

Fear of AI in Middle East SMEs & the Cost of Not Knowing

How leadership understanding determines
SME AI readiness & results

2025 September

AI Feels Big, New, &
Scary for SMEs

80% of Middle
East organizations
feel the intense
pressure to adopt
AI, but nearly half
struggle

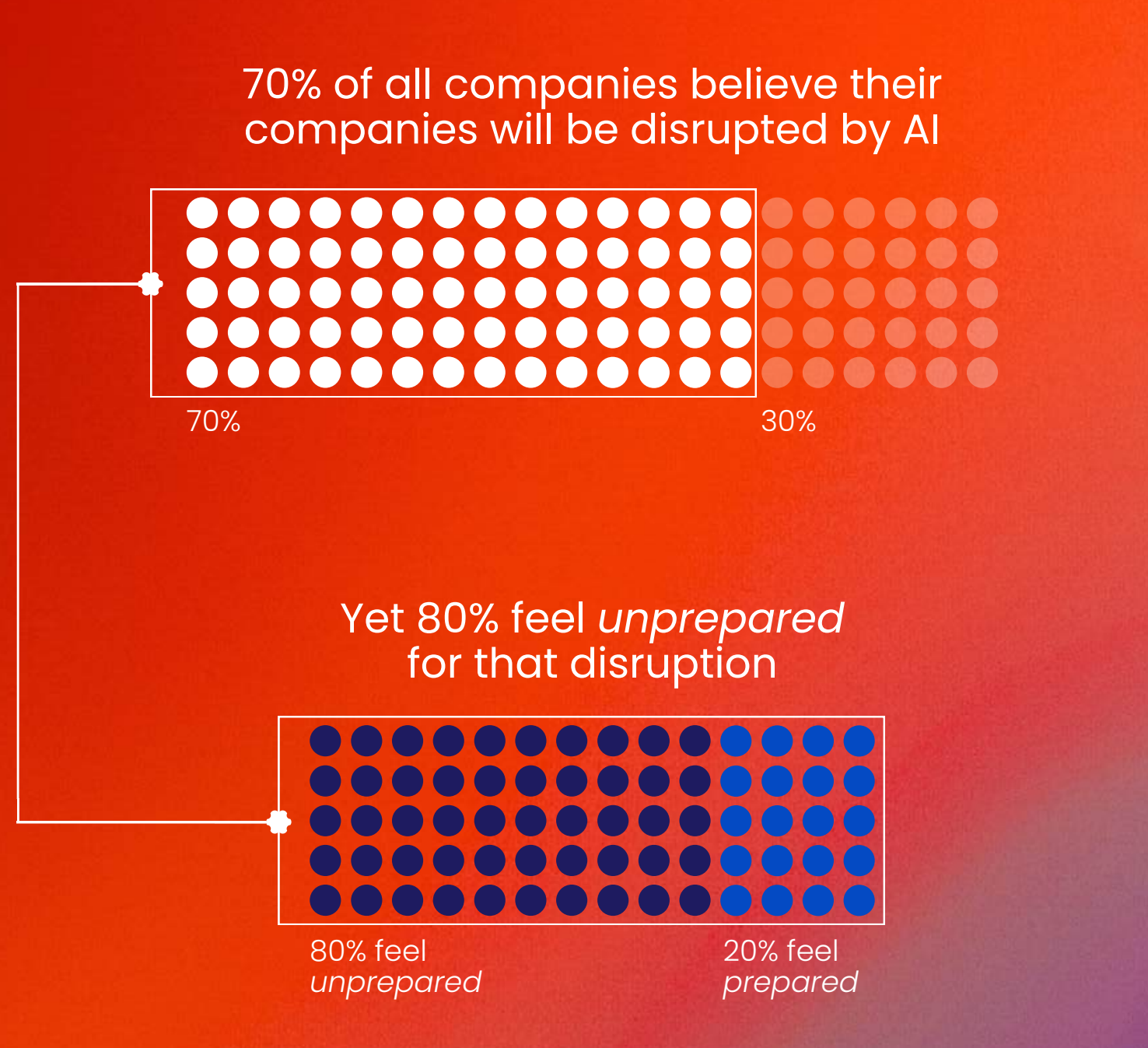


“There has been a persistent AI talent shortage in the GCC.

While organizations have strong ambitions and are investing heavily in AI technologies, they struggle to find people who can properly design and implement these systems.”

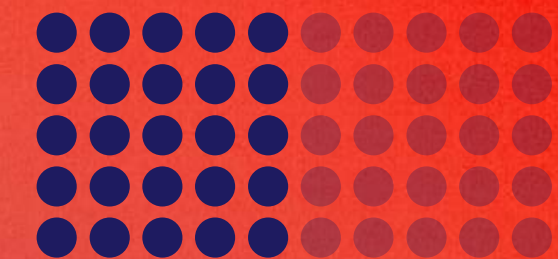
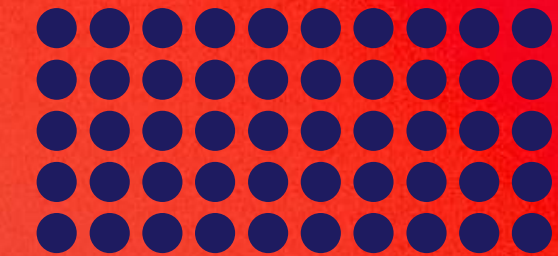
General Manager for MENA at a leading data science and machine learning platform provider

Data proves that **leadership understanding** of AI is the single greatest predictor of organizational preparedness



Out of the 80% that feel *unprepared*

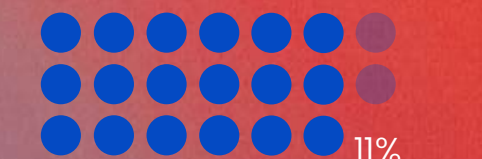
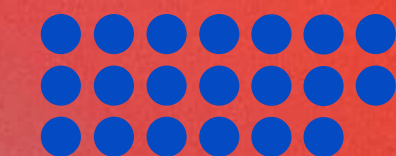
51% feel so because of a lack of **leadership understanding**



51% 49% other

Out of the 20% that feel *prepared*

89% feel so because of a strong **leadership understanding**



89% 11% other

Barriers to AI Development & Deployment

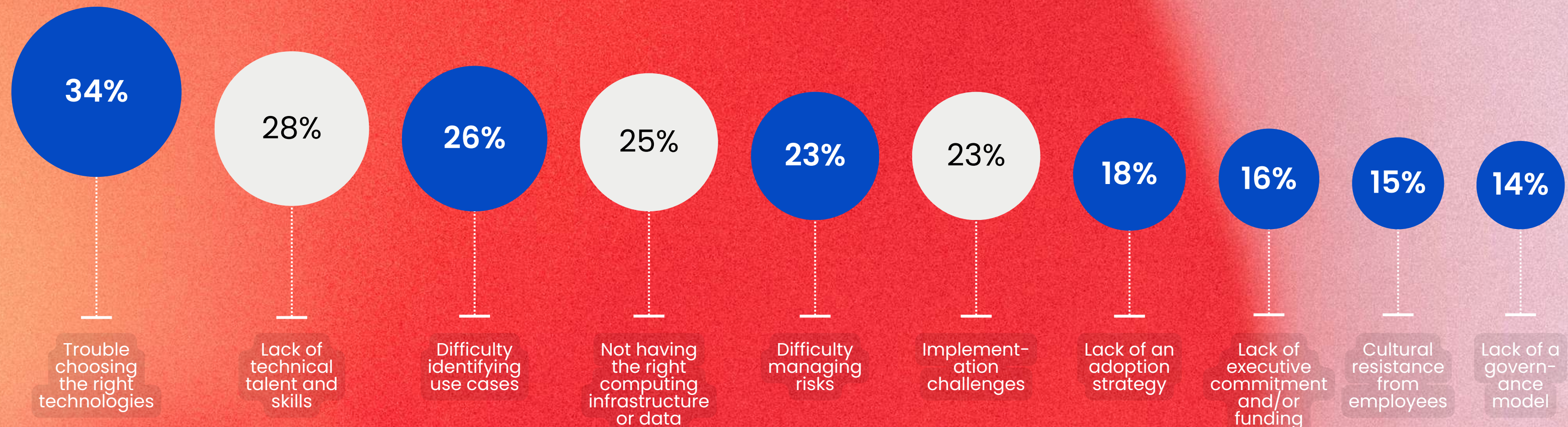


GCC SMEs cite many barriers to AI, but the strongest predictors of success link back to **leadership understanding** and strategic clarity

Q: What has most held your organization back in developing and deploying AI tools / applications?

(N = 155; Total does not add to 100%; Select up to three challenges)

- Leadership Understanding Barriers (decision, adoption strategy, governance)
- Technical Barriers (infrastructure, data, implementation)



The Cost of Not Knowing

The cost of not knowing is far greater than the cost of adoption—leaders who fail to understand AI create fear, slow decisions, and leave their businesses behind



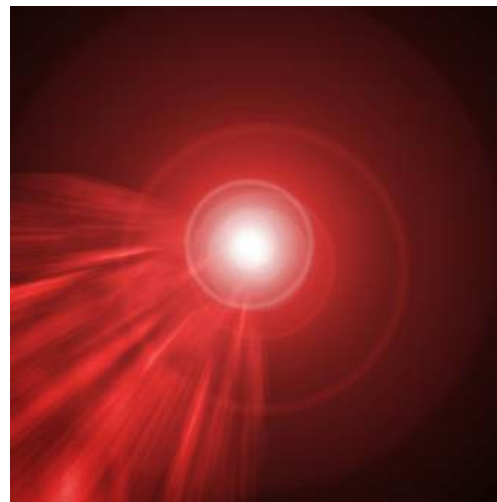
“The question is no longer if to adopt AI —only how soon.”

Hesham Abbas, CEO

Demystifying AI for SMEs: A Leadership Playbook

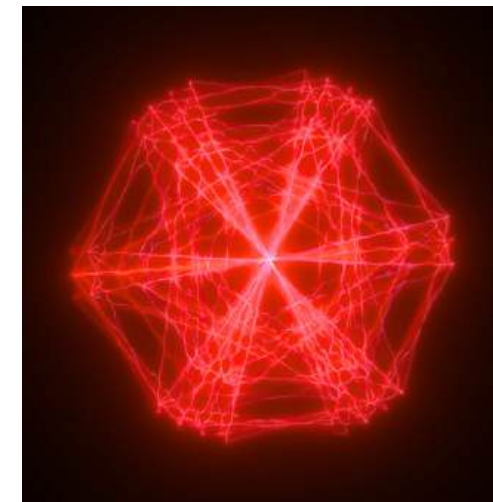


AI readiness depends on leaders mastering 4 fundamentals.



Choosing the Right Technologies

Understand what truly fits your business, not just the latest market hype.



Identifying Clear, High-Value Use Cases

Define 1-2 priority applications with clear ROI, ensuring alignment with business goals.



Executive Commitment

Secure funding, set direction, and communicate consistently.



Setting an Adoption Strategy Roadmap

Build a clear step-by-step roadmap instead of scattered, ad-hoc pilots.

Discover how you can turn AI fear into future advantage

Authorship



Abdullah Madany

abdullah@heshamabbasforconsulting



Abdelrahman Madany

abdelrahman@heshamabbasforconsulting



Contact us for more information



+973 16-50-1144



www.heshamabbasforconsulting.com



info@heshamabbasforconsulting.com



Bahrain Financial Harbour, East Tower, Level 11, Office 1144