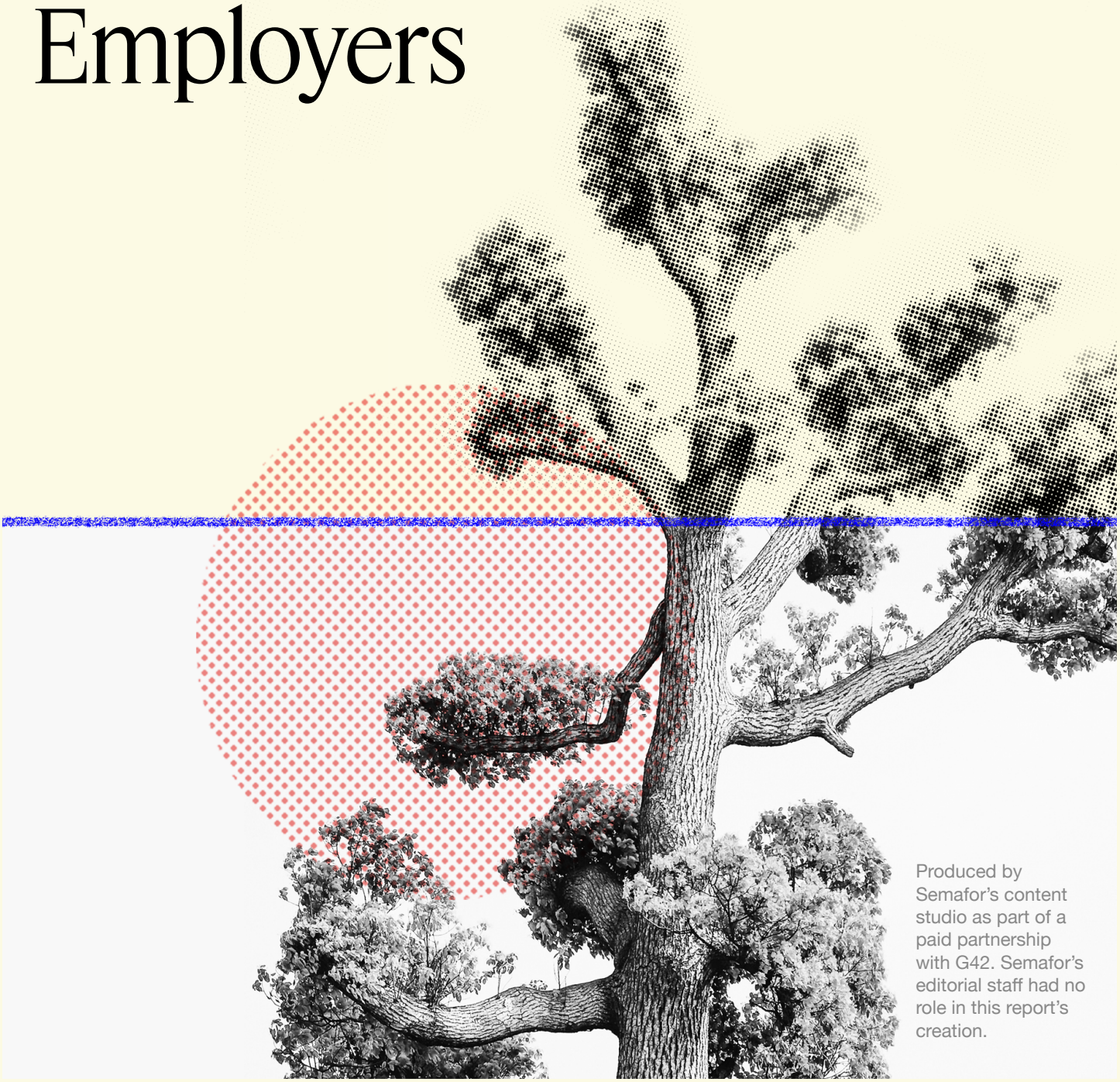
AN ORIGINAL REPORT FROM

G42 | SEMAFOR

What AI Experts Want From Their Employers



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SURVEY OVERVIEW

750
U.S. AI Professionals

94%
of respondents are employed full-time.

All survey respondents are employed full-time, part-time, or self-employed in the technology industry.

Survey fielded from
November 25th – December 4th, 2024

208
Research-Focused respondents

239
Implementation-Focused respondents

148
Associate or Below

596
Team Lead or Higher

521
Less than 3 years experience

229
3 or more years of experience

Introduction

The race for AI talent isn't theoretical anymore: it's happening in real time, in job postings, cross-border relocations, and high-stakes boardroom discussions. The companies that crack the code on AI hiring will shape the future of their industries. The ones that don't? They'll be left behind.

The demand is undeniable: AI job postings are growing 3.5 times faster than the overall market, and 86% of employers expect AI to transform their business models. But hiring AI talent isn't like hiring software engineers or data scientists of a decade ago. This is a different workforce with different priorities, and most companies haven't caught up.

So what do AI professionals really want? To find out, Semafor and G42 surveyed 750 AI professionals in the United States, all working in the tech industry or in technology/IT departments. These respondents — all over the age of 18 and already handling AI-related responsibilities — are shaping the future of AI today. The results challenge conventional hiring wisdom: yes, compensation matters — but not as much as the ability to work on cutting-edge projects, the freedom to experiment, and the sense that their work is shaping something bigger.

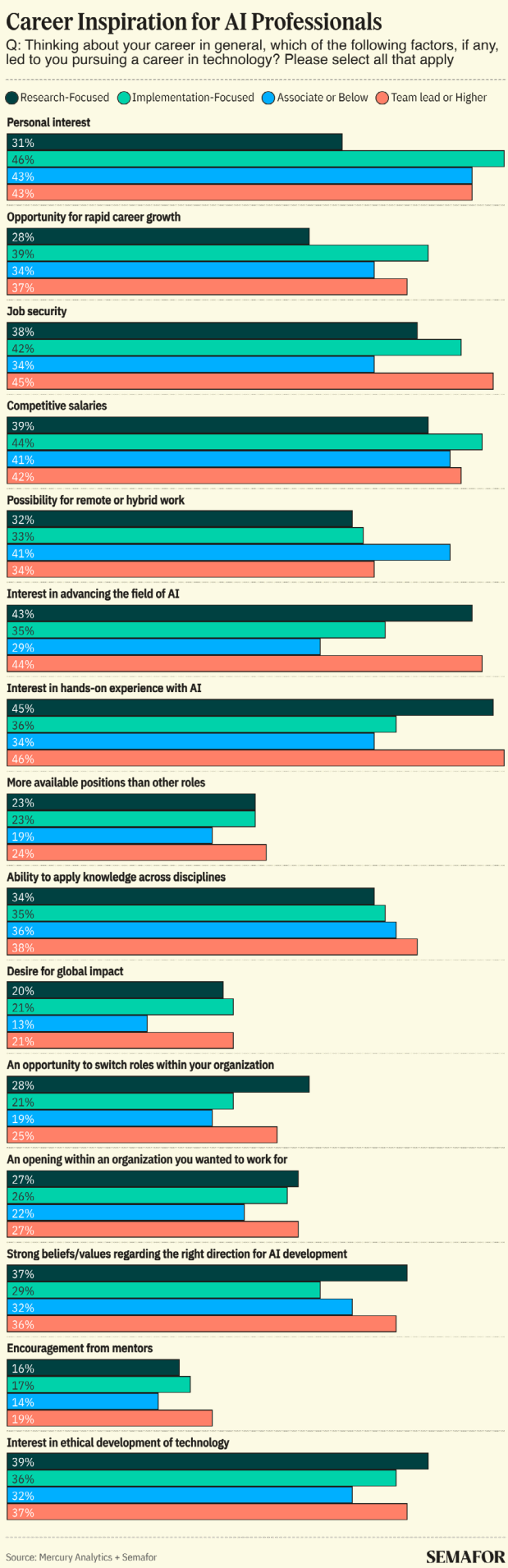
This report offers more than just hiring trends. It's a blueprint for the companies that want to win the AI talent race — before it's too late.

The Bigger Picture

Our findings go hand-in-hand with what experts expect from the workforce and economy in the next five years

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs report for 2025 surveyed 1,000 of the world's largest employers to predict how the job market will change in the coming years. Broader digital access and AI adoption were the most commonly identified drivers of change for labor — meaning that demand for technical and AI experts is at an all-time high. That means that employers may compete with each other for workers with AI expertise; to win out, an employer will need to know how to make a truly compelling offer to a potential hire.

The report also predicted that destabilizing factors like global economic uncertainty and the rising costs of living



will affect both employers and employees. As such, hirers and recruiters should be prepared to offer employees stability, the potential for long-term careers, and competitive pay. Employers also identified skill gaps in the labor market — as well as skill gaps within their organizations — as a primary barrier to transformation. For a field as complex as AI, this means that employers may want to establish training and upskilling structures within their organizations, which are also attractive to potential employees.

According to Gartner's 2025 Top Strategic Technology Trends report, demand for AI governance, compliance, and ethics professionals will grow by 35% annually, driven by regulatory pressures and responsible AI mandates. Similarly, LinkedIn's 2025 Jobs on the Rise report ranks Artificial Intelligence Engineer as the number one fastest-growing job in the U.S., with a 325% increase in job postings over the past year.

Career Motivations

Different kinds of AI experts diverged in their career goals and interests

AI experts who had been in the technology field for longer (three or more years) were the most likely to have pursued a tech career specifically because of an "interest in hands-on experience with AI." Half of those experts selected that interest as a motivating factor, followed by 46% of AI experts who are team leads or above.

Experts with associate titles or lower were the least likely to have pursued a tech career because of an "interest in hands-on experience with AI" (34%) and the most likely to select "possibility for remote or hybrid work" (41%) as a motivating factor.

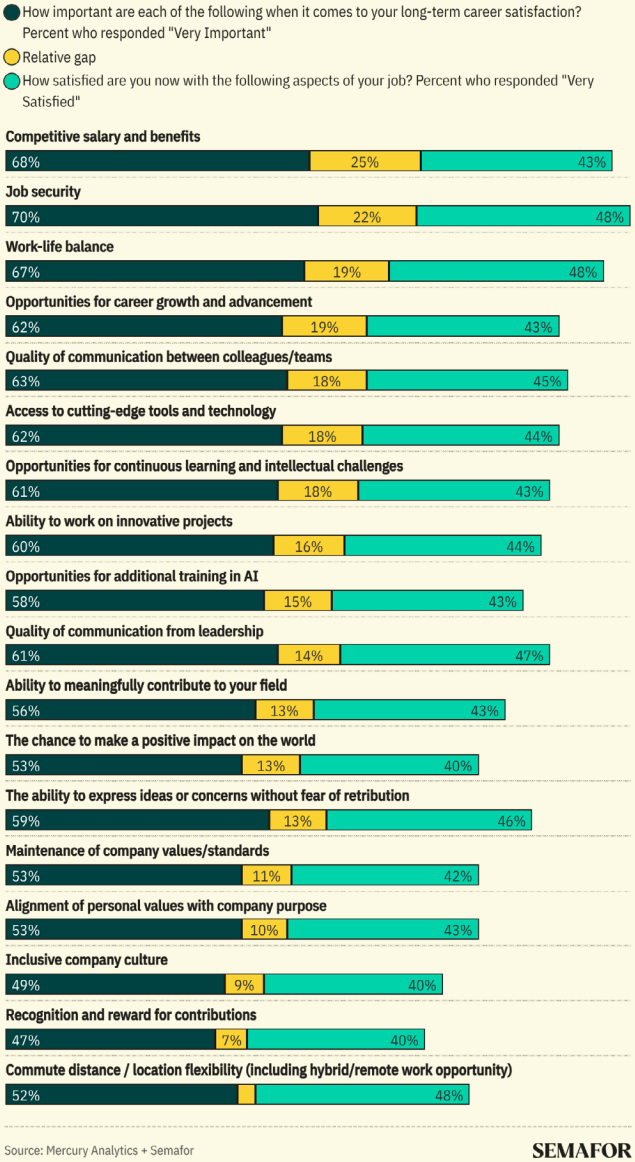
Meanwhile, AI experts focused on the implementation and use side of AI were the most likely to have entered the field due to "personal interest" (46% of implementation-focused experts), as opposed to AI experts focused on AI and machine learning research (31%). In terms of future career trajectories, research-focused experts were far more likely to be interested in pursuing "IT infrastructure and support" (70%). In comparison, implementation-focused experts are interested in both "IT infrastructure and support" (53%) and "artificial intelligence & machine learning" (53%). Associates and below were more likely than any other group to be interested in pursuing data & analytics (39%).

According to McKinsey's "The Gen AI Skills Revolution" report (2024), companies using generative AI for coding have seen up to a 40% increase in developer productivity. As AI becomes a critical tool in the software development life cycle, AI experts are prioritizing roles that provide access to cutting-edge AI models and opportunities to develop AI-enhanced coding skills.

Recommendations:

- Consider the likely reasons that an AI expert chose their career, and include this in hiring conversations.
- Identify what company initiatives align with the potential hire's career motivations and specify how the hire could become involved.

How AI professionals rank the most important aspects of their job against their satisfaction



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What AI Experts Value

There are some common themes among AI experts when it comes to career priorities and opportunities for recruitment

Across specializations and years of experience, some common themes emerged in terms of areas of current dissatisfaction and the things experts want out of their next job opportunity. Respondents were asked about the aspects of their job they found most important, as well as their level of satisfaction with those aspects at their current jobs. The largest gaps were identified in "competitive salary and benefits" (68% rated this as "very important," while only 43% said they were "very satisfied"), "job security" (70% vs. 48%), and work-life balance (67% vs. 48%).

According to LinkedIn's 2025 Jobs on the Rise report, AI engineers are among the fastest-growing job categories, with demand for AI-related roles increasing by 74% year-over-year. However, many AI professionals express frustration over misalignment between their salary expectations and employer offerings, particularly in emerging AI hubs outside Silicon Valley.

When it came to the factors that would make experts seriously consider a job offer, "competitive base salary & bonus structure" had the highest impact, with 38% of respondents selecting it as a top-three consideration. This was followed by "opportunity to work on cutting-edge technology in AI" (33%) and "improved benefits package" (32%). "Location or commute distance" and "alignment of personal values with the company purpose" were the least important (14% and 13%).

Recommendations:

- Identify where potential hires are most dissatisfied in their current positions, and tailor your conversations to address how those conditions differ at your company.
- Consider that salary, benefits, and job security tend to be highly important to AI experts. Be specific and competitive when detailing what those factors look like.
- Offering stock options, profit-sharing, or AI-focused career development programs can improve retention and attract top talent.

The Skills AI Experts Consider Important To Their Careers

Specialists and experts with varying amounts of experience prioritize different skill sets in their career paths

The skills considered essential by AI experts could point to the skills they hope to grow and develop in their jobs. “Data handling & processing” was identified as essential by a majority of all survey respondents, as was “proficiency in programming languages” and “knowledge of deep learning frameworks.”

There were some notable divergences: AI experts with three or more years in the field were more likely than others to identify “expertise in machine learning algorithms” as essential (57%), as were team leads (48%). Research-

Technical Priorities for AI Professionals

Q: Which of the following technical skills would you consider essential for a successful career involving AI?

	All Respondents	Research-Focused	Implementation-Focused	Associate or Below	Team lead or Higher	Experience <3yrs	Experience 3+ years
Proficiency in programming languages (Python, R, Java, etc.)	62	56	66	53	64	60	66
Mathematics and statistics	36	37	36	29	38	33	42
Expertise in ML algorithms	45	39	45	33	48	40	57
Data handling & processing experience	68	64	68	64	69	68	70
Knowledge of deep learning frameworks	61	52	63	55	62	60	62
Expertise in convolutional neural networks	34	41	27	23	36	29	45
Familiarity with cloud platforms & deployment	53	45	53	43	56	51	59

focused experts, team leads, and veterans were more likely than their counterparts to value expertise in conventional neural networks (41%, 36%, and 45%).

According to McKinsey's The Gen AI Skills Revolution report (2024), AI professionals are increasingly expected to integrate AI-assisted coding tools into their workflows. As a result, companies are prioritizing expertise in AI model fine-tuning and hybrid AI-human development environments. In non-technical skills, implementation-focused experts were more likely to consider "intellectual curiosity and a passion for solving problems" and "adaptability and creative problem solving" as essential to their careers (70% and 73%); they were also more likely to identify "cybersecurity" and "written communication skills" (51% and 34%) as essential areas of knowledge than their research-based counterparts.

The report also highlights the increasing demand for AI governance and compliance expertise, as organizations face stricter AI regulations and ethical considerations. Team leads, unsurprisingly, were more likely than associates to consider the "ability to coordinate a team and manage workflows" essential for a successful career (65% of team leads vs. 47% of associates).

Recommendations:

- AI experts will likely want to both work with people who have the skills essential to the field and have opportunities to develop essential skills. Be prepared to describe the skill sets prevalent at your company and describe opportunities for potential hires to

Non-Technical Priorities for AI Professionals

Q: Which of the following non-technical skills would you consider essential for a successful career involving AI?

	All Respondents	Research-Focused	Implementation-Focused	Associate or Below	Team lead or Higher	Experience <3yrs	Experience 3+ years
Ability to coordinate a team and manage project workflows	61	58	62	47	65	59	67
Intellectual curiosity and a passion for solving problems	65	55	70	64	66	64	68
Professionalism in communications & the workplace	54	50	53	45	56	52	59
Persuasive ability with non-industry clients/customers	35	39	31	28	37	32	40
Adaptability and creative problem solving	64	48	73	60	65	64	66
Emotional intelligence and effective collaboration	45	48	45	39	47	43	50

deepen their skills.

- Non-technical skills are especially important to more senior experts; consider sharing how they can expect to develop their leadership skills.
- As AI governance and compliance become more critical, companies should offer training programs that equip employees with the skills to navigate ethical AI challenges and regulatory requirements.

Where Research And Implementation Diverge

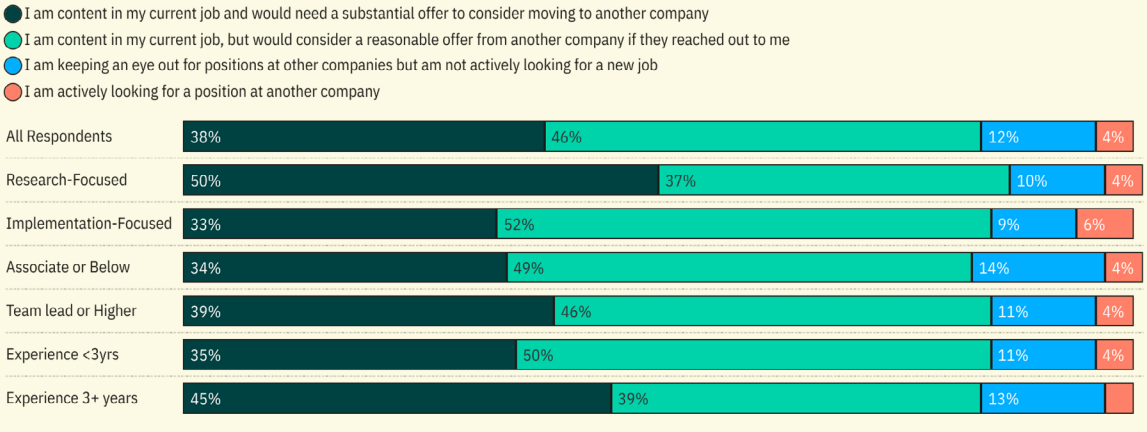
Experts who work in research and those who work in implementation are attracted to different elements of a job offer

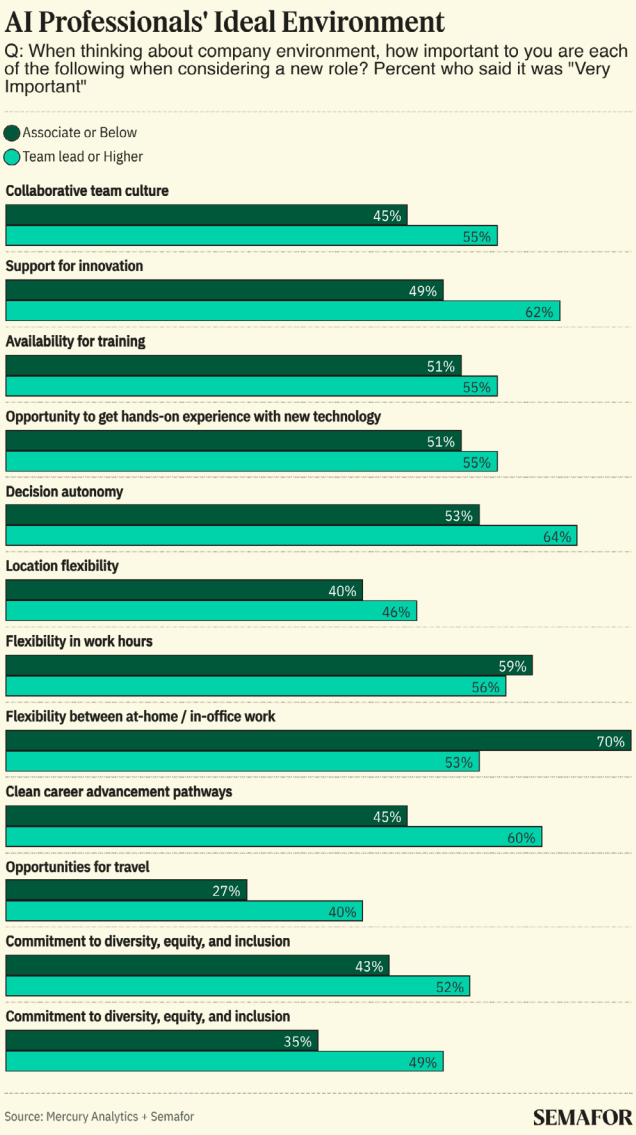
We found that experts in different areas of focus within AI diverged in their current levels of satisfaction and their priorities in their next jobs. Research-focused AI experts were more likely to be content in their current positions — only willing to consider a new job if a "substantial" offer was made (50%), a significantly higher result than their implementation-focused counterparts (33%).

Research-focused and implementation-focused experts diverged most strongly when rating priorities in considering a new role when it came to opportunities for travel (49% of research-focused experts identified this as "very" important vs. 35% of implementation-focused experts) and "decision autonomy" (51% of research-focused experts vs. 39% of implementation-focused experts).

Implementation-focused experts were 18% more likely

AI professionals' overall job satisfaction





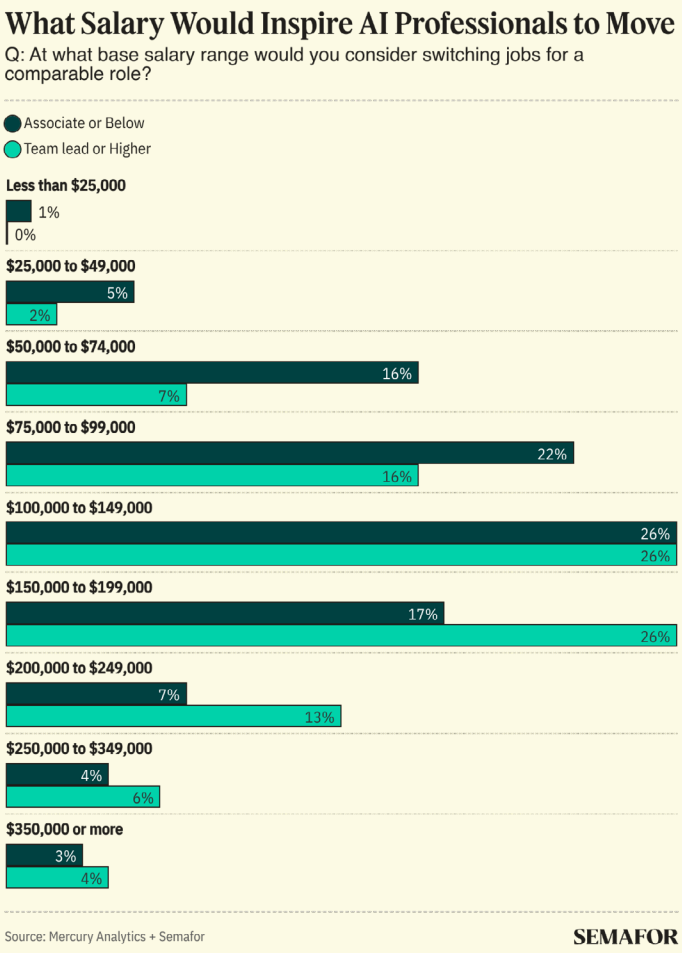
than research-based experts (62% vs. 44%) to immediately consider accepting a job offer that included a higher salary. They were also 13% more likely to identify "potential for career growth" as a top-three factor in considering a job offer (32% vs. 19%). Research-focused experts, meanwhile, were more likely to identify "job security" (38% vs. 24%).

There were also differences in how research-focused and implementation-focused experts pictured their ideal roles. Research-focused experts were more likely than implementation-focused experts to prefer exclusively technical responsibilities in their roles (37% vs. 23%) and to want "sustainability/environmental oversight" to be part of their role (35% vs. 20%). Implementation-focused experts were more likely to want an even balance of technical and non-technical responsibilities (36% vs. 20%) and for their job to involve leadership skills (59% vs. 39%). They were also 10% more likely to rate "the company has an ethical approach to AI" as "much" more likely to impact the likelihood of accepting an otherwise ideal job offer.

Implementation- and research-focused experts seemed to agree that money talks: About half of experts in both categories said they would consider switching jobs and accepting a job offer if the base salary was between $100,000 and $200,000.

Recommendations:

- Bear in mind that AI experts who focus on research and those who focus on implementation are likely to have different priorities when it comes to changing jobs. For example, research experts are more likely to require a very significant pay raise and may want to hear about opportunities for travel and independence.
- Be prepared to explain the balance between technical and non-technical expectations in the role you are hiring for, and how that balance could be tailored to an expert's preferences and area of focus.
- Companies hiring for both research and implementation roles should develop dual-track career pathways—one focused on deep technical expertise and long-term innovation, the other on applied AI leadership and industry deployment.



How Job Titles Affect AI Experts' Priorities

Job seniority had a notable impact on experts' openness to new job opportunities

We found that AI experts with titles of team lead or above and experts with titles of associate or below considered different things important when it comes to job opportunities. The vast majority — 70% — of associates identified "flexibility between at-home/in-office work" as "very" important when considering a new job, as opposed to 53% of team leads. Meanwhile, team leads were most likely to select "opportunity to get hands-on experience with new technology" as "very" important (64%), followed by "support for innovation" (62%) and "access to cutting-edge tools and technology" (60%).

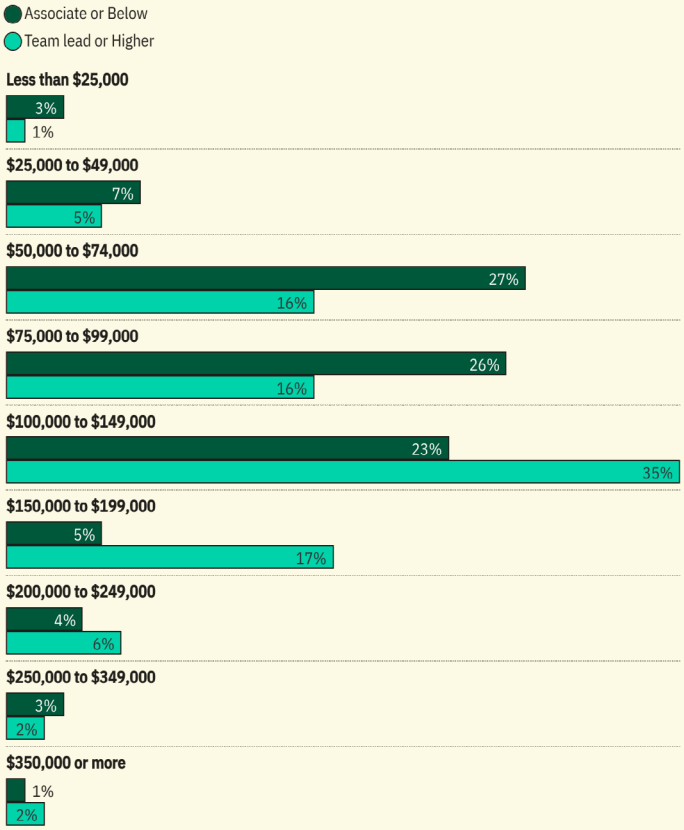
Associates also indicated a number of significant gaps between the importance of job elements and their current satisfaction with those elements, including in "job security" (66% of associates rated this as "very" important, but 41% said they were "very satisfied") and in "competitive salary & benefits" (60% said it was important, and 36% said they were satisfied). They also indicated a gap in "alignment of personal values with company purpose" (50% said it was important, and 30% said they were satisfied). The largest gaps for team leads were also in "competitive salary & benefits" (69% said it was important, and 45% said they were satisfied) and in "job security" (71% vs. 50%).

Associates were 16% more likely than team leads to immediately consider switching jobs if offered a "higher salary" and 12% more likely if offered "additional flexibility between at-home/in-office work." They were also more likely to consider switching jobs at lower salary thresholds (21% of associates would consider a new job offering less than $75,000, and 22% would consider an offer between $75,000 and $99,000, as opposed to 9% and 16% of team leads). Half of people less established in their tech careers with three or fewer years under their belt said they would consider a reasonable job offer from another company; this might be related to their lower salaries (79% of those experts were making less than $150,000 in their current roles).

Overall, experts regardless of years of experience found similar factors to be important in a company environment when considering a new role; "opportunity to get hands-on experience with new technology" was the most important

What AI Professionals are Earning Now

Q: What is your current base yearly salary?



Source: Mercury Analytics + Semafor

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factor for everyone (68% of experts with three or more years of experience and 60% of experts with three or fewer years of experience), but experts with three or more years of experience ranked "support for innovation" as equally important. Experts with three or fewer years ranked "flexibility between at-home/in-office work" as second most important (57%).

When it came to job elements that would make experts immediately consider switching jobs, 61% of experts with three or fewer years of experience identified "higher salary," as opposed to 49% of experts with three or more years. They were also 8% more likely to select "additional flexibility between at-home/in-office work," while experts with three or more years of experience were 8% more likely to select "opportunities for professional development."

In their ideal job, experts with three or more years of experience were 11% more likely to want purely technical responsibilities (30% vs. 19%), 8% more likely to select "leadership" as a non-technical responsibility, and 6% more likely to select "sustainability/oversight." They were also 14% more likely to accept a job offer if it includes "the opportunity to innovate on your own" (60% of AI experts with three or more years of experience vs. 46% of AI experts with three or fewer years of experience).

Recommendations:

- Consider hiring experts who have been in the field for three or fewer years. These individuals are more open to recruitment and, with the right opportunities and coaching, can grow to become institutional experts.
- When hiring experts who have been in the field for more than three years, bear in mind that they are likely to value autonomy, independence, and the chance to work with exciting, new technology.

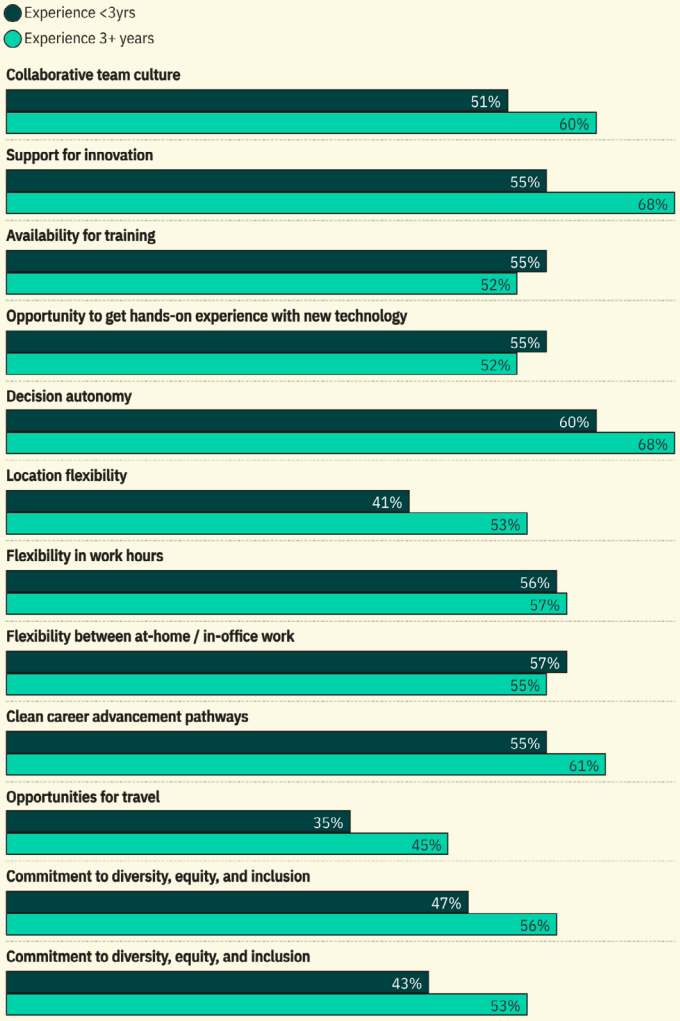
How Years Of Experience Affect AI Experts' Priorities

Experts with fewer years in the field have different priorities than those with more years under their belt

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the amount of time experts have spent in the AI field seemed to affect their willingness to consider new jobs. Half of people less established in their tech careers with three or fewer years under their belt said

How Experience Impacts Job Choices

When thinking about company environment, how important to you are each of the following when considering a new role? Percent who said it was "Very Important"



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they would consider a reasonable job offer from another company; this might be related to their lower salaries (79% of those experts were making less than $150,000 in their current roles).

Overall, experts regardless of years of experience found similar factors to be important in a company environment when considering a new role; “opportunity to get hands-on experience with new technology” was the most important factor for everyone (68% of experts with three or more years of experience and 60% of experts with three or fewer years of experience), but experts with three or more years of experience ranked “support for innovation” as equally important. Experts with three or fewer years ranked “flexibility between at-home/in-office work” as second most important (57%).

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Conclusion

As the field of AI grows — as well as the job opportunities that come with it — AI experts are likely to be in high demand across sectors. As our survey showed, many of them are ready to consider new job offers that include the right elements, and it's likely that someone's title, specialty, and amount of experience will affect their consideration and should change the approach of companies looking to hire. From experts newer to the field hoping to establish flexibility in their work-life balance, to veterans looking to drill down into their areas of special interest, talent is available — and recruiters would do well to customize their offers based on what we know about their priorities.

Looking ahead, the AI talent market is expected to remain highly competitive. Employers that offer ongoing learning opportunities and clear career progression paths will be better positioned to attract and retain top AI professionals.

Additionally, as AI regulation continues to evolve, experts in AI governance and compliance will become crucial hires for companies deploying AI at scale. Organizations that integrate responsible AI principles into their hiring and retention strategies will gain a significant competitive advantage in recruiting high-caliber AI talent.

Finally, global AI workforce mobility is accelerating, with AI professionals relocating to markets that offer higher salaries, greater research autonomy, and stronger regulatory clarity. Employers must consider global hiring strategies, remote-friendly policies, and competitive compensation benchmarking to remain attractive to top AI talent.