

From Investment To Impact

Using Professional Services To Future-Proof Your Workplace

As enterprises accelerate investment in AI and modern workplace technologies, many are discovering that speed of adoption is outpacing their ability to operationalize and secure the underlying IT infrastructure at scale. What begins as innovation momentum quickly collides with a more complex reality: The workplace is not a controlled environment like a data center or a single system. It is a constantly shifting intersection of people, processes, devices, and AI-driven tools that must all function together.

AI-driven productivity gains are real, but so are the downstream risks. Gaps in infrastructure readiness, integration, governance, and workforce enablement can turn promising deployments into fragmented, underperforming systems. Failures in this layer do not stay contained; they directly impact employee productivity, customer experience, security posture, and business outcomes.

Professional services can provide critical expertise to help organizations navigate this complexity — aligning technology with business goals, embedding governance into AI adoption, and ensuring that teams are equipped to work effectively alongside intelligent systems. In fact, **73% of respondents expect a 30% to 70% reduction in risk across implementation, operation, and optimization of IT infrastructure from engaging professional services.** Without this support, organizations risk stalling adoption, diluting ROI, and falling behind more coordinated competitors.



In our study of 718 IT decision-makers with responsibility over their organization's professional services for IT infrastructure, we found that the workplace is where the gap between AI adoption and sustained value is most pronounced — and most urgent.

KEY FINDINGS

AI adoption is advancing faster than enterprise infrastructure

foundations. Organizations are rapidly expanding their use of AI and modern workplace tools, but many lack the strategic architectural and IT infrastructure foundations needed to sustain value. The challenge is not deploying tools but designing infrastructure environments that can continuously adapt to changing technologies, workflows, and risks.

Complexity, integration, and security pressures are stalling ROI.

Technology design complexity (43%), evolving cyber and AI-specific threats (42%), and operational overhead (41%) are major barriers. Post-adoption, integration challenges intensify these barriers with 42% citing difficulty integrating new tools, while workflow alignment (38%) and workforce upskilling (36%) limit the ability to scale and measure ROI effectively.

The workplace is fundamentally a design problem — not just an adoption problem.

Implementation complexity (42%) and ongoing operational burden (41%) indicate that success depends on building flexible, integrated systems, not executing one-time deployments. Without this foundation, organizations struggle to absorb continuous change.

Professional services are critical to operationalizing AI at scale.

Ninety-nine percent of respondents believe professional services will be critical, reflecting the growing need for external expertise to bridge gaps in integration, governance, and workforce enablement while accelerating time to value.

Future-Proofing The Enterprise Workplace Is Hampered By Complexity And Legacy Infrastructure

As organizations scale AI and modern workplace investments, they are encountering a fundamental challenge: The workplace is the most difficult IT infrastructure environment in the enterprise to future-proof. Unlike a data center, it is not bounded; it evolves continuously as employees adopt new tools, workflows shift, and hybrid work patterns redefine how work gets done. This complexity is exposing infrastructure gaps that cannot be addressed through deployment alone.

What starts as innovation momentum often exposes deeper issues in infrastructure readiness, integration, governance, and skills; **99%** of respondents believe professional services will be critical to building and optimizing IT infrastructure for the AI era.

- **Operational challenges and evolving threats are disrupting progress.**

Respondents identify technology design complexity (43%), evolving cybersecurity threats and AI-specific risks (42%), and the operational burden of managing dynamic environments (41%) as major obstacles. These are not short-term implementation issues. They reflect structural challenges in how workplace systems are designed and governed. Without the right foundation, organizations struggle to evolve their environments without introducing fragmentation and risk.

- **Integration becomes the primary barrier after initial adoption.** As organizations move beyond early deployment, integration challenges intensify. The heterogeneous nature of most IT infrastructure with multiple solutions in one environment compounds the integration challenge. Forty-two percent of respondents report difficulty integrating new tools and platforms, while 38% struggle to embed AI into existing workflows. These challenges are heightened by the need to upskill employees

(36%), making it difficult to scale adoption consistently or demonstrate clear ROI. What begins as a technology initiative becomes a workforce and operational transformation challenge.

- **The human dimension is both the differentiator and the biggest constraint.** Workplace transformation is ultimately about how people interact with technology. Thirty-six percent of respondents cite difficulty upskilling employees and driving adoption, while 34% report challenges delivering consistent user experiences. Broader workforce shifts are already underway: 56% of organizations report the rise of new hybrid roles, and 54% report changing skill requirements. These trends underscore that redesigning the workplace is as much about rethinking people and processes as it is about deploying new tools.

Keeping up in times of great change proves challenging — **54%** of respondents report changes in skill requirements.

Optimize Infrastructure To Scale AI Adoption And Improve Cyber Resilience

As organizations push beyond initial deployments, a harder reality is setting in: Adoption does not guarantee impact. The ability to scale AI-enabled workplace tools and extract sustained value from them depends on how well organizations align infrastructure architecture, governance, and workforce capabilities over time. This is where many initiatives begin to stall.

Scaling adoption and alignment remains a critical pressure point. Deploying new tools is only the first step. Forty-two percent of respondents expect professional services to help accelerate employee adoption, improve satisfaction, and enhance the quality of hybrid and remote work. These outcomes reflect a deeper need: ensuring that technology integrates seamlessly into how people actually work. Without this alignment, adoption remains uneven and productivity gains fail to materialize at scale.

- **Post-implementation complexity exposes long-term resilience gaps.** Even after deployment, organizations face ongoing challenges related to integration, governance, and scalability. As environments evolve, IT teams must simultaneously manage performance, security, and measurement, often without clear frameworks or sufficient resources. This complexity can introduce new vulnerabilities and reduce organizational agility if left unaddressed.
- **Professional services are increasingly measured by outcomes rather than deployments.** Respondents' expectations reflect a shift in how success is defined. The top anticipated benefit from professional services is improved employee adoption, satisfaction, and quality of work (42%). These are ahead of cost or speed. Additional priorities include alignment with AI-ready infrastructure (37%), better integration with existing tools (35%), and upskilling and knowledge transfer (35%). These findings signal that organizations are looking beyond implementation toward sustained operational impact (see Figure 1).

- **Sustained value requires continuous enablement and governance.**
To maintain momentum, organizations must invest in clear metrics, structured knowledge transfer, and ongoing workforce development. Professional services can help stabilize and optimize environments over time, ensuring that infrastructure, processes, and people evolve together without slowing innovation. This continuous alignment is essential for both scalability and cyber resilience in AI-driven workplaces.

FIGURE 1

Expected Benefits From Engaging With Professional Services To Aid In Future-Proofing Workplaces

(Showing ranked top five)

Increased rates of employee adoption, satisfaction, and quality of hybrid and remote work experience technologies



Increased alignment with AI-ready infrastructure and capabilities



Enhanced integration with existing and new digital tools/systems



Improved upskilling and knowledge transfer to internal teams



Improved governance and process standardization



Well-defined ROI and measurement of business impact



Increased cost optimization (i.e., efficiency and savings)



Accelerated modernization of workplace IT infrastructure



Note: Showing top eight responses

Base: 718 IT decision-makers at global enterprises with responsibility over their organization's professional services for IT infrastructure strategy

Source: Forrester's Q1 2026 AI-Enabled IT Professional Services Survey [E-66761]

The Stakes

The cost of failing to future-proof the workplace is not hypothetical — it is already materializing in the stalled initiatives, underutilized tools, and growing operational risk. Organizations that cannot align technology, workforce, and infrastructure will struggle to translate AI investments into meaningful outcomes. By contrast, those that engage the right expertise are poised to see measurable gains. Respondents' most common expectations of include:

- Up to a 40% improvement in end-customer experience.
- Up to a 30% reduction in time to market.
- Up to 30% cost savings from an effective professional services engagement.

In the workplace context, these outcomes are directly tied to how well employees can adopt, integrate, and collaborate with AI tools.

Ultimately, the future-proofed workplace is not a single deployment or initiative. It is a continuously evolving infrastructure system that must balance performance, employee enablement, governance, and human-machine collaboration in real time. The defining challenge is no longer whether organizations can adopt AI tools but whether their workplace IT infrastructure is designed to absorb constant change and whether their people are equipped to thrive within it. Organizations that recognize this and evolve their approach to professional services accordingly will be the ones that convert AI momentum into sustained competitive advantage.



Up to a 40%
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Appendix A: Methodology

Summary Of Results From The Cisco-Commissioned Thought Leadership Study, “The Cost Of Inaction: Why Leaders Must Modernize IT Infrastructure With Professional Services To Maximize AI Investments.”

Cisco commissioned this study to understand evolving enterprise use of professional services for IT, especially AI-enabled professional services.

To achieve these objectives, Forrester conducted an online survey with 718 IT decision-makers at global enterprises with responsibility over their organization’s professional services for IT infrastructure strategy.

To read the full results of this study, please refer to the Thought Leadership Paper commissioned by [Cisco](#) titled, “The Cost Of Inaction: Why Leaders Must Modernize IT Infrastructure With Professional Services To Maximize AI Investments.”

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