

# TRUSTING THE DIGITAL FRONT DOOR: CAN NSW LEAD AUSTRALIA'S APPROACH TO PUBLIC TRUST?

RESEARCH INNOVATION COUNCIL ANZ BRIEF | VOL.4

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



On 20 October, 2024, a dynamic assembly of government officials, academic leaders, industry representatives, and community members gathered at the **University of Technology Sydney (UTS)** for an incisive roundtable focused on advancing digital transformation in the Australian public sector. The discussion revolved around unlocking productivity, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and designing citizen-centric digital services.

Attending the Chatham House discussion were 13 senior public sector leaders representing key NSW government agencies and departments. Of these attendees, **54% held Executive Leadership Team seniority**, including roles such as Chief Operating Officer, Chief Digital Officer, Chief Technology Officer, and Acting Chief Executive Officer, while the remaining 46% seniority comprised Directors serving as second-in-command (2ICs). Bringing cross-sector expertise to the table, this forum welcomed 6 industry leaders from the AWS partner network including **AWS, PolarSeven, HashiCorp, NEXTGEN, Okta, and Shine Solutions**, as well as 3 senior hosting academic contributors from the **University of Technology Sydney**.

These leaders oversee critical portfolios spanning ICT and digital, data and analytics, cybersecurity, enterprise IT services, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and workforce initiatives. Collectively, they contribute to driving strategic priorities in areas such as whole-of-government digital transformation, emerging technology adoption, customer-centric service delivery, and the implementation of secure and innovative ICT solutions.

The discussion underscored the pressing need to enhance productivity in a context of constrained population growth and workforce participation. Digital transformation, particularly when leveraging citizen-centric designs and data-driven strategies, was championed as a key driver of economic growth and public trust. With the GX5 framework referenced as a foundational guideline, this roundtable uniquely explored regional challenges and opportunities, offering actionable strategies to translate broad digital ambitions into tangible outcomes.

By **Patrick Joy** | Head of Research & Analysis | [Public Sector Network](#)

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WHAT IS THE GX5?



FIVE DIGITAL INITIATIVES  
TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

THE GX5 | RESEARCH BRIEF



## AUSTRALIA'S ECONOMIC CROSSROADS

Traditional growth drivers—population and workforce participation—are nearing their limits. Population growth, heavily reliant on immigration and birth rates, faces political, logistical, and cultural constraints. Similarly, workforce participation is squeezed by high employment and demographics.

- **Focus on Productivity Gains:** With the public sector accounting for ~27% of Australia's GDP, participants identified digital transformation as a critical lever for improving efficiency, reducing costs, and driving economic growth.
- **Avoiding Economic Stagnation:** Without decisive productivity improvements, governments may face stark trade-offs, including raising taxes or cutting public services. These measures risk undermining societal well-being and trust in public institutions.

## DATA AS A STRATEGIC ASSET FOR POLICY

The discussions emphasised that data, when used effectively, can inform better policies and streamline service delivery.

- **Barriers to Data Sharing:** Resistance to inter-agency collaboration, technical incompatibilities, and cultural fears about data misuse were cited as key challenges.
- **Legislative Reforms:** Participants called for updated legislation to simplify data sharing while ensuring robust privacy protections. Policies modelled on international best practices, such as the UK's Digital Economy Act, could provide a framework.

## THE VALUE OF CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

The roundtable highlighted the potential of partnerships between government, academia, and industry. For instance:

- **Harnessing Academic and Industry Expertise:** Universities like UTS can contribute significantly by providing research expertise, measuring trust metrics, and acting as neutral facilitators for innovation and research.
- **Industry Collaboration:** Engaging with industry partners is crucial to adopt global standards and technologies that can support government initiatives, ensuring interoperability and scalability. Industry leaders such as AWS and Okta are advancing standards for digital identity and secure authentication.

## THE NECESSITY OF STRONG, VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Digital transformation efforts require leaders who can articulate a clear vision, inspire teams, and overcome bureaucratic inertia.

- **Fostering an Innovation-Friendly Culture:** Resistance to change was identified as a significant inhibitor. Participants suggested incentivising innovation through targeted rewards and public recognition programs.
- **Political Will and Long-Term Commitment:** Sustained leadership, beyond election cycles, is critical to the success of complex, multi-year digital initiatives.

# BUILDING AND SUSTAINING PUBLIC TRUST

As private-sector services increasingly outpace government offerings in digital maturity, public confidence in government capabilities is at risk. Participants highlighted the following priorities:

- **Transparent Use of Data:** Clear communication about data protection measures, paired with evidence of benefits, fosters confidence. For example, the success of Service NSW's COVID check-in system demonstrated how transparent practices can build trust rapidly during a crisis.
- **Real-Time Feedback Mechanisms:** Tools such as customer satisfaction scores, sentiment analysis, and regular trust metrics provide actionable insights for improving citizen engagement.
- **Consistency Across Channels:** A seamless and user-friendly experience—whether online, via apps, or in person—was identified as a cornerstone for maintaining trust.

**Public Sector Network** is pleased to present further research undertaken in survey of Digital NSW Government leaders in November 2024 to support this discussion point:

## THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD PUBLIC TRUST IN DIGITAL NSW

Transparent reporting on government efficiency, performance, and decision-making	30%
Protecting citizens through a cyber secure and resilient public sector	22%
Citizen engagement and co-design of digital services	14%
Demonstrating tangible productivity gains as a result of digital initiatives	12%
Accessibility and inclusivity of digital services	12%
Ethical and assured use of citizen data for the public good	11%

Source: PSN Digital NSW Innovation Survey 2024; Total Sample: 399 NSW Gov Executives

# INNOVATIVE IDEATION

## CUSTOMER-CENTRIC SERVICE DESIGN

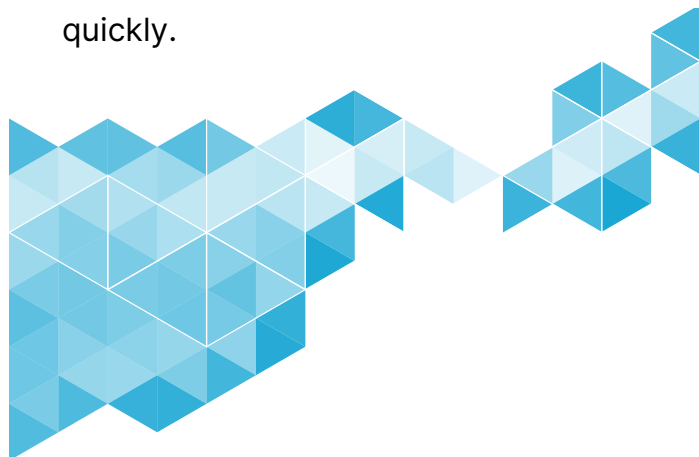
- **Dynamic Feedback Loops:** Tools that capture real-time user feedback, such as the Service NSW app, enable iterative improvements and measurement.
- **Inclusive Design Principles:** Services must be designed to cater to vulnerable populations, such as those with low digital literacy or limited access to technology.

## DATA-DRIVEN POLICY

- **De-Identified Data Analysis:** Leveraging anonymised datasets can unlock insights while respecting privacy.
- **Common Data Standards:** Standardising formats across agencies simplifies integration and fosters interoperability.

## AGILE FUNDING MODELS

- **Incremental Investment:** Pilot funding, paired with defined success metrics, can reduce risks and demonstrate value quickly.



# ACTIONABLE OUTCOMES

## 1. Develop Productivity Metrics for Treasury Engagement:

Build a compelling economic case for digital projects by quantifying expected productivity gains and ROI. Leverage tools like the NSW Digital Restart Fund as a precedent.

## 2. Strengthen Governance Structures:

Establish cross-agency committees and formalised collaboration frameworks to oversee digital initiatives, ensuring accountability and alignment.

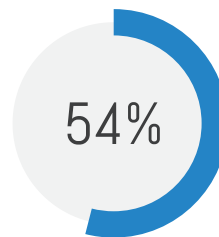
## 3. Implement Real-Time Citizen Feedback Systems:

Use dynamic tools to monitor citizen satisfaction and experience, identify pain points, and refine services in real time.

## 4. Empower Leaders as Change Agents:

Launch leadership development programs to cultivate the skills required for driving innovation and navigating institutional resistance.

### THE NEXT MOST CRITICAL STEP TO ENHANCE DIGITAL SKILLS WITHIN THE NSW PUBLIC SECTOR



**#1 Fostering a culture of continuous learning and emotional intelligence to drive innovation and adaptability**

Source: PSN Digital NSW Innovation Survey 2024;  
Total Sample: 392 NSW Gov Executives

## CONCLUSION

The inaugural gathering at UTS highlighted a critical juncture for the NSW public sector. With traditional avenues for economic growth constrained, enhancing productivity through digital transformation is imperative. Participants emphasized that achieving this requires strong leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and a relentless focus on the citizen experience.

### TOP PRIORITY FOR BOOSTING PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH DIGITAL

Simplifying access to government services across State, Local, and Federal levels	47%
Streamlining e-government processes and digitisation for businesses and households	23%
Integration of more cross-agency digital services feeding into the Service NSW front door	15%
Accelerating data sharing and analytics capabilities to predict citizen and community needs	10%
Greater digital-enablement of frontline service delivery through 24/7 AI agents	4%

Source: PSN Digital NSW Innovation Survey 2024; Total Sample: 410 NSW Gov Executives

## THE PATH FORWARD

- **Prioritise Productivity Gains:** Focus on digital projects with measurable impacts.
- **Secure Cross-Sector Buy-In:** Engage stakeholders early to ensure alignment.
- **Monitor and Adapt:** Regularly evaluate progress and refine strategies based on citizen feedback.
- **Sustain Momentum:** Maintain engagement through regular forums, working groups, and collaborative efforts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Public Sector Network** thank all participants, with special recognition to the Hon. Victor Dominello, Ember Advisors, AWS and partners, and the host universities for their invaluable contributions. The insights shared at these events will guide the next chapter of digital transformation in Australia and New Zealand.

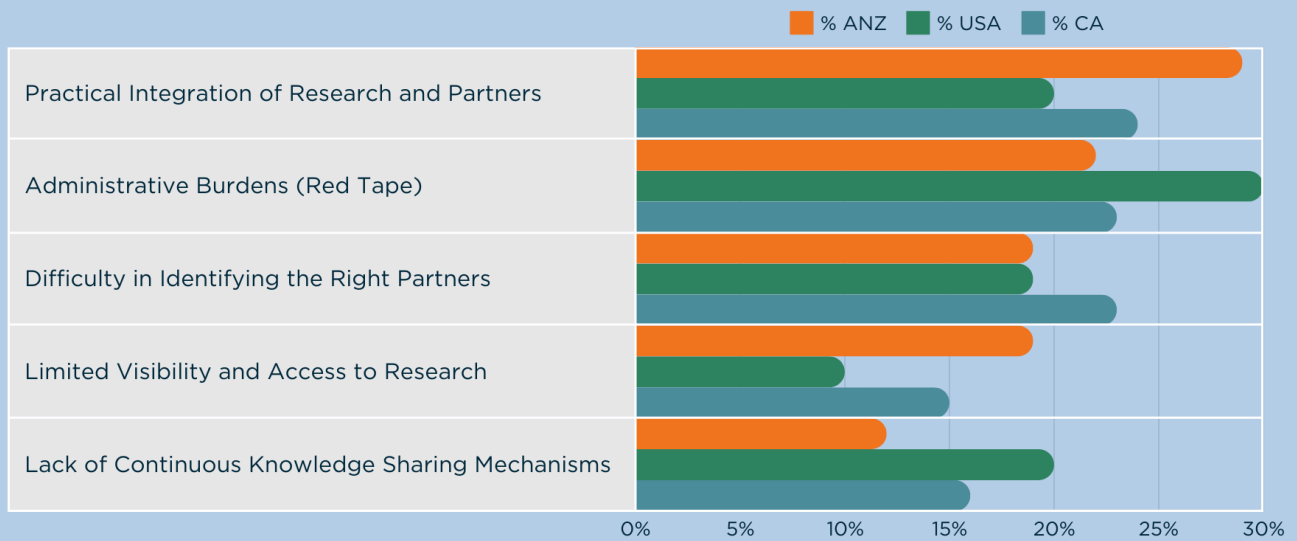
# ABOUT THE RESEARCH INNOVATION COUNCIL

**Connecting government, industry and academia:** we've been able to engineer a new program antithetical to the classical red tape, administration, and risk-aversion that impedes innovation.

Our program offers senior executives a unique opportunity to gather monthly for PSN-facilitated roundtable sessions with colleagues, academics, and technologists. We run the program at no cost to government executives or academics, and provide attendees a private online group on our global insights exchange platform, access to research briefs, and expert engagement with PSN analysts and facilitators.



## Greatest challenge partnering with Academia or Industry



Source: PSN Research Innovation Council Survey 2024. Total Sample Size: 188 ANZ/ 83 USA/ 80 CA Gov Executives

## ABOUT PUBLIC SECTOR NETWORK

Public Sector Network is a research company that represents public sector professionals across Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the USA. It develops roundtables, seminars, and conferences to suit current areas of interest to government agencies and their suppliers.

PSN's growing community spans across federal, state, and local government departments, healthcare, and education, allowing members to share information, access the latest in government innovation, and engage with other like-minded individuals on a secure and closed-door network.

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