

CommBank Business Insights Report: Professional Services.

Innovation for sustainable success

March 2018



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Key insights

Embracing an innovation mindset

Over the past year, Professional Services firms have accelerated their innovation journey, reaping significant financial benefits along the way. But should they be doing more?

Key Insights

This is the second edition of our Business Insights Report for the Professional Services industry — part of a landmark nationwide study examining the value that innovation can deliver to individual businesses, and its greater contribution to productivity and national economic growth.

The Professional Services market is broad and diverse, encompassing everything from architects to IT experts, accountants, lawyers and lab technicians. Yet while individual sectors face their own unique circumstances, all are undergoing deep and lasting structural change, driven by disruptive technologies, changing customer demands and new market entrants.

Accounting and legal firms are increasingly looking to move up the value chain, as outsourcing, automation and new business model competitors threaten to absorb the lower-value, high-volume activities that have traditionally generated so much of their revenue. Architects are likewise under pricing pressure, despite the efficiency dividend that

new technologies promise to bring. Engineering Services firms face a highly cyclical market, at a time where business capex remains sluggish and even IT Services businesses are subject to intensifying competition, despite high levels of demand for their skills as other firms respond to technological change.

Our research shows that Professional Services firms are addressing these challenges head-on, evolving to meet changing customer needs and the shifting market landscape. As such, we have observed a significant increase in innovation activity between 2016 and 2017, with all industry sectors proving they are both willing and capable of adapting to the ‘new normal’.

Professional Services businesses are also achieving tangible results from their investment in implementing new and significant changes. Active innovators say they are more competitive and efficient, with a more productive and engaged workforce, which in turn is positively impacting

customer service. And when it comes to realising a return on their investment, Professional Services firms that have implemented innovations are one of the standout performers in the Australian economy — generating an average of more than three dollars for every dollar they invest in innovation and injecting \$12 billion into our national economy.

Overall, our research paints an encouraging picture of an industry responding to structural change by finding new and better ways to deliver value to its clients. We hope this report provides some useful and practical insights for your business, and we look forward to the opportunity to discuss our findings with you further.

Marc Totaro

National Manager, Professional Services
Business and Private Banking
Commonwealth Bank of Australia

About the CommBank Professional Services Business Insights Report

The CommBank Professional Services Business Insights Report is based on a sub-set of a wide-ranging quantitative survey of 2,473 business owners, decision makers and managers, as well as 16 in-depth qualitative interviews. This sub-set comprises responses from 331 businesses within Professional Services sectors (including management consulting, legal, accounting, scientific and technical services). The survey was conducted on behalf of the Commonwealth Bank by DBM Consultants between August and October 2017 and analysis by ACA Research between November and December 2017. Participants were drawn from businesses across Australia with an annual turnover of more than \$500,000 and at least two employees. Additional analysis on this data set was conducted in February 2018. The survey was designed to benchmark the innovation performance of each business, identifying the key motivations and drivers influencing that performance, and highlighting best practice.

CommBank Innovation Index

	2017	2016
Professional Services	31.1	23.9
National average	32.0	24.0

Rate of innovation

	Professional Services	National average
Innovating	56%	47%
Making improvements	29%	35%



Return on investment from innovation

	Investment amount	Additional improvement in earnings	ROI
Professional Services	\$171,000	\$585,000	3.42
National average	\$300,000	\$592,000	1.97



Innovation Index by industry sector

IT Services	49.1
Management Consulting	31.1
Scientific Research	31.1
Legal Services	26.9
Architect or Engineering Services	24.5
Accounting Services	19.5



Innovation active and improving businesses

Efficiencies and productivity	53%
Stakeholder engagement	51%
Staff engagement	50%
Market position	44%
Competitive advantage	31%



Top areas of investment¹

	Professional Services	National average
Technology	51%	36%
Staff training and expertise	38%	36%
Operational efficiency	29%	30%

Estimated injection into the Australian economy as a direct result of innovation²

= \$12 billion

Timeframe for expected return on investment¹

Within 6 months	7-12 months	1-2 years	3 years or more	Don't know
43%	22%	21%	4%	10%

¹Among innovation active businesses.

²Estimated value generated from having implemented innovation, multiplied by the percentage of the number of businesses in the economy that have implemented an innovation. Number of businesses supplied by DBM.

Measuring innovation

To measure Australia's ongoing innovation performance, we adopted a globally recognised methodology and then expanded on it with our CommBank Innovation Index.

The OECD innovation framework

To determine which business initiatives were truly innovative, we adopted the framework set out in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) *Oslo Manual*. Used by organisations around the world, including the Australian Federal Government and Bureau of Statistics, the manual is constructed around four key innovation areas: products, processes, marketing and organisational.

The CommBank Innovation Index

In our survey, we tested 15 core elements of innovation across management capability and entrepreneurial behaviour. Together, they comprise the CommBank Innovation Index. The index combines the results into a single numerical indicator, enabling us to rank businesses on a scale from -100 (innovation restrictive) to +100 (disruptive innovation), thus creating the concept of an innovation curve or spectrum.

We also spoke to many businesses to understand their empirical experience in implementing innovation within their organisation. This qualitative analysis forms the basis for accompanying observations, case studies and quotes included in the report.

Measuring 15 core drivers of innovation

Management capabilities



Process¹

- Brainstorm for new ideas
- Encourage staff to ask questions
- Give staff opportunities to observe customer experiences
- Experiment and test new ideas



People¹

- Hire staff with creativity in mind
- Evaluate staff with creativity in mind
- Formal networking of business



Philosophy¹

- Allow staff to take risks and fail
- Expect staff to give ideas for improvement

Entrepreneurship behaviours



Seizing opportunities²

- Look for new ways to benefit from market changes and technology
- Respond to attractive opportunities



Taking risks²

- Willing to take financial risks
- Invest time and capital in uncertain capital ventures



Focus²

- Limit focus to a small number of opportunities



Adapting²

- Adapt products and services to make the most of opportunities

¹Source: Dyer et al (2011) The Innovator's DNA.

²McGrath et al (2000) The Entrepreneurial Mindset: Strategies for Continuously Creating Opportunity in an Age of Uncertainty.

Sustainable innovation

Innovation activity surges

Professional Services firms have stepped up their innovation performance to reach new highs. Nonetheless, some sectors are still near the beginning of their innovation journey, with unrealised potential to achieve greater gains.

Crossing the innovation threshold

The last year has seen a surge in innovation among Professional Services firms, with growth in both the proportion of firms actively innovating, and in the capabilities and behaviours that drive innovation. Our research shows that every sector within the industry improved their innovation performance between 2016 and 2017, although not all gains were of equal magnitude.

When we assessed the overall rate of innovation in the Professional Services industry using the *Oslo Manual* criteria, we found 85% of firms were either innovating or making improvements — a jump of 8% from the year before. Fifty-six per cent were actively innovating, up from 44% a year earlier. That rise was complemented by a 4% fall in the proportion of businesses that were implementing improvements rather than innovations when assessed against the Oslo Manual guidelines. Compared to a national average of 47% of Australian businesses actively innovating in 2017, this result establishes Professional Services firms as standout performers when it comes to their overall rate of innovation activity.

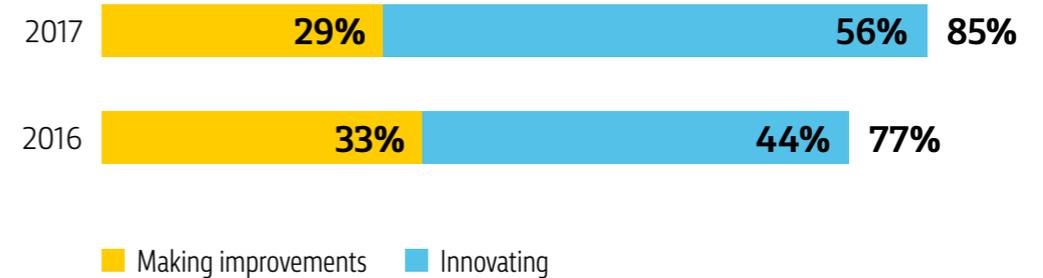
While still positive, the results were slightly weaker when we applied the CommBank Innovation Index to measure their innovation capabilities and behaviours. Overall, Professional Services firms increased their average index reading from 23.9 in 2016 to 31.1 in 2017 — an impressive gain, but still only enough to place them just below the national average across all industries.

Nonetheless, this is a significant result, both because of the magnitude of change within a relatively short period, and because it means that Professional Services firms have now crossed the threshold separating genuine innovation from day-to-day improvements (marked by an index score of 25.0).

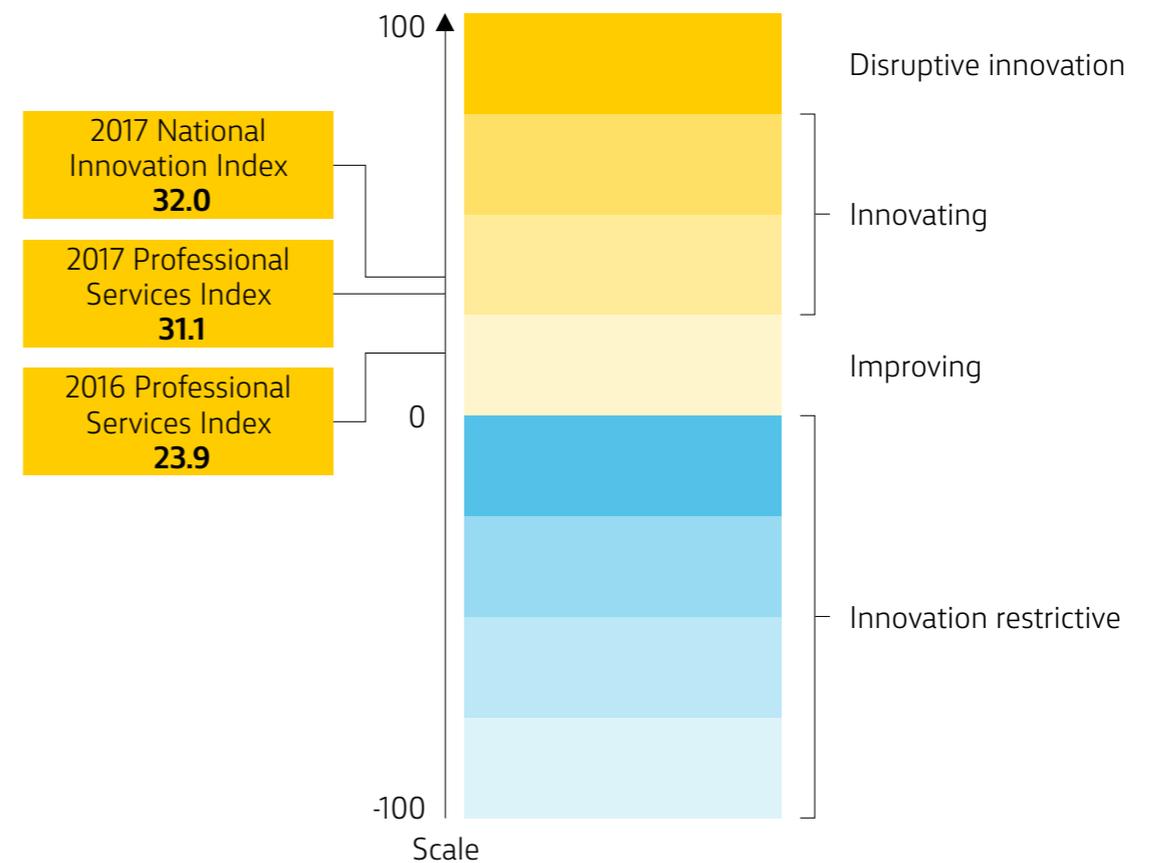
“It is clear that the approach to innovation among Professional Services firms has matured substantially, demonstrating the sector’s ability to adapt to ongoing structural change.”

Marc Totaro, National Manager, Professional Services, Business and Private Banking,
Commonwealth Bank of Australia

The rate of innovation in Professional Services



The CommBank Innovation Index



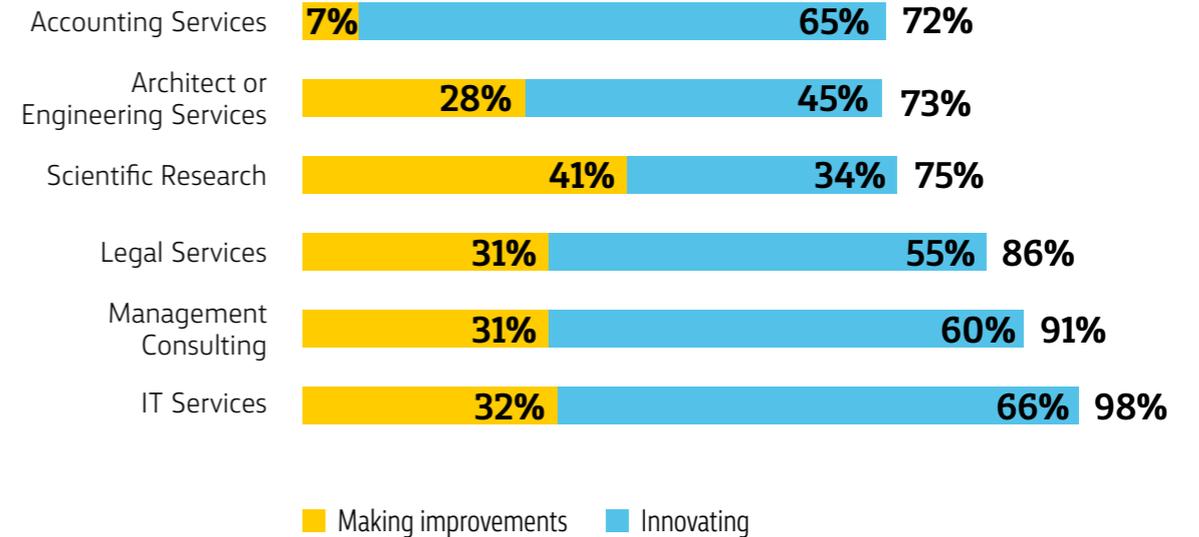
The standout sectors

The Professional Services market is diverse and rapidly evolving, with six distinct industry sectors: Accounting Services, Architect or Engineering Services, Scientific Research, Legal Services, Management Consulting, and IT Services. In our research, the differences between sectors reflected not only their unique business models and challenges, but also the progress they have made along their individual innovation journeys. While they all exhibited a commitment to improving and innovating within their businesses, some made more progress than others in adapting to a changing market landscape.

When assessing the rate of innovation by industry sector, Accounting and IT Services were the top performers, with the highest proportion of innovation active firms, at 65% and 66% respectively. Yet the Accounting Services sector falls short when it comes to the proportion of firms improving, rather than innovating. Only 7% of Accounting Services firms are making improvements, compared to around one in three IT Services businesses. As a result, a remarkable 98% of IT Services businesses are either innovating or improving, followed by Management Consulting (91%) and Legal Services (86%).

A similar pattern emerged when we looked at the CommBank Innovation Index for each sector. IT Services led the way, with an impressive overall score of 49.1, suggesting that IT firms have integrated innovation into their standard operating procedures. In contrast, Accounting Services and Architect or Engineering Services both scored below 25.0, placing them in the 'Improving' category, rather than 'Innovating'.

The rate of innovation by industry sector



Innovation Index by industry sector

Industry Sector	Innovation Index score	Category
IT Services	49.1	Innovating
Management Consulting	31.1	Innovating
Scientific Research	31.1	Innovating
Legal Services	26.9	Innovating
Architect or Engineering Services	24.5	Improving
Accounting Services	19.5	Improving

Empowering employees and taking risks

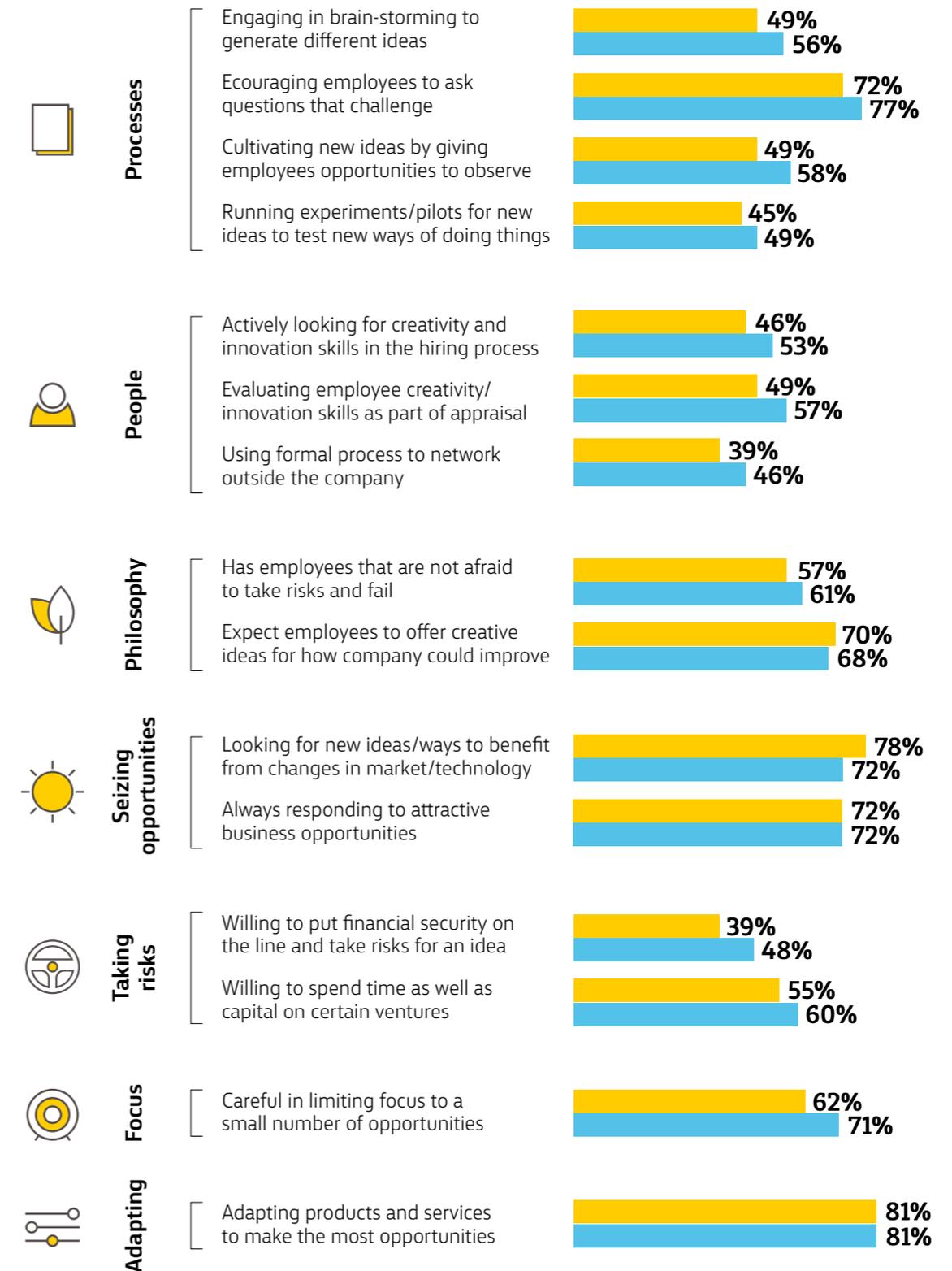
The drivers behind the pronounced increase in innovation in the Professional Services industry became clear when we examined firms' attitudes and behaviours. We saw increases in 11 of the 15 behaviours that collectively comprise the Innovation Index, with the remaining four either staying at the same level or falling only slightly.

The most significant increases occurred in behaviours focused on people and processes, including cultivating new ideas by giving employees opportunities to observe (up 9 percentage points, from 49% in 2016 to 58% in 2017) and evaluating creativity and innovation skills in staff appraisals (rising from 49% to 57%). In an industry where the most important (and costly) assets are the expertise of its people and the client relationships they create, empowering and engaging employees is crucial to fostering an organisation mindset of innovation.

Our survey also suggests that a higher proportion of firms are prepared to take risks than a year ago, with many now willing to invest time as well as capital in new or uncertain ventures (60% in 2017, up from 55% in 2016), or even put their financial security on the line to support an idea (48%, up from 39%). This is a significant result, given the strong compliance cultures and highly regulated environments in which many Professional Services firms operate. Nonetheless, most are displaying caution in risk-taking and maximising their chances of success by focusing on a small number of opportunities (71% in 2017, up from 62% in 2016).

While these results are strong, there is room for further improvement. Professional Services firms lag the national average when it comes to engaging in brainstorming to generate different ideas (56% compared to 62%), running experiments or pilots to test new ways of doing things (49% compared to 55%), and looking for new ideas to benefit from changes in the market or technology (72% compared to 77%). This suggests some firms still have opportunities to move higher up the innovation curve by embedding these behaviours in everyday business practices.

Core drivers of innovation



■ 2016 ■ 2017

Benefits and barriers

Driving proactive change

Faced with fast-changing markets and new competitors, Professional Services firms are harnessing innovation to increase efficiency and deliver greater value, despite resourcing and cultural challenges.

Motivated by productivity and clients

When it comes to innovation, businesses can be motivated by a large number of factors. Some businesses are compelled to innovate in response to external threats, such as increased competition or new entrants in the market. Other businesses are internally-focused and want to innovate by improving their business and service models, or upskilling their employees.

The most common drivers of innovation and improvement for Professional Services firms are a desire to improve efficiencies or productivity (41%), improve the quality of the offering to clients (39%), or take advantage of new or emerging technologies or solutions (30%). These results are in line with the national average and indicate a strong motivation by firms to improve how their business is run and provide their clients with a superior level of service.

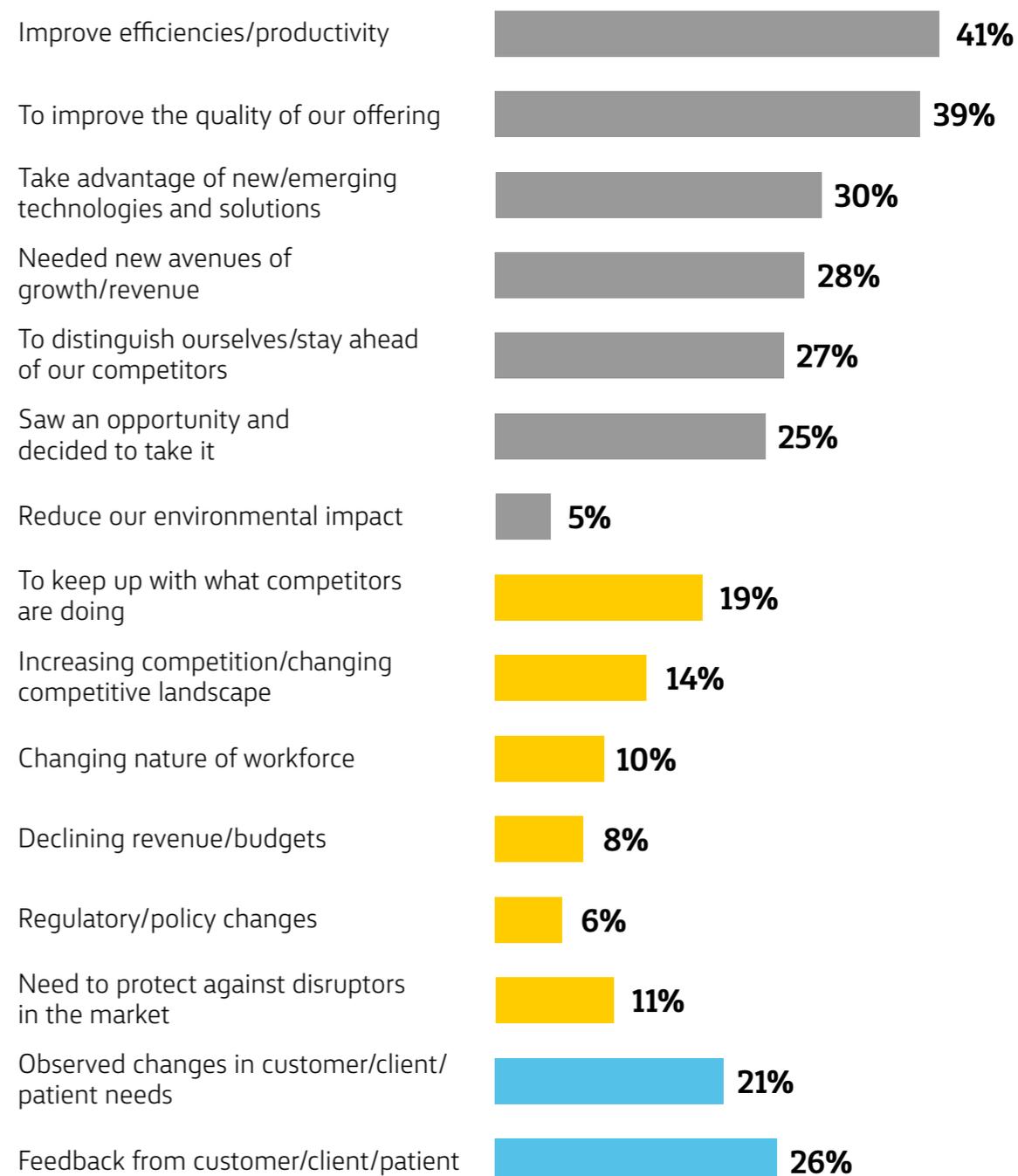
However, our research shows that Professional Services firms are less reactive than other types of Australian businesses. Only 14% of firms surveyed quoted increasing competition or a changing competitive landscape as their reason for innovating (compared to the national average of 21%), 10% said they were responding to the changing nature of the workforce (compared to 16%) and 8% said they were making changes to their firm because of declining revenues or budgets (compared to 14%).

Surprisingly, for an industry that has a high level of regulation and compliance, only 6% of firms cited regulatory and policy changes as the driving force behind their innovation (compared to the national average of 14%). This percentage was higher, however, for the regulation-heavy sectors of Legal Services (13%) and Scientific Research (15%). For other sectors, the low response to this driver may be due to the inflexible nature of policy changes and a mindset that compliance is an obligatory process rather than an opportunity for innovation.

“It’s encouraging to see many firms taking a proactive approach to improving internal processes and leveraging new technologies. With more time to focus on the quality of delivery, the benefits can support better client relationships.”

Marc Totaro, National Manager, Professional Services, Business and Private Banking, Commonwealth Bank of Australia

Drivers of Innovation amongst Innovation Active Businesses



■ Proactive ■ Reactive ■ Customer focus/driven

Benefits across the industry

When asked about the benefits that Professional Services firms expect innovation and improvements to bring to their businesses, each sector within the industry offered distinctly different responses. While there were common themes among the top three benefits cited by each sector — increased efficiency and productivity, better outcomes for clients, and a greater competitive advantage — there are other certain benefits that remain unique.

Accounting Services firms expected to see an increase in the engagement and wellbeing of their staff as a result of the innovations they had implemented (34%), while Architect or Engineering Services said they expected to be well placed to harness new opportunities (33%). Scientific Research firms that had made changes within their business said they expect to achieve a better internal organisational culture as a result of innovating (42%), as well as more knowledgeable and better skilled staff (38%). The most common expected benefit for IT Services was an improved market position (45%).

Benefits of innovation¹

Accounting Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased productivity (49%) 2. Increased staff engagement/wellbeing (34%) 3. Improved efficiencies (31%)
Architect or Engineering Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Better outcomes for clients (58%) 2. Improved efficiencies (46%) 3. Well placed to harness new opportunities (33%)
Legal Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved efficiencies (64%) 2. Better outcomes for clients (44%) 3. Increased productivity (36%)
Scientific Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Better internal organisational culture (42%) 2. Better competitive advantage (40%) 3. More knowledgeable and better skilled staff (38%)
Management Consulting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Better outcomes for clients (49%) 2. Better competitive advantage (43%) 3. Improved efficiencies (40%)
IT Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved market position (45%) 2. Better outcomes for clients (39%) 3. Increased productivity (38%)

¹ Small sample size — results are indicative only.



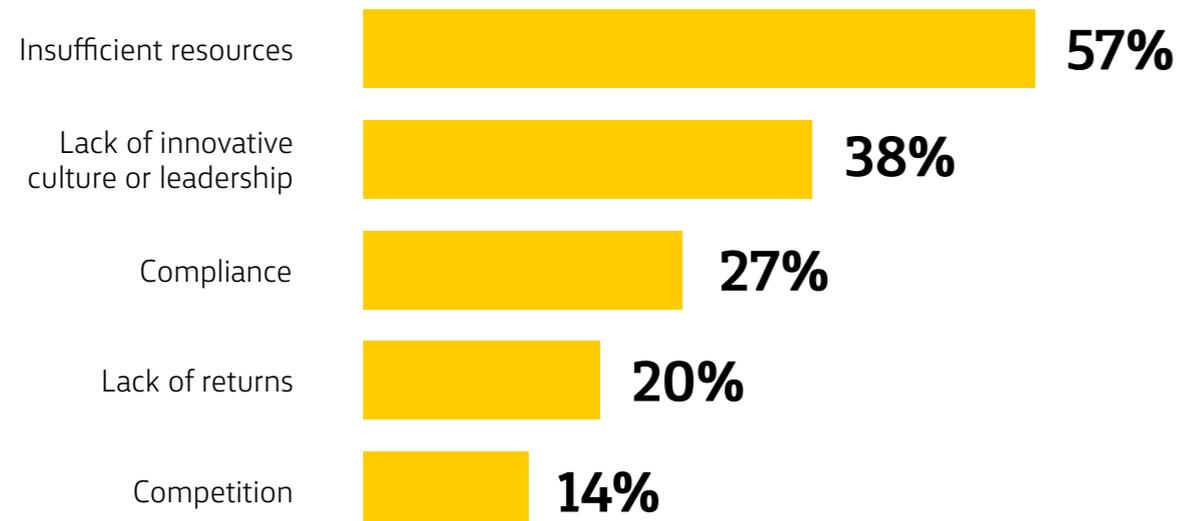
Challenges impeding innovation

Even with a clear vision and the best of intentions, challenges can hamper innovation and prevent a business from reaching its highest potential. This is especially true for Professional Services firms, where cost pressures, rigorous processes and a heavy compliance burden can make it difficult to adapt to changing market conditions.

If we look at Professional Services as a whole, insufficient resources is the most common challenge encountered by firms while implementing changes (57%), followed by a lack of innovative culture or leadership (38%) and compliance (27%).

Delving deeper into the results, we can see that Accounting Services and Architect or Engineering Services firms are more affected than firms in other sectors by a lack of time (43% and 42% respectively), while Architect or Engineering Services firms also struggle with a lack of financial resources and budget (38%). Legal Services firms are more likely than other types of firms to face complicated internal organisational processes and procedures (31%), while Scientific Research firms feel that government regulations and compliance are holding them back from making changes (34%). Management Consulting firms also struggle with a lack of time and financial resources (32% and 23% respectively) and are more likely than other Professional Services firms to be challenged by increasing competition (20%) and a lack of human resources/personnel (20%). IT Services firms are the most likely to face internal resistance to change (34%).

Common challenges encountered by firms¹



¹ Small sample size — results are indicative only.



Investing in innovation

Improving the service delivery model

Professional Services firms are focused on innovations that create better products and services for their clients, enhanced internal processes and a more knowledgeable and skilled workforce.

Areas of innovation

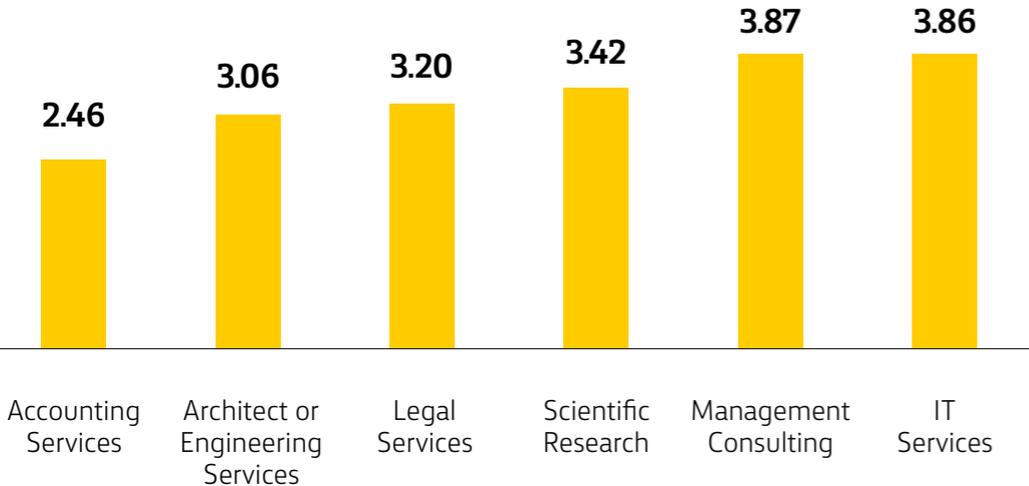
Innovation can take many forms, from highly visible changes such as introducing a new product or changing the organisational structure of a firm, to more subtle changes such as refining hiring and employee appraisal processes. In line with the *Oslo Manual*, we can broadly categorise all types of innovation into four groups: Products and Services, Processes, Marketing, and Organisation.

Indicatively, Professional Services firms that participated in our research said they were predominantly investing in their products and services (30%). This was particularly true for IT Services, with almost one in two innovation active firms investing in product and service innovation. Twenty-three per cent of Professional Services firms are innovating their

processes, while marketing and organisational changes are less of a focus (15% for both), although there are some exceptions to this among the individual sectors.

When we look at the number of areas in which sectors are investing, the results fall largely in line with the Innovation Index. Sectors that scored higher on the Innovation Index — IT Services and Management Consulting — are investing in more areas than Accounting Services and Architect or Engineering Services, which scored lower on the Innovation Index. As with the Innovation Index, Legal Services and Scientific Research firms fall in the middle of this range.

Number of investment areas



“We feel that high levels of transparency and communication across the business feeds innovation, and therefore seek to maintain an open dialogue about the applications for technology through working groups, social channels, and other internal forums.”

Grant Saxon, Managing Partner, BDO Sydney



Investing in technology and staff

More than any other type of investment, Professional Services firms are spending their money on new and improved technology in pursuit of innovation. Over half of the firms we surveyed (51%) said they had invested in technology over the past year. The proportion was even higher for Accounting Services (66%), Legal Services (64%) and Architect or Engineering Services (60%).

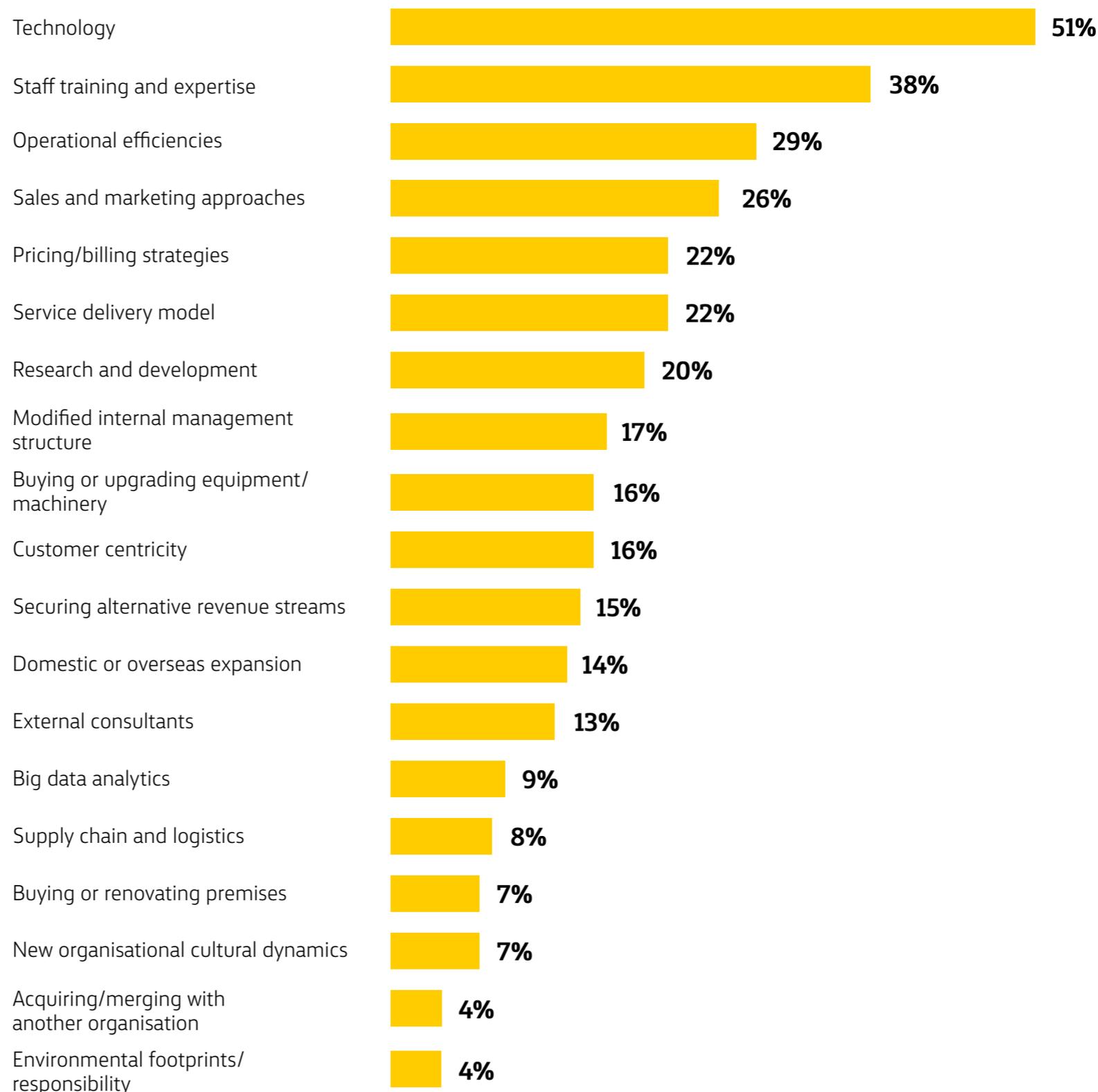
The top five technology investment areas that Professional Services firms invested in over the past 12 months were:

1. IT software (54%)
2. Website or increasing digital presence (48%)
3. IT hardware (44%)
4. Cloud technology (41%)
5. IT infrastructure (34%)

The second most common area of investment for Professional Services firms was staff training and expertise (38%), with Architect or Engineering Services and Legal Service most likely to invest in this area (47% and 49% respectively)¹.

With only 26% of Professional Services firms investing in sales and marketing approaches, compared to the national average of 36%, this is an area where innovation gains could be achieved through a greater focus. Firms that are looking to move further along their innovation journey could consider investing in this area as a way to set themselves apart from their competitors.

Areas of Investment



¹ Small sample size — results are indicative only.



Return on investment

Reaping the financial rewards of innovation

Professional Services firms are receiving a return of investment of nearly double the national average, generating an average of more than three dollars for every dollar they spend.

Pay-off for investing in innovation

One of the main areas of focus for our research was measuring the return on investment for firms that have already implemented their innovation. Though it can be difficult to quantify the return an investment achieves, especially when it comes to an investment as wide-ranging and imprecise as innovation, it is clear that investing in innovation is paying off financially for Professional Services firms.

Even though Professional Services firms are investing less than the national average, spending \$171k on innovation over the past 12 months compared to \$300k, they are producing almost the same amount in estimated additional earnings. This is providing them with an extremely high return on investment of 3.42. In other words, Professional Services firms are generating a return of more than three dollars for every dollar they spend on innovation. The average return on investment for Australian businesses is 1.97, so Professional Services firms are well ahead of the pack when it comes to reaping the financial benefits of innovating.

Collectively, Professional Services firms are injecting \$12bn into the economy as a direct result of their investment in innovation. If this level of innovation continues or increases even further, it has the potential to make a huge ongoing impact on the Australian economy.

Return on investment

	Investment	Additional earnings	Return on investment	Injection into the economy
Professional Services	\$171k	\$585k	3.42	\$12bn
National average	\$300k	\$592k	1.97	\$110bn

“We don’t always need to be the first to introduce revolutionary new initiatives, but because of our internal culture and flexibility, we might be the first to get it out the door because we can move quickly.”

Grant Saxon, Managing Partner, BDO Sydney



Firms are willing to wait for their return

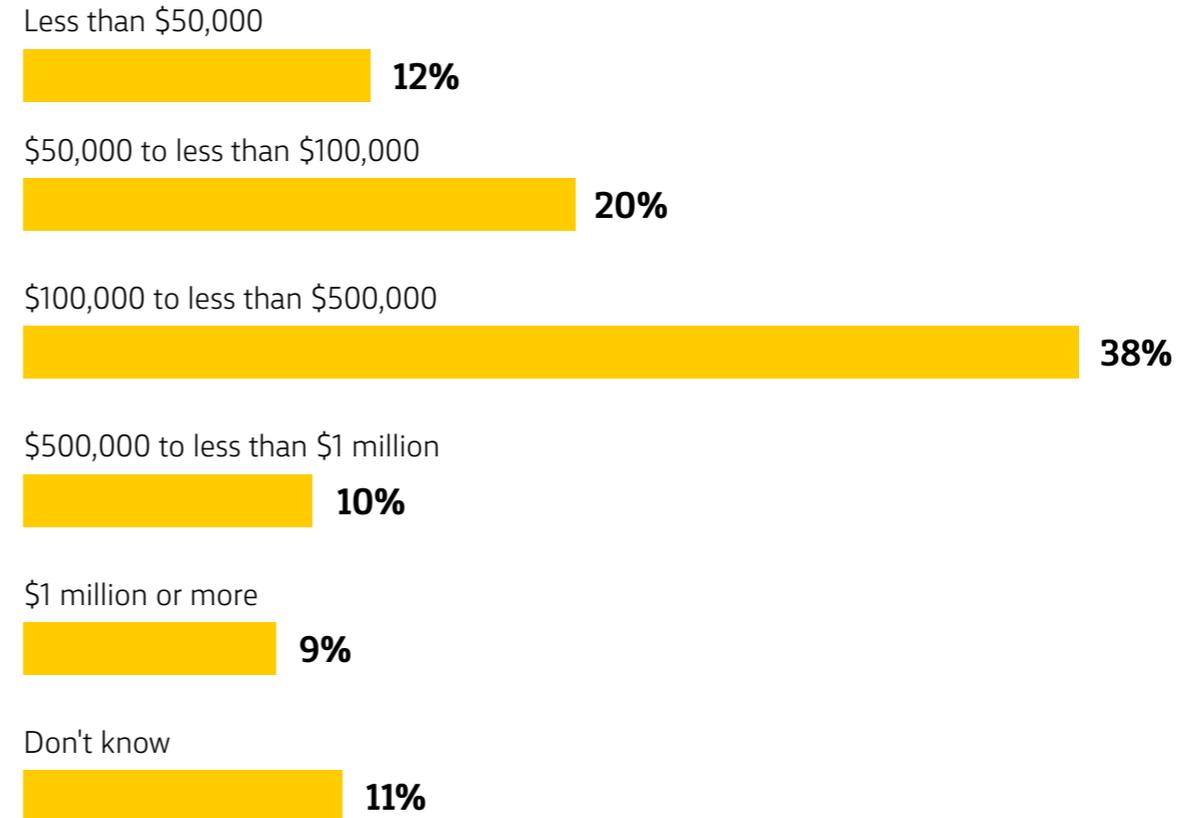
When we take a closer look at the amount individual Professional Services firms are spending on innovation, we can see that many businesses are investing far less than the average amount of \$171k. In fact, only 25% of the the innovation active firms we surveyed spent more than \$100k on innovation over the past 12 months. While innovation doesn't have to be expensive to generate strong outcomes, some firms may benefit from allocating resources to new ideas to give them a greater chance of success.

Our research also showed that Professional Services firms are generally more patient than other types of businesses when it comes to receiving a return on their investment. Forty-seven per cent of the firms we surveyed expected to wait more than six months to see a financial return after implementing a change in their business, which is ten percentage points higher than the national average of 37%. For most types of innovation this is a realistic timeframe, and it provides further evidence of Professional Services firms' planned and considered approach to innovation.

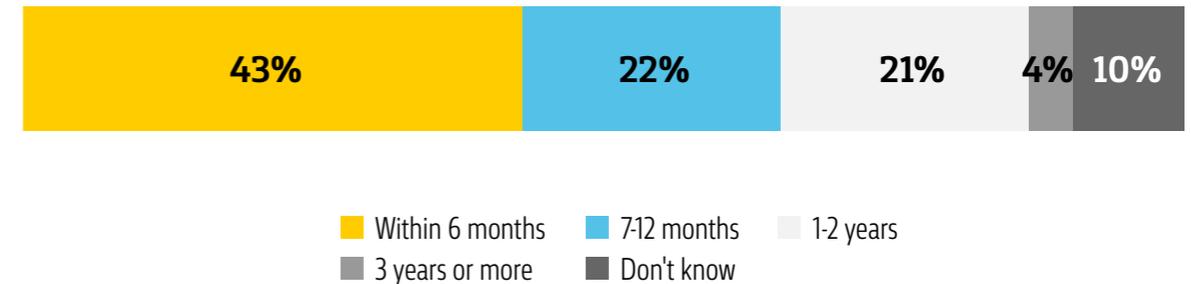
“The average investment in innovation tracks well below the national average, but is delivering a far more efficient return. This shows that firms are very effective at putting their capital to work, and that innovation doesn't need to carry a prohibitive price tag.”

Marc Totaro, National Manager, Professional Services, Business and Private Banking, Commonwealth Bank of Australia

Estimated additional earnings from innovations already implemented



Timeframe for expected return on innovations already implemented



Innovation in action: BDO





As one of the world's leading accounting and advisory businesses, BDO is actively reshaping the traditional role of an accountant as technology and shifting client requirements continue to drive structural change within the industry.

BDO's Sydney Managing Partner, Grant Saxon, says that the accounting services sector has experienced a 'paradigm shift' where adapting to rapid change is now simply part of remaining competitive, rather than a disruptive threat.

Grant explains that BDO is now focused on delivering its global strategy based on the 'convergence' of people and technology to deliver the next generation of accounting and advisory services across its network of 73,854 people operating in 162 countries and territories.

"There is a client driven need for us to innovate," Grant says. "Our traditional compliance work such as book keeping, tax and reconciliation activity is now often undertaken by the client themselves or has been replaced by technology.

"Clients are thinking differently about how they use their accountant and they rely on a different set of skills. Clients now look to us to analyse and interpret data across their business, identify insights, and advise on new and different solutions based on what we find."

Grant says that BDO has developed a data and insights platform that is reflective of the modern requirements of BDO's clients. Known as BDO Drive, the service combines data, insights and intelligence provided through consulting expertise to support the management of client businesses.

To service evolving client demand, BDO continues to build in 2017 its capabilities and culture of innovation, recently appointing seven new Australian partners with an advisory background, which Grant says complements a highly entrepreneurial mindset among the existing partners.

"For me, creating the right culture to facilitate innovation is crucial. As one of the Top 5 accounting networks in the world we certainly have a clear global strategy to determine the application for digital services, but for this to be successful everyone needs to be on board.

"We feel that high levels of transparency and communication across the business feed innovation, and we therefore seek to maintain an open dialogue about the applications for technology through working groups, social channels, and other internal forums.

"Ultimately, if we can provide a safe environment where our people can challenge ideas, and have permission to try new ways of doing things, innovation will follow."

For Grant, responsiveness and an entrepreneurial mindset, rather than scale, provides BDO with a competitive advantage, particularly when considering client solutions.

"The fact that we aren't the biggest in Australia works to our advantage. We don't operate as a vast hierarchy, rather our partners are more hands on and closer to their clients, which means we can turn things around quickly compared to our larger competitors.

"We don't always need to be the first to introduce revolutionary new initiatives, but because of our internal culture and flexibility, we might be the first to get it out the door because we can move quickly." Grant says.

One global first that BDO is poised to release to the Australian market this year is the next generation of its global audit tool, APT, that combines the deep experience of its worldwide audit teams and new technologies to change the delivery of a service deeply rooted in traditional compliance.

"While we must work within the required regulatory and compliance frameworks, APT will be available on any device, and will offer auditors and clients a range of features such as real time communication, embedded video that can be archived and logged instead of documentation, and a stocktake app to assist client inventory audits."

"We will continue to engage with our clients digitally as well as physically – but the data behind the scenes is connected and talking to each other, whether it relates to client records, or the ATO, it's all in the cloud and it's global."

Grant says that understanding the changing complexities of client needs in this environment will continue to bring new and diverse talent into the industry and that innovation will become even more embedded into the daily operations of the firm.

"I think there will continue to be a change in the nature of people coming to our business, and when you overlay the potential for emerging technology like artificial intelligence, the potential for further change is immense," Grant added.

Talk to us

Visit commbank.com.au/professionalservices

Call **13 19 98** or email insights@cba.com.au to access Australian-based Business Banking Specialists.

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