

Artificial Intelligence and the Future of R&D Governance

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a major enabler of R&D governance and project management. Using a data-intensive approach, it aims to address issues of project choice, risk mitigation, optimal resource allocation etc thereby enhancing efficiency. In the present paper we have attempted to evaluate AI application in R&D governance in the global vis-à-vis national perspectives; and to underline its key strengths, weaknesses and applicability.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, R&D Governance,
Funding Agencies

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, as the world has entered a more dynamic phase of stakeholder interactions, there has been an increasing trend in the use of frontier technologies. R&D and innovation have progressively occupied the centre-stage among the drivers of socio-economic development. Amidst such a backdrop, focus has been on data-driven decision-making and the evolution of evidence-based policies. It is therefore unsurprising that automation in analysing data and providing insights to support decision making have made rapid inroads in all forms of governance. (Smith and Jones, 2023).

A key challenge in R&D governance has been the understanding of what is to be done, why it is to be done and what could be the most effective combination. Further, contextualisation and positioning with respect to regions,

provinces and countries could further add to the challenge. As R&D is almost always associated with investment of a large quantum of funds over a protracted period, another question that is often asked is whether the funding have taken place at the right time, in the right amount and more importantly, whether the fund investment has led to the desired results. Managing R&D projects effectively has thus been the single most important task in R&D governance.

According to PMI, USA, 40% of all projects globally are completed within the original budget; and 45% of those have delivered on time (PMI, 2021). Thus, meeting project objectives and deadlines continues to remain a major concern. The uncertainty is much higher when it concerns high-risk R&D projects. As we progress almost a quarter into the millennium, frontier technologies particularly artificial intelligence has emerged as an important tool in R&D governance.

2. Scope of the Present Essay:

In the present essay, we attempt to investigate the changing hues of R&D governance and the ways in which AI has been instrumental in shaping the same. Since its advent, artificial intelligence (AI) has made deep inroads in both R&D governance and project management segment. AI-powered analytics to forecast project risks and project delays have been extensively used (Johnson et al, 2019). Adoption of AI in project management is projected to increase by more than 80% during the next two to three years (Gartner, 2023). We try to look at the issue from a more philosophical standpoint of view, attempting to evaluate AI application in R&D governance in the global vis-à-vis national perspectives; and to underline its key strengths, weaknesses and applicability. We have also highlighted primarily the component of project management, which we consider to be the key action-vertical that could determine the way AI reshapes R&D governance.

3. AI in R&D Governance:

Funding agencies and multi-institutional research networks across the world have been progressively adopting AI in their

R&D governance framework. National Institute of Health (NIH) of the US have harnessed AI to enforce stricter data management, enhanced inter-agency collaboration and integration of available technologies. Data collection, storage and ethical use of personal health data for secondary research have focused increasingly on AI based applications. Max Planck Group of Germany have also made large-scale use of AI in its R&D governance such as data access, performance evaluation, collaboration and inter-institutional coordination. AI tools and data-driven project management and evaluation; as also research priority setting is being practiced by other agencies in France, UK, China, Japan, Australia and Brazil.

India, despite its current focus on shifting the R&D governance strategy to a more innovation-centric and data-driven collaborative model, has been relatively weak to fully adopt the AI driven approach. The national R&D base dataset continues to remain fragmented, with lack of proper unification in the myriads of individual datasets and databases available to multiple scientific agencies.

This fragmentation is compounded by a lack of standardised data collection protocols across diverse research institutions and ministries, making comprehensive AI-driven analysis challenging (Kumar & Singh, 2024). Furthermore, bureaucratic hurdles and slow adoption of digital transformation initiatives within public R&D bodies have historically impeded the development of integrated AI infrastructures (Ministry of Science and Technology Report, 2023). While policy blueprints like the NITI Aayog's National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence have been formulated, translating these into widespread, tangible AI adoption across the R&D ecosystem remains a significant hurdle, often due to insufficient investment in AI infrastructure, a persistent skill gap in AI/data science among researchers and administrators, and a general resistance to depart from traditional, manual methods of governance (NITI Aayog, 2022; Sharma & Das, 2023).

4. Project Management as a subset of R&D Governance:

R&D governance, in its broadest sense, encompasses the strategic direction, policy formulation, resource allocation, and

overall oversight of an R&D ecosystem to ensure it aligns with national or institutional objectives. It defines the ‘what’ (strategic priorities), the ‘why’ (societal impact, economic growth), and the ‘who’ (key stakeholders, institutions). Within this overarching framework, project management serves as the critical operational arm, focusing on the tactical execution, monitoring, and control of individual research initiatives or projects. While governance sets the strategic agenda, project management translates these strategic goals into tangible outputs and outcomes by managing the specific tasks, resources, timelines, and risks associated with each R&D endeavor (Turner & Müller, 2013). Effective project management is, therefore, indispensable for successful R&D governance, as it ensures that the strategic vision is implemented efficiently and effectively at the granular level, ultimately determining whether funds are utilised appropriately and desired results are achieved (Crawford & Cooke-Davies, 2017).

Most governance efforts are based upon solving certain challenges either by using some frontier science or by developing and deploying appropriate technologies. For example, governance of research in climate change would focus upon identifying right projects, identifying right institutions, identifying right stakeholders for the technologies, and identifying the right quantum of budget and its sources. The ‘component approach’ to science governance usually comprise the most adopted mechanism that breaks down the problem to be solved into smaller components and evolve a project out or each. After this the projects are given to different players and later the results/outcomes obtained from each are integrated into a common knowledgebase that is used to evolve appropriate policies and practices.

An example in this regard may be taken from the approach to address the challenge of food security and food spoilage that have been known to take a serious toll on the world population, particularly the global south. Addressing the multifaceted challenge of food security and minimising food spoilage requires a coordinated R&D governance strategy that leverages this component-based approach. A governing body, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) or a national agricultural research council, would first identify food security as a strategic

priority due to its significant impact on public health and economic stability (FAO, 2020). This broad challenge is then disaggregated into actionable R&D components. For instance:

- Component 1 (Crop Science): Projects focused on developing climate-resilient, high-yield crop varieties through genetic engineering or marker-assisted breeding to enhance agricultural productivity in adverse conditions.
- Component 2 (Post-Harvest Technology): Research initiatives exploring novel packaging materials, optimised cold chain logistics, or natural preservatives to extend the shelf life of perishable goods and reduce waste in storage and transportation.
- Component 3 (Precision Agriculture): Projects designing AI-driven tools for optimal irrigation, nutrient management, and early pest and disease detection, thereby minimising pre-harvest losses and resource consumption.
- Component 4 (Supply Chain Optimisation): R&D efforts leveraging data analytics and AI to predict demand fluctuations, optimise transportation routes, and identify choke points in food distribution networks to prevent spoilage and ensure equitable access.
- Outcomes from these individual projects, often conducted by diverse research institutions, are subsequently integrated into a comprehensive knowledge base. This synthesis then informs policy decisions on sustainable agricultural practices, food safety standards, and national food security strategies, demonstrating how project-level successes collectively contribute to broader governance objectives (Smith et al., 2022; World Bank, 2021).

5. Why AI in Project Management could be transformative:

Project management has long been a forte of wise individuals, who could not only analyse and predict how work is going; but also, who could forecast and understand what should be done. Thus, the differentiation between what ‘could’ be done and what ‘should’ be done comprises the most fundamental premise of any successful project manager. It is in context of this logic that AI has made its prowess felt. Artificial intelligence relies on

computation models that mimic human cognitive functions; and comprise of several disciplines such as machine learning, natural language processing, predictive analysis and others (Jones & Wang, 2022).

Machine learning makes use of historical project data to understand patterns that help in predicting future outcomes, thereby providing early warnings of cost overruns and schedule delays (Brown et. al 2018). Natural language processing can scan voluminous project documents to understand deep insights, similarities, patterns and trends. (White and Smith, 2019). Predictive analytics make use of AI algorithms to forecast future events such as potential risks, market trends and so on. (Lee et al, 2017).

As per a study conducted by Price Water house Coopers (PwC), 97% of organisations consider project management critical to their business performance; yet only 32% of all projects are successful (PwC, 2019). Let us therefore look at some of the key features of projects that contribute to such a high failure rate.

- *Element of Risk:* All R&D projects have an inherent element of risk that is difficult to ascertain early. This risk stems from not only the uncertainties associated with experiments and protocols, but also with other associated elements such as unavailability of appropriate human resources, access to OEMs, supply chain constraints and so on.
- *Lack of Appropriate Capacity:* Capacity to enable successful completion of projects is often limited
- *Inappropriate timing:* Many projects are taken up at an inappropriate timing – either too early or too late – which makes it out of context as per benchmarks
- *Constraint of Resources:* Inadequate allocation of financial, human, and material resources is one of the most common reasons why projects fail to achieve their objectives. In R&D environments, while teams may strive for timely execution, administrative bottlenecks—particularly delays at higher levels due to complex government rules, approval procedures, and compliance requirements—often hinder progress and impact overall outcomes.

AI by means of its predictive and analytical power could address almost all the above issues, thereby making it an ideal choice to navigate projects in the right path. Understanding risks early, knowing when to start a project, allocating the right resources and data-driven tracking of its performance allows reducing chances of failure significantly.

6. Gaps in use of AI for Project Management:

Notwithstanding the large opportunities and transformative potential AI has in project management, the same is also fraught with various impediments and gaps that required to be bridged. AI being an essentially data-intensive approach, requires extensive datasets for the various project parameters. This covers budget, project objectives, milestones, deliverables, output, outcome elements and so on. The total volume of legacy data is particularly important (replete with all the aforesaid parameters) while generating the ground-truth that is used to train subsequent models under the machine learning approach. Non-continuous, non-validated and partial legacy data can play a crucial role in derailing all efforts of applying AI in R&D governance. Unfortunately, often, our project databases are incomplete, with serious concerns about accuracy of data. The volume of the data is small. Under such circumstances either the training data is nonexistent or inaccurate to return desired results. Beyond the issues of data volume and accuracy, the *quality* and *completeness* of historical project data present significant hurdles. Missing values, inconsistencies, and varied reporting formats across different projects make it challenging to consolidate a unified, clean dataset suitable for AI model training (Davenport & Redman, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of standardised data schemas and interoperability across diverse R&D institutions or departments hinders the aggregation of data needed for robust, generalisable AI applications. Concerns surrounding data privacy, intellectual property, and security also limit the sharing and accessibility of sensitive R&D project data, restricting the breadth and depth of training datasets (European Commission, 2020). Finally, the high cost associated with developing, deploying, and maintaining advanced AI solutions, including specialised infrastructure and expert personnel, can be a

substantial barrier, especially for organisations with limited budgets or those new to AI adoption (IBM, 2021). These factors collectively contribute to a situation where the foundational requirements for effective AI implementation in project management are often unmet (Rahman & Khan, 2023).

7. Opportunities for AI in Planning Agency Projects: A Case for CSIR

Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) could strategically leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to strengthen knowledge management, collaboration, risk governance, and impact assessment across its extensive network of laboratories.

AI-powered platforms could systematically analyse large volumes of internal research data, including project reports, publications, patents, technical documents, and archival records. Through advanced text mining (extracting useful information from unstructured textual data such as research papers, technical reports, patents, emails, and project documentation), natural language processing (interpret context, relationships, and semantic meaning), and pattern recognition techniques (machine learning algorithms to identify recurring structures, correlations, and predictive signals within datasets), AI systems could identify emerging scientific trends, thematic overlaps, and complementary expertise across laboratories. Such insights would enable the identification of potential inter-laboratory collaborations, reduce duplication of research efforts within CSIR laboratories and across Ministries, and promote a more integrated and synergistic research ecosystem.

In the domain of risk identification and mitigation, AI models could utilise historical project data in conjunction with external indicators—such as market dynamics, regulatory developments, supply chain variables, and technological maturity indices—to forecast potential technical, financial, and operational risks associated with high-stakes R&D initiatives. Predictive analytics and machine learning algorithms could generate early warning signals, assess probability-impact matrices, and recommend proactive mitigation strategies, thereby strengthening decision-making under uncertainty.

Furthermore, AI could significantly enhance impact assessment and performance evaluation mechanisms. By integrating and analysing diverse data streams—including scientific publications, citation metrics, patent filings, technology transfers, policy contributions, and socio-economic indicators—AI-driven systems could provide near real-time, evidence-based assessments of the societal, economic and industrial impact of CSIR's research outcomes. Such data-driven evaluation frameworks would support informed funding allocation, strategic planning, and transparent reporting to stakeholders, while reinforcing CSIR's mandate of scientific excellence and societal relevance.

8. The Socio-Cultural Interface of Adopting AI in R&D Governance

Although automation has been a revolutionary engine for human workspace, socio-cultural interfaces play a crucial role in determining the extent to which it can be internalised and adopted. Artificial intelligence is no exception. One aspect of the logic is to what extent would AI displace the role of a human project manager from the governance value chain. The other important aspect is the ethical concerns that pose before society while making large-scale data accessible, which often include privileged subsets.

Although a complete displacement of the human interface is ruled out at least for now, more of the transactional components of R&D governance and project management shall be done by AI. For example, budget planning and financial monitoring of projects; fund allocation quantum, etc., are particularly poised to be AI-driven.

Ethics is a major area that warrants attention. This includes custody and privacy of data being used and distributed; predictive analytics with the dataset being stored; and further downstream use of such information. Concerns have also been raised in the possibility of AI driven increase of the digital divide.

It may also be argued that R&D governance sometimes consciously introduce a skewed allocation and evaluation

pattern, with an objective to iron out regional and community disparities. Underprivileged communities, aspirational provinces etc are often provided with the benefit of relaxation in several parameters to bolster their development. Should a purely data-logic driven approach be adopted, concerns exist about the detrimental effect on such communities.

Further ethical considerations in AI adoption for R&D governance include the pervasive issue of bias in AI algorithms. If AI models are trained on historical data that reflects past biases in funding, collaboration, or research focus (e.g., favouring certain disciplines, institutions, or demographics), they risk perpetuating or even amplifying these inequalities in future decision-making, leading to unfair or inequitable outcomes (O’Neil, 2016). The “black box” nature of some advanced AI systems also raises questions of transparency and accountability. When AI makes recommendations for project selection or resource allocation, it can be challenging to understand the underlying rationale, making it difficult to justify decisions to stakeholders or address potential errors (UNESCO, 2021). While AI may not fully displace human project managers, it will inevitably transform their roles, necessitating significant upskilling in data interpretation, AI tool management, and ethical oversight, raising concerns about job security and the need for comprehensive reskilling initiatives (World Economic Forum, 2020). Moreover, the benefits of AI in R&D governance might disproportionately accrue to institutions and countries with advanced digital infrastructure and AI expertise, thereby exacerbating the existing digital divide and further marginalising less-resourced regions or “aspirational provinces” that lack the foundational capacity to leverage these technologies effectively (Crawford, 2021). Finally, intricate legal and ethical dilemmas surrounding intellectual property and data ownership emerge when AI is used to analyse vast datasets or even generate new research insights, particularly in collaborative multi-institutional or international projects (European Parliament, 2023).

9. Implication of AI in Policy Making and Foresight:

The cross-talk between AI instruments and policy tools is bi-directional. Thus, one hand, AI strategies may be shaped and

influenced by existing and evolving policy tools. On the other hand, policy tools may be sharpened and customised for better delivery through AI-based interventions.

Existing policy tools and frameworks need to be leveraged to develop national strategies for AI in R&D governance. This may include (but not restricted) to technology foresight, research-priority setting, and fund-priority setting, to name a few. Policies should also be adequate to regulate AI use for the machine-human interface. The UNESCO Science Report 2020 has made a review of the national AI strategies while monitoring global science governance frameworks.

On the other aspect of AI-based interventions on national STI policies, application of AI in statistical, econometric and linguistic models has been experimented to arrive at better decision-making towards identifying priority areas, collaboration potential, technology transfer networks and so on.

10. AI-Enabled R&D Governance: Balancing Optimisation and Human Judgment in the Future of Global Innovation

In a future where artificial intelligence is responsibly integrated into research and development (R&D) governance—and where data collection, storage, and analytics have matured significantly—we may witness a transformative shift in the global innovation ecosystem. AI-driven systems could seamlessly connect project outcomes to new research ideas, enabling continuous cycles of discovery and improvement. Collaborative networks may emerge organically, guided by intelligent systems that identify complementary expertise across institutions and borders. Heuristic monitoring tools could optimise resource allocation and minimise duplication of efforts, ensuring more efficient distribution of funding, talent, and infrastructure.

Such a landscape would likely foster distributed research models, where data-intensive work can be conducted remotely, enabling truly global and interconnected research environments. Novel solutions to complex, interdisciplinary challenges could emerge from AI's ability to detect patterns and connections beyond conventional human perception.

However, this transformation also raises critical questions. Would algorithm-driven systems identify research problems that are more imaginative or impactful than those conceived by trained human minds? Could machine-generated collaborative networks genuinely outperform traditional, human-centered scientific communities? And should R&D funding and governance be guided primarily by optimisation metrics and machine-derived insights, or must they continue to reflect subjective human values, creativity, and societal priorities?

Ultimately, the effectiveness of future R&D governance will depend on how thoughtfully it integrates classical human judgment with AI-enabled intelligence. Rather than replacing human insight, the most sustainable and impactful model may be one that harmonises computational optimisation with human wisdom, ethics, and vision.

11. Conclusion:

It is evident from the aforesaid discussion that artificial intelligence has emerged as a pivotal player in the ambit of R&D governance. Nevertheless, it is important to devise effective policy tools and guiding its ethical and judicious use; while also providing adequate attention to build capacity for accelerating its adoption in national scientific agencies which may be achieved through targeted funding for responsible AI projects. As AI emerges as a transforming force in R&D governance, becoming central to its conception, management, and evaluation, the emulation of AI-centric practices of global leaders like NIH and Max Planck for enhanced data management and coordination, is being increasingly echoed in India's innovation-centric approaches.

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