

THE 2026 STATE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSION

Key Findings & Insights



American Society of
Administrative Professionals



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Administrative Work Is More Strategic Than Ever. Why Isn't It Recognized as Such?

Administrative professionals (APs) are carrying more scope, influence, and strategic responsibility than ever before.

They're proving themselves leading complex initiatives, managing risk, supporting executive decision-making, and integrating AI into daily operations.

Yet in many organizations, the role is still defined, evaluated, and developed through a task-first lens.

That disconnect has real consequences.

When expectations rise but recognition and development pathways don't evolve alongside them, talent is underleveraged and growth slows. Organizations miss the full value administrative professionals are ready to deliver.





We Set Out to Understand the Gap

As leadership expectations for admin professionals evolve, critical questions emerge:

- Which skills are being prioritized — and by whom?
- Where do leaders see gaps?
- Where do administrative professionals feel confident?
- And where does perception diverge from reality?

To answer those questions, The American Society of Administrative Professionals (ASAP) gathered insights from **more than 5,000 administrative professionals, executives, and HR leaders.**

This report explores where that misalignment exists across the administrative profession, why it matters, and what must change to fully leverage its potential in 2026 and beyond.

The Career Stages Framework

These stages serve as a flexible framework to help administrative professionals strategically approach their career growth.

While each stage has associated skills and responsibilities, the reality is that the APs' roles vary significantly across organizations.

1.

ASSISTING

Early-career APs typically under five years of experience, focused on scheduling, document organization, and foundational tasks.

2.

SUPPORTING

At this stage, APs build on Assisting tasks with greater autonomy, such as managing projects and handling more complex day-to-day operations through a strategic lens.

3.

PARTNERING

Here, the focus shifts to business partnership and strategic contributions. APs at this stage collaborate on business plans, manage large projects, and may oversee teams.

4.

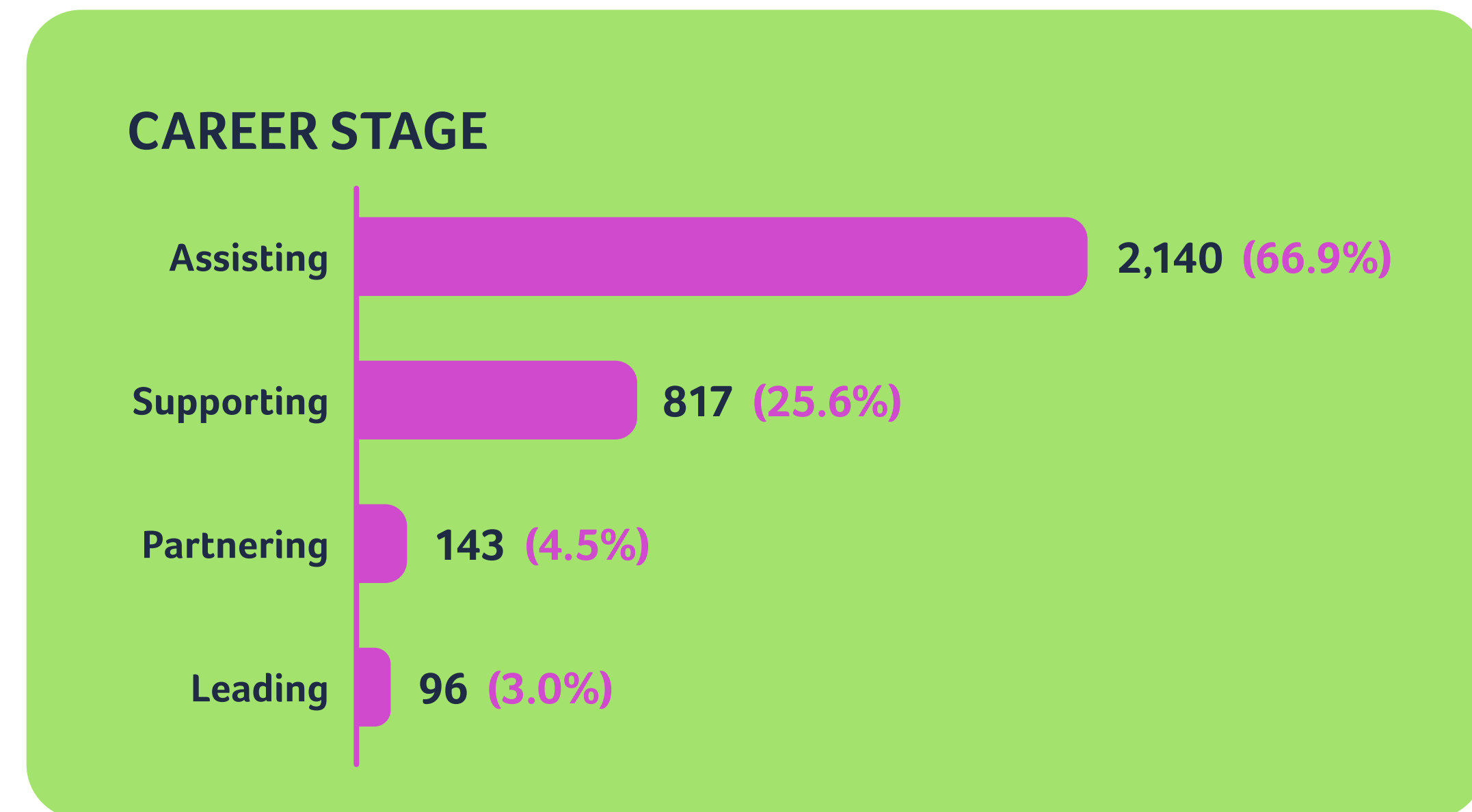
LEADING

This stage is where APs own large-scale initiatives. They advise senior executives as trusted business partners, lead strategic systems and teams, and drive innovation.

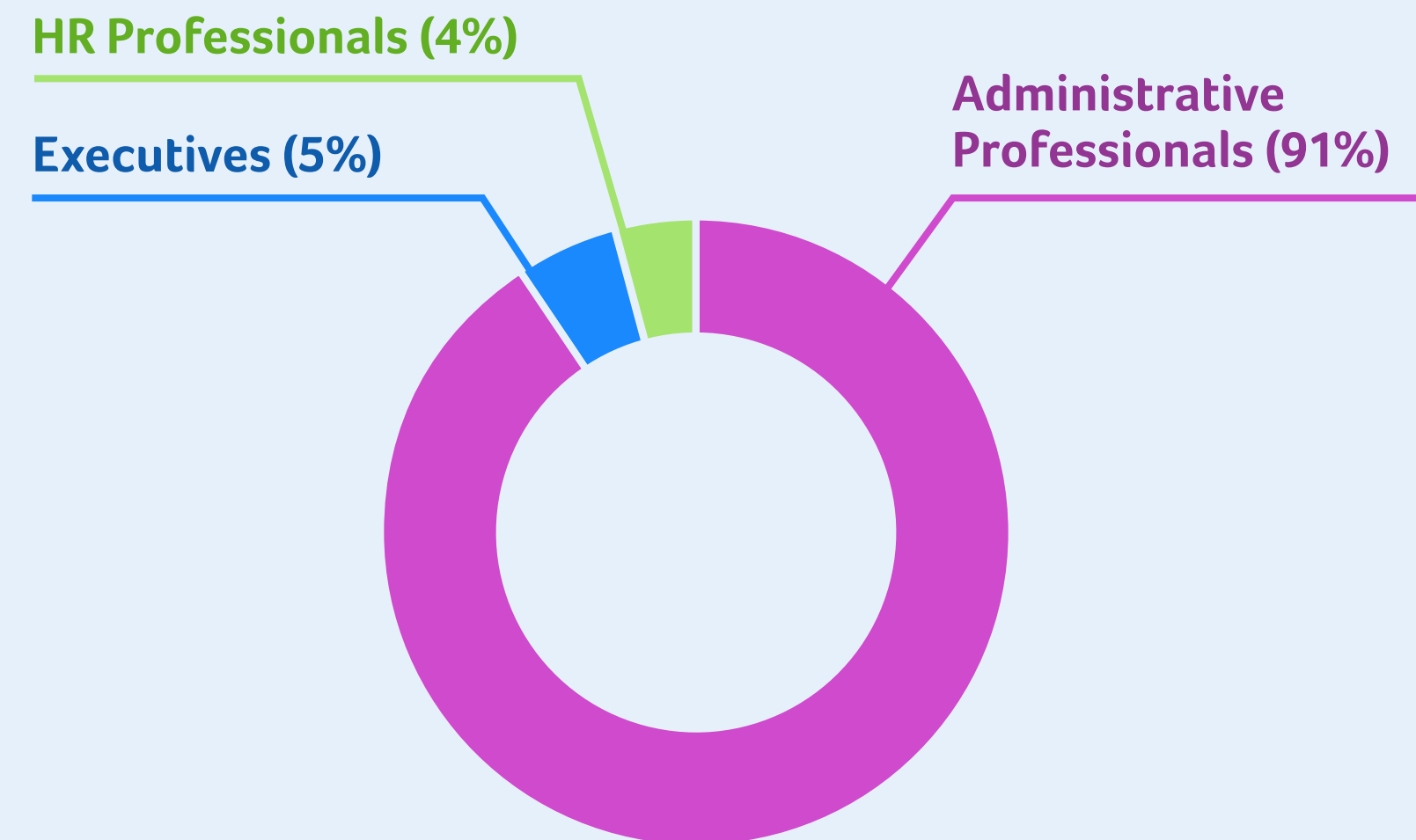
Built on the Most Comprehensive State of the Profession Study to Date

This research brings together the perspectives of administrative professionals, executives, and HR leaders across industries and career stages.

Together, they offer a comprehensive view of how the profession is evolving and where expectations are diverging.



5,536 TOTAL RESPONDENTS



A multi-stakeholder view of the profession in 2026.

Administrative Professionals Represented in This Study

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Less than 5 years



5-9 years



10-19 years



20-29 years



30+ years



HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Did not complete high school



High school graduate / GED



Associate's degree



Bachelor's degree



Graduate degree



Doctorate or equivalent



INDUSTRIES

Education & Academia



Government & Nonprofits



Healthcare



Additional industry representation found in finance, technology, and manufacturing.

5 Shifts

ADMINISTRATIVE WORK IN 2026 IS NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE



Administrative Professionals Conference
Embrace Today, Lead Tomorrow
2025
KIMBERLEY BORZI
CAPITAL ONE
ARLINGTON, VA
CHIEF OF STAFF

Administrative Professionals Conference
Embrace Today, Lead Tomorrow
2025
LISA BALDWIN
CAPITAL ONE
DUNN, TX
CHIEF OF STAFF

Administrative Professionals Conference
Embrace Today, Lead Tomorrow
2025
BEVERLEY ROGERS
CAPITAL ONE
ALEXANDRIA, VA
CHIEF OF STAFF

The Five Shifts Shaping Administrative Work in 2026

AI ADOPTION IS OUTPACING TRAINING AND SUPPORT

AI usage has accelerated across the profession, but confidence, proficiency, and formal development pathways have not scaled at the same pace.

1.

PERCEIVED VALUE IS FALLING BEHIND CONTRIBUTION

Even as responsibilities grow more complex and strategic, many administrative professionals report a declining sense of recognition and value.

2.

3.

CAREER PROGRESSION IS CONSTRAINED BY STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITY

Growth barriers stem from unclear expectations, shifting definitions of strategy, and development pathways that have not evolved with the role.

4.

5.

STRATEGIC EXPECTATIONS AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT ARE MISALIGNED

Administrative professionals and organizational leaders agree strategy matters, but they differ on which capabilities define strategic contribution and how those skills are developed.

STRATEGIC CAPACITY IS UNDERUTILIZED

Highly experienced and educated professionals continue to spend significant time in foundational tasks, leaving strategic potential untapped.

Core Shift 1

AI IS OUTPACING TRAINING AND SUPPORT

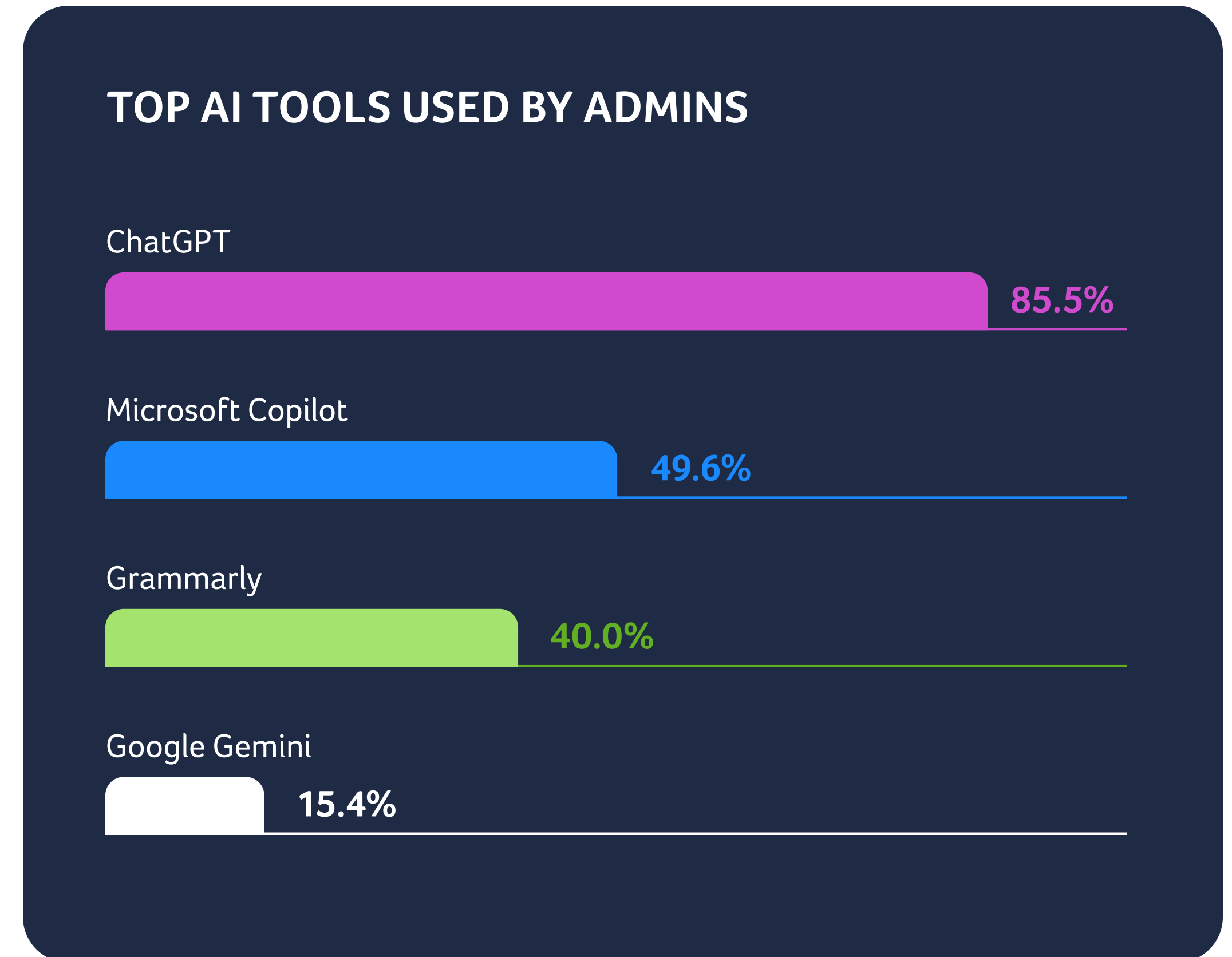
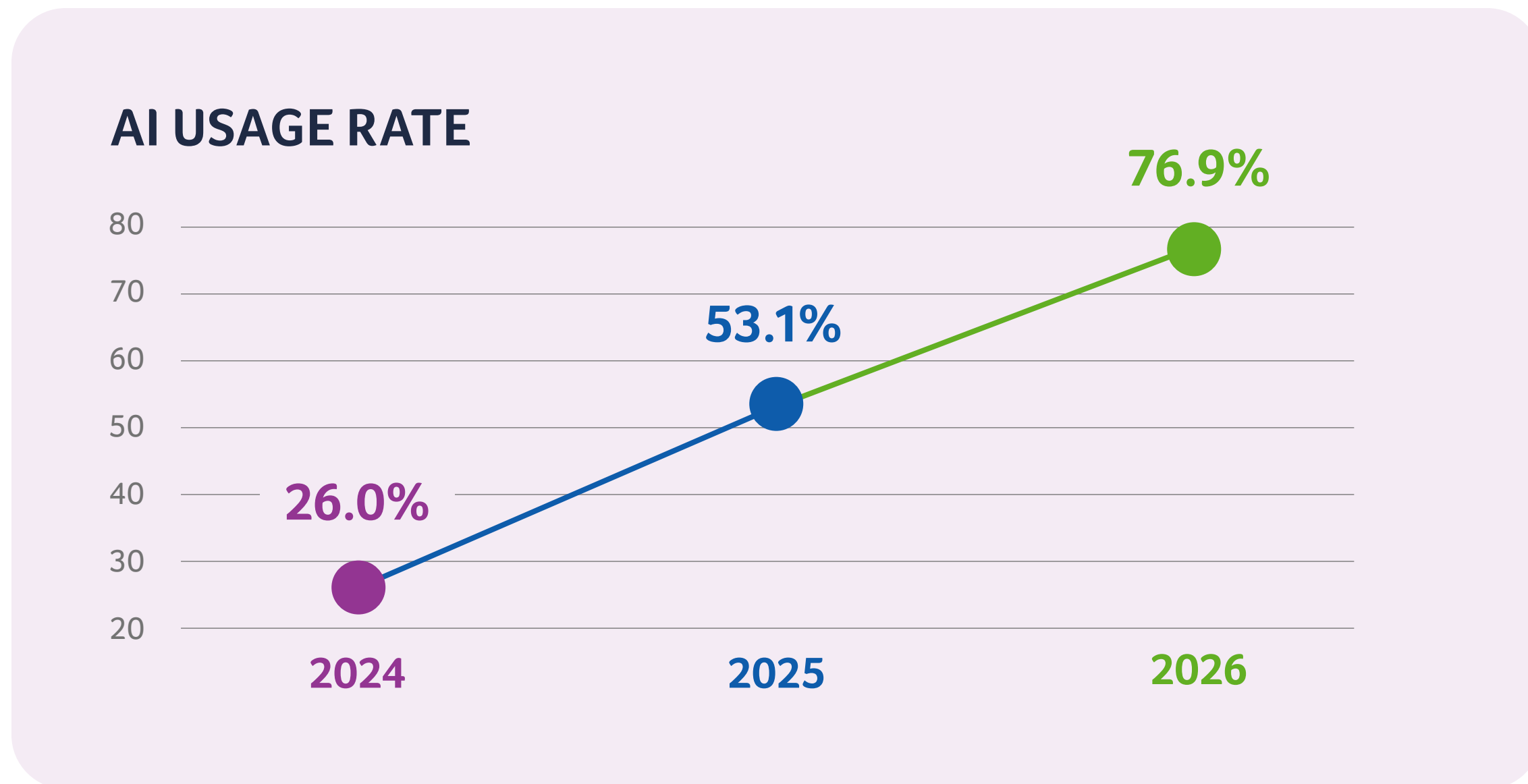
AI usage across the profession has surged at an unprecedented pace. But adoption doesn't equal confidence. This section explores where proficiency, structure, and development are keeping up — and where they are not — and what that means for the future of administrative work.



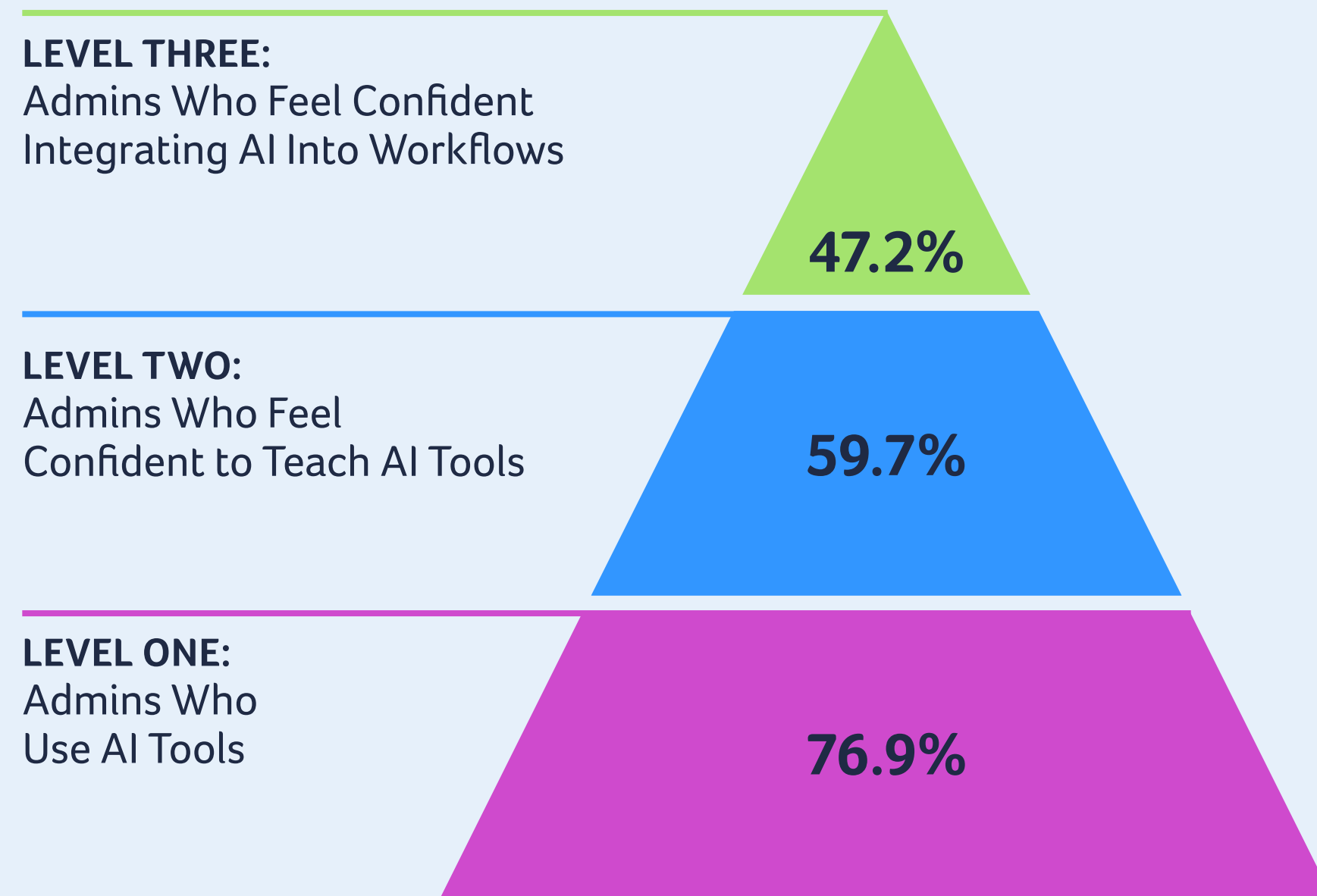
AI Usage Has Nearly Tripled Among Admin Over Two Years

76.9% of administrative professionals report using AI in their daily work in 2026, up from just 26.0% in 2024.

AI adoption has nearly tripled in two years, signaling a rapid shift in how administrative work is executed, prioritized, scaled, and ultimately perceived.



AI ADOPTION IS NOT THE SAME THING AS MASTERY



Still, An AI Confidence Gap Exists

AI usage is widespread among admins, but confidence in using the tools isn't.

76.9% of administrative professionals report using AI tools, but only 47.2% feel confident integrating AI into their workflows.

That gap matters.

AI adoption without clear pathways to professional development in strategic capabilities creates three risks:

- Inconsistent output quality
- Invisible strategic contribution
- Erosion of perceived value

Organizations that formalize AI development turn admins who are just using the tool for task work into operational intelligence assets.

AI confidence significantly lagging behind usage represents both a challenge and an opportunity for organizations.

AI Is No Longer the Differentiator. How It's Used Is.

Administrative professionals are leading AI integration within executive offices. The question is no longer who is using it, but who is mastering it.

As AI use becomes baseline, the competitive edge will go to those who apply it strategically, consistently, and confidently.

53.8%
of APs want to develop at least one AI skill in 2026

WHAT THIS SHIFT MEANS FOR THE ADMIN PROFESSION

AI CREATES NEW LEADERSHIP SPACE

The AI confidence gap points to clear opportunity. Structured AI training can accelerate strategic impact and position administrative professionals as operational leaders.

AI ADOPTION WITHOUT DEVELOPMENT CREATES RISK

When AI use outpaces skill-building, quality varies and value is harder to measure. Without role clarity and training, AI stays task-based instead of transformative.

THE ADVANTAGE WILL BELONG TO THE PREPARED

Organizations that invest in AI-capable administrative teams will move faster and execute better. Those that stop at informal adoption will see uneven results.

A woman with braided hair is seen from behind, raising her right hand in a classroom or meeting setting. She is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt with a colorful patterned cuff. The background is blurred, showing other people and a presentation screen.

Core Shift 2

STRATEGIC EXPECTATIONS AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT ARE MISALIGNED

Administrative professionals are being asked to operate more strategically than ever before, yet leaders and admins aren't always aligned on which skills define "strategic" work. Here, we examine where expectations diverge and how that misalignment impacts growth, performance, and opportunity.

Where Capabilities And Expectations **Already Align**

To understand alignment, we asked executives and HR leaders to identify the core competencies they expect from administrative professionals and asked APs to assess their proficiency in those same areas.

Across foundational capabilities, administrative professionals report meeting — and often exceeding — executive-defined expectations.

From problem solving to strategic planning, the profession is operating at a level that reflects its expanding scope of responsibility.

In emerging areas like AI, many APs are progressing faster than formal organizational priorities.

95.7% of admins report strong problem-solving proficiency.

CORE COMPETENCIES	HOW CLOSELY AP PROFICIENCY ALIGNS WITH EXECUTIVE EXPECTATIONS
Problem solving	Exceeds
Leading meetings	Meets
People management	Meets
Strategic planning	Aligns with Expectations
AI tools & prompting	Greatly Exceeds

Where Expectations Diverge

Executives and HR professionals, asked to rank AP capabilities in priority order, rank strategic capabilities in data visualization, risk mitigation, and corporate governance as the top three most important skills. However, significantly fewer APs report proficiency in these skills.

35.4 point gap

DATA VISUALIZATION

60.8% of executives rank data visualization as the most important capability for APs, but only 25.4% of admins report proficiency.

24.4 point gap

RISK MITIGATION

63.8% of executives rank risk mitigation as a high priority capability, but only 39.4% of APs report proficiency.

17.5 point gap

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

49.2% of executives rank corporate governance as a high priority capability, but only 31.7% of APs report proficiency.

What These Capabilities Look Like In Practice:

Turning raw data into executive-ready insights that inform decisions.

Identifying issues early and solving for impact before escalation.

Supporting compliance, board reporting, and structured decision-making at scale.

The Impact of Expectations and Professional Development **Falling Out of Sync**

When expectations, role design, and development pathways aren't aligned, the impact goes beyond skills. It affects career progression, role clarity, and how value is perceived across the organization.

GROWTH

When strategic expectations shift faster than role design and development pathways, growth slows.

If administrative professionals aren't given clarity on which strategic skills matter most, development efforts become fragmented.

ROLE CLARITY

When strategic priorities aren't clearly embedded in role definitions, expectations become ambiguous.

Ambiguity creates friction, both for executives and administrative professionals.

TRUST & VALUE

When administrative professionals feel capable but strategic expectations are unclear, perception gaps emerge.

Over time, perception gaps can affect recognition, engagement, and how value is communicated.

Core Shift 3

PERCEIVED VALUE IS FALLING BEHIND CONTRIBUTION

As responsibilities expand, recognition hasn't always followed. Many admins report a declining sense of value, even as their work becomes more complex and strategic. This section looks at what is driving that shift and why perception matters as much as performance.



Recognition Isn't Keeping Pace **With Responsibility**

Between 2025 and 2026, the percentage of administrative professionals who feel valued dropped 5.6 percentage points. This decline occurred even as 70% received salary increases and AI adoption surged by 24 points, revealing a critical insight: pay and technology alone cannot sustain professional satisfaction.

8.3%

decline in perceived value
in a single year.

62.2%

of admins feel valued, down from
67.8% just one year ago.

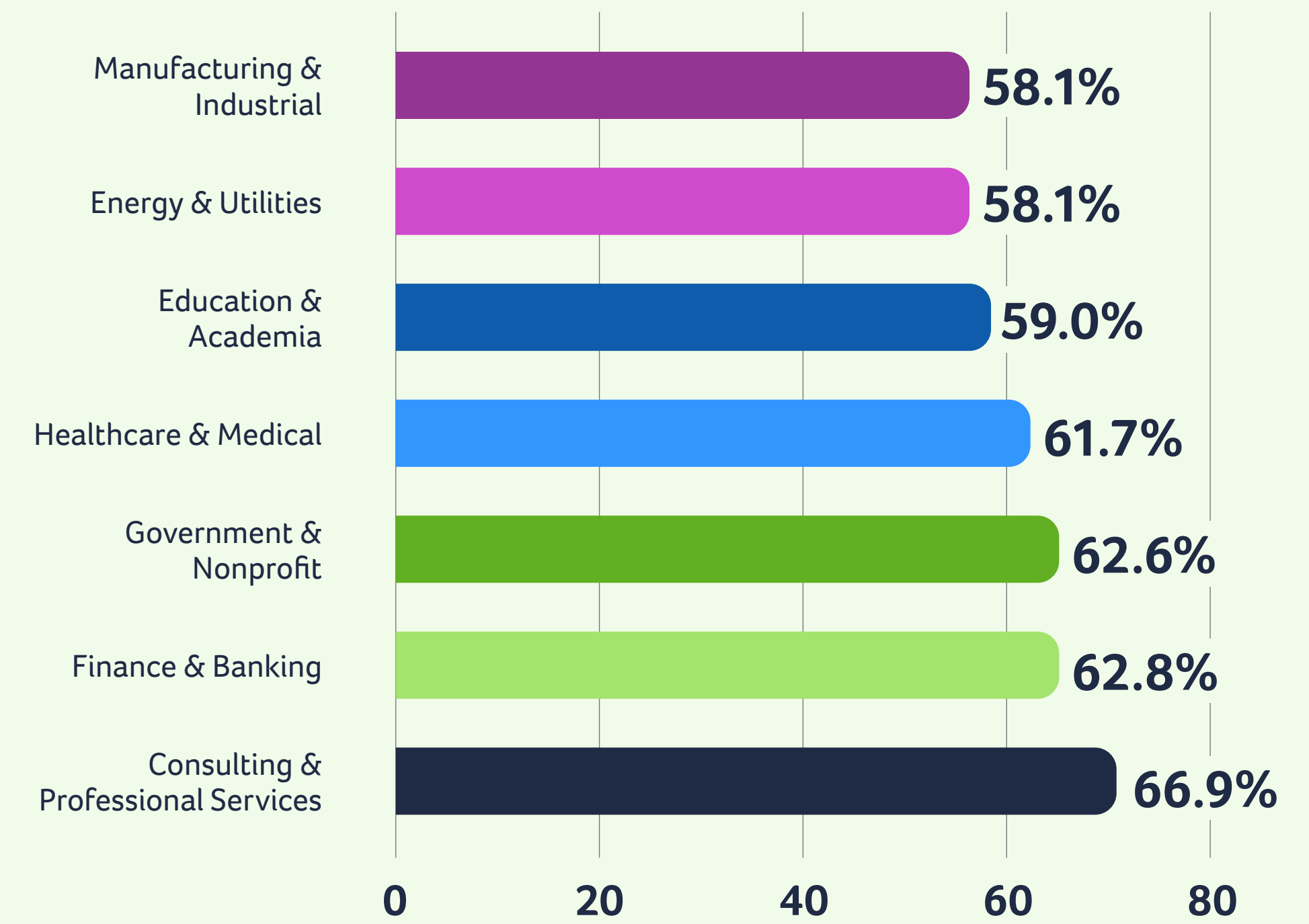
What Drives Feeling Valued and How It Varies by Industry

Four factors consistently correlate with stronger value perception among administrative professionals:

- 1. COMPENSATION**
 Competitive pay reinforces professional worth.
- 2. RECOGNITION**
 Formal acknowledgment of contributions strengthens perceived impact.
- 3. STRATEGIC INVOLVEMENT**
 Admins engaged in strategic work are more likely to feel valued.
- 4. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
 Access to structured growth opportunities reinforces long-term investment and career trajectory.

Technological advancement and compensation alone don't drive professional satisfaction. Recognition and appreciation are critical factors.

FEELING VALUED IN 2026 BY INDUSTRY



Core Shift 4

STRATEGIC CAPACITY IS UNDERUTILIZED

The talent exists, but the opportunity often doesn't. Despite experience and qualifications, a significant percentage of administrative professionals are still performing little to no strategic work. We explore what's preventing AP capacity from being fully activated and what organizations risk when it isn't.



Strategic Capacity Exists But It's Not Being Leveraged

THE UNDERUTILIZATION GAP

APs are capable of more strategic work than they're currently assigned.

Strategic skill potential exceeds the proportion of strategic responsibilities delegated. When strategic capacity is underused, organizations miss operational leverage.

QUALIFICATIONS VS. RESPONSIBILITIES

Experience and education far exceed the work assigned.

- **71% have 10+ years of experience**
- **44.9% have 20+ years**
- **73.5% hold a college degree**

This points to a role design problem, not a gap in skill.

Nearly **40%** of admins

report zero strategic Partnering or Leading stage responsibilities, despite qualifications that support higher-level work.

Compensation Follows Career Stage Progression

Compensation doesn't increase with tenure alone.

As administrative professionals advance into stages defined by greater strategic contribution, broader scope, stronger executive trust, and higher organizational visibility, compensation follows.

When roles remain task-heavy, career progression and pay plateau.

CAREER STAGE	AVERAGE SALARY
Assisting	\$67,284
Supporting	\$72,500
Partnering	\$81,611

Tenure alone does not determine pay progression.
Strategic impact does.

+\$14,327 salary increase
for Partnering stage admins vs. Assisting stage admins - a 21% increase



Core Shift 5

STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITY IS STALLING CAREER GROWTH

The barrier to growth doesn't simply point to funding limitations or access to training. It boils down to clarity. Misaligned expectations, shifting priorities, and unclear development pathways are creating friction. This section uncovers where those gaps show up and how closing them unlocks progress.

The Professional Development Gap Isn't Caused By Lack of Desire — It's Access

WHAT APS WANT TO LEARN

Administrative professionals aren't asking for generic training. They're asking for development that strengthens how work actually gets done.

41.3% of APs face friction before development even begins.

Approval bottlenecks:

- Lack of time
- Unclear relevance to role
- Funding visibility gaps

ROLE-SPECIFIC DEPTH

Learning tied directly to their current responsibilities

APs want development that directly strengthens the work they're already expected to perform.

STRATEGIC CAPABILITY

Data, risk, governance, executive operations

APs see that strategic responsibilities are increasing and want training that prepares them to meet those expectations with confidence.

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED SKILLS

AI tools, workflow integration, systems thinking

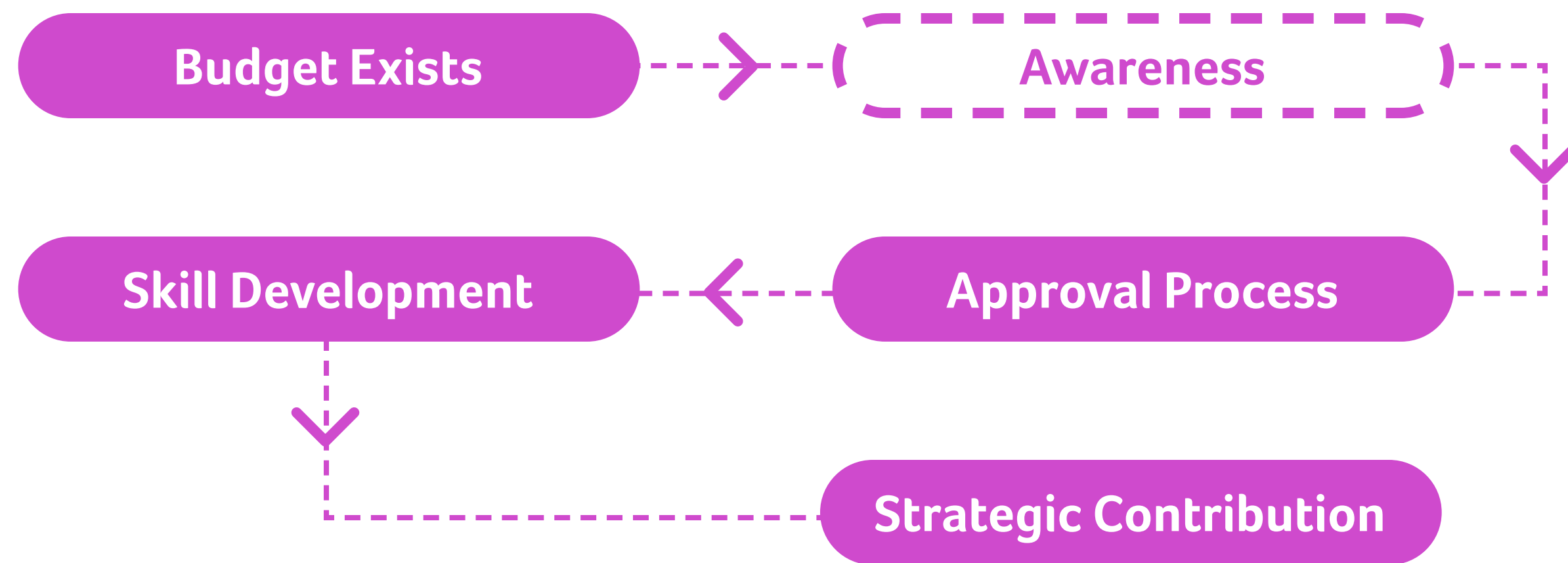
APs want structured support to turn usage into strategic impact.

Development Access Isn't the Same as Development Opportunity

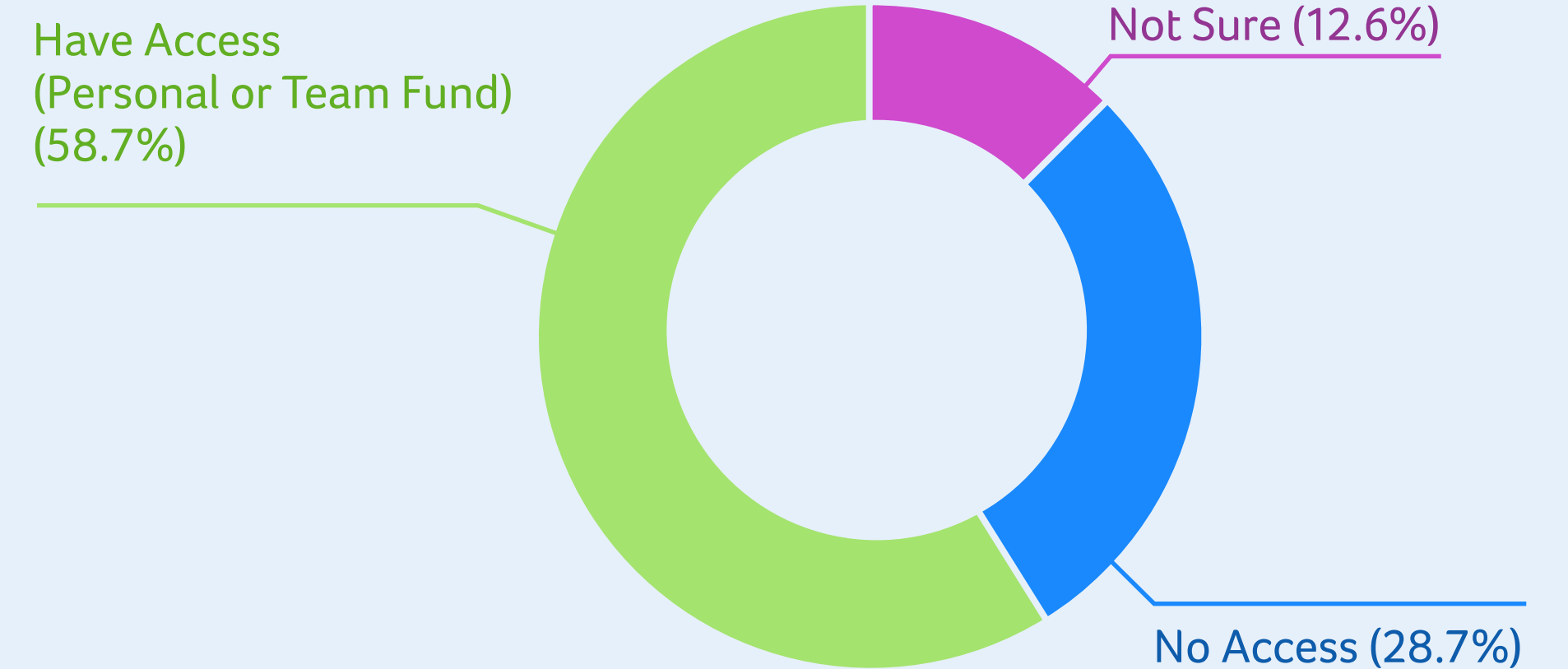
Access to professional development varies and uncertainty is widespread for administrative professionals.

A meaningful share of admins – 41.3% – either lack funding access altogether or are unsure whether it exists. 91% of executives have the authority to approve training, yet budget approval is still the #1 barrier APs report.

WHERE ACCESSING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BREAKS DOWN



ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING



Funding may be available, but pathways are unclear. Without clarity on approval processes, eligible training, or strategic skill alignment, development becomes inconsistent or delayed.

Development Is an Organizational Lever

With feelings of being valued declining in 2026, organizational funding of professional development—through events like APC or EA Ignite, courses, or certifications—signals a tangible commitment to growth and career progression.

STRATEGIC READINESS

Role-specific and strategic training prepares APs to support executive-level priorities.

When development aligns to data, risk, governance, AI, and executive operations, organizations unlock higher-impact support, not just faster task execution.

RETENTION & ENGAGEMENT

Investment signals value.

As feeling valued declined to 62.2% in 2026, development becomes a visible commitment to growth, contribution, and career progression.

AI LEVERAGE

Technology alone doesn't create advantage. Capability does.

With AI adoption accelerating, structured training ensures administrative professionals become drivers of systems and outcomes and not just users of tools.

Organizations that invest in administrative development are investing in operational intelligence.

**ADVANCING THE
PROFESSION:
TURNING INSIGHT
INTO ACTION**



How To Use This Report

For Administrative Professionals

If you're looking to **reflect on your own growth**, use it as a:

REFLECTION TOOL

- Assess your current strengths:** Assess your current strengths and skills gaps using ASAP's [Career Stages Framework](#).
- Clarify your development priorities:** [ASAP's courses](#) can help you build the skills - strategic, AI-enabled, governance, data - that matter most right now
- Plan your next move intentionally:** Use ASAP State of the Profession data and the Career Stages Framework to guide your learning and career decisions.

If you're looking to **align with other admins**, use it as a:

CONVERSATION STARTER

- Surface perception gaps:** Highlight where expectations diverge between APs, executives, and HR.
- Anchor career conversations in data:** Move discussions beyond opinion and toward shared understanding.
- Advocate for strategic development:** Use ASAP's [justification tools](#) to request training, scope expansion, or role clarity.

For Executives & HR

If you're looking to **evaluate your organization**, use it as a:

BENCHMARKING REFERENCE

- Compare against trends:** See how your team stacks up in AI adoption, skill readiness, and feeling valued.
- Identify risk areas early:** Spot misalignment that may impact engagement, retention, or performance.
- Inform smarter investment decisions:** Use the data to prioritize skills-based professional development for admins, such as [EA Ignite](#), [APC](#), or [PACE](#).

How to Lead Growth Conversations in 2026

Growth conversations require alignment between administrative professionals and organizational leaders.

Whether you're advocating for your development or setting expectations for your team, here's how to structure the conversation.

The data shows rising expectations, expanding AI adoption, and shifting perceptions of value. The next step is alignment. Here's how to focus your energy moving forward.

START WITH IMPACT, NOT ACTIVITY

APs consistently meet or exceed expectations in core competencies. Shift the conversation from "What I do" to "What I enable": operational efficiency, risk mitigation, and executive clarity.

1.

CLARIFY STRATEGIC EXPECTATIONS

Data shows significant capability gaps in areas like data visualization (+35.4 pp), risk mitigation (+24.4 pp), and governance (+17.5 pp). Instead of vague expectations around "being more strategic," define which strategic capabilities matter most and why.

2.

ALIGN AI SKILL DEVELOPMENT WITH OUTCOMES

Nearly 80% of admins surveyed use AI tools. Far fewer feel confident or proficient in integrating AI into their workflows. Growth conversations should focus on moving from adoption to strategic implementation.

3.

CONNECT DEVELOPMENT TO VALUE

APs feeling valued is down 5.6 percentage points year over year. Development discussions should explicitly link skill growth to funded training, visibility, and recognition. Lack of organizational support erodes engagement.

4.

REDESIGN SCOPE, NOT JUST TRAINING

APs are highly experienced and educated, yet strategic underutilization persists. Career progression accelerates as responsibilities and strategic scope evolve. Growth conversations should include what skills and training are needed to get to the next desired career stage.

5.

ABOUT ASAP



EA Ignite
WHERE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANTS BECOME LEADERS
DIONNA HANNAH
CITY OF WHITEHALL
WHITEHALL, OH
CONFERENCE
FIRST TIME

EA Ignite
STEPHANIE CALDERON
USAA
SAN ANTONIO, TX
CONFERENCE

ASAP's Role in Moving the Profession Forward

Administrative professionals are being asked to operate at a higher strategic level, often without clear pathways, aligned expectations, or visible investment. The American Society of Administrative Professionals (ASAP) believes the administrative profession is one of the most under-leveraged assets in modern organizations and exists to close that gap.



ASAP connects administrative professionals to role-specific training, certification, and a global community of 132,000+ peers. Our membership helps you build in-demand skills, earn recognized credentials, and grow your impact at every stage of your career.



EA Ignite delivers in-person, advanced training designed for executive assistants ready to expand their strategic influence. Learn directly from experts and peers to sharpen leadership, executive operations, and business partnership skills.



APC brings thousands of administrative professionals together for immersive learning and real-world skill building. Sessions focus on practical tools, strategic growth, and emerging competencies shaping the profession.



PACE is the administrative profession's leading certification, equipping admins with in-demand skills in communication, project management, technology, and leadership through a flexible, self-paced program. PACE-certified admins are more sought-after by employers and operate from a shared foundation of proven skills.



Explore more of our trainings and resources by visiting our website at asaporg.com.



www.asaporg.com