

THE FUTURE OF USER RESEARCH REPORT 2026



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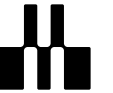
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The turning point: Insight meets impact

For years, researchers have carried the quiet weight of valuable insights—without always being heard. You saw the patterns. You gathered the evidence. You challenged assumptions.

But having the insights and influencing the outcome are two very different things. In organizations still building their research practice, that gap feels wide. In more established teams, expectations have risen, and so has the pressure.

In 2026, the landscape shifts.

Nearly 2 in 3 researchers now use AI in their workflows. Recruitment, transcription, synthesis, reporting—tasks that once stretched for weeks now take hours. This process-heavy work is faster, lighter, and often automated. But speed isn't the destination. What AI cannot replace is what has *always* mattered most in research:

Judgment. Interpretation. Strategy. Influence.

We surveyed nearly 500 researchers, designers, and product professionals to understand how this shift is reshaping research. The data reveals something bigger than faster workflows.

- AI becomes the baseline, human judgment becomes the edge
- Research influence reaches the boardroom
- Pressure builds as demand outpaces systems

Research has claimed its seat at the table. The question now: are your systems—and your culture—built to keep it there?

Meet our subject matter experts:



Amanda Gelb

Strategic Researcher,
Aha Studio Inc



Dalia El-Shimy

Director of User Research,
Wise



Kate Pazoles

Senior Manager, Research,
Twilio



Brooke Sykes

Senior Manager, Firefox User
Research, Mozilla



Daniel Soranzo,

Principal UX Researcher,
GoodRx



Megan Blocker

Senior Director, Research &
Insights, JustWorks



Caitlin Sullivan

AI Trainer
for AI Customer Research



Dave Chen

Senior Director, UX Foundations
& Enablement, 1Password



Pert Eilers

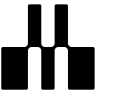
Staff Strategic Operations
Manager, Adobe



AI becomes baseline, judgment becomes the edge

What started as cautious experimentation has become everyday practice. In 2026, AI isn't replacing researchers; it's changing how research gets done. And in doing so, it's revealing something important: automation scales execution—humans scale meaning.





AI has moved into the mainstream

Nearly 2 in 3 participants (69%) now use AI in at least some of their research projects—a 19% increase from last year.

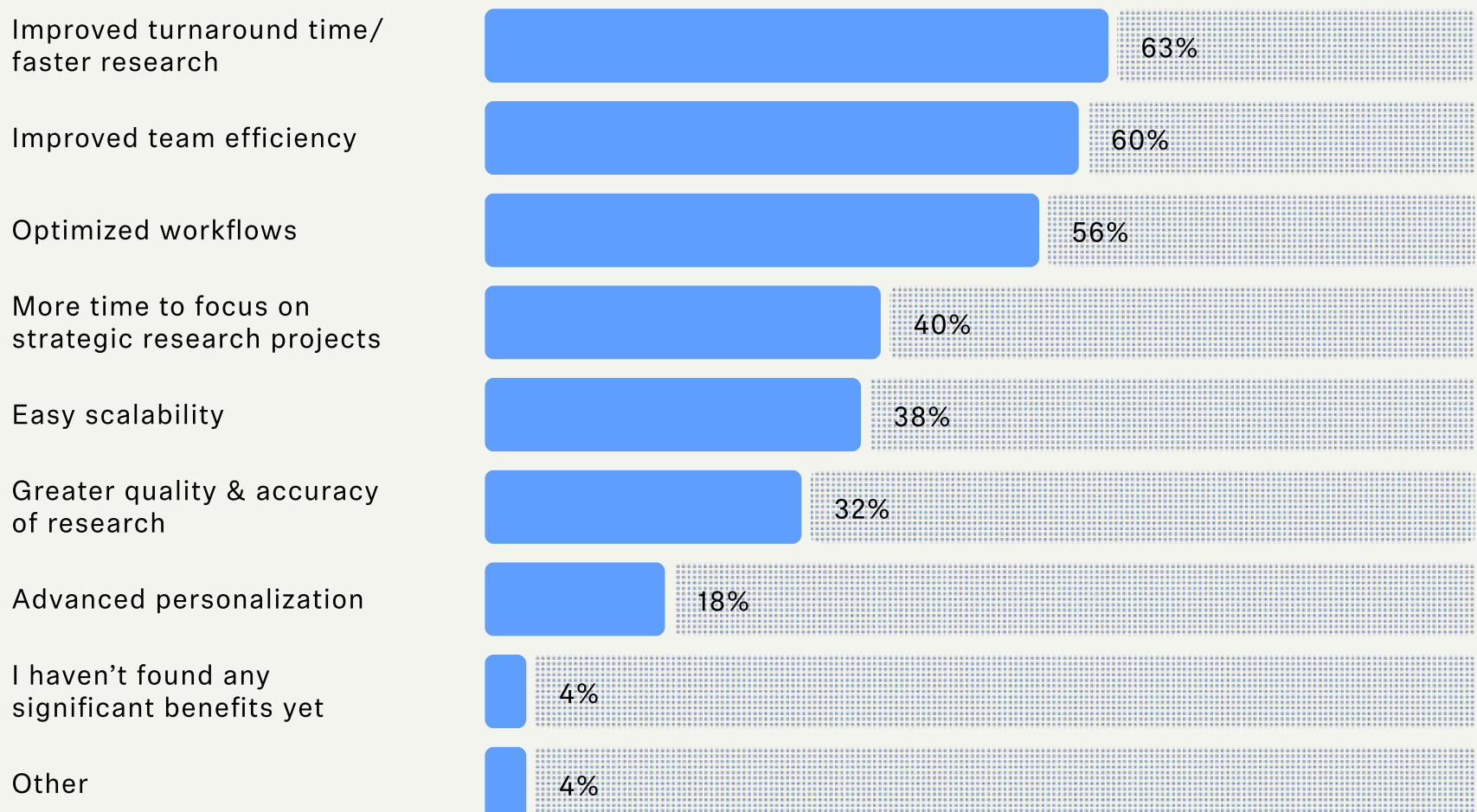
What once felt like a competitive edge is now table stakes. As one participant shared, the role of the researcher “has shifted from a specialized role to a strategic, AI-integrated skill.” Researchers are using AI to analyze data (76%), automate transcription (57%), plan and draft studies (56%), and even generate research questions (55%).

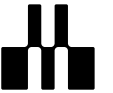
The benefits of using AI are clear:

- 63% faster research turnaround
- 60% improved team efficiency
- 56% more optimized workflows

By handling repetitive, time-intensive tasks, AI shortens the distance between question and insight, and helps teams keep pace with product cycles and rising expectations. The hesitation around AI hasn’t fully disappeared, but behavior tells a clear story: AI is a baseline expectation of the role.

What benefits have you experienced using AI tools?





AI executes, humans decide what matters

Before AI, researchers found themselves drifting into systems administration: managing tools, wrangling transcripts, stitching together outputs under tight timelines. All necessary work, but not the reason most entered the field. AI is swinging the pendulum back.

“The most immediate application for AI has been replacing the repeatable parts of research execution. But we’ve always known that just executing research has never been enough to be a successful researcher: you need to be able to think strategically and influence direction, alongside the execution.”



Dalia El-Shimy

Director of User Research,
Wise

AI can surface patterns, summarize interviews, and draft themes. But it can’t pick up on hesitation, read between the lines, or decide which insight matters most for the business—and why. When asked where human judgment remains essential, participants identified:

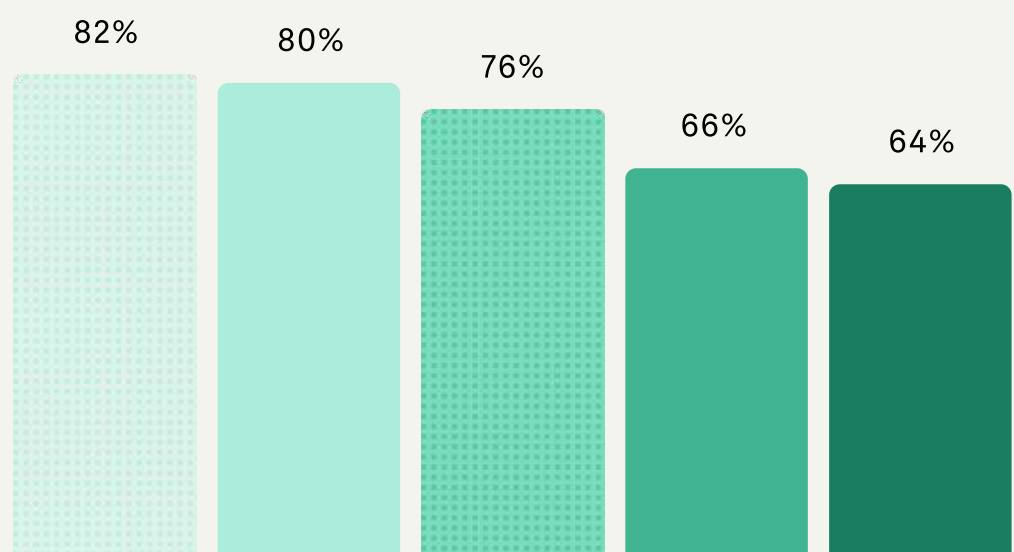
- Interpreting nuance and emotion (82%)
- Ethical decision-making (80%)
- Framing the right questions (76%)
- Delivering strategic recommendations (66%)
- Influencing stakeholders through storytelling (64%)

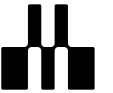
As Daniel Soranzo, Principal UX Researcher at GoodRx, explains: “Nuance is where researchers really need to come through. AI doesn’t pick up on facial expressions, tone, or hesitation—these non-verbal communications make up 70% of interactions. AI takes things at face value, making human touch really important.”

The value of research isn’t in producing outputs. Its value lies in the humans who transform data into direction.

When using AI in research, where is human judgment still essential?

- Interpreting nuance and emotion
- Ethical decision-making
- Framing the right questions
- Strategic recommendations
- Stakeholder influence and storytelling





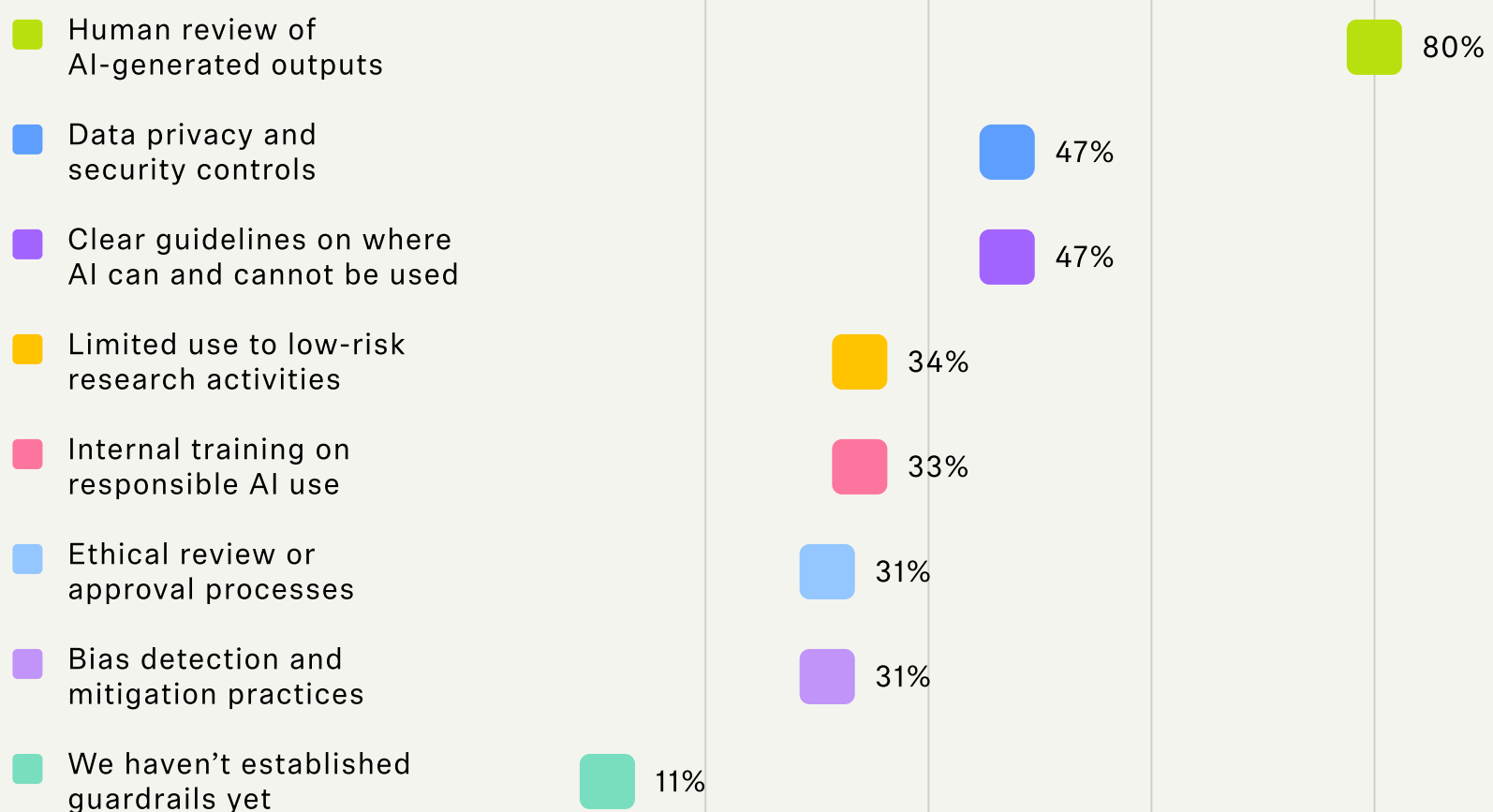
Credibility requires human judgment

Acceleration comes with responsibility. Seventy-three percent (73%) of participants say the need for human review is a key challenge when using AI tools. Trust and credibility (66%) and ethics and privacy concerns (43%) remain top of mind.

Leading teams aren't avoiding these concerns—they're designing for them. Eighty percent (80%) report implementing human review of AI-generated outputs as a core guardrail, embedded directly into their workflows. For these teams, credibility is operationalized. Human review is how they stay close to the data, uphold standards, and ensure their recommendations carry weight.

Daniel Soranzo explains, "As thought leaders and experts in the space, we want to be familiar with the data—we want to understand what we're delivering. Human review is not a bottleneck; it's a necessary part of the process for user researchers to make knowledgeable recommendations as to what will drive the most impact to the customer and business."

What guardrails have you used to address those challenges?





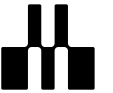
Scaling AI-to-human collaborative research

“The way you prevent human review from becoming a bottleneck is by building verification into the workflow itself, not bolting it on after or having to do it manually all the time. With good criteria, examples and previous feedback, AI can implement its own verification processes that replicate mine. The goal also isn't ‘review everything AI produces.’ It's ‘make AI's reasoning transparent enough that a human can validate it quickly.’ That's a design problem, not a resource problem.”



Caitlin Sullivan

AI Trainer
for AI Customer Research



AI magnifies what already exists

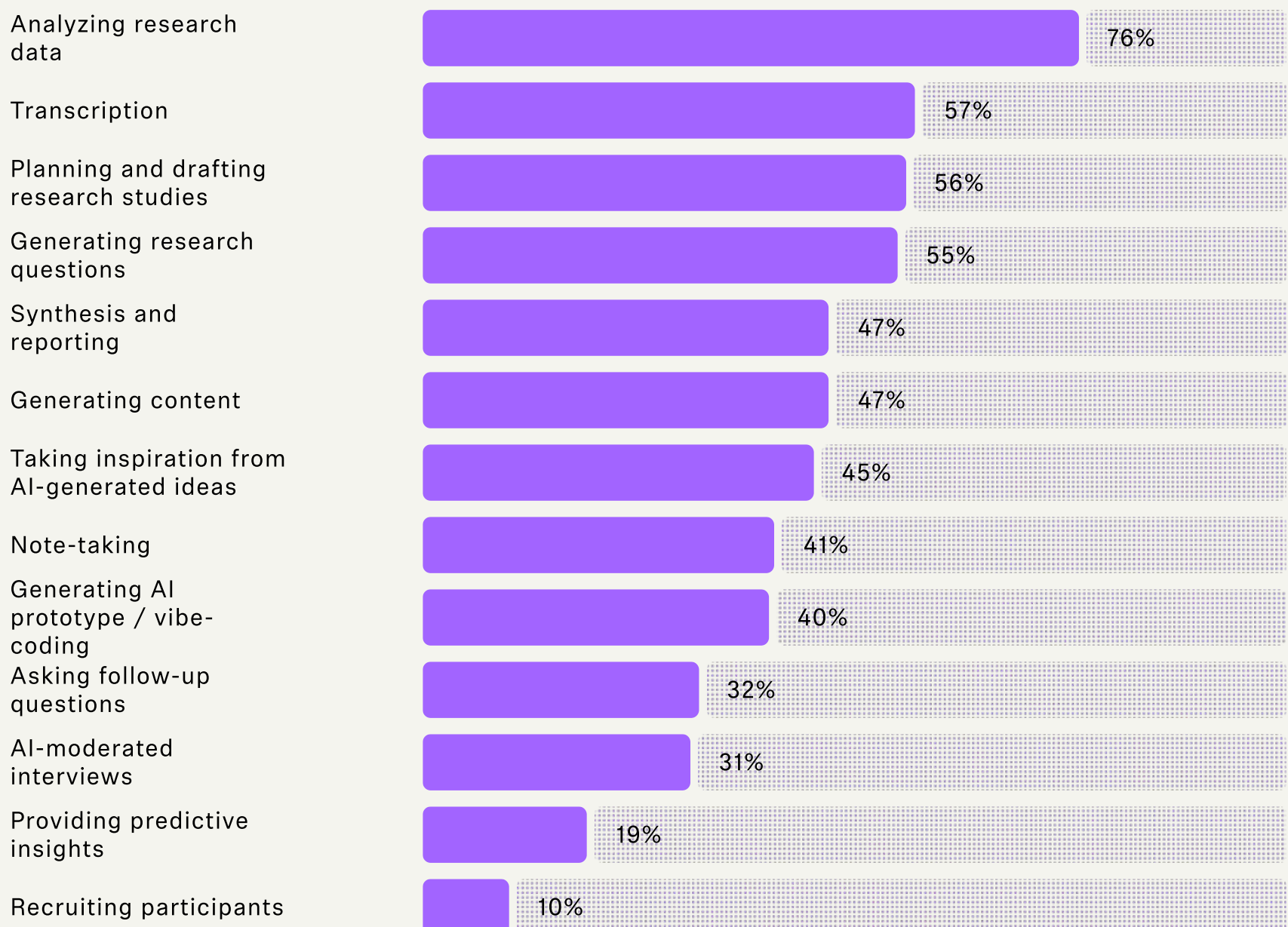
AI doesn't fix weak processes; it exposes them. When paired with clear research goals and structured workflows, AI becomes a scale enabler. It accelerates analysis, expands capacity, and helps teams move faster. But, when layered onto inconsistent methods or unclear ownership, it scales chaos.

As usage expands across the research lifecycle—from data analysis (76%) and transcription (57%) to planning

studies (56%) and generating research questions (55%)—one pattern is clear: AI supports the workflow. Researchers safeguard the integrity of the work.

Research-grade AI is emerging to meet that need—tools built with transparency and research-specific safeguards to protect research depth, context, and accountability.

How are you using AI tools to conduct user research studies?





Where human judgment is most valuable

“In research, AI excels at tasks like tagging, synthesis, and running interviews at scale. It doesn't replace human judgment; it augments our capacity. Human review remains essential because there's an element of intuition and pattern recognition that AI can't replicate yet. It's like recognizing good design instantly without being able to articulate exactly why—that tacit knowledge still requires a human eye.”



Dave Chen

Senior Director, UX Foundations & Enablement, 1Password

“Human judgment is most valuable in the messy middle. Where you're connecting what customers said (and often reading between the lines or making dotted lines across different interviewees and points of view) to what the organization should do about it.”



Amanda Gelb

Strategic Researcher, Aha Studio Inc



What this means for research in 2026

AI capabilities are quickly evolving, continuing to push the boundaries of how quickly research can be conducted, but that doesn't necessarily lead to better research.

As Dalia El-Shimy, Director of User Research at Wise, puts it, “I think that speed is the wrong problem to focus on. Speed needs to be counterbalanced with something else. If you optimize for speed exclusively, without any other guardrails in place, you'll run the risk of running in the wrong direction or shipping garbage really fast.”

The teams pulling ahead in 2026 are rethinking how the work gets done. They're using AI as a research partner—handling moderation, synthesis, and workflow acceleration—while researchers focus where they add the most value: framing sharper questions, interpreting nuance in context, connecting insights over time, and standing behind decisions with confidence. Human review is being built-in as a safeguard rather than an afterthought, and it's one of the simplest ways to strengthen trust in AI-supported outputs.

Trust grows when teams understand how insights were generated, why conclusions were drawn, and where judgment shaped the outcome. Research-grade AI tools built specifically for research environments are helping make that possible—adding transparency, controls, and traceability without slowing teams down.

In 2026, what sets leading teams apart is how intentionally they combine automation with human judgment.

“AI solves for combing many sources quickly, but it can't replace judgment, and it can't be trusted not to hallucinate. Until that changes, human review is critical.”



Megan Blocker

Senior Director, Research & Insights, JustWorks

As you integrate AI further into your workflow, consider:

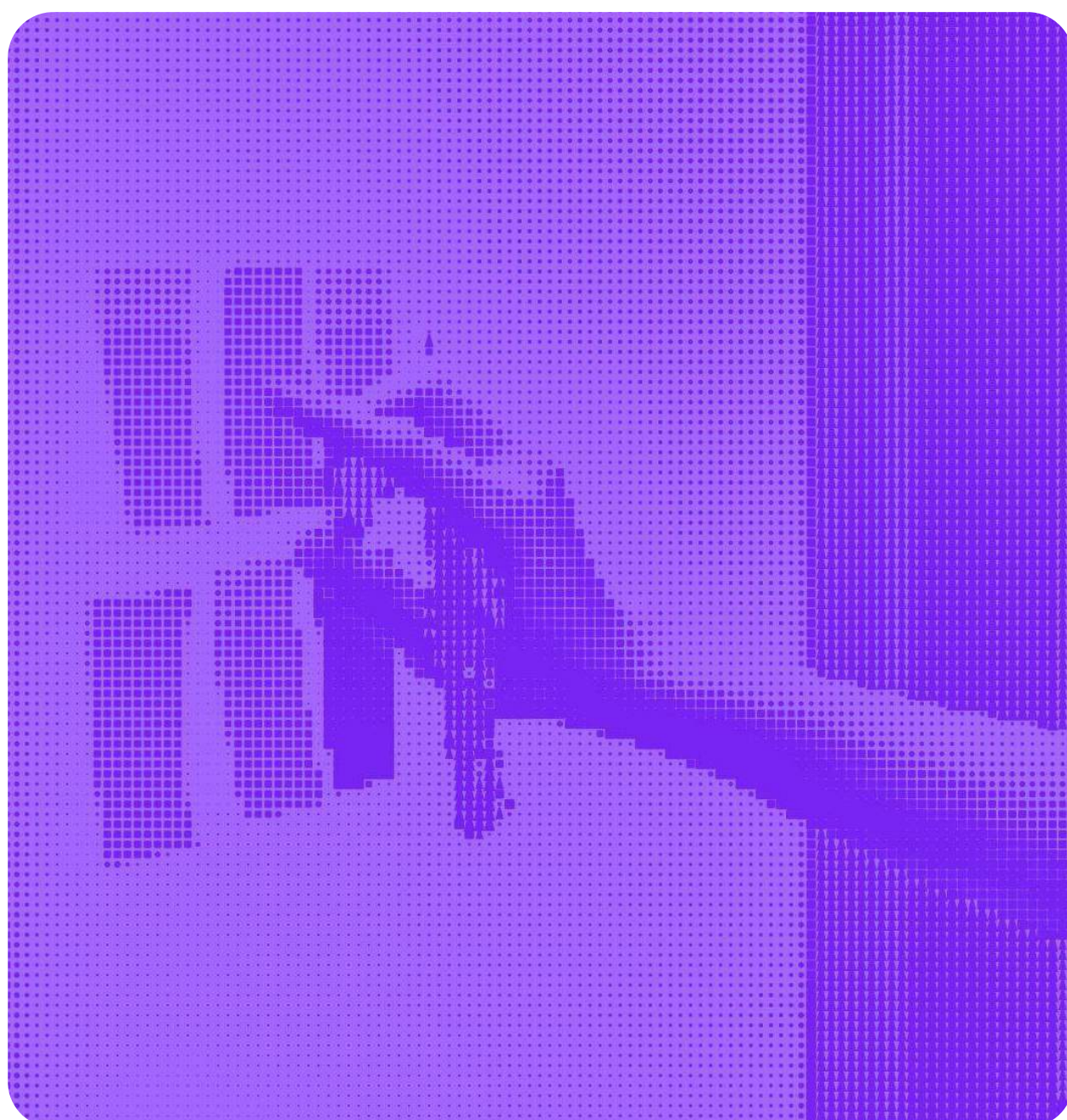
- Using research-grade AI to strengthen trust and accountability
- Clearly defining which parts of research can be accelerated by AI
- Treating human judgment as a quality requirement, not as a final step
- Making insight traceability standard

[Learn more](#) about research-grade AI →



Research influence reaches the boardroom

The role of research (and the researcher) expands, informing product decisions and shaping business direction. Researchers have always had the insights. In 2026, they finally get the authority to match.





Research is moving up the strategy ladder

Researchers have worked hard to earn a seat at the table. In 2026, that seat is becoming a permanent fixture.

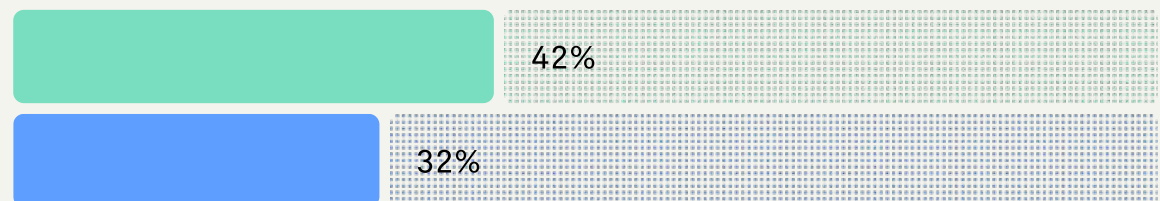
In 2025, just 8% of participants said research was essential to all levels of business strategy and operations. In 2026, the importance of research to business strategy nearly tripled, jumping to 22%. At the same time, 41% report that research now informs both product and broader strategic business decisions.

Organizations are moving from using research to validate decisions to using it as a compass, guiding what they build, prioritize, and pursue. The teams leading this shift aren't just running more studies; they're building systems of learning that make insight accessible, repeatable, and actionable across the business.

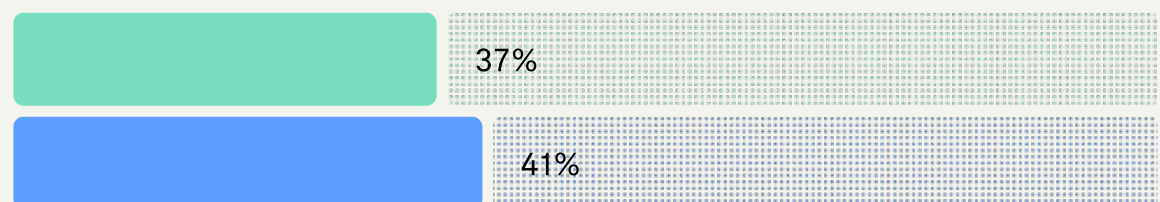
What role does research play in your organization's decision-making process?

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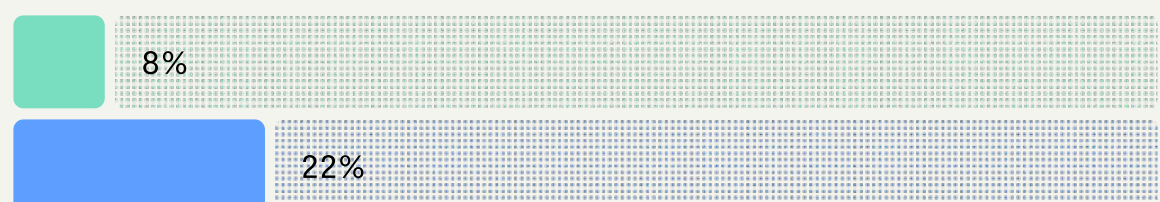
Research is used primarily for product-specific decisions



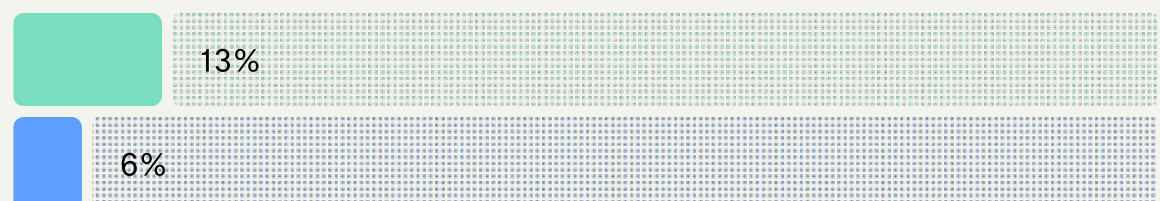
Research informs both product and strategic business decisions



Research insights are essential to all levels of business strategy and operations



Research is conducted but rarely used in decision-making

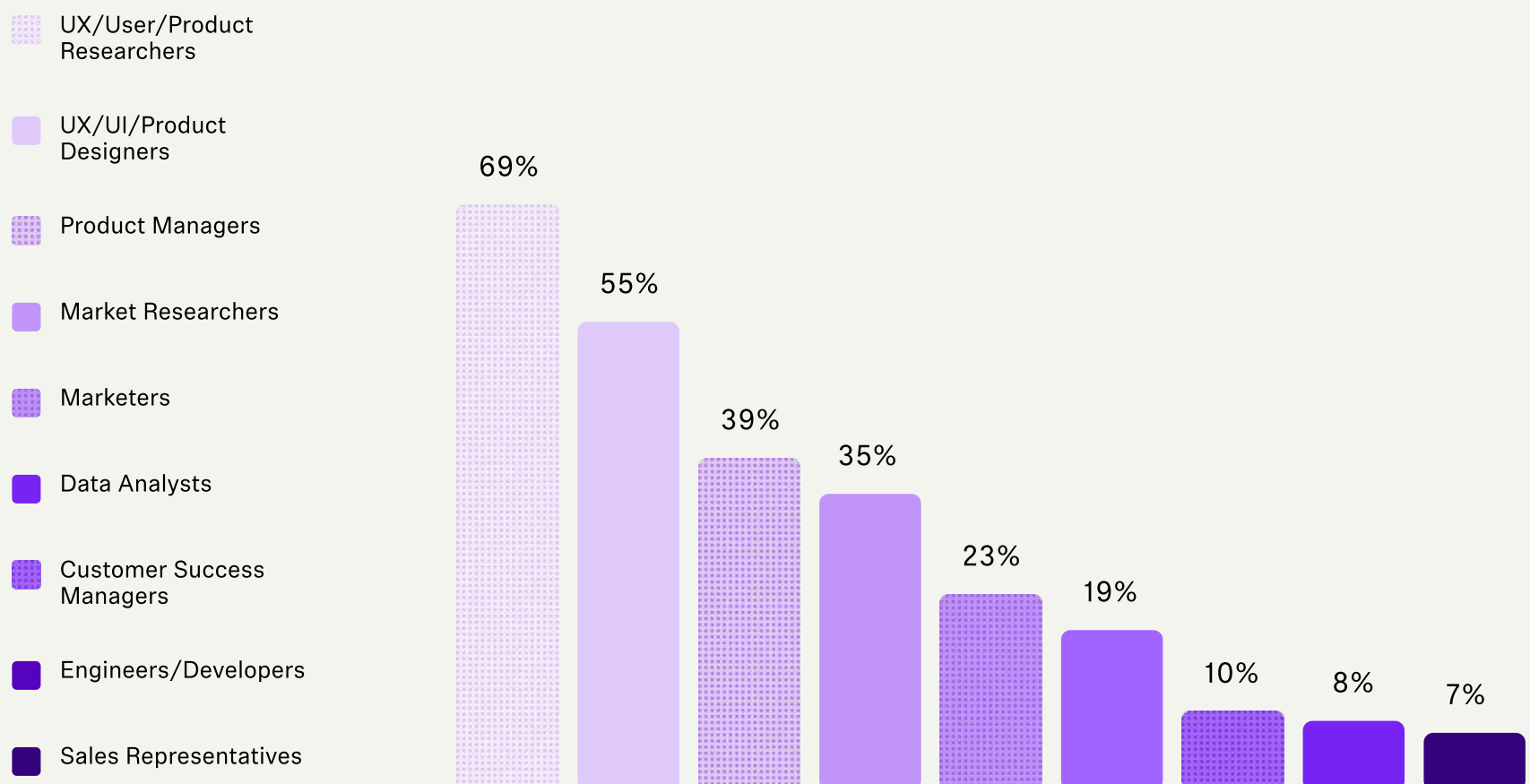




Research spreads company-wide

This rise in influence is moving horizontally across teams. In 2026, research is conducted by UX researchers (69%), designers (55%), product managers (39%), and market researchers (35%), alongside growing participation from marketing, data, and customer-facing teams.

Who is conducting research at your company?





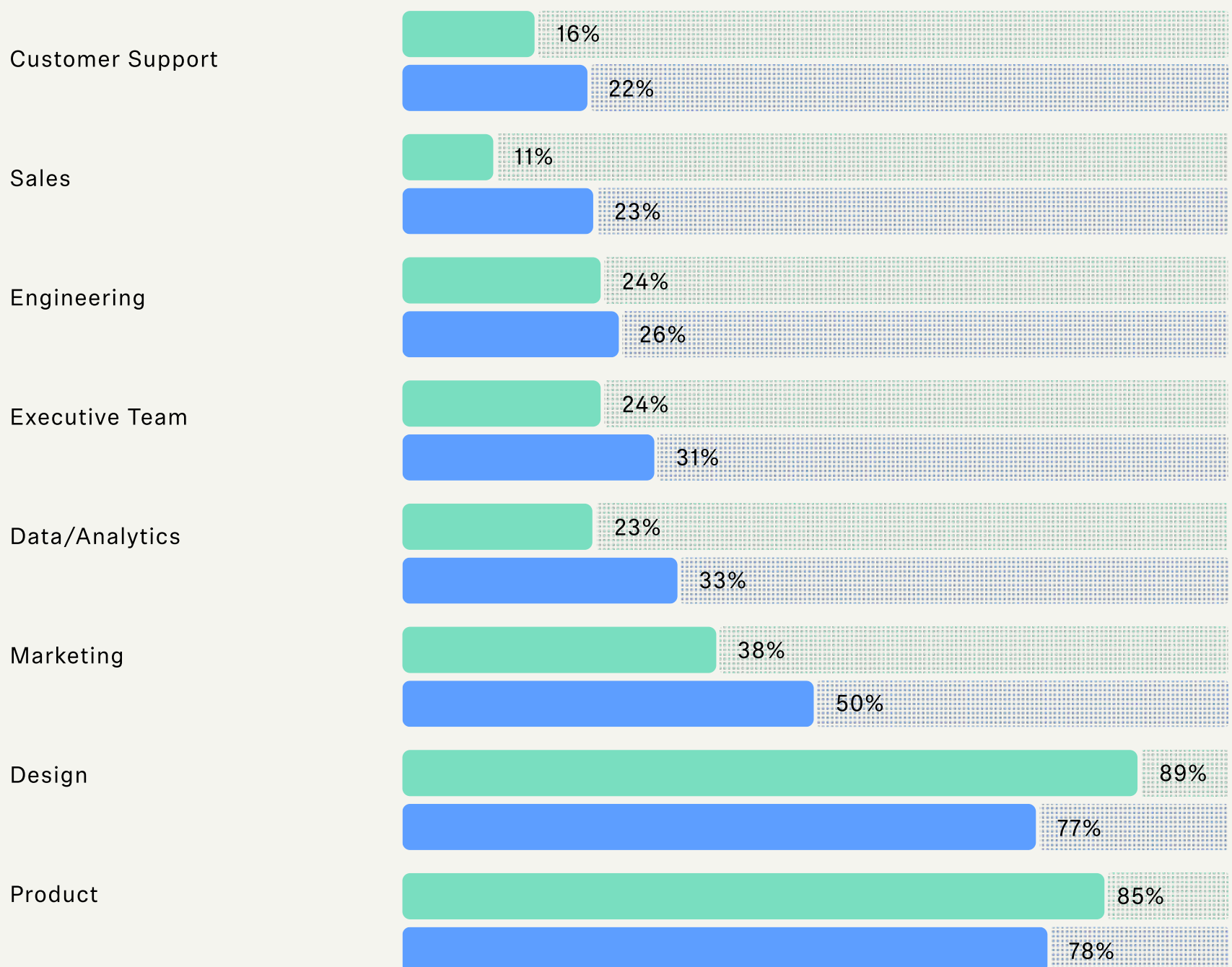
Marketing alone saw a 32% increase in incorporating research into decision-making compared to 2025. Sales adoption more than doubled, and executive team engagement increased. While product and design remain the primary owners, insight is reaching further into the business.

At first glance, this expansion can feel like dilution—especially for established teams protective of quality and standards. But it may well be a sign of trust. When research thinking spreads, evidence spreads with it. For mature research teams, this creates leverage. For lean or emerging teams, it builds momentum—more advocates, more shared ownership, fewer battles to prove value.

The voice of the customer expands beyond a single function. It's becoming embedded across the business.

Which teams in your organization incorporate user research findings into their decision-making processes?

2025 2026





“Researchers need to trust non-researchers to own their studies. Research is both art and science, and quality develops over time, not overnight. By trusting stakeholders to drive their own research and coaching them to improve incrementally, we create an environment where quality standards can be met within the organization's context while empowering teams to move faster.”



Dave Chen

Senior Director, UX Foundations & Enablement, 1Password



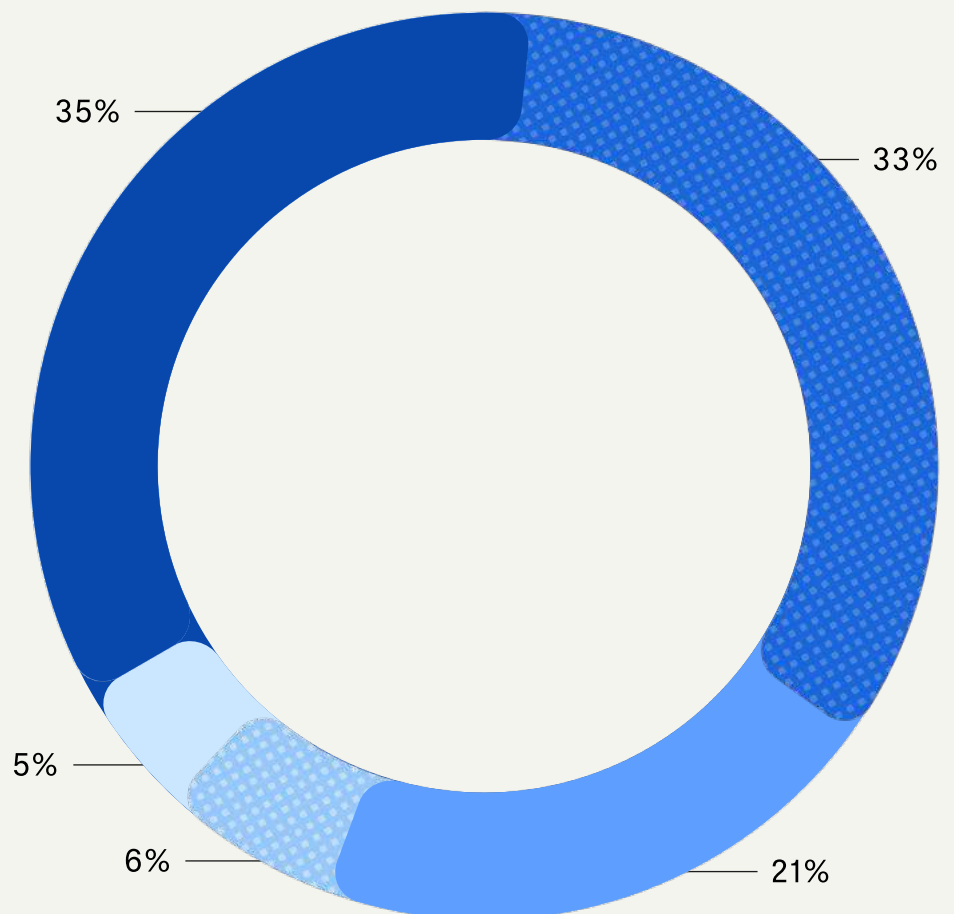
From insight producer to strategic partner

As research expands, the role of the researcher evolves with it. Thirty-five percent (35%) of participants say the role is becoming increasingly strategic—shifting from execution to advisory and business partnership. Another 33% describe it as more blended, requiring fluency across product and market research.

For mature teams, this evolution deepens influence on high-impact business decisions. For lean teams, it means prioritizing insights that will move the needle and letting tools handle the rest. The common thread across both? The researcher's scope has grown—from running studies to becoming the organization's insight strategist.

How do you see the researcher role evolving in the industry?

- Increasingly strategic**
The role is expanding beyond execution to strategic advisory and business partnership
- More blended**
Researchers are expected to handle diverse methodologies and wear multiple hats across product and market research
- More specialized**
Researchers are focusing on specific disciplines (e.g., UX research, market research, consumer insights)
- Not sure**
- Stayed about the same**
The scope and expectations have remained consistent





The research skill stack for 2026

According to participants, the expectations of the "leveled-up" researcher expands across four key areas:

AI fluency

AI makes everything fast. We don't base final decisions on what it gives us but it helps to speed up the research process.

It has shifted from a specialized role to a strategic, AI-integrated skill. Researchers now focus on high-level strategy while AI automates synthesis.

Researchers are now using AI to speed up tasks like recruiting, note-taking, transcription, analysis, and synthesis, allowing them to focus more on interpretation, strategic thinking, and storytelling.

Big-picture business strategy

The researcher role has become more strategic, with greater involvement in decision-making, closer collaboration with executives and product teams, increased use of data and AI tools, and stronger focus on linking insights to measurable business outcomes.

Now, researchers are involved in strategic planning and are often involved in decision-making at decision-level meetings.

The role has become more important and more involved in decision-making.

Cross-functional collaboration

The role evolved because digital speed, customer expectations, AI adoption, and compliance pressures demanded that research move beyond design support to become a strategic, cross-functional driver of organizational success.

Research has become increasingly strategic and cross-functional, often involving multiple interactions with multiple teams, and aiming to solve more strategic business-critical questions.

Quickly adapt and iterate

Tighter timelines and budgets, plus higher expectations for measurable impact, pushed teams to reduce risk quickly and iterate faster.

We are expected to do more, faster and to be knowledgeable across many areas and methods.



“Stakeholder management is a soft skill that opens so many doors and possibilities as a researcher. Having good relationships with your partners will completely shift how you’re perceived and the outlook of your role...Get close to stakeholders, find out their needs, and find answers to the questions they might have. You become a necessity because of your knowledge of both product and user experience.”



Daniel Soranzo,

Principal UX Researcher,
GoodRx

“In this era of AI-augmented research, alongside developing AI fluency, I see value in focusing on where researchers have an edge: our ability to make sense of complex, nuanced data in context; to build rapport and trust with users to deeply understand their needs; and to navigate the very real tradeoffs that shape product decisions.”



Brooke Sykes

Senior Manager, Firefox User
Research, Mozilla

“Research has never been about data collection. It’s about distinguishing signal from noise, understanding context, and moving from observation to insights that change decisions. That’s where your value lives.”



Pert Eilers

Staff Strategic Operations
Manager, Adobe



Outcomes are how research proves its impact

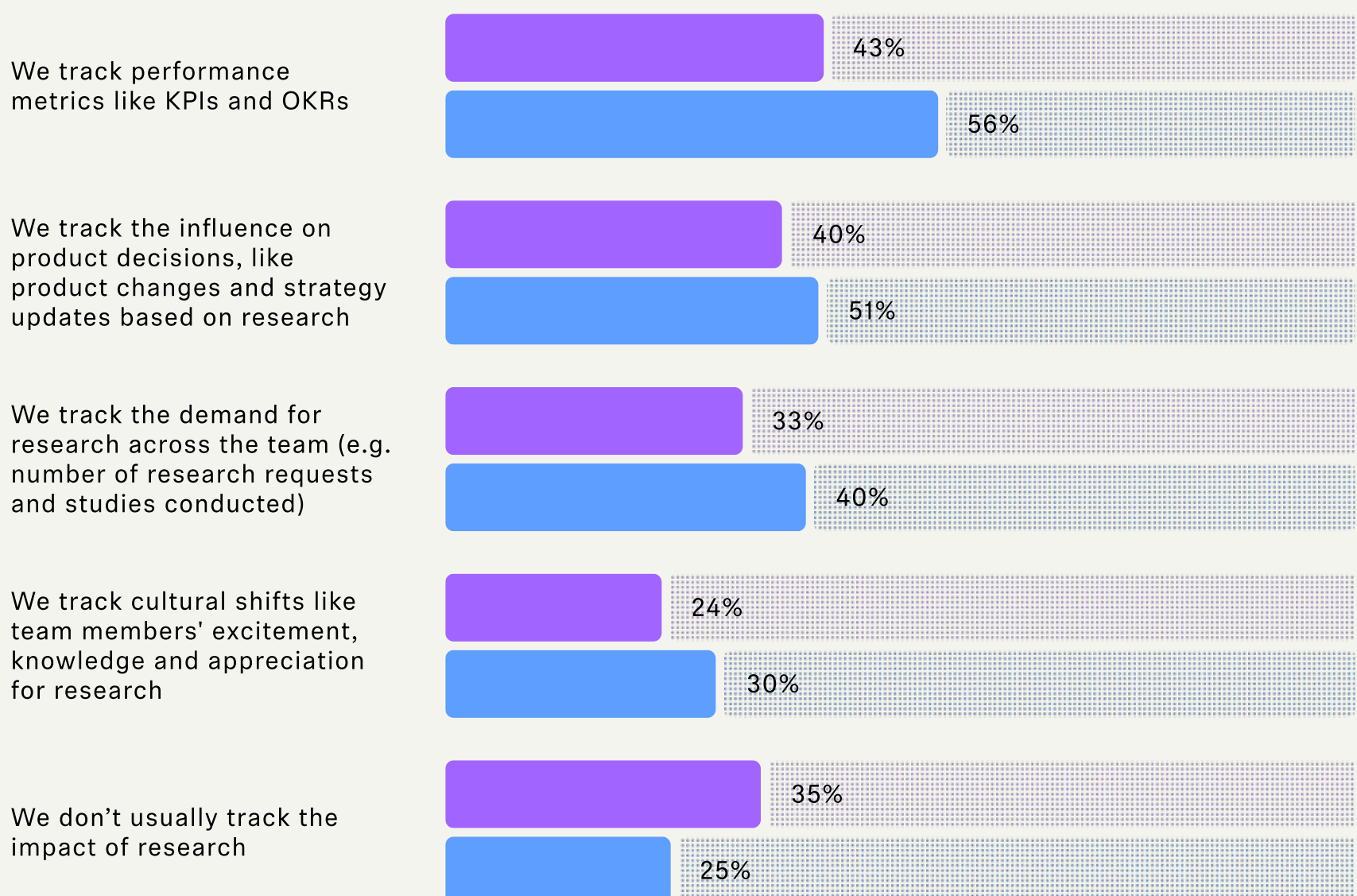
A seat at the table comes with a new question: *what changed because of this work?*

With greater influence comes greater accountability. Researchers are expected to deliver insights and demonstrate outcomes. In 2025, 43% tracked KPIs and OKRs to measure research impact. In 2026, that number jumped to 56%. Tracking influence on product decisions also increased from 40% to 51%, a shift in how research defines success.

More teams are also tracking demand for research (a 7% increase) and even cultural indicators, like awareness and appreciation (a 6% jump). At the same time, the number of teams that *don't* track impact dropped from 35% to 25%. This tells us that impact isn't implied anymore—it's measured.

How does your team measure the impact of research?

2025 2026





Business fluency builds authority

As research moves closer to strategy, executive trust becomes non-negotiable. When asked what most increases executive trust in research, participants pointed to:

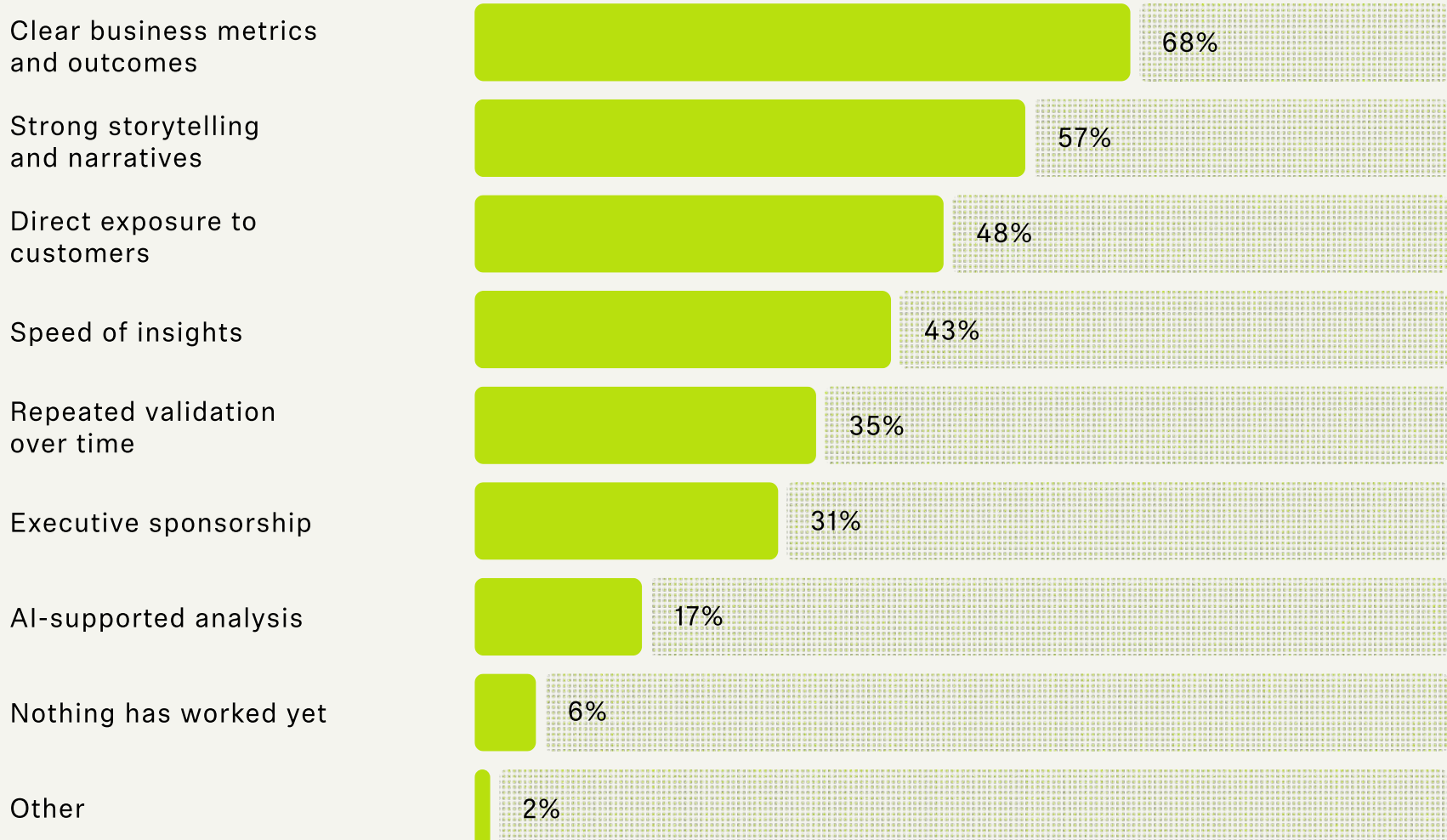
- Clear business metrics and outcomes (67%)
- Strong storytelling and narratives (57%)
- Direct exposure to customers (48%)

Research earns authority when research connects directly to revenue impact, risk reduction, and product direction. Framing insights in business terms—

and shaping them into clear narratives—helps stakeholders see what’s happening *and* what action should follow. When research is grounded in evidence, framed in business terms, with a clear path forward, influence solidifies.

Kate Pazoles, Senior Manager, Research at Twilio, explains: “The most valuable skill to develop is the ability to craft and communicate a strong, evidence-based point of view. The best researchers can triangulate business strategy, stakeholder goals, and user research to form a clear narrative about what action should be taken.”

What most increases executive trust in research at your organization?





“My advice: start tracking decision influence. Did the team actually use this insight? Did it change the roadmap? Did the product metric move? The simplest version is just documenting at the start of every study, what decision this research is meant to inform—and then following up after the decision is made.”



Caitlin Sullivan

AI Trainer
for AI Customer Research

“Researchers have always earned more trust by bringing their collaborators into the research process, sharing insights early and often... Researchers need to double down on that openness and bring their teams along for the ride as they experiment with new approaches and tools.”



Megan Blocker

Senior Director, Research &
Insights, JustWorks

“As a qualitative researcher at heart, I value research impact stories. One of the most effective ways I’ve seen members of my team demonstrate impact is by articulating a clear narrative: What decision did the research inform? What changed as a result? Being able to tell a clear, memorable story about how insights directly shaped a product direction or influenced a key tradeoff is a powerful skill.”



Brooke Sykes

Senior Manager, Firefox User
Research, Mozilla



What this means for research in 2026

Research is no longer adjacent to decision-making. It's shaping how organizations prioritize, invest, and grow. Elevation brings visibility—and higher expectations.

The researchers who thrive in 2026 will operate upstream: clarifying ambiguous asks, aligning research to strategic priorities, and turning insight into direction. They'll connect user needs to revenue, retention, and risk—and build systems that ensure insights endure beyond a single presentation, informing decisions over time.

Kate Pazoles adds, the most skilled researchers are “very good at seeing ‘the question behind the question’: what information stakeholders actually need, which can be different than what they're asking for. They meet those needs with the right amount of research and distill it into a clear recommendation for what to do and why. Once you do this, you become a thought partner instead of another source of information in an already noisy environment.”

The data makes it clear: research influence is growing and so are expectations. Influence today is about more than research visibility. It's about shaping the narrative around your insights, informing decisions in the moments that matter, and earning a permanent seat as a strategic business partner.

The researcher of 2026 is:

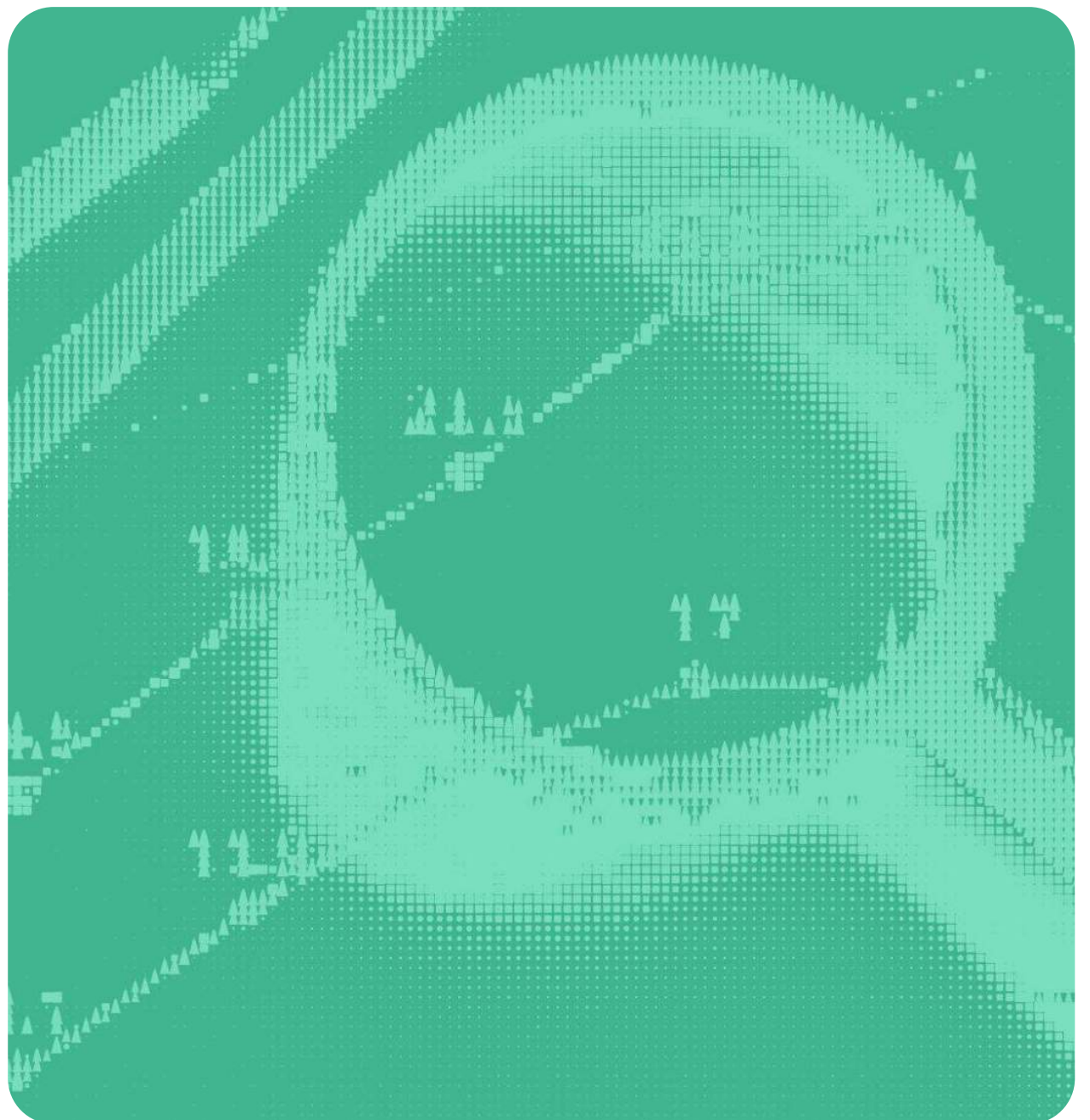
- **Business-minded:** Connects findings to strategy and measurable outcomes
- **AI fluent:** Leverages automation to increase leverage, not reduce rigor
- **Cross-functional:** Influences decisions across product, marketing, and leadership
- **Outcome-driven:** Measures success by impact and builds systems that scale it

[Discover more](#) about the evolving role of user research →



Pressure builds as demand outpaces enablement

Research has never been more visible—or more stretched. As influence grows, so do expectations, and the systems built to support research teams are struggling to keep up.





Demand outgrows capacity

Last year, 55% of product professionals reported increased demand for research. This year, that number climbed to 66%.

Research is expected to de-risk decisions, validate direction, and demonstrate measurable impact. Yet for many teams, resources haven't expanded at the same pace. The mandate has grown, but the capacity often hasn't.

The strain shows up in timing. Roadmaps move. Decisions accelerate. Research is asked to inform choices that are already in motion. Teams are forced into tradeoffs—depth or direction, rigor or responsiveness—while trying to stay connected to the moments that matter. And that pressure is only growing.



Participants describe the tension clearly:

“Stakeholders are increasingly asking for faster turnaround, even if the research is less comprehensive.”

“There’s more pressure to deliver quick, directional insights rather than deep studies.”

“Product decisions are sometimes made before research can be completed.”



Research becomes always-on

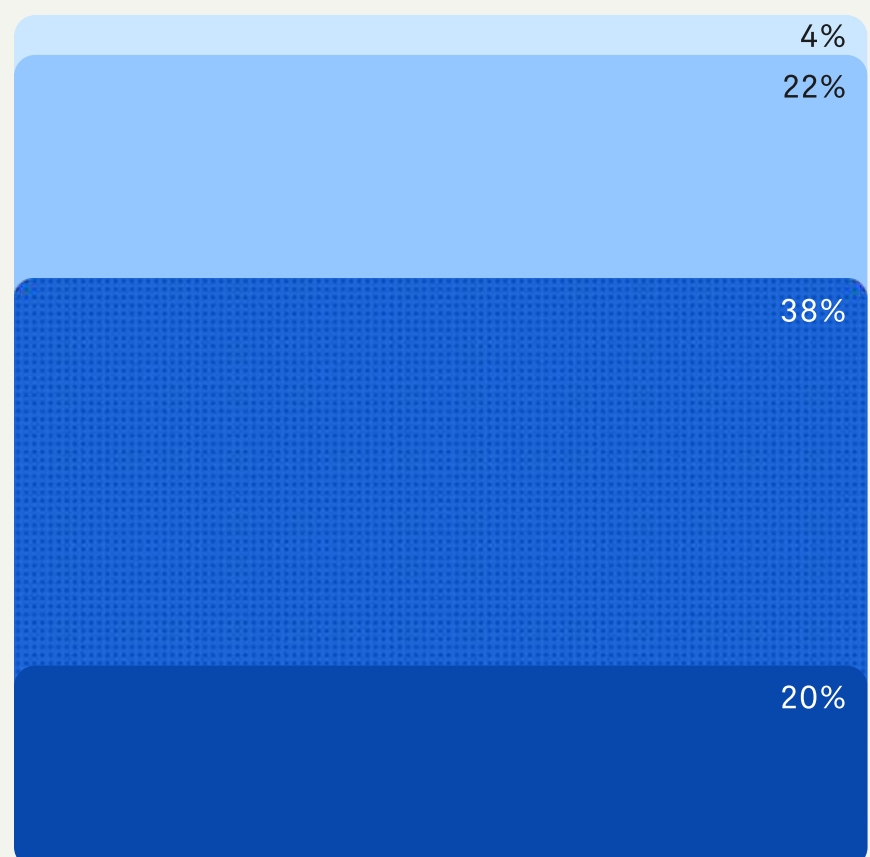
To keep up with the surge of demand, teams are rethinking how research fits into their workflows.

While surveys (77%), usability testing (75%), and moderated interviews (71%) remain core methods, 21% of teams are using AI-moderated interviews—a signal that faster feedback loops are becoming essential and experimentation is the norm.

Teams are actively adapting their research methods to stay ahead. Thirty-eight percent (38%) say they sometimes explore and adopt new methods for specific projects, while 20% frequently tailor their approach to fit unique requirements.

How often do you incorporate new or novel research methods into your process?

- ☐ Never
We use the same set of methods for all our projects
- ☐ Rarely
We occasionally consider alternatives, but we mostly stick to methods we know well
- ☒ Sometimes
We explore and adopt new methods for some projects when needed
- ☒ Often
We frequently tailor our research methods to suit the unique requirements of each project





Research becomes always-on

This flexibility shows that research is no longer a one-size-fits-all. Teams are experimenting with tools, formats, and approaches to answer new types of questions as speed and expectation increase.

The most forward-thinking teams are building systems for continuous learning. They're tapping into the data streams already flowing through their organizations and turning passive signals into active insights.

Always-on doesn't mean replacing deep research—that's important—it means reducing blind spots between studies. And something interesting happens when that access improves.

When research becomes more accessible, curiosity expands. Teams ask earlier, validate sooner, and reduce risk faster. But, if research is always-on, what happens when the volume of research is greater than the systems built to support it?

“The top teams I work with are using automation to continuously analyze the data streams they already have coming in that used to just pile up or get siloed: support tickets, app reviews, NPS, sales call transcripts. That's the real "always-on" opportunity—not replacing deliberate research studies, but finally making use of the massive data piles you're already collecting.”



Caitlin Sullivan

AI Trainer
for AI Customer Research

“You would think the biggest unlock of continuous research is speed. It's actually that teams ask research questions they would have skipped if it meant waiting 3 weeks for a dedicated study.”



Amanda Gelb

Strategic Researcher,
Aha Studio Inc



Speed without structure creates noise



As demand increases and research becomes more accessible, activity expands with it. What begins as responsiveness can quickly turn into fragmentation without shared standards, visibility, and context alongside it.

When methods vary widely and insights live in silos, findings become harder to interpret and connect. Over time, this doesn't just create inefficiency—it weakens research's credibility at the very moment its influence is rising. Without shared guardrails, increased activity can produce noise instead of clarity, adding pressure to an already stretched function.

“In the 2010s, the companies that were first to market were rewarded for speed. We're trying to apply the same mindset now, but the game has been completely blown open. AI has equalized that advantage for everyone: it's never been faster to ship features into production. A company will win not because of speed but because they're delivering something that actually solves a user's real needs and makes money for the business.”



Dalia El-Shimy

Director of User Research,
Wise



Participants describe the challenge clearly:

Different research methods

“Because of the increase in research requests, more people across the organization are conducting research, but there isn’t a consistent way of doing it.”

“The demand for research has grown, and now teams outside of research are running their own studies without much standardization.”

Lack of centralized insights

“We often redo research because we don’t have a central place to store or find past studies.”

“A lot of insights already exist, but they’re hard to find, so teams end up repeating the same work.”

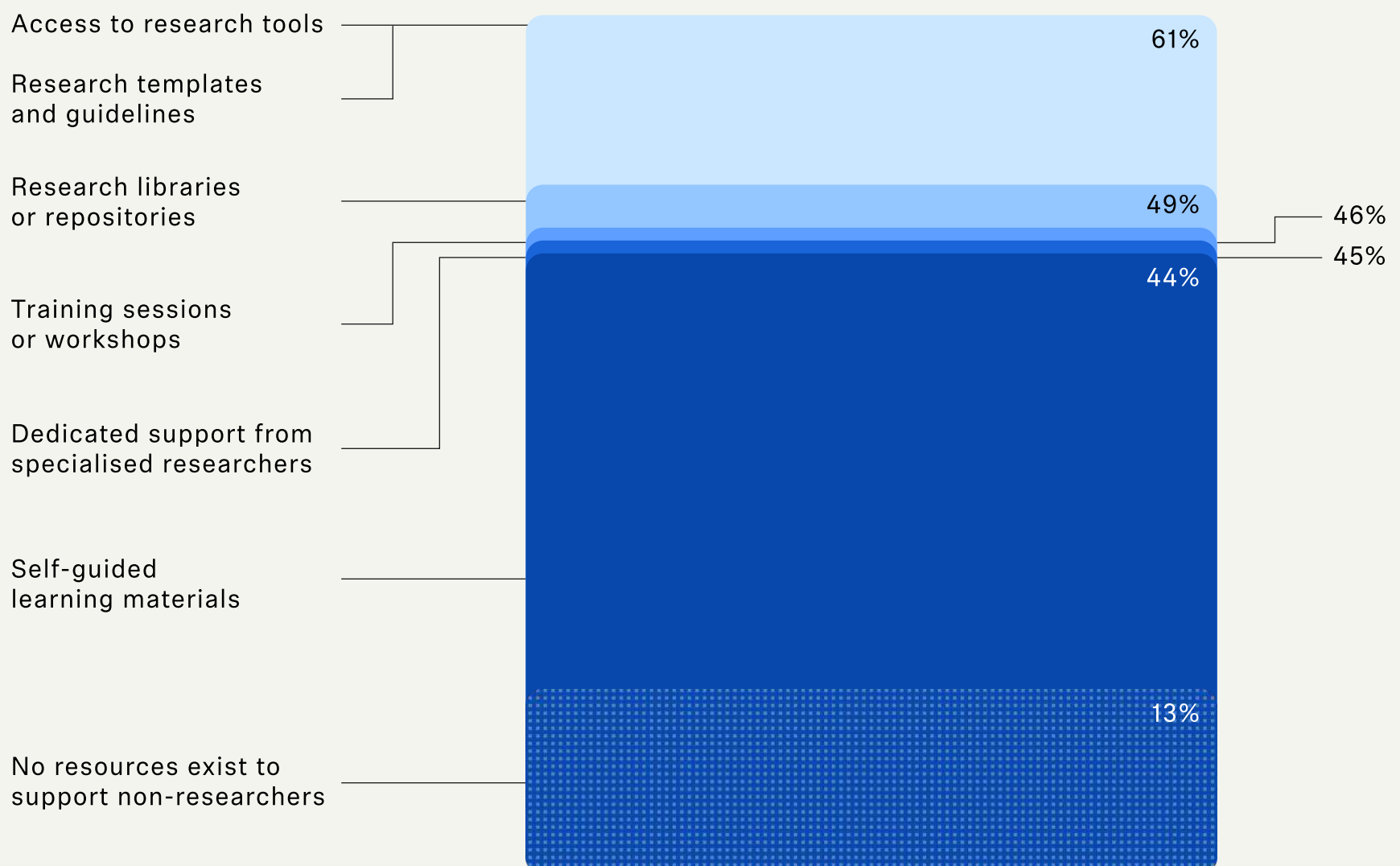


Enablement is culture, not just tools

Enablement is often treated like an operational function: a workshop, a template pack, access to a tool. But when demand spreads across teams, enablement has to become something sturdier—infrastructure.

Infrastructure is the backbone of how insight moves through an organization. Tools are an important aspect of infrastructure, but they're just one part of the equation. The culture and systems built around those tools determine whether insights reach the right people, at the right time, and whether stakeholders know how to ask—and evaluate—the right questions.

What resources are available to support non-researchers in conducting research?





While 61% of organizations provide access to tools and templates, fewer than half offer dedicated support from specialized researchers (45%), structured training (46%), or research libraries (49%). Thirteen percent (13%) report having no resources at all to support non-researchers. The data highlights a gap between tool access and deeper enablement—something our subject matter experts say can shape how research is understood, applied, and trusted.

When enablement becomes infrastructure—not an initiative—research shifts from reactive to repeatable. For teams still early in this journey, that gap can feel daunting. But it’s not an individual capability; it’s up to the organization to create a culture of research so influence becomes a shared system of learning.

The organizations successfully building this system of learning define what “good research” looks like. They centralize knowledge so teams start with what’s already known. And they embed research into sprint planning, roadmap reviews, and strategy discussions so insights travel and shape decisions before they’re finalized.

“Enablement isn't a couple of lunch-and-learns on ‘how to use our research tool’ or ‘how to run interviews.’ It's teaching people the thinking behind good research: how to write non-leading questions, how to recognize confirmation bias in their own analysis, and critically, how to verify what AI spits out before acting on it... An effective program gives people lightweight but rigorous verification workflows so they know when they can trust findings and insights and when they need to pull in a specialist.”



Caitlin Sullivan

AI Trainer
for AI Customer Research

“The foundation of all this [a comprehensive enablement program] is our team—researchers and ResOps professionals who've built strong frameworks, clear structure, and most importantly, genuine relationships with their partners. Those relationships are what make scaling feel manageable rather than chaotic. The operational structure only works because the people running it have invested in trust and collaboration.”



Dave Chen

Senior Director, UX Foundations & Enablement, 1Password



What this means for research in 2026

Everyone wants to do research, but not every organization is equipped to scale it overnight.

For some researchers, the pressure can feel immediate: rising demand, limited support, and the expectation to move fast. The instinct is often to expand quickly, but a full-scale research program doesn't emerge in a quarter. It's built through gradual, intentional improvements. Without that foundation, teams risk burnout before they build credibility.

For more established organizations, the challenge isn't about starting but about scaling without losing coherence. As research spreads across functions, maintaining quality, consistency, and trust becomes more complex.

“Scale comes from standardization. We're doubling down on templates, shared frameworks, and clear best practices so we're not reinventing the wheel with every study. That operational consistency increases efficiency—but more importantly, it protects quality.”



Pert Eilers

Staff Strategic Operations
Manager, Adobe

The teams that build research infrastructure that scales will:

- Elevate question quality, so stakeholders frame sharper, evidence-based problems
- Centralize discovery, so learning compounds instead of repeating
- Standardize quality, so insights remain trustworthy at scale
- Embed distribution into operating rhythms, so research shows up when decisions happen
- Invest in continuous enablement as infrastructure, not as a workshop

Those who get this right will keep up with demand through clarity—without the risk of scaling chaos.

[Learn how to scale](#)
user research across teams →

The biggest risk facing research today isn't slowness. It's fragmentation.

As demand continues to rise, organizations face a choice: they can allow research to scale organically—faster, noisier, and increasingly inconsistent—or they can build the foundations that turn demand into competitive advantage.



Beyond influence: Building systems that scale

The transformation of research in 2026 isn't theoretical. AI is now embedded in everyday workflows. Research has expanded beyond product into broader business strategy. Researchers are stepping into more strategic, outcome-driven roles. The seat at the table is no longer a symbol—it's a reality.

As researchers step into more strategic roles, the pressure rises, and expectations climb. Demand accelerates, and more teams run studies. But the systems designed to support research haven't adapted, creating a widening gap between insights and impact.

Speed without structure creates fast mistakes. Without shared standards, centralized insights, and intentional workflows, growth quickly turns into fragmentation.

Research has claimed its seat at the table. Let's build the systems and culture that keep it there.

The opportunity in 2026 is to build the foundations that make research reliable at scale. To convert momentum into a lasting advantage, organizations must:



Design thoughtful AI-human guardrails so speed never compromises rigor



Invest in enablement as ongoing infrastructure, not one-time training



Centralize insights so knowledge compounds instead of repeating



Measure outcomes, not outputs, connecting research to real business impact



Embed research into operating rhythms so it shapes decisions before they're made



Methodology and audience insights

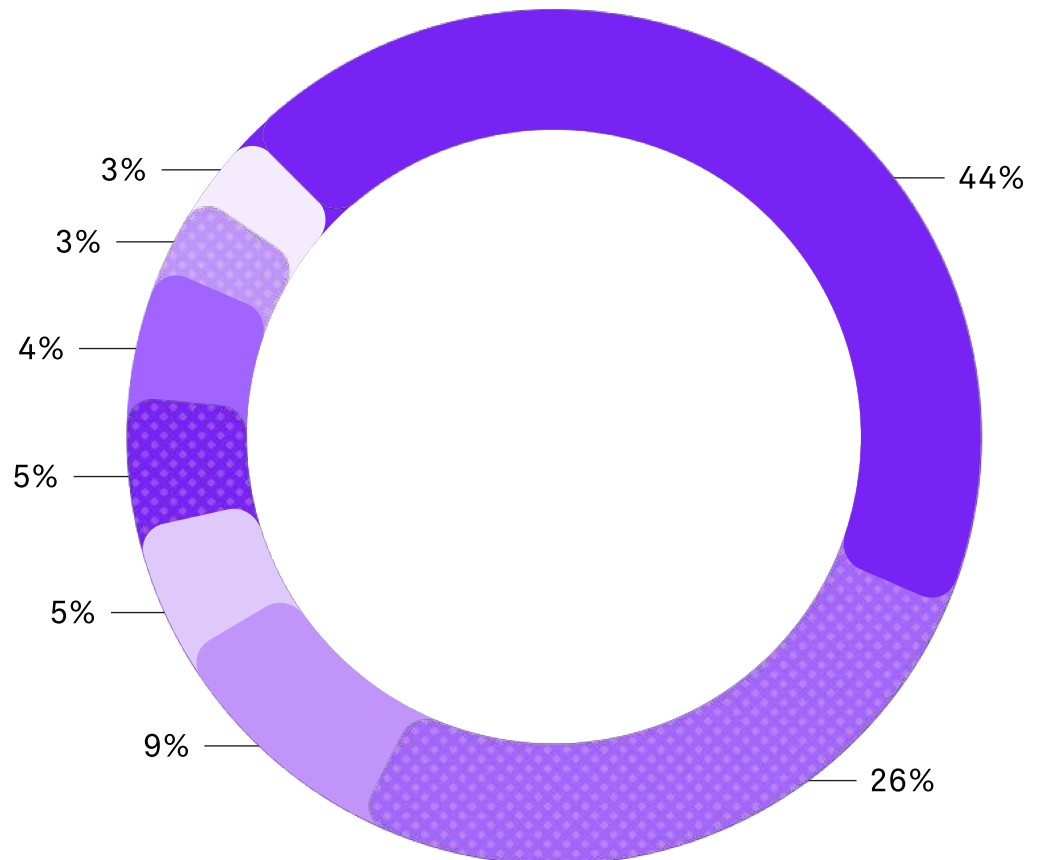
The report survey was created using Maze and distributed between December 23, 2025 and January 13, 2026. During that time, Maze collected nearly 500 responses from a variety of research-focused roles, including UX/Product Researchers (44%), UX/UI/Product Designers (26%), and Marketers (9%).

Compared to last year, the participant breakdown reflects a slightly broader cross-functional mix—aligning with a key theme of this report: that research is increasingly distributed across teams, not confined to a single function.

Maze donated \$2 for every completed survey—\$1,000 in total—to the Raspberry Pi Foundation, a charity with the mission to empower young people through the power of computing and digital technologies.

Which of the following best matches your job function?

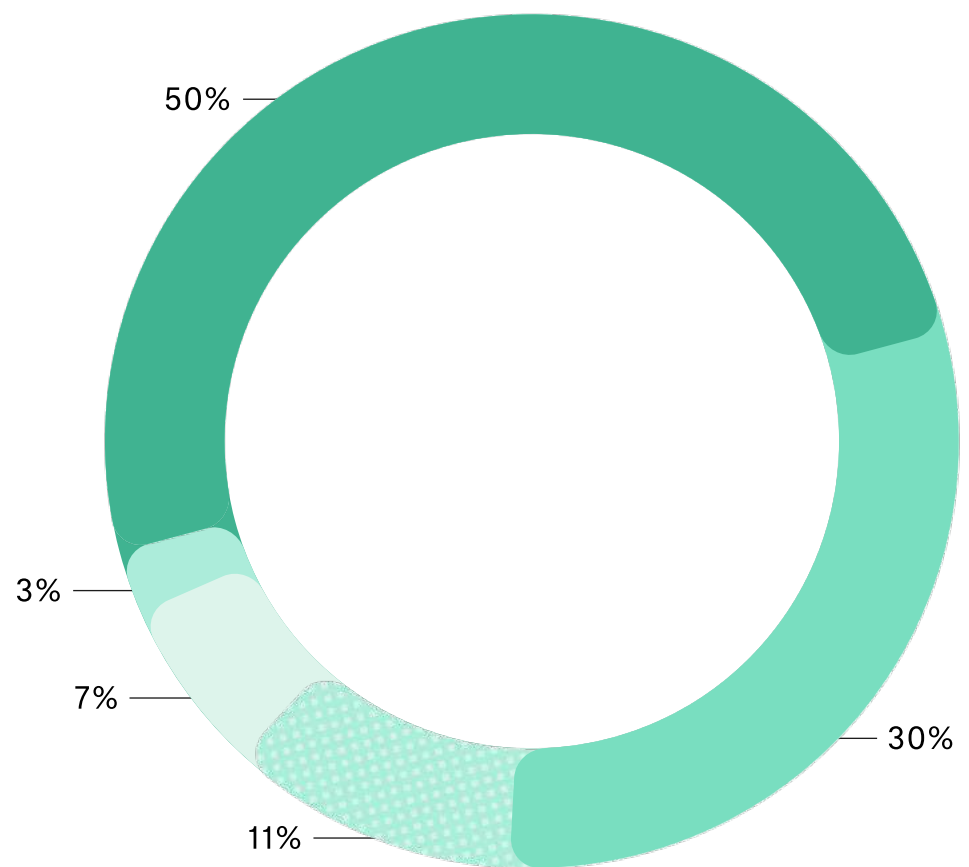
- UX/User/Product Researcher
- UX/UI/Product Designer
- Marketer
- Market Researcher
- Data Analyst
- Research Operations
- Product Manager
- Developer or Engineer





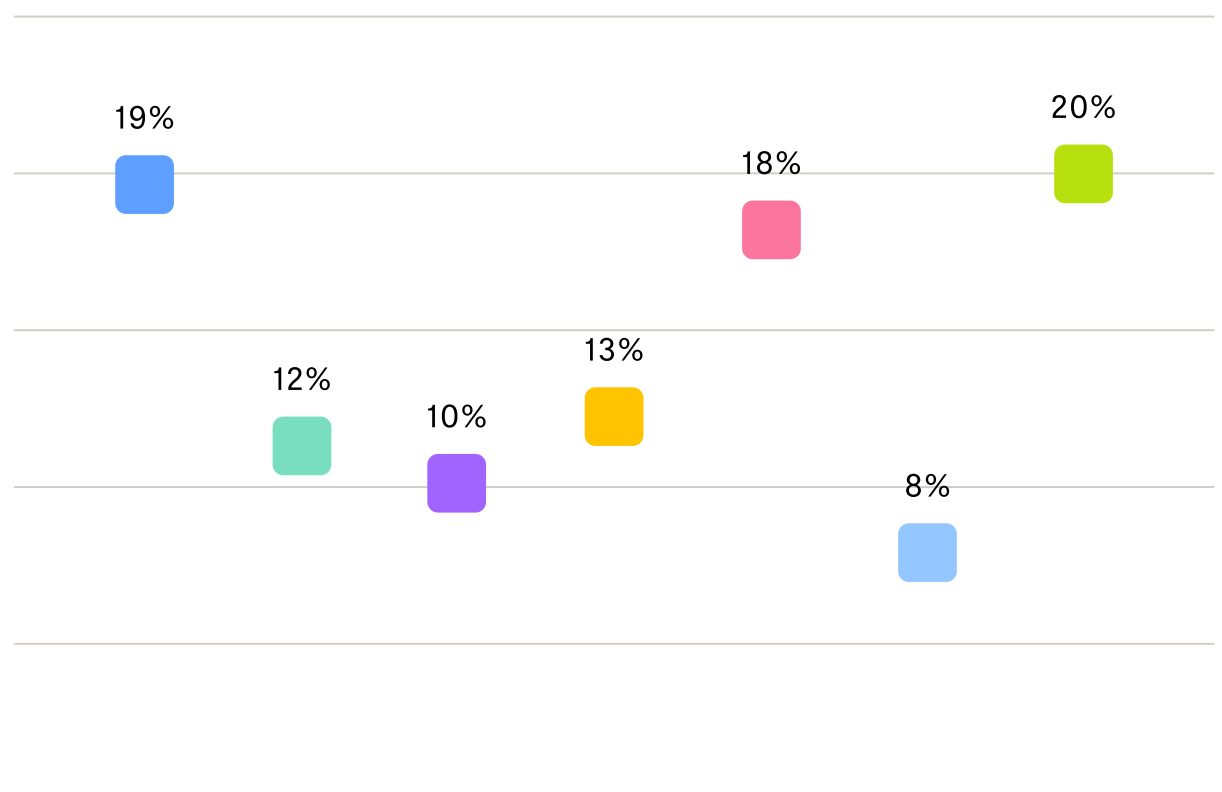
Which of the following most accurately describes your title?

- Individual Contributor
- Team Leader or Manager
- Director/Head of/VP
- Freelancer/Self-Employed
- CEO/C-Suite/Executive Management



How large is your organization?

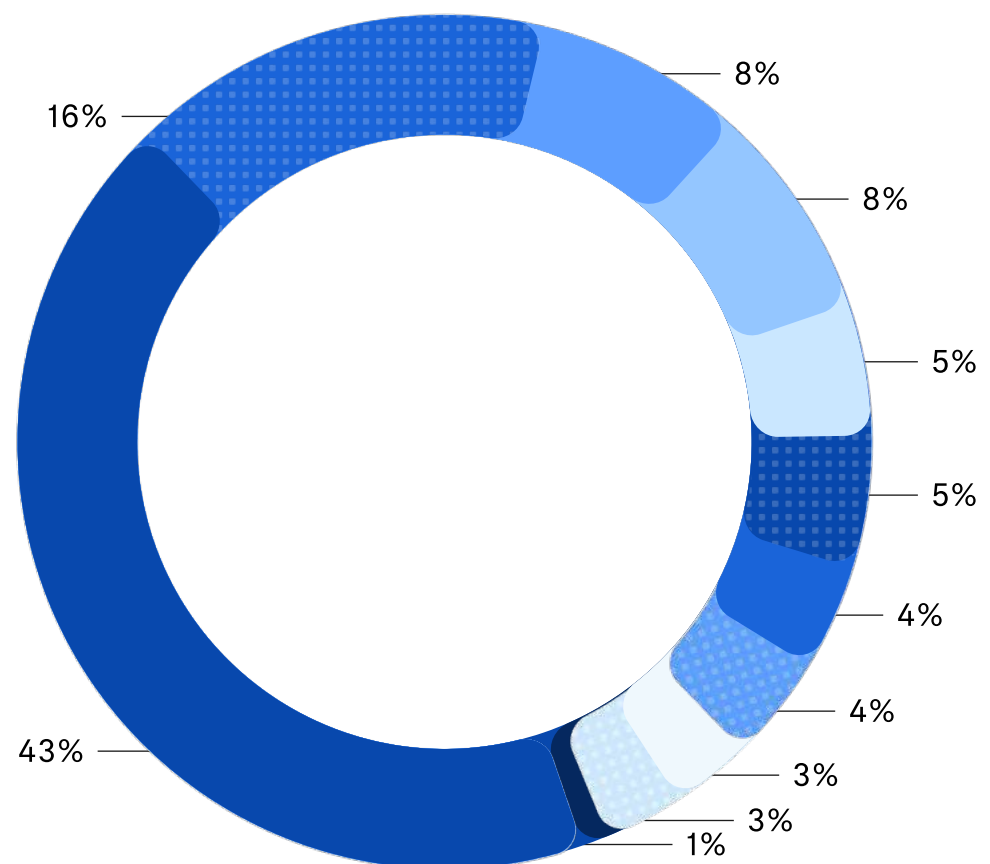
- 1-50 employees
- 51-200 employees
- 201-500 employees
- 501-1,000 employees
- 1,001-5,000 employees
- 5,001-10,000 employees
- 10,000+ employees





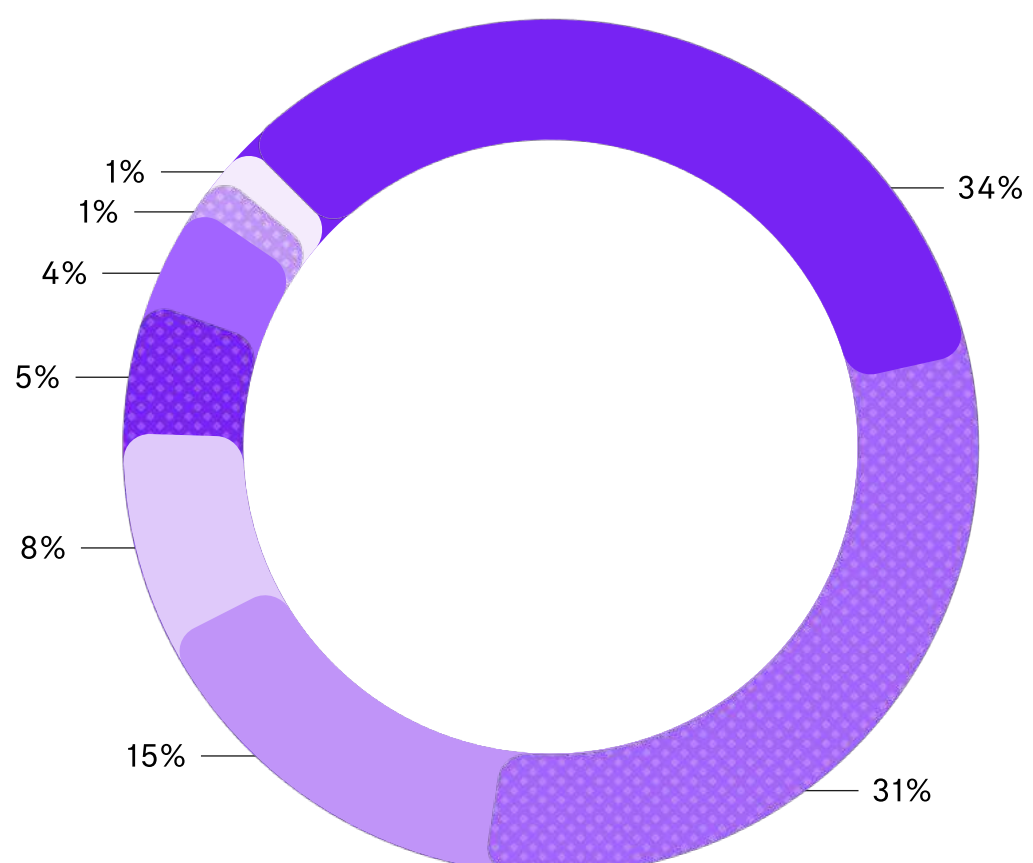
In which industry does your organization operate?

- Tech and software
- Financial services, banking, and insurance
- Education, government, and non-profit
- Retail, e-commerce, or sales
- Creative and media
- Manufacturing, construction, and real estate
- Business consultancy, management, and HR
- Healthcare
- Hospitality, food, and leisure travel
- Energy and utilities
- Other



In which region is your company based?

- Europe
- North America
- Asia
- Latin America
- Africa
- Entirely remote company
- Oceania
- Middle East





Maze empowers researchers to be change makers, turning customer insights into enduring competitive advantage. By bringing recruiting, testing, and analysis together, Maze helps organizations move from intuition to evidence, faster. From researchers to designers and PMs, anyone can run studies that answer any question and drive better decisions. Equipped with Maze's research-grade AI, teams can focus on what matters most: understanding people, uncovering insights, and shaping change with confidence.

Get started

[Request a demo →](#)

