

UK Project-Based Firms Move from AI Experimentation to Measurable Results, Deltek Finds

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UK project-based businesses are entering a new phase of digital maturity, with organisations moving beyond experimentation with artificial intelligence and embedding it across the project lifecycle to deliver measurable business outcomes, according to new research from Deltek.

The findings, drawn from Deltek's 7th Annual *Clarity Trends and Insights for Architecture, Engineering and Consulting Firms* report, show that 55% of UK firms now consider themselves 'advanced' or 'mature' in their digital transformation journey.

While the proportion identifying as 'advanced' has declined slightly—from 20% in 2025 to 15% in 2026—the report suggests this reflects a shift in perception rather than a slowdown. As digital capabilities become embedded into daily operations, expectations around integration and performance have increased, prompting organisations to reassess their maturity levels.

AI adoption shifts to delivery phase

Artificial intelligence is emerging as a central driver of this next phase. Nearly a third (29%) of UK organisations now cite operationalising and optimising AI as a strategic priority, with applications spanning forecasting, planning, reporting and resource management.

Early returns are already visible. Almost half of firms report moderate productivity or cost improvements linked to AI adoption, while 12% say they are seeing significant, measurable return on investment.

This marks a clear transition from pilot programmes to scaled implementation, as businesses begin to embed AI into core workflows rather than treating it as a standalone innovation.

Focus on financial control and visibility

Alongside AI adoption, firms are strengthening financial discipline as project complexity increases. The research highlights cost control and AI implementation as key drivers of profitability in 2026.

Confidence in project performance tracking is also high. Around 85% of UK firms report strong confidence in monitoring project profitability, while the majority say they effectively track utilisation rates and overheads—an indication of improving operational visibility supported by digital systems.

Skills gap emerges as key challenge

As technology adoption accelerates, workforce capability is becoming a critical factor. The research identifies AI literacy as the most important skill organisations will require over the next three years.

At the same time, AI adoption itself is cited as the leading project management challenge, underscoring the need for organisations to equip teams with the skills required to operate in increasingly digital environments.

Neil Davidson, Group Vice President for the Professional Services Sector at Deltek, said the industry is at a turning point.

“Architecture, engineering, and consulting firms are at a genuine inflection point. After years of steady growth and significant investment in digital foundations, the industry is now asking a harder question: how do we convert that investment into measurable productivity gains? The firms that answer it decisively, embedding the right technology into the heart of how they run projects and serve clients, will set the benchmark for the next decade.

“Firms have spent the last few years building the digital foundations needed to modernise how they run projects. What we’re seeing now is a shift from experimentation to real results as AI becomes embedded into core business workflows. Many organisations are already seeing measurable ROI from AI investments, driving clear improvements in efficiency, insight, and overall business performance. As adoption becomes more consistent across organisations, that value is set to scale even further.

“For project-based businesses, the opportunity now is to turn that momentum into stronger project insight, better decision-making, and improved financial performance.”

Industry outlook

The findings point to a maturing Project Economy, where digital transformation is no longer defined by adoption alone, but by outcomes. As firms move into this next phase, the focus is shifting toward integration, capability building and measurable value—factors likely to define competitive advantage in the years ahead.