

2026 Workforce Productivity Research

Government Insights for
Senior Public Sector Leaders

Productivity, AI and Better Work Design

Better work design can strengthen execution, lift productivity and reduce workforce pressure

Our 2026 Workforce Productivity Research identifies significant productivity challenges. Despite clear strategies, competing priorities, rework, manual reporting and disconnected systems consume time that could be directed to higher-value work.

In government, these challenges exist alongside legitimate accountability and service obligations. The opportunity is to reduce duplication and unnecessary coordination without compromising these requirements.

Three key findings

1. Strategy is understood, but execution is constrained.

Competing priorities, changing requirements and limited capacity visibility create rework and slow execution.

2. Disconnected systems and manual work consume capacity.

Connected data, streamlined workflows and responsible AI adoption can reduce duplication and release time.

3. Leaders and teams face capacity and skills pressures.

Heavy meeting loads, workforce overload and changing skills requirements reinforce the need for better work design.

The opportunity

Three connected shifts - Align Execution, Connect Systems, Data & AI, and Evolve Teams & Skills - can help government leaders strengthen execution, release capacity and improve services and public outcomes.

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Productive capacity is lost when strategy, systems and people are not connected

When strategy, systems and people are disconnected, employees spend significant time coordinating, reporting and managing competing priorities, leaving less time for delivering outcomes.

Strategy is clear but breaks down in execution

- Strategy is understood but not always connected to how work is organised
- Priorities compete for the same capacity
- Changing requirements or priorities often create rework

83% understand how their work connects to strategic priorities.¹

only 51% say their organisation is effective at organising work so that people can focus on what matters.¹

Fragmented systems and data create manual work

- Disconnected systems create manual work and duplication
- Status reports and presentations take significant time
- Data for decisions is not always available when needed

38% spend significant time on manual tasks or duplication due to system constraints.¹

42% spend significant time creating or updating status reports, presentations and updates.¹

Meetings and coordination compete with focused execution

- Many meetings are not seen as necessary or moving work forward
- Senior leaders report a much heavier meeting load
- Unnecessary meetings take time from focused work

only 44% agree most meetings are necessary and help move work forward.¹

¹EnterpriseWorks ANZ Survey, 2026

Improving productivity within the realities of government

The opportunity is to reduce duplication, rework and coordination effort while respecting government's accountability and service obligations.

Government priorities can be set externally

Leaders cannot always choose fewer priorities, but they can sequence them and make trade-offs visible.

New priorities do not necessarily remove existing work

The research links changing priorities to rework and wasted effort. Visible trade-offs matter most here.

Structural change can reshape responsibilities & workflows

Changing requirements can create rework. A consistent operating rhythm helps keep work flowing through change.

Accountability & assurance requirements are substantial & legitimate

The research found reporting takes significant time. The opportunity is less duplication in how accountability is met.

Information & systems may need to work across organisational boundaries

The research found disconnected systems lead people to spend significant time on manual work and duplication.

AI adoption carries privacy, security, governance & accountability obligations

The research identifies governance, redesigned work and skills, not access alone, as conditions for AI value.

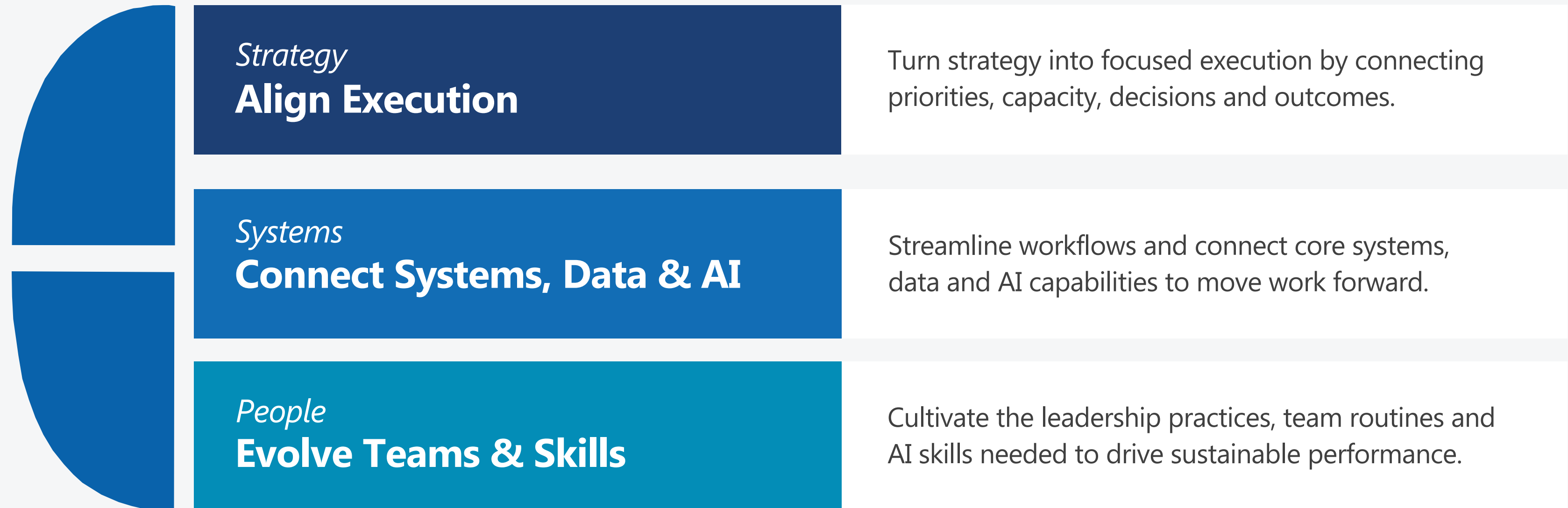
Leaders balance execution, stewardship & service delivery

The research found senior leaders report a substantially heavier meeting load than individual contributors.

These conditions are a legitimate part of government. The opportunity is to reduce the duplication, rework and coordination that build up around them.

Research findings: EnterpriseWorks ANZ Survey, 2026 and 2026 Workforce Productivity Report. Descriptions of the operating environment are EnterpriseWorks interpretation.

There is a clear path to more capacity, by connecting strategy, systems and people



The outcome: Stronger execution and more capacity to deliver better services and public outcomes.

Strategy is clear but breaks down in execution

Most people understand the strategy. The gap is in how work is organised, sequenced and seen.

Changing priorities can create rework and competing demands. In government, where priorities may be set externally, clear visibility of capacity and trade-offs is especially important.

Constant change creates wasted capacity

49%

say changing requirements or priorities often create rework or wasted effort.¹

Priorities compete for the same capacity

29%

do not agree their team has clear visibility of its workload and capacity.¹

Leaders can't align work they can't see

37%

do not agree they have the data and reporting they need to make informed decisions quickly.¹

¹EnterpriseWorks ANZ Survey, 2026

Five actions to align strategy with execution



1

Keep work flowing through change

Maintain a consistent operating rhythm through structural and machinery-of-government change, so work keeps flowing.

2

Create clarity, reduce distractions

Keep reports, updates and requests that support a decision, action or genuine accountability requirement. Stop the rest.

3

Sequence work, make trade-offs visible

Focus effort on what matters most. When a new priority arrives, decide what stops, slows or waits, and give priorities time to land.

4

One front door, aligned to capacity

Bring all new work through one pathway, prioritised against capacity, so teams focus on the highest-value work.

5

Push decisions closer to the work

Give every priority one accountable owner, with clear decision rights and escalation points, so teams can move faster.

Reporting & disconnected systems consume capacity

When systems don't connect, people spend time manually bringing together information.

In government, much of this reporting supports genuine accountability. The opportunity is to reduce duplication in how information is collected and reused.

Disconnected systems create manual work

38%

of knowledge workers spend significant time on manual tasks or duplicating work due to system constraints.¹

¹EnterpriseWorks ANZ Survey, 2026

Manual reporting is draining capacity

42%

spend significant time creating or updating status reports, presentations and updates.¹

Fragmented data weakens reporting

The Australian National Audit Office found that disconnected systems and inconsistent data undermined cross-agency grants reporting and funding oversight.²

²ANAO, Governance of Data, June 2025

AI can reduce manual work, with potential for greater value

AI is already helping people reduce manual work, but its benefits are not yet reaching everyone. Broader adoption creates an opportunity to release more capacity.

Realising that potential requires appropriate governance, redesigned workflows and workforce capability, alongside a clear plan to redirect time saved into higher-value work.

**AI is already
reducing manual
work**

46%

of individual contributors who use AI agree it meaningfully reduces manual work in their role.¹

¹EnterpriseWorks ANZ Survey, 2026

**AI adoption
has not yet
scaled**

only 48%

say AI tools are available and actively used in their team.¹

**Government
trials show
potential value**

Around 40% of respondents in the Australian Government's Microsoft 365 Copilot trial agreed it enabled them to allocate time to higher-value or more complex tasks.³

³Digital Transformation Agency, 2024. Self-reported. Post-use survey, n=807. Trial ran January to June 2024.

Five actions to connect systems, data & AI



1

Simplify and connect workflows

Remove the handoffs between teams and systems that create re-keying, rework and risk.

2

One core system for each need

Define one core system for each need, so work is not duplicated or lost between tools.

3

Build one connected data layer

Create trusted, connected data, collected once and reused, to improve visibility, reporting, accountability and AI readiness.

4

Automate high-volume manual work

Target repetitive work that consumes capacity, so people can shift their time and skills to higher-value work.

5

Embed AI into core workflows

Build AI into core workflows, with privacy, security and accountability built in, so it becomes part of daily work.

Leaders and teams face capacity and skills pressures

Many public servants report working beyond capacity. Across large organisations, senior leaders report a much heavier meeting load, and skills are not keeping pace with AI.

Without better work design, time saved through technology can be absorbed by meetings and low-value activity rather than redirected to priority work.

Employees are working beyond capacity

The Australian Public Service Commission found 17% of employees report working well above capacity and 39% slightly above.⁴

In the NSW public sector, 57.3% report working above capacity.⁵

⁴Australian Public Service Commission, 2025 |

⁵NSW Premier's Department, 2025

Senior leaders carry a heavy meeting load

49%

of senior leaders rate their meeting load as heavy, compared with 13% of individual contributors.¹

¹EnterpriseWorks ANZ Survey, 2026

Skills are not keeping pace with changing needs

88%

of employees expect to need major upskilling, but **only 36%** feel properly trained.⁶

⁶Boston Consulting Group, 2026

Five actions to connect people to performance



1

Prioritise engagement and wellbeing

Treat engagement and wellbeing as essential foundations for sustained performance.

2

Help leaders guide their teams

Simplify priorities, reduce reporting and clarify team rhythms so leaders can build high-performing teams.

3

Protect focused work time

Create dedicated time for priority work and reduce reactive demand.

4

Build practical AI skills in daily work

Equip people with practical skills, confidence and guardrails to unlock the value of AI.

5

Reinvest freed capacity deliberately

Direct reclaimed time to priority work, better service, capability and sustainable workloads.

Actions to release capacity and strengthen execution

Each action is small on its own. In the EnterpriseWorks view, taken together they can release capacity for better execution, better services and better public outcomes.

			Questions for leaders
	<i>Strategy</i> Align Execution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep work flowing through change• Create clarity, reduce distractions• Choose fewer priorities, go deeper• One front door, aligned to capacity• Push decisions closer to the work	What will stop, slow or wait when the next priority arrives?
	<i>Systems</i> Connect Systems, Data & AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simplify and connect workflows• One core system for each need• Build one connected data layer• Automate high-volume manual work• Embed AI into core workflows	Which duplicated reporting or data entry will we remove first?
	<i>People</i> Evolve Teams & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritise engagement and wellbeing• Help leaders guide their teams• Protect focused work time• Build practical AI skills in daily work• Reinvest freed capacity deliberately	Where will we reinvest the first capacity we free up?

About this edition and the research behind it

The research

This edition draws on the 2026 Workforce Productivity Research, designed and conducted independently by EnterpriseWorks.⁷ The research is informed by:

- A 2026 survey of 385 knowledge workers in Australian and New Zealand organisations with 500 or more employees.¹
- Interviews with 33 knowledge workers and leaders across industries.
- A review of more than 125 published research sources.

How to read this edition

- Survey findings describe knowledge workers in large Australian and New Zealand organisations across sectors. They are not government statistics, and this edition is not a study of the government workforce.
- Government sources are published Australian Government and NSW Government documents, used for context. Survey and trial findings are self-reported. The APS and NSW employee surveys are separate and use different questions.
- The link from released capacity to better services and public outcomes is the EnterpriseWorks view.

Support for the research

The 2026 Workforce Productivity Research was supported by monday.com. EnterpriseWorks retained full editorial control over the analysis, findings and recommendations. This government edition was prepared by EnterpriseWorks.

About EnterpriseWorks

EnterpriseWorks transforms how work gets done. We help organisations lift productivity, strengthen execution and create capacity for the work that matters most, by redesigning how people, teams, workflows, decisions and technology come together. Our advice is grounded in research.

To discuss what the research means for your organisation, contact EnterpriseWorks at contact@enterpriseworks.com.au.

REFERENCES

This edition draws on the 2026 Workforce Productivity Research and on published sources. Sources cited in this edition are listed below.

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Visit enterpriseworks.com.au for the full 2026 Workforce Productivity Research report and full list of references.

Research and publication

Researched, analysed and prepared by EnterpriseWorks Pty Ltd. This government edition draws on the 2026 Workforce Productivity Research, including the 2026 ANZ Knowledge Worker Survey, and on published sources cited throughout, including Australian Government and NSW Government sources. The 2026 Workforce Productivity Research was supported by monday.com. EnterpriseWorks retained full editorial independence, and the findings and views expressed are EnterpriseWorks' own.

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