



Empowering public servants to make confident, informed decisions with data and AI

Global insights from civil servants

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FOREWORD



Amid rising global complexity and tightening resources, public sector leaders are under increasing pressure to make fast, fair and transparent decisions.

At SAS, we believe that data and AI play a pivotal role in improving public sector impact and citizen trust. With data and AI, civil servants are empowered to move from instinct to insight, from reactive to pro-active, and from isolated tasks to strategic alignment.

This report, developed in partnership with Global Government Forum, draws on the views of over 600 civil servants worldwide. It reveals strong consensus: more than 80% of respondents agree that better use of data improves risk management, forecasting, service delivery and accountability. Yet barriers persist with siloed and inaccessible data, skills shortages and limited investment.

The findings also highlight a significant opportunity for AI. While 81% of respondents see potential for AI to enhance decision-making, only 27% say their organisations are using more advanced forms such as traditional and agentic AI. Closing this gap requires more than greater awareness and commitment from leadership.

At SAS, we're dedicated to helping governments transform how they work, whether by streamlining workflows, enhancing services or building trust through transparency. We help public servants make confident decisions that can deliver better outcomes for all.

We hope this report inspires action.



Jennifer Robinson

Global public sector strategic advisor, SAS



INTRODUCTION

Governments around the world are working hard to extract – and act upon – the insights held in their vast data stores, and to embrace artificial intelligence (AI) and the promise it holds for innovation and transformation.

At the same time, economic pressures and constrained budgets are compelling public servants to do more with fewer resources, while governments are called to respond quickly and effectively to complex challenges.

Against this backdrop, data and AI can help those working in government both to streamline their workflows and make fast, informed decisions. This in turn drives efficiency and can unlock productivity gains – and ultimately lead to improved performance and better services for citizens.

Global Government Forum (GGF) surveyed over 600 civil servants worldwide to understand how data is being used in government and where there are further challenges and opportunities.

Most recognise the potential of data to aid confident decision-making in various ways – from enabling better forecasting and planning in government, to supporting more effective service design and delivery. But there is some way to go before most public servants have access to the data they need and can use it consistently to make decisions.

When it comes to AI, the vast majority see either some or great potential in using it to improve decision-making in government but the more advanced capabilities of AI tools remain largely untapped.



Global Government Forum surveyed over 600 civil servants worldwide to understand data opportunities and challenges





INTRODUCTION

In this report, we explore:

- The benefits of data- and AI-driven decision-making in government – and some key use cases.
- How to overcome the barriers to using data and AI in decision-making.
- How to get the fundamentals right to use data and AI effectively.
- How to make a business case for investment in data and AI.
- What the future holds for data and AI in government decision-making.

The survey findings covered in this report are backed by insights shared by public and private sector experts during the ‘Confident decision-making for better outcomes in government’ webinar in June 2025.

The panellists included Jennifer Robinson, global strategic advisor for SAS’ public sector practice; Dr Sarah Garner, head of data and insight – One Login, at the UK Government Digital Service, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology; and Meagan Collins, chief, enterprise information management, corporate services sector at the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. They are quoted in this report alongside an expert from AWS, and other public service leaders from a range of countries.

The report also highlights a range of other global examples of how data and AI are being used in government decision-making.



The survey findings covered in this report are backed by expert insights and global examples





PART 1: WHY USE DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING?

Data and AI, if used safely and effectively, can offer a myriad of benefits.

These technologies can strengthen and accelerate government decision-making, informing action by, for example, helping pool and interpret information from various sources, and providing situational awareness for a rounded view on which to base decisions.

AI can be used to undertake routine tasks and crunch data in a fraction of the time it would take a team of people. It can streamline workflows and operations, freeing civil servants to do the work that only humans can do.

Data and AI can also help forecast demand for services, enabling governments to allocate resources accordingly. They can act as catalysts for cross-organisational sharing of information and insights, empowering officials and promoting transparency and accountability to build public trust.

As Jennifer Robinson, global strategic advisor for SAS' public sector practice, summarised: "I've heard people say, 'I feel we should do this', and they're saying that because their gut is telling them. Others will say, 'I think this', because they have a little bit of information but not enough to have total confidence.

"What you want officials to be able to say is, 'I know we should do this' – because the power to know is afforded by their data and having the right information at the right time."

8 in 10

respondents say that better use of data in decision-making is useful for achieving key outcomes





PART 1: WHY USE DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING?

Benefits of data for decision-making

Our survey shows that civil and public servants are aware of the benefits of data-driven decision-making, with more than 8 in 10 respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that better use of data in decision-making is useful for achieving nine outcomes in their organisations (see graphic).

One survey respondent encapsulated its benefits neatly: “[Use of data] nudges decision-makers to respect the due process and methodology – the cornerstone for developing public policy and decisions for the greater good of society and humanity.”

Improving risk identification and management



Helping make decisions based on best practice and evidence



Helping make decisions based on more accurate performance data



Enabling better forecasting and planning



Enabling more effective allocation of resources



Supporting more effective service design and delivery



Improving the efficiency and productivity of teams



Enhancing transparency and public accountability



Supporting innovation in policy or operations



“[Use of data] nudges decision-makers to respect the due process and methodology”
Survey respondent



PART 1: WHY USE DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING?

Decision-making in a crisis

There was a step-change in how governments used data during the COVID-19 pandemic, which vividly illustrated many of the above benefits at a time of global crisis.

Sarah Glavey, head of public service transformation policy at Ireland's Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform, recalled that the demands of the pandemic prompted "a huge collective effort to use all of our sources of data".

Civil and public service data owners, universities, emergency planners and data visualisation specialists collaborated to build a "real-time platform that fed into both Ministry of Health and central government decision-making", drawing on both "quantitative data from many public service bodies in our system, and weekly panel surveys on public sentiment".

This provided officials with "lived experience of how we bring together and use real-time data", Glavey explained – and government is now applying these skills elsewhere. Pulling in data from the Central Statistics Office and the census, Irish officials are building a portal to track public sector initiatives and service provision in disadvantaged areas.

Using AI in decision-making

AI can take government data use to the next level, by analysing great swathes of data in seconds – producing significant time savings and allowing civil servants to make decisions and provide elected officials with advice based on the most comprehensive picture of any given situation.

The vast majority (81%) of our survey respondents see AI as having some or great potential to contribute to improved decision-making in government, with over a third (34%) seeing great potential.

This potential has been **exploited by the Southern States Energy Board (SSEB)**. Comprised of governors and state legislators from sixteen southern states and two territories of the US, the board works to advance energy policies, technologies and practices that enhance the region's energy efficiency, with a focus on collaboration and innovation.

It uses AI and analytics platform SAS Viya to analyse and manage vast amounts of geological, regulatory and community sentiment data.

As Dr Ben Wernette, principal scientist and strategic partnerships lead at the SSEB, described: "SAS Viya,

81%

say AI has potential to improve decision-making





PART 1: WHY USE DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING?

in conjunction with generative AI, is helping us have more informed, transformative conversations with regulators about topics of concern to their constituents. We can confidently provide data that shows what the public's concerns are and proactively communicate key messaging."

The **UK government is similarly using an AI tool to review public consultations** and to pinpoint and organise themes within thousands of responses. Such uses are expected to save officials the equivalent of 75,000 days of manual analysis every year, and save up to £20m (US\$26.7m) in staffing costs.

As part of plans to 'rewire the state' and make it more productive and agile, UK prime minister Keir Starmer has **set out** a mantra that: "No person's substantive time should be spent on a task where digital or AI can do it better, quicker and to the same high quality and standard."

Such thinking **is also being applied in Nigeria**, which has deployed its Service Wise GPT AI tool across government. As head of the country's civil service Didi Esther Walson-Jack explained, the tool "enhances decision-making, improves efficiency and digitises service delivery processes", for example, by enabling civil servants to quickly access policy documents, guidelines and regulations so they can make informed decisions in real time.

According to Walson-Jack, the tool has helped reduce bureaucratic delays and improved responsiveness within the public sector, and she believes it's an innovation that could "serve as a model for countries seeking to leverage AI in governance to streamline operations and enhance transparency".

"We can confidently provide data that shows what the public's concerns are and proactively communicate key messaging"
Dr Ben Wernette, Southern States Energy Board



PART 1: WHY USE DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING?

Enter agentic AI

Agentic AI can go a step further, taking successive actions autonomously and making decisions across a series of combined tasks. It is best suited for tasks that are highly repetitive, require the orchestration of multiple models or systems, and can be executed reliably with minimal human oversight.

Uses include real-time traffic management, prioritising and routing citizen engagement, and supporting regulatory compliance.

AI agents play a part too. These execute tasks based on programmed instructions, unlike agentic AI which is more sophisticated and can make autonomous decisions and exhibit self-direction.

Jennifer Robinson explained: “A good example is where an organisation is responsible for pulling information from paper documents. Here, an AI model can lift handwriting in free-text boxes – unstructured data – and put it into a table. Another model will interpret it, categorising and classifying the information, and another will make sense

What potential do you see for AI to contribute to improved decision-making in government?

Some potential



Great potential



Little potential



No potential



AI agents execute tasks based on programmed instructions. Agentic AI can make autonomous decisions





PART 1: WHY USE DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING?

of it and summarise it for government workers. That's a classic example of a workflow that's being streamlined by an AI agent."

Yet our survey shows that few of the civil servant respondents understand how agentic AI can support decision-making, and that most government departments aren't yet using it – 27% say their organisation is using agentic AI, 40% are not, and 33% don't know.

Almost three-quarters (73%) say they have either little or no awareness of agentic AI's potential to support decision-making. In addition, some respondents gave examples of generative AI tools when asked about agentic AI, suggesting room to build skills and knowledge among civil servants.

Are you aware of agentic AI tools and their potential to support decision-making?

A little



No



Yes



73%

have either little or no awareness of agentic AI's potential to support decision-making





PART 2: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO USING DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING

Though data is used in government for decision-making, there remain significant barriers to doing so routinely.

Our survey found that siloed data and lack of integration across departments or systems is the biggest barrier to data-driven decision-making (cited by 43% of respondents). Other barriers include insufficient investment in data tools, systems or roles (highlighted by 29%) and difficulty accessing relevant data (29%).

Some of the civil servants surveyed elaborated on the barriers they face to using data better, citing legacy IT systems, poorly administrated processes for collecting data, scattered data, protracted permission processes, and poorly designed data governance frameworks.

In one survey respondent's experience: "Data is in too many disparate spreadsheets, consolidated and shared too slowly and when it is shared it is static screenshots in a presentation so no dynamic analyses or modelling can be done."

Top six barriers to data-driven decision-making

Siloed data and lack of integration across departments or systems



Difficulty accessing relevant data



Insufficient investment in data tools, systems or roles



Lack of skills to analyse or interpret data



Poor data quality



Leaders that do not emphasise or model data-informed decision-making



"Data is in too many disparate spreadsheets, consolidated and shared too slowly"
Survey respondent



PART 2: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO USING DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING

Siloed data and access

While the biggest segment of survey respondents (41%) say they usually have access to the data required to make confident decisions, and 24% say they always do, 25% say they only sometimes do and 8% rarely do.

When looking at responses by country, the US stands out.

Civil servants working for the US government – who accounted for 19% of survey respondents – say they have better access to data and use data more regularly for decision-making than those in other countries.

More than half (58%) of US respondents say that data is used to inform most or all decisions – compared to 38% of respondents overall. Meanwhile, 42% say that they always have access to the data required to make confident decisions, compared to 24% of global respondents.

Interestingly, when we look at global survey responses by seniority, senior civil servants – classed as those in the top five ranks or equivalent and equating to the top 1% of the civil service workforce – appear to have more difficulty accessing the data they need and using it consistently than those in more junior roles.

Most senior civil servants (54%) say that data is often, but not consistently, used to inform decision-making, while 22% say data is used occasionally or only for certain types of decisions. Only a fifth (20%) say data is used to inform most or all decisions.

In addition, most senior civil servants (44%) say they only sometimes have access to the data required to make confident decisions. More than a third (36%) say they usually do, and only 15% say they always do.

“Silos are probably one of the biggest inhibitors because you have departments within an organisation that have such different remits for which they’re collecting data. This creates duplicative data across an organisation,” said Robinson.

“The problem with these silos is that sometimes it's very difficult to do that cross-organisational data sharing.”

A survey respondent emphasised this problem. They have difficulty understanding “what teams own what data – and what data is already out there to be used to prevent duplication of effort”, they said.

24%

Only a quarter of respondents always have access to the data required to make confident decisions





PART 2: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO USING DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING

One important way to solve the problem of siloed data, and to enable access, is by devising and implementing a robust data governance framework.

As Robinson explained: “A data governance framework basically establishes the who, the what, the why of data sharing, and it brings people together across the organisation to be able to say: what are the rules that

we have for our data standards? When do we share? When do we not share? What are the formats? Who can have access to it, and what kind of access?”

What some organisations have found by establishing robust data governance mechanisms is that “it does more than just facilitate data sharing – it actually enhances cross-organisation communication and cooperation.”

How civil servants are using data to inform decision-making

Data is often used, but not consistently across decisions



Data is used to inform all or most decisions



Data is used occasionally or only for certain types of decisions



Data is rarely or never used to inform decisions



Skills and data literacy

Many civil and public servants who are not data or digital professionals lack the skills to be able to analyse and interpret data for decision-making, and may not be aware of AI’s applications – meaning opportunities to use it to solve problems or make efficiencies are missed.

In our survey, a lack of skills to analyse or interpret data was cited as the fourth-biggest barrier to data-driven decision-making by respondents overall, and the biggest barrier by senior civil servants. Those in the senior cohort cite insufficient investment in data tools, systems or roles, and inadequate technology or data infrastructure, as equal barriers to lack of skills.

Tools such as dashboards can help officials to make sense of data, while many governments are working to upskill

“You increase your chances of success when you expose civil servants to new techniques and technologies in the context of a mission-driven use case”

Carlos Rivero, AWS



PART 2: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO USING DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING

civil servants to improve data literacy and understanding of AI and where it can be useful.

Carlos Rivero, executive government advisor – data governance & strategy, at Amazon Web Services (AWS), said the best way to upskill civil servants is to provide access to tools, functions and capabilities that are directly related to a use case that drives mission value.

“Upskilling for the sake of learning something new doesn’t carry the same weight as upskilling to meet an important mission need. Therefore, you increase your chances of success when you expose civil servants to new techniques and technologies in the context of a mission-driven use case,” he said.

With regard to AI specifically, another recommendation highlighted by [a large government-wide trial of a generative AI tool in Australia](#), is to put staff through multiple forms of AI training, rather than just one.

Training formats included in the trial comprised online resources, hands-on experimentation, agency-facilitated and private-sector-led training sessions, and more. The government found that three-quarters of participants who received three or more forms of training reported a 28-percentage point lead in their confidence with using

the AI tool over those who underwent just one form of training.

Supporting Rivero’s assessment, training was also found to be most effective when tailored to the Australian Public Service, the users’ role and the agency context.

Leadership and organisational culture

Another barrier is organisational leaders or cultures that do not promote the use of data in decision-making.

In the survey, a quarter of respondents say their leaders do not emphasise or model data-informed decision-making, and reluctance or resistance to change among staff is cited as a barrier by 23% of respondents overall, and 22% of those in senior roles.

Robinson advised: “One thing that I found in talking to governments is that you have a lot of bottom-up endeavours in data sharing, and I would encourage organisations to begin with a top-down initiative, and having leadership commit to the value of using their data. That gives permission to the lower levels of government to spend the time and the resources to collect and share their data and use it with advanced analytics or AI.”

25%

say leaders do not emphasise or model data-informed decision-making





PART 2: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO USING DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING

Here too, training is important so leaders themselves understand how and where data and AI can be used to drive productivity, and can clearly communicate benefits, allay concerns and work to embed its use across the organisation.

The advice of AWS' Carlos Rivero is to "always lead by example".

"Walk the talk. Don't just say you're using AI to drive important business decisions. Show how the data and AI were used to come to, and carry out, those decisions," he said.

He added that leaders shouldn't be afraid to admit when there are data quality issues, model drift or other problems in the AI pipeline.

"Responsible AI is also about acknowledging where there are opportunities for improvement. Present those opportunities to your governance entity for review and recommendations, and act on the recommendations to build a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement."

Lack of time or capacity to use data effectively

Lack of time or capacity to use data effectively is another barrier, cited in our survey by 23% of respondents.

Dr Sarah Garner is head of data and insight – One Login, at the UK Government Digital Service, which sits within the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. She and her team are focusing on enabling product managers working on the UK government's One Login digital identity programme – through which citizens can access a range of services from driving licences and passports to tax returns – to use data in decision-making to provide a better online service experience for citizens.

The role of Garner and her team is to make sure product teams are exploiting user journey data to improve citizens' experiences of their interactions with government.

She explained that One Login is in its growth stage and has "an extremely tight roadmap of new features that we're adding all the time to try and make the product better".

23%

cite lack of
time or capacity
to use data
effectively as
a barrier





PART 2: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO USING DATA AND AI IN DECISION-MAKING

As such, one of the key issues to have come out of a data maturity assessment conducted last year was that “product teams and product leads really want to use data to drive decision-making, but they are struggling to find the time to engage intentionally with the data about their product and find space within that roadmap to be able to then act on those insights”.

As one product lead told Garner: “Our roadmaps are based on evidence and data, but then we can’t easily flex if something new emerges or we see something we want to iterate on quickly.”

Garner and her team have been working to make data accessible to product leads to enable them to do this, and to “bake” data into product planning so they can exploit user journey data to improve citizens’ experiences of their interactions with government.

She has produced an impact framework with two senior colleagues that goes out to product leads quarterly and contains a range of metrics about different points in users’ journeys through One Login.

This includes where it’s common for people using One Login services to disconnect, how many users are impacted, how much it costs every time they drop out, and how many calls they get to their call centre about a particular pain point. It also includes a ‘resistance scale’, which shows how many attempts it took a user to get through that pain point.

“The purpose of this framework was to really try and consolidate all of the different bits of data and insight that gets thrown at product managers on a daily basis, and consolidate it in one place to give them a tool as part of their quarterly planning that they can then intentionally engage with and start to factor into their roadmaps,” Garner said.

Garner has also mapped out what she calls a ‘data value chain’ which involves taking a number of datasets and following through to all of the places where that data is being used to inform decision-making across the programme. “It looks like a big spider web of places that the data goes to, where you’re getting your return on investment.”

29%

say they have
difficulty accessing
relevant data for
decision-making





PART 3: PREPARING TO SUCCEED WITH DATA AND AI FOR DECISION-MAKING

If governments are to use data in decision-making to best effect, there are fundamentals that need to be put in place. These are needed to ensure the right tools are selected for the right tasks and that governments maintain public trust.

Meagan Collins, chief, enterprise information management in the corporate services sector of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, shared a metaphor that demonstrates this need succinctly: “The push for AI and more data-driven decision-making is not new to any [Canadian federal] government portfolio... but that doesn’t mean there isn’t work to be done. As Government of Canada CIO Dominic Rochon says: ‘You have to have your data vegetables before you can have your AI dessert.’”

It’s about getting the fundamentals right, she said – understanding the needs, the requirements, the problem statements and then building on these by “getting a real handle on where our data is and how can we tap into it in all the different places it may reside”.

This includes deploying mechanisms that ensure data is high quality, which is crucial, as Carlos Rivero of AWS emphasised: “AI without accurate, reliable and appropriate data is a proof-of-concept that never makes it to production.”

Tidying the house

Robinson has her own metaphor for getting the fundamentals right: “I often say ‘You have to clean your house before you have a party.’”

Departments and organisations that have “tidied the house” tend to be better prepared when crises strike – when the need for speed and high productivity is greatest.

“When crises happen, we see that organisations that are already data driven are able to turn and meet the new demands better because they have their data together. This is critically important for organisations that want to be nimble,” she said.

In uncertain times, organisations with robust systems are able to pull in new data sources as they become available in order to “get the answers to decision-makers’ fingertips faster”.

Tools are available to government departments that can help, integrating data and preparing it for analysis and ensuring it is clean, properly formatted, reliable, and unbiased. These include:

- **Data access and integration tools** to read, write, and update data from multiple sources (e.g. databases,

On getting the data fundamentals right: “You have to clean your house before you have a party.”

Jennifer Robinson, SAS



PART 3: PREPARING TO SUCCEED WITH DATA AND AI FOR DECISION-MAKING



Updating legislation takes time. Data governance frameworks and guardrails can be implemented more quickly in the interim

the open-source software framework Apache Hadoop, and cloud storage).

- **Data preparation tools** to cleanse, transform, and profile data for high-quality pipelines.
- **Data catalogues** to organise and manage data assets.
- **Data lineage tools** to track how data flows and transforms across its lifecycle.
- **Compliance tools** to automate data discovery and ensure privacy regulation adherence.
- **Data quality tools** to maintain consistency through profiling and entity resolution.
- **Synthetic data tools** to generate realistic, diverse datasets and address bias and privacy concerns.

Ethics and public trust

In governments' role as data stewards, setting privacy requirements and legislative components that govern responsible data and AI use is also a crucial part of the puzzle.

Confident decision-making means knowing that decisions are being made in ways that benefit citizens equally and that they feel comfortable with. This means it's critical

that privacy is respected when citizen data is used, that it can be kept securely, and that AI tools and systems are ethically sound, bias-free and explainable to ensure results are reliable and don't exacerbate existing inequalities.

As Meagan Collins of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat pointed out, legislation governing use of data and AI can be 10- to 15-years old and does not always reflect the current digital landscape. Updating legislation so it is fit for purpose is important, but it can take time. Data governance frameworks and guardrails can be implemented more quickly in the interim and set rules for civil servants to follow.

These should embed privacy rules and ensure that data is stored securely and accessible only to those who need it and can make good use of it for the benefit of their teams or citizens. They should also direct that there are humans in the loop to review decisions and spot risks.

In addition, legislation and governance frameworks should ensure that AI models and tools are explainable, so that those using them or affected by outputs made with them understand how decisions have been made, fostering transparency and accountability and helping to build and maintain public trust.





PART 3: PREPARING TO SUCCEED WITH DATA AND AI FOR DECISION-MAKING

In Canada's Treasury Board, for example, a framework has been implemented that requires the code work and datasets underpinning an AI model or algorithm used to make decisions to be reviewed by an official as standard.

Another way to foster public trust, as demonstrated by the government in Singapore, is to use analytics platforms to gather citizen feedback of their experience of public services and then use those insights to make improvements.

The city-state's Whole-of-Government Application Analytics platform is an end-to-end website performance evaluation platform comprising a frontend citizen feedback interface and a backend dashboard for data analytics visualisation.

As the government explained, it allows officials "to gain insights on the performance of government websites and digital services in real-time through a convenient and user-friendly platform".

The platform also consolidates data points from across government to allow agencies to benchmark the performance of their website services and have a holistic overview of government digital services.

"This helps agencies to make effective data-driven decisions and proactively improve the performance of their citizen and business services, potentially leading to cost savings as well," the government said.

In addition, Singapore's Personalise.gov.sg is a whole-of-government personalisation engine that aims to customise digital touch points such as emails and websites to provide the most relevant services to its residents.

The engine is built on top of a customer data platform that ingests a myriad of data from across government systems, which is then fed into deep machine-learning models to identify the most relevant or personalised content for users.

"Through personalisation of government digital services, more effective targeting and engagement strategies can be developed to achieve policy-based outcomes," the government said, adding that this "facilitates stronger government-citizen relationships and builds trust".



Singapore uses analytics platforms to gather citizen feedback and improve experience of public services





PART 3: PREPARING TO SUCCEED WITH DATA AND AI FOR DECISION-MAKING

Avoiding AI bias

Jennifer Robinson described ways to identify and root out bias in the data training AI.

“We have something we refer to as model management, or model report cards, that show if you’re starting to have model drift – when your model stops being as accurate as it was before or if bias has been introduced into it.”

She emphasised that: “One of the ways to make sure that bias is not inherent in the system, is to have people that represent a lot of different perspectives on the team overseeing it.”

Building the business case

Though data and AI can significantly accelerate decision-making and boost productivity, realising these benefits requires thoughtful upfront investment. So, at a time when government budgets are being cut, officials must prove return on investment (ROI).

Skills and training play a part in this. If civil servants are to make a business case for the use of data and AI, they must understand clearly where tools can be applied to best effect.

As Robinson pointed out with regard to AI agents specifically: “An AI agent may be exactly what a government organisation needs to streamline its workflow, but it may be total overkill for other types of problem solving where an analytic model might do the trick. We definitely don’t want our governments chasing after technology just because it’s exciting and buzzy.”

“Align your technology investments with your specific goals to ensure that your organisation will get the most ‘bang for the buck’ by avoiding over-engineered systems or underperforming tools.”

Canada’s Meagan Collins set out how she and her team approach ROI: “If you’re going to make a case for putting taxpayer money into these things, you really have to prove why it’s going to be useful and why the investment is necessary.”

“If you want to be able to reduce the amount of time it takes to do a task, run a pilot. Did you get the time back? Be really clear what your value statement is... and check where the tools are best suited.”

“It’s about going back to the basics of scientific testing on these things,” she added.

“If you want to be able to reduce the amount of time it takes to do a task, run a pilot”

Meagan Collins, Treasury Board of Canada



CONCLUSION

Governments are working hard to extract insights from their data and to use those insights to make the most effective decisions – whether they relate to the government workforce, public policy or services for citizens.

The barriers to data-driven decision-making in government are not insurmountable. Overcoming them requires a keen focus on building a solid foundation for the use of data and AI that is shared across government as a whole. It also requires individual departments and agencies to be led by leaders who have a clear understanding of the potential of data-driven decision-making and are committed to advancing it.

Achieving this is vital to the crucial government mission of boosting efficiency and productivity at a time of increasing demands.

The use cases coming out of governments show great promise, and yet many are only at the start of their data and AI journey. As civil servants get to grips with related tools, systems and best practice for their effective and ethical use, they will find they can supercharge collaboration, solve problems quicker, and create a more streamlined bureaucracy – with associated savings for taxpayers.

Getting there will involve robust frameworks underpinning data and AI use, upgrades in technology, and a focus on related skills and training.

Garner shared her vision for the future: “In five years I would like to see data being prioritised, data governance frameworks in place, and data having a seat at the table right at the top, with chief data officers and chief AI officers who are part of the conversation.”

For Robinson, the full potential of AI can only be realised on the back of public trust – with implications for those who govern. As she concluded: “Trust is going to be paramount, and it’s going to be really interesting to find out five years from now if we trust AI more or less. That will be a responsibility that’s executed by those who are responsible for the use of data and AI.”

“In five years I would like to see data being prioritised, data governance frameworks in place, and data having a seat at the table right at the top”
Sarah Garner, UK GDS



ABOUT THIS REPORT

About SAS

SAS is a global leader in data and AI, empowering public sector organisations to make smarter decisions, faster. With advanced analytics, machine learning, and fraud detection solutions, SAS helps governments protect public funds, improve citizen services, and build trust through transparency and accountability. Trusted by agencies worldwide, SAS delivers proven outcomes in areas such as tax compliance, welfare integrity, procurement oversight, and cyber fraud prevention.

To learn more about how SAS supports the public sector in fighting fraud, waste and abuse visit sas.com/public-sector

About AWS

Since 2006, Amazon Web Services has been the world's most comprehensive and broadly adopted cloud. AWS now has more than 240 fully featured services for compute, storage, databases, networking, analytics, machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), mobile, security, hybrid, media, and application development, deployment, and management.

Millions of customers – including the fastest-growing startups, largest enterprises, and leading government agencies – trust AWS to power their infrastructure, become more agile, and lower costs. To learn more about AWS, visit aws.amazon.com.



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Global Government Forum is part of
Pendragon International Media Ltd

Registered address: The Old Vicarage, 10 Church Street,
Rickmansworth, WD3 1BS, United Kingdom

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