2026 AI in Professional Services Report

GenAI is here, agentic AI is coming — and business model shifts are next

Thomson Reuters Institute

Executive summary

It took about three years for generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) to become an integral part of professional services.

Think about how quick GenAI adoption has captured professionals' collective imagination, especially considering the history of business technologies. Cloud technologies emerged in the early 2000s but still aren't in use at some organizations. Email communications were banned in some corners because it was viewed as unsecure or even unethical. For some larger-scale technologies like document management systems or enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, three years barely covers a full implementation cycle.

Now, however, the GenAI technologies that first went public in November 2022 have fully taken root in critical professions such as legal, tax & accounting, corporate risk & fraud and government professionals, according to the fourth edition of the annual *AI in Professional Services Report* from the Thomson Reuters Institute (TRI). The data for this report was gathered from a survey of more than 1,500 members of those professions in more than two dozen countries, quizzing them about their AI usage and feelings about the business impact of AI, GenAI and agentic AI. (*For more on the demographics backing this research, see the Methodology section on page 23.*)

Many professionals are beginning to turn their attention towards the larger implications of AI.

In professions where almost right isn't good enough, more than half of professionals in those industries say they use publicly available GenAI tools like ChatGPT, while professional-grade and industry-specific GenAI tools are inching towards majority use. Most professionals say they believe GenAI will be a central part of their workflow by 2030, and they largely hold positive sentiments towards that change. And more innovation is ahead: Agentic AI promises perhaps the next step in technological innovation — and while current adoption remains in the early stages, many professionals say their organizations already are exploring or planning for agentic AI use cases.

With this initial adoption largely completed, however, many professionals are beginning to turn their attention towards the larger implications of AI, both personally, in relationships with outside stakeholders, and within their respective industry at large. Despite overall positive sentiments, more professionals say they also believe AI will disrupt current labor and business models, with increasing recognition that AI may cause momentous, industry-wide shifts. Many professionals say their organizations are still struggling to determine the return on investment (ROI) of AI tools, with the ability to gather metrics around AI still in its infancy. And while corporate clients want their outside firms to use AI, the lack of true incentives to force collaboration around AI usage means that firms and clients remain in the dark about each other's AI goals.

Now, as the professional services field enters 2026, TRI sees organizations turning towards more strategic thinking around AI. Chiefly, these organizations are determining how AI fits within wider professional workflows, leading organizational leaders to accelerate conversations about AI's value both internally and externally, and precipitate planning with AI as a central part of their professional services business strategy now and into the future.

The chance to be an AI early adopter has come and gone.

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Key findings

- **GenAI is being used by majority of professionals** — Over the past 12 months, GenAI has nearly doubled in both individual and organizational use. Four-in-ten respondents say their organizations are using GenAI, up from 22% last year — while only 19% say their organizations are not planning on using GenAI at all. Publicly available tools such as ChatGPT are still the most commonly used GenAI platform with more than 50% of respondents citing its use, although industry-specific and vertical tools and business enterprise tools (especially among corporate respondents) are growing in prominence.

40%

Of respondents say their orgs are using GenAI, up from 22% last year.

- **Workflows are shifting now and into the future** — As in previous years, the most common GenAI use cases are for internal work matters, such as research, drafting, and summarization. However, these uses are increasingly being baked into regular workflows. Among professionals using GenAI currently, for example, more than 80% report using the tools at least weekly. Most also expect this trend to continue, as 87% of professionals say they believe GenAI will be a central part of their workflow within the next five years.
- **Agentic AI is in its growth stage** — Only 15% of professionals say their organization uses agentic AI tools, but an additional 53% say their organizations are either in the planning or consideration phase. This portends wide-scale agentic AI growth in the coming years, as 77% of professionals say they expect it to be a central part of their workflow by 2030. While respondents report being less educated on agentic AI as compared to GenAI, a majority say they still feel it should be applied to regular work.
- **Broader industry questions are emerging** — The majority of professionals say they believe GenAI should be used for daily work, and more than half also report feeling excited or hopeful for AI's future in their profession. At the same time, however, a number of professionals say they anticipate wide-scale industry change, with a higher percentage in 2026 believing AI will be a threat to current jobs, billing structures, and the overall need for professionals.
- **AI's ROI is still hard to ascertain** — Despite the wide-scale use of AI across professional services, only 18% of respondents say their organizations collect metrics around ROI from AI. Of those, most metrics are internally focused, involving such areas as cost savings or employee usage, rather than business-focused metrics such as client satisfaction or amount of business generated. Additionally, 40% report not knowing whether their organization collects ROI metrics, suggesting many are using AI tools without any guidance as to what constitutes AI success.

18%

Of respondents say their orgs collect metrics around ROI from AI.

- **Disconnect between clients and their outside firms over AI persists** — Although roughly two-thirds of corporate respondents say they believe their outside firms should use AI, less than 20% are mandating its use through guidelines or RFPs. This is creating confusion in many outside firms, as 40% of professionals say they've been told both to *use* AI and *not to use* AI on client work, depending on the clients. Changing business models will force more of these conversations; although about three-quarters of respondents say they believe *firms* should take the initiative to begin these talks.

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AI usage today

If 2023 was the year of investigation and 2024 was the year of experimentation and initial personal use, then 2025 was the year that true widespread generative AI arrived to professional services organizations. Enterprise-wide usage nearly doubled across each of the legal, tax & accounting, risk & fraud, and government sectors, reaching close to half of all organizations represented in the survey. Personal use of GenAI tools also topped half of professionals for the first time; and for the most part, those currently using GenAI tools are doing so frequently. While most respondents say that AI is not yet central to their workflow, the expectation of the vast majority of professionals is that it will be within the next five years.

With this initial roll-out now well underway, professional services organizations are turning their attention towards AI's future. For many, this means beginning to explore the next wave of technological innovation, such as agentic AI tools that can automate the workflow process even more fully. Others are expanding their use cases of AI technology, as we see firms moving from more internally focused projects to beginning to incorporate AI into client-focused work.

The result is perhaps not a revolution, but certainly an *evolution* of how today's professionals work. AI has been brought along cautiously and with care, owing to the sensitive nature of white-collar work; but it is clear that AI use is growing by necessity, as professionals look to keep up with the pace of modern business.

"All other departments of a corporation develop and become more modern while the legal and finance departments are always stuck in the past. The demands for legal gets higher while the way we work is the same," said one Swedish corporate general counsel. "We cannot keep up with the modern-day corporations' demands unless we also develop and adapt our way of working."

The various shades of AI

Throughout the survey, we drew a distinction between traditional AI, GenAI and agentic AI in situations in which those terms arose. We provided the definitions and examples below:

- **Traditional AI/Machine Learning** — Traditional AI analyzes patterns and makes predictions, such as spam filters or credit scoring.
- **Generative AI** — GenAI creates new content based on user prompts, via publicly available platforms such as ChatGPT; and it can be used to write an email, create document summaries, and much more.
- **Agentic AI** — This latest iteration of AI can autonomously complete multi-step tasks; for example, as an AI system that independently researches regulations or laws, drafts a document, identifies pitfalls, and revises the document without step-by-step human guidance.

"We cannot keep up with the modern-day corporations' demands unless we also develop and adapt our way of working."

– Corporate general counsel, Sweden

Generative AI now pervasive

The tenets of Gartner's Hype Cycle, which predicts how new technologies are viewed by stakeholders and the general public, estimate that a new technology will often receive an abundance of initial interest amid promises of its transformational nature. Yet, those promises will fall into a trough of disillusionment as users realize the technology has limitations like any other tool. Finally, expectations will come to rest at an equilibrium when use cases become more readily defined.

For GenAI, the peak of the hype almost certainly occurred in late-2023 and into 2024, when the technology became a central tenet of nearly every major corporation's short-term and long-term planning. This was followed by disillusionment for some within professional services, as slower than expected rollouts and barriers to entry such as accuracy rates cooled expectations.

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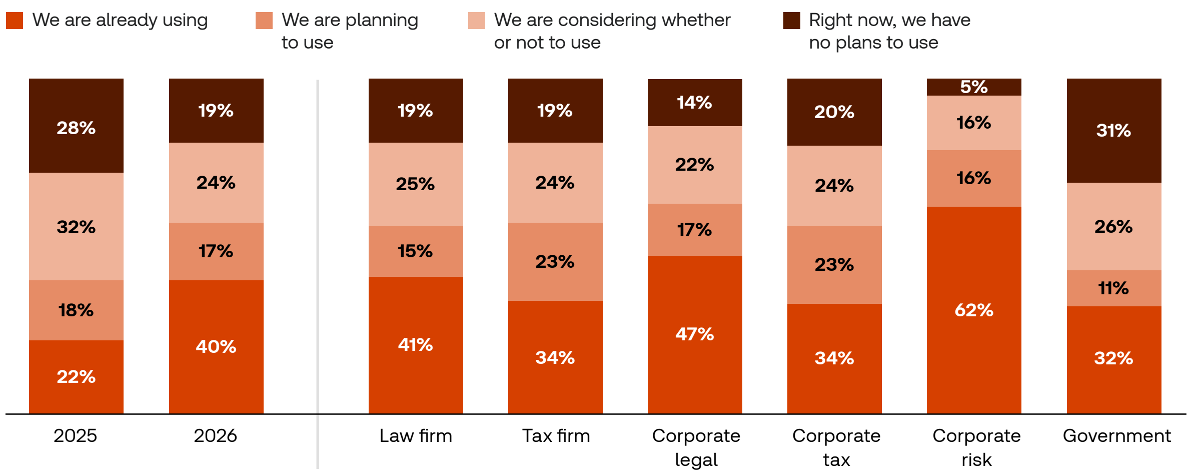
Looking at respondent data, however, it's clear that professional services organizations across all sectors are still moving ahead in adopting GenAI on a wide scale.

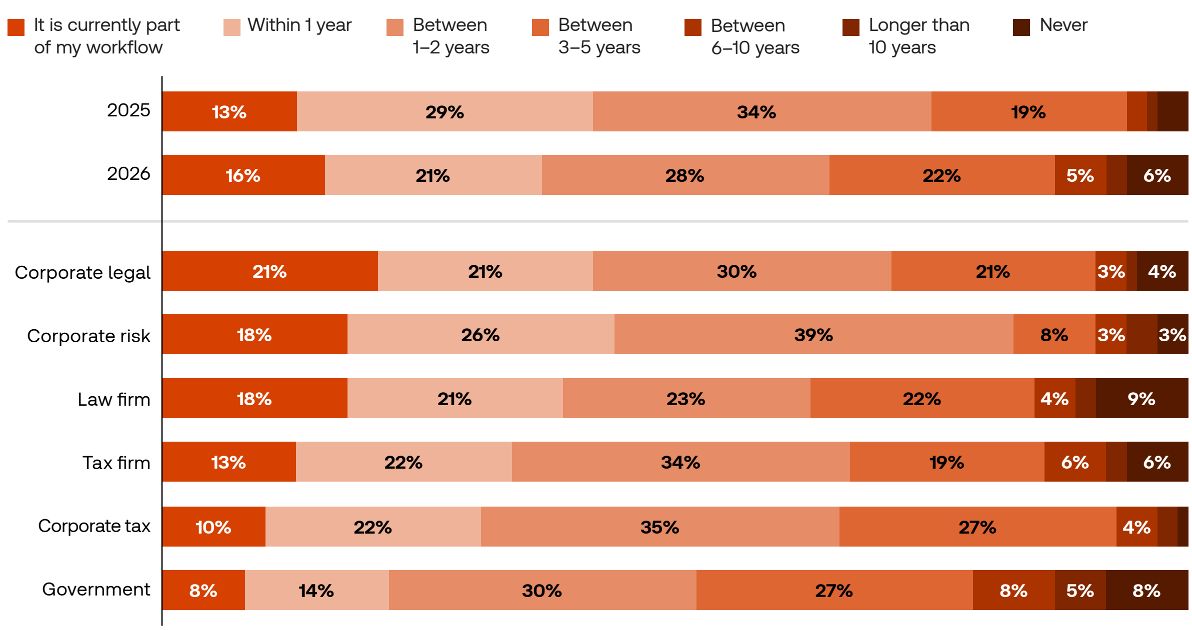
INFOGRAPHIC 1:

Organizational use of GenAI, now and in the future

Organizational GenAI usage, by organization type



Estimated time until GenAI is central to organization's workflow



Source: Thomson Reuters 2026

Indeed, those organizations that have not yet widely adopted GenAI truly are behind their peers, given that many organizations have already moved past initial use to now refine their GenAI strategy moving into 2026 and beyond. Even with some individual users potentially still within the trough of disillusionment, there is still, at an organization-wide level, an understanding that at least investigating GenAI use cases is increasingly a necessity for today's professional services businesses.

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"As I am in the early stage of my career, I often doubt whether I am interpreting information and case law judgements correctly, so I find AI very useful to confirm my understanding," responded one Australian law firm paralegal. "AI also helps me with getting started in tasks that I am unfamiliar with, so I am excited to continue to utilize it going forward."

Despite this rosy outlook, survey responses do also indicate that some organizations may be finding GenAI adoption a slower process than initially expected. Last year's survey noted that 29% of respondents said they believed GenAI will be a central part of their workflow within the next year; however, those saying GenAI is *currently* central to their workflow only rose three percentage points within the last year.

"I'm very bullish on the potential of AI, even though in our culture we seem to be in the 'trough of disillusionment.' AI is not a magic button, and it's not a tool to be left to its own devices," said one US corporate risk analyst. "But when it's integrated into everyday work and everyday workflows, there is still a substantial potential for transformation. The number one barrier we'll need to clear is the trust barrier — convincing employees that it can be used, it can provide value, and its responses are normally good and trustworthy."

The TR Institute's View:

The implementation timeline evolves

Now more than three years into GenAI's public lifecycle, the shine has begun to wear off the technology. In 2023 or 2024, it wouldn't be uncommon to hear the head of a corporate department or managing partner of a firm say: "We need AI now, however you can get it." But this mad rush has largely been replaced with a more thoughtful approach that's focused on the *problems* that GenAI can help fix rather than adopting technology for technology's sake alone.

That's a good thing. Separate TRI research from the *2025 Future of Professionals Report*[1] has found that organizations with a formal *AI strategy* are more than three times more likely to realize positive ROI from GenAI than those without a formal strategy. Even if it lengthens integration timelines slightly, approaching GenAI through a strategic lens that blends leadership, operations, and individual users greatly increases an organization's chance of AI success. The shift towards a longer timeline until GenAI is central to the organization does not represent a failure of the technology. Rather, it's increased recognition of the hard work it takes to ensure GenAI success.

On a personal level, today's professionals have a wide variety of GenAI tools at their disposal — and they're actively using many of them. More than half of professionals say they are using publicly available GenAI tools such as ChatGPT and Claude for work purposes, and nearly half are using enterprise business GenAI tools such as Microsoft Copilot.

Industry-specific tools also saw large growth within the past year, with usage rising 14 percentage points in 2026. Perhaps more notable, however, is that respondents see this category of tool growing in importance over the coming years, as an additional 42% say they are either planning or considering whether to use these tools. Compare that with publicly available tools that have seemed to already have reached their maximum influence. Indeed, a full one-quarter of respondents say they have no plans to use public tools.

1 *Future of Professionals Report*, Thomson Reuters Institute (June 26, 2025), available at www.thomsonreuters.com/en/c/future-of-professionals

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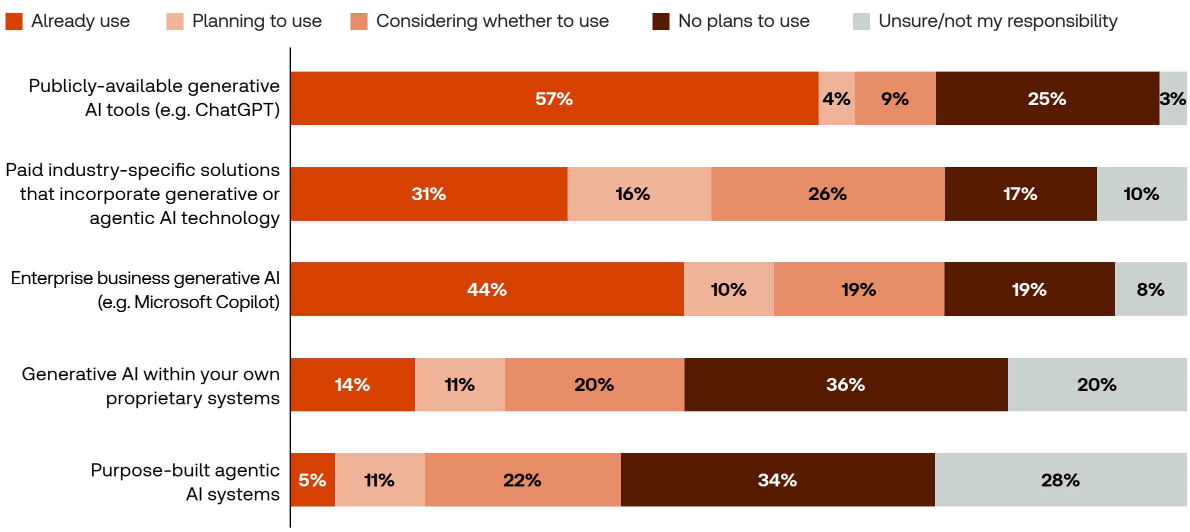
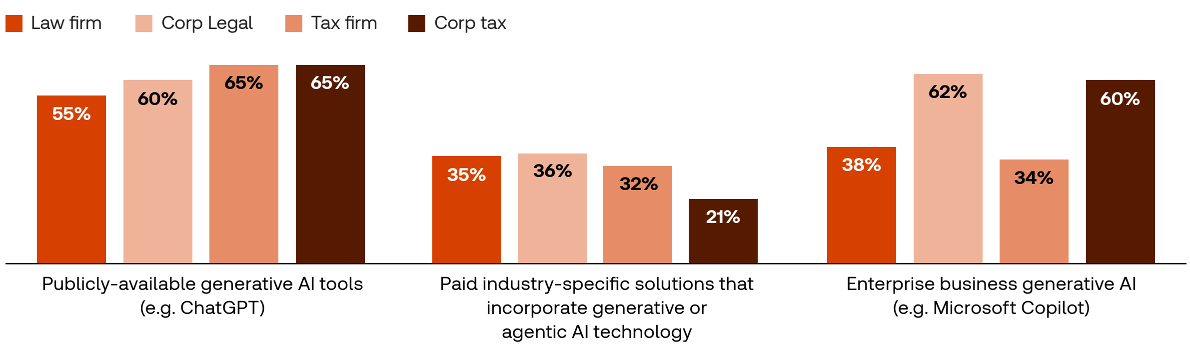
INFOGRAPHIC 2:
How professionals are using GenAI

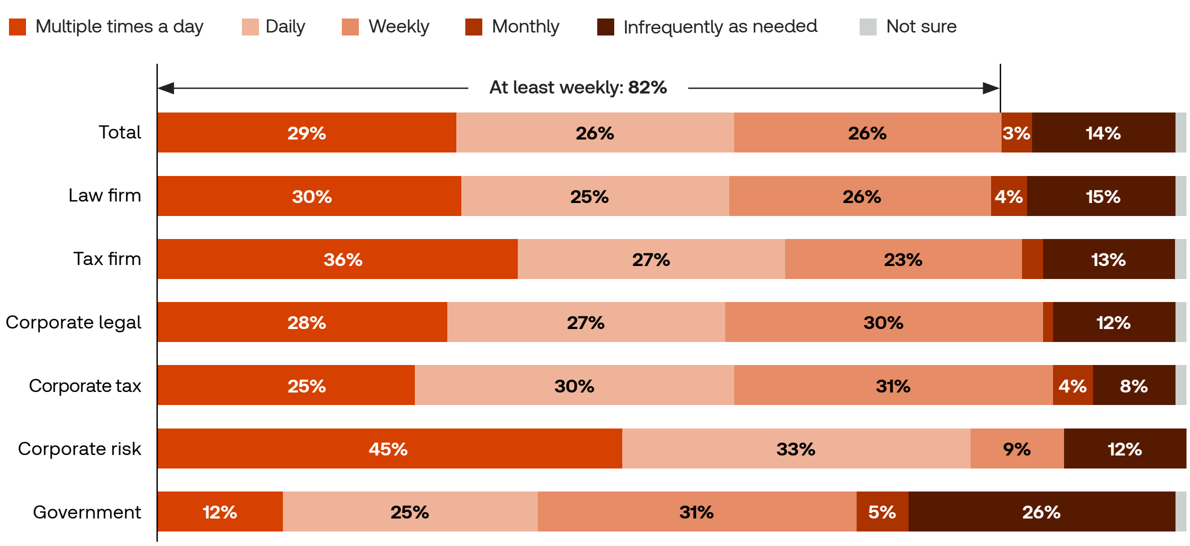
Individual professional GenAI usage



Current individual GenAI usage, by organization type



Frequency of GenAI usage among current users



Source: Thomson Reuters 2026

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Top generative AI use cases by industry

Legal		Tax & Accounting		Risk & Fraud	
1.	Legal research (80%)	1.	Tax research (69%)	1.	Document summarization (86%)
2.	Document review (74%)	2.	Document summarization (57%)	2.	Document review (74%)
3.	Document summarization (73%)	3.	Document review (55%)	3.	Risk assessment & reporting (71%)
4.	Brief or memo drafting (59%)	T-4	Accounting/bookkeeping (53%)	4.	Knowledge management (66%)
5.	Correspondence drafting (55%)	T-4	Tax advisory (53%)	5.	Correspondence drafting (63%)
6.	Contract drafting (49%)	T-4	Tax return preparation (53%)	6.	Extracting contract data (57%)

Source: Thomson Reuters 2026

Those currently using GenAI tools are finding they have utility. In fact, more than half of respondents using GenAI tools say they do so daily, and more than 80% report utilizing them at least weekly. Some respondents note that GenAI has already displaced long-standing technology applications as their go-to source for asking questions or drafting documents or correspondence.

"Because the use of generative AI is already freeing up time on low-value-added tasks that are resolved through chat, the analysis of situations, problems, or tasks with generative AI adds a different perspective to personal judgment," noted one Argentinian corporate tax vice president. "It also makes a greater amount of information readily available to everyone than was previously accessible through Google or Bing."

Many respondents note they have a desire to replace low-value tasks and see a wider variety of tasks that are suited to GenAI intervention. When asked about their regular GenAI use cases, responses focused on repeatable tasks such as research, document summarization and review, and memo or correspondence drafting. Professionals are also utilizing GenAI in a wide variety of ways — the top five use cases in each segment were noted by more than half of current GenAI users.

Agentic AI on the rise

While GenAI arrived on the professional services scene with a bang, other new technologies have not had as pronounced of an entry. This may be because of GenAI's accessibility — it answers queries in plain language, aims to write in the same way as humans, and looks to mimic human visuals and speech.

Agentic AI, meanwhile, works more in the shadows. These autonomous AI systems look to transform professional workflows, with the ability to independently plan, reason, decide, and execute complex tasks to achieve specific goals with minimal human oversight. Both GenAI and agentic AI look to offer efficiency, but in different ways — GenAI by aiding and mimicking human tasks through natural language, and agentic AI by replacing parts of those tasks entirely in service of a larger goal.

As a result, agentic AI has not seen the explosive growth that GenAI has within the past year. It has the potential to be just as transformative, however, and some respondents are looking ahead towards that potential future.

"Agentic AI models represent a great opportunity to automate work, improve accuracy, and do more with less," said one Australian corporate CFO. "There are risks of misuse or misunderstanding, but I feel like CFOs must have felt in the '60s when computer-based accounting was introduced."

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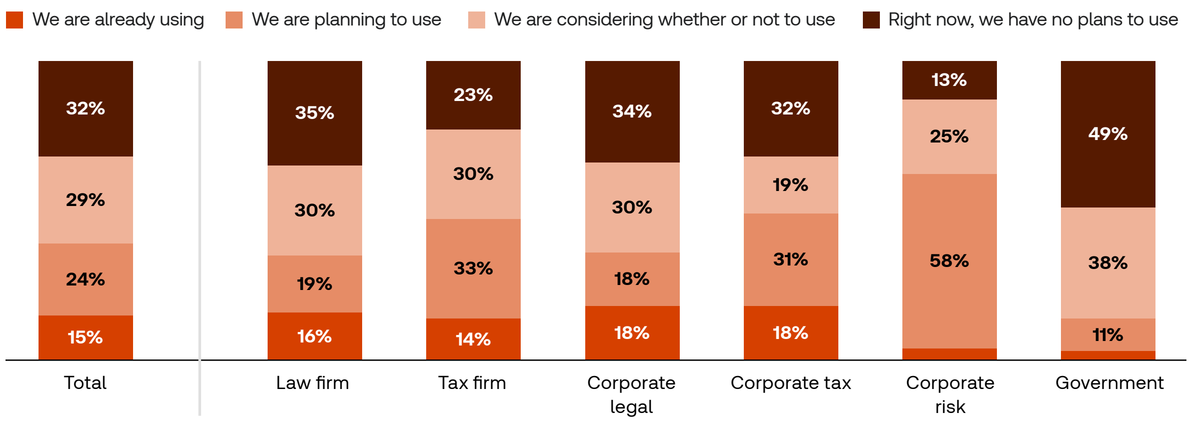
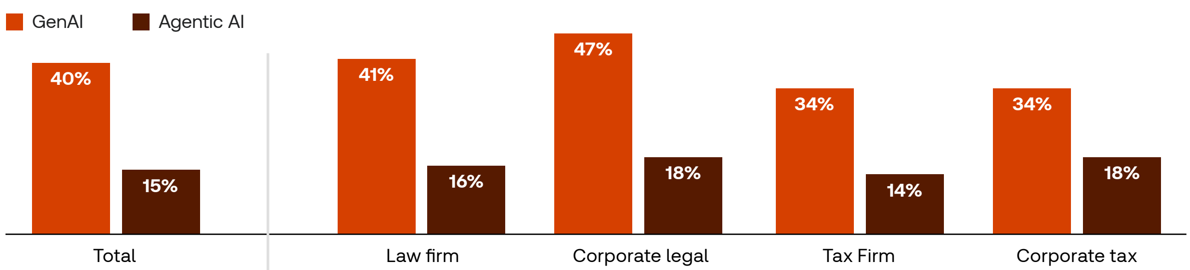
INFOGRAPHIC 3:

Agentic AI's use on the rise

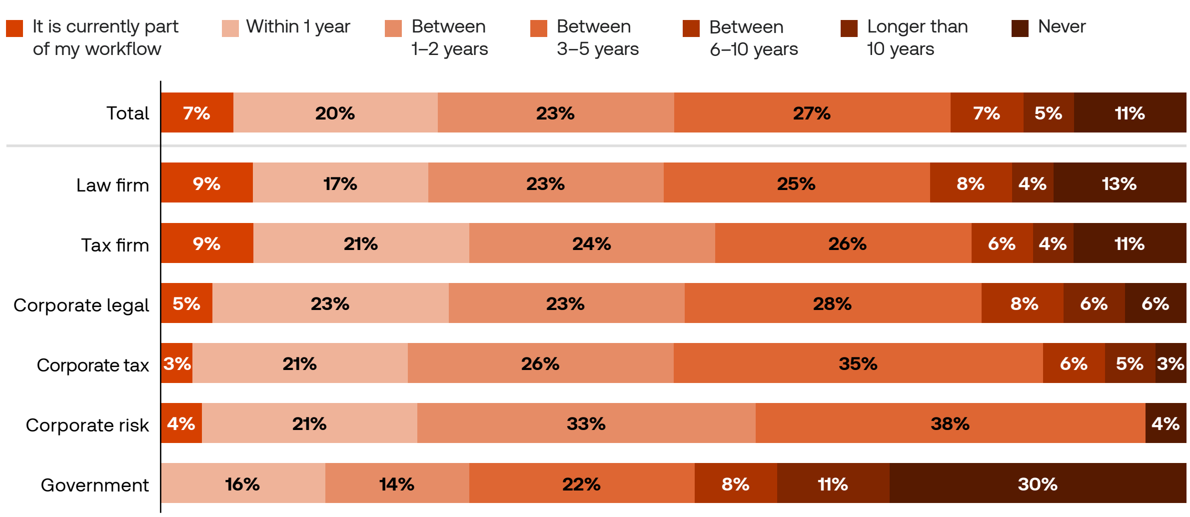
Organizational agentic AI usage, by organization type



Current usage comparison, GenAI v. Agentic AI



Estimated time until agentic AI is central to organization's workflow



Top agentic AI use cases (All professionals)

1. Process automation/ workflow management	2. Research	3. Writing	4. Data analysis and reporting	5. Risk assessment and reporting

Source: Thomson Reuters 2026

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Current agentic AI usage looks similar to where GenAI was in 2024, with fewer current users but with many organizations actively exploring whether the technology might be right for them. As one US tax firm director noted: “Accounting guidance is a slog to go through currently. There are hundreds of pages with a ton of information. Using AI to go through guidance will be tremendously useful.”

On the other hand, however, one US law firm attorney noted the reticence that many in professional services industries may feel with the high levels of automation inherent in agentic AI. Professionals want to feel like they’re in full control of their work, the attorney said. “Agentic AI, while exciting, to me removes oversight a step too far. I like the idea of prompting and reviewing a result,” the attorney added. “It is something else to have a machine have so much autonomy in the actual doing of a thing and potentially acting on my behalf without that very concrete review.”

The TR Institute’s View:

How much AI is too much?

What level of automation is a proper level of automation? That line will differ from professional to professional. A 2024 TRI survey asked professionals what line they felt would be too far when allowing AI autonomy. More than 95% said it would be ethical to trust AI to perform basic administrative tasks, while less than 10% would feel ethically comfortable allowing AI to represent clients in court or make final decisions on complex matters. There was variation in the middle, however, as only 17% of legal professionals felt comfortable with AI giving legal advice, while 65% of tax & accounting professionals felt comfortable with AI providing strategic tax planning recommendations.

As with many things concerning AI, there is no universal answer. Yet, it is important to have this conversation, especially as agentic AI promises to hold a greater potential for automating tasks and workflows than ever before. Clearly, human validated checkpoints are essential to any agentic AI-aided workflow, and before implementing any of these tools, organizations should solicit a wide variety of internal (and even client) viewpoints about what tasks are best to be automated, how often humans should be involved in decision-making, and what latitude agentic AI has to correct its own work.

As with GenAI, agentic AI is a tool, not a substitute for human reasoning. Agentic AI certainly brings the potential to reduce or eliminate repetitive work, but the ethical line always remains with the professionals themselves.

With agentic AI adoption just beginning within many organizations, it’s not surprising that many respondents view the technology as needing a longer runway until it’s central within professional workflows. Even with that said, however, many believe the potential efficiency gains of automating repetitive work may be too great to hold back for long. The goal is to have AI agents perform work that professionals themselves either don’t want to do or do not have time to perform.

“Agents can deliver legal services in my absence or as a supplement to the services I perform personally,” said one US corporate attorney. “They can also be automated to run around the clock and review broad datasets in moments, which is something that I could never do myself, and of course would never aspire to do.”

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AI perceptions and risks

With AI increasing in prominence in many organizations, many professionals have started to crystallize their views towards AI in their respective industries. Some view AI with excitement, seeing in it the potential to revolutionize industries and unlock near limitless opportunities. Others view AI with fear, holding strong objections due to accuracy concerns, employment worries, or even ethical grounds.

According to our research, however, most professionals fall somewhere in the middle: They understand that AI is simply a growing part of how work is done today and have a cautious, although generally hopeful view of a future that frees professionals up to perform more high-value work. As in our 2025 survey, there is a prevailing sentiment that AI *should* be a part of how professionals work today, although there is also recognition that its use will by necessity force changes both within their own organizations and in their industries at large.

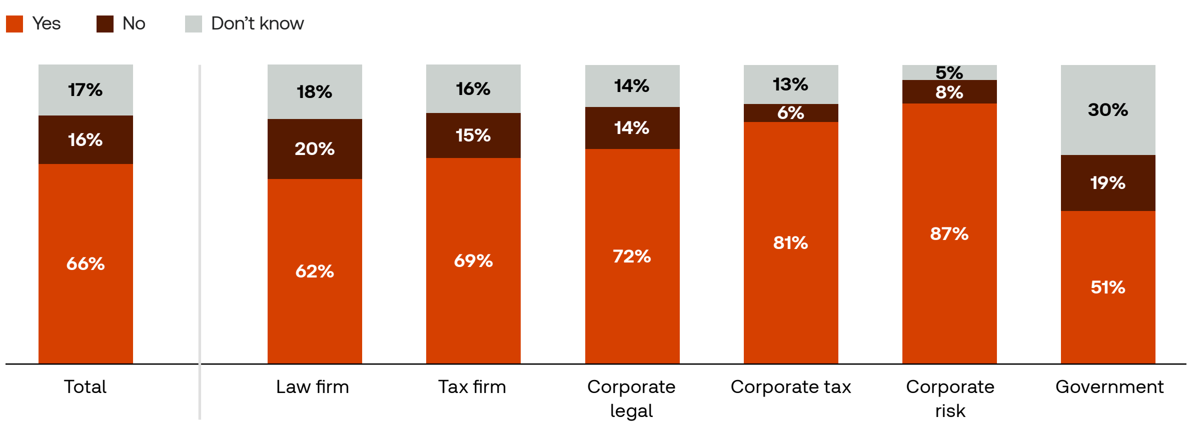
An AI approach to the future

By and large, professionals have been welcoming towards GenAI adoption since the technology was introduced in late-2022. When TRI has asked professionals whether GenAI should be applied to their work, more than half believe that it should, increasing from 54% of respondents in 2024 to 62% in 2025. Now, that figure stands at nearly two-thirds of all professionals.

INFOGRAPHIC 4:

Positive approach towards GenAI's future

Should GenAI be applied to your work, by organization type



Top reasons why professionals feel...

Gen AI should be applied to their work

1. Will assist in saving time/streamline processes	2. Increased efficiency/productivity	3. Assist with or automate routine tasks	4. Improve quality/accuracy of work	5. Cost savings/cost reduction

Gen AI should *not* be applied to their work

1. Reliability/accuracy concerns	2. Generality of output/lack of critical thinking	3. Need for human oversight/regulation	4. Lack of human touch/intuition	5. Ethical/legal/environmental concerns

Source: Thomson Reuters 2026

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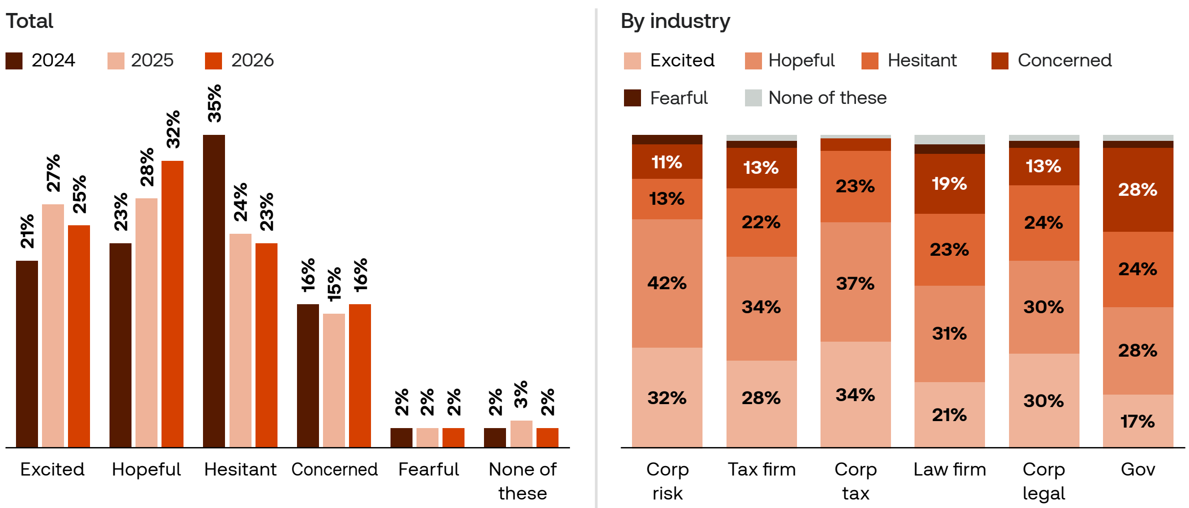
Sentiment on the future of GenAI



Source: Thomson Reuters 2026

The portion of respondents saying GenAI should be applied to their work has risen steadily over the years, across the board among all types of respondents, but particularly among those working within corporate environments. For outside professional services firms, this represents a potential conundrum because it means, by and large, that firms' clients are more bullish on using AI for legal and tax work than the firms themselves are. This may mean that outside firms will be pushed into using AI as a result of client service needs rather than by their own internal use cases. Although, as we explore later in the report, clients are largely not mandating their outside firms use these technologies — yet.

"My ideal legal department of the future is boldly digital-first, relentlessly innovative, and tightly woven into business priorities," said a corporate general counsel based in the United Arab Emirates. "The essential features for this would be robust automation for all repetitive work, advanced analytics and AI integration for proactive, strategic insight — plus transparent cross-functional collaboration."

Indeed, the top reasons why professionals say they feel AI should or should not be applied to their work remain largely consistent year-over-year, with some slight variation. By and large, those who support GenAI being used for professional work largely point to saving time and increased productivity on routine tasks. Among those who feel the opposite, however, worries over reliability and accuracy stands out as the primary reasons.

"My ideal legal department of the future is boldly digital-first, relentlessly innovative, and tightly woven into business priorities."

– Corporate general counsel, UAE

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The TR Institute's View:

Finding GenAI's best fit

The term *hallucination* has become very common when discussing GenAI, but it also may be a bit of a misnomer. A GenAI tool never intends to provide an incorrect answer; rather, it provides an answer that is believes is correct for the context it is given, whether that context is in the form of a prompt, its underlying data, or previous learnings from a conversation. It is the human interpretation of the answer that determines whether the tool's output fits the professional's needs, thus determining whether GenAI is *accurate* in addressing those needs.

GenAI will never be able to anticipate 100% of human needs, just as a law firm associate will never be able to anticipate 100% of what a partner wants. However, the goal should not be a 100% *accurate* output; rather, it should be how well the output facilitates getting to 100% success more quickly and efficiently. That means finding the proper mix of human and technology to facilitate the contextually correct answer. For most professionals, that means not eschewing technology entirely, but instead finding how to verify technology's output in a simple manner. Hallucinations are not a problem on their own — forgetting that AI is just one tool to get to the correct answer is the true issue.

With this positive view towards GenAI work in mind, it's perhaps no surprise that most professionals still feel largely positive overall about GenAI's future within professional services. Similar to 2025, when asked which emotion they most closely associate with GenAI's future — *excited, hopeful, hesitant, concerned*, or *fearful* — more than half of respondents selected the positive *excited* and *hopeful* emotions, while less than 20% say they are either *concerned* or *fearful*.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who expressed positive emotions towards GenAI pointed largely to the positive benefits of time savings, efficiency, and its ability to assist with routine tasks. More respondents this year, however, also pointed to GenAI as an opportunity to bring new opportunities or growth, demonstrating that some organizations are beginning to approach GenAI from a more sophisticated and strategic perspective. This is a crucial development, as organizations begin to explore how GenAI can add value to organizations rather than simple lower costs.

"Working in a lean tax department, efficiency and accuracy are critical," said one US-based corporate tax manager. "Leveraging AI has helped me upskill quickly, make faster, more informed decisions, and ultimately strengthened my credibility within the team."

Among those respondents with negative sentiments, concerns around accuracy and misinformation were prevalent. "While it could be helpful, it sometimes gives answers that are incomplete, partially accurate, or entirely incorrect," said one US corporate CFO. "If clients are going to rely on it as 100% accurate, it could create more headaches than benefits."

A number of respondents say they also remain worried about over-reliance on AI processes and AI replacing human reasoning. More than simply fear of the unknown, these worries extend to those who know what GenAI tools can do but are worried about their efficacy or overall impact. "Without human interaction, how do we know that tax return or other processes are good the way they should go?" asked a US tax firm president. "AI is great to catch abnormalities, but if you're doing something a certain way for a reason, will it know that?"

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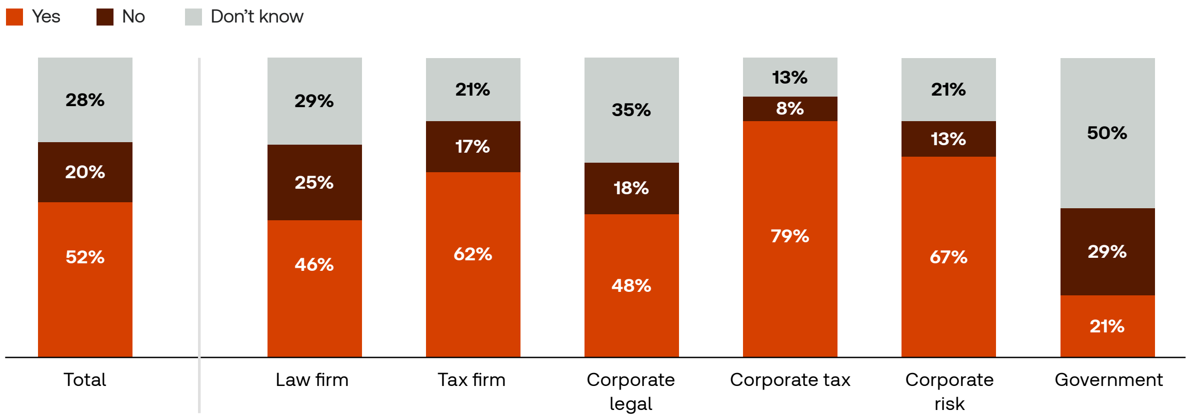
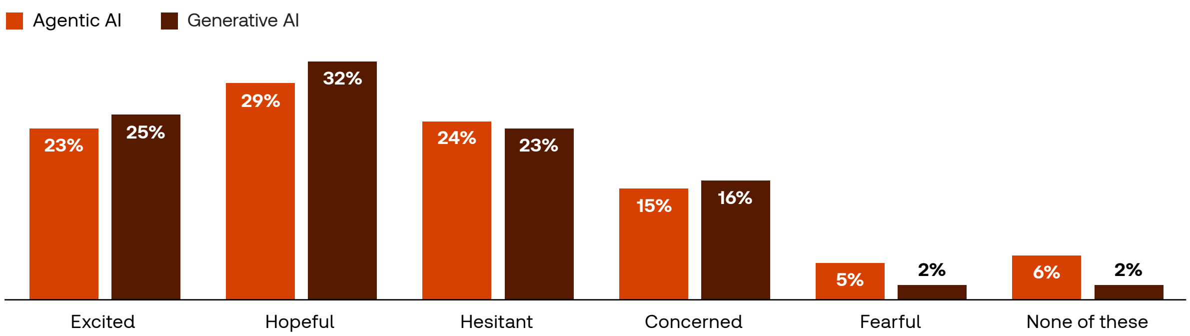
INFOGRAPHIC 5:

Cautiously embracing agentic AI

Should agentic AI be applied to your work, by organization type



Sentiment on the future of agentic AI v. GenAI



Source: Thomson Reuters 2026

Compared with GenAI, professionals may feel slightly more cautious about agentic AI, but overall are reacting positively. This is particularly true in the corporate world, especially among corporate tax departments, which exhibit higher than average rates of agentic AI adoption.

Indeed, some respondents say they see agentic AI as a technology that may truly move then needle. As one New Zealand corporate associate GC suggested, calling agentic AI “the game changer, or at least, the next in a line of game changers. It is what will take AI beyond being a sophisticated Google search.”

As noted, however, many professionals voice some confusion about the ways in which agentic AI is different from GenAI and also how agentic AI will be applied practically in their own organizations. When asked why agentic AI should or should not be applied to their work, some professionals conflated GenAI and agentic AI, speaking to common GenAI barriers like *hallucinations* in their explanations.

“People don't really understand what agentic systems mean and don't have realistic expectations for what they can accomplish,” said one US corporate risk analyst. “I'm very bullish on the idea of agentic-like workflows, but very hesitant about autonomous systems because their reliability for more than basic functions hasn't yet been proven at scale. Accordingly, I'm also nervous that some [users] will choose to apply them for purposes that [agentic AI's] capabilities can't match.”

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Still others connected agentic AI's autonomy as another step of large-scale changes in professional services — changes, in fact, that some view warily. "Have you ever seen the Matrix?" asked one US law firm associate. "Also, this job is my livelihood — while I don't want to work, how else would I gain an income?"

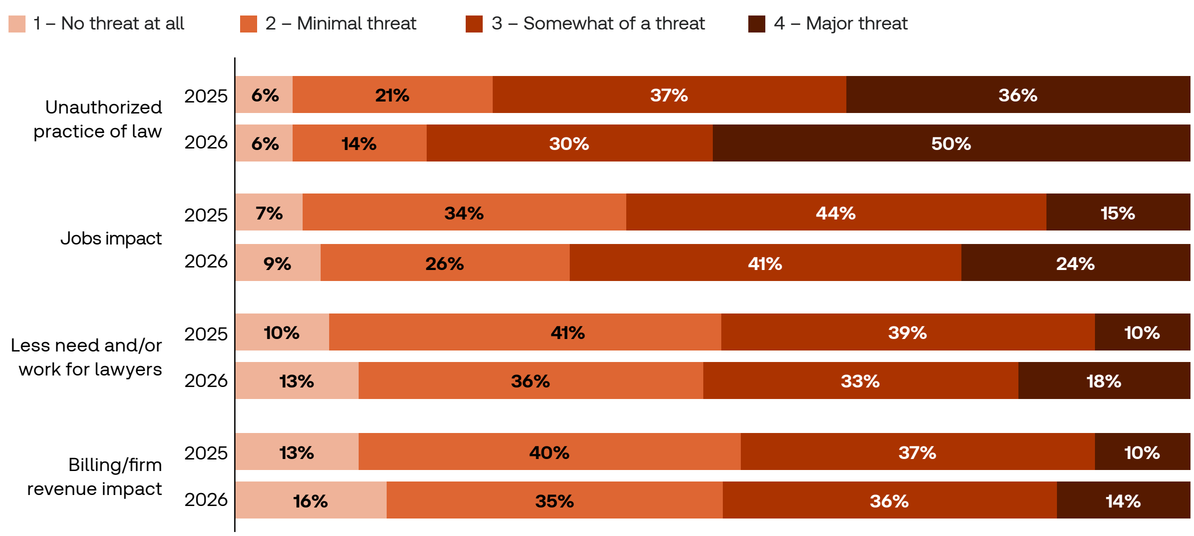
A changing profession

Indeed, trepidation about what the future may hold underpinned many responses to our survey. While there is general hopefulness about AI's capabilities and an understanding that it is the way that work will be conducted in the future, there also remains increased recognition that the ripples created by AI could expand into larger, industry-level tectonic shifts.

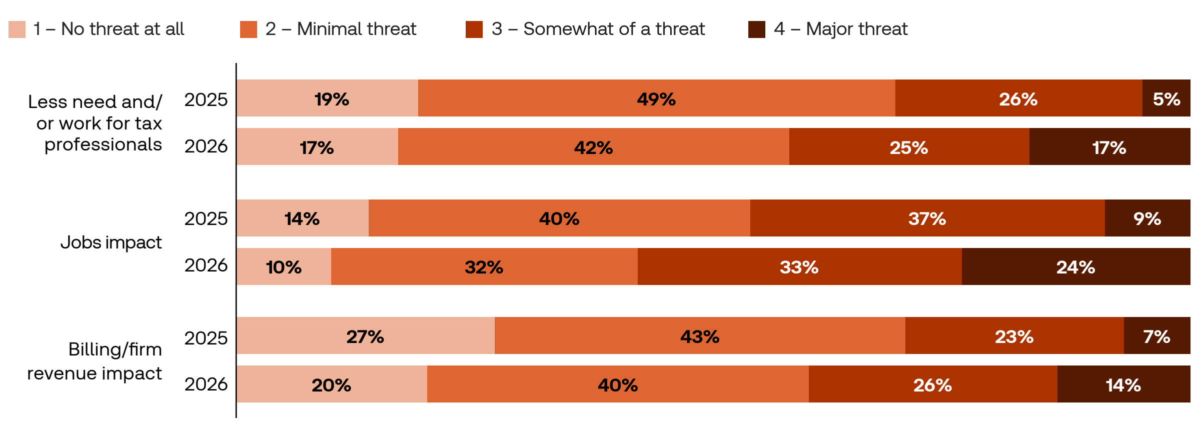
INFOGRAPHIC 6:

An uncertain industry-wide impact

Legal professional views on AI's impact on profession



Tax & accounting professional views on AI's impact on profession



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Some respondents, for instance, worried about big-picture impacts on how the legal profession at large may change. As an Australian law firm attorney explained: “I think AI will provide better access to justice for many people; however, it is important that safeguards are built into these systems to avoid laypeople receiving inaccurate legal advice. We have received letters from self-represented opposing parties which have clearly been AI-generated and contain copious errors. This ends up costing our client more as they require our assistance to formulate complex responses to each of the points raised.”

Other respondents were understandably more focused on the immediate impact to their own careers. A few respondents likened the AI impact to either *The Terminator* or *The Matrix* movies. “It’s going to render me, a research attorney, redundant,” said one US law firm partner. “And once the programming becomes ‘self-aware’ it might send out terminators to eliminate the competition — *i.e.*, me.”

The TR Institute’s View:

Winning the AI-enabled future

While TRI does not ascribe to the idea that we’re now living in a *Terminator* or *Matrix* sequel, it would be foolish to assume that professional services business models do not need to change with this emerging technology. Advanced AI capabilities mean that work that previously took hours can now be done in minutes. And for business models such as law firms that still largely depend on hourly-based billing, this could mean an existential threat to how they make money — and, of course, it should be treated as such.

As the saying goes, the best time to start creating a plan for a potential disaster scenario was yesterday, but the second-best time is today. The winners in an AI-enabled future will be the professionals and their organizations that have the strategic clarity to determine how they’re going to provide services in a way that uses technology to complement and augment professional expertise, all while protecting themselves and their organizations from risk.

This will require deep thinking on the part of professionals about the type of work they and their organization do, as well as *how* that work gets done. Do we need a time audit to determine how long certain tasks take, thus estimating the risk of automation? Are there skills I should develop to make sure I’m not at risk? And (*the sometimes-ignored question*), who should I talk to both internally and externally about how AI may impact our relationship?

In this self-reflexive environment, a little planning can go a long way, particularly if, as more people expect, massive change could be on the horizon.

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Business impact of AI

If 2024 was the year of initial AI implementation, and 2025 was the year of expansion, then 2026 promises to be the year of attempting to answer these overlying business questions. However, in a rapidly developing space such as AI in professional services, there are no simple answers.

Some of that uncertainty surrounding how to best leverage AI in professional services is simply a matter of timing: Not all professionals or organizations adopt AI at the same rate. While some organizations already are adapting their business models, others are still at the edge of the pool, wondering whether to jump into the deep end of AI at all. This means uniform change among professional services industries will happen in fits and starts, which makes stating grand claims about the impact of AI nearly impossible.

On the other hand, however, the business impact of AI is also hard to ascertain due to many organizations' own decision-making, particularly around two areas that are critical to business: measurement and communication. Because AI does not in many cases provide a neat and tidy ROI, a number of organizations simply are not collecting any metrics around their AI use at all. Meanwhile, neither side of the firm/client relationship seems eager to initiate conversations around AI, creating a dynamic in which clients want their outside firms to use AI, but largely have no indication whether they are or not.

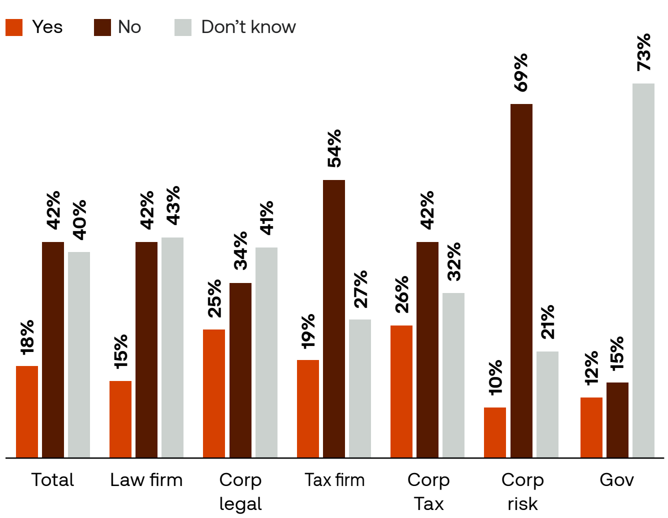
Missing measurement

As professional services organizations look to expand their AI usage, naturally the question turns to what it will mean for the overall business. Those organizations that adopted GenAI early are now looking towards their early returns to determine how it has impacted their professionals. Late adopters, meanwhile, are hoping to take advantage of a more knowledgeable market to more accurately estimate those business impacts *before* implementation. In both cases, however, a lack of overall metrics may hinder organizations' insight into AI's overall business impact.

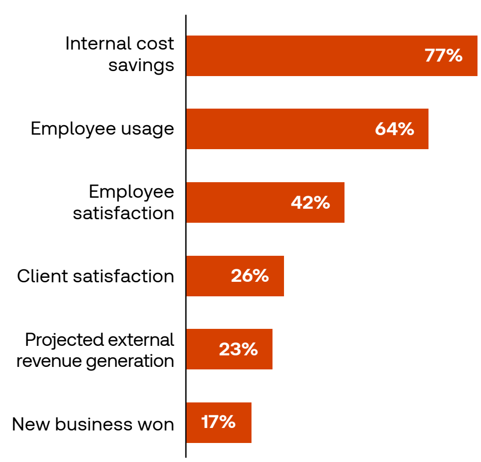
INFOGRAPHIC 7:

Little measurement of AI's ROI

Is your organization measuring the ROI of AI tools?



If measuring ROI of AI, what metrics are you using?



Source: Thomson Reuters 2026

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Somewhat worrisome, 82% of all respondents say their organizations are either not collecting ROI metrics around AI usage or they are unsure about whether their organizations are collecting such metrics, with professionals in the legal and government sectors most unsure about how AI use is measured within their organizations.

In many cases, respondents may be end-users of the technology and are not responsible for AI business decisions, meaning that ROI is not something they are actively monitoring. However, even end-users should be aware of the organization's overall goals for AI. The large proportion of respondents who say they don't know about AI metrics also likely have little guidance into how their organizations measure AI success, which may mean their own AI usage is largely less strategic — and perhaps unguided at all.

The *operational* impact of AI continues to be largely divorced from the *business* impact of AI.

Further, even those respondents that say their organizations *do* collect AI ROI data report they only collect rudimentary metrics, such as internally focused metrics around cost savings, employee usage, and employee satisfaction. Not surprisingly, these metrics remain paramount, likely because these are easier for any organization to measure. Few organizations, however, are collecting externally focused metrics such as client satisfaction, projected revenue generation, and new business won from AI implementations, according to respondents. This means that the *operational* impact of AI continues to be largely divorced from the *business* impact of AI.

The TR Institute's View:

A new data gameplan

While building a data metrics collection plan may seem like an obvious fix for many professional services organizations, the actual implementation of such a plan may be more difficult than it seems. This data often lives in disparate systems, such as document management repositories, customer relationship management systems, IT and help desk tickets, and even executive email folders. Workflow and knowledge management tools can help, but given that many professionals are being asked to move ever quicker, some may find it tough to justify the time and investment needed to create a metrics program that actually works. And the larger the organization, the more complex the data problems become.

To get the most out of AI tools, however, investing in these metrics should be thought of as a necessity. Adopting AI for innovation's sake no longer works in 2026; both internal and external stakeholders expect AI implementation to be targeted, focused on true work issues, and above all else, beneficial to the organization's overall strategic goals. The only way organizations can accomplish this goal is by fully understanding where those barriers to true innovation lie. This means developing data collection capabilities that capture both internal and external feedback, with an eye towards improving what actually needs to be fixed within the organization.

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That is not to say that organizations are not taking clients into account when implementing AI. While the most forward-looking organizations are measuring ROI's impact on business initiatives, they also are tying AI into the organization's strategic goals at large. If a law firm wishes to bolster a certain practice area, for instance, a leading AI firm can measure how well AI is generating business development leads compared with the baseline that existed before AI's implementation. This not only creates a metric that can be measured, but it draws a direct line to the organization's ultimate business goals.

Unfortunately, few organizations are at this point. And part of the reason for that may be that many professional services organizations are reluctant to talk with their clients about their AI use.

Beginning the conversation

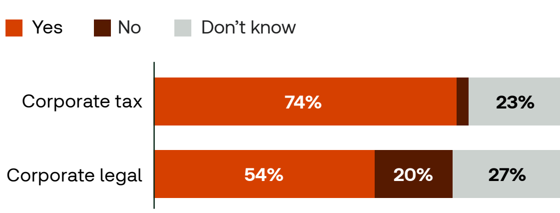
Looking more narrowly at the relationship between law firms and corporate legal departments, as well as between tax & accounting firms and corporate tax departments, reveals a gap between desires and outcomes. Many corporate clients want their outside firms to be using AI on their matters; but firms and their clients remain unaligned on how that AI usage should occur, with firms receiving mixed messages in guidelines and RFPs, and many clients expressing that firms should be initiating the conversation around AI use.

As in past years even before the explosion of AI, enabling functions within corporations have been increasingly tasked to do more with less. Other TRI reports on corporate tax and corporate legal departments reveal that budgets are tightening, and many department leaders feel under-resourced. Thus, it's not much of a surprise that these corporate professionals want their outside partners to be using AI in order to keep down costs and provide efficiencies in the client work these outside firms do.

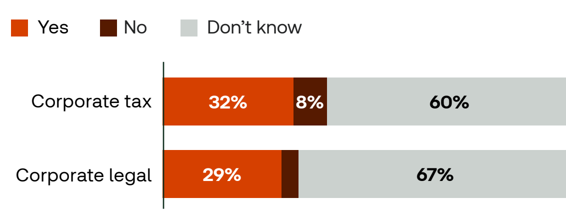
INFOGRAPHIC 8:

Clients, firms remain unaligned on AI usage

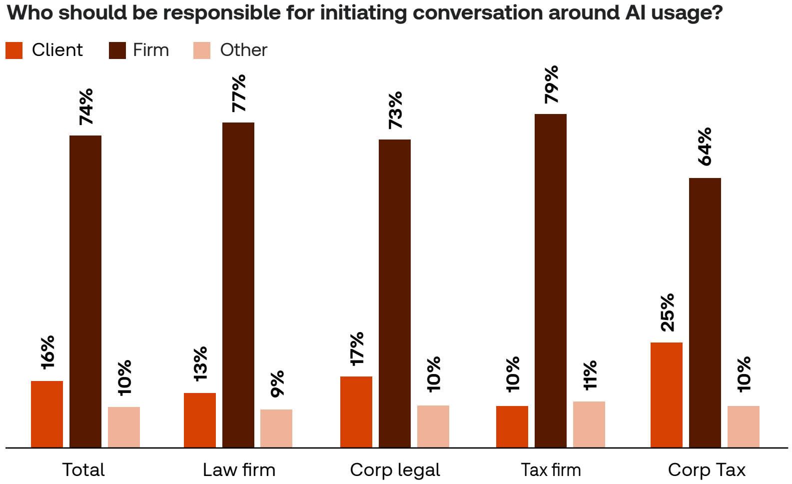
Client views whether AI should be used by their firms



Client awareness of AI usage in outside firm work product



Who should be responsible for initiating conversation around AI usage?



Source: Thomson Reuters 2026

The most common themes among those who selected 'Other' were:

- **Both/Either** - Respondents believe both client and firm should share responsibility for initiating AI discussions
- **Context-dependent** - The appropriate party depends on the specific matter, project scope, or relationship dynamics
- **N/A / Don't know** - Uncertain or no clear opinion on who should lead
- **No discussion needed** - AI tool usage doesn't require formal discussion
- **Should Not Use AI** - Opposition to AI tool usage in general

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In particular, corporate tax professionals say they overwhelmingly believe that GenAI should be applied to outside tax firms' work, as only 3% said GenAI should *not* be applied to client work. Particularly in a tax world that has not only budgetary concerns but issues attracting personnel, AI technology represents a potential panacea.

However, many corporate departments are treating AI as a *nice-to-have*, rather than mandating its use. In general, these AI-centric conversations remain in their early stages, more interested in gauging possibilities than directing usage. "We ask, 'Do you use it?' and they say, 'Yes, no, well sometimes… we don't know,'" says one UK-based corporate tax managing director. "People are lax currently about data management, so [they] only use it sporadically. They're awaiting best use cases for wider rollout, I think."

For law and tax firms, however, this can quickly create an untenable situation. This means very little standardization across their roster of clients in terms of how AI should be used, with most of the direction coming in the form of *asks*. In fact, roughly two-fifths of law firm and tax firm respondents say they have received conflicting reports from different clients on whether to use AI on external projects.

Pair this with the fact that most AI projects on both the firm and client sides tend to be internally focused, and neither side seems particularly aware of how the other side is approaching AI. One US corporate chief legal officer (CLO) said that their team aims to have frank discussions with outside firms about AI but often finds that firms are not willing to give candor in their responses.

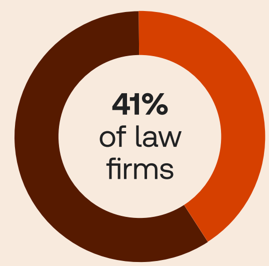
"Firms are reluctant — they claim it would compromise quality and fidelity. I think they are threatened by it," the CLO said. "The quality still needs to be checked, and the human beings should still be responsible for the quality just as any junior associate work would need to be carefully reviewed by someone more experienced. But they should use it."

The natural question then becomes, *How can clients and firms close this gap?* Perhaps surprisingly, both clients and firms put the onus largely on the firms' side of the conversation. The prevailing sentiment is that firms should be trusted to perform the work as they see fit, or else they wouldn't be receiving the work in the first place — but that doesn't mean they should be using AI wholly out of their clients' sight.

"I trust them to make the right decisions and stand behind their advice wherever it comes from," said one New Zealand corporate associate GC. "Before long, the conversation will need to move to cost though."

40%

Of firms say they have received direction from their client base both to use AI and not to use AI on different client projects.



"Firms are reluctant — they claim it would compromise quality and fidelity. I think they are threatened by it."

– Corporate chief legal officer, USA

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The TR Institute's View:

Have the AI talk with clients

If firms need to start having the conversation around AI with their clients, where they should begin? It starts with understanding value — both the value that AI brings to the client engagement, but also the value that the legal or tax professional brings above and beyond what such advanced technology provides. The data shows that corporations are ahead of firms on AI adoption, which means that many in-house functions are now insourcing many low-value, repeatable tasks that previously may have gone to firms. In a new AI paradigm, firms will be forced to answer big question: *What can you give me that technology cannot?*

This is where the best legal and tax professionals can truly shine. TRI studies on stellar performing professionals have shown they excel in a few common areas: critical thinking, intimate subject matter expertise, strategic planning, and relationship building. These are also areas in which AI tools lag far behind human cognition. Thus, in an optimized scenario, if AI takes away repetitive tasks, it should allow these stellar performers more time to dedicate to those factors that truly set them apart.

Understanding this value — and how AI is helping unlock it — will be crucial to client conversations both now and in the future.

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An AI-centric future

Given the results of this year's survey report, it's clear that those professionals and their organizations that haven't yet begun experimenting with AI tools are already behind. The majority of professionals are using GenAI in some form, most of them on a weekly basis or even more frequently. Further, many have begun to form a solid understanding of what AI tools can and cannot do.

This means that for the majority of professionals, it is time to shift from an exploration mindset to a planning mindset. Especially those professionals using AI tools without strong guiding metrics or overall strategic planning, need to ask, *What am I looking to achieve by using AI?*

If it's simply time or costs saved, then it's worth conducting a time audit to determine where automation can best be applied to streamline workflows. If it's better client service or improved project outcomes, then you should accelerate conversations with clients around what they want to see and where AI can be applied to be mutually beneficial. And if it's idea generation, you should establish a formal plan to take AI-aided ideas and put them into action.

Most common opinions on future of AI in professional services

All professionals

1. Expect increased efficiency/productivity
2. Assist with/automate routine and low-value tasks
3. Concerns about job displacement
4. Assist in time savings/streamline work processes
5. Needs quality control checks and human oversight

AI does not, and should not, exist in a vacuum. It is one tool among many that legal, tax & accounting, risk & fraud, and government professionals have at their disposal. Any AI use should be part of a larger overall strategic plan, with personal and organizational business goals in mind, to achieve a specific desired outcome. Asking ChatGPT to summarize a meeting is one thing; creating a plan to take those summaries and other AI outputs to more fully research and understand a client's core problems is the next step.

Clearly, professionals are getting there, according to this year's data. And perhaps just as importantly, they *want* to get there, recognizing that the most productive future consists of people and technology working in tandem to provide the best outcomes possible for both themselves and their clients.

The work for the next year, five years, and indefinitely into the future, will be determining just where that optimal mix lies. AI has become an integrated part of professional services, this much is clear — and the winners of the future will be those who best figure out how AI technologies can be used to elevate the strategic and analytical thinking that set the best professionals apart from the rest.

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Methodology

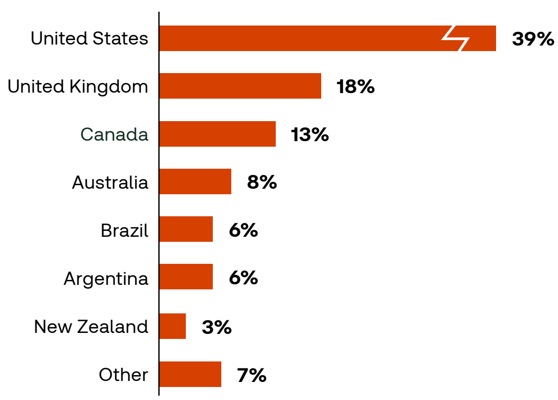
The data for this report was gathered from a survey of members of the legal; tax, audit & accounting; corporate risk & fraud; and government professions about their usage, sentiments, and business impact of AI, GenAI, and agentic AI.

Responses were collected through an online survey with 1,514 respondents, conducted in October and November 2025. The sample was drawn from lists provided by Thomson Reuters, and participants were screened to ensure that they were familiar with AI technology. Participants were located in 27 different countries, with the majority of respondents coming from the United States (39% of all respondents), United Kingdom (18%) or Canada (13%).

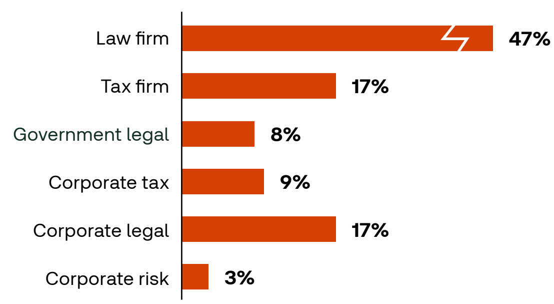
Participants included members of legal, tax, and risk departments within corporations; independent law firms; independent tax & accounting firms; and government legal departments. The survey administrators included quotas to ensure roughly equal representation of different sizes departments and firms, as well as respondents' pre-existing knowledge of AI.

Respondent Profile

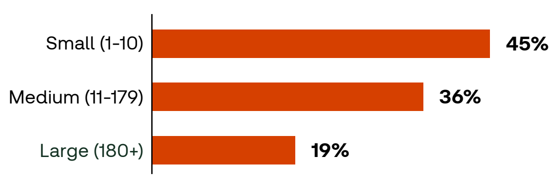
Country



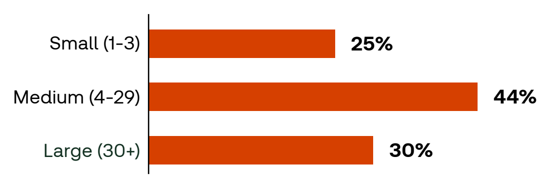
Organization type



Law firm (number of lawyers)

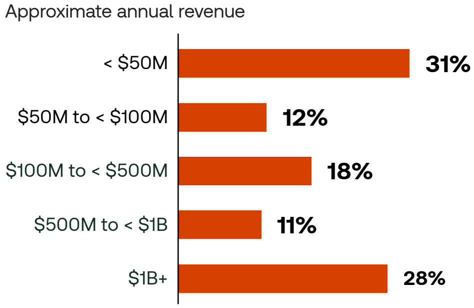


Tax firm (full-time staff)

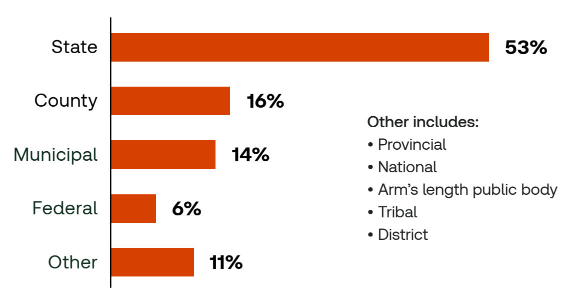


Corporate

Approximate annual revenue



Government/Court level of government



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