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INORMS 2025: AI AND THE RESEARCH MANAGEMENT PROFESSION: PREPARING FOR A RESPONSIBLE AND RESILIENT FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

What is new?	Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming research management, yet research managers and administrators (RMAs) are often uncertain how to strategically and ethically adopt it. This article summarises key insights from the INORMS Congress 2025 to address this need.
What was the approach?	This opinion piece draws on case studies and sessions from INORMS 2025 to analyse institutional responses to AI integration, including training, ethics, and systems development.
What is the academic impact?	The opinion piece contributes to research management discourse by highlighting strategic and ethical approaches to AI adoption, positioning RMAs as critical change agents.
What is the wider impact?	Research institutions and RMAs will benefit from understanding how to responsibly integrate AI while fostering institutional readiness, equity, and professional sustainability.
Keywords	Artificial Intelligence, Research Management, INORMS, Responsible Innovation, Capacity Building

INTRODUCTION

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into research management ecosystems has shifted from speculative discourse to an urgent institutional priority. At the INORMS Congress 2025, hosted in Madrid, Spain, AI emerged as a defining theme across multiple pre-conference workshops, plenary sessions, and case studies. The Congress showcased how Research Management and Administration (RMA) professionals are not only grappling with the rapid evolution of AI technologies but are also leading efforts

to integrate them ethically, strategically, and equitably into research institutions and universities.

Based on the topics of discussion during the conference, the author was inspired to use AI in the writing of this opinion piece to experience the application thereof at a pragmatic level. ChatGPT was used in the writing of this opinion piece.

Below is a summary of the main themes that emerged from the various sessions.

Strategic AI Integration: From Vision to Implementation

AI is no longer a tool on the horizon. It is now embedded in the operational core of many RMA offices. Several institutions shared compelling case studies that demonstrated how AI is improving efficiency and redefining research management processes.

At the University of Michigan, AI has been integrated into award setup and contract management workflows. A tailored AI system automates administrative processes, ensures compliance, and enables staff to focus on strategic tasks. The University is also piloting a web-based platform to digitise contracts, automate negotiations, and provide real-time analytics to support data-driven decision-making (Arnett & White, 2025).

Similarly, Northwestern University has adopted AI for reviewing clinical trial agreements and non-disclosure agreements. AI is used to "redline" contracts, identify discrepancies, and align documents with institutional policies. These practical examples illustrated how AI can supplement limited human resources in research offices, particularly amid increasing regulatory complexity and transaction volume (Arnett & White, 2025).

Meanwhile, at Utrecht University, AI-driven chatbots built using ChatGPT and Microsoft Teams Copilot Studio are streamlining researcher support and administrative inquiry handling (Aston, 2025). These innovations are not futuristic abstractions—they are already transforming how RMAs work.

Building AI-Ready Institutions: The People-First Imperative

Yet the message from INORMS 2025 was not simply about efficiency. Several presentations urged the profession to see AI not only as a tool but as a transformation requiring a people-first approach. One of the most impactful presentations came from the University Medical Center Utrecht, where the FUTURE Project was launched to bridge internal divides in AI readiness (Chen et al., 2025). Their three-pillar model—Technology, Training, and Policy—emphasises co-development of AI capabilities alongside ethical frameworks and professional development.

Their structured approach included hands-on Generative AI (GenAI) training, custom ChatGPT prototypes, and living guidelines co-developed across departments. Most importantly, it focused on addressing staff anxieties about job displacement by embedding AI as an augmentation, not a replacement, of human expertise.

The take-home message was clear: upskilling is essential. The profession must invest in GenAI literacy, not only to use AI effectively but to shape the governance, values, and policies that will determine how AI is used institutionally.

Responsible AI Use: Equity, Ethics, and Global Inclusion

Another compelling strand of the conference focused on the ethical dimensions of AI use, particularly in the context of global research collaborations. In her session on the Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations, Dr Retha Visagie (University of South Africa) argued that AI must not reinforce structural inequalities in international partnerships (Visagie, 2025). The Charter offers a framework for equitable, inclusive, and ethically grounded collaborations between institutions in the Global South and North.

As AI is increasingly used throughout the research lifecycle, from literature reviews and data collection to manuscript drafting and editing, there is a growing risk that institutions with greater AI access will dominate the production and validation of knowledge. Dr Visagie emphasised that RMAs have a critical role in ensuring AI use in collaborative research upholds the principles of epistemic justice, equitable capacity building, and shared AI literacy.

These concerns were echoed in other sessions. For example, Dr Michael Baker's presentation on AI in Higher Degree Research (HDR) in Australia underscored the need for institutional policies that preserve academic integrity and originality in the PhD process (Baker, 2025). Supervisors and doctoral candidates alike need guidance on how to navigate AI-enhanced research responsibly.

Telling the Story of Research Impact with AI

In addition to process efficiency and ethics, AI is now playing a role in amplifying the visibility of research impact. A joint pilot project between Utrecht University and Elsevier demonstrated how AI can be used to generate "impact biographies" of researchers, narratives that convey the societal contributions of research using data from Scopus, Overton, and PlumX (Sethi et al., 2025). These tools translate complex, qualitative impact into compelling stories for funders, policymakers, and the public.

As research impact becomes a strategic priority in many funding systems, this application of AI offers a new way to capture and communicate the value of academic work. It also raises questions about narrative framing, attribution, and transparency, issues that RMA professionals must help institutions navigate.

Towards a Resilient, AI-Enhanced Research Ecosystem

Several presentations addressed how open data and AI can be leveraged together to drive institutional strategy. The Connect by YERUN platform, developed by the Young European Research Universities Network, exemplifies this potential. Built on a database of over 35,000 researchers and nearly one million publications, the platform uses AI to recommend collaborators, analyse research trends, and identify funding opportunities

(Misevic et al., 2025). Developed through a bottom-up, user-centred process, it shows how AI can democratize access to research intelligence, provided it is built with appropriate skills, governance, and transparency.

The University of Southern Denmark offered another approach by developing privacy-compliant, task-optimised large language models (LLMs) for proposal writing (Puzzovio et al., 2025). Their "coherence checker" ensures consistency across proposal sections and offers a safer, localised alternative to commercial AI platforms. This effort reflects a growing institutional interest in controlling AI infrastructure, minimising dependency on external vendors, and aligning tools with organisational values.

The Way Forward: Stewarding Change, Not Just Managing It

What became clear at INORMS 2025 is that AI is not simply a technical innovation; it is a cultural and professional transformation. As AI reshapes how research is conceptualised, managed, communicated, and valued, the RMA profession finds itself at a crossroads. The challenge is not whether to engage with AI, but how, and on whose terms.

As the sessions demonstrated, RMAs are ideally placed to mediate between technology and ethics, translate institutional policy into practice, and advocate for inclusive, evidence-based approaches. They are becoming both the architects and the guardians of the AI-infused RMA enterprise.

To do this effectively, RMAs need institutional support, investment in their professional development, and the space to lead. They must be empowered not just as implementers, but as strategic actors shaping how AI is integrated, governed, and understood.

If AI is to be a force for good in RMA, its implementation must be human-centred, ethically grounded, and globally inclusive. The sessions at INORMS 2025 provided a roadmap, but it is RMAs who must now lead the way.

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- Summarise the conference abstracts related to AI
- Analyse the summaries for common themes
- Identify improvements in the writing style.

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BIOGRAPHY

Lessing is a seasoned professional with over a decade of experience in higher education, specialising in research management, project management, and leadership. He serves as a board member of the editorial board for the Journal of Research Management and Administration (JoRMA), a role he has held since joining the founding board in 2019. Les contributes his expertise to advance the field through insightful reviews and strategic guidance, demonstrating his commitment to the global research management community. In 2021, he obtained professional recognition as a Senior Research Management Professional (SRMP) from the International Professional Recognition Council (IPRC). Beyond his academic pursuits, Lessing has engaged in notable professional activities. He served on the Project Management South Africa (PMSA) Board from 2006 to 2015 and was invited back in 2021 to serve another five-year term. Additionally, he currently serves as an International Academic Advisor for the PM World Journal.

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