# Corporate Researcher of the *Future*

A **Confidence in Research** report

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# The Corporate *Researcher of the Future*

The global research and development (R&D) landscape is undergoing profound transformation, driven by rapid technological progress, evolving societal priorities, and shifting economic and policy conditions.

This is an era of reconfiguration, in which adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI), collaboration, adaptability and foresight will be key to shaping the future of research.

Despite the challenging global context, including economic crises and a pandemic, R&D nearly tripled between 2000 and 2023, to more than US$2.75 trillion.[1] In 2023, the top 2,000 corporate investors spent €1.257 trillion on R&D, representing 7.8% growth year-on-year.[2] Yet costs remain high, and return on investment increasingly difficult to achieve. For example, in the pharmaceutical industry in 2024, the world's largest companies spent almost 25% of their revenue ($190 billion) on R&D and yet saw the median journey to launch stretch to over 14 years.[3]

To support corporate researchers in their fast-changing world, Elsevier gathers their insights and perspectives through regular global surveys on various aspects of research, gathering their insights and perspectives.

Highlighting the voices and experiences of corporate researchers worldwide, this report identifies the most pressing challenges they face today and provides actionable insights to support their continued success.

### Researcher of the Future — a Confidence in Research report

**Survey:** Online survey by email invitation

**Date:** August–September 2025

**Respondents:** 3,234 active researchers from 113 countries:

- 2,541 researchers primarily from academia
- 571 research leaders across academia and
- 122 corporate researchers from R&D-led corporations and research institutions (the focus of this report).

*Responses are weighted geographically to improve representativeness. See the main report for details.*

# Key findings

## AI is transforming research

AI adoption in research has surged among corporate researchers: 67% have used AI tools for work, showing a significant increase since 2024 (38%).[5] However, a third (33%) of corporate researchers have still not yet used AI for work purposes.

Corporate researchers already see many benefits to AI tools, including that it saves them time (63%), empowers them (54%) and increases their autonomy (47%).

76% expect AI tools to save them time in the next two to three years, while 49% expect AI will accelerate the discovery of new knowledge.

59% believe AI will be the creative force driving new knowledge in the next two to three years.

35% feel sufficiently trained in AI, and 41% agree their institutional AI governance is good.

## AI usage and expectations

AI-using corporate researchers are currently more reliant on research-specific tools (38%) than generalist AI tools (31%).

49% of corporate researchers use AI tools to analyze research data, 61% for literature reviews and 68% for summarizing the latest research.

43% of corporate researchers use AI tools for writing or drafting research papers or reports, while 44% say they do not and would not consider AI for this task.

70% say AI automatically citing references would increase their use of the technology, 64% say AI being explicitly trained for factual accuracy and safety, and 63% say guaranteed confidentiality of input data.

# AI is transforming research

Corporate researchers are early adopters of AI, optimistic about its benefits today and in the future, and comparatively positive about their own and their institutions' preparedness.

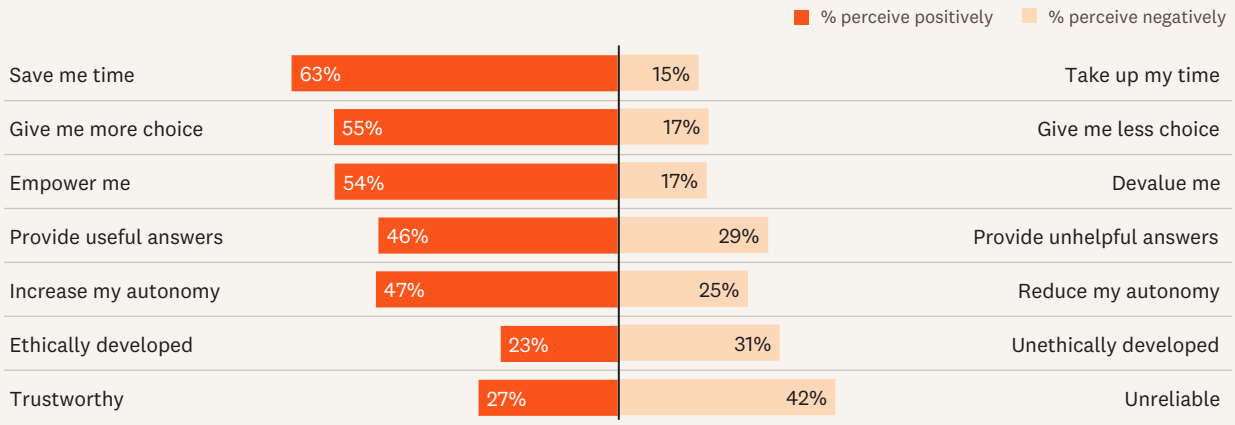
In 2024, Elsevier published a report based on corporate researchers' responses in the Attitudes toward AI research. The key findings showed an overall positive attitude to AI and higher than average usage compared to the wider group of respondents.[5] The current study shows a continuation of these trends.

> *"AI might be considered 'a creative force' but not 'the creative force.' Actually, AI cannot 'create', only make use of what already exists. AI will not replace human beings."*
>
> **Senior Corporate Researcher, USA**

## Tracking the rise of AI: perceptions and attitudes

Figure 1

### Current perceptions of AI tools




**Question:** How do you perceive the impact of AI tools on you as a researcher? For each of the following pairs of statements, please indicate where your view falls on the spectrum. Not charted are those who answered at the mid-point of the spectrum.

Base: n= 122

Corporate researchers perceive AI tools as empowering (54%), with about half (47%) agreeing the technology increases their autonomy. However, 42% say AI tools generally are currently unreliable, compared to 27% who say they are trustworthy, while 29% say they provide unhelpful answers, compared to 46% for useful answers.

Compared to other groups of respondents in the study, corporate researchers are the most likely group to believe there is good AI governance at their institution, at 41% agreeing and 21% disagreeing, compared to 32% and 33% respectively overall. More than a third (35%) agree and an equal proportion disagree that they have had sufficient AI training, showing more balance than the overall average, which is less optimistic. (See the accompanying databook for more details).

In general, corporate researchers' attitudes towards the future benefits of AI are slightly more positive than the average across all groups, with 76% expecting AI tools to save them time in the next two to three years (compared to 69% overall) and 49% that AI tools will accelerate the discovery of new knowledge (versus 38%).

In line with broader expectations, corporate researchers believe AI tools will increase the quality of their work (44%) and research more generally (37%), help them write more papers (32%) and enable them to conduct more research projects (30%).

> *"I agree that there is good governance of AI at my institution because there are established policies, oversight committees and ethical frameworks that ensure AI is developed and applied responsibly. These structures provide transparency, fairness and accountability, giving confidence that risks are effectively managed."*
>
> **Senior Corporate Researcher, Malaysia**

# Mounting pressures on researchers

Corporate researchers are tight on time and under pressure to commercialize and maximize ROI, but they are slightly more optimistic about their R&D environment compared to the wider pool of researchers. They acknowledge the importance of peer review and believe publishers play a vital role in research integrity.

> *"Empirically, I squeeze research activities in on the train, or I neglect other duties for a week to make time."*
>
> **Senior Corporate Researcher, USA**

Like researchers in academia and health, corporate researchers are under growing pressure from various sources, notably to save costs, maximize return on investment and commercialize their research.

Expectations of funding increases in the next two to three years are low, although corporate researchers are a little more optimistic compared to the average across all participants, with 38% expecting an increase, versus 33% overall (see the accompanying databook for more details).

## Confidence in the scientific record

Most (75%) agree that peer-reviewed research is trustworthy and 87% that corrections and retractions ensure integrity. As one senior corporate researcher in the UK commented, "Mistakes can happen; the peer review system should make room to correct them."

> *"Ultimately, publishers safeguard the credibility of the scientific record, fostering trust in research findings, and enabling the continued progress of knowledge."*
>
> **Head of Laboratory/R&D Manager, India**

> *"Rigorous peer review is a powerful mechanism contributing to trustworthiness, but the adoption of open science principles has potentiated the efforts to make articles reporting research more trustworthy."*
>
> **Head of Organization (e.g. President/CEO), USA**

# AI usage and expectations

Overall, corporate researchers are more positive about AI compared to other groups surveyed. Their AI usage is already transforming how they work, and they shared the factors that would increase this further.

AI-using corporate researchers are currently more reliant on research-specific tools (38%) than generalist AI tools (31%), though their reliance on research-specific tools lags slightly behind all groups (49%). Of those who use AI tools regularly for work, two-thirds (66%) use ChatGPT and one-third (33%) Gemini. Corporate researchers report using Microsoft Copilot significantly more than other groups, at 37% versus 20% overall.

They are using AI for a variety of tasks. 49% of corporate researchers use AI tools to analyze research data, 61% for literature reviews and 68% for summarizing the latest research. In line with researchers more broadly, 36% use AI tools to manage research projects.

When looking at more creative aspects of their work, there is a sharp divide between those using or wishing to use AI, and those who will not consider it. For example, 43% of corporate researchers use AI tools for writing or drafting research papers or reports, and a further 13% would like to do so. However, 44% say they do not and would not consider AI for this task.

Over a third (35%) of corporate researchers use AI tools to generate new research hypotheses, and a further 18% would like to do so, while 47% would not consider using AI. A similar proportion (34%) use AI to design experiments or studies, and 16% would like to use it, contrasting with 49% who would not use AI for this purpose. However, those who recognize AI's benefits are more likely to use a secure, reliable AI assistant for these purposes.[5]

# Shaping AI tools for future benefit

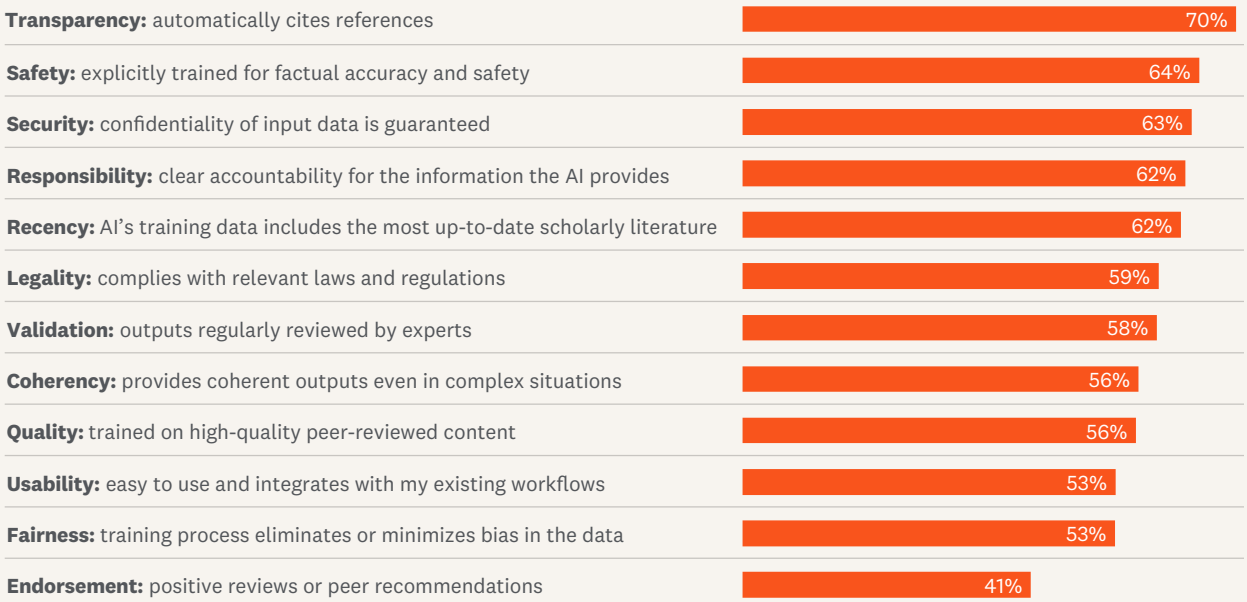
Some significant differences are evident between corporate researchers and the broader group when it comes to what would increase their use of AI. Corporate researchers showed more positive responses across a range of factors, including transparency, safety and responsibility.

For example, 70% say AI automatically citing references would increase their use of the technology, 64% agree for AI being explicitly trained for factual accuracy and safety, and 63% for guaranteed confidentiality of input data.

This reflects some corporate researchers' perception that the answers they get from AI are less useful, as well as highlighting the proprietary nature of their work.

Figure 2

## What would increase use of AI




**Question:** Which of the following factors would increase your willingness to use an AI tool for work purposes?
Base: n= 122

# Conclusion

The corporate researcher of the future will work efficiently with the support of AI tools that are reliable, useful and ubiquitous.

While the challenges they face today, including time crunch, pressure to publish and limited funding, may continue, they will embrace AI technology in a way that enables them to overcome those challenges.

- Corporate researchers are already relying on AI tools to save time and boost productivity, but 33% are not yet using them; companies could nurture this with strengthened AI governance and training.
- Corporate researchers are broadly split on whether they currently rely more on general-purpose AI tools or research-specific tools — 31% vs 38%.
- In order to be able to use AI to advance human progress, corporate researchers must be able to trust the tools they use — the key factors for this are transparency, safety and security.
- AI developers can facilitate corporate research by creating tools that are transparent, secure, reliable and accountable.

**What would help researchers use AI more?**

- Automatic citations (transparency)
- Trained for factual accuracy and safety
- Confidentiality of input data is guaranteed
- Most up-to-date scholarly literature
- Clear accountability for the info the AI provides

We recognize that, along with other stakeholders, Elsevier has a role to play in supporting corporate researchers amid the changes and challenges they are facing. This report shares the results of the latest survey in a series designed to gain valuable insights and perspectives from researchers, which we hope will inform institutional strategies and help to shape the tools and services we provide to the research community.

For further information, visit:

elsevier.io/researcher-of-the-future

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