



BAMM

AI in consumer insights

What clients really think (but rarely say)

BAMM Strategic Insights Agency
Quirks Chicago 2026

**Every manager in 2026
being forced to become
an AI expert**



The Agenda

Method & Sample

1. Year in Review: Unevenly Distributed Enthusiasm

2. Early Wins and Productive Fails

3. Tomorrow's Talent



01

Year in Review: Unevenly Distributed Enthusiasm



AI REPRESENTS A FOUNDATIONAL SHIFT BUT ADOPTION IS MIXED



*"Gen-AI is a foundational technology like electricity, it's a fool's errand to think of it as a cost-cutting (tool). When Edison was trying to power a light bulb, **people weren't saying, 'how does this save money?'**"*

Senior human insights leader



Exceptional
leadership

Who push and support
with consistency

Confident First Movers

Internal, evolving
AI constitutions

Regular collaboration
and meet-ups

**There is a
wide range of
companies in
varying states
of AI readiness**

Blind ambitions with no
end game

Relying on mid-levels to
“figure it out”

Laggards

Lazy enterprise platform
agreements


Hero cultures




INSIGHT PEOPLE ARE REMARKABLY **BULLISH** ABOUT THEIR AI SKILLS

I'm an elite user of AI  36%

I'm ahead of my peers but not yet ready to call myself an expert  37%

I'm using it regularly but frequently feel behind others  20%

I'm ahead of my peers but not yet ready to call myself an expert  6%

I'm using it regularly but frequently feel behind others  1%



Q: How do you feel about your current level of skill and experience when incorporating AI?



THERE IS STRONG PRESSURE FROM BOARDROOMS TO USE AI...

... but we aren't clear where we're going



64%

are feeling the uncertainty of their companies' direction

34%

We are in line with leadership expectations and have clear commercial and cultural goals

30%

We are in line with leadership expectations but **defining specific goals is proving tricky**

23%

We have work to do to understand how the leadership mandates will impact my team

10%

AI mandates are being thrust upon us. I don't think leaders have thought this through

3%

There are no leadership expectations on my department relating to AI usage

Q: AI mandates are rife, and expectations are high. How are you managing those expectations?





"There is a push from senior leadership to increase AI adoption, but sometimes it feels like we are using it just for the sake of using it. We should focus on clear use cases rather than using AI simply to say that we did."

Global Insights Director



“GO EXPERIMENT!” IS THE RESULTING MANDATE

A traditionally uncomfortable challenge in big companies

Mid-levels are tasked with defining success which is challenging for many in light of:

- ✓ **Everyday precision work** vs the open ended nature of experimentation
- ✓ Requires a **high level of AQ**
- ✓ Those left alone are reliant on **self teaching or agencies to help** them discover the right path

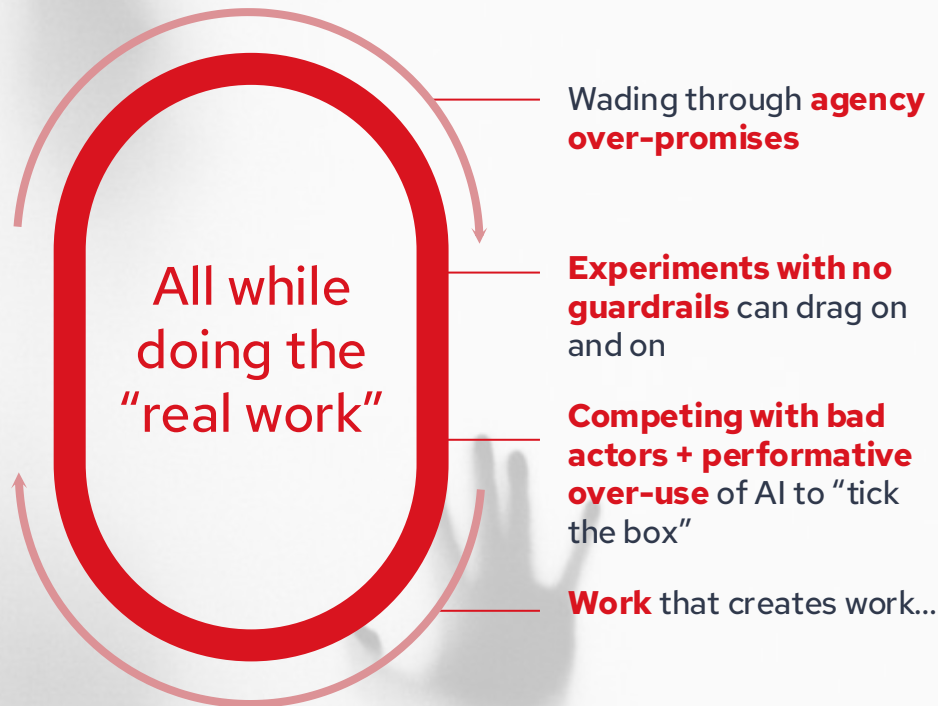
“All my experimental work is a side hustle”

“The speed (of AI) is very seductive (to leaders). We are all taking baby steps but the impatience in the org is there...”

“There's a mass experiment going on, in which we're being given access to a really wide range of AI tools ... every role has been encouraged to effectively transform their ways of working.”



**THESE
SUPER URGENT,
OPEN ENDED
"SIDE HUSTLES"
CREATE A
CYCLE OF
ANXIETY**



AT IT'S WORST, AI IS UNDERMINING THE CRAFT & INTEGRITY OF THE RESEARCH FUNCTION



Q. For moments when we perceive a threat from AI to our jobs, identify which aspects of AI may undermine market research professionals?



"I've seen things from different suppliers with AI generating their reports. And you're like, this statement doesn't make any sense, or it's completely illogical. But no one's there to check it."



*"I have people from all sorts of verticals trying to do my job by using AI. **People who have no idea how research works sending me a research plan that they got AI to generate. And none of them has been good.**"*



"AI makes it easy to deliver junior amateur work with very little effort. We're suddenly flooded with a lot of people selling snake oil, shiny toys that are not adding the 2%... and they're barely getting the 80% right"



02

Early Wins and Productive Fails

BEYOND GENERAL PRODUCTIVITY AND PROCESS EFFICIENCY, OUR CLIENTS ARE HITTING THESE RIGHT USE CASES WITH CONFIDENCE

- ✓ Leaders are creating **personal AI agents** to critique first drafts before reviewing
- ✓ Specific models to behave like **behavioral scientists** or **customer persona**
- ✓ Repositioning the role of synthetic consumers into **“narrowing scope”** or **adding value** to tracking
- ✓ Removing **drudgery** and **blank page paralysis**
- ✓ **Interactive** deliverables and **socialization** tools
- ✓ **Knowledge retrieval** and reports gathering dust
- ✓ **Supercharging synthesis** on massive datasets
- ✓ **Free up time**
- ✓ **Inject energy into new tasks**
- ✓ **Accelerate real-time understanding**
- ✓ **Learn quicker**
- ✓ **Make fewer unforced errors**
- ✓ **Ask new questions**
- ✓ **Spend more time getting closer to real people**

IMPACT: SENIOR LEADERS ARE MUCH MORE POSITIVE ABOUT AI IMPACTING RESEARCH QUALITY



C-suite and Directors seeing this most positively at **68%**, but this drops to **47%** for Manager level (who are doing the work!)

Q: Where do you see AI making the most impact on your current workflow?



THIS GAP IS MORE PRONOUNCED REGARDING PERCEIVED SKILL GROWTH

What is your current attitude towards developing your team's AI talent?

	Total	Juniors
It's improving their problem solving	56%	46%
Helping them get to better quality answers	54%	46%
It's improving how they handle basic tasks	47%	35%
Helping them be more responsive to stakeholders	42%	33%
It's improving their creative thinking	31%	25%
I'm wary of AI diminishing the quality of their work	28%	30%
It's improving their strategic thinking	23%	19%



"I'm seeing a lot of people, especially VPs, CMOs they're getting up on stage and talking to their teams, and they say, "automate everything, create agents, blah, blah, blah". But they haven't invested the time to actually understand what it means"



"CONFIRMATION BIAS" IS A LARGE PART OF SENIOR LEADERS' ACCEPTANCE OF AI

"How do you know if AI is working?"

"The results look **familiar**"

"It gave me **what I wanted**"

"But if it throws up **unexpected answers**, stakeholders think it's hallucinating"

If we're only trusting AI when it confirms what we think we know, then we're not uncovering insights, we're validating our own blind spots



WE'RE GETTING TO AVERAGE VERY QUICKLY. THE MODELS CAN GET US "GOOD ENOUGH"

But the industry is recognizing that AI now generates the generic baseline, and leaves the crucial competitive edge entirely up to human critical thinking



"The work was 80% right, but the last 20% was devastatingly bad"



GETTING TO THE TRUTH

The extra 2-5% is the competitive advantage

Everybody has access to the exact same answer. That's tablestakes

AI models get us to 70-80% of the answer very quickly



**The commodity is the tool.
The premium lies in knowing
what to do with it**



03

Tomorrow's Talent



AI EXACERBATES THE ISSUES INSIGHT TEAMS HAVE BEEN FEELING FOR YEARS

The Bull Argument

AI is a force multiplier for all
Distributing research skills
through agents which can
empower product managers
& drive overall efficiency

BUT

The burn of recent and persistent job cuts emotionally fortifies long felt feelings

“Marketers think they can do our jobs”: WebMD Effect

Organizational desire for speedy results with an unchecked interest in rigor & quality

Transfer of data, not. wisdom

OPTIMISM: AI IS NOT OUR “FIRST RODEO”

Unlike previous technologies, more mature insight professionals are seemingly more at ease with AI than younger people

Resilience is a key part of this generation of insight leaders

- 1. Curiosity is in the DNA**
- 2. The sharpest operators have survived...**
 - a. A brutal half decade of re-organization
 - b. Politically savvy
 - c. Expert reframers
- 3. Have dealt with waves of industry trends**
 - a. Performance marketing
 - b. DIY
 - c. Social media analytics



“It is new, and it’s not. I remember getting the internet... we’ve gotten over DIY tools... [AI] is fun, and I know what to expect...”



WE MUST LOOK OUT FOR OUR YOUNG TALENT WHO ARE LESS CONFIDENT IN THE FUTURE

I feel excited and will master AI to have a long career	57%	<p>+11pp for Directors</p> <p>-19pp Juniors</p>
I feel like it's too early to say and am feeling ambivalent	35%	
I believe I have time, but I need to work toward future proofing my career	25%	
I feel my job and future roles are at threat	34%	
I'm actively pursuing alternative career paths due to AI's threat	6%	



"One of the exciting things is that we're all learning new tools. I'm learning to make a prototype, make a design, things that I would never have done before"



"Having a versatile tool set in the age of AI gives me the explicit ability to last in this era"



"I have this open question of, like, will I be a UXR next year? Like, I don't know, maybe, maybe not"

Q8. There is much public discussion about the existential nature of AI as it impacts people's lives and jobs. Thinking about your future in market research, which of the following best encapsulates how you are thinking and feeling?



CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE INSIGHT WORKER

1

AI doesn't save money. It buys ambition. If you're only cutting costs, you're missing the point. The real ROI is doing work that was out-of-reach before.

2

When everyone has the 80%, the last 20% is everything. AI gives you the average answer, very quickly. Judgement, taste, courage, that's now the job.

3

We're automating the apprenticeship out of the industry. No grunt work = no gut instinct. And that's where real insight comes from.



HOW WE SHOULD REACT

Lean hard into the discomfort to expand your role

Any friction you feel when working with AI will help identify the new skill you need

- 1 AQ / Growth Mindset** - experimentation is a skill and a forever need
- 2 Be a leading voice in hybrid intelligence & AI**
 - Master return/risk/rigor conversations to manage AI vs non-AI research needs
 - Innovate your total workflow, and pick the right problems to solve to deliver meaningful results
- 3 Use AI to unlock legacy weaknesses** of insight people and use AI to master creative, strategic and storytelling skills



BAMM. SUPERHUMAN RESEARCHERS

Getting to the truth

BAMM'S HUMAN EXPERTISE

TECH

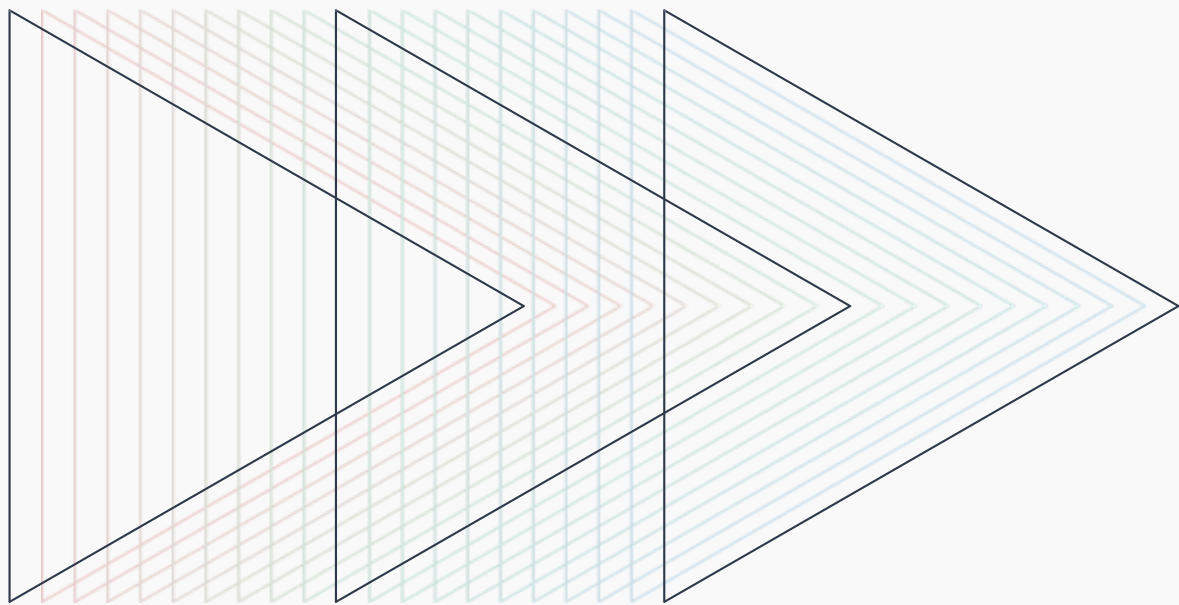
Heavier reliance on technology for
faster, agile briefs

BAMM'S HUMAN EXPERTISE

TECH

Greater human involvement for more
strategic, future-facing briefs





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