

The State of FDE Jobs in 2026

The future of engineering is built closer to the customer.

 **4,503**

FDE-like roles hide
under adjacent titles

 **1,311**

employers represented
in the included role set

 **9**

major verticals show
FDE demand

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About the data

All figures derive from a single live scan of 6,486 validated employer ATS boards (Greenhouse, Lever, Ashby, SmartRecruiters, Workable, Recrutee, and enterprise Workday boards) conducted in June 2026 — 239,428 raw postings, narrowed to 5,426 strict-included roles after a two-pass classification and cross-source de-duplication. LinkedIn is excluded by policy. Role classification is model-assisted (see Methodology): treat “true FDE” shares as directional, not audited.

Report research, analysis, and design by  Taylor Gregoire-Wright  Stefano Munarini  Hebah Fisher

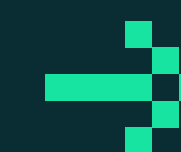
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The Rise of Forward Deployed Engineering

FDE is a visible labor market, not just a Palantir vocabulary spillover.

5,426

strict FDE or adjacent roles





SHYAM SANKAR, CTO - PALANTIR

The FDE role began with engineers working alongside users

Palantir's early deployments revealed a gap between building software and making it work in a customer's environment. Shyam Sankar, who joined as Palantir employee #13, describes the response as an “**extreme ownership**” model: put engineers beside users, make them responsible for the outcome, and carry what they learn back into the product.

Shyam's website says he “envisaged the role of Forward Deployed Engineer”, which is apt. One might say Shyam programmed the kernel of the FDE operating system, and many of Palantir's finest have, over the years, built out the fully-realized incarnation of what we know today as Forward Deployed Engineering.

The Forward Deployed Engineer, or “FDE,” has since become one of the most talked-about roles in tech. What began as Palantir's “definitional engineering model” has expanded into thousands of roles across AI, SaaS, consulting, government, healthcare, data infrastructure, and more, creating an entire labor market.

SOURCE :

<https://shyamsankar.com/about>

<https://tbpndigest.com/story/2025-04-17/palantirs-shyam-sankar-on-enterprise-ai-autonomy-defense-reformation-and-why-the-forward-deployed-engineer-cant-be-cargo-culted/transcript>

FDE is a visible market, not just Palantir vocabulary

 239,428

raw live postings scanned as of June 2026

 6,486

validated employer ATS boards

 5,426

strict FDE or adjacent roles

 1,311

employers represented

 3,381

FDE-adjacent roles

 2,045

true builder FDE roles

But the new market is noisy and muddled across titles, company types, and role definitions. A single live scan found thousands of FDE-like roles across the market, but most of the work is hidden under adjacent titles.

All counts are live postings from June 2026. LinkedIn excluded by policy. Role classification is model-assisted and directional.



FDEs are entrepreneurs.

They're sitting with customers, mapping workflows, shipping code, chewing glass to get to outcomes.

The industry built an entire machine to insulate engineers from that reality: layers of people and plans between those building it and those living with it. FDEs collapse the layers.

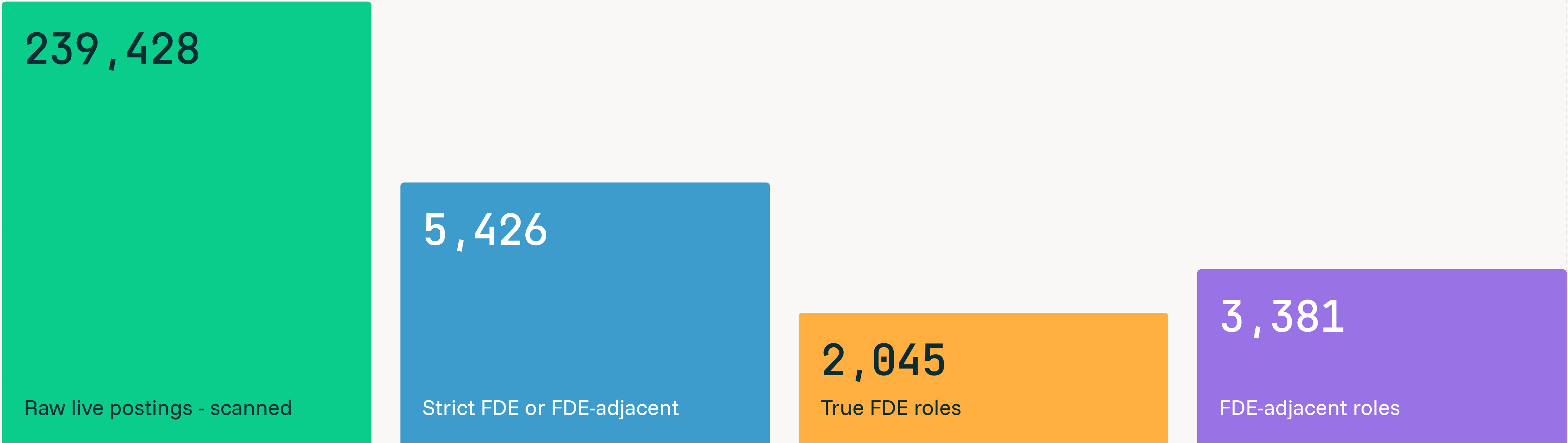
You're inside the problems, seeing what your product actually does, and noticing what nobody knew to ask for. It teaches you to build and deploy something insanely valuable. And to do it fast.

Joy Bissell

Managing Partner & Founder, Kestrel0x2  Currently at Palantir

 [LinkedIn](#)

FDE-like work is a small but meaningful slice of the broader hiring market



Source: Ontologize live scan, June 2026. LinkedIn excluded by policy.

This report separates three questions: where FDE-like work appears, how much of it is true builder work, and how candidates or employers can tell the difference.





The right product will only be realised through the brilliant partnership and reinforcement loop of real patients and real providers on the front-lines of care.

Microsoft AI is moving quickly, building new systems at the forefront of medical superintelligence. But we cannot succeed alone. Our small and highly leveraged FDE team moves between the technical abstractions of our research and the operational realities of frontline care to distil that signal and power our hill-climbing machine.

Bay Gross

VP Health @ Microsoft AI

 [LinkedIn](#)  [@baygross](#)  [Cityblock Health](#)

Bottom line: FDE demand is visible, but hard to find.

Employers looking for true builder FDEs are not hiring for a single stack. The strongest roles combine software engineering, customer-facing deployment, AI/data fluency, cloud infrastructure, and integration work.

KEY ACTIONS

For employers

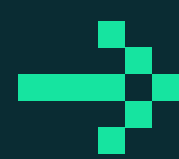
- 🔍 Do not assume candidates know your title vocabulary.
- 🔍 Name the engineering work and deployment context early.
- 🔍 Use adjacent search terms in the post's body.
- 🔍 Publish the constraints: onsite, travel, clearance, seniority.

For candidates

- 🔍 Search beyond Forward Deployed Engineer and FDSE.
- 🔍 Treat FDE as a work pattern, not a fixed title.
- 🔍 Expect noisy results; screen before applying deeply.
- 🔍 Screen roles for three concrete responsibilities: building systems, deploying them in customer environments, and owning measurable outcomes.

What Counts as FDE Work

True FDE roles combine builder ability, customer deployment, and ownership of outcomes.

83% 

of relevant roles lack a direct FDE title

“True” FDE = builder + deployer + owner

Dimension	What the job post should show	Weak substitutes
Builder	Writes code, assembles systems, integrates data, APIs, AI workflows	Demos only; SaaS configuration only
Deployer	Works in or near customer environments, workflows, and operations	Internal product work only
Owner	Accountable for adoption, operational value, or measurable outcomes	Project coordination without outcome ownership

The title is a clue, not the definition

The strongest FDE signal is behavioral: technical hands-on work, customer deployment, and accountability for measurable impact. This framing separates true builder roles from pre-sales, customer success, pure consulting, or generic implementation.





Bolting FDE onto an existing organization may work from a revenue perspective, but it won't necessarily change how you discover product.

At an FDE-native company, the philosophy is that you create product in the field. You build for customers, throw away a lot of what doesn't work, and generalize what does.

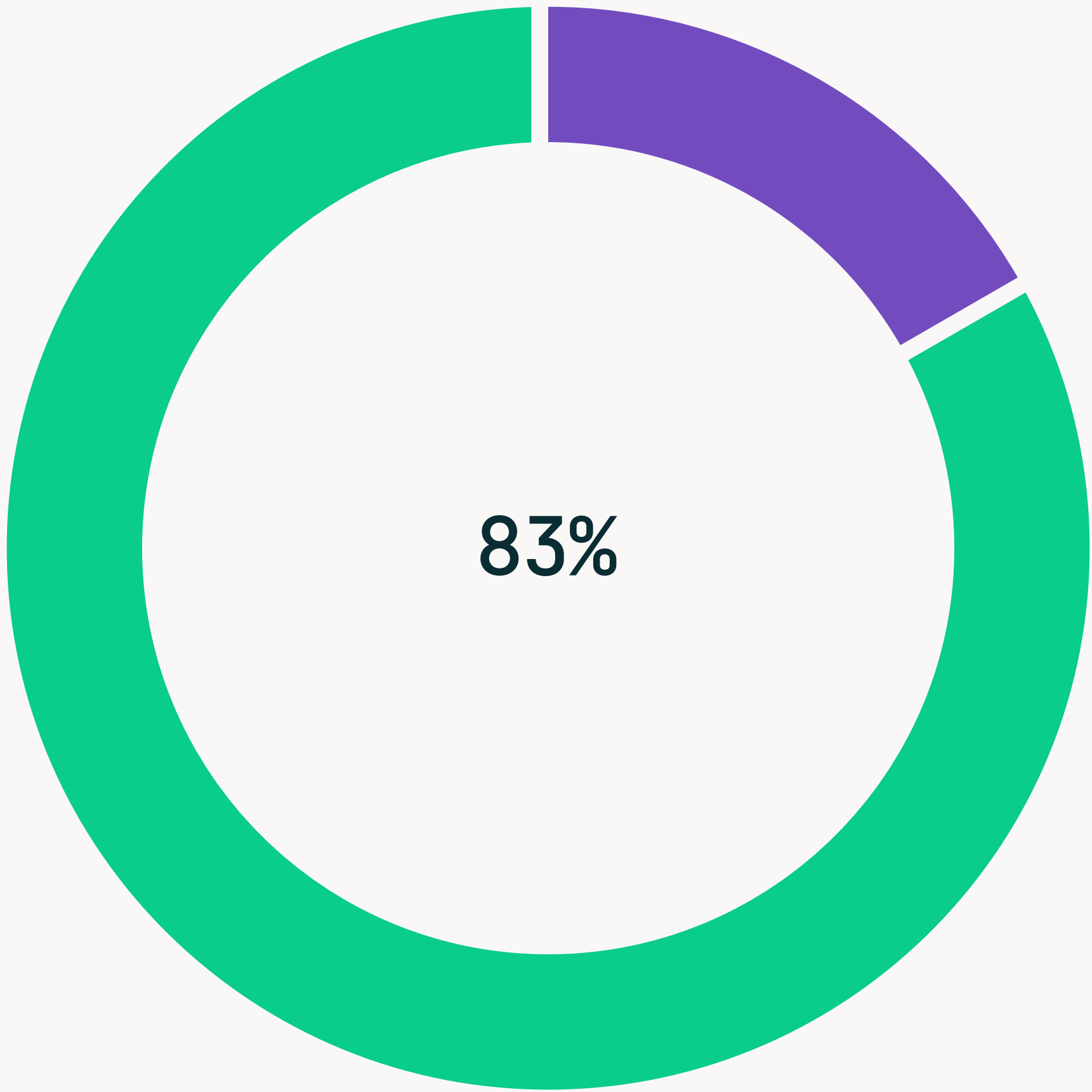
For that to work, the culture, the systems, and the way decisions get made all have to change.

Ravin Thambapillai

Founder & CEO, Credal  Palantir FDE, 8yrs

 [LinkedIn](#)  [credal.ai](#)

83% of FDE-like roles do not use a direct FDE title



Direct FDE title
923 (17%)

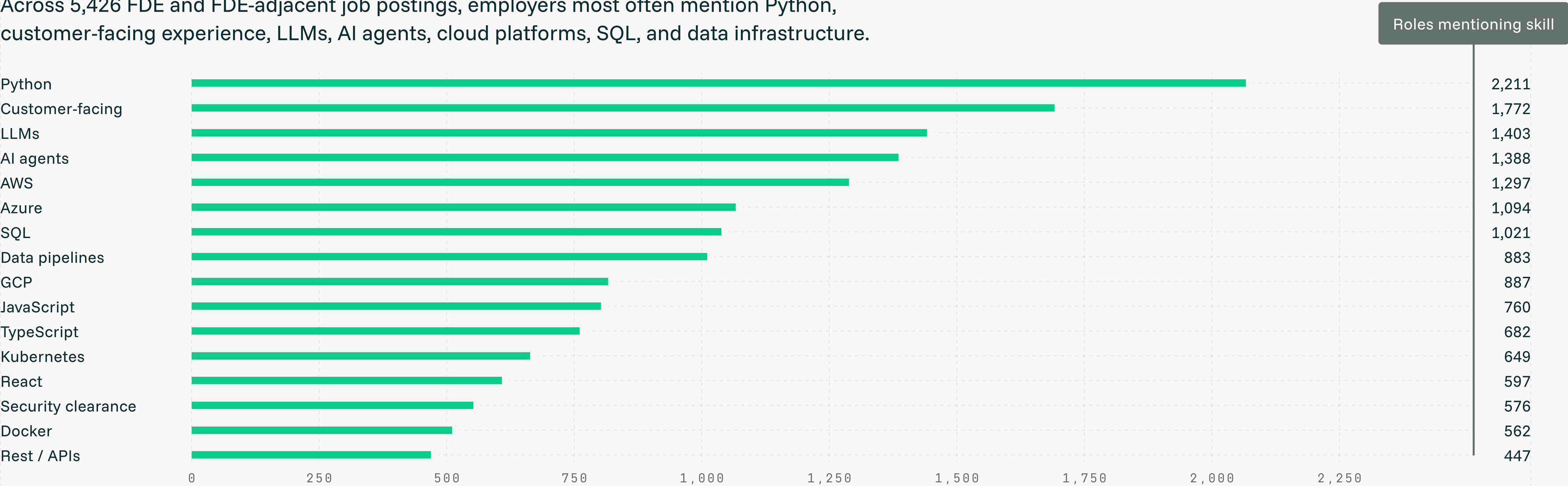
Adjacent title
4,503 (83%)

Searching only for “Forward Deployed Engineer” misses most of the market. Employers also lose candidates when they do not use searchable adjacent language.

Direct FDE title" (17%, 923 roles) counts every FDE variant -- Forward Deployed Engineer, FDSE, Forward Deployed AI Engineer, Senior FDE. The exact string "Forward Deployed Engineer" alone is just 4.1% (223 roles)

FDE job postings seek a hybrid mix of software, AI/data, and cloud

Across 5,426 FDE and FDE-adjacent job postings, employers most often mention Python, customer-facing experience, LLMs, AI agents, cloud platforms, SQL, and data infrastructure.



 No single technology defines the role. Employers seek broad fluency across software, AI/data, cloud, and infrastructure.



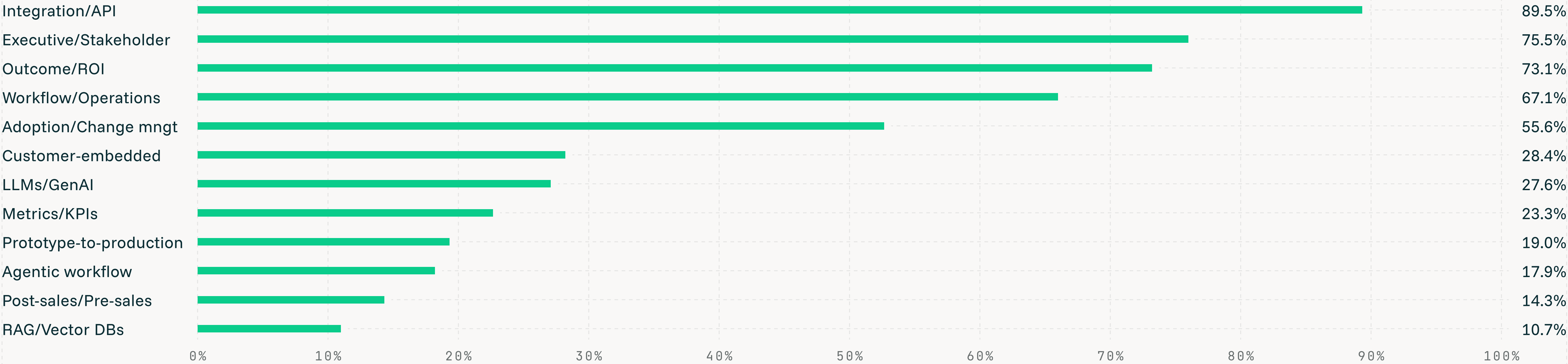
The FDE candidate is usually a hybrid: engineer, deployer, and translator

Archetype	Signal to screen or show
Software engineer who likes customers	Shipped customer-facing systems, integration work, tradeoff explanation
Solutions engineer who can really code	API, data, and system design depth; not only demos or pre-sales
Data or AI engineer who can deploy	Model or application deployment, evals, data pipelines, workflow integration
Technical consultant with engineering depth	Code ownership and implementation evidence; not only slideware
Ex-Palantir or platform-adjacent builder	Foundry, AIP, ontology, or customer-deployment ownership
Startup generalist	Ambiguity tolerance, product sense, direct discovery, rapid shipping

ⓘ The best candidates show evidence of building under ambiguity, integrating with real workflows, and owning outcomes.



Job descriptions reveal the work: integration, stakeholders, ROI, & workflow change

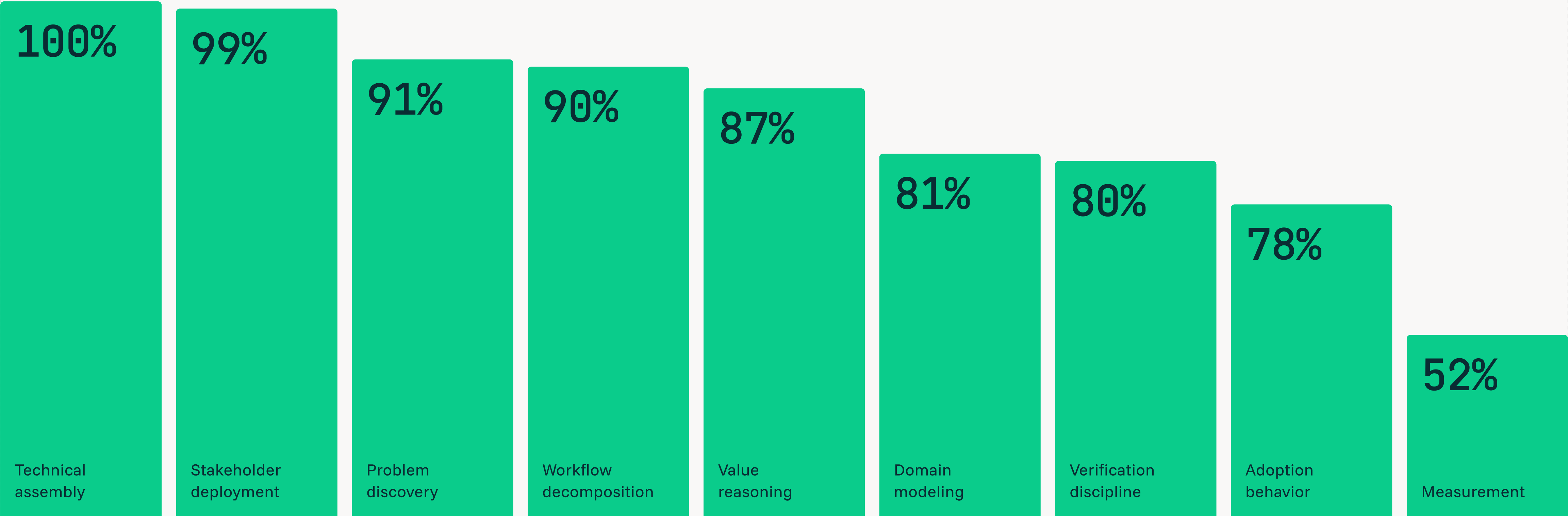


ⓘ The language of FDE postings is operational, not just technical. Strong roles connect engineering work to integration, workflow change, and measurable outcomes.



FDE is defined by a 9-dimension capability rubric

How often each FDE dimension appears in an included posting:



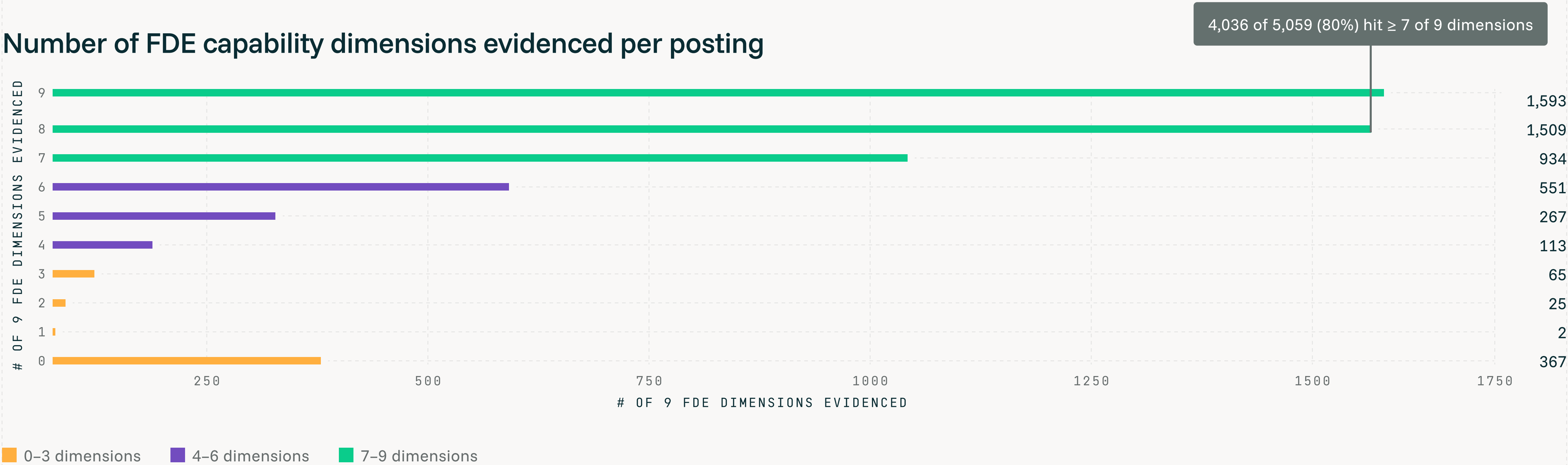
Source: Ontologize FDE relevance classifier rubric, full-dimension scoring available for 5,059 of 5,426 included postings.



The FDE market clusters are most, but not all, of the role dimensions

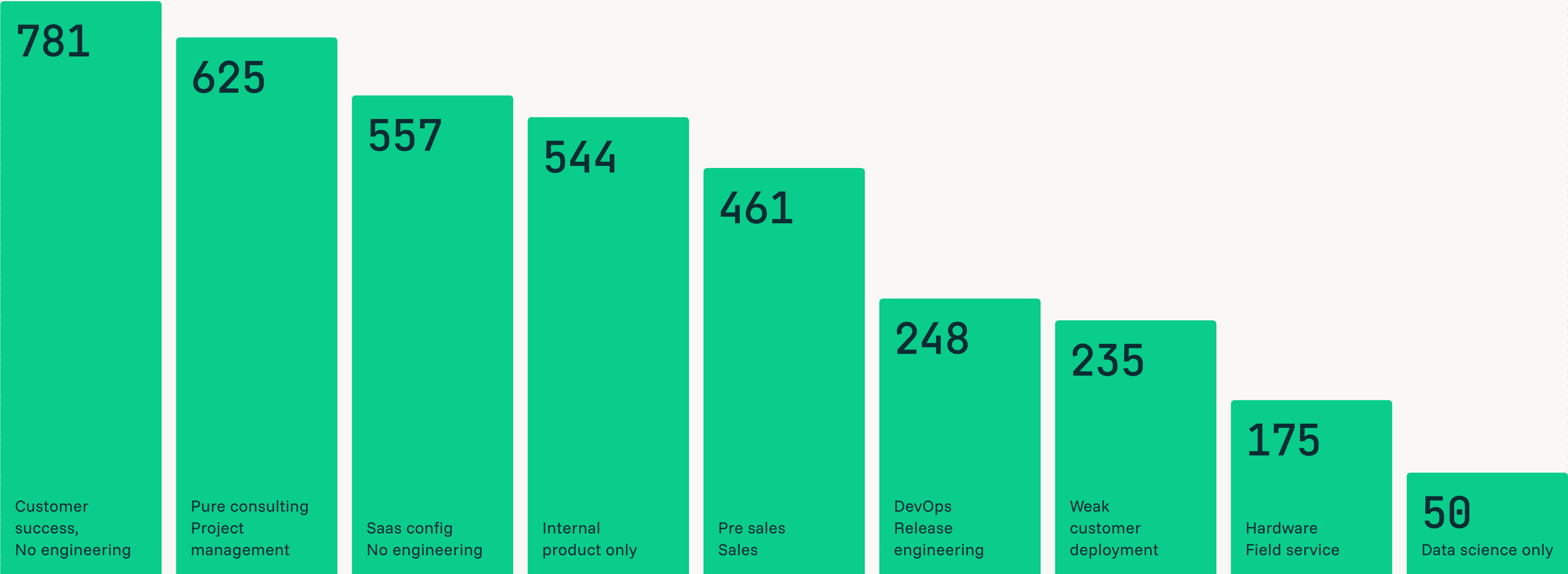
Across 5,059 full scored FDE-like postings, 80% evidence at least 7 of the 9 FDE capability dimensions.

Number of FDE capability dimensions evidenced per posting



Why FDE-like postings fail the true FDE test

Primary disqualifying reasons among roles classified as FDE-adjacent:





As the FDE role explodes, it's very important to understand how to deploy them in the right direction.

Canonically, FDEs are thought of as forward-deployed outside of an organization, into the customer's environment.

But the best way to think about them is as forward-deployed in front of the product roadmap.

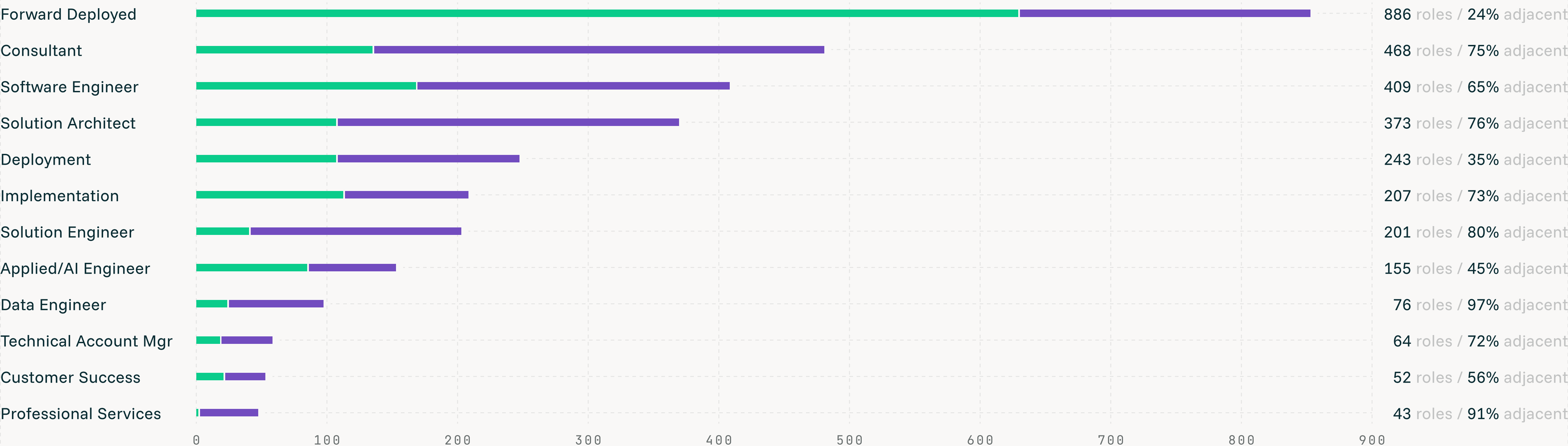
FDEs are your explorers, your vanguard, your scouts venturing "forward" in order to mine secrets worth productizing. The best way to predict the future is to invent it.

Peter Wilczynski

Chief Product Officer @ Vantor  12yrs @ Palantir

 [LinkedIn](#)  [@petewilz](#)  [vantor.com](#)

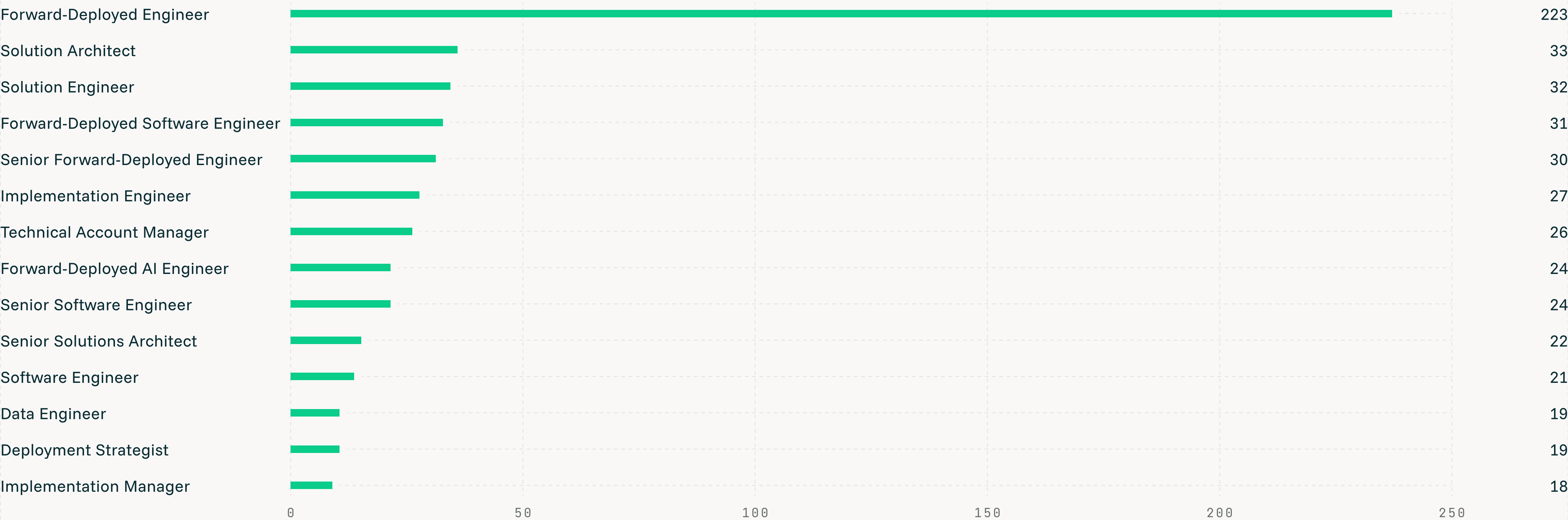
FDE work mostly wears an adjacent title; only ‘Forward Deployed’ titled roles are majority true FDE



■ True FDE ■ FDE-adjacent

ⓘ Title families among the 5,426 included roles (catch-all ‘Other’ omitted).
‘Adjacent’ = FDE-like work that misses ≥ 1 defining dimension.

The same work appears under 20+ job titles

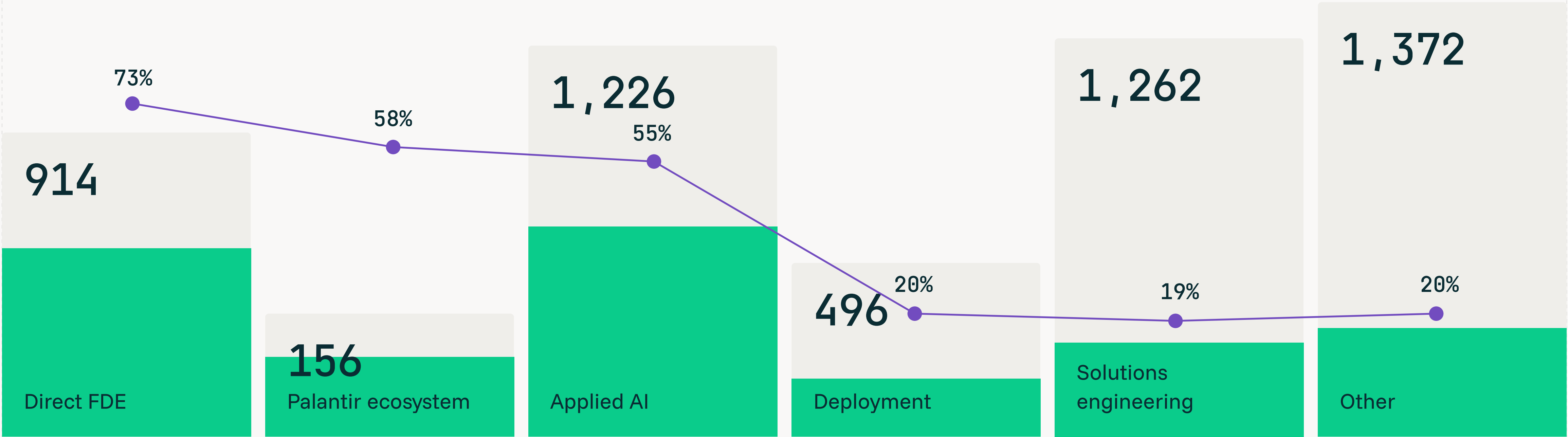


n = 5,426 strict-included roles. Titles normalized only minimally in this view.

 FDE-like work spreads across direct-FDE, solutions, deployment, applied-AI, data, and platform-adjacent titles — it's a work pattern, not a single job title. The exact title 'Forward Deployed Engineer' is just 4.1% of included roles; the same builder work appears under 20+ others.



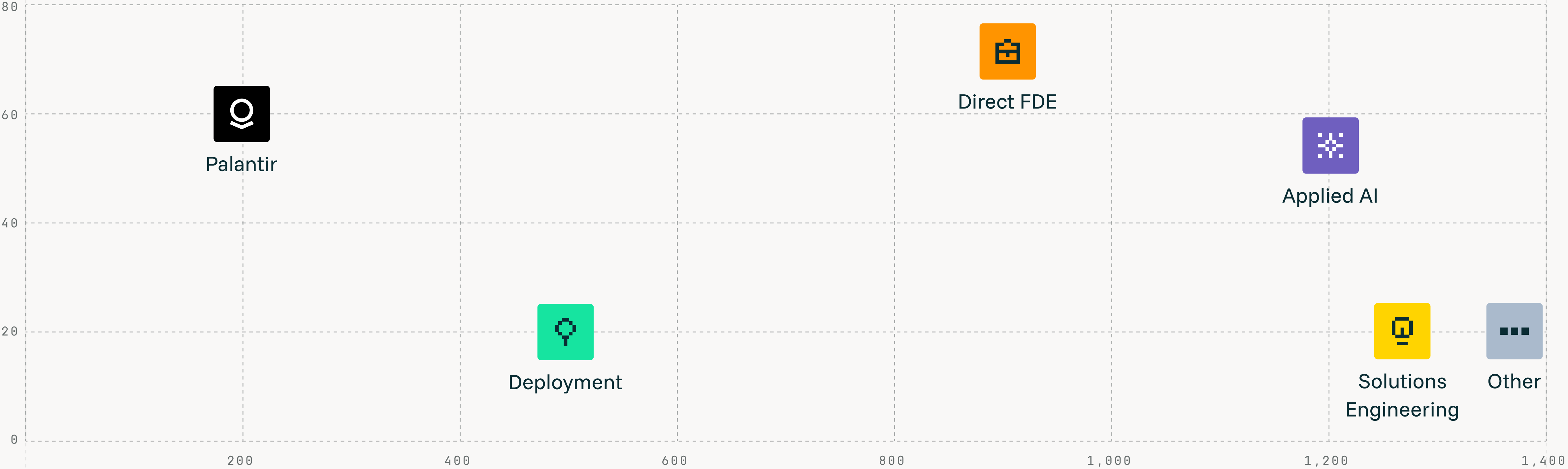
Direct FDE, applied AI, and Palantir ecosystem clusters have the strongest signal



■ Total roles ■ True FDE roles ● True FDE

① Direct FDE labels are high-signal. Applied AI and Palantir ecosystem roles are also strong. Solutions engineering and deployment contain many relevant jobs, but more adjacency.

The biggest hiring clusters are not always the truest FDE clusters



Bubble size = role count. Use this chart to separate market size from market quality.
n = 5,426 · scan June 2026 · cluster and true/adjacent split are model-adjudicated against a 9-dimension capability rubric.

Direct FDE, applied-AI, and Palantir ecosystem clusters have the highest share of true-FDE roles. Solutions engineering and deployment contain many relevant roles, but they are more likely to be adjacent than true builder FDE.

True FDE work is defined by responsibility, not title

The core screen is behavioral: what gets built, where it ships, and who owns value after launch.

KEY ACTIONS

For employers

- ✓ Separate engineering ownership from demos or configuration.
- ✓ List specific systems: APIs, agents, workflows, data pipelines.
- ✓ Show what happens after the first deployment.
- ✓ Screen for customer judgment plus code depth.

For candidates

- ✓ Ask how much time is spent building versus selling.
- ✓ Look for ownership after production launch.
- ✓ Bring proof of shipped customer-facing systems.
- ✓ Be wary of roles that only mention stakeholders and demos.

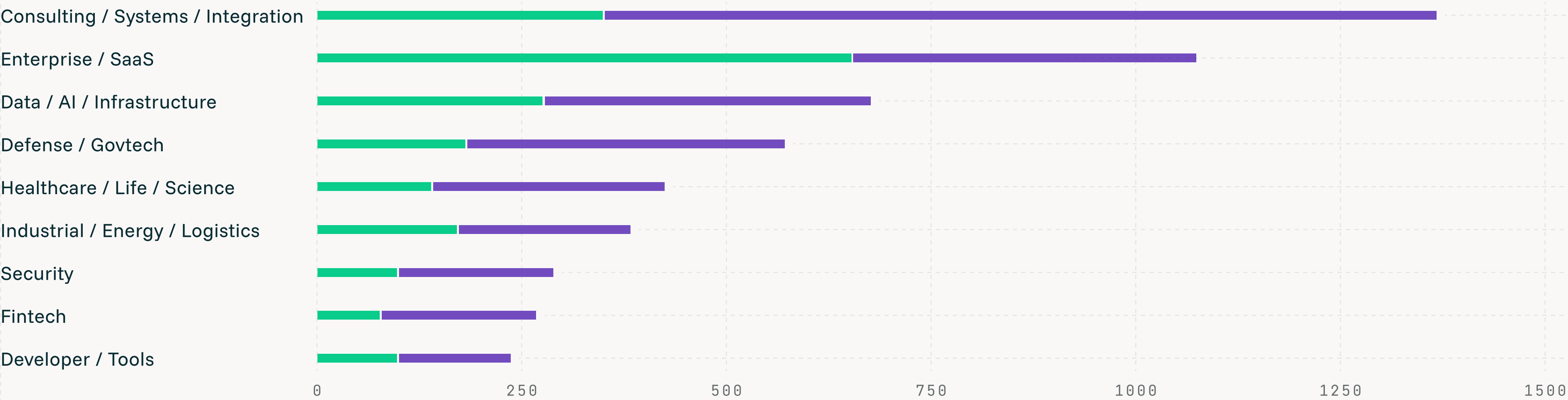
Where Demand is Forming

FDE demand spans sectors, but signal quality varies.



FDE demand follows complex deployment environments

FDE demand is highest in sectors where customers need hands-on technical deployment:
integrating systems, adapting workflows, handling data complexity, navigating stakeholders, and turning pilots into production.



■ True FDE ■ FDE-adjacent

ⓘ Title families among the 5,426 included roles (catch-all ‘Other’ omitted).
‘Adjacent’ = FDE-like work that misses ≥ 1 defining dimension.





The point is to solve a hard, important problem, and what that requires is going to vary from customer to customer.

Knowing when you're serving that outcome, when you're going off the rails, and when something should become part of the product is a matter of taste.

An FDE develops that taste by hitting themselves in the face with reality again, and again, and again.

Vipul Shekhawat

Co-Founder & CTO T51  Formerly FDE & PM at Palantir

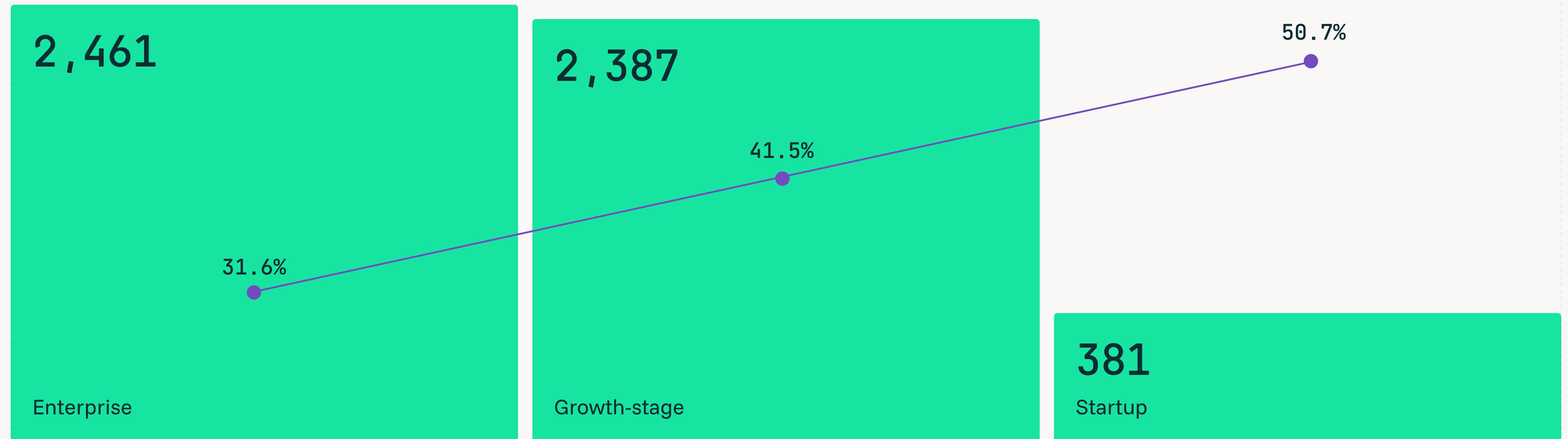
 [LinkedIn](#)  www.t51.ai

FDE in Venture-Backed Sectors

A venture lens on how the FDE category is spreading beyond its original vocabulary.



Startups have fewer FDE roles, but they are more likely to be true builder roles



Company maturity buckets derived from model-built company profiles. Treat as directional.

① Larger companies have more absolute roles, but startups have the highest true-FDE concentration, likely because deployment, product, and customer discovery are closer together.



1 in 6 validated VC-backed portfolio companies is hiring FDE-like roles^[1]



2,456

Investor sources mapped



25,127

Unique portfolio-company domains



2,500

Portfolio companies with validated careers boards



435

Validated VC-backed companies hiring FDE-like roles

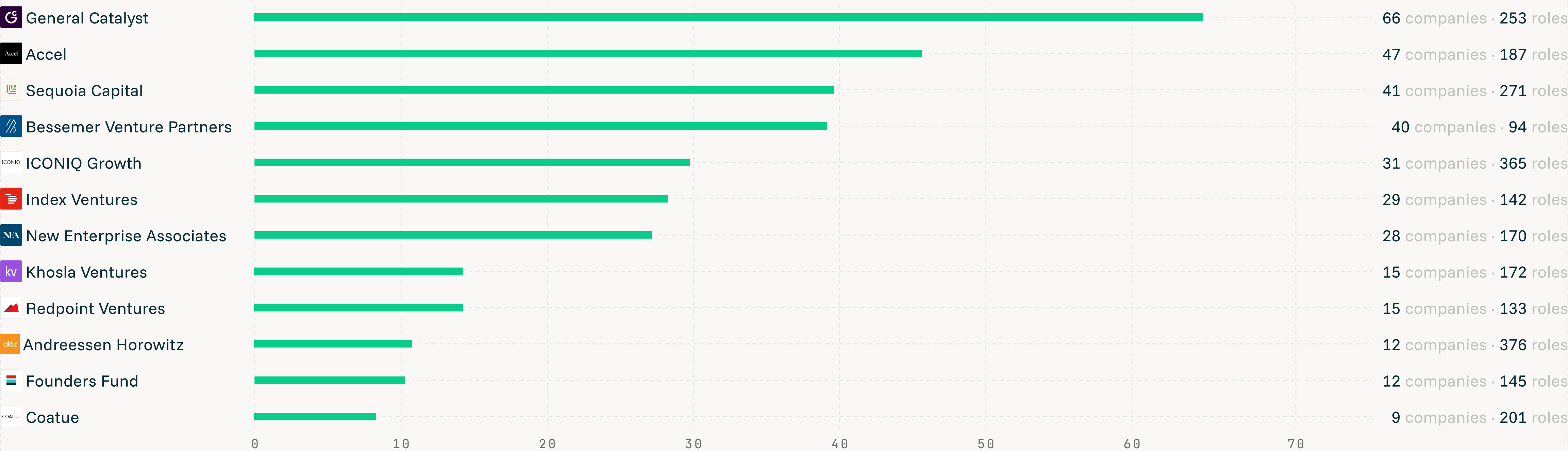
FDE adoption % = FDE-hiring companies / validated portfolio companies.

^[1] VC portfolio coverage derived from investor sources and validated career-board matches.

Each portfolio company is counted once per investor, so bars overlap across firms and are not additive — the 254 distinct FDE-hiring companies here come from a deeper per-firm portfolio map, a more granular lens than the 435/2,500 board scan on the section opener.

Ontologize FDE Dataset, June 2026

General Catalyst and Accel have the most portfolio companies hiring for FDE-like roles



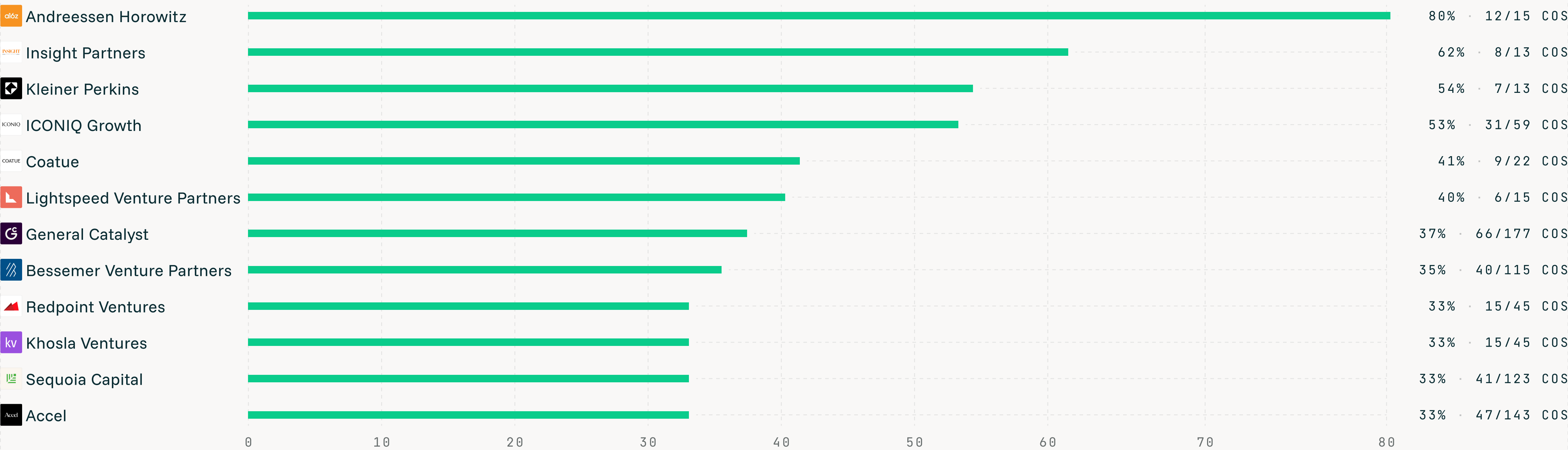
Source: Ontologize FDE Dataset, June 2026 (vc_portfolio_membership)

Ranking method: distinct companies with ≥ 1 included FDE or FDE-adjacent posting, using the curated VC-company membership map. Investor-name variants are merged; companies count once per investor but may count under multiple investors. This broader membership map differs from the public-portfolio cohort used on the individual VC profile slides.



Which investors' portfolios most adopt FDE hiring?

Share of an investors' validated portfolio companies that hire FDEs (investors with ≥ 10 validated portfolio companies)



Filtered to firms with 10+ validated portfolio companies, adoption share shows where FDE-like hiring is common across the observed portfolio, not just present in one breakout employer.

Curated VC-to-company map (vc_portfolio_membership), direct ATS matches; firm-name variants merged, companies counted once per firm. Adoption = cos with ≥1 FDE role ÷ validated cos. Directional; portfolio lists under-count. Source: Ontologize FDE Dataset, June 2026



Nearly half of Greylock’s validated portfolio companies are hiring FDEs

50%

FDE adoption among validated companies



36

Validated portfolio companies



18

Companies hiring FDEs



61

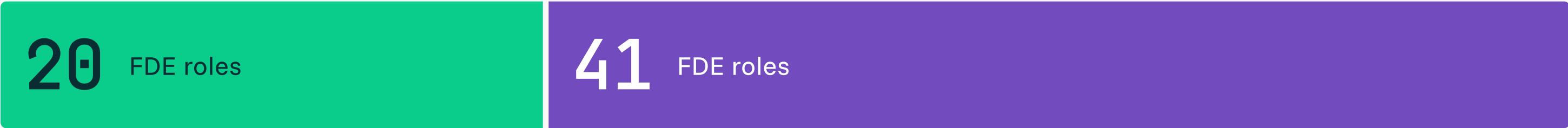
Observed FDE roles

How the 61 roles break down

20 of 61 roles sit at the largest observed portfolio employer.

1 employer

Other 17 employers



① Profile method: public Greylock portfolio companies matched to validated live ATS boards.



Google Ventures' FDE footprint is well distributed

14 linked portfolio companies are hiring FDEs, while the largest employer contributes less than one-quarter of roles.

36.8%

Adoption among validated companies



38

Validated portfolio companies



14

Companies hiring FDEs



35

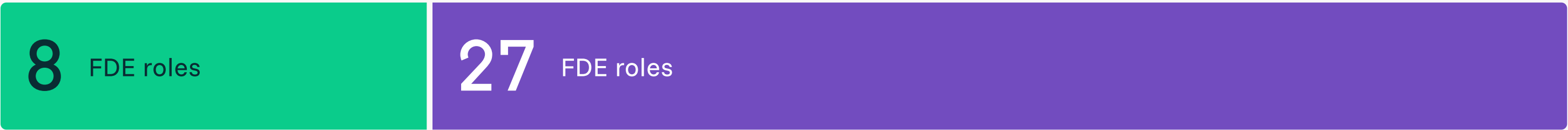
Observed FDE roles

How the 35 roles break down

No single observed portfolio employer dominates.

1 employer

Other 13 employers



Profile method: public GV portfolio companies matched to validated live ATS boards. Uses the canonical “Google Ventures” row only; aliases are not consolidated. Not directly comparable with the broad VC ranking.



8VC shows early FDE adoption, but not yet at scale

The observed adoption rate is 37.5%, but the validated portfolio sample is still small.

30.4%

Adoption among board-matched companies



110

Portfolio companies
in our 8VC scrape



46

Matched to a live
ATS board



14

Observed FDE roles



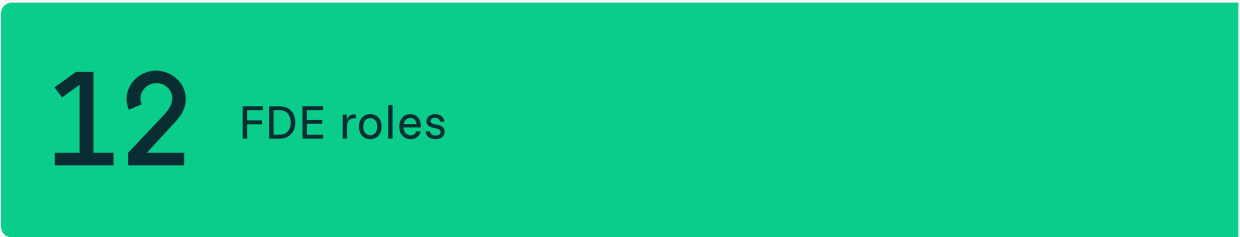
30

Observed FDE roles
+ FDE-adjacent roles

How the 30 roles break down

One company holds 11 of 16 roles, or 68.8%.

Top 3 employers



Other 11 employers

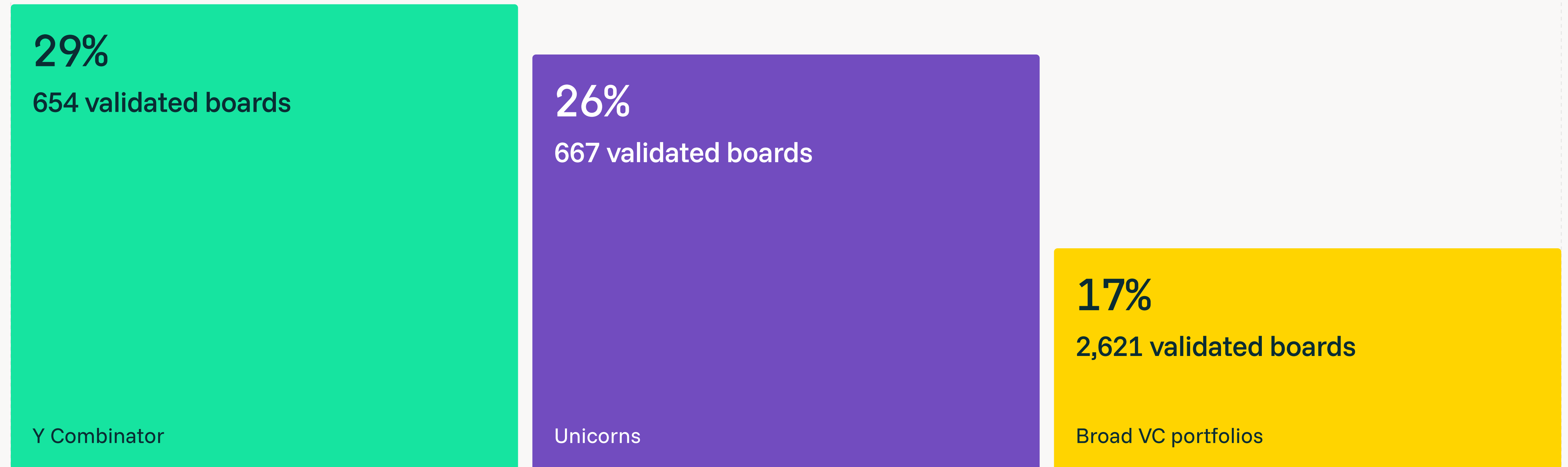


Profile method: 46 of 110 companies in our 8VC portfolio scrape matched a live ATS board. The 30.4% rate equals 14 of 46 and counts FDE and FDE-adjacent roles, consistent with the rest of this report. Directional, not a fund ranking; our portfolio scrape is partial.



Y Combinator and unicorns show higher adoption rates for FDEs than broad VC portfolios

Share of validated company boards with at least one included FDE or FDE-adjacent role.

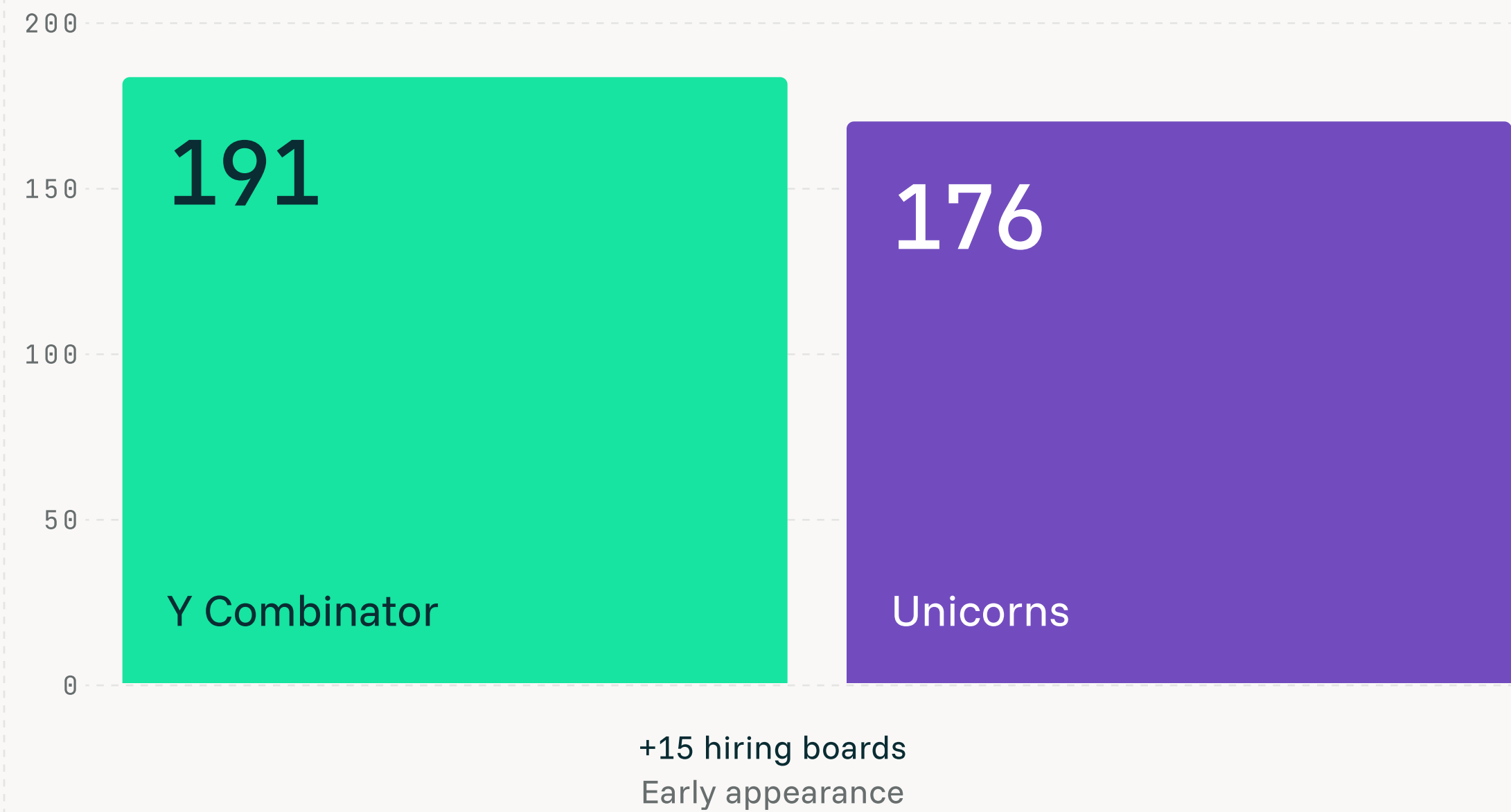


Adoption = share of validated company boards with ≥ 1 included FDE or FDE-adjacent posting. Cohorts overlap: 53% of unicorn boards and 34% of YC boards are also in the VC-portfolio cohort.

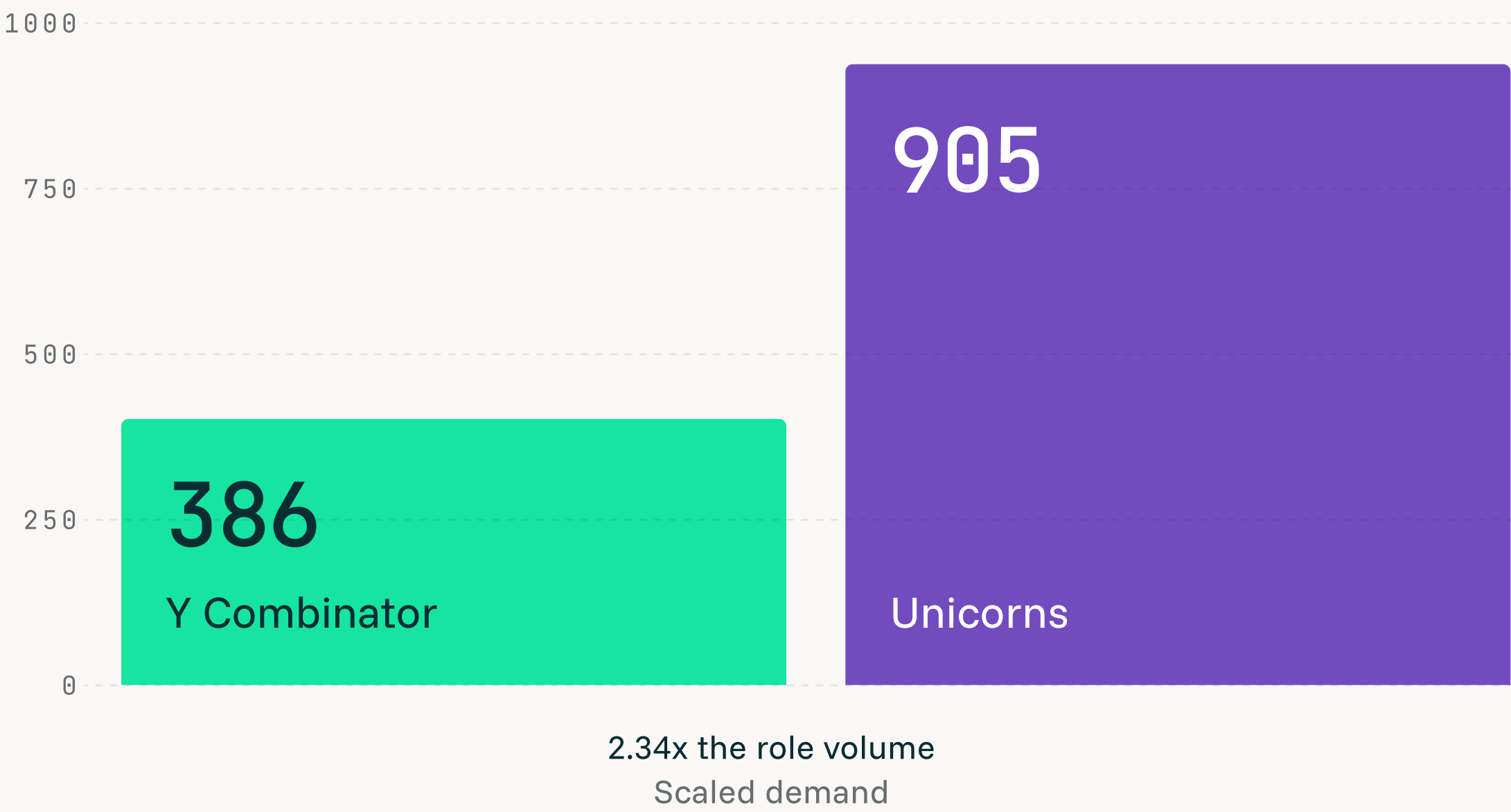
YC is where FDE adoption appears early, but unicorns are where it scales

YC has slightly more companies hiring FDEs, but unicorns generate more than twice the included role volume.

Companies hiring FDEs



Included FDE roles

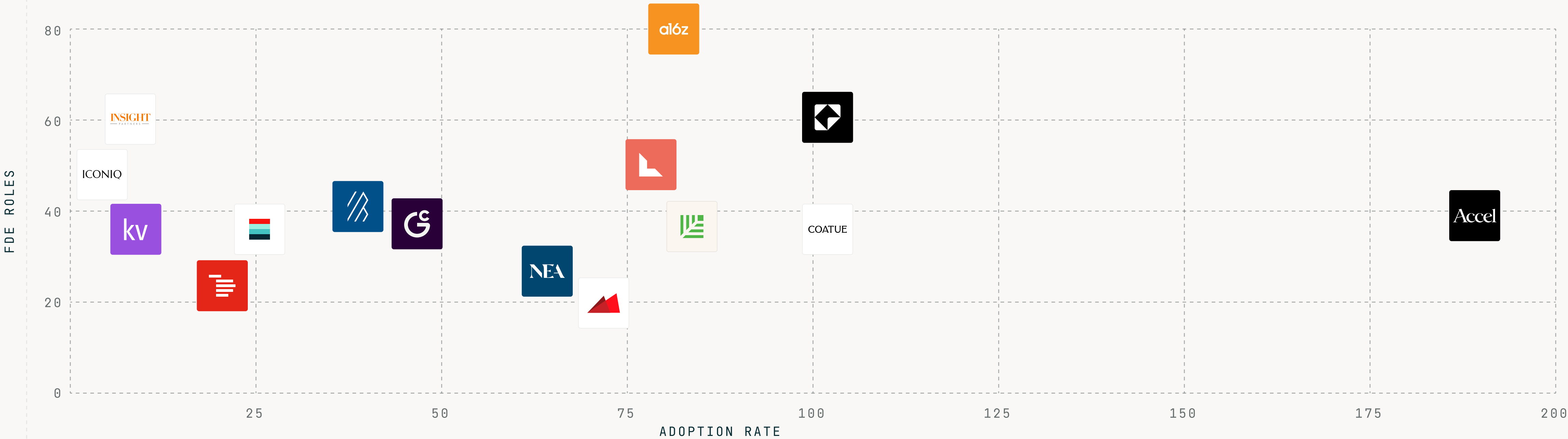


ⓘ Cross-sectional, overlapping cohorts; this is not a YC-to-unicorn progression. Roles are distinct observed postings, not hires or employee headcount.



VC discourse does not reliably predict portfolio hiring

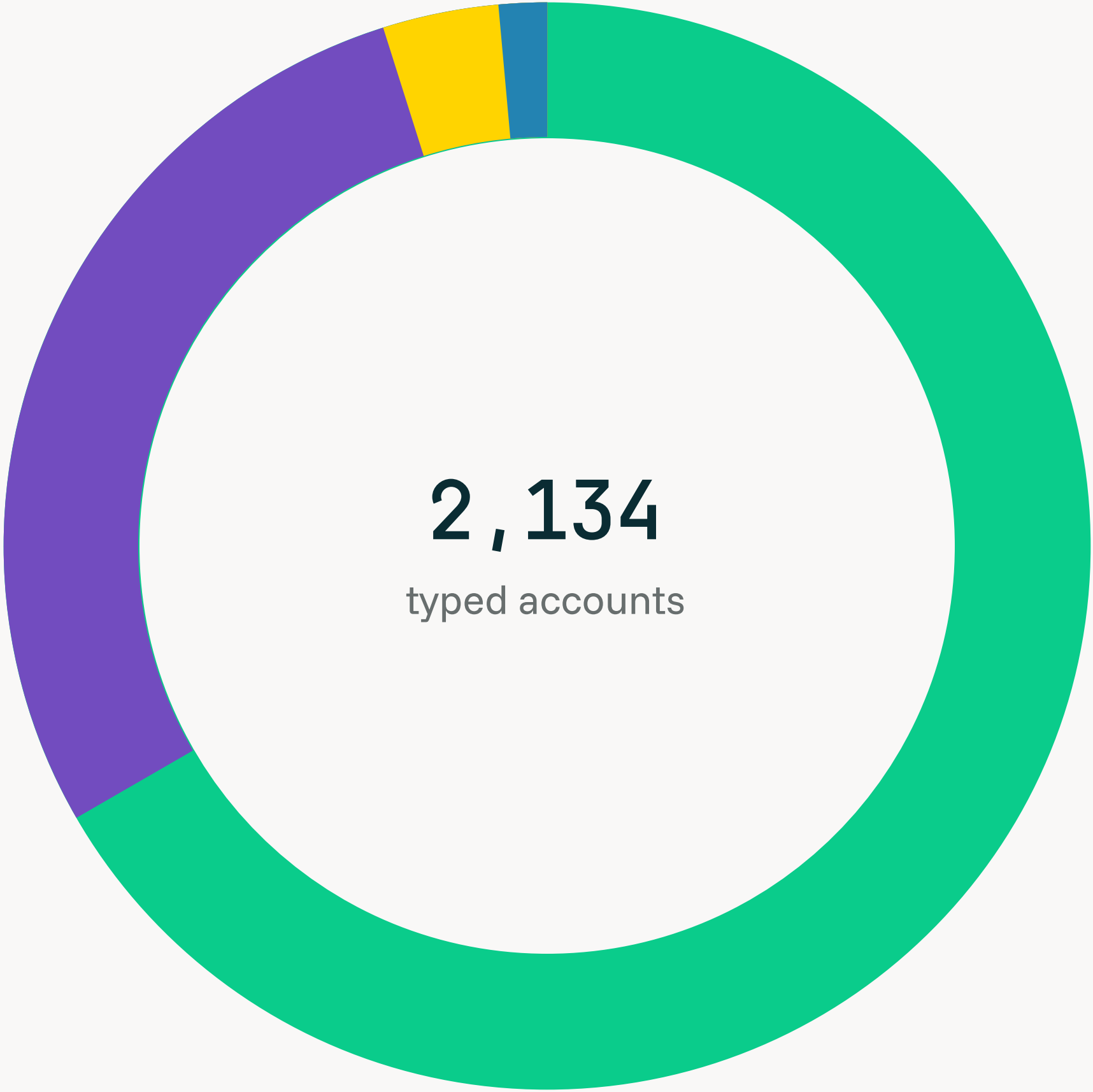
FDE-term mentions vs portfolio FDE-adoption %, for the 13 firms with both discourse data and ≥10 validated portfolio companies.



- Andreessen Horowitz
- Khosla Ventures
- Sequoia Capital
- Bessemer Venture Partners
- Insights Partners
- NEA
- Kleiner Perkins
- Coatue
- ICONIQ Growth
- Founders Fund
- Redpoint Ventures
- Lightspeed Venture Capitals
- General Catalyst
- Accel
- Index Ventures

Hiring from the curated VC-to-company map and VC discourse (Ontologize FDE Dataset, June 2026). Firms absent from either dataset are not plotted (not “low hiring”) Narrative heat and observed hiring are near-independent ($r=0$): heavy talkers Accel/Kleiner show only average adoption, while quiet ICONIQ adopts heavily.

Who drives the FDE conversation on X?



Founder / Operators
1,501 (70%)

VCs / Investors
530 (25%)

Recruiting / Talent
73 (3%)

Palantir alumni / Employees
30 (1%)

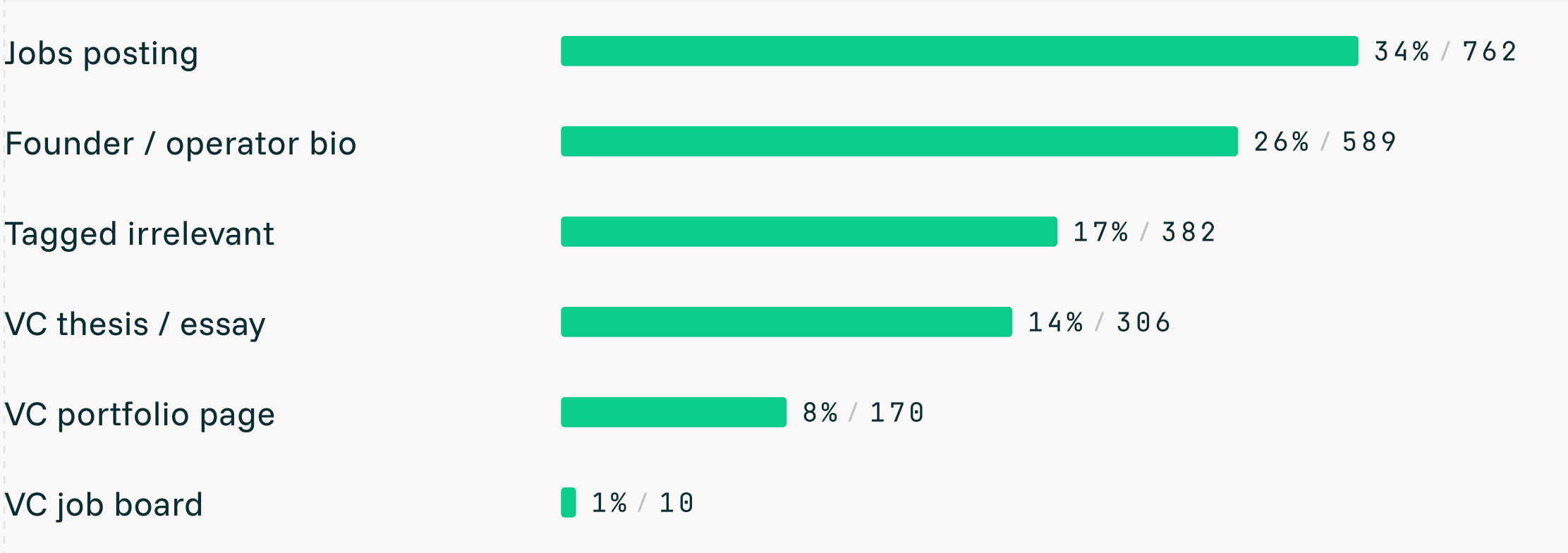
Based on 2,134 accounts the classifier could type (of 16,215 FDE-discourse authors; rest 'unknown'). May-June 2026 snapshot, not a trend.

Source: Ontologize FDE Dataset, June 2026.

Most VC attributed FDE mentions do not reflect an explicit FDE thesis

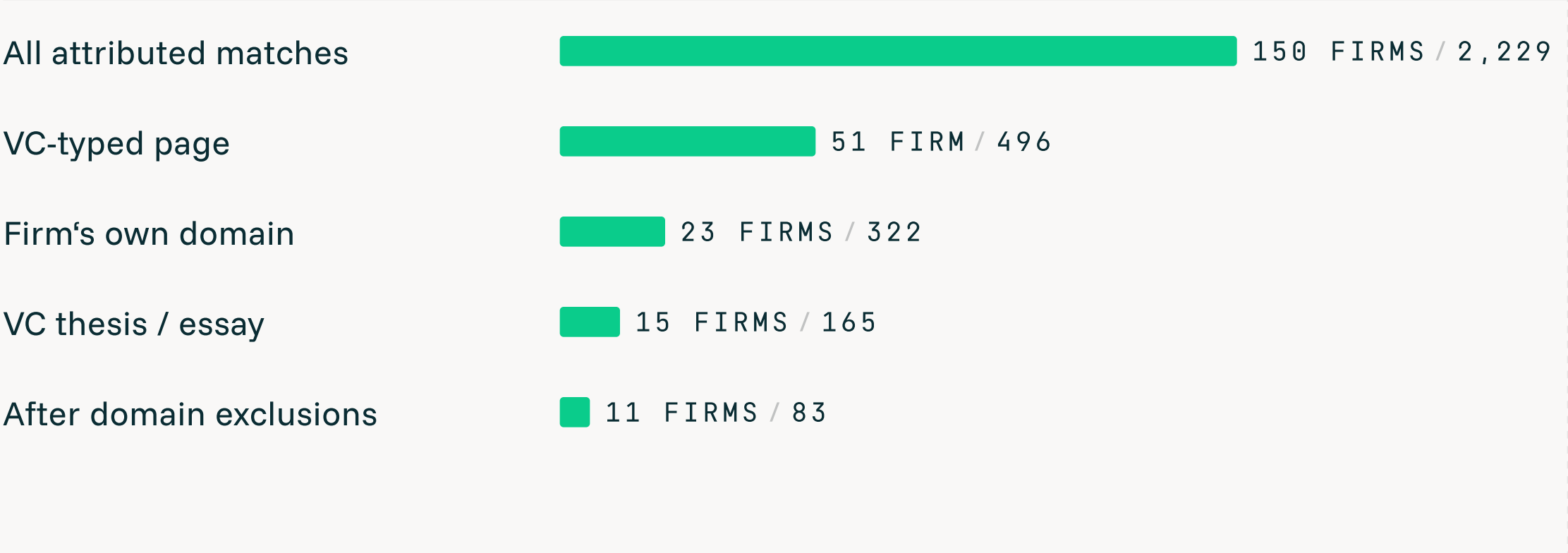
Of 2,229 firm-attributed matches, 83 remain after requiring a VC thesis page on the firm’s own publishing domain.

Most matches are jobs, bios, or irrelevant pages



🔗 496 of 2,229 matches (22%) are on a VC-typed page.

Only 83 matches survive a stricter authorship test



🔗 a16z contributes 48 of the 83 retained matches (57.8%).

Interpretation: “firm-attributed” means the firm name appeared on the page. It does not establish authorship.
The 83-count is a custom page-type and domain audit, not a measure of all VC discussion across social, video, or interviews.



Founder-led deployment is becoming formal hiring

High-touch deployment is becoming part of company design.

KEY ACTIONS

For employers

- 🔧 Use sector context to explain why this role exists now.
- 🔧 Make the technical bar explicit, especially if your title is generic.

For candidates

- 🔧 Use sector and VC data to find overlooked companies.
- 🔧 Compare role quality, not just role volume.
- 🔧 Look for signs of proximity to product, code, and customer operations.

Business Models

The same FDE language can describe two different operating models: accelerating product adoption or delivering services.



FDE appears in two business models: product acceleration and services delivery

Product companies: FDEs as revenue accelerators

FDEs deploy the company's own product to drive customer adoption and value.

Company	Roles
Anduril Industries	146
Databricks	87
OpenAI	86
Palantir	71
Veeva	60
Celonis	48
Mistral	44
Salesforce	42
Appial	41
Esri	39

Services firms: FDE work as revenue generator

The forward-deployed delivery work is itself the billable service.

Company	Roles
PWC	72
Accenture Federal Services	71
Accenture	56
Human Agency	47
Credera	37
Guidehouse	36
NICE	36
Concentrix	35
GDIT	34
Theodo	32

 The same FDE language can describe different models. Candidates should know whether they are deploying a product or selling deployment labor.



The best FDEs are like the pluripotent stem cells of a business.

You can put them in almost any situation and they can immediately translate the lexicon.

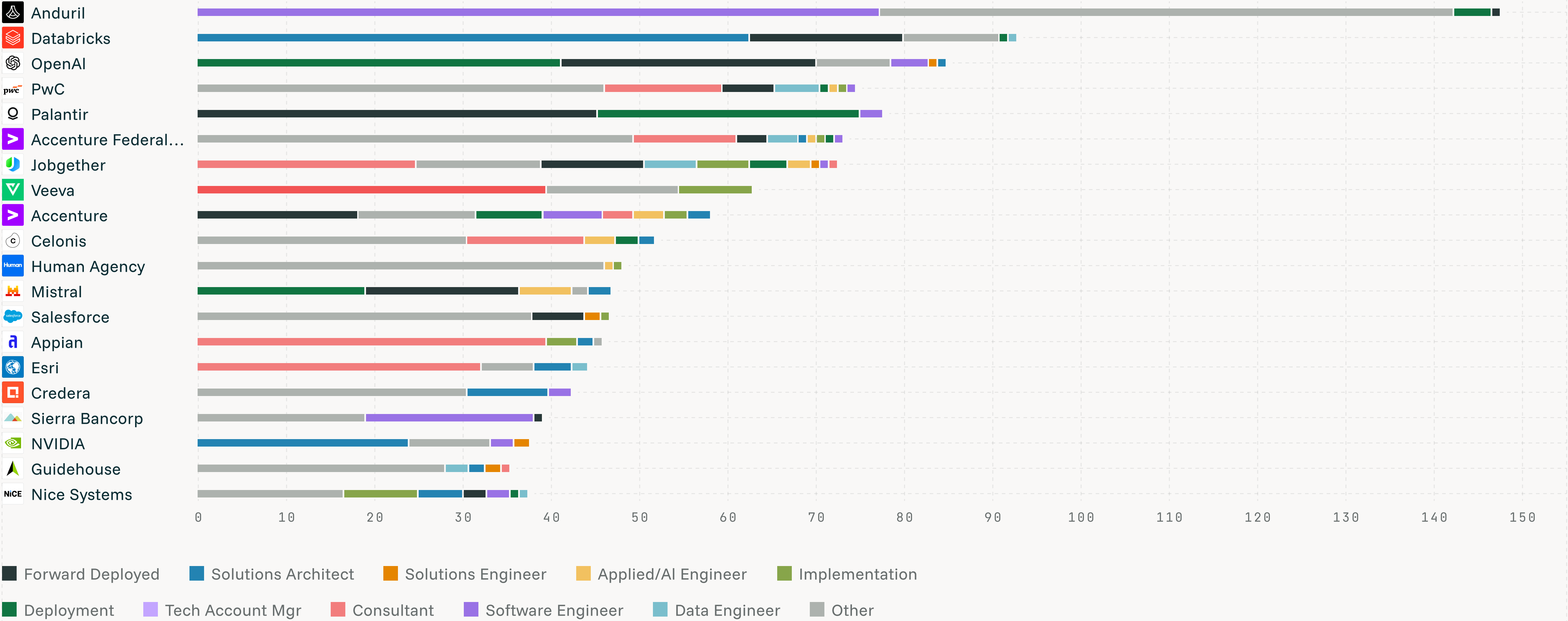
Not just on a logical level, but on an emotional one. They've accumulated enough operational experience to speak the native language of whoever is in front of them.

Wes Field

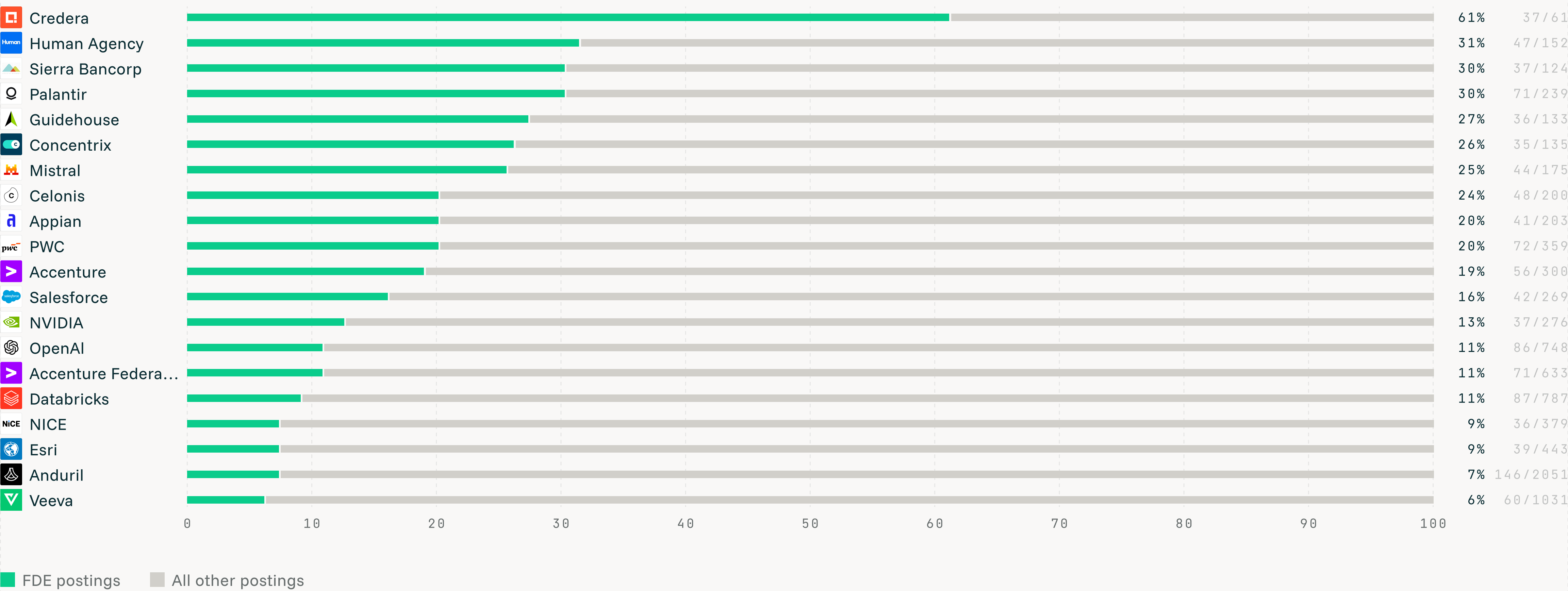
Chief Commercial Officers, Handshake  Palantir for 3 years

 [LinkedIn](#)  [@WesAField](#)  [joinhandshake.com](#)

Top 20 employers by FDE postings - split by job-title family

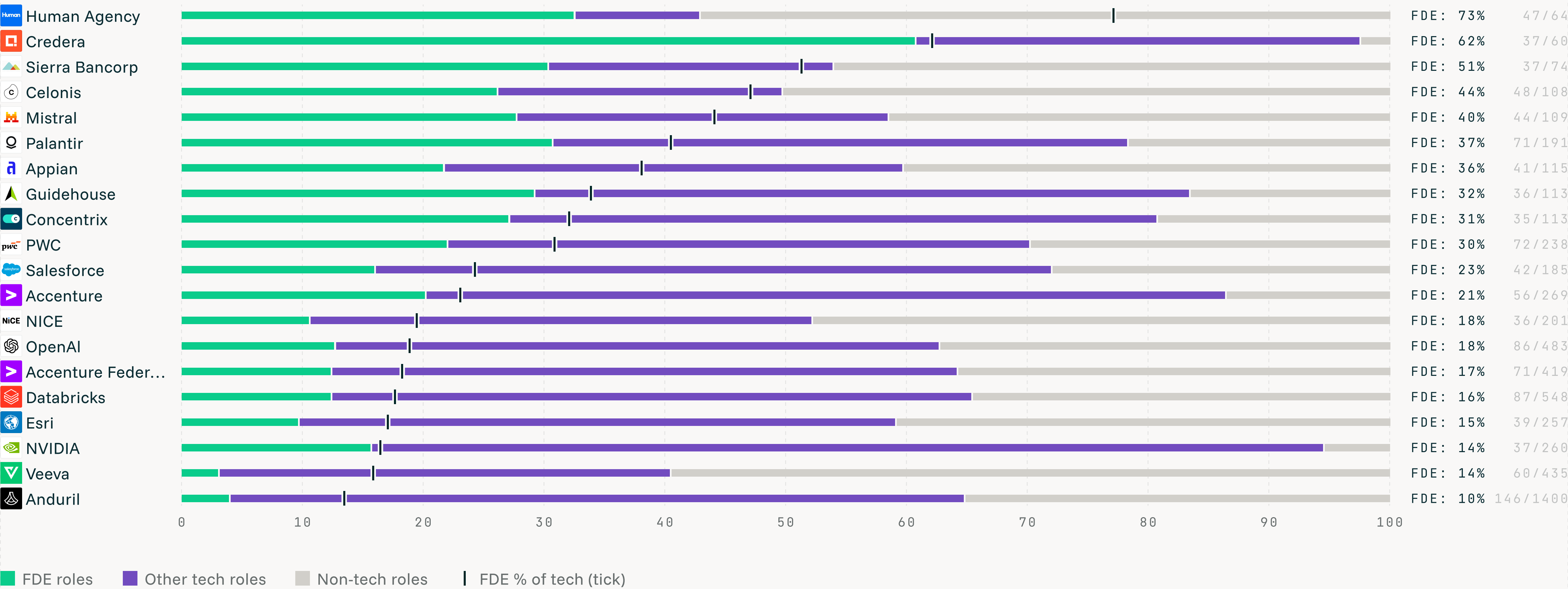


How much of each top employer's hiring is FDE?



How much of each top employer's hiring is FDE?

Every scraped posting split into FDE / other-tech / non-tech - top 20 employers by FDE count.



The same title can describe two very different jobs

It's important to distinguish deploying a product from selling deployment labor.

KEY ACTIONS

For employers

- ✓ Clarify whether the FDE accelerates product adoption or delivers services.
- ✓ State who owns roadmap feedback and code after deployment.
- ✓ Avoid blurring consulting, pre-sales, and engineering tracks.
- ✓ Tie success metrics to adoption, value, or shipped systems.

For candidates

- ✓ Ask if you are deploying the company's product or billable delivery.
- ✓ Check whether the role compounds product and engineering judgment.
- ✓ Clarify utilization, travel, and account expansion expectations.

Geography, Seniority, and Pay

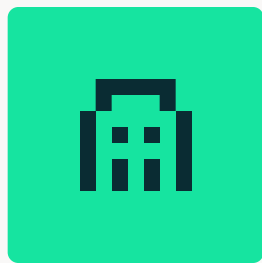
FDE is high-touch, often senior, and less remote-friendly than ordinary software roles.

12%

comprise remote-eligible roles

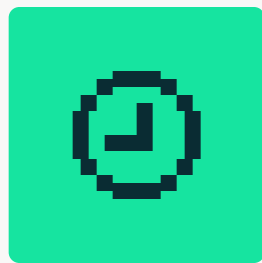


FDE is high-touch work: only 12% of tracked roles are remote-eligible



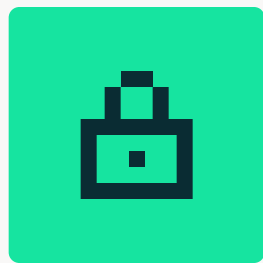
12%

remote-eligible roles



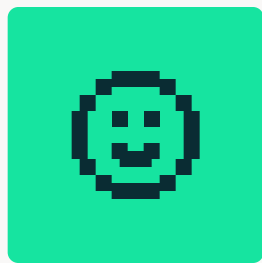
31%

require travel to customer sites



13%

require security clearance



57%

senior, lead, or staff level

High-trust, high-touch, high-seniority work

FDE roles are often close to customer operations, sensitive environments, or complex deployment contexts. They should not be evaluated like ordinary remote software jobs.





FDE was never designed.

It's the residue of one company solving one problem from first principles.

The companies worth joining are the ones that derived the role from their own problem, not the ones that copied the org chart.

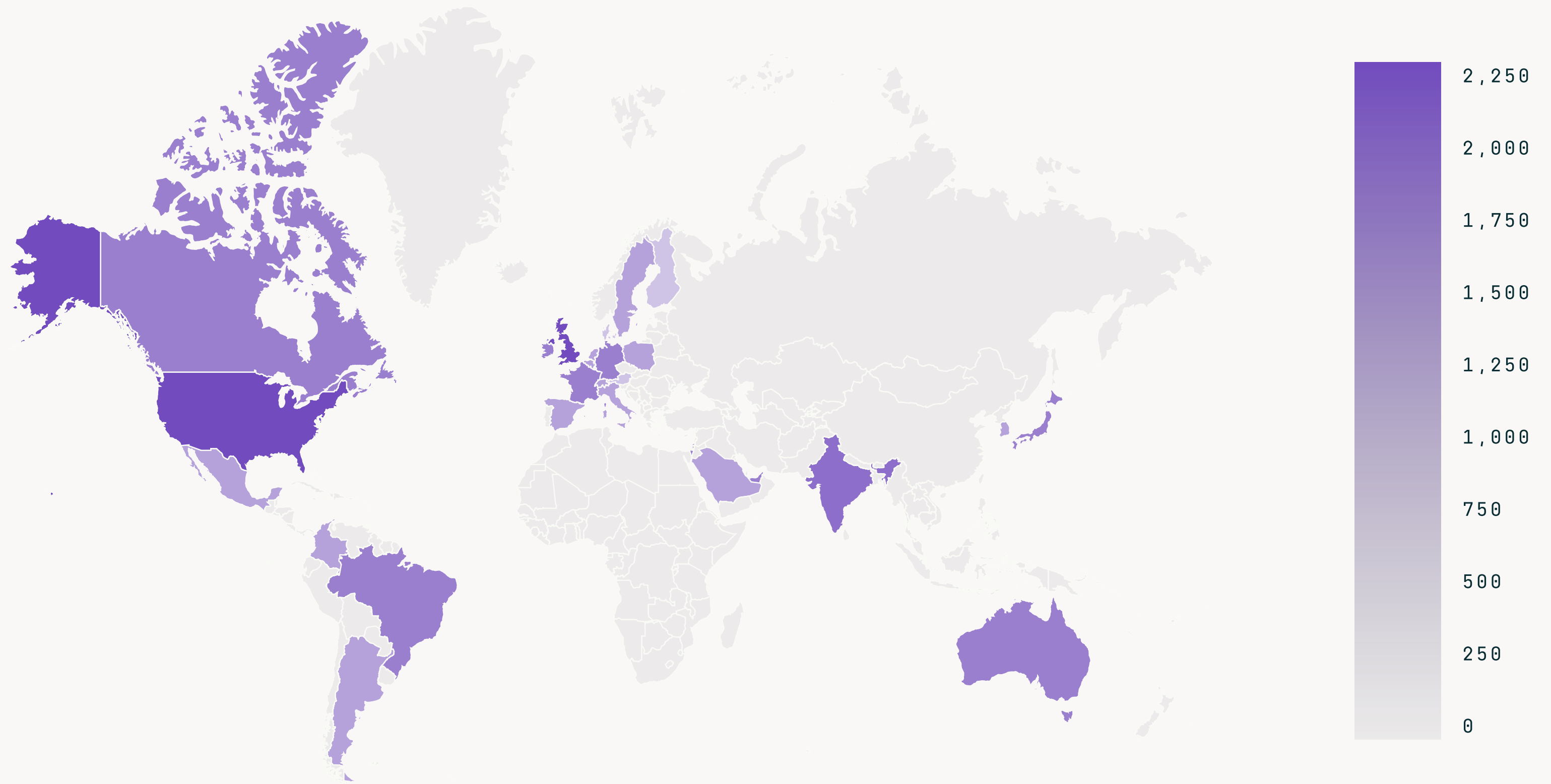
Anjor Kanekar

Foundry, Platypus Technologies  7 years at Palantir

 [LinkedIn](#)  [platypustech.xyz](#)  [anjor.xyz](#)

The US leads FDE demand, but the market is global

The United States accounts for 42% of tracked FDE demand, but meaningful demand appears across India, the UK, Germany, Canada, France, Australia, Singapore, Japan, and Brazil.



 FDE roles by country • 1,150 roles (21.2%) had unknown location and are not mapped



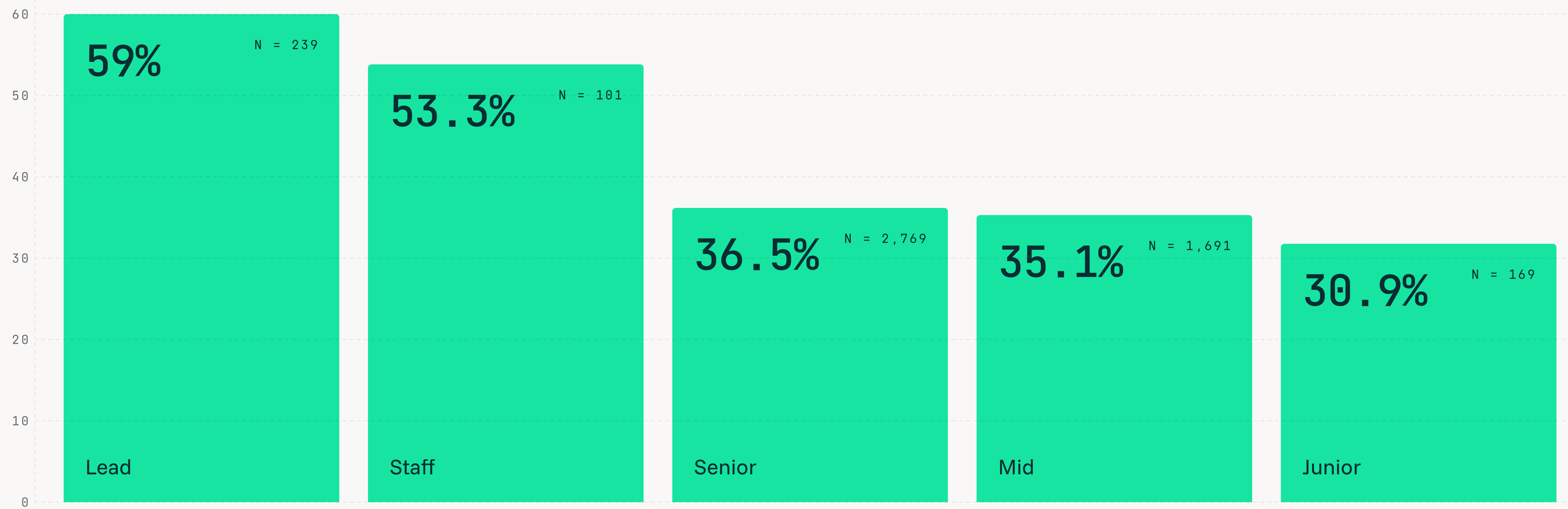


Forward deployed engineers, a role popularised by Palantir, are seeing rising demand in India... TeamLease Digital data shows FDE job demand rose nearly 800% in the first three quarters of 2025.

TeamLease Digital data, reported by Business Standard

✕ @TeamLease · x.com/bsindia/status/2062411526154105279

Lead and staff roles are 1.5 to 1.7x more likely to be true FDE



① Seniority derived from title and description signals.

② Role quality rises with seniority because the work demands ambiguity tolerance, architecture judgment, and outcome ownership.



Compensation Packages

Published salary bands give a useful but incomplete view of how FDE work is priced.

42.5%

roles with disclosed salary bands

\$144K-\$195K

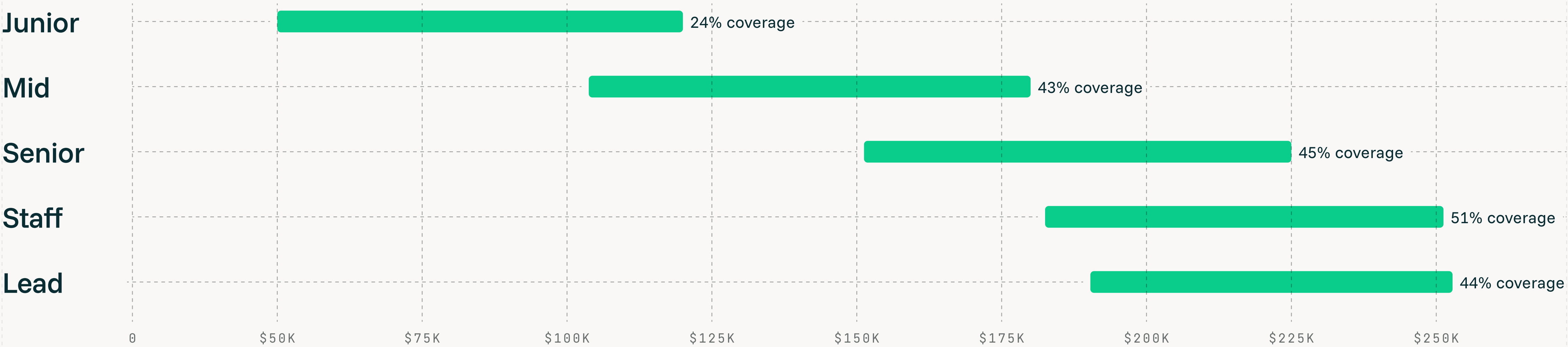
disclosed senior bands cluster here

Directional

base salary only, not total comp



FDE base salary bands rise sharply with seniority, but disclosure is uneven



ⓘ Base salary only. ATS-published bands. Directional, not a salary survey. Use final salary dataset to reconciledisclosure count.

ⓘ Compensation is useful but sparsely disclosed. Of 5,426 strict-included roles, 2,309 (42.5%) published a salary band. Treat all compensation findings as directional, not a full-market salary conclusion. Published base-salary bands skew toward ATS-disclosed roles and do not capture total compensation at AI-native or frontier-lab employers.



FDE is a not a standard remote software role

The strongest roles often trade flexibility for proximity to customers, complex environments, and decision-makers.

KEY ACTIONS

For employers

- ✓ Declare travel, clearance, and onsite expectations up front.
- ✓ Match seniority to ambiguity and customer-trust burden.
- ✓ Publish pay where possible; sparse comp data creates friction.

For candidates

- ✓ Decide early whether the travel and onsite requirements suit you.
- ✓ Ask what level of autonomy and customer trust is expected.
- ✓ Compare base salary against seniority and deployment burden.
- ✓ Check whether clearance or geography gates the role.

Employer and Candidate Playbook

How to write, find, and evaluate FDE roles in a market where the work is real, but the labels are messy.



Employers writing clearer FDE job posts will attract better candidates

The best FDE job posts make the work legible: what gets built, who uses it, how it ships, and what value the FDE owns.

KEY ACTIONS

Do

- ✓ State what the FDE will build
- ✓ Name the customer deployment context
- ✓ Explain ownership after deployment
- ✓ Specify travel, clearance, and remote expectations
- ✓ Include searchable adjacent phrases
- ✓ Clarify product vs services model

Do not

- ✗ Hide the work under vague customer-success language
- ✗ List every AI or cloud keyword without context
- ✗ Make the role sound like demos or configuration only
- ✗ Surprise candidates late in process
- ✗ Assume everyone searches only “FDE”
- ✗ Blur deployment, consulting, and pre-sales

Candidates should search broadly, then screen hard

Title alone is not enough. The real FDE signal is the work pattern.

KEY ACTIONS

Search for

- ✓ Forward Deployed Engineer, FDSE, Forward Deployed AI Engineer
- ✓ Applied AI Engineer, AI Deployment Engineer, Deployment Engineer
- ✓ Implementation Engineer, Customer Engineer, Foundry Engineer, AIP Engineer
- ✓ Solutions Engineer with code ownership
- ✓ Platform or ontology roles in the Palantir ecosystem

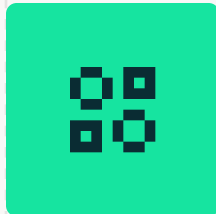
Screen for

- ✓ Coding or technical assembly
- ✓ Customer deployment and workflow integration
- ✓ Post-deployment ownership and adoption accountability
- ✓ Architecture judgment and outcome metrics
- ✓ Travel, clearance, and pre-sales risk



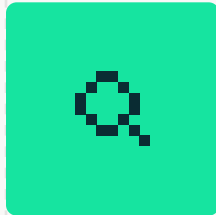
The FDE market has a search and classification problem

The FDE market has a search and classification problem. Roles are scattered across titles, sectors, and business models, making it harder for candidates to find the right work and for employers to reach the right builders.



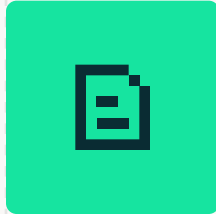
Messy titles

FDE-like work is scattered across 20+ labels.



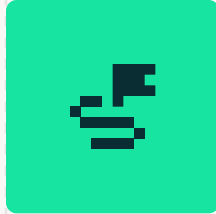
Noisy search

Candidates miss relevant roles and inspect too many weak matches.



Unclear posts

Employers blur builder roles with sales, consulting, or success.



Cleaner discovery

Candidates and employers need a better way to find each other.

Browse jobs. Post a role.
Join the bi-weekly FDE Jobs Brief.

These findings are why Ontologize is launching [ForwardDeployedEngineer.com](#): a dedicated jobs board for FDE, FDSE, Forward Deployed AI Engineer, Foundry, AIP, and deployment engineering roles.

 Independent jobs board. Not affiliated with or endorsed by Palantir Technologies.





The FDE market cannot mature until it can see itself.

FDE became a meaningful category of work before it became a coherent labor market.

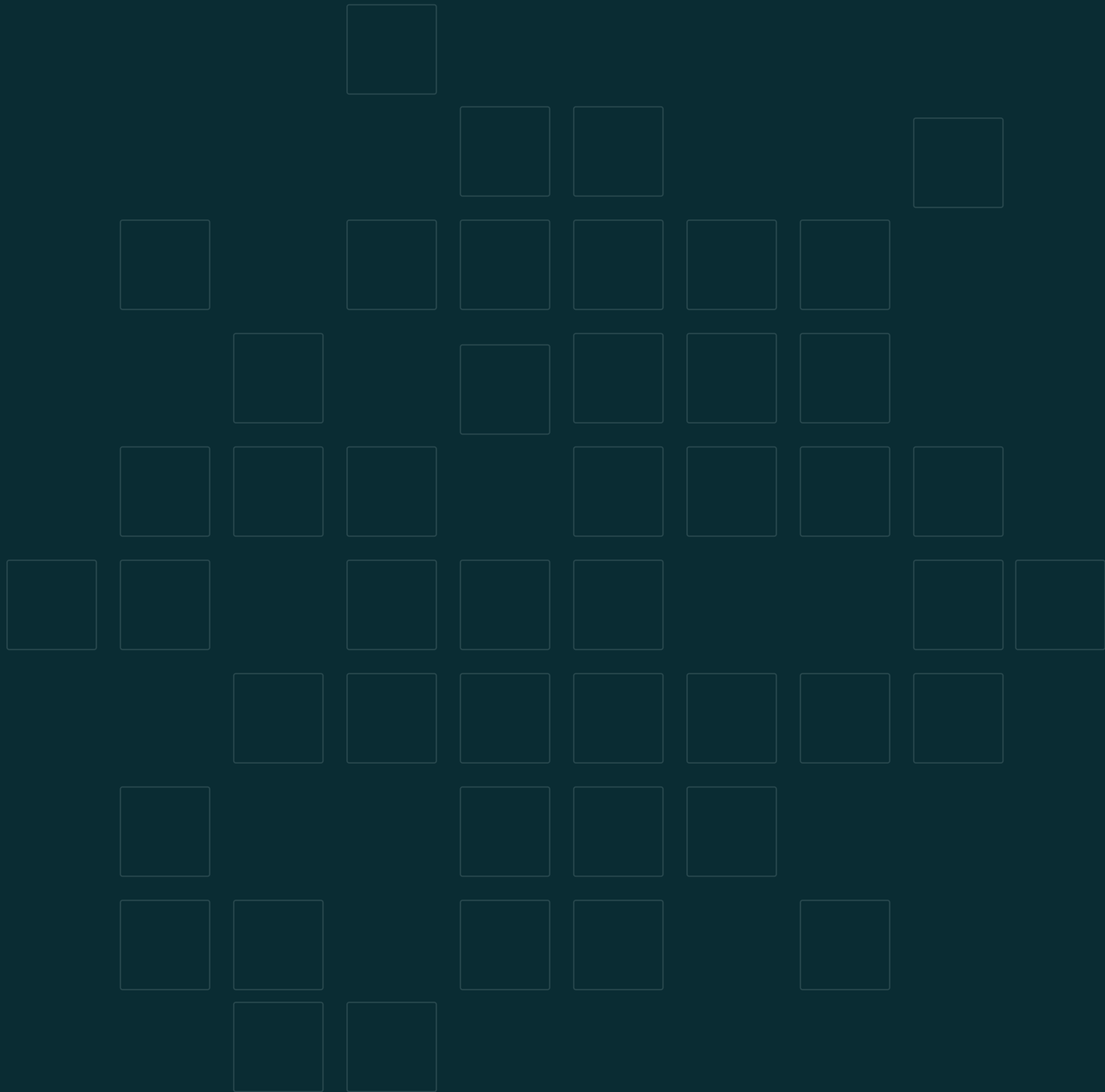
We created this report (and jobs board) to make the market visible: so builders can find their place in it, employers can better describe what they need, and the industry can build from a common understanding.

Taylor Gregoire-Wright

 CEO, Ontologize

Workforce training that builds AI capability and drives real business impact. As Palantir’s sole official Training & Assessment Partner, we help organizations build self-sufficiency in Foundry and AIP.

5,000+ USERS TRAINED 250+ ORGS SERVED



Methodology

How we defined and measured the FDE market



Report methodology and limitations

Methodology

Model-in-the-loop disclosure. Role inclusion, the true-FDE / FDE-adjacent classification, and the cluster and vertical assignments are produced by an LLM (GPT-5.5) adjudicating each posting against a 9-dimension FDE capability rubric, not by human coders. They are reproducible and consistently applied, but they are model judgments: the “true FDE” share figures throughout this report should be read as directional. Soft attributes (company vertical and size, skills, remote/travel/clearance flags) are likewise extracted programmatically from job-description text and model-built company profiles.

Source citations

- [1] All figures derived from a live scan of 6,486 validated employer ATS boards (Greenhouse, Lever, Ashby, SmartRecruiters, Workable, Recrutee, Workday) conducted in June 2026. Each posting was scored against a 9-dimension FDE capability rubric; the strict-included population of 5,426 survived a two-pass classification and cross-source de-duplication.
- [2] Title data from the 5,426 strict-included roles. Titles were normalized to a canonical form; only 923 of 5,426 roles (17.0%) carry a direct FDE-variant title. The remaining 4,503 describe equivalent work under adjacent titles.
- [3] Cluster assignments use a 9-dimension FDE capability rubric scored by GPT-5.5. True-FDE share within a cluster reflects the rubric-score distribution after adjudication. Palantir-ecosystem roles are identified by a Foundry/AIP platform signal in the job description.
- [4] Vertical classifications are assigned via a model-built company profile at time of scan. True-FDE share per vertical reflects GPT-5.5 adjudication outcomes for all strict-included roles at companies in that vertical. Individual company verticals (e.g. Palantir, Mistral) are approximate — see classification caveats.
- [5] Size buckets (startup / growth / enterprise) come from model-built company profiles across the 1,311 profiled employers. The chart shows true-FDE share within each bucket = true-FDE roles ÷ all included roles at companies in that bucket: startup 50.7% (193/381), growth 41.5% (991/2,387), enterprise 31.6% (778/2,461). Startups show the highest true-FDE concentration. Directional.



Report methodology and limitations

Source citations (continued)

[6] “Product companies” are classified as revenue accelerators — FDEs deploy the company’s own product. Role counts reflect live postings only; historical hiring is not included.

[7] “Services firms” are classified as revenue generators — the forward-deployed delivery work is itself the billable service. PwC’s figure combines two separate Workday tenant boards. Job aggregators (e.g. Jobgether) are excluded from this leaderboard because they are not direct employers.

[8] Skill mentions are extracted by keyword and phrase matching against the full job-description text of each strict-included role. Each skill is counted once per role regardless of mention frequency. “True-FDE share within skill” is the fraction of roles mentioning the skill that classified as true FDE.

[9] Archetypes are derived from cluster, title-family, and skill co-occurrence patterns across the strict-included population. They are observational groupings, not mutually exclusive categories.

[10] Country assignments are derived from the ATS location field, normalized to ISO country codes. “Unknown” is the residual for postings with no parseable location. China and a small set of US-adversary jurisdictions are excluded by geographic policy.

[11] Remote-eligibility, travel, and clearance flags are extracted from job-description text for each strict-included role. Seniority is derived from title and description signals.

[12] Compensation data is from ATSs that publish structured salary bands (primarily Ashby; some Greenhouse and Lever). All figures are base salary only. Non-USD bands are converted using a static FX table as of May 2026. Only 2,309 of 5,426 roles (42.5%) disclosed a band — treat all figures as directional.

[13] 2,456 investor sources scanned; 2,500 validated boards. Share denominator is validated portfolio companies, not all portfolio domains. Investor names are as listed in the workbook; GV/Google Ventures and Greylock variants should be normalized before final publication if you want one canonical brand row. Counts reflect live postings in the scan window, not historical hiring.

[14] Investor leaderboard & adoption use a per-firm portfolio map (firm site map + index scrape, companies matched by name/domain to the jobs universe): 793 matched, 254 hiring FDEs. Counted once per firm, so per-firm bars overlap and are not additive to the 435 distinct companies in [13]. Adoption % is filtered to firms with ≥ 10 matched portfolio companies.

