



Outsized's 2025

# Talent-on-Demand Report

Insights, trends, and cost benchmarks for the high-end independent talent markets across Asia-Pacific, Middle East, and Africa

From the team at

**Outsized.**

## About Outsized



Outsized was built by **ex-consultants, private equity directors, and industry leaders**. We really do know what great talent looks like for discerning clients.

Since 2016, we've been connecting top independent professionals with leading organisations across Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa. Could we help you find the right match, too?

**Niclas Thelander**  
Founder of Outsized



# Flexibility meets expertise: The new talent advantage

Demand for independent talent from our clients is surging across sectors and geographies, growing far faster than the underlying economies themselves.

A key factor is the fundamental shift in how consultancies and enterprises manage their workforce strategies - a shift that is rapidly gaining momentum.

Rather than building large permanent teams - or scrambling to hire specialised talent on short notice - businesses are seeking more flexible, scalable, and cost effective ways to adapt to market changes.

From closing skill gaps to scaling capabilities for new initiatives, forward thinking leaders are turning to on-demand talent to stay

prepared for tomorrow's challenges- without adding unnecessary fixed costs. While this transformation has been underway for some time, our data and client discussions indicate that 2025 is the tipping point for agile talent at scale in our markets.

In this 2025 Talent on Demand Report, our team is proud to share exclusive and proprietary data of independent rates (excl. our margin), insights, and best practices to help you shape an agile and future proof talent strategy.

[Get in touch](#)

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# Thriving in uncertainty: Why adaptability defines success



Anurag Bhalla  
CEO Outsized

The most in-demand skill areas last year from Outsized clients centred around driving and managing change. With new technologies, shifting consumer expectations, and evolving market conditions, **the ability to pivot quickly has become a competitive advantage- one that's here to stay.**

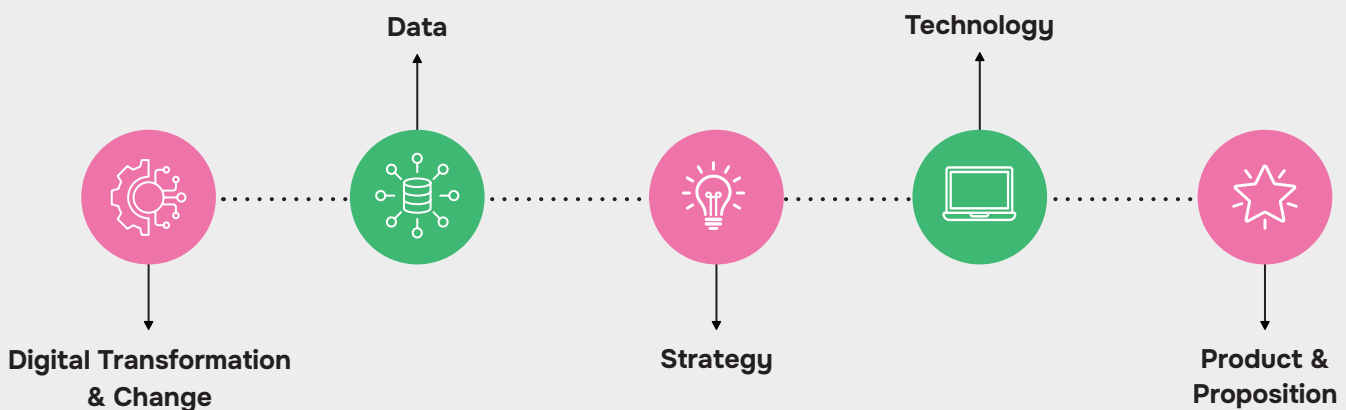
From harnessing data insights and building agile strategies to leveraging AI and reimagining

business models, every aspect of modern leadership demands teams ready to evolve in real time.

## What does this mean for executives today?

The next page highlights the key takeaways from the Outsized 2025 Talent-on-Demand Report, equipping leaders with actionable workforce and business strategies to stay ahead.

## Most in demand skill areas globally from Outsized clients



# 5 talent strategy takeaways for 2025



## 1 Agility is not optional

Rigid workforce structures are outdated. Companies must adopt capability-driven models to stay competitive.

- Scaling quickly in response to market changes
- Bridging skill gaps in emerging areas like AI, ESG, and digital transformation
- Reducing fixed workforce costs without sacrificing quality

**Leadership takeaway:** Move from static workforce planning to dynamic capability-building, deploying the right talent at the right time.

## 2 AI is reshaping work, but the biggest challenge is human

AI isn't just automating tasks - it's transforming workforce dynamics. Success depends on workforce readiness, not just AI adoption.

- Hybrid roles merging strategic and technical expertise

- AI governance becoming a core leadership responsibility
- Continuous AI upskilling (AI fluency, data literacy, automation strategy)

**Leadership takeaway:** The organisations that thrive in AI-driven environments will be those that invest in workforce adaptability.

## 3 ESG is a core business priority, not an add-on

ESG has moved beyond compliance to a core driver of investment, talent attraction, and market success.

- Demand for ESG specialists (carbon accountants, sustainability experts)
- Regulatory pressure increasing
- Investors and employees prioritising sustainability

**Leadership takeaway:** ESG must be embedded into workforce planning - success is no longer just financial but measured by sustainable impact.

## 4 Workforce costs are rising, value creation is the focus

Talent shortages and wage inflation are driving costs, but leaders must focus on value, not just cost-cutting.

- Shift to a mix of full-time, independent, and project-based talent
- Use AI and automation to enhance productivity
- Leverage real-time workforce analytics

**Leadership takeaway:** Instead of asking “How can we cut costs?”, business leaders should ask “How can we deploy our workforce investment to create maximum impact?”



## 5 Project-based work is a competitive advantage

The way work is structured is changing. Instead of long-term headcount planning, leading organisations are moving toward project-based workforce models - where the right expertise is assembled for a specific initiative.

**This shift is being accelerated by three factors:**

- Business complexity requires diverse skill sets
- Speed matters - traditional hiring cycles can't keep up
- Cost efficiency - flexible talent models reduce fixed overheads

**Leadership takeaway:** Design workforce planning around deliverables and capabilities, not just full-time roles.





## Behind the scenes - who are the Outsized independent talent?

Outsized is the home of top independent talent across Asia-Pacific, Middle East, and Africa. Our independent professionals come from leading consultancies and global enterprises, bringing both deep domain expertise and proven track records of impact and execution.

Handpicked and vetted for excellence, they offer flexible yet top tier capabilities to fill critical skill

gaps - ensuring your organisation can adapt and thrive without compromising on quality.

What's even better - they can start adding value in days, not months! Below are some of the top independent talent on Outsized. If you're lucky they are free for your next initiative, but if not, there are over 45k more of them to choose from.



**Yash**, GTM and Growth Strategy

McKinsey  
& Company



**Leo**, Strategy Consulting

OliverWyman



**Cetrin**, Product Management

cashbac



**Mfanafuthi**, QA Test Analysis

absa



**Danish**, Supply Chain and Procurement

BCG



**Hester**, Operations & Compliance

Sanlam



**Peter**, Agile Transformation

ANZ



**John**, Product Development

amazon

# Different ways to leverage independent talent



**Johann van Niekerk,**  
Outsized COO &  
Africa Lead



**Talent-on-Demand:** Quickly close capability and capacity gaps for your core functions and project teams. Onboard talent in days, not weeks or months.



**Teams:** When more is more...! Whether you need a team of different specialists to quickly scale up a business unit or project, or a number of people with the same skills, a team of independents is your answer.



**Bench:** Always-on access to curated and continuously updated and maintained talent pools of top-tier independents across skill areas. Outsized guarantees quality, depth and availability of talent.



**Contract-to-Hire:** Speed up and de-risk hiring for both you and the talent. Through a Contract-to-Hire solution, employers and skilled talent get to know each other during the 'try before you buy' period, ensuring a great match for both parties.

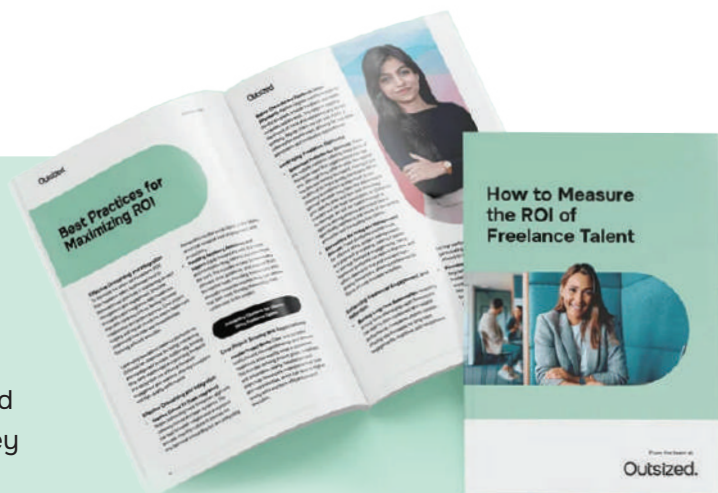


**Contracting-as-a-Service:** An end-to-end service helping you contract, pay and manage your independent talent. We reduce the complexity, time and risk associated with onboarding individuals who don't sit on your payroll

## The true ROI of independent talent

The value of independent talent goes well beyond cost savings. Innovation, agility, and sustained value creation are some of the key advantages that are often forgotten.

Organisations must move beyond a narrow cost-benefit analysis and consider the broader impact of this evolving workforce. While harder to quantify, its influence on business resilience, adaptability, and long-term growth is undeniable.



[Get the guide](#)





1  
Project & Programme  
Management



2  
Strategy



3  
Digital Transformation  
& Change



4  
Data & Business  
Intelligence



5  
Technology Implementation &  
Development



6  
Your Previously  
Used Talent

## Product deep-dive

### Bench by Outsized: Fundamentally transform your agility with deeply vetted, on demand talent pools

Bench by Outsized is a strategic asset allowing you to **ramp capabilities up and down in line with business demand**. It allows you to fill critical skills gaps, quickly test and build new capabilities, execute important projects and drive innovation in your organisation.

With Bench, you tap into the talent you need when you need it; reducing overheads and boosting delivery outcomes.

[Get a demo of Bench](#)

### Here's what you get with Bench - at no extra cost

- ✓ **Pre-loaded talent pools:** Access fully vetted, independent talent across high-demand areas - ready to deploy immediately.
- ✓ **Your own Bench Manager:** A dedicated Outsized Bench Manager who ensures Bench depth and availability. I.e., your own additional staffer or talent manager, free of charge.
- ✓ **Customisable talent ecosystem:** Build on this foundation by adding bespoke talent pools for your unique requirements for a small fee.
- ✓ **Agile and future-ready:** Respond to immediate talent needs and stay ahead by creating a workforce that scales as your business evolves.

[Learn more about Bench](#)



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# Southeast Asia

## Top trends and skills in demand in Southeast Asia

Ezriq Jen Muzakir,  
Strategic Accounts  
Manager SEA



### Overview

With geopolitical instability in the US, UK and Europe combined with continued uncertainty in regard to China, Southeast Asia is positioned well for growth. The region will continue to be an attractive market for foreign investment with growth expected in areas such as renewable energy and circular economy, e-commerce, data centres, digital banking, and supply chain transformation.

The Philippines, Vietnam, and Cambodia are expected to experience rapid growth, while Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand continue to present strong opportunities.

Despite enhanced connectivity and trade integration, each market retains distinct characteristics, requiring localisation and hybrid talent strategies. Companies are increasingly integrating international expertise with local teams to ensure effective execution and cultural alignment. On-site work remains the norm, with fully remote roles becoming rarer, particularly in delivery-focused positions.

Businesses across the region are prioritising **AI adoption, digital transformation**, and automation.

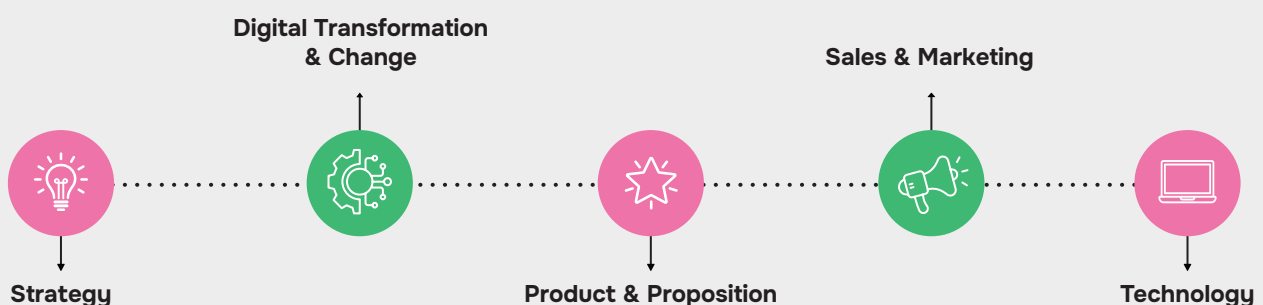
While AI investment is moving beyond strategy to pilot programmes and experiments, strict risk controls are slowing widespread adoption. Organisations continue to invest in ERP upgrades and core system modernisation, creating strong foundations for digital transformation.

**Digital customer engagement** is a growing priority, with companies shifting investments towards data-driven marketing, customer analytics, and agile channel strategies. This is leading to declining spend on traditional marketing, as firms focus on personalised, intelligent engagement.

**Delivery capability remains** in high demand, with project managers, transformation leads, PMOs, and agile practitioners sought after to execute complex initiatives. In parallel, data infrastructure investments are accelerating, with a focus on cloud migration, data lakes, and hyperscaler adoption.

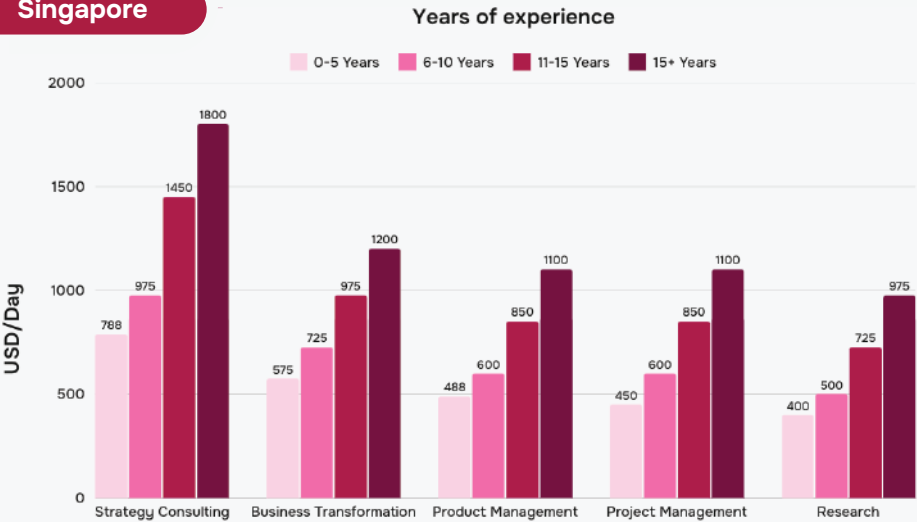
Consulting firms are evolving towards hybrid delivery models, blending strategy expertise with industry SMEs to enhance execution. Meanwhile, PE/VC-backed firms focus on helping investees establish core competencies on an interim, fractional or project basis in areas such as finance, human capital, and sales.

### Top skill areas in demand in Southeast Asia

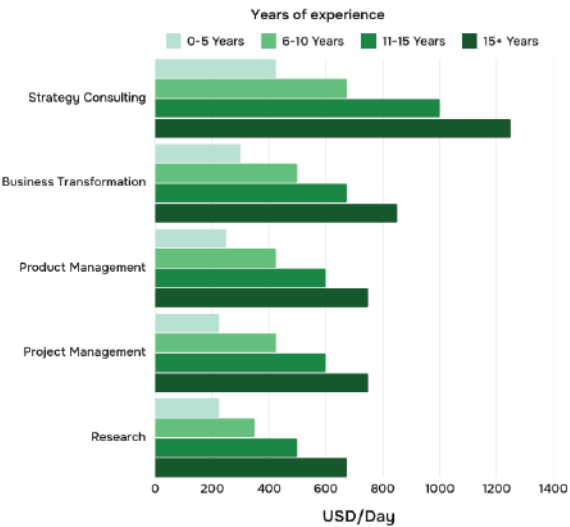


# Day rate examples for common skills in demand in Southeast Asia

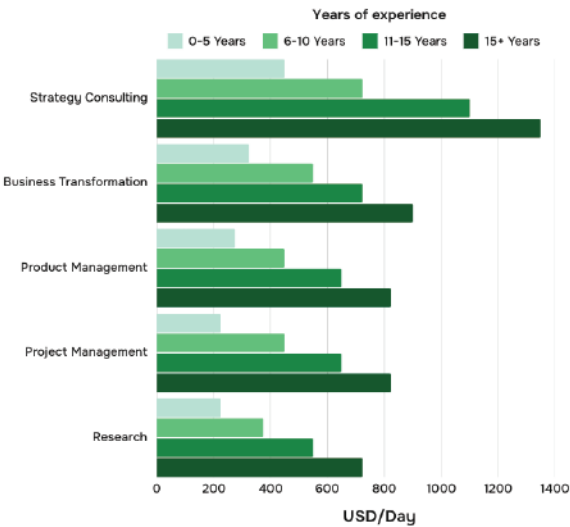
## Singapore



## Indonesia



## Malaysia



Access rates for all skills and markets



## Case study

# Building digital financial services talent pools for Oliver Wyman



### Background

Oliver Wyman's Asia-Pacific team was seeing an increase in demand for projects building new digital financial services propositions for their clients across Southeast Asia.

As a result, they were facing a crunch in terms of both capacity and in-house capabilities in certain skills areas. In particular, they were looking to add high-quality independent consultants in the areas of Strategy, Product Management, PMO, and Customer Experience.



### The outcomes

Outsized built four bespoke talent pools of fully vetted independent talent meeting rigorous quality standards: Strategy consultants, Product Managers, PMOs, and Customer Experience SMEs

This seamless integration of Outsized's independent consultants with Oliver Wyman's teams enabled rapid project initiation and increased efficiency

Further, it enabled Oliver Wyman to pitch for new projects with confidence, knowing that they had no capacity or capability issues thanks to the depth of the talent pools built on Bench by Outsized



### What we did

Outsized and Oliver Wyman partnered to put together world-beating teams by combining Oliver Wyman professionals with independent consultants for a number of cutting-edge projects in the digital financial services space.

Through Outsized's product Bench, Oliver Wyman could draw upon curated and pre-vetted specialists in four different talent pools.



“

*Outsized has quickly become an important partner for Oliver Wyman in the Asia Pacific region for our talent-on-demand needs. They enable us to grow quickly, without any compromises on quality. We were excited to partner with Outsized to build up highly curated talent pools for our digital financial services projects.*

**Kirsty Hill, Director of Talent Asia Pacific, Oliver Wyman**

## Rate Calculator

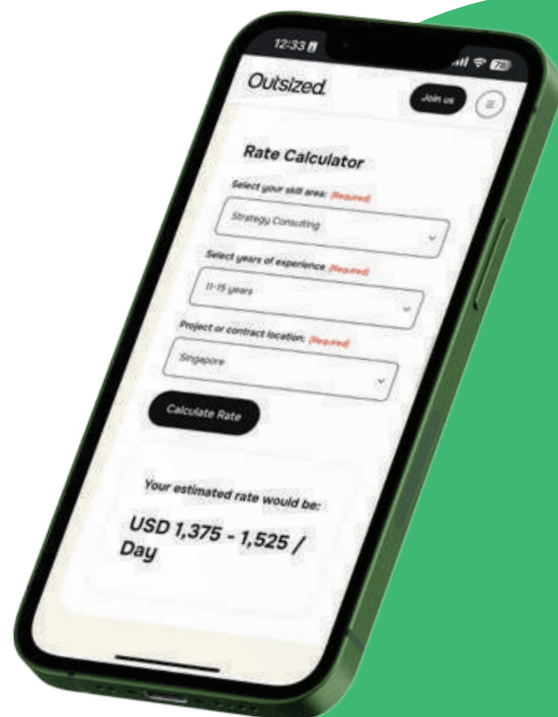
# How much do independent consultants cost by skill and geography?

**This is one of the most common questions we get, and the answer is.... 'it depends'.**

Rates will vary based on factors like project complexity, urgency, market demand, and more, so there isn't a definite answer.

However, we have collected tens of thousands of **proprietary datapoints from real projects, from real clients, with real rates from projects on our platform.**

Throughout this report we are showcasing rate examples by skill and geography for some of the most in-demand areas of expertise. But there is much more where that came from. Visit our website to search for rates by skill areas, level of experience, and geography for our core markets across Asia-Pacific, South Africa, and the Middle East.



Rate calculator based on real data this way!





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**South Africa**

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# Top trends and skills in demand in South Africa

**Frans Meyer**, Senior Business Development Manager, South Africa

## Overview

South Africa's market continues to evolve, shaped by political and economic shifts, regulatory changes, and the ongoing adoption of new technologies.

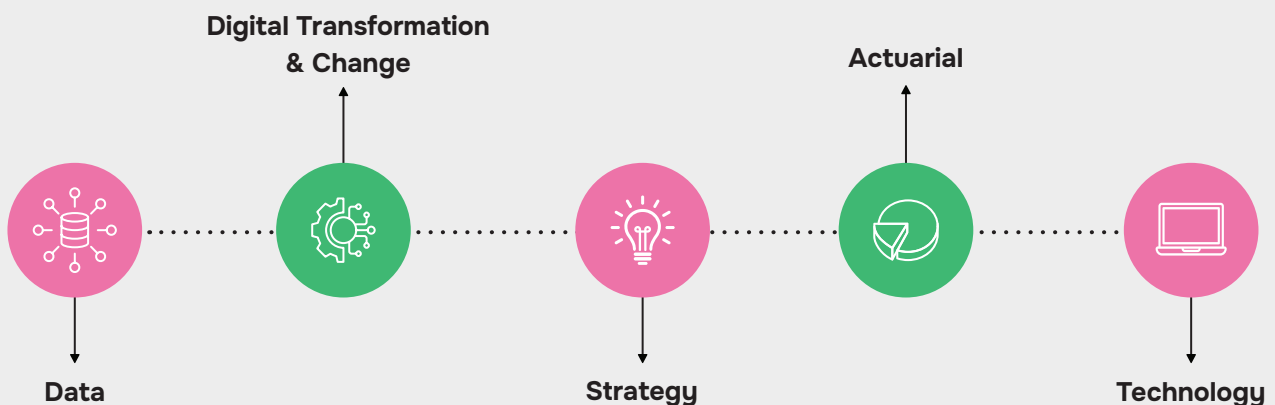
Over the past year most businesses have focused on digital transformation, automation, cost optimisation, and regulatory compliance, driving demand for specialised skills across various sectors.

**Data** remains a critical asset, with companies prioritising data-driven decision-making, automation, and AI integration. At the same time legacy systems are being reviewed and new technologies implemented and embedded. This has fuelled demand for data analysts,

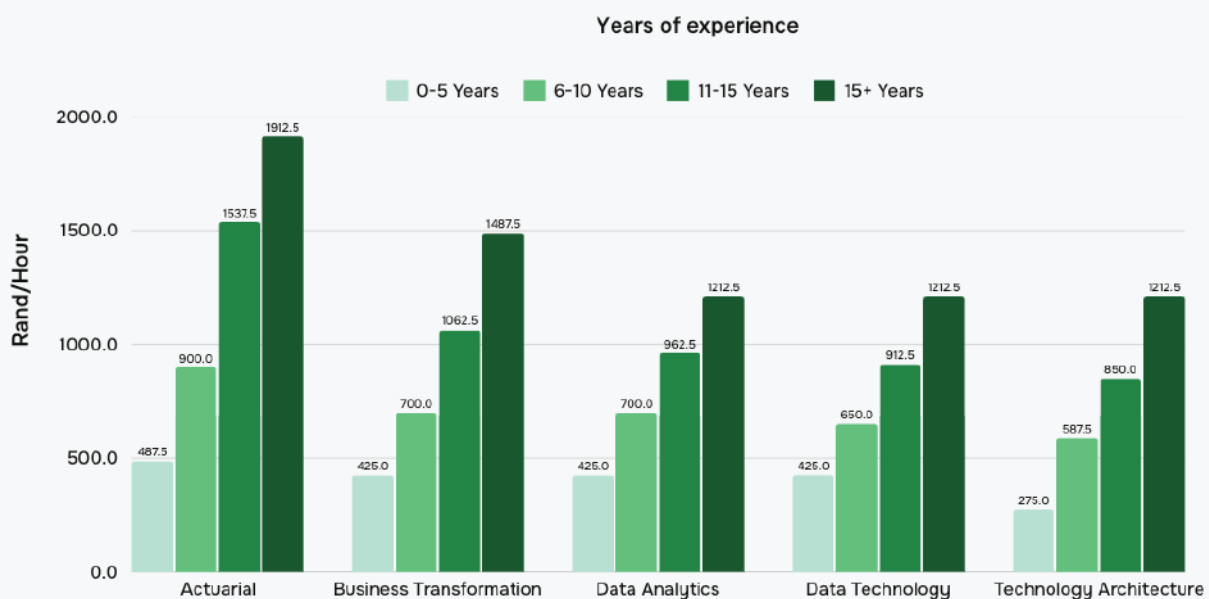
data engineers, solutions architect, and cloud specialists, to name but a few.

Organisations are undergoing significant structural and operational changes, driven by market volatility, competition and evolving regulations. Experts such as Business Analysts are critical in bridging the gap between business goals and technology, helping to define requirements and streamline processes. Critical too are project and programme managers who ensure successful project delivery. Alongside them, change management professionals and strategic and management consultants are essential for guiding businesses through aspects such as digital adoption, process optimisation, and business restructuring.

## Top skill areas in demand in South Africa



# Talent cost analysis: Hourly rates & experience - South Africa



In the financial services sectors broadly, but insurers specifically, actuarial professionals continue to be highly sought after, particularly those with expertise in risk modelling, IFRS 17, and capital management.

We have also seen strong demand for financial analysts, technical accountants, and regulatory and compliance experts.

[Access rates for all skills and markets](#)

## What to expect in 2025

As businesses continue to prioritise agility in an uncertain world, professionals with cross-functional expertise—combining technology, strategy, and financial acumen—will stand out. The demand for contract and project-based specialists will continue to rise as companies seek flexible workforce solutions that offer key skills on an agile basis. Organisations that invest in upskilling, digital capability-building, and adaptive leadership will be best positioned for success in this evolving market.



## Case study

# Navigating IFRS 17 compliance with Outsized's expertise

AVBOB, a leading insurance company in South Africa with over a century of experience in funeral insurance, faced a pressing challenge: achieving compliance with IFRS 17. This international standard demanded significant changes to ensure transparent and comparable financial reporting for insurance entities worldwide.



### The challenge

IFRS 17 required AVBOB to adapt to a rigorous new framework, fundamentally altering how their actuarial valuations and financial results were reported. Meeting these standards was not only about compliance but also about maintaining trust and credibility in an increasingly regulated industry. With the compliance deadline approaching, the team at AVBOB had to find the right partner for the job.

### Our solution

#### Tailored recommendations

Identified and presented three consulting companies that aligned with AVBOB's needs

#### Rigorous evaluation

Assessed each firm based on IFRS 17 expertise, Prophet software familiarity, location, and budget, followed by a thorough interview process

#### Strategic selection

AVBOB selected SolveCO, benefiting from both their expertise and convenient proximity to their offices

### The outcome

#### Compliance

All reporting requirements were met without disruption

#### Revenue growth

By avoiding a lengthy talent search, AVBOB accelerated their project timelines

#### Enhanced brand positioning

Consultants integrated seamlessly into AVBOB's team, maintaining transparency and trust throughout the process

“



*Outsized's team made this process seamless. From initial contact to final placement, their ability to understand our needs and deliver the right fit saved us weeks of research and interviews. Despite the complexity of IFRS 17 and a tight timeline, the consultants Outsized recommended were invaluable. Their expertise ensured we met our deadline and delivered a top-quality solution*

**Colin van Son, Chief Risk Officer, AVBOB**



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# Middle East

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# Top trends and skills in demand in the Middle East

Azeem Zainulbhai  
MENA & India Lead

## Overview

The MENA region is experiencing a dynamic shift in its talent and economic landscape, driven by ambitious national projects, localisation policies, and a growing demand for specialised skills.

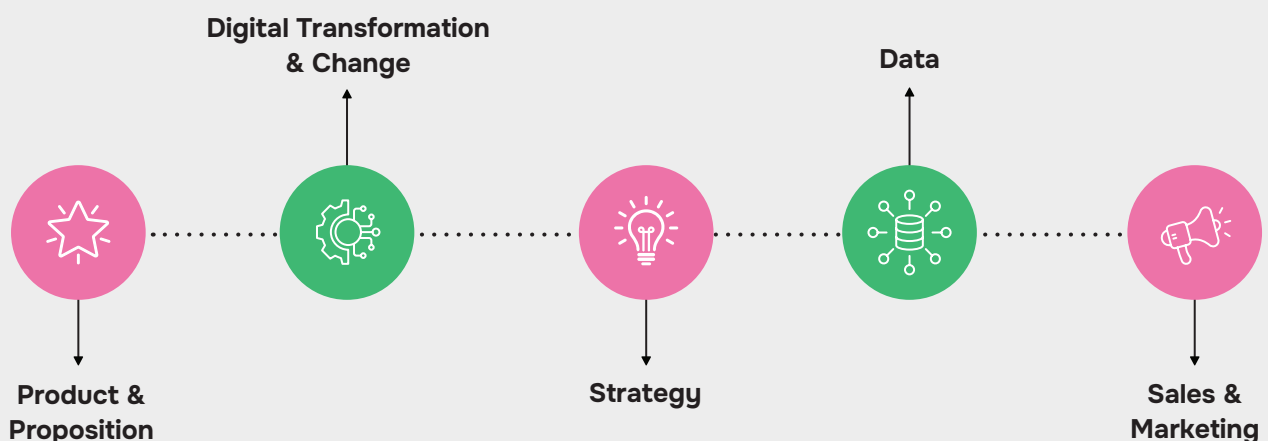
Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and other large-scale initiatives have spurred demand for expertise in product development, change management, strategy, data analytics, and sales and marketing. However, localisation requirements in countries like Saudi Arabia have made permanent hiring challenging, prompting firms to explore alternative strategies such as engaging

Arabic-speaking talent from outside the GCC, sourcing global expertise (particularly from South Asia), and embracing remote work options.

**Despite these efforts, a significant supply-demand gap persists, with skilled professionals commanding higher premiums compared to other regions like South Asia or South Africa.**

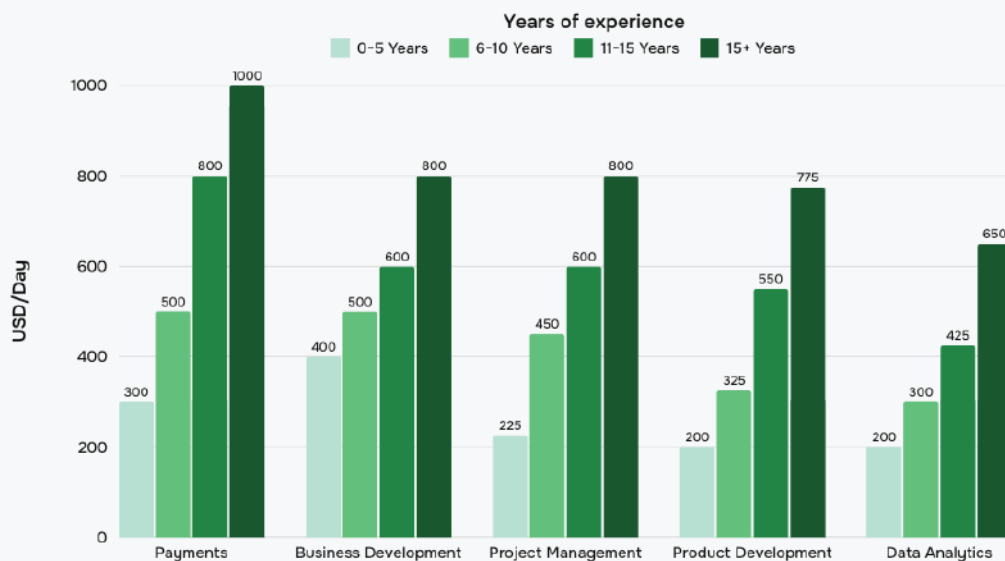
This talent scarcity has also led to increased reliance on flexible talent solutions, such as independent consultants and project-based hires, which offer agility without long-term commitments.

## Top skill areas in demand in Middle East





# Talent cost analysis: Day rates & experience - Middle East



UAE & Saudi Arabia



## What to expect in 2025

Looking ahead to 2025, the consulting market in MENA is poised for a rebound as corporations recover from recent economic uncertainties. Companies are expected to adopt more flexible workforce models to mitigate risks and adapt to fluctuating market conditions. Meanwhile, emerging sectors such as ESG sustainability, and data analytics are likely to see heightened activity.

The region's rapid digital transformation further amplifies the demand for tech-savvy professionals. Trends like AI adoption, IoT-driven smart cities, and 5G connectivity are reshaping industries and creating new opportunities. In this evolving landscape, businesses must remain agile, leveraging innovative talent strategies to stay competitive.

Access rates for all skills and markets



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India

# Top trends and skills in demand in India



**Faisal Shah,**  
Manager, India

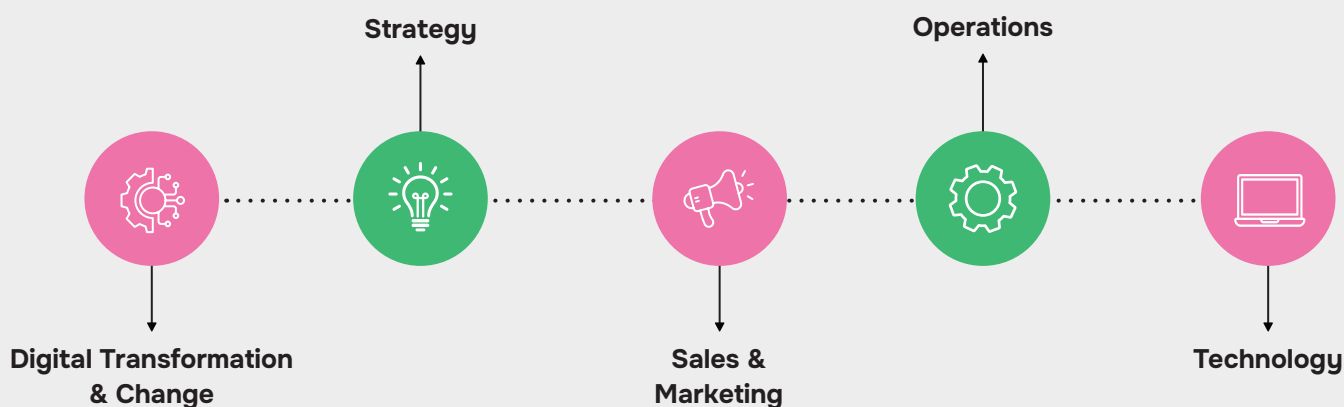
## Overview

India's professional landscape is evolving rapidly, driven by globalisation, technological advancements, and shifting market dynamics. Post-pandemic globalisation has accelerated the transfer of skills to South Asia, positioning India as a burgeoning hub for talent. This evolution is reflected in two significant trends: the growing acceptance of flexible talent by traditional corporates and a more structured, professional approach to contracting external resources.

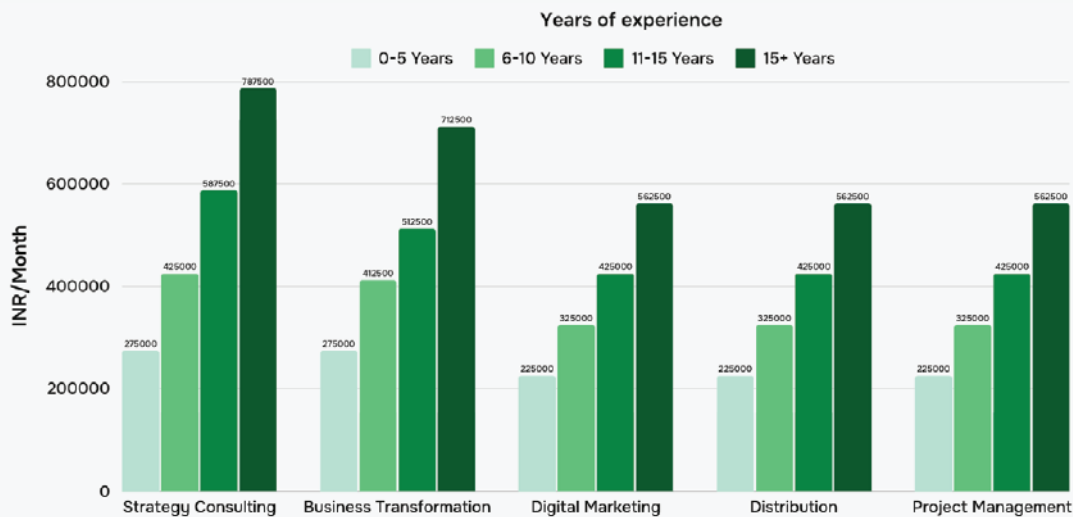
These developments are underpinned by a culture of trust and institutional knowledge, enabling independent professionals to be treated more like employees than vendors - boosting project outcomes and operational speed.

Key skills in demand include change management, strategy, sales and marketing, operations, and technology.

## Top skill areas in demand in India



# Talent cost analysis: Monthly rates & experience - India



The consulting market is witnessing a strong **recovery**, fuelled by growth in sectors such as telecom, retail, energy, and construction. This resurgence is expected to intensify in 2025, driving up rates for high-quality independent professionals. Additionally, there is a rising trend of **Indian clients engaging international experts** for specialised projects requiring niche expertise.

India's talent market is also adapting to global trends. The demand for roles in technology and sustainability reflects broader shifts towards digital transformation and ESG priorities. Emerging roles like Sustainability Analysts and Behavioural Therapists highlight the focus on environmental consciousness and mental health.

## What to expect in 2025

Looking ahead, India's maturing talent ecosystem - bolstered by its demographic dividend and global integration - positions it as a key player in meeting both domestic and international skill demands. As client expectations evolve, India's workforce is poised to lead with agility, innovation, and expertise.

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# Australia & New Zealand

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# Top trends and skills in Australia

Sara Kahlau,  
ANZ lead

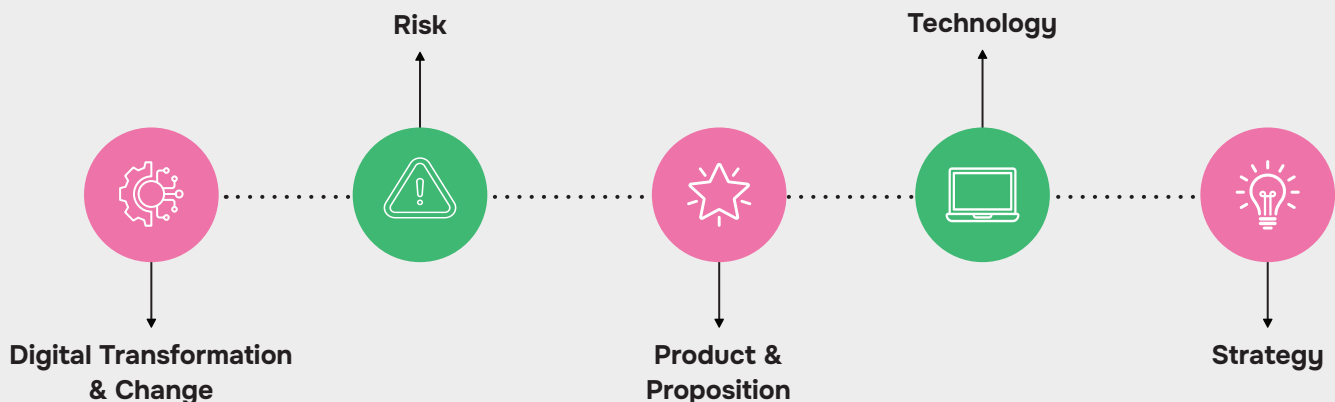


## Overview

Persistent economic uncertainty has prompted companies to reassess their workforce strategies. Many are shifting towards skills-based hiring, prioritising versatile leaders with diverse skill sets and practical experience in navigating challenges over traditional qualifications. This approach emphasises adaptability and strategic thinking, enabling organisations to remain agile in fluctuating conditions.

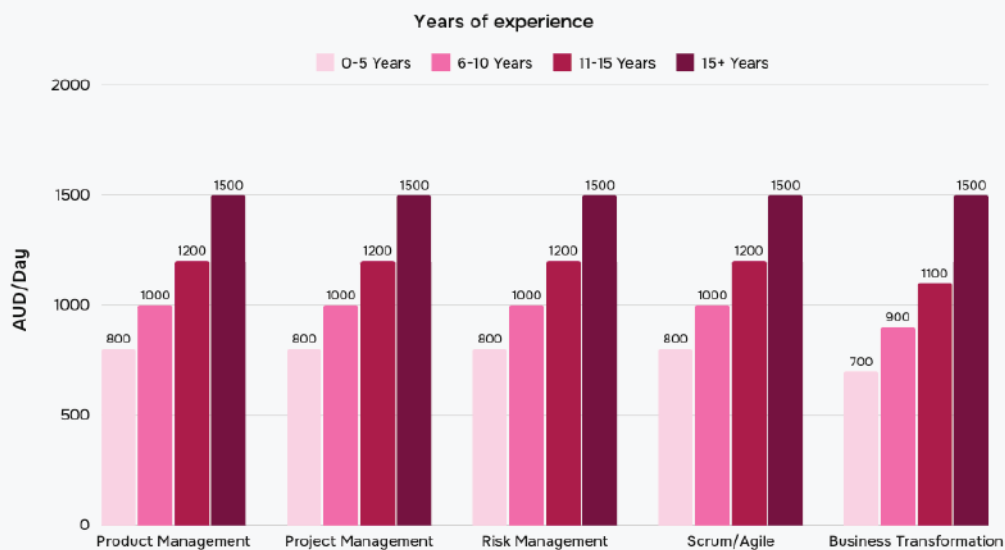
In Australia and New Zealand (ANZ), there's a growing recognition of the value that independent professionals bring to the table. Enterprises are increasingly engaging independent talent to access specific expertise for critical projects. This strategy offers agility and cost-effectiveness, ensuring that the workforce's skills remain aligned with evolving business needs. We at Outsized have facilitated this transition for clients by providing seamless matching and engagement of the right talent at the right time.

## Top skill areas in demand in Australia





# Talent cost analysis: Day rates & experience - Australia



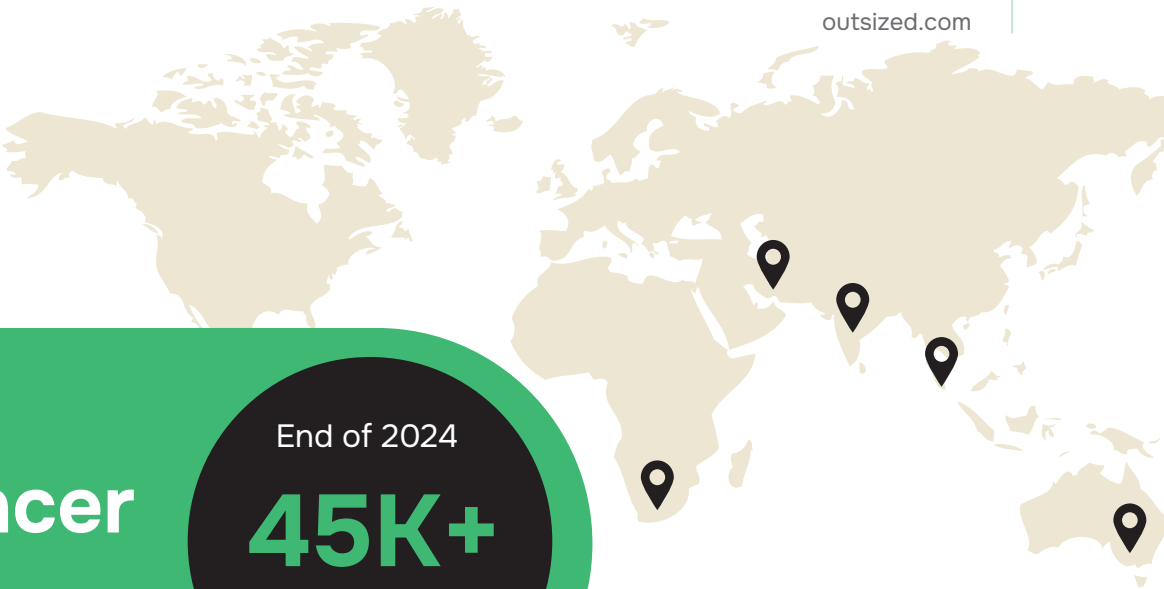
**Demand across top areas like Product, Technology, and Data** is driven by technological and digital advancements, prompting enterprises to invest in infrastructure enhancements and new initiatives to meet market and customer demands. Additionally, cost pressures necessitate efficiency improvements. However, the relatively small population and geographical challenges in ANZ contribute to skills shortages. Combined with consequently higher costs to access these skills (due to the smaller available pool) and difficulties in engaging international talent, enterprises sometimes experience delays or issues in bringing onboard talent at the right time.

[Access rates for all skills and markets](#)



## Looking ahead to 2025

It's anticipated that enterprises will integrate independent talent solutions more deeply into their workforce strategies. Innovative organisations are expected to adopt platforms like Outsized's Bench to manage the temporary components of their workforce effectively. Emerging skills gaps are likely to extend beyond technical and business domains, emphasising creative and analytical thinking, technological literacy, and resilience. As technology and AI handle more routine tasks, these human-centric skills will become increasingly vital for enterprises, whether through permanent hires or independent experts.



# Freelancer growth



2024 has been a standout year for independent professionals globally. With talent registrations booming across 60+ countries, the year showcased impressive regional trends that reflect the growing diversity and specialisation of the independent workforce.

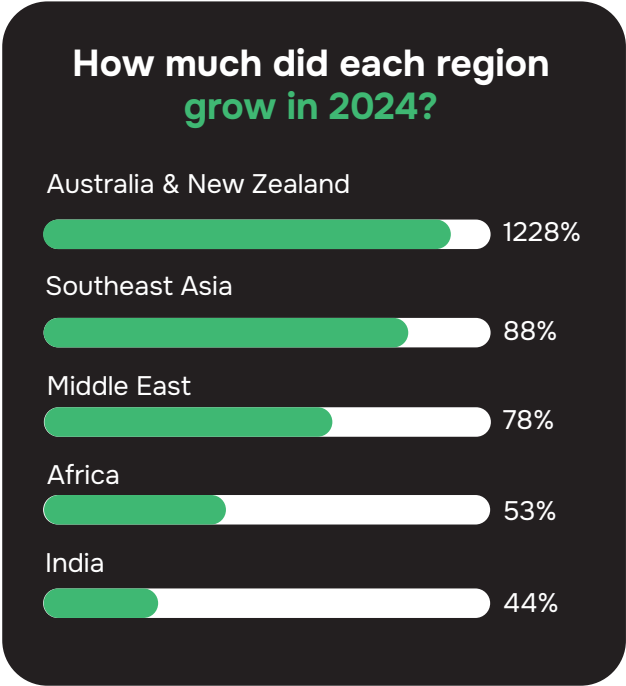
**ANZ:** Outsized doubled-down on the ANZ region in 2024, setting up local operations in the beginning of the year. The result? A surge in talent registrations not least in the areas of change management, strategy consulting, and technology.

**SEA:** The strong regional talent growth continued, seeing a slight trend shift from change management and strategy, to a surge in talent with a focus on technology, data, and sales & marketing.

**Africa:** Growth previously centered on finance and change management, but 2024 saw a notable rise in technology and data skills, with change remaining a key area.

**India:** 2024 saw significant growth in terms of approved talent registrations across strategy consulting, technology, and sales, but also an increase in skills related to manufacturing and procurement projects.

**Middle East:** Consistent demand for financial services and payments continued, with growing interest in data, product management, and technology.





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# Industry spotlight: Consulting



# Tapping consulting-grade independent specialists

**In 2024, the consulting sector experienced notable shifts in talent demand.** With broad-reaching changes across sectors driven by technological change, consulting firms faced two primary drivers of resource needs: capacity and capability. To address capacity constraints, firms increasingly turned to independent talent to supplement their in-house teams. These professionals, often with backgrounds in top-tier consulting firms, were valued for their readiness to deploy their consulting toolkits.

On the capability front, there was a heightened demand for independent consultants possessing specialised industry knowledge or advanced technological expertise. This approach allowed firms to offer clients contextual insights and address specific challenges without hiring for these niche skills in-house.

**The engagement of independent talent has become a standard practice among consulting firms.** Many have developed sophisticated processes to manage their flexible workforce at scale. However, challenges arise when these processes create barriers between firm partners, talent providers like Outsized, and the independent consultants themselves. Reduced direct communication with project leads can lead to suboptimal matching, cultural misalignment, and reduced support during project delivery. Instead, make sure to work closely with talent partners to form a direct relationship, allowing them to understand your ideal talent.

## What to expect in 2025

Looking ahead, the consulting landscape is poised for further evolution. While large firms continue to hold significant market positions, there's a noticeable rise in boutique consulting firms. These smaller entities approach flexible talent differently, often leveraging solutions like **Outsized's Bench** and Teams to rapidly scale their operations. This trend democratises consulting, basically allowing anyone to launch firms and compete effectively with established players.

In terms of **specific skill demand**, consulting firms seek independent professionals with robust strategy and execution experience, particularly those with backgrounds in top tier consulting firms. There's also a growing need for experts in technology domains such as cybersecurity, AI governance, and platform development. Beyond technical prowess, essential soft skills include flexibility, emotional intelligence, curiosity, strong communication, leadership, and the ability to quickly demonstrate value to clients.

# We understand what great independent talent looks like for consulting firms

## Sara Kahlau's background

Sara Kahlau is the Global Sales Lead and ANZ Lead at Outsized, driving top-line growth across Southeast Asia, ANZ, the Middle East, India, and Africa. With a background in strategy consulting at Booz & Co and leadership roles in innovation and customer experience, she has spent over a decade helping Fortune 500 and Global 2000 companies navigate transformation.

At Outsized, Sara specialises in connecting enterprises, consulting firms, and investors with top-tier independent talent to drive business transformation. Whether scaling capabilities, delivering project-based work, or embedding flexible workforce strategies, she ensures organisations access the right talent at the right time.



## Anurag Bhalla's background

Anurag is the CEO and Southeast Asia Lead at Outsized. With a background in innovation, venture building, and proposition design, he has worked extensively with global enterprises to develop disruptive digital solutions.

Before Outsized, Anurag held key roles at **Market Gravity** (a proposition design and innovation boutique consultancy) and strategy firm **Monitor Deloitte**. He specialised in innovation strategy, leading teams to design and launch transformative propositions across financial services, telecoms, and energy sectors. His experience spans working as a consultant to Fortune 500 firms on new product development, digital transformation, and customer-centric innovation, as well as co-creating Outsized value proposition to leading global consulting firms at Outsized.



A photograph of a business meeting in a modern office. Two people are seated at a round table, looking at a laptop. Large windows in the background show a cityscape. A potted plant is visible on the left. A dark circular overlay is placed over the center of the image, containing the text.

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# Industry spotlight: Enterprise clients



1

# Financial Services

## Banking & Payments



### Built by a team with strong Financial Services background

Johann van Niekerk, co-founder, COO and Africa lead, spent 15 years in the insurance and reinsurance industries. As a qualified actuary his roles spanned product development, management, business development and corporate venturing.

His work saw him serve both the insurance and banking sectors, the latter via bancassurance initiatives. Johann has been with Outsized since 2018, having built the South African operation from the ground up.

## Banking & Payments






### Heightened pressure in a large and valuable market

The banking and payments space has seen incredible competitiveness, pitting large players against each other, as well as new digital entrants looking to disrupt. This is expected to continue in 2025 and beyond, creating an innovative and dynamic environment.

### Innovation needs skills to succeed

The banking and payments landscape is transforming as digitalisation, fintech innovation, and regulatory shifts shape the industry. Professionals skilled in change and transformation have proven essential to implementing new technologies and improving operational efficiencies. Demand for the top skills has strengthened, being felt particularly in the broader areas of data and technology. We expect this to continue with those businesses most adaptive to new ways of work being the ultimate winners.

Top skills - Banking & Payments

-  Digital Transformation & Change
-  Project Management
-  Risk Management
-  Data Analytics
-  Product Development

1

# Financial Services

## Insurance



### Continued resilience across markets

The insurance sector, in the main, is established, well capitalised and resilient. Cost pressures remained throughout 2024, together with a very competitive environment, and thus also a focus improved agility and efficiency.

### Transformation and efficiency bring a focus on skills

The insurance sector is continuing to adapt to economic pressures, evolving regulations, and rising customer expectations for digital solutions. Core skills like actuarial, data and business analysis, and project management remain, but increasingly the need for technology exposure is coming to the fore as new platform and cloud technologies are being implemented.

Independent talent, which often has this cross-functional exposure from multiple projects and clients, is seeing a surge in demand.

Top skills

- 1 Actuarial
- 2 Data Analytics
- 3 Project Management
- 4 Claims Management
- 5 Product Development

# 2 Technology



## Strong demand growth from tech sector clients

The tech landscape across APAC, Africa, and the Middle East is undergoing rapid transformation, driven by digitalisation, economic shifts, and evolving client demands.

Across regions, business analytics, project management, AWS expertise, and agile project delivery are among the most sought-after skills by our technology sector clients. 2025 is expected to see strong growth, not least driven by trends related to AI and related areas.

## AI, Cloud and 5G rollout - some of the growth drivers across regions

Southeast Asia (SEA): The region's digital economy is forecast to surpass \$300 billion this year, spurred by a young, mobile-first population and supportive government initiatives such as quickly rolling out 5G. Companies are prioritising various AI-related initiatives, with significant investments like Microsoft's \$2.2 billion AI infrastructure project in Malaysia as one example of major initiatives.

Flexible work models and talent platforms are on the rise, driving demand for agile, project-based talent and continuous upskilling. There's also a growing emphasis on developing digital talent and fostering a thriving startup ecosystem, with the region becoming a major hub for mobile gaming.

### Top skills



**Business Analytics**



**Project Management**



**AWS**



**Management Consulting**



**Agile Project Delivery**

# 2 Technology



**ANZ:** Despite some economic uncertainty, the tech sector remains robust, with strong demand for cloud computing, data analytics, and cybersecurity skills. Government-led digital initiatives (including Australia's ambition to be a top 10 digital economy by 2030) and New Zealand's "Digital Boost" for SMEs are fuelling further growth. Persistent talent shortages have heightened competition for versatile professionals, particularly those combining technical expertise with business analytics and project management. As a result, employers are increasingly turning to flexible work arrangements and independent talent for critical, project-based needs.



**Middle East:** The region's digital economy is projected to hit \$200 billion in 2025, fuelled by robust digital infrastructure and consumer adoption of services like quick commerce and digital subscriptions. Companies are prioritising cloud computing, AI, and cybersecurity to meet market demands for efficiency and innovation.



**South Africa:** The tech sector is booming, with AI, cloud computing, and data analytics leading the charge. A 73% skills gap highlights the need for continuous upskilling, whereas the rollout of 5G is enabling advancements in IoT and smart city initiatives.



**India:** Emerging technologies like AI and generative AI are driving a 20% surge in tech jobs. Tier 2 and 3 cities are becoming talent hubs as companies embrace flexible hiring models and gig economy solutions to address talent shortages.

## Outlook

**Clients are bifurcating their needs** between specialised technical roles (e.g., AWS or SAP experts) and generalist skills like agile delivery and analytics. However, quality gaps persist at junior-to-mid levels, particularly in global capability centres (GCCs).

**In terms of 2025 outlook,** expect heightened investment in upskilling initiatives across all regions to bridge talent gaps. Independent talent platforms will gain traction as businesses seek cost-effective solutions to remain agile amidst economic fluctuations. The emphasis on human-centric skills like adaptability and strategic thinking will complement technical expertise as organisations navigate a tech-forward future.



# 3 FMCG



## Overview

The FMCG sector, once reliant on price increases to drive growth, is under pressure to find alternative levers as consumer spending power declines. High inflation has driven up raw material costs, while geopolitical instability continues to disrupt supply chains.

Regulatory complexity is increasing, and competition for consumer spending is intensifying, with smaller, more agile challenger brands offering better value for money.

While sectors such as healthcare, financial services, and retail have embraced digital transformation and AI, FMCG has been slow to adapt. However, 2025 is expected to mark a shift, with major players leveraging their scale to drive innovation, efficiency, and growth. Investment will focus on productivity, category expansion, mergers and acquisitions, new revenue streams, and digital customer acquisition.

To enable these initiatives, organisations are addressing long-standing capability gaps in data, technology, and digital. Historically, FMCG has not been an obvious choice for talent in these areas, but demand is growing rapidly.

- Many organisations are still in the early stages of structuring and organising customer, product, and sales data before unlocking full business value. Enterprise data architecture,

cloud adoption, and data lakes are becoming urgent priorities.

- Procurement, supply chain, and logistics are focusing on cost optimisation, automation, and digital transformation to enhance efficiency.
- Growth will be driven by product innovation, entry into adjacent categories, and mergers and acquisitions to quickly acquire new customers and capabilities.
- Traditional customer engagement channels are becoming less effective, leading to increased investment in digital, social, and non-traditional marketing for more personalised interactions.
- AI and data analytics adoption is a priority, particularly for demand forecasting, but progress is limited by immature data infrastructure and a shortage of specialised talent.

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# 3 FMCG

Balancing innovation with cost efficiency is critical. The need for rapid transformation, coupled with financial pressures and market uncertainty, is driving the adoption of agile talent models that enable fast capability building while controlling fixed costs and reducing delivery risk.

## Top skills

- 1 Demand Planning
- 2 Data Architecture
- 3 Digital Sales & Marketing
- 4 Procurement & SCM
- 5 Lean Manufacturing & Plant Productivity

## FMCG Case Studies: use cases for flexible talent



Nestlé integrated independent talent into its supply chain strategy to enhance efficiency and sustainability. These external experts helped with quick implementation of advanced digital tools for better decision-making. They also identified opportunities for reducing carbon emissions and optimising resources to meet consumer demands

1

**Impact:** Nestlé's approach resulted in significant improvements in supply chain efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and the ability to meet consumer demands for faster, more sustainable delivery at a lower cost and faster pace



Coca-Cola leveraged independent consultants to drive digital marketing, enabling rapid implementation of cutting-edge campaigns that boosted brand engagement and sales. This approach provided Coca-Cola with the flexibility to scale marketing efforts efficiently, without the long-term costs associated with permanent hires

2

**Impact:** The use of independent talent allowed Coca-Cola to enhance agility in its marketing strategy, leading to increased brand visibility and sales growth all while managing their budget and timely deployment



Procter & Gamble (P&G) integrated independent experts into its R&D operations, leveraging specialised skills to accelerate product development and innovation. This approach allowed P&G to reduce time-to-market for new products and enhance its ability to quickly respond to market trends

3

**Impact:** P&G significantly enhanced their ability to innovate rapidly with highly skilled support on R&D. This strategy led to faster product launches, greater agility in responding to market trends, and ultimately, increased market share

**Data sources:** 1 A new model of value creation for the FMCG industry by McKinsey & Company. 2 Insights on Digital Marketing and Independent Talent by McKinsey & Company 3 R&D Strategies in FMCG by Harvard Business Review

A woman with blonde, wavy hair and black-rimmed glasses is smiling broadly. She is wearing a dark blue short-sleeved top and light-colored trousers. She is standing in an office environment with large windows in the background showing a cityscape. In the foreground, there is a desk with a laptop and some papers, and the back of a person's head is visible on the right side.

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# Industry spotlight: Private Equity

## We understand Private Equity



**Niclas Thelander**, Founder and CMO, built and led the value creation team at growth markets PE fund LeapFrog Investments. Earlier in his career he spent five years at KPMG managing commercial due diligence projects. Outsized is the second successful venture-backed company he's founded.



**Azeem Zainulbhai**, Co-founder and MENA & India lead, started his career in investment banking in the US at BoA and Merrill Lynch. Later he worked as an investor at India-based New Silk Route, and has been the founder of a number of startups. He has also held CFO, CSO, and Chief of Staff roles at ShopX and Housing.com.

### **Rebounding markets and a strong outlook across our geographies**

The private equity market rebounded in 2024, with optimism high for the year ahead - particularly in APAC and the Middle East. India is gaining traction as an alternative to China, while the Middle East is widely seen as having the strongest growth potential overall.

### **Longer holding periods means an increased need for value creation activities**

Most funds have felt the effects of the pandemic and economic uncertainty, facing a tougher exit environment and longer holding periods. As a result, deal teams and operating partners are revisiting value creation, as many earlier initiatives are now outdated.

Rapid digital transformation, AI adoption, and shifting consumer behaviour have accelerated this need, while ESG and sustainability have become critical priorities, driven by both LP expectations and growing consumer pressure on portfolio companies.

“

*Put bluntly, value creation projects executed two or three years ago are well past their sell-by dates and no longer serve their purpose to drive exit values.*





# Critical success factor for PE funds: Access to specialist talent for repeatable value creation

### What it means in terms of talent needs

With longer hold periods and evolving market conditions, private equity funds are adopting a more agile approach to value creation. The focus has shifted from identifying improvements to reassessing, adapting, and accelerating execution.

AI, digital transformation, and ESG have reshaped competitive landscapes, rendering past strategies obsolete more quickly. Meanwhile, as exit timelines extend and pressure to maximise returns grows, execution speed and precision are now critical.

### This demands a more flexible, specialised talent strategy.


Funds are moving beyond traditional portfolio management, increasingly deploying a mix of interim executives to fast-track transformation, full-time specialists to drive deep operational change, and fractional experts for targeted expertise across multiple companies.

The ability to scale capabilities up or down as needed - without overburdening portfolio firms with fixed costs - has become a key differentiator in maximising portfolio performance.


### Bench for Private Equity: Typical Talent Pools

Bench is Outsized’s unique product, offering clients deeply vetted, high availability talent pools in selected skills areas.


### Typical Talent Pools




1  
Digital transformation




2  
Finance & governance



3  
Sales & marketing




4  
People & HR





5  
ESG


[Book a demo of Bench](#)


### Types of independents in demand

- 

Interim executives
- 

Specialists with deep implementation expertise
- 

On-demand talent for specific skills
- 

Project managers
- 

Fractional executives

A smiling woman with blonde hair, wearing a white top and a black watch, is looking towards the left. She is in a meeting setting with other people partially visible in the background.

## Conclusion

In 2025, organisational agility is the defining factor for competitive advantage across sectors and geographies. Traditional workforce models, characterised by rigid structures and long-term planning, are becoming obsolete due to volatility, technological transformation, and evolving consumer expectations.

Leaders are prioritising flexible talent solutions, recognising that adaptability and expertise-on-demand offer strategic differentiation and resilience. The rise of independent professionals - highly skilled, rigorously vetted, and rapidly deployable - addresses critical capability gaps, accelerates innovation, and ensures cost efficiency.

Emerging imperatives such as AI adoption, ESG initiatives, and ongoing digital transformation require dynamic workforce strategies. Businesses must embed these priorities deeply into their organisational structures and talent planning.

This transformation involves complexities. Leaders must blend permanent and flexible talent, creating hybrid teams that combine strategic insight with technical expertise. Organisations excelling in this model benefit from greater responsiveness, deeper insights, and sustained competitive advantage. Ultimately, the future of work is already here. Organisations embracing agility and strategic capability-building will not merely navigate uncertainty—they will thrive in it.

## About Outsized: Enabling talent agility at scale for discerning clients

Outsized connects quality-conscious clients across Asia-Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East with carefully vetted independent consultants and execution specialists. Founded in 2016 by former management consultants, private equity directors, and senior industry professionals, Outsized enables organisations to rapidly access specialist talent and flexibly scale their teams. Supported by dedicated local teams, Outsized ensures businesses can quickly and efficiently adapt to evolving market demands. Get in touch today to learn more.

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