The State of the Market Research Industry - Workforce Trends and the Rise of AI

A global tracking study of Market Research and Insights professionals about their industry and the forces impacting their work and career prospects

April 2026

MRII MARKET RESEARCH INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

Welcome... from the MRII Executive Director

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to latest MRII's latest wave of our research study, "The State of the Market Research Industry - Workforce Trends and the Rise of AI." At MRII (the Market Research Institute International) our mission is provide educational and training resources to help you achieve market research success. Learning, training and education are all central to how we fulfill this mission.

This new research updates earlier waves of research conducted in 2023, 2024, 2025, and expands it to include new, topical areas as well. It was conducted among a global sample of market research and insights practitioners to help the industry gain deeper understanding of the state of our profession. It provides insight into such areas as:

- Understanding the career paths and job satisfaction of market research professionals
- Identifying skills gaps and training opportunities for professionals
- Gathering opinions on the state of the market research industry as a whole
- Tracking attitudes and behavior among research professionals with regard to AI and the impact it is having on them, and their views about its future.

The results are fascinating on multiple dimensions and can serve as a guide to our industry about the way the workforce is thinking, as both leaders and the people who work for them are adapting to the rapid pace of change in our world, our companies, and our individual lives.

As we navigate the ever-changing world of work, one element remains stable—investing in people and skill development is core and crucial. We hope you find the research enlightening as you shape your personal or corporate learning and development strategies. We'd love to hear from you and help in any way we can. To learn more about MRII, visit mrii.org, and you can reach me at ed@mrii.org.

—Ed Keller, Executive Director, MRII

Executive Summary

The key findings of the 2026 MRII "State of the Market Research Industry" study reflect clearly an industry in transition, shaped by evolving workforce expectations, accelerating AI adoption, shifting approaches to career development and growing pressure on workforce satisfaction

1. Career Satisfaction - Overall job satisfaction remains relatively strong but is softening

- Majority of market research professionals report being satisfied
  - Managers and highly experienced professionals continue to report the highest levels of satisfaction
  - However, satisfaction among non-managers and more tenured employees has declined YOY
- Flexibility remains the most valued aspect of work despite recent declines, likely tied to return-to-office trends
- Key aspects of job satisfaction center on opportunities to learn and grow, advancement, and influence in decision-making
- The expectations set for work, opportunities to learn and grow, and freedom to innovate are the biggest gaps between highly satisfied and less satisfied researchers

2. Industry outlook is stabilizing in the eyes of industry practioners

- Reported hiring activity has increased, and sentiment about the future of market research has rebounded after a dip in 2025
- Most professionals expect stability or improvement in the coming year,
- In what is one of the most important findings in the study, a majority of researches believe MR will become *more* important in the future with relatively few believe the industry's importance will decline

3. Learning and Development Opportunities - Learning and development is increasingly critical, but evolving

- Motivation to engage in training has declined year-over-year, even as employer expectations for upskilling rise.
- In-house training remains the most common learning source but is declining, while graduate education and digital learning formats are gaining traction.
- Skill gaps are most evident in communication, data analysis, and interpretation

Executive Summary

4. Usage and Expected Impact of AI - AI use is rapidly growing and seen as beneficial, but concerns about job security are increasing and only a small percentage say they are fully implementing AI into the workflow

a. **Demand for new skill sets—especially AI—is accelerating**
   - AI and machine learning rank as the top areas where professionals seek further training, followed by data visualization and advanced analytics
   - At the same time, interest in soft skills (e.g., leadership, financial analysis) is increasing, particularly among younger professionals

b. **AI adoption is rapidly expanding, with mixed implications**
   - Usage of AI has grown significantly across both agency and corporate researchers, reaching a majority of teams
     - However, only one-in-ten indicate AI is fully integrated into their workflow
   - Overall sentiment toward AI remains positive, with most believing it will improve their jobs
   - However, concerns about job displacement and security are rising rapidly, particularly among less tenured professionals

c. **Perceived value of AI is shifting**
   - While efficiency and time savings remain the primary benefits, their perceived impact has declined year-over-year
   - Concerns around bias, privacy, and overreliance persist but are easing slightly, while anxiety about job loss is increasing

Table of Contents

Research Objectives and Methodology

2026 MRII State of the Market Research Industry Study

What we asked

MRII fielded an online survey using a combination of closed and open-ended questions.

The survey objectives were to:

- Understand the career paths and job satisfaction of market research professionals
- Identify skills gaps and training opportunities for professional advancement
- Gather opinions on the state of the market research industry as a whole
- Assess respondents' thoughts and feelings regarding the ievolving role of AI into the market research industry

Fieldwork was conducted from January 22 - February 15, 2026

Who we asked

On behalf of the MRII, our research partner QuestionPro collected 498 **responses** from market researchers around the world.

Respondents spanned a diverse range of ages, career levels, backgrounds, and job roles.

Male
50%

Female
49%

Purchaser | 31%
- **Corporate researcher: 31%**

Vendor | 67%
- **Consultant in the industry: 12%**
- **Market research agency: 34%**
- **General supplier: 14%**

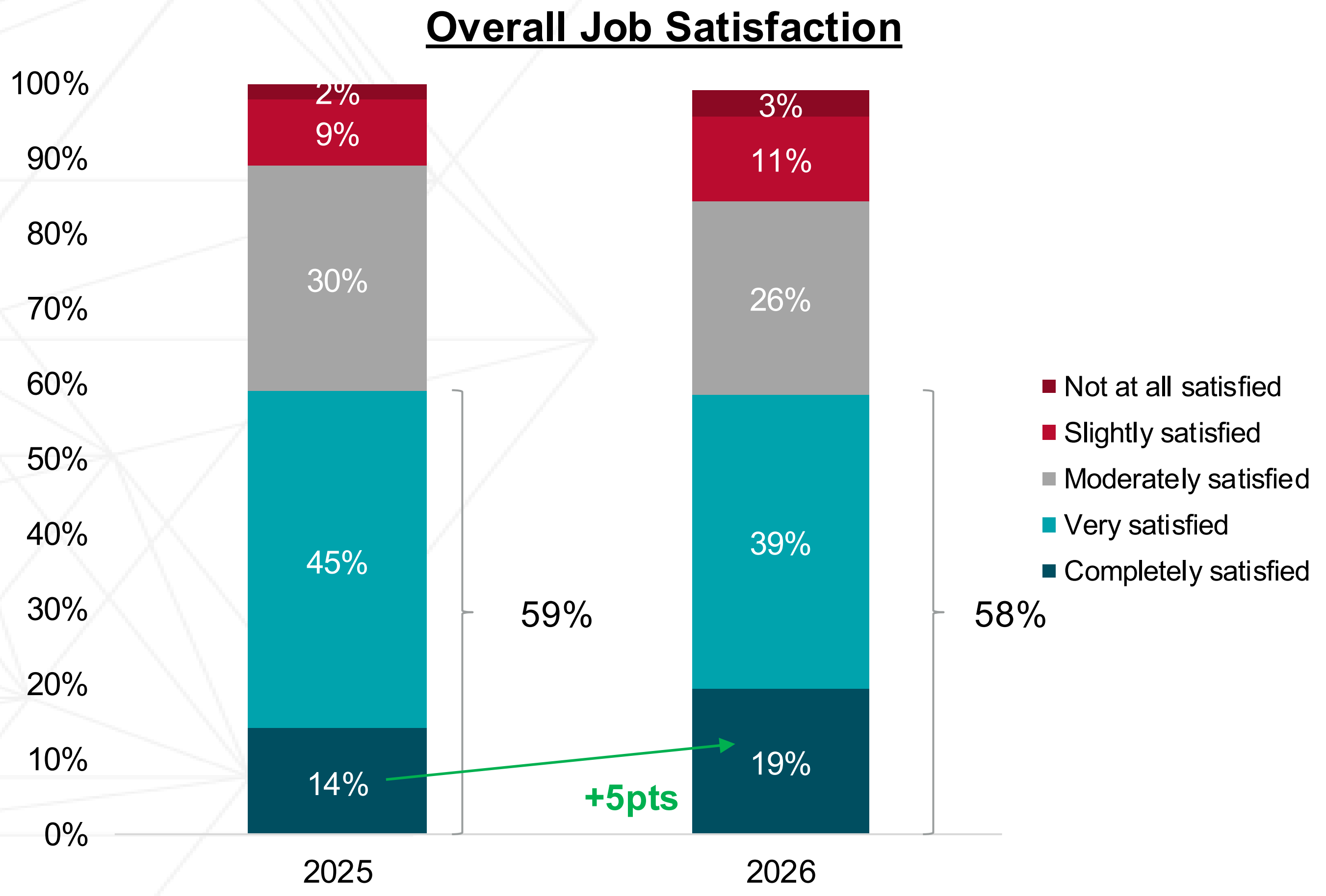
Special Thanks QuestionPro

MRII sponsor QuestionPro provided invaluable assistance in the fielding and analysis of this research.

We thank them for their expertise and their generosity.

Career Satisfaction Update

Most Market Research (MR) professionals are satisfied with their job, holding steady YOY on T2B measure; Complete satisfaction with Job is up 5pts YOY



Q3. What is your overall satisfaction with your job?
N=498
T2B = Top two bos

Career Satisfaction - Subgroup Analysis

Strong differences are seen between two of the subgroups on career satisfaction. Those with least tenure show great improvements in career satisfaction, while those with more tenure saw satisfaction decrease. Even still, those with 20+ years of work experience are still the most satisfied

T2B%	Less than 10 years	10-19 years	20 years or more
	54% (+10 pts)	49% (-7 pts)	61% (-5 pts)

Managers	Non-Managers	Consultant/ Agency	Corporate Researchers
64% (+3 pts)	45% (-11 pts)	61% (-1 pts)	53% (-1 pts)

The delta in satisfaction between manager and non-managers grew more substantial within the past year, with improvements in satisfaction for managers and declines for non-managers.

Corporate researchers continue to be less satisfied than those in the consultancies / agency, however, neither group showed movement over the past year and in each case a majority are satisfied.

Note: +/- pts represents change vs. 2025

Q3. What is your overall satisfaction with your job?
N=498
T2B = top two box

Career Satisfaction

There was an improvement in Satisfaction across most work aspects, with the exception of flexibiltiy in work schedule which declined

Flexibility of work schedule was the only factor in job satisfaction to decline – in line with the general push for return to offer (RTO) across the country. However, it is still the one highest job satisfaction metric.

More than one-half of the respondents indicate satisfaction with workload, opportunities for advancement, pay and benefits.

MRII MARKET RESEARCH INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

Q4. How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your job?
N=498
T2B = Top two box. PCYA = Percentage point change vs. a year ago

Career Satisfaction - Subgroup Analysis

- Job satisfaction is higher on the agency side across various aspects of their career.
- Non-managers are significantly less satisfied will all aspect except for flexibility of schedule

T2B GAP	Gap: 20+ years in industry vs. <10 years	Gap: Consultants / Research agency vs. Corp Researchers	Gap: Non-managers vs. People Managers
The flexibility in your work schedule	12pts	14pts	6pts
Your benefits	-8pts	0pts	-9pts
Your pay	-10pts	2pts	-12pts
Opportunities for advancement	-7pts	16pts	-14pts
Opportunities to learn and grow	-3pts	3pts	-13pts
Freedom to innovate	4pts	8pts	-11pts
Your workload	-6pts	5pts	-5pts
Materials and equipment provided to do your job	8pts	6pts	-7pts
The expectations set for your work	-3pts	4pts	-12pts

While tenured researches are more satisfied with flexibility and materials provides, less tenured professionals are more satisfied with benefits, pay, workload and opportunity for advancement

MRII MARKET RESEARCH INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your job?
N=498
T2B = Top two box

Career Satisfaction - Subgroup Analysis

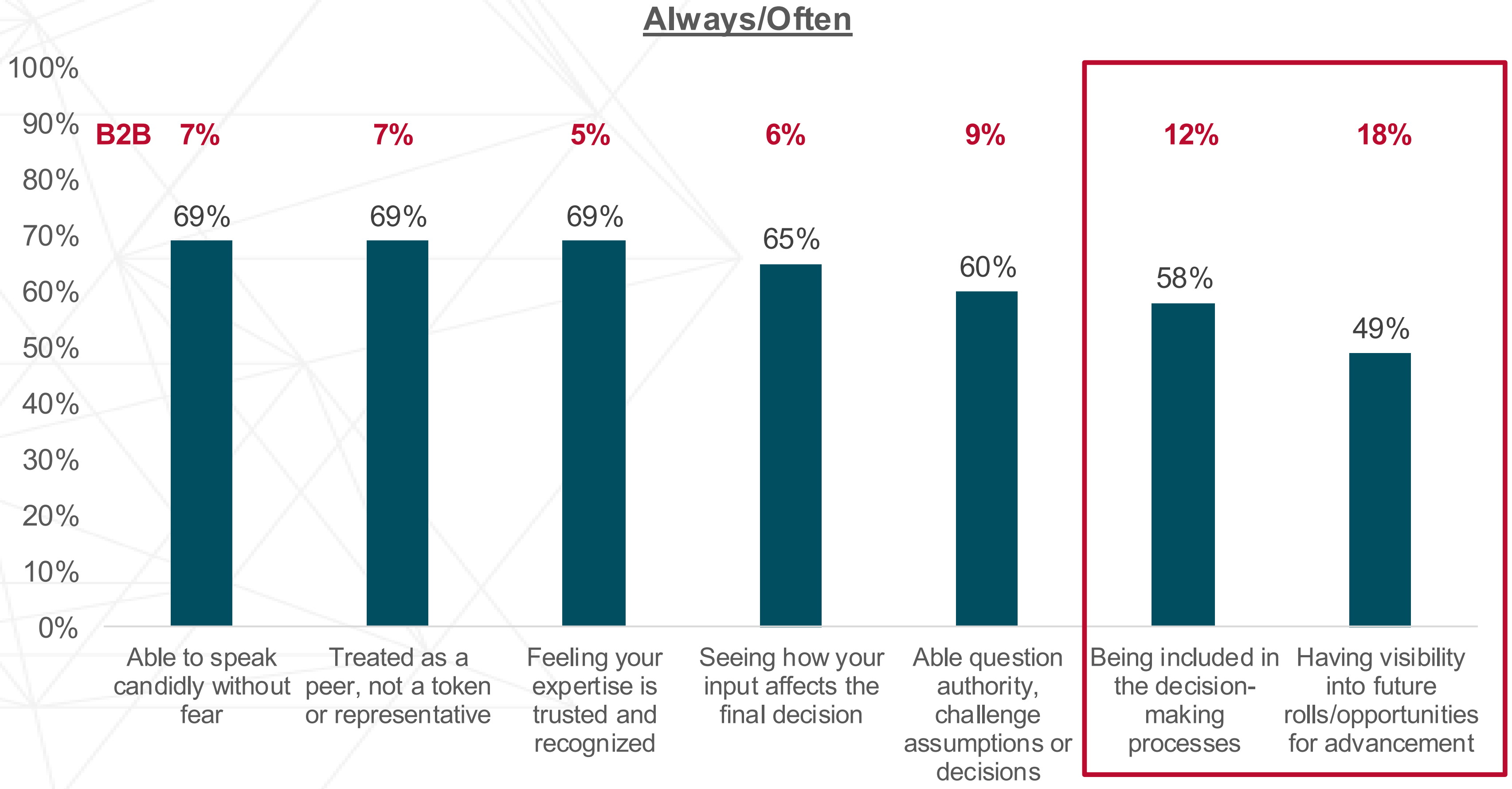
- The expectations set for work, opportunities to learn and grow and freedom to innovate are the biggest gaps between highly satisfied and less satisfied researchers

T2B GAP	B2B Satisfied Researchers	T2B Satisfied Researchers	GAP
The flexibility in your work schedule	37%	85%	48%
Your benefits	26%	73%	47%
Your pay	19%	71%	52%
Opportunities for advancement	21%	69%	48%
Opportunities to learn and grow	18%	84%	66%
Freedom to innovate	23%	85%	61%
Your workload	25%	68%	43%
Materials and equipment provided to do your job	28%	79%	51%
The expectations set for your work	16%	84%	67%

How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your job?
N=498
T2B = Top two box. B2b = Bottom two box. Gap = the difference between the twp

Having a Seat at the Table

- Majority of researchers indicate they generally able to speak candidly, are treated as a peer and feel their expertise is trusted and recognized
- Being included in decision making processes and Having visibility into future role/advancement opportunities show largest B2B scores

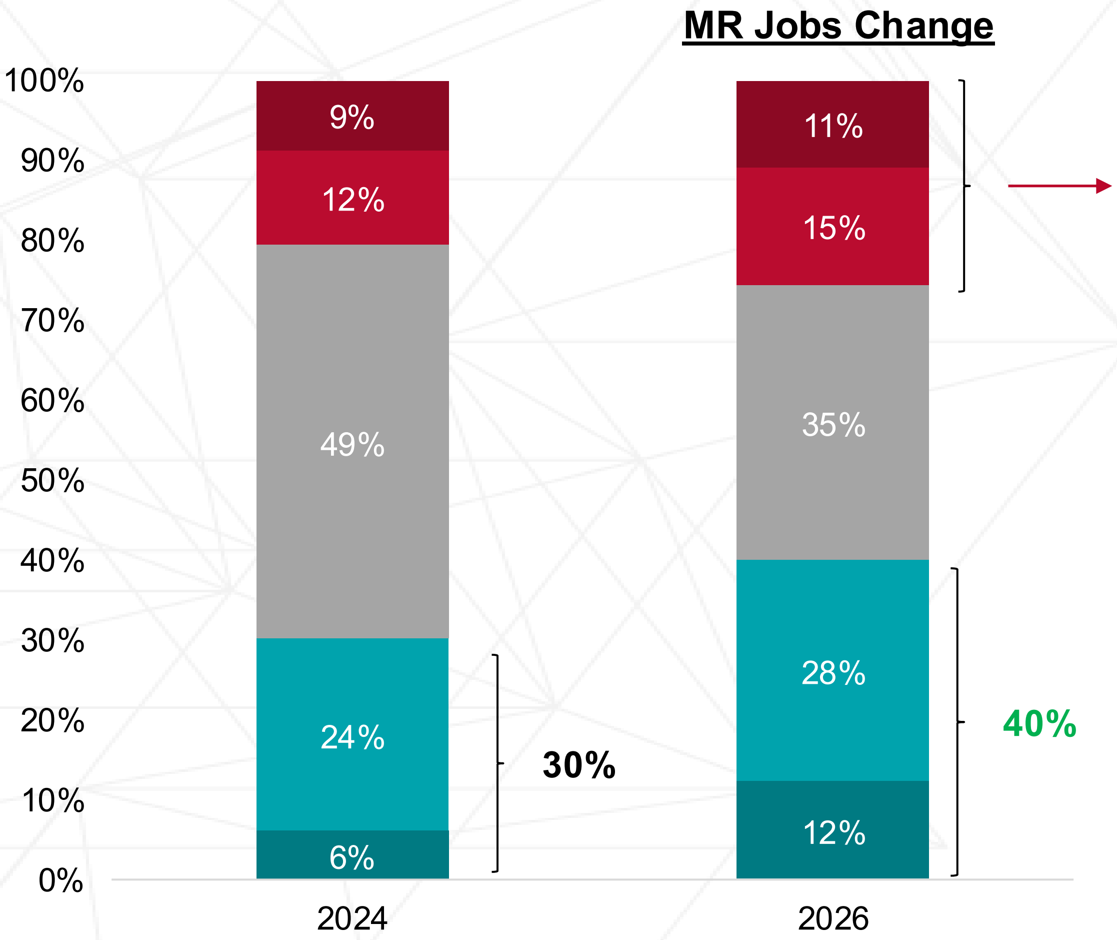


Q9. How often do you find yourselves:
N=498
B2B=Bottom Two Box

Outlook on the Market Research Industry

Industry Future

Two-in-five researchers indicate their company added new jobs – up by 10pps since 2024



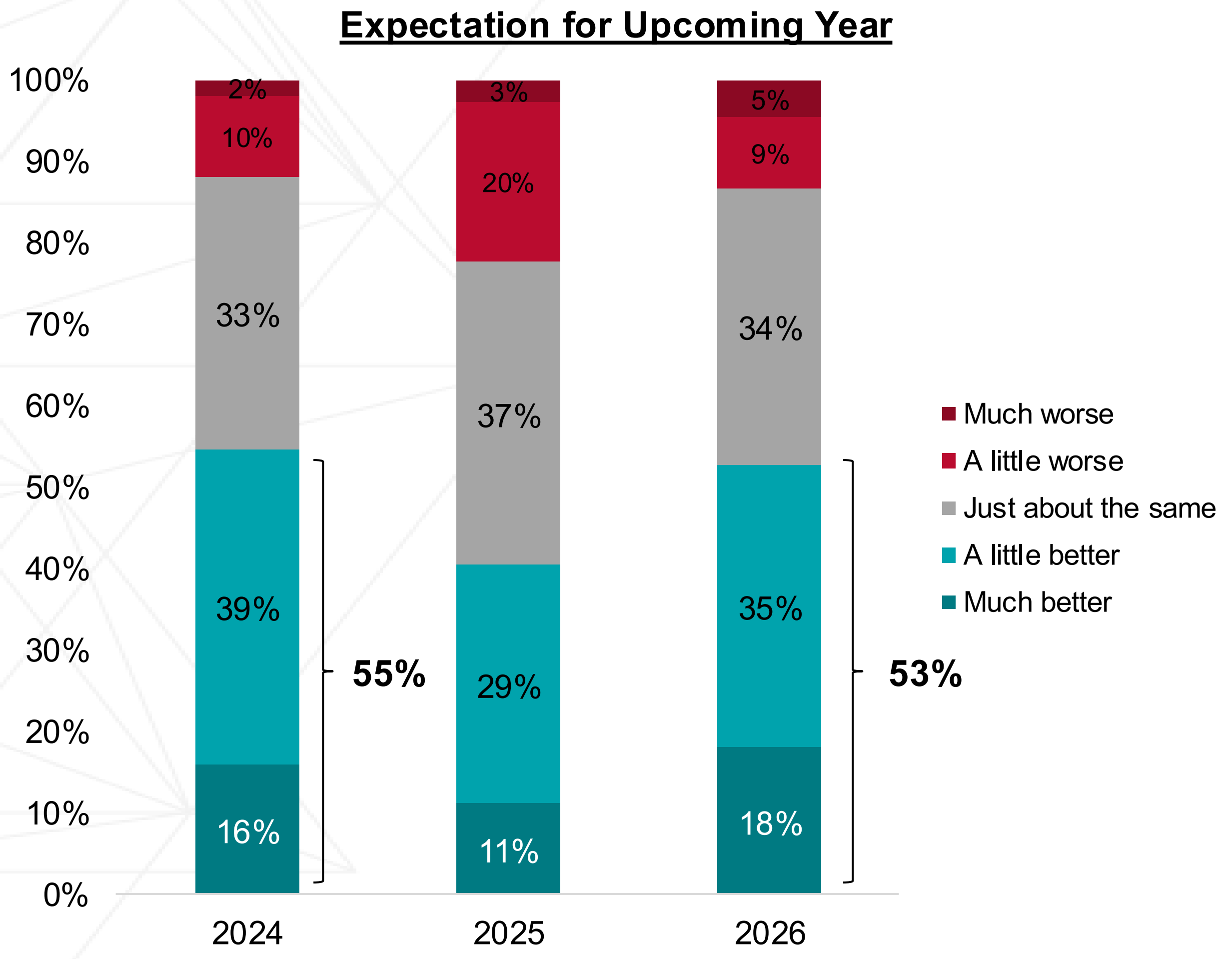
Researchers indicate the job cuts put more burden on everyone else and impact perceptions of job security, more so in ’26 than two years ago, however, they are less likely to start looking for new positions

Views on Job Cuts	2026	Δ vs. ‘24
It has put more burden on everyone to make up for staff cuts	57%	5%
It made me nervous about my own job security	54%	**9%**
I understand the need to cut staff to reduce costs	43%	**3%**
It made me start looking around for new positions	39%	**-6%**
I felt frustrated because our results have been strong the past couple of years	27%	7%
I think it was the responsible thing to do to cut costs	24%	**7%**

Q17. During the past 12 months, did your company:
N=498
Pps = percentage points

Industry Future

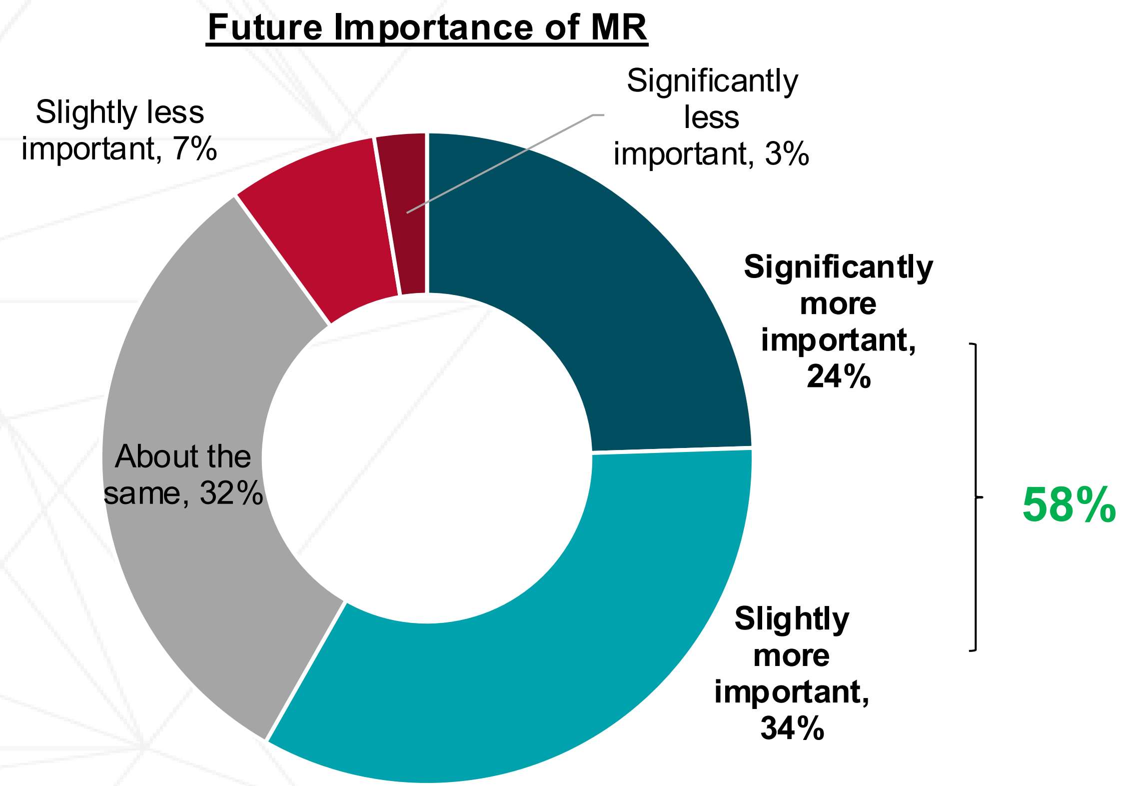
After a dip in sentiment in 2025, job outlook for researchers rebounded



MARKET RESEARCH INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

Q17. Thinking about your job in 2026 and taking all things into consideration, do you anticipate 2026 will be better, worse or just about the same as 2025?
N=498

58% of researchers believe that Market Research will be more important in the future, with only one-in-ten believing it will become less important

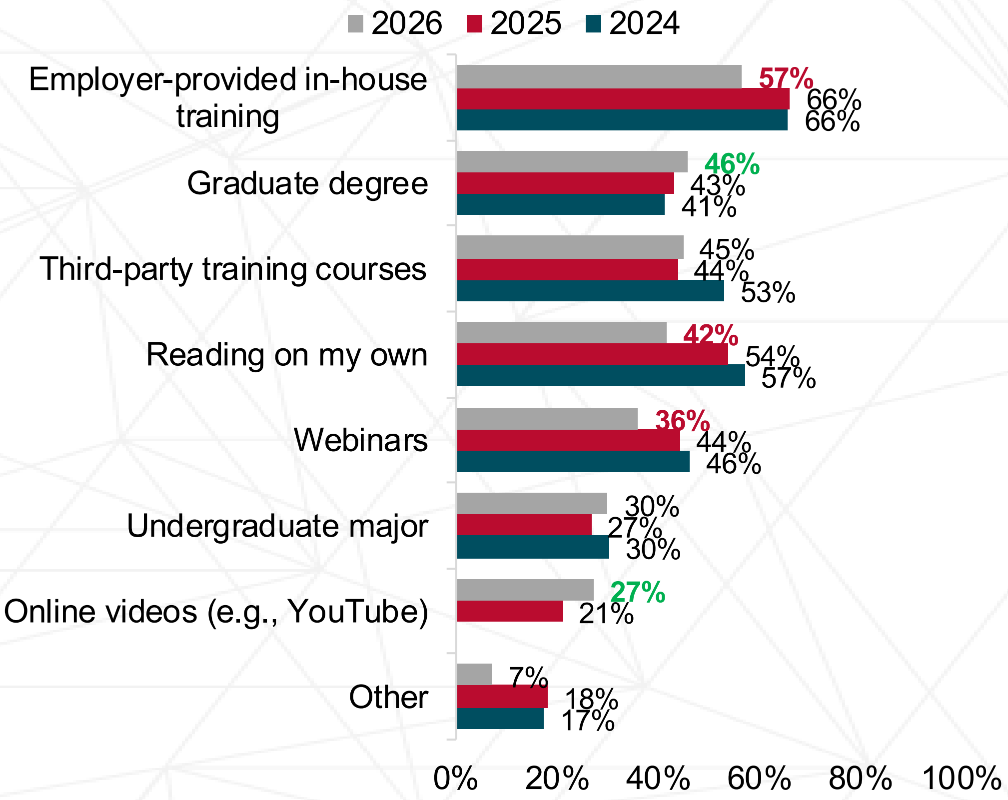


18. In the future, how do you expect the importance of the market research/insights function to evolve? Will it become:
N=498

Learning & Development Opportunities

Career Development and Learning

Employer-provided in-house training is still the most common source for training skills as a Market Research professional; however it has declined substantially in 2026



Overall Trends

- Graduate degrees and online videos are trending up over the last 3 years
- Webinars and self education (reading on my own) are trending down

Subgroup Breakdowns

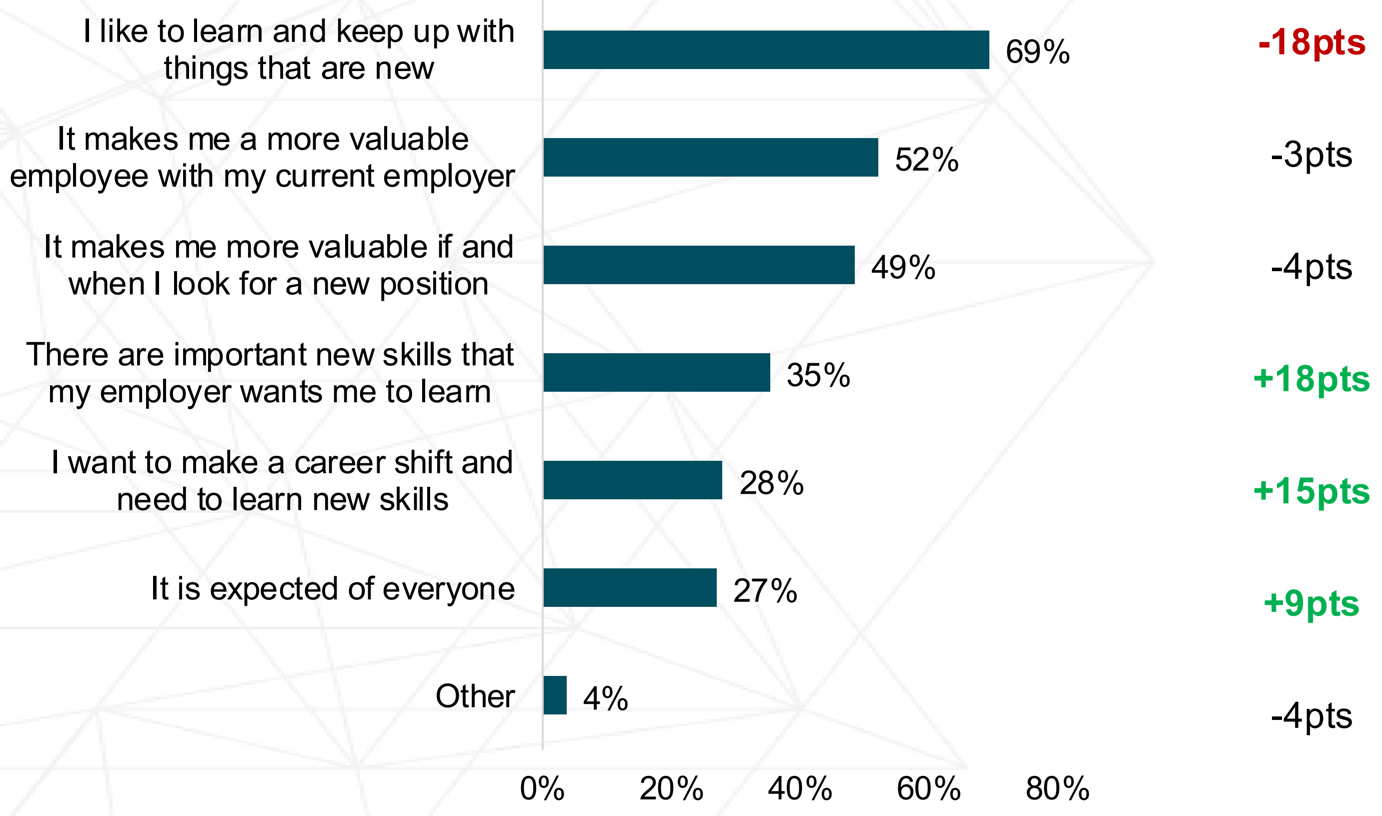
- People managers are most likely to say employee provided training, graduate degree and third-party training course – significantly more so than non-managers for third-party training.
- Those with longest tenures (30+years) are much more likely have learned on the job, reading on their own and have undergraduate degrees. While youngest in the industry are much more likely to have Graduate degrees and utilize online videos for learning.
- Corporate researchers utilize variety of educational resources (outside of formal degrees) vs. those in agencies

Q2. How did you learn the skills to be a market/insights researcher?
N=498

Career Development and Learning

The leading motivation for training and development at work continues to be to learn and keep up with new things, however it's **down** by 18pts since last year

Main Learning Motivation



Employer push for upskilling, career shift motivations and general expectation to learn and grow have **grown substantially** over the past year.

MRII MARKET RESEARCH INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

Q6. What would you say are your main motivations for training and development at work?
N=498
PCYA=Percentage Point Change vs. Year Ago

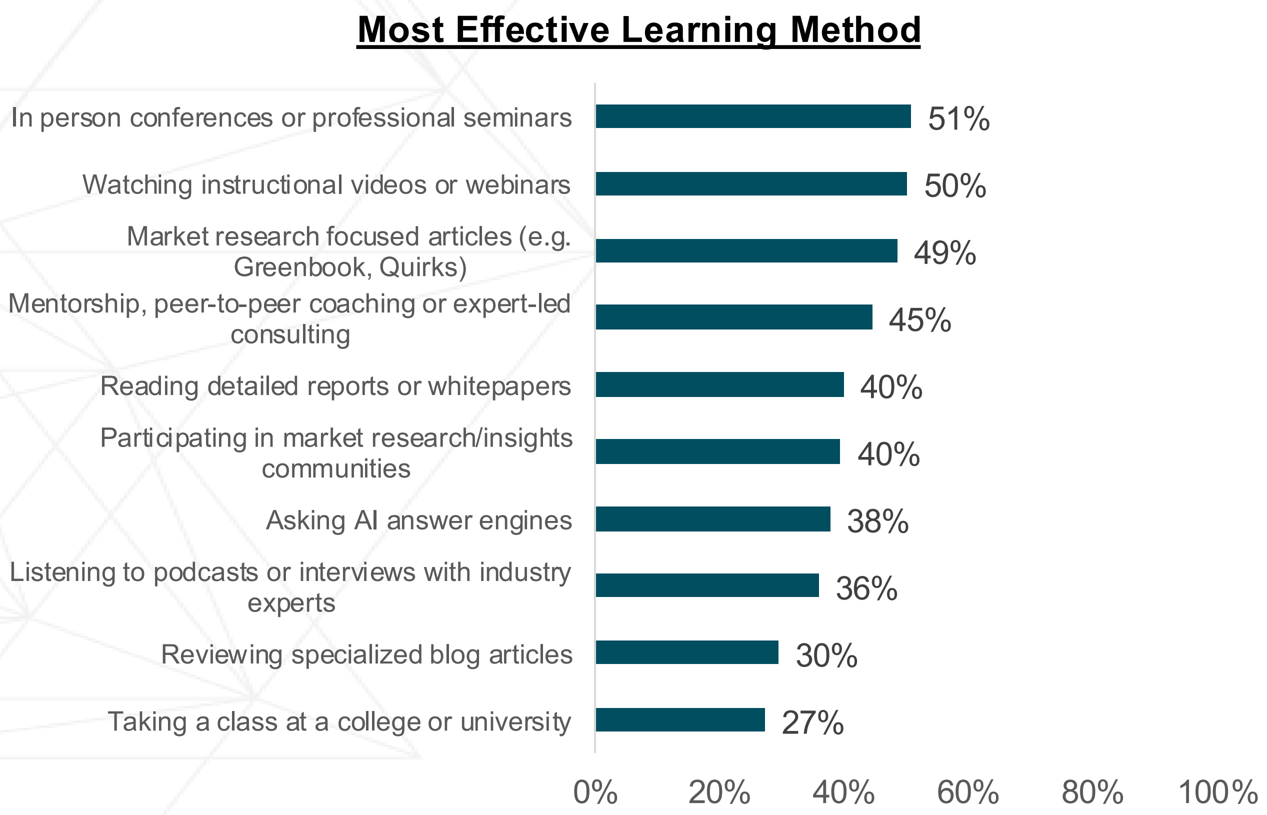
Career Development and Learning

- Artificial intelligence (AI)/machine learning is the skill ranked highest need for education/training, followed by data visualization tools and advanced analytics
- Majority of the skills have seen an uptick as overall education is becoming more important, with 2 notable exceptions – Story-telling and Neuroscience

	2025	2026	Δ
Generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT)	49%	49%	0pts
Data visualization tools	48%	44%	-4pts
Advanced analytics	47%	44%	-4pts
Research automation	40%	42%	2pts
Online market research communities	20%	35%	**15pts**
Story-telling	45%	35%	**-10pts**
Synthetic data	34%	32%	-2pts
Social listening	31%	31%	1pts
In person qualitative (focus groups or one on one interviews)	15%	30%	**15pts**
Text analytics/NLP	31%	29%	-2pts
Online quantitative surveys	18%	28%	**10pts**
Online qualitative	19%	26%	**6pts**
Financial analysis	14%	25%	**11pts**
Global or multicountry research	17%	22%	**5pts**
DIY platforms	16%	22%	**6pts**
Mobile chat-based research	18%	22%	4pts
Syndicated/secondary research	15%	21%	**7pts**
Digital twins		20%	-
Ethnography	19%	17%	-1pts
Neuroscience	26%	17%	**-9pts**
Telephone surveys	2%	13%	**11pts**

Q7. Regardless of how often you presently use it, which of these would you or others in your organization benefit from having more education/training to improve your skills.
N=498

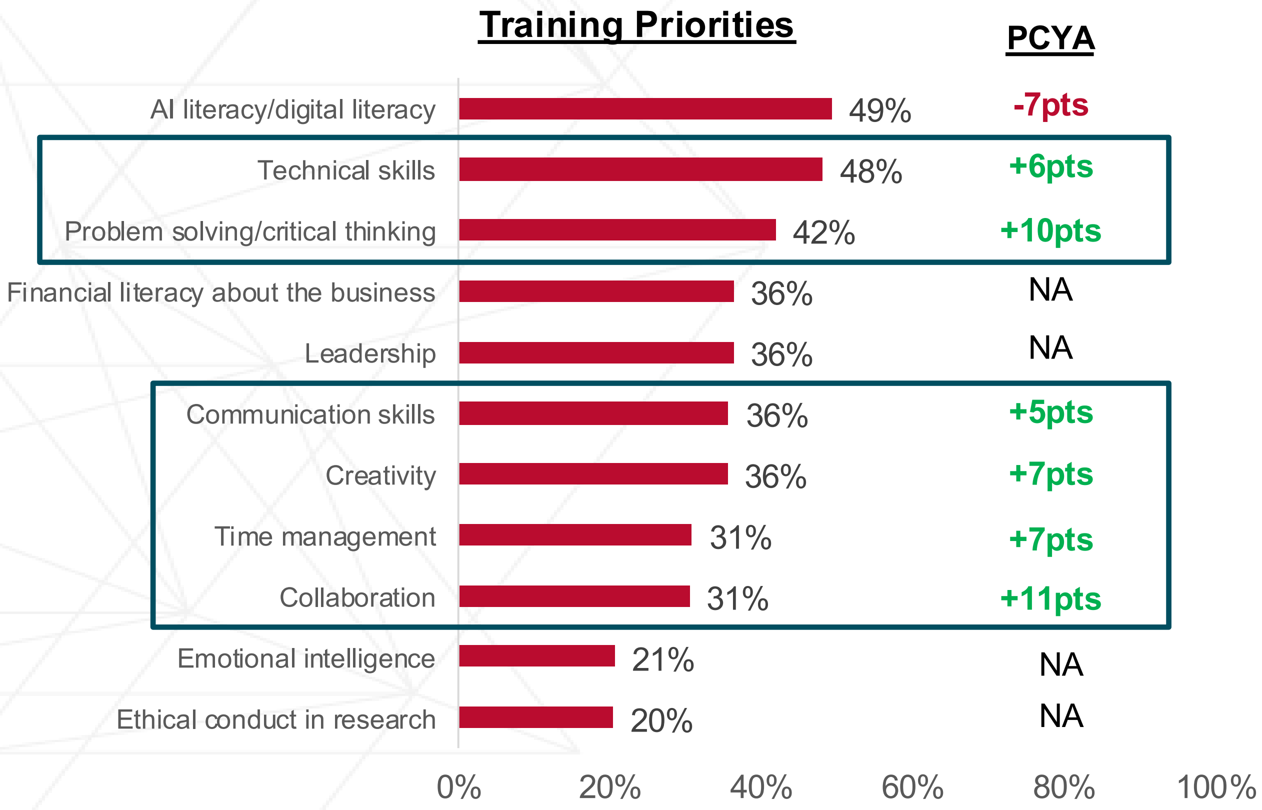
In person conferences / professional seminars, instructional videos and Market Research-focused articles are seen as most effective method for learning



Q5. When learning about new market research concepts, which method(s) do you find most effective?
N=498

Career Development and Learning

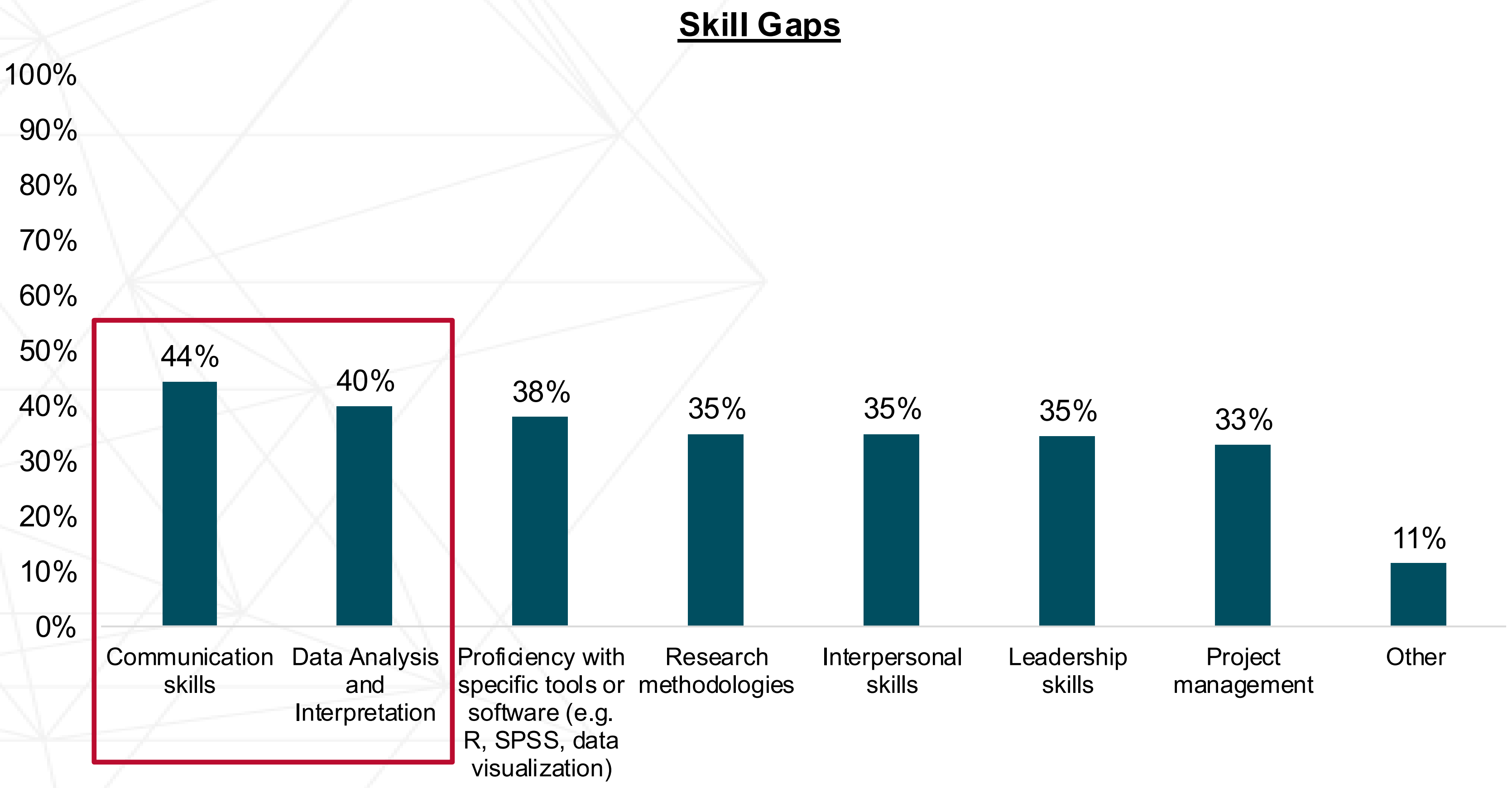
AI and Technical skills top the list of training that would most benefit market researchers in their jobs. The need to learn softer skills trails, but grew in 2026



MRII MARKET RESEARCH INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

Q8. For which of the following would you benefit from having training to become better at your job?
N=498
PCYA=Percentage Point Change vs. Year Ago

Researchers indicate Communications skills is the biggest gap among Market Research candidates, followed by Data Analysis and Interpretation

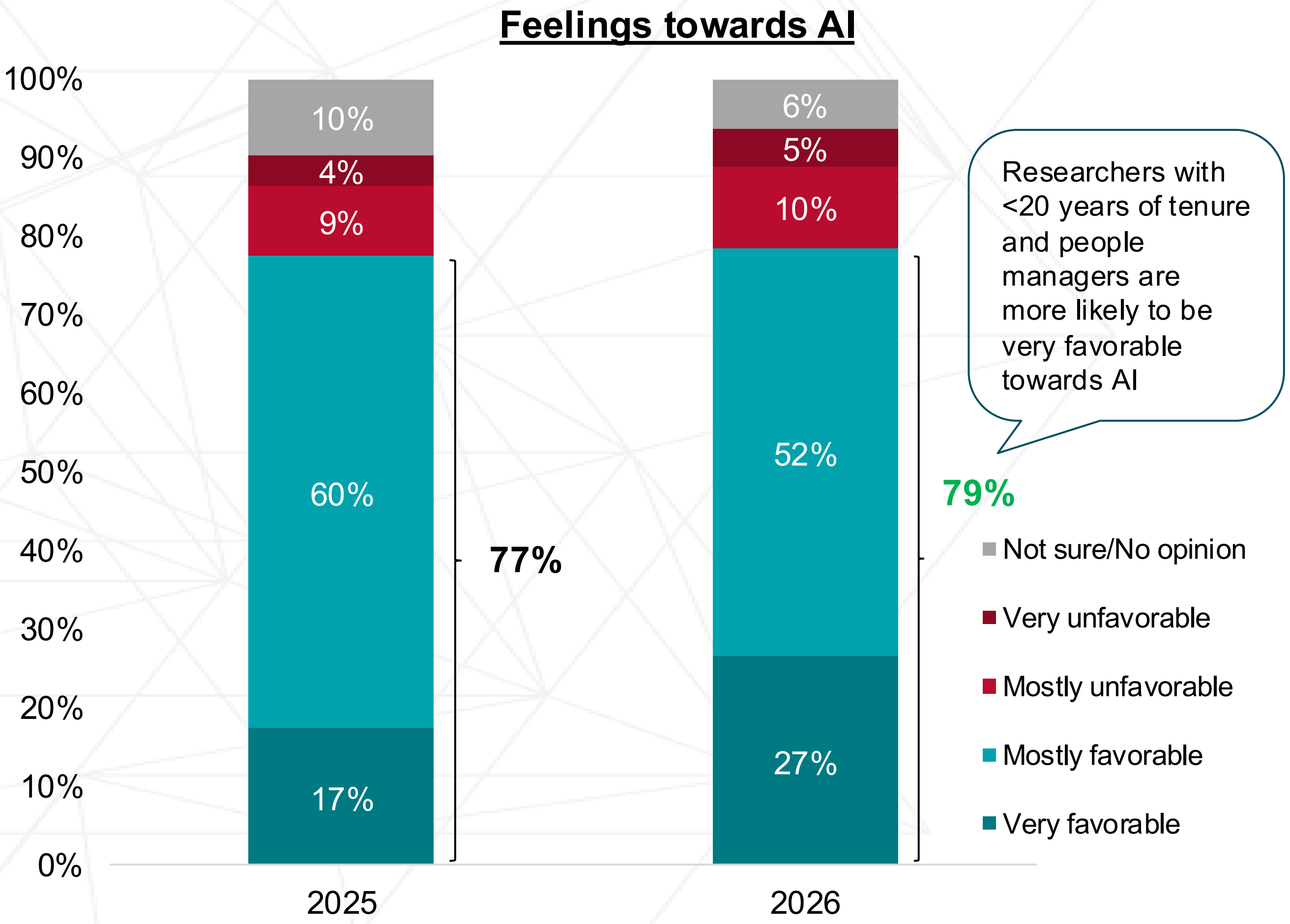


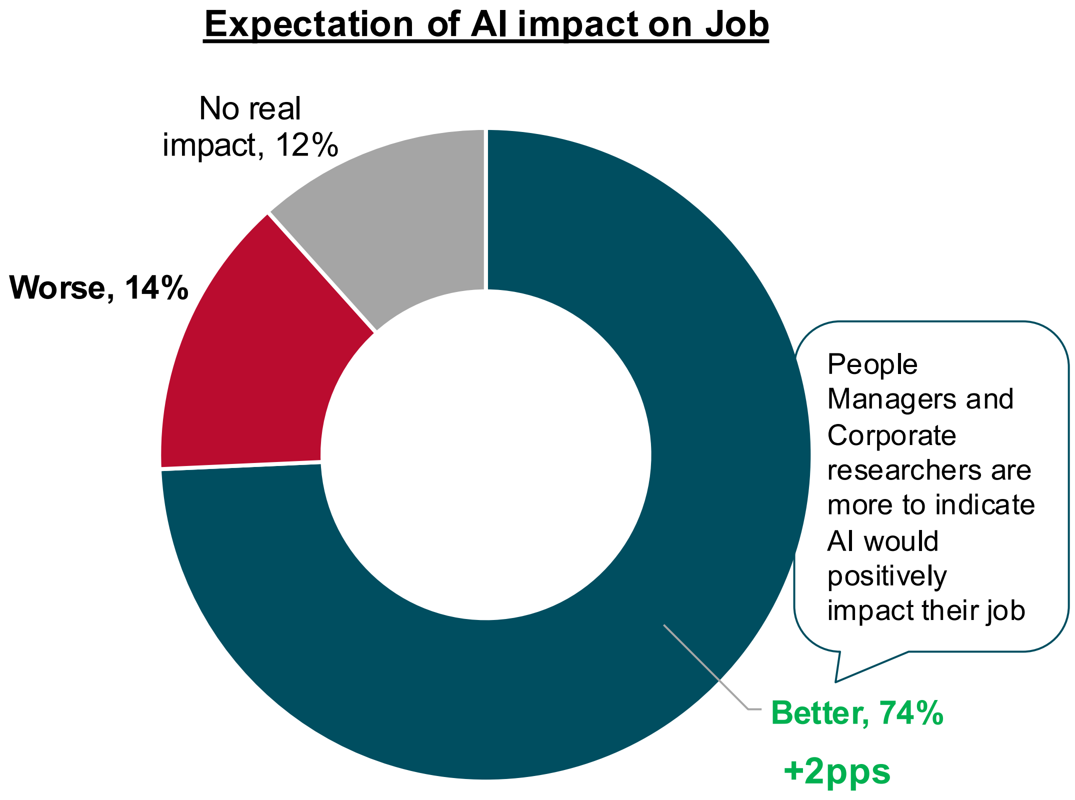
Q22. What are the most common skill gaps you've observed among candidates applying for a research role?
N=498

Perspective on GenAI

Feelings towards AI

Perceptions of AI remain highly positive, with overall favorability increasing slightly from 2025 to 8 in 10, with expected Job impact being positive / improving slightly YOY

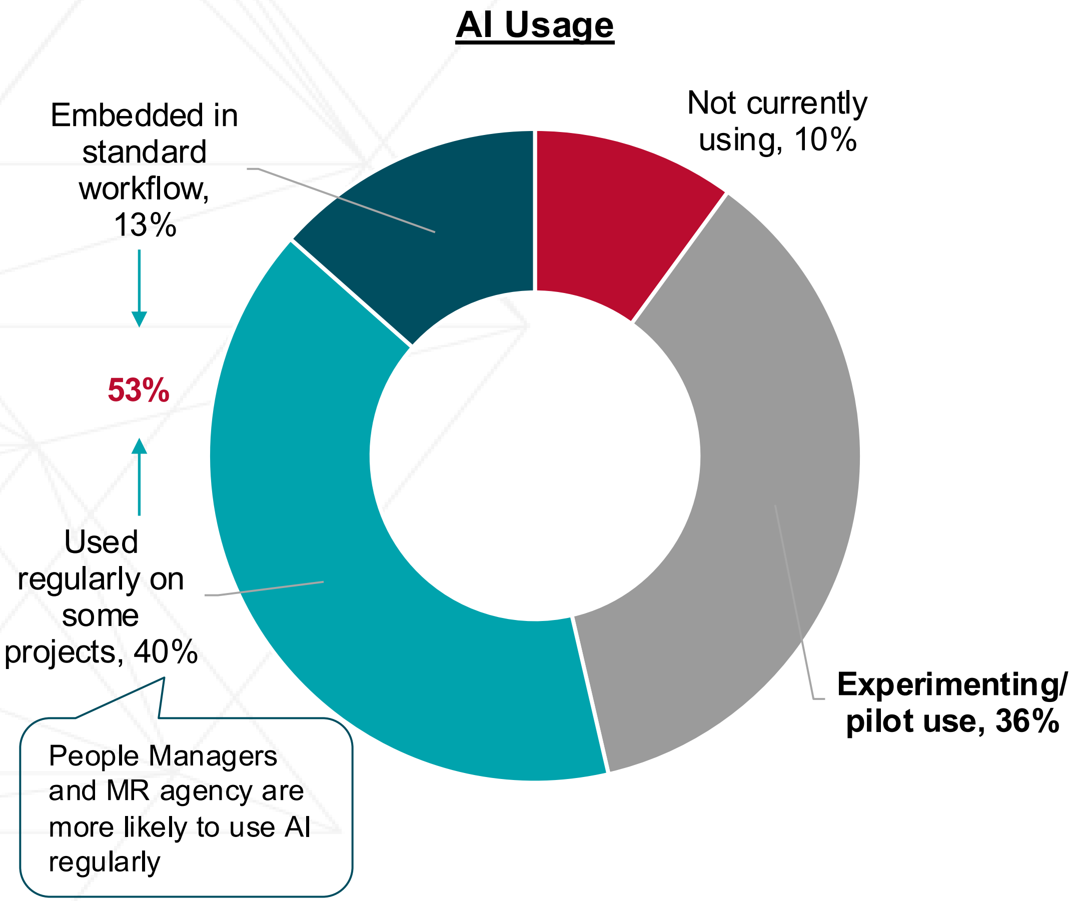




Q10. There has been a lot of talk recently about Artificial Intelligence, or AI, and different people have different opinions about it. Thinking about AI as it relates to your job and your company, is your view:
Q13. Do you think AI will make your job better over the coming year or two, worse, or will have it no impact when it comes to your job?
N=498

Current use of AI in the workplace

About one-half of researchers report regular AI usage, however only about one-in-10 report that AI is embedded in their standard workflow



Q11. Which of the following best describes your organization's current use of GenAI in market research?
N=498

Current use of AI in the workplace

Use of AI increased rapidly in 2025 vs. ‘24, and readjusted in ’26 – while predictive analytics, sentiment analysis, trend forecasting and chatbot usage went up sustantially, literature review, questionnaire development learning new skills usage of AI went down

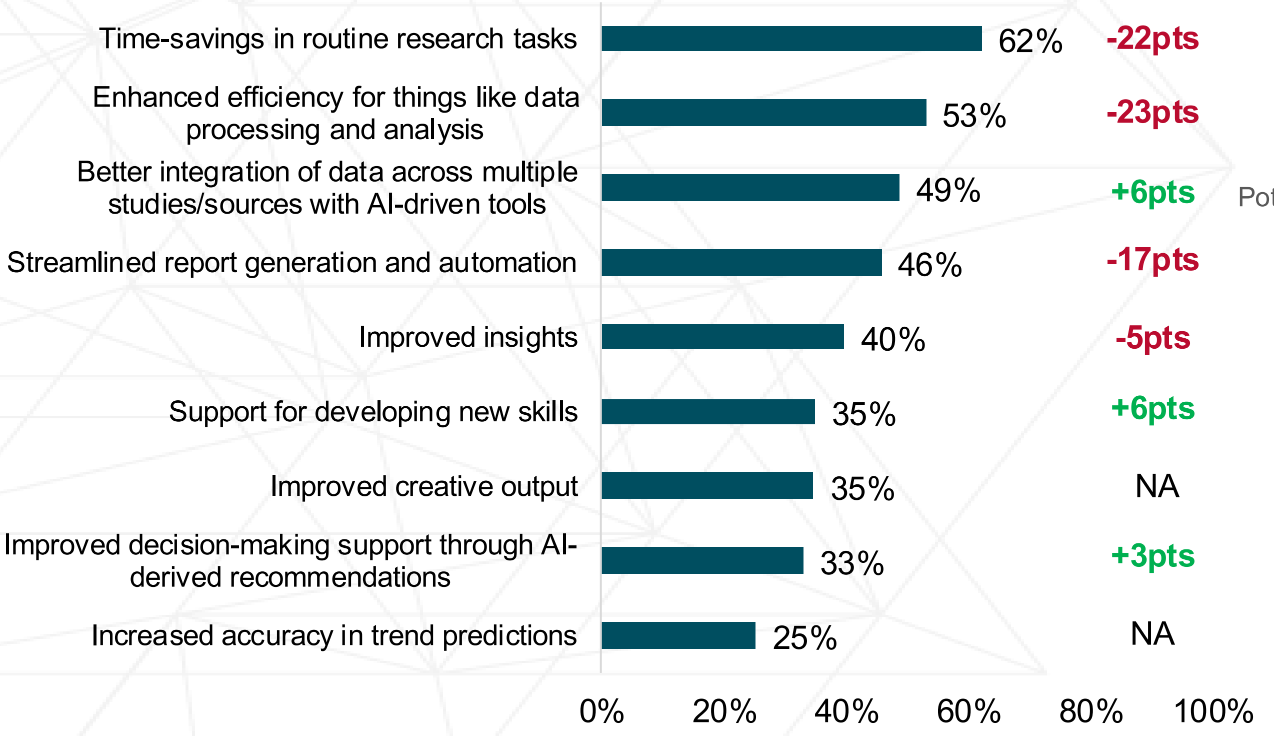
	2026	Δ vs ‘25
For questionnaire development	40%	-10pts
Sentiment analysis in social media monitoring or other forms of unstructured data	39%	10pts
For a literature review on topics of interest	37%	-16pts
Concept, stimulus or idea generation	37%	NA
Synthesizing insights across multiple studies or data sources	35%	NA
For report generation	32%	-3pts
To learn new skills	31%	-5pts
To analyze data across a large number of data sets	30%	-3pts
AI conducting qualitative interviews or asking open-ended questions in survey	28%	NA
To help identify respondent fraud	26%	3pts
Automated survey data analysis	26%	4pts
Chatbots for customer interaction, qualitative interviews, or open-ended questions in survey	24%	5pts
Image and video analysis for visual data	23%	12pts
For trend forecasting	21%	10pts
Predictive analytics for consumer behavior	20%	10pts

Q12. In what ways is AI currently being used by you or people who work on your team?
N=498

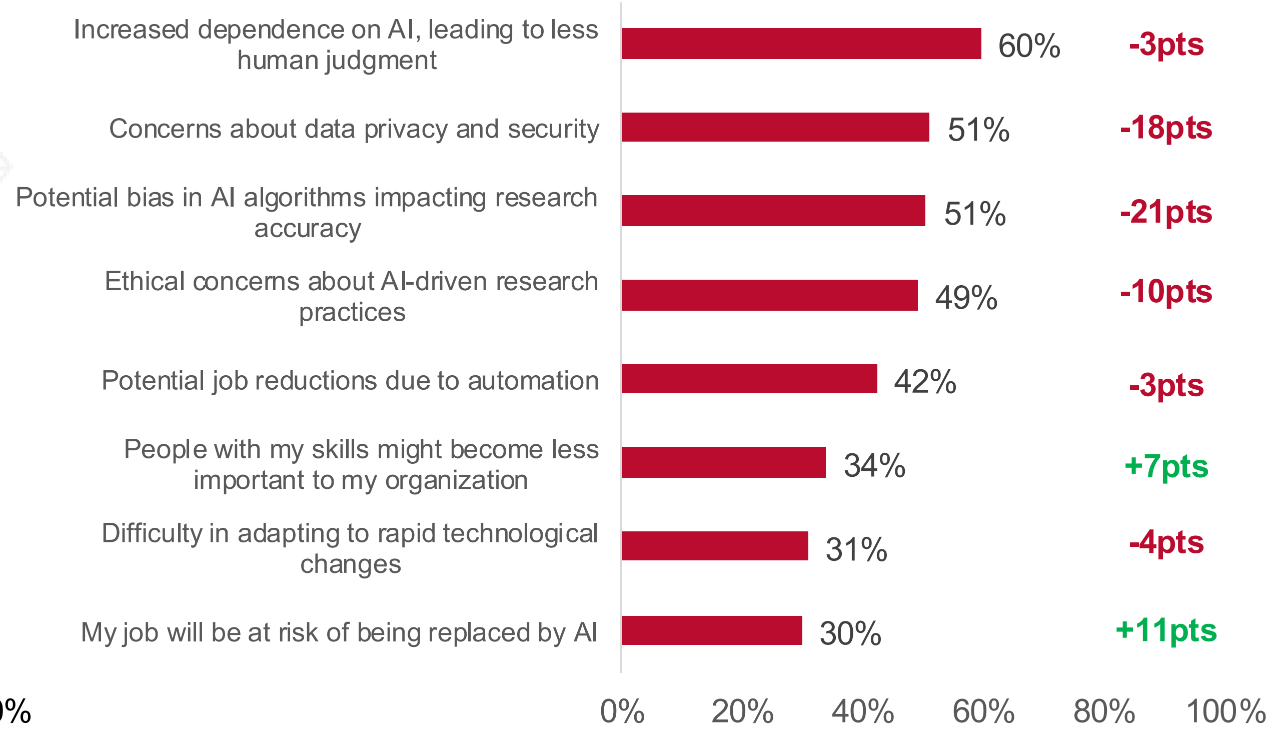
AI Opportunities and Risks

- AI's positive contribution is still highest around time-savings and enhancing efficiencies, however, those saw significant declines YOY.
- Majority of of researchers are concerned about increased dependance on AI, data privacy and potential biases, however, those concerns are decreasing YOY; those around job security are up substantially.

Positive AI Contributions | **PCYA**



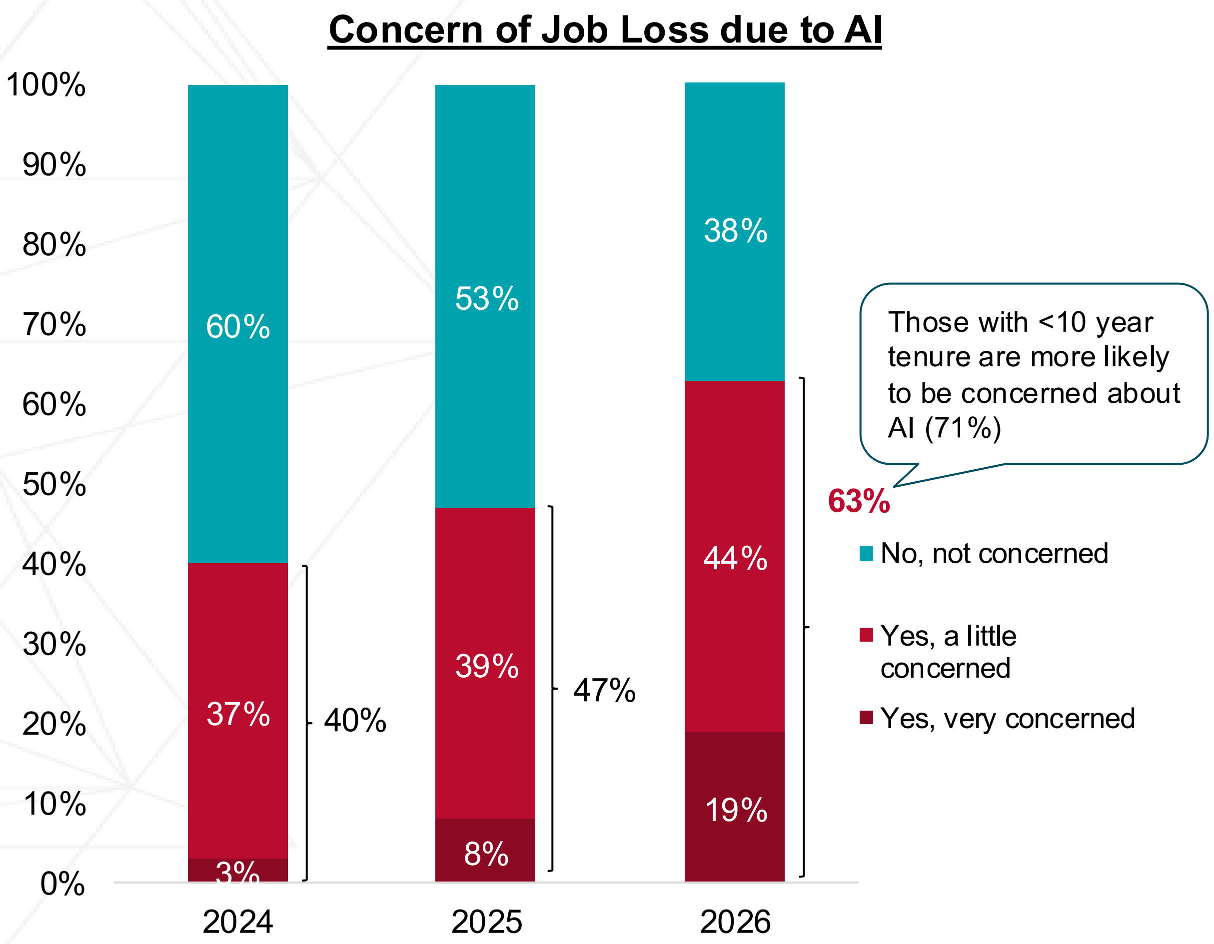
Negative AI Contributions | **PCYA**



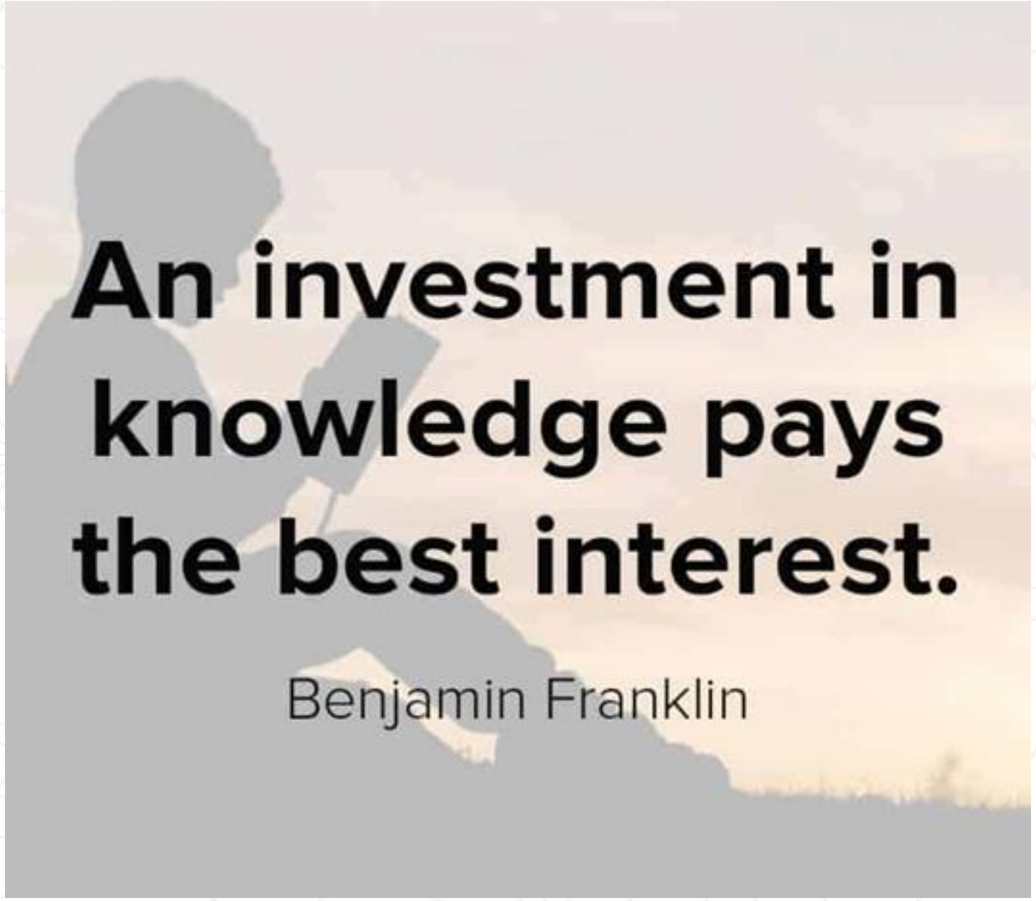
Q14. In what ways might AI make a positive contribution to your role as a market researcher?
N=498
PCYA=Percent Change vs. Year Ago

Current use of AI in the workplace

Concern about risk of job loss due to AI grew sharply over prior years, with less tenured researchers showing most concern for their jobs



Q16. Are you concerned that your job might be at risk as a result of AI?
N=498



Thank you!

For more information visit mrii.org

Sample Composition

Sample Composition

	2026
Years in industry	
Less than 10 years	44%
10 to 19 years	24%
20 years or more	32%
Company size	
Sole proprietor or self-employed	7%
Small	26%
Medium	40%
Large	27%
Type of Company	
Corporate researcher	31%
Consultant in the industry	12%
Market research agency	34%
General supplier to the research industry	14%
Left the research industry	2%
Other role in the research industry	6%

	2026
People Managers	
Yes	67%
No	33%
Gender	
Male	50%
Female	49%
Other	1%

Appendix

MRII: Market Research Institute International

A non-profit educational institute offering continuing education & skills development about market research, insights & analytics

MRII believes that training and development is key to realizing the full potential and value of market research and insights, and to driving innovation within the sector.

Online market research courses with University of Georgia, webinars, YouTube channel, podcast, awards programs, and more

Principles of
Market Research

Master the MRCBOK to Earn Certification

Our signature self-paced program covers the 13 topics of the Market Research Core Body of Knowledge (MRCBOK™) and provides a solid foundation for new and experienced practitioners.

www.marketresearchcourses.org

Principles Express Courses

Select individual courses from our full catalog of 13 topics, or combine them to create a custom path for learning flexibility without committing to a full certificate.

Quick & Trusted Answers to Your Market Research Questions

NEW

FREE

KNOWLEDGE NAVIGATOR

Powered by MRII | UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Additional Learning Channels from MRII

MRII YouTube Channel

MRII Podcast

Thanks to MRII's Sponsors and Founding Organizations

Principles of Market Research & Principles Express Courses

Founding Organizations

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA | MRII MARKET RESEARCH INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

INSIGHTS ASSOCIATION esomar

LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

CloudResearch · Full Circle Research · Google · Listen

OvationMR · PureSpectrum · Savanta · Suzy

SPONSORS

Adelphi · Conveo · curion · discuss · dtect

dynata · escalent · fieldwork · Greenbook THE FUTURE OF INSIGHTS · infotools HARMONI

L&E Research The people for you · QuestionPro · RTi · Sawtooth Software · SPORTS & LEISURE RESEARCH GROUP

FRIENDS OF MRII

Anonymous | Brand Riffs | Gazelle Global | RONIN International

MEDIA SPONSOR

Greenbook