Are You De-Risking or De-Valuing Your AI?

How Governance can Become the Growth Engine for Public Sector AI

Public sector leaders are being told AI will unlock productivity, savings and better services. Budgets are being announced. Action plans are being published. But on the ground? AI is stuck in pilots and proof-of-concepts, with legacy systems, messy data and fragmented governance.

In an ideal world AI would be embedded into frontline services, driving faster decisions, fairer outcomes and better use of public money. But the foundations for this aren't in place. 28% of government systems are legacy[1], data is siloed within departments and ownership is unclear.

The result is the governance paradox: controls designed to de-risk AI end up de-valuing innovation and keeping it away from the frontline. This leads to the band-aid problem – rather than applying AI strategically to achieve productivity gains and cost savings, AI patches are used to fix small-scale problems.

We're cutting through the noise and showing you how to flip that, using Databricks Unity Catalog as a unified governance layer that lets you move fast and stay safe.

For the full discussion with Manuka and Databricks experts, you can also watch the 60-minute webinar on demand.

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WATCH NOW

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Reframing governance as an AI growth engine

Leaders are walking a tightrope. Move fast on AI and risk compliance, or play it safe and miss the opportunity for transformational change. That dilemma is why 78% of executives say data privacy and governance are a major concern when adopting AI.[2]

Most play it safe. They embed governance that de-risks AI but de-values innovation in the process.

But there doesn't need to be a trade-off between governance and risk. The answer is more effective governance. Governance built on robust, unified data takes the handbrake off AI, driving tangible improvements to frontline services.

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"Governance is often thought of as something to control risk. But when you think of a tool like Unity Catalog as a unified governance engine it allows you to apply the power of AI models to your data in a safe setting."

– Liam Hine , Head of GTM, Strategy & Alliances

Government systems are fragmented and often outdated. This is compounded by a lack of organisation-wide standards and interoperability.

In practice that leads to isolated experimentation with copilots and chat interfaces, proof-of-concepts that tick the AI box but rarely scale, and the uncontrolled adoption of unapproved tools, creating a risky shadow AI.

Upgrading government systems is costly. But without action AI progress will stall. Databricks Unity Catalog can square this circle by sitting above your existing systems, unifying data and governance in one place.

[1] State of Digital Government Review, GOVUK, January 2025: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review
[2] KPMG Generative AI Survey: https://kpmg.com/us/en/media/news/kpmg-generative-ai-2023.html

Underpinning governance with Databricks Unity Catalog

Unity Catalog enables strategic AI governance in three ways:

1

Brings the model to the data

Unity Catalog lets AI work directly with data inside your security perimeter, so you're not sending sensitive records to external models. Information stays safe, compliance is preserved and lineage maintained, while departments still have access to leading models such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude and Llama.

2

Balances quality and cost

Embedding custom agents into workflows is complex and potentially costly. Unity Catalog simplifies the process with built-in evaluation, fine-tuning and retrieval-augmented generation (RAG). Leaders can dial quality up or down to control compute demands and cost, ensuring AI delivers dependable results without overspending.

3

Delivers enterprise scale

Too many pilots fail to scale. Unity Catalog works across cloud environments and connects securely to existing systems, enabling departments to move from isolated experiments to enterprise-grade deployments with confidence.

> "*We have a single, unified approach to governing both data and AI. Unity Catalog unifies all assets across your structure.*"
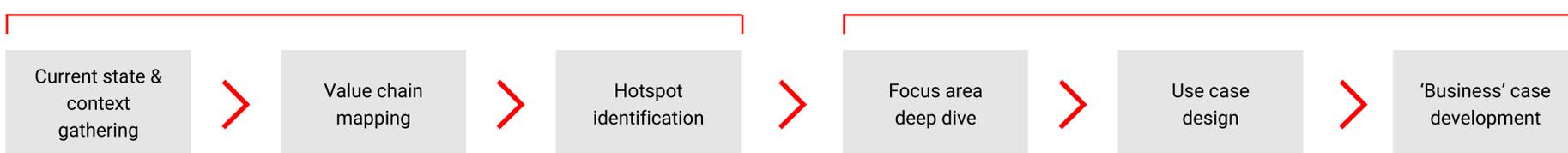>
> – Kiran Sreekuma , Data & AI Governance Specialist

From policy to production

But where to start? Tools alone won't fix the governance paradox. You need a clear, strategic approach to turn AI ambition into live, governed services rather than 'quick fixes'.

Start with outcomes, not technology. Use value chain mapping to identify where AI can move the needle on cost, capacity, fairness or citizen experience.

Stage 1: Value chain mapping

Stage 2: Use case identification & prioritisation, 'business' case

| Current state & context gathering | > | Value chain mapping | > | Hotspot identification | > | Focus area deep dive | > | Use case design | > | 'Business' case development |

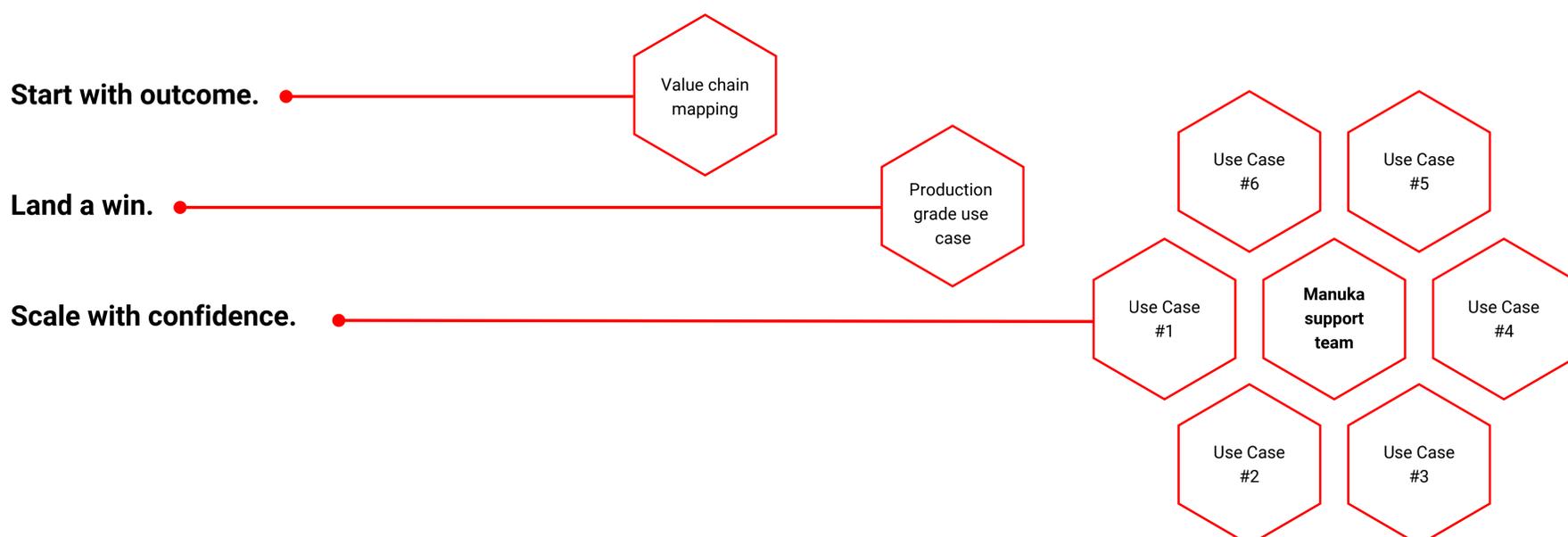**Workshops, interviews, research, & write-up - 2 week timeline**

Current state assessment playback

Pipeline of high-priority use cases playback

Then focus on one catalyst use case and stress test it against four simple questions:

1. Does it have cross-team impact, not just a single champion?

2. Is there clear leadership backing and budget ownership?

3. Can we measure success in a way that will stand up to scrutiny?

4. Are your data and governance foundations ready to support it safely?

Only then can you start to scale with confidence as the path to production is now established and solid.

Start with outcome. —————————— Value chain mapping

Land a win. —————————— Production grade use case

Scale with confidence. —————————— Use Case #1

Use Case #6 | Use Case #5
Manuka support team
Use Case #4
Use Case #2 | Use Case #3

Databricks in action: accelerating policy search and response

North Dakota University System – GenAI Policy Assistant

Challenge: More than 3,000 internal policy and state regulation documents with slow compliance checks and manual searches / updates.

Solution: Consolidating all documents in Azure Databricks, governed by Unity Catalog and deployment of a custom GenAI-powered policy assistant, they transformed how policy information is accessed and used. Staff can now search public PDFs and internal databases through a secure interface, automate updates and share insights across the system.

The impact:
- **10 to 20x faster policy search and response**
- **2× faster time to production**
- **100% reduction in procurement time and costs**

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"Because everything stays within your security perimeter, you can enforce access controls, you can manage the cost, prevent harmful outputs and track full data to model lineage."

– Kiran Sreekuma , Data & AI Governance Specialist

From rock solid foundations to impact

A unified governance layer is the launchpad for AI that moves beyond pilots to deliver real change in the public sector.

Trusted data enables faster decisions. Consistent governance ensures fairer outcomes. Scalable platforms make better use of public money.

Manuka helps organisations make this shift. Through value chain mapping, catalytic use cases, and a build-once, scale-many-times approach, we embed Databricks safely and at scale. The result: frontline services that are more responsive, policies implemented more efficiently and tangible outcomes for people on the ground.

To discuss how we could help your public sector organisation build AI-empowering governance, **get in touch.**