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Gartner Research & Development Connect Highlights

Key Insights from Top Sessions

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Gartner Opening Keynote: Navigating the Innovation Paradox

If great ideas are becoming exponentially harder to find, how do we stop R&D from being viewed as a ballooning cost center and reclaim its role as the company's primary value driver? In an era where it takes much more effort to find a breakthrough than it did decades ago, the "Innovation Paradox" is no longer a theory, it's a threat to the bottom line.

To navigate the innovation paradox, leaders are making a multi trillion-dollar bet on AI and expecting high-level efficiency gains. However, widespread reliance on similar data and tools risks standardizing output, generating faster results at the cost of differentiated, innovative ideas that truly drive growth.

Keep reading to explore takeaways from 4 expert sessions at the 2026 R&D Connect →

"In R&D, if AI improves everyone's performance, where exactly are we finding differentiation?"



Atul Dighe
VP Analyst

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Riding the Hype Cycle: Investing in the Right NPD Technologies



Trevour Kelleher
Sr. Director, Analyst

Session Summary

Riding the hype cycle in New Product Development requires separating meaningful innovation from market excitement and understanding where investment will deliver the greatest return. This session examines the latest Gartner Hype Cycle for NPD, helping R&D leaders identify which technologies to fund, pilot, or prioritize while building a roadmap for successful execution. Attendees will leave with a practical framework for sequencing NPD technology investments through 2027.

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62% of CEOs in R&D-intensive industries call AI the defining technology of the new business era

Key Actions for R&D Leaders

- **BANK**: Invest for near-term returns
- **BUILD**: Invest in the foundation
- **BET**: Invest for future readiness

How to Get Started:

- Review Gartner's research on how to **Speed Up New Product Development in R&D**.
- Discover how AI and global market shifts will reshape **R&D strategy, portfolios and teams through 2030**.

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The Pillars of a Successful AI Strategy for R&D



Svetlana Golden

Sr. Director, Analyst

Session Summary

The enormous potential business value of AI is not going to materialize spontaneously. R&D leaders should guide their organization toward an era in which AI is not only creating tangible business value but goes beyond to become a critical competitive differentiator and industry disruptor. Join this session as we explore the path of create a successful AI strategy.

Only 6% of orgs have a comprehensive, widely-used documented vision for how AI will shape R&D.

Key Actions for R&D Leaders

- Determine reasons for pursuing AI transformation
- Figure out what type of AI strategy to pursue
- Learn how to scale AI use within practice

How to Get Started:

- Explore how AI advancement and global market realignment will fundamentally **reshape R&D in the next 5-10 years.**
- Learn **when and when not to use agentic AI in R&D**.

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Your Portfolio Is Your Innovation Culture



Charlotte Boliver
Sr. Director, Analyst

Session Summary

The concept of a shared innovation culture is breaking down from as hybrid work, rapid change, and competing priorities fragment the R&D employee experience. In this session, we'll explore why our understanding of innovation culture is eroding, reveal how the R&D portfolio is both the mirror and mold for your organization's innovation culture, and discover why portfolio decisions, not slogans or strategies, are the strongest signal of your organization's values, and how they shape subcultures, engagement, and real innovation outcomes.

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Only 22% of R&D employees report being highly engaged at work

Key Actions for R&D Leaders

- Use portfolio decisions to create the innovation environments employees actually experience.
- Design innovation environments intentionally to reinforce the behaviors and outcomes you want.
- Identify which types of innovation need different governance, metrics, and funding models.

How to Get Started:

- Use the **Gartner R&D Innovation Culture Report** to establish a credible and sustainable culture aligned with business objectives and long-term organizational success.
- Review how to **Amplify Innovation Velocity With Agentic AI** and discover how leading R&D teams are achieving speed, agility and insight advantages through agentic AI adoption.

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Scenarios for the AI-Augmented R&D Portfolio: From Insight to Autonomy



Lauren Maiya
Sr. Director, Analyst

Session Summary

As AI capabilities rapidly advance, the future of R&D portfolio management is poised for transformation. But what might that future look like and how can R&D leaders prepare for it? This session will explore several forward-looking scenarios for the use of AI in portfolio management, ranging from today's early adoption to tomorrow's potential for autonomous, adaptive portfolios.

Only 46% of R&D Leaders are confident they can achieve portfolio balance in the next 12-18 months

Key Actions for R&D Leaders

- Utilize AI as a portfolio analytics engine to inform decisions at key points in time
- Develop R&D staff skills to be able to confidently audit AI outputs
- De-stigmatize resource shifts and demystify AI by establishing an **AI engagement charter**
- Prevent convergence by setting diversity parameters and risk multipliers
- Shift portfolio reviews to focus on strategic gaps and quality of AI decision making

How to Get Started:

- Use the Gartner R&D Portfolio Management Report to improve practices and build a healthy portfolio
- Review the R&D Budget and Efficiency Benchmark to balance your portfolio

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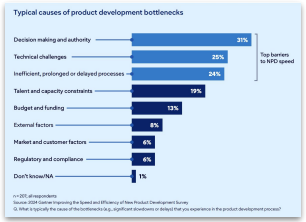
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Navigate Your Top Challenges with Gartner Support

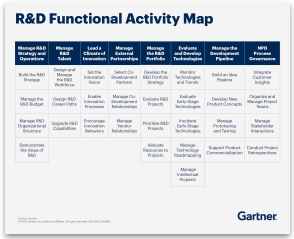
Explore four portfolio management strategies
R&D leaders can use to make more strategic investment decisions, allocate resources effectively, and ensure innovation efforts remain aligned with business objectives as priorities evolve.



Learn how leading R&D organizations **accelerate new product development** by simplifying processes, focusing teams and automating workflows.



Use the Gartner R&D Score to measure the maturity of your function, prioritize areas of improvement and plot the function's path to improvement in 29 activities across six functional objectives.



View additional Gartner for R&D tools and support, including client success stories that detail how your peer R&D leaders are driving growth through product innovation.



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