

The AI Value Quadrant

A Framework for Technical Teams





Introduction

Technical teams were supposed to feel the biggest impact of AI. They work in the systems where it lives. Many of them are the ones building it. So why does it feel like AI is still falling short?

Part of the answer is hiding in plain sight. Technical teams don't work in one place. They coordinate across tools, handoffs, and systems that were never designed to share context with each other. That's the environment AI inherits—and that environment matters enormously for what AI can actually do.

This report shows exactly where value stalls and what it takes to make it scale. It maps two organizational conditions that determine whether AI value compounds or stalls:

Friction

The overhead that builds up when tools don't connect and work doesn't flow

Enablement

The gap that forms when workers haven't been equipped to use the tools they already have

Together, these form the **AI Value Quadrant**, a diagnostic for understanding where your organization stands and what to prioritize first. For technical leaders, it's a practical tool for understanding what needs to change first. For chief information officers (CIOs), it's a way to evaluate whether the conditions exist for your AI investments to deliver compounding returns.

Who we surveyed

Data in this report reflects original survey data from 1,500+ professionals, including 478 in technical roles such as engineering, product, and design (EPD), as well as information technology and information systems (IT).



The tool sprawl problem weighing on technical teams

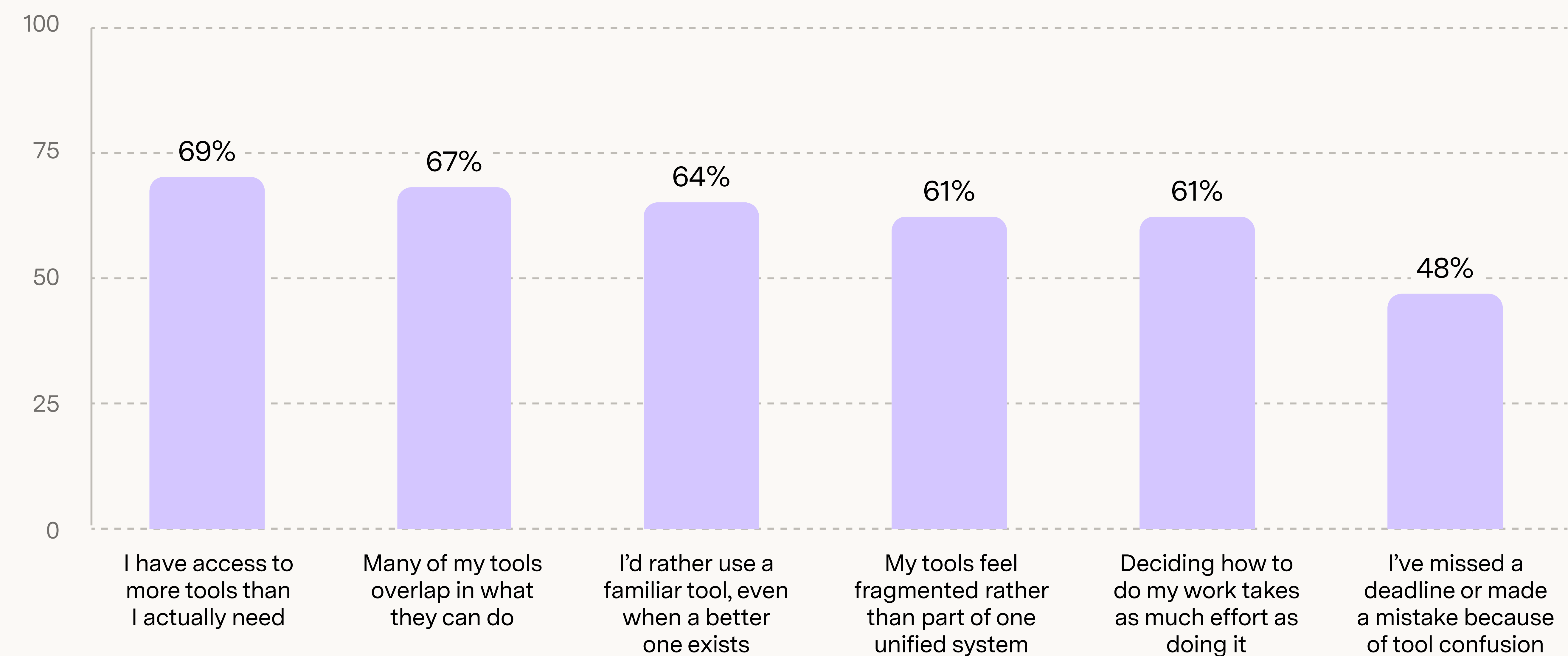
Technical work is multisystem by design—writing and reviewing code, managing sprint cycles, tracking dependencies, aligning on product requirements, documenting design decisions. None of these activities live in one place. They’re distributed across an ever-expanding sprawl of tools, few of which are designed to work together.

The majority of technical workers (65%) report using six or more tools in a typical week. They’re routinely switching between two or three tools just to complete a single task. That overhead accumulates: switching contexts, reconstructing information, bridging systems that weren’t built to talk to each other. Nearly two-thirds say their tools feel fragmented rather than part of one unified system.

This is what friction looks like in technical work. It’s not a single breaking point but an accumulated drag that compounds across every tool switch, every handoff, every moment spent figuring out where work lives.

Tool sprawl hits technical teams hardest

% of technical workers who agree





Not all AI experiences are equal

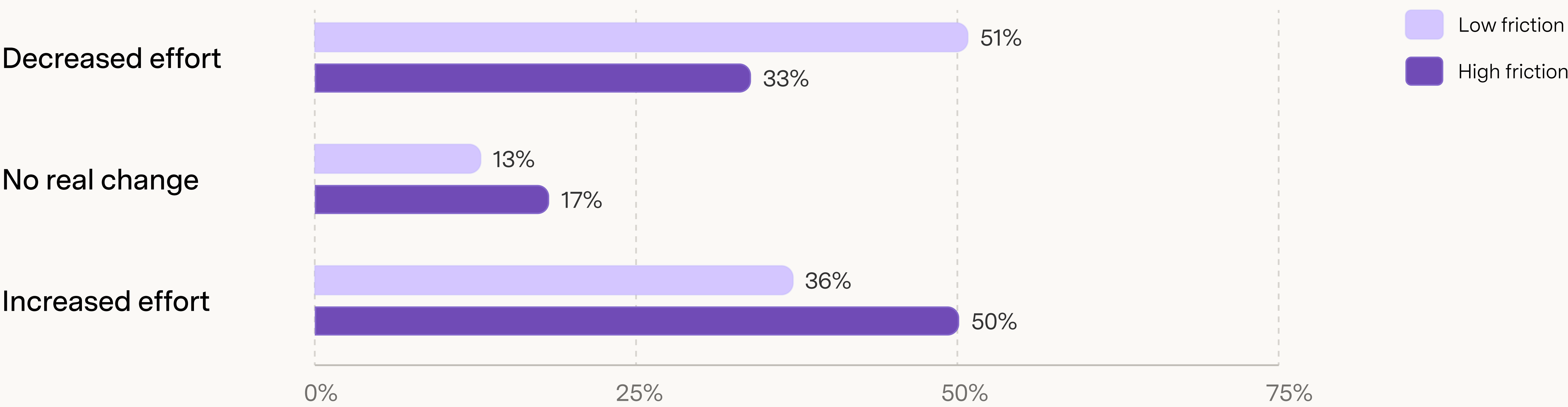
For technical teams, AI isn’t new, and it isn’t optional. Nearly every technical worker has access to AI writing, coding, summarization, search, and copilot capabilities, and when they use it, they find genuine value. Nearly 90% say AI helps them feel more accomplished at the end of the day. The catch is that AI can create value and effort at the same time depending on the tool environment around it.

To understand how that environment shapes the AI experience for technical teams, we looked at trends across two segments based on their level of decision friction—simply put, how hard it is to figure out which tool to use for a given task and how much overhead it takes to keep work moving across tools.

The difference between the groups is stark. In low-friction environments, where tools work together and stay connected, more than half of technical workers (51%) say AI lightens their workload. In high-friction environments, where fragmented systems create more of a burden, that flips—half say AI adds to their workload instead.

The environment determines what AI does to your workload

% of technical workers reporting AI’s impact on effort, by friction segment





When friction rises, workarounds follow

When AI increases effort instead of reducing it, technical teams don't stop working. They adapt. They route around the official company tools and reach for ones that feel easier or more familiar. This is known as shadow AI, and it carries real risk, such as fragmented data, governance gaps, and a shrinking return on AI investments.

In high-friction environments, 89% of technical workers report turning to shadow AI. In low-friction environments, that number is only 51%.

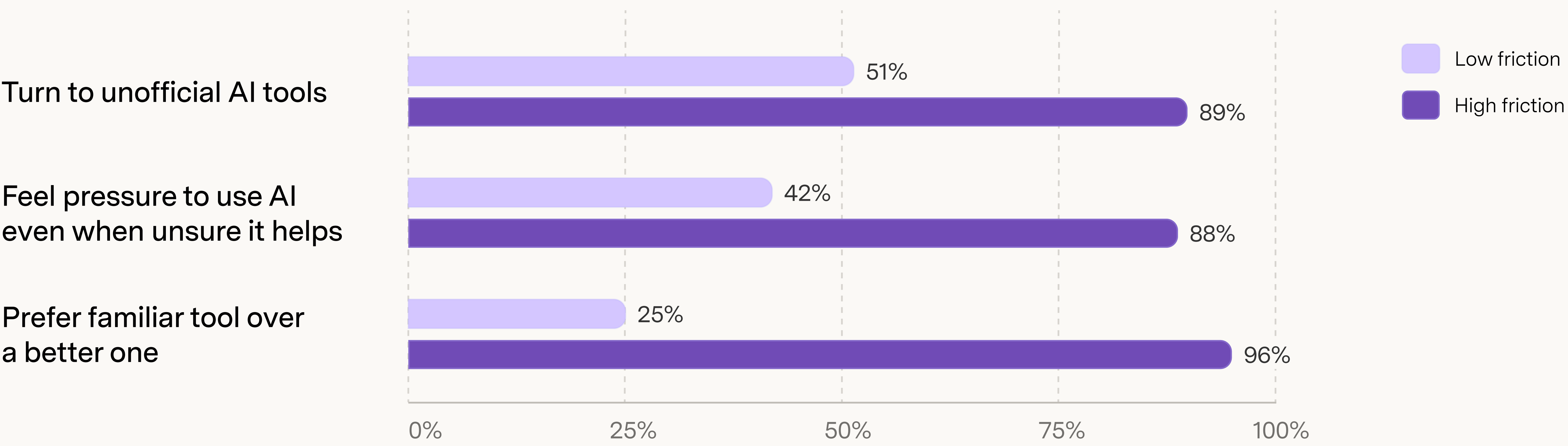
Why technical workers choose unofficial tools



Shadow AI is one escape route. Familiarity bias is another. When navigating the official stack already feels like extra work, the calculus is simple: Go with what you know. In high-friction environments, 96% say they'd rather use a familiar tool even when a better one exists. In low-friction environments, that number is just 25%.

In high-friction environments, workarounds become the norm

% of technical workers by friction segment





Enablement gaps holding AI value back

Shadow AI is an adoption signal. It tells you where your official stack isn't working the way your teams do. It also reveals a quieter problem: Organizations haven't equipped their workers to use the tools they've already deployed. This is an enablement gap that shows up across three areas:

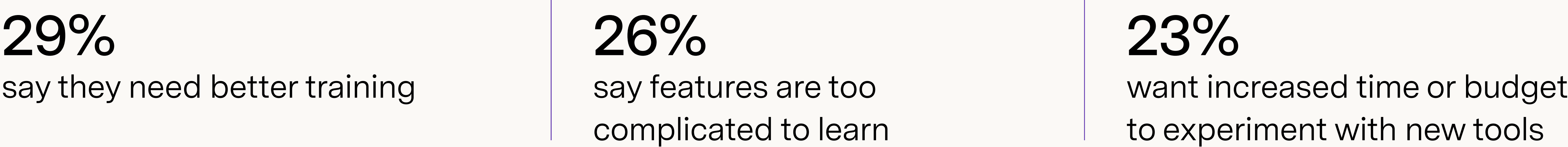
Awareness

Organizations deploy tools without telling workers what they do or when to use them.



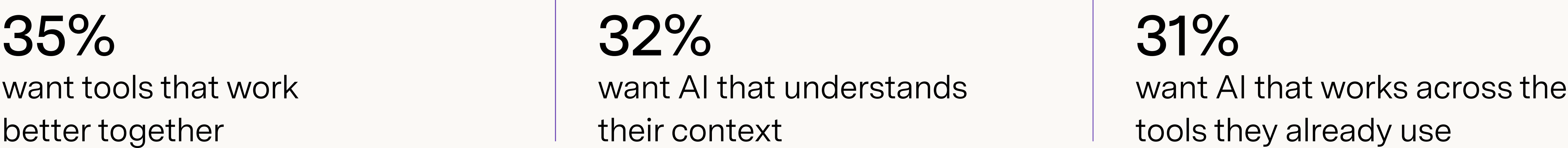
Training

Organizations are deploying tools faster than they're training workers to use them.



Capability

The tools workers have don't connect well enough to support how technical work actually flows.



None of these are individual failures. They're the predictable result of deploying tools without the context, guidance, or space for workers to develop fluency with them. Workers are leaving capability on the table, not by choice but because their organizations haven't closed the gap between deployment and enablement.



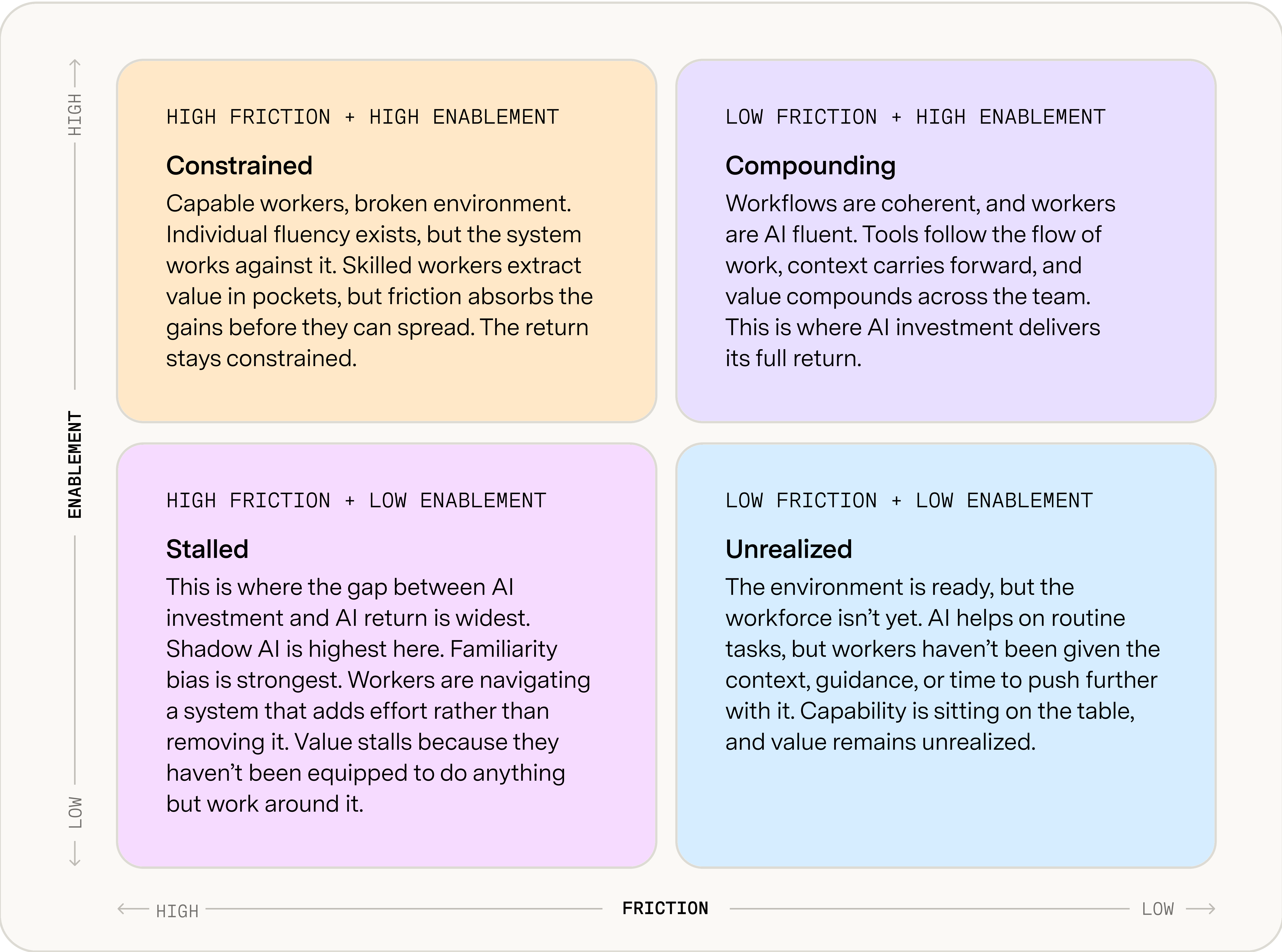
The AI Value Quadrant

The data across this report points to two organizational conditions that determine whether AI delivers returns or drains them.

The first is friction:
how much overhead workers carry just to keep work moving across tools and systems.

The second is enablement:
how well organizations prepare workers to use AI effectively and how clearly they communicate what those tools can do.

The AI Value Quadrant maps where your organization sits across these two conditions. It's a diagnostic, not a destination. The question it answers isn't whether your teams are using AI. It's whether the conditions exist for AI to deliver what you're investing in.





The path forward:

How to reach compounding value

Understanding where your technical teams sit on the quadrant is the first step. The second is knowing what to prioritize, because the path to compounding AI value looks different depending on where you're starting from.

If AI value is constrained

Your workforce is ready. The environment isn't. Here's where you should start:

- Prioritize workflow integration so the work stays connected as it moves between tools
- Talk to power users to identify where individual gains exist but aren't spreading to the broader team
- Remove the decision overhead of which tool to use by establishing clear guidance on when to use what

If AI value is compounding

You're where AI value scales. Here's how to protect it:

- Treat onboarding as an enablement investment so new team members develop workflow fluency from day one
- Check in regularly to make sure your tech stack is easy to navigate, not fragmented
- Use shadow AI rates and familiarity bias as ongoing diagnostics so you catch early signals before they become structural problems

If AI value is stalled

Both conditions need work but start with friction:

- Map where coordination overhead and tool confusion are highest
- Consolidate tools where possible and prioritize ones that carry context forward automatically
- Survey for shadow AI use to understand where your official stack isn't working for your teams

If AI value is unrealized

The environment is ready. The workforce isn't yet. Here's where you should focus:

- Overcommunicate how tools connect to the work and make awareness a habit rather than a one-time launch event
- Invest in ongoing training and onboard teams properly when new capabilities are introduced
- Prioritize tools that are connected and context aware so workers can push further without added decision overhead

Deploying more AI doesn't move an organization up the quadrant. Reducing friction does. Committing to enablement does. When both conditions are true, value stops being an individual advantage and starts being an organizational one.



SUPERHUMAN

Superhuman (formerly Grammarly) is the AI productivity platform on a mission to unlock the superhuman potential in everyone.

The Superhuman suite of apps and agents brings AI wherever people work, integrating with over 1 million applications and websites. The company's products include Grammarly writing assistance, Docs collaborative workspaces, Mail inbox management, and Go, the proactive AI assistant that understands context and delivers help automatically.

Founded in 2009, Superhuman empowers over 40 million people, 50,000 organizations, and 3,000 educational institutions worldwide to eliminate busywork and focus on what matters. Learn more at superhuman.com/solutions/enterprise.

Part of the answer is hiding in plain sight. They coordinate across teams, manage work in progress, review code, technical requirements, document product requirements, and they're not just to complete a single task. They're routinely managing work in progress, reviewing code, technical requirements, document product requirements, and they're not just to complete a single task. They're routinely managing work in progress, reviewing code, technical requirements, document product requirements, and they're not just to complete a single task.