

# Becoming Frontier

The Skills, Talent and Workforce  
Strategies Shaping Frontier-Ready  
Microsoft Partners



# Contents

## 01

The Frontier conversation has moved on. Now, who's going to deliver it?

Page 03

## 04

The hardest people to find aren't always the most technical

Page 15

## 02

The three capability areas behind the hiring demand

Page 06

## 05

What does a Frontier-ready partner actually look like?

Page 19

## 03

Skilling or hiring? For most partners, the answer is both

Page 11

## 06

Turning Frontier ambition into deliverable capability

Page 22

# The Frontier conversation has moved on. Now, who's going to deliver it?

Much of the early conversation around Frontier focused on the technology itself. Microsoft partners have spent time understanding the opportunity around AI and agents, deciding where they want to play and considering what new services customers may need.

Those questions still matter. But they're now being followed by a more practical one:

## 01

---

# Do we have the people and skills to deliver this properly?

Across the Microsoft partner ecosystem, Frontier is moving from a strategic talking point into a workforce priority. Partners need people who can turn customer interest into secure, governed services that work in the real world. That means connecting technical knowledge with consulting, architecture, security, data and delivery experience.

For leadership teams, workforce planning can't sit at the end of the strategy. If a business is deciding which Frontier services to build, it also needs to understand who will design them, sell them, deliver them and support customers once they're live.

# From market interest to hiring activity

Our own hiring data shows how quickly this conversation is changing. Frontier-related skills currently account for approximately 50 to 60% of our live Microsoft partner requirements, compared with around 15 to 20% six months earlier.

This is our view of active demand among the partners we work with, rather than a measure of the entire market. Even so, the increase tells us something important. Frontier is no longer confined to marketing plans and future service roadmaps. Partners are starting to build the teams behind it.

In some cases, that means hiring for specialist AI, data or agent roles. In others, it means asking more of existing architects, developers and consultants. People who have traditionally worked around Azure, Dynamics, Microsoft 365 or Power Platform are being expected to understand how those areas connect with agents, AI applications and modern data platforms.

We're also starting to see organisational structures evolve alongside the technology. Azure practices are increasingly being repositioned as Cloud & AI practices, while roles that were once focused purely on cloud infrastructure are being broadened to encompass AI services, data platforms and agent-led solutions. The change in job titles may seem cosmetic, but it reflects a wider shift in how partners are thinking about their future capabilities and the services they want to build.

The result is a broader workforce question than simply, "Can we hire an AI engineer?"

Partners need to ask whether capability exists across the full customer journey, from the first discovery conversation through to implementation, governance and ongoing delivery. A gap anywhere along that chain can make it harder to turn a promising proposition into successful customer work.

# Three areas are shaping demand

Although Frontier covers a wide range of technologies and services, the hiring demand we're seeing is clustering around three connected areas:



**Copilot Studio and agents**  
Building AI-powered workflows, automation and agent-led experiences.



**Microsoft Foundry**  
Developing AI-enabled applications and extending the value of existing Azure investments.



**Microsoft Fabric**  
Creating the trusted data foundations that AI, analytics and decision-making depend on.

The important point is that Frontier isn't one capability. A partner building Copilot Studio services will need a different mix of skills from a partner focusing on Fabric-led transformation or AI application development. Before thinking about recruitment, partners need clarity on the customer problems they want to solve and the services they intend to deliver. Only then can they make sensible decisions about the capabilities they need to build, develop or acquire.

# The three capability areas behind the hiring demand

Before making workforce decisions, it helps to understand why Copilot Studio, Foundry and Fabric are attracting so much attention. They solve different customer problems, but each is changing the skills partners need and the way teams work together.

# 02



## Copilot Studio and agents: taking AI into everyday work

The first wave of AI adoption was often centred on individual productivity. Organisations explored how AI could help people draft content, summarise information and spend less time on routine administration.

The conversation is now becoming more operational. Customers want to know how agents can support workflows, connect information and help complete defined tasks under appropriate human oversight.

This brings Copilot Studio into a much wider range of customer conversations. Agent capability is no longer relevant only to a specialist innovation team. Power Platform professionals, developers, consultants, architects and governance specialists may all have a role in shaping and delivering agent-led solutions.

For Microsoft partners, the workforce implication is clear. It isn't enough to have one person who understands the technology. The business needs enough knowledge across discovery, design, build, security and adoption to move a solution into production responsibly.

## Microsoft Foundry: building on the Azure foundation

Many Microsoft partners have spent years helping customers modernise infrastructure, migrate workloads and build strong Azure foundations. That work continues, but customers increasingly want to know what those foundations can help them do next.

Microsoft Foundry supports the development of AI applications and agents. For partners, it represents an opportunity to extend established Azure relationships into application innovation, AI engineering and new customer services.

This doesn't make traditional Azure expertise less valuable. It makes the team around it broader. Infrastructure and cloud architecture remain important, but partners may also need development skills, AI engineering, solution design and people who can connect technical possibilities with worthwhile business use cases.

The partner may already have helped a customer build the platform. The next opportunity is helping them create practical value on top of it.



## Microsoft Fabric: where AI meets the reality of customer data

**Almost every serious AI conversation eventually reaches the same subject: data.**

Customers may begin by talking about agents, automation or generative AI, but the quality of the outcome depends heavily on the information underneath it. Data needs to be accessible, well managed and suitable for the purpose for which it's being used. That's why Fabric is becoming such an important part of Frontier workforce planning. It isn't simply a platform discussion for a traditional data team. Architects, consultants and delivery leaders also need to understand how modern data foundations support wider AI and transformation programmes.

For partners, this creates demand for more than technical platform knowledge. Customers also need help understanding what data is available, how it should be governed and whether it can support the outcomes they're hoping to achieve.



# Different technologies, one shared challenge

Copilot Studio, Foundry and Fabric each require different technical strengths, but they create a common workforce challenge. Partners are trying to build capability in several areas while continuing to support existing customers, services and project commitments.

That makes prioritisation essential. Very few businesses can hire and train across every possible Frontier opportunity at once. The stronger approach is to choose the customer problems the organisation is best placed to solve, then build the connected team needed to solve them well. We help Microsoft partners map those workforce requirements to their growth plans. That might mean identifying the skills already available internally, deciding where training is realistic or finding experienced people who can help a new capability gain momentum.

**The aim isn't to build the largest possible Frontier team. It's to build the right one for the work the partner genuinely intends to deliver.**

# Skilling or hiring? For most partners, the answer is both

The Frontier workforce debate is sometimes presented as a simple choice: develop existing employees or recruit people who already have the required expertise.

In practice, most Microsoft partners will need a combination of the two.

The range of knowledge associated with Frontier is too broad to solve through isolated hiring. Partners need technical skills across AI, agents, applications and data, but they may also need stronger capability in consulting, governance, security, architecture and delivery. Trying to recruit every skill from the external market would be expensive, slow and difficult to sustain.

Internal development alone has its own limits. Learning takes time, and a certification doesn't immediately give someone experience of leading customer discovery, shaping a solution or delivering it in production.

The real question is therefore not whether to build or buy capability. It's where each approach makes sense.

# 03

---

# Capability is now a business planning decision

Workforce development has traditionally been divided between learning and development on one side and recruitment on the other. Frontier makes that separation less useful.

If AI, data and agent-led services are part of the growth plan, leadership teams need to understand the workforce behind them.

## That means asking:



Which capabilities will be most important to future growth?



Which skills can existing employees realistically develop?



Where would an experienced hire accelerate progress?



How much depth is needed before a new service can be offered confidently?



Do we have enough capability to deliver more than one engagement at a time?

These aren't simply HR questions.

They affect which opportunities the business can pursue, how confidently it can sell and whether customer work can be delivered consistently.

# The specialisation is becoming the route forward

Microsoft's partner recognition landscape is changing. The Frontier Partner badge will remain active during FY27 for organisations that continue to meet its requirements, but it will retire on 30 June 2027. The Azure Expert MSP programme is also being retired, with new enrolments already closed and renewals ending in January 2027. For partners looking beyond those programmes, the Frontier Partner specialisation is becoming the more logical route forward.

This is more than a change in terminology or partner status. The Frontier Partner badge does not automatically convert into the specialisation, and organisations pursuing the new recognition will need to meet a separate set of criteria. That includes holding the required prerequisite specialisations, developing specific skills within the workforce and demonstrating delivery capability through an independent audit.

The skilling requirements make the workforce implications particularly clear. Partners need five individuals to complete the Frontier Transformation Engineer pathway and three individuals to achieve the Fabric Analytics Engineer Associate certification, DP-600. The same people can contribute towards both requirements, but the capability must exist within the organisation.

For many partners, this creates a practical decision about how those requirements will be met. Some will be able to develop existing employees through the relevant learning and certification pathways. Others may need to recruit people who already hold the necessary credentials or bring experience that can strengthen delivery capability ahead of the audit. Most are likely to combine the two approaches.

The important point is that the retirement of the existing badge and Azure Expert MSP programme places even greater emphasis on what comes next. The Frontier Partner specialisation gives partners a clearer destination, but reaching it depends on having the right people, skills and delivery experience in place. Workforce planning therefore cannot be left until the organisation is ready to apply. It needs to begin early enough to identify the gaps, build the required capability and make targeted hiring decisions where internal development alone will not be enough.

# Start with the people **you already have**

Existing employees often provide the strongest foundation because they already understand the organisation, its customers and the way it delivers. With the right development, an Azure architect may extend further into AI applications. A Power Platform specialist may build deeper Copilot Studio expertise. A data consultant may strengthen their Fabric and AI knowledge.

The important thing is to be realistic about the distance involved. Some skills can be developed through focused learning and supported project experience. Others may require a specialist hire who can contribute immediately and help the wider team develop.

This is where external recruitment can have value beyond filling a vacancy. The right person can introduce experience, mentor colleagues, help shape a repeatable service and give the business greater confidence in early customer engagements.

We work closely with partners to identify that balance. Rather than automatically treating every gap as a recruitment brief, we look at the capability the business is trying to create, what already exists and where an external hire would make the greatest difference.

**The strongest Frontier workforce won't be built through skilling or hiring alone. It will come from knowing when to use each.**

# The hardest people to find aren't always the most technical

**Once a partner decides where external recruitment is needed, it meets another challenge: much of the Microsoft ecosystem is looking for similar people.**

Copilot Studio, Foundry and Fabric are distinct capability areas, but hiring demand frequently converges on a relatively small pool of candidates. Partners want people who understand the technology, know the Microsoft ecosystem and can contribute to customer work without a long settling-in period.

Technical knowledge is only part of that brief.

# 04

# Customer delivery requires a wider skill set

A strong engineer may understand the platform in depth without having worked in a customer-facing consulting environment. That doesn't make them the wrong person, but it does affect where they can contribute immediately and what support they may need.

Partner delivery often relies on people moving comfortably between technical and commercial settings. They may need to take part in discovery, support pre-sales, scope the work, design the solution and explain decisions to customer stakeholders. Some will also need to understand statements of work, delivery risk and how one engagement fits into a longer customer relationship.

As more requirements are added, the candidate pool becomes smaller. Partners aren't only searching for Fabric, Copilot Studio or Foundry capability. They may also want previous consulting experience, Microsoft partner knowledge, customer confidence and evidence of successful project delivery.

**This is why the shortage can feel more severe than the technology skills alone suggest.**



# Frontier depends on the whole delivery chain

**A partner can't build a Frontier practice by recruiting engineers alone. Depending on the service, the wider team may need capability across:**

- ✓ Discovery and consultative selling
- ✓ Technical pre-sales and solution architecture
- ✓ Scoping and statements of work
- ✓ Engineering and implementation
- ✓ Data, identity, security and governance
- ✓ Adoption, measurement and ongoing support

Not every role needs all of these skills. The organisation does, however, need them represented somewhere in the delivery model. Workforce planning should therefore begin with the customer experience the partner wants to provide.

If the goal is to deliver agents in production, the business needs more than people who can build an agent. If the proposition centres on Fabric, platform knowledge needs to sit alongside customer discovery, architecture, governance and delivery management.

**Otherwise, the partner risks creating pockets of technical expertise rather than a connected practice.**

## Look beyond the perfect Microsoft partner CV

Previous partner experience can be extremely valuable, but treating it as essential for every role creates a circular problem. Partners end up recruiting from the same group of competitors, all of which are trying to retain and grow the same skills.

A better approach is to separate what someone must know on day one from what can be developed with the right onboarding and support. Some leadership, architecture and customer-facing roles may genuinely require proven partner experience. Other positions may be suitable for professionals from an MSP, consultancy, software business or customer organisation. A candidate with strong technical knowledge and the right communication skills may be able to develop partner-specific experience more easily than the business can teach a scarce technical specialism from the beginning.

The aim isn't to lower standards. It's to keep the brief focused on what the role genuinely requires.

## Our Borderless model opens up a wider talent market

Geography can narrow an already limited candidate pool even further. When a partner combines a specialist technical requirement with previous consulting experience and a restricted location, finding the right person can take considerably longer.

Our Borderless model helps Microsoft partners access qualified professionals across a wider talent market and bring them into their existing teams. It isn't conventional outsourced delivery and it isn't simply a way to move work elsewhere at a lower cost. The focus is on finding Microsoft specialists who match the requirement and can work as part of the partner's delivery model.

Borderless recruitment won't suit every role. Customer expectations, collaboration requirements and the way the team operates all need to be considered. Used selectively, however, it can help a partner secure scarce expertise, add capacity and reduce its reliance on recruiting from the same local group of competitors.

If the skills are specialised, the search may need to extend beyond the places the business has traditionally looked.

# What does a Frontier-ready partner actually look like?

Frontier readiness is sometimes discussed in terms of technology, badges and certifications. These all matter, but none tells the whole story.

A partner is Frontier-ready when it can take a customer opportunity from initial conversation into secure, governed and reliable delivery. That requires technical depth, but it also calls for consulting strength, sound governance and enough workforce capacity to repeat the work successfully.

**Readiness is therefore an organisational capability, not simply a programme status.**

# 05

---



---



---



---



---



---

# Five foundations of Frontier readiness

- **Technical depth**  
Relevant knowledge across AI, agents, applications and data.
- **Consulting strength**  
People who can understand a customer’s needs and turn them into a realistic solution.
- **Trust by design**  
Security, identity, data protection and governance considered from the beginning.
- **End-to-end delivery**  
Capability across discovery, architecture, implementation and ongoing support.
- **Workforce depth**  
Enough skills and capacity to support consistent delivery as demand grows.

These foundations depend on one another. Strong engineering can’t compensate for poor discovery. A good proposition can’t overcome a lack of delivery capacity. Governance can’t be treated as something to add once the technical work is complete.

The most valuable capability often sits between disciplines, where technical knowledge is turned into a practical customer solution that can be delivered securely and commercially.

# Readiness needs enough depth to be repeatable

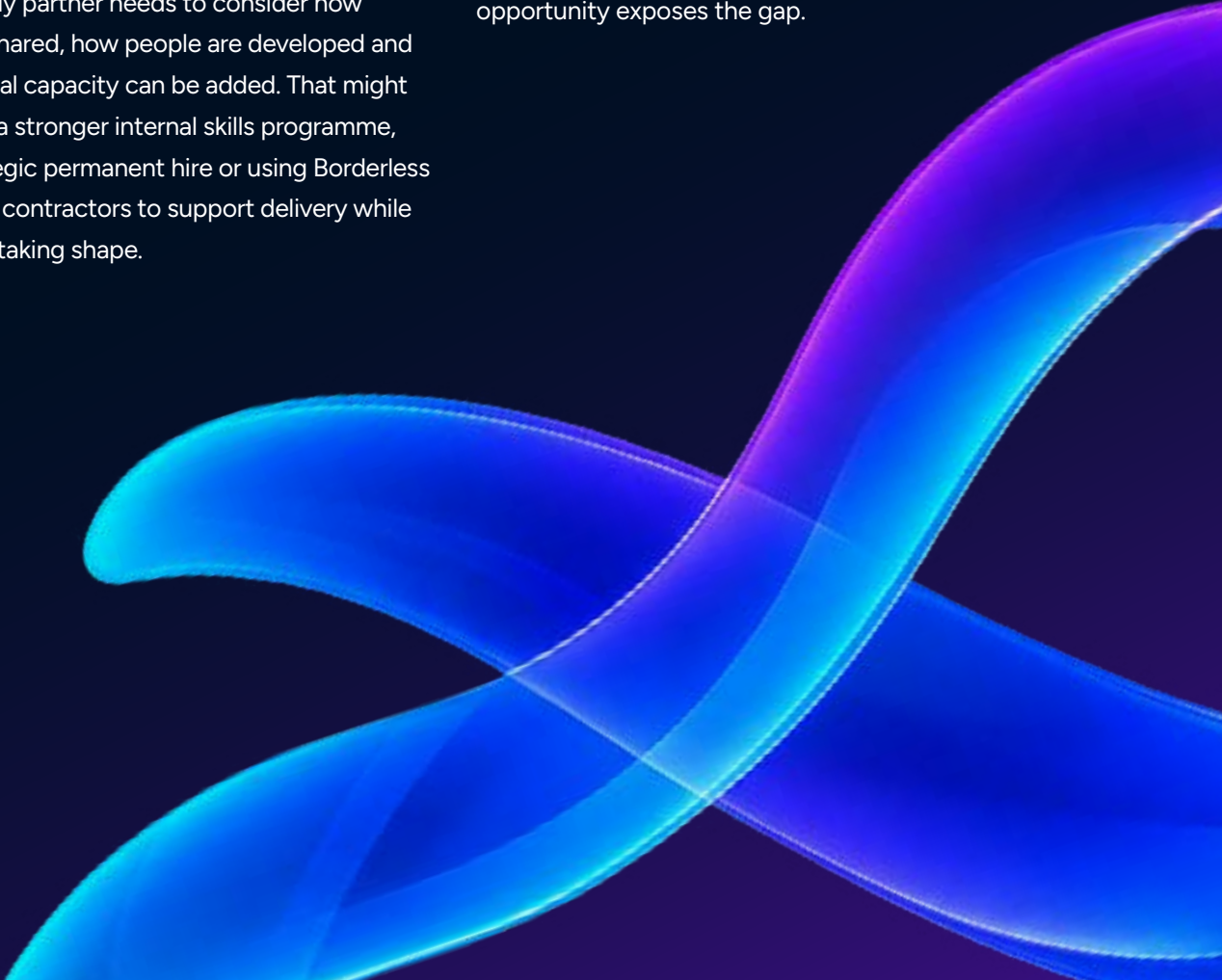
A partner may have enough expertise to launch a service or deliver its first project without having enough depth to support several customers at once.

That distinction is important. Capability existing somewhere in the business isn’t the same as having a scalable practice. If one person holds most of the knowledge, leads every discovery session and reviews every design, they quickly become a bottleneck.

A Frontier-ready partner needs to consider how knowledge is shared, how people are developed and where additional capacity can be added. That might mean building a stronger internal skills programme, making a strategic permanent hire or using Borderless specialists and contractors to support delivery while demand is still taking shape.

Cloud Decisions helps partners look at all of those options together. Through our Assess, Build, Scale and Deliver approach, we can help identify future workforce needs, recruit critical permanent talent, add flexible capacity through our Borderless model and mobilise teams around defined customer work.

The right answer will depend on the partner’s plans, starting point and appetite for investment. What matters is making those choices before a major opportunity exposes the gap.



# Turning Frontier ambition into deliverable capability

For many Microsoft partners, the direction of travel is no longer the difficult part. Opportunities around AI, agents, data and application innovation are becoming easier to see. Customers are asking new questions and partners are deciding what they want to offer in response.

The harder part is building the organisation capable of following through.

Throughout this guide, one theme has returned again and again. Partners don't become Frontier-ready by adopting one technology, earning one credential or hiring a handful of specialists. They become ready by connecting workforce decisions with the services they want to sell and the customer outcomes they want to deliver.

# 06

## Five questions worth asking now



Which Frontier capabilities matter most to our growth plans?



What useful skills and experience already exist within our team?



Where can internal development close the gap?



Which roles require proven expertise from the outset?



Do we have enough depth and capacity to deliver consistently?

There is no single workforce model that every partner should follow. An established Azure business will start from a different position to a Dynamics specialist or a partner building its first data practice. Some will make internal skilling the priority. Others will need experienced external hires to get moving. Many will combine permanent recruitment with flexible capability.

The goal isn't to copy how another partner is building its team. Every partner starts from a different position and has different ambitions. There is, however, value in understanding how other organisations have approached the challenge, which workforce investments have paid off and which mistakes have slowed progress. The strongest workforce strategies tend to borrow lessons from the wider market while remaining focused on the partner's own goals, customers and strengths. Ultimately, success comes from understanding what your business is trying to become and putting the right people behind that plan.

# How Cloud Decisions can help

We work specifically with Microsoft partners, so these conversations are familiar to us. We understand that a Frontier workforce requirement rarely begins and ends with a job title. It usually starts with a bigger business question about where the partner wants to grow, what customers are asking for and whether the current team can support it.

## We can help you:



### Assess your capability

Understand the skills, leadership and delivery capacity behind your growth plans, and identify the workforce opportunities that will have the biggest impact on future growth.



### Build critical expertise

Recruit permanent leaders, consultants, architects and technical specialists who can help establish or strengthen a practice.



### Scale through our Borderless model

Access a wider pool of Microsoft professionals and add specialist delivery capability without restricting the search to the local market.



### Deliver against customer demand

Bring together the people and skills required to mobilise defined customer work and maintain momentum once opportunities are won.

Frontier creates a significant opportunity for Microsoft partners, but customers will experience that opportunity through the people responsible for delivering it. The partners best placed to grow will be those that start building the workforce early, make considered decisions about what to develop and know where outside expertise can help them move faster.

Technology may open the door, but people turn the opportunity into something customers can trust.



# Speak to Cloud Decisions

If you're deciding where to build Frontier capability, trying to strengthen an existing practice or struggling to find the specialist skills behind a customer opportunity, we'd be happy to talk it through.

Let's look at what you already have, where the gaps sit and the most practical way to build the workforce you need.

## Talk to Cloud Decisions about your Frontier workforce

 [info@cloud-decisions.com](mailto:info@cloud-decisions.com)

 **UK:** 07539489243

 [cloud-decisions.com](https://cloud-decisions.com)

 **US:** +1 689 329 0628