Australian Government

Jobs and Skills Australia

Our Gen AI Transition

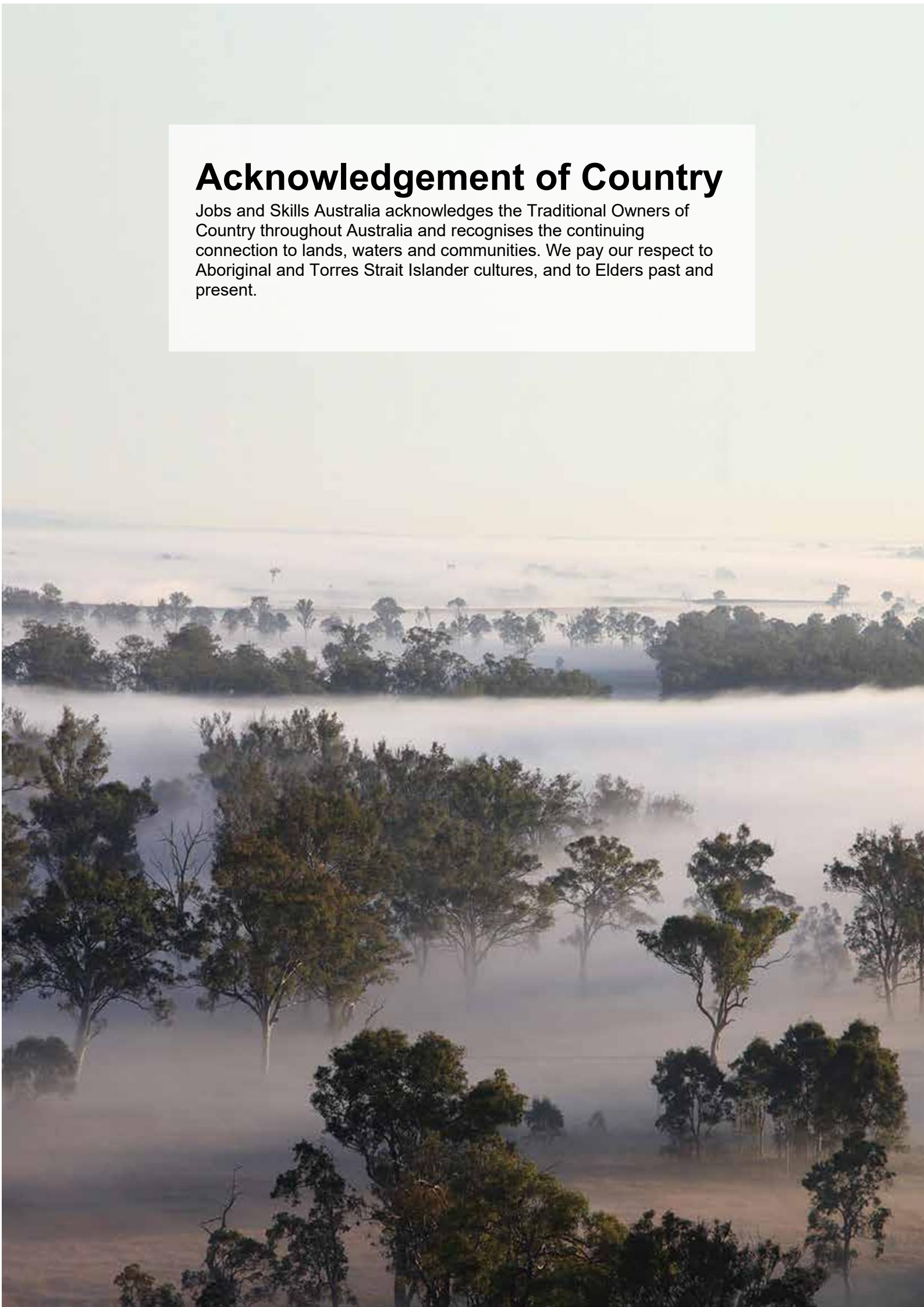
Implications for Work and Skills

Case Studies

2 September 2025

Acknowledgement of Country

Jobs and Skills Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.



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Introduction

This compendium of case studies provides practical insights into how individuals and organisations are navigating the implementation of Generative AI (Gen AI). The case studies highlight the importance of context-specific adoption and adaptation rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.

By presenting examples of both successful strategies and implementation challenges, the compendium aims to support more informed, thoughtful, and inclusive approaches to Gen AI adoption across the diverse range of organisations and communities in Australia.

This compendium is organised around three themes that emerged from **eight** case studies:

1. **Adapting work and skills**, which includes **four** case studies exploring how Gen AI is being reflected in employment patterns, skill requirements, and organisational workforce strategies. These case studies include insights from companies (e.g., ReadyTech and Workday), professional services sectors (legal, health care, and creative industries), and small businesses.
    a. **Gen AI adoption and adaptation at ReadyTech:** This case study provides insight into how Gen AI is influencing demand for labour, skills and knowledge in an Australian technology company, as well as the potential for alternative approaches to skill development.
    b. **A skills-based approach at Workday**: This case study explores how Gen AI can act as an enabler and accelerator of skills-based approaches to hiring, mobility and workforce development.
    c. **Gen AI and entry-level roles in legal, health care, and creative industries:** This case study explores differential impacts on entry-level roles across these sectors.
    d. **The changing nature of work – perspectives on Gen AI adoption from workers and small business operators**: This case study examines participants' perspectives on the adoption of Gen AI, focusing on the factors that enable or hinder its adoption. The case study also explores workplace settings, user experience, and productivity.
2. **Hybrid co-design**, which includes a case study on **the University of Sydney** that showcases productive and responsible engagement with both staff and students in designing solutions for educational contexts.
3. **Inclusion and cultural authority**, which includes **three** case studies focused on AI systems that address accessibility and cultural sensitivity, and empowerment for people with disability and Indigenous communities.
    a. **Inclusive design, disability, and Gen AI**: The case study addresses both the potential benefits and risks of AI for people with disability, emphasising the importance of appropriate design.
    b. **The Mamutjitji Story App**: This case study demonstrates cultural preservation through digital innovation, specifically preserving endangered Indigenous languages.
    c. **Indigitek**: The case study focuses on increasing Indigenous participation in the technology industry through promoting culturally inclusive workplaces and accessible digital economy pathways.

These case studies contribute to our evolving understanding of how Gen AI is reshaping and could reshape work, skills, and institutions. They also highlight what this transformation means for policy, practice, and people, while acknowledging the methodological and contextual limitations that shape the scope and applicability of these insights.[1]

[1] The following case studies were based on interviews, focus groups, and consultations conducted between October 2024 and July 2025. Comprehensive details of the qualitative research design, including the approaches and methods used for the case studies, are available in the Study's accompanying Technical Release (forthcoming).

Adapting work & skills

Adoption & adaptation

Gen AI is changing the demand for labour, skills & knowledge, varying case by case

Plan early for the pipeline and open alternative pathways for digital talent

A skills-based approach

Gen AI can enable and speed a skills-based approach, with clear use cases

Gen AI supports recruiters; it does not replace them

Entry-level roles

The nature of entry-level roles in some industries is starting to change

Changing nature of work

Adoption is pragmatic but constrained: small firms lack capability & confidence

Unclear rules and thin training slow uptake; leadership and workforce shape use

Gen AI adoption and adaptation at ReadyTech

Key insights

- Impacts of Gen AI on demand for labour, skills and knowledge vary depending on the use case but can be significant.
- In areas where Gen AI reduces demand for entry-level hires, planning to ensure a talent pipeline into the future is vital.
- Alternative pathways can expand the talent pool for digital workers and deliver positive outcomes for employers and workers.

Early examples of deep Gen AI adoption can provide insight into the real-world impact of Gen AI on demand for labour, skills and knowledge in specific contexts. While the generalisability of individual cases can be limited, examining early cases of adoption and adaptation is useful in capturing the complexity of real-world adoption contexts and validating or challenging findings from quantitative data. This is particularly useful in relation to new and emerging trends which may not yet be visible in official statistics.

This case study draws on evidence from semi-structured interviews with a senior leader at ReadyTech. This evidence is supplemented and supported by insights gathered from analysis of ReadyTech's Half Year Results – Investor Presentation from 26 February 2025.

Where and why has ReadyTech adopted Gen AI?

ReadyTech is a publicly listed Australian technology company which has been in operation for over 25 years. In their most recent reports, ReadyTech (2025) refer to a global workforce of over 500 people.

ReadyTech identified their **software development** function as an early use case for Gen AI adoption:

> *We understood from all the research that was emerging that coding was one of those places where using Gen AI made absolute sense. (ReadyTech senior leader, interview)*

Within 3-6 months of initial adoption, all software engineering teams at ReadyTech were using Github Copilot as a coding assistant.

On the question of benefits from adoption, ReadyTech has reported that Gen AI assisted coding has improved coding efficiency by more than 25%, along with improved software reliability and reduced time spent on debugging and rework (ReadyTech, 2025).

ReadyTech identified customer support as an additional high-impact use case for Gen AI adoption. They embedded two AI support agents into customer service workflows to assist in managing around 80,000 inbound queries per year. These two agents were designed to support different but related functions:

- The **first agent** is trained on a knowledge set of product documentation and past tickets, and designed to retrieve the relevant information where it was already available.

- The **second agent** then takes this information and drafts a response to the query for human review, before a response is provided to the customer.

Reaching the point where the AI support agents delivered sufficient reliability and accuracy required significant investment over more than 6 months. ReadyTech has reported that its AI support agents are retrieving information and drafting responses to 70% of tickets, leading to improved response times and enabling human support staff to have a greater focus on more complex issues (ReadyTech, 2025).

How is Gen AI impacting demand for labour, skills and knowledge in the firm?

The medium to long term impacts of Gen AI on demand for labour at the firm level may be more significant than any immediate or short-term changes. Across both customer support and software development teams, ReadyTech is aiming to leverage Gen AI to scale up these functions – to be able to provide more support and produce more or better software – 'without a corresponding increase in human resources' (ReadyTech, 2025). While sharing the objective of scaling up functions with a corresponding increase in human resources, the two use cases of Gen AI varied considerably in their impact on demand for labour, skills and knowledge.

Software development

Full implementation of Github Copilot at ReadyTech led to changes in the composition of the engineering team, providing an example of how the adoption of Gen AI can influence the relative demand for different types of workers and the talent pipeline.

In an example of skill-biased technological change, ReadyTech highlighted the value of them having additional senior developers in Australia, rather than more junior developers often based overseas:

> *We've returned those roles back to Australia because a really strong Australian senior would outperform multiple offshore resources as they became more productive. It wasn't necessarily the case pre-Copilot. One byproduct of that has also been that there is no logical business reason to take on a junior engineer and train them up in situ in the same way. So we've seen a shift where we hire fewer entry level engineers. (ReadyTech senior leader, interview)*

In explaining the reduced hiring of junior engineers and increased focus on senior engineers, ReadyTech identified that the gap between juniors and seniors is not just related to their depth of technical skills but also acknowledgement of the increasing importance of domain expertise and knowledge of the business context:

> *A senior and mid engineer would have to not just effectively support them through coding, but also explain the space that we're developing these products for. Education – tertiary education – is actually really complex. Compliance. Highly regulated. You can't just look at the code base and pick it up and know instinctively how you're going to add value. (ReadyTech senior leader, interview)*

Customer support

The customer support team is a common entry point for new employees into ReadyTech, with relatively high mobility as many workers in the area seek to progress their careers in other areas of the business. As a result of this higher mobility, ReadyTech observed – as distinct from the engineering team – that 'there'll always be an open door into that team.'

A key challenge ReadyTech identified in relation to its customer support function is bringing new team members up to speed quickly:

> *The challenge that we have is that because our products are enterprise and it takes a long time to bring someone in and train them on the product that they're supporting to the point where they might achieve mastery ahead of the customer that's using it … so that they can actually feel like they're contributing good value. (ReadyTech senior leader, interview)*

Gen AI has presented an opportunity to ReadyTech to address this challenge while making more efficient use of senior members of the team. Specifically, Gen AI support agents have improved the time to value for new hires who require lower levels of support from senior staff to transfer knowledge in a one-on-one context. Instead, ReadyTech explained that knowledge retrieval is now enabled by the AI support agent:

> *Then it's a case of that individual – that new person – coming in and actually saying "Does that response seem on the surface to be consistent with what I would think?" and then they can go and explore and spend more time in the product itself, start testing the validity of that response as opposed to spending all their time trying to find the right answer from the knowledge base. So it's switched where their attention is. (ReadyTech senior leader, interview)*

Gen AI has also helped to mitigate the impact of the loss of knowledge as experienced support staff move onto other opportunities within ReadyTech:

> *If you just think about every ticket that they've ever responded to becomes part of the knowledge base. So effectively that knowledge is captured, everything that they would have done becomes part of how we retrieve answers into the future. So we see that as offsetting some of that knowledge seep, which means that we're happier now where people want to progress (their career) to help that without feeling as though it's to the detriment of that support team. (ReadyTech senior leader, interview)*

Why is ReadyTech pursuing an employment first approach to skills?

An increased focus on senior engineers presented ReadyTech with a choice regarding the talent pipeline: either attract a senior developer from elsewhere or explore an alternative approach to skill development.

In addition to cost considerations, ReadyTech identified that providing pathways from entry-level into engineering roles was important for future-proofing their skills pipeline and for upholding the values of the company:

> *It's unacceptable to us to think that we're never going to offer an entry level role. We exist to help community thrive and you can't help community thrive if you're not giving people employment opportunities. So that's actually core to our values. (ReadyTech senior leader, interview)*

The solution pursued by ReadyTech was to identify the skills, knowledge and attributes they are seeking and consider options for developing this talent from within:

> *We want to bring people in that have digital fluency… and learning agility is absolutely one of the things that we care about. (ReadyTech senior leader, interview)*

Thinking about these characteristics, ReadyTech identified those who have developed mastery through experience in customer support of the space in which ReadyTech operates, their products and their customers as their best source of talent:

> *We have doubled down on our successful strategy of employing individuals with potential from any background in our support team where they are immersed in our culture, our products, our customers and our ways of working. In this time, we work to identify the right pathway to pursue, we define, design and deliver the skills they need through partnerships. And when the time is right, we will support these individuals into that opportunity. As they move onwards and upwards, it frees up a place to allow us to repeat the pattern. Or, and this really matters, they can stay and grow in our support team. It seems simple, but placing a high value on employment first and owning the persistent challenge of job readiness is worth testing. (ReadyTech senior leader, interview)*

As a result of this strategy, members of the customer support team may be supported to progress to roles in software engineering, AI engineering, data science, cybersecurity or DevOps.

A skills-based approach at Workday

Key insights

- With the right use case and implementation, skills-based approaches can facilitate positive outcomes in matching people to jobs and training opportunities.
- Gen AI can be an enabler and accelerator of a skills-based approach.
- Gen AI solutions can complement – but are not a substitute for – skilled recruiters.

Skills-based or skills-first approaches to people management have become increasingly popular in Australia and internationally since the emergence of Gen AI. The emergence of Gen AI is significant in the context of skills-based approaches in two ways.

First, Gen AI as a technology has offered new capabilities to organisations taking a data-driven, dynamic and personalised approach to people management.

Second, the transformative – and disruptive – potential of Gen AI on the world of work has prompted greater interest in approaches that promote greater agility in skill development and acquisition.

What is a skill-based approach?

As described by the World Economic Forum (2023):

> *A skills-first approach focuses on whether a person has the right skills and competencies for a particular role, rather than having the right degree, job history or previous job titles. It means that businesses get the skills they actually need for a particular job, but more than that, it democratizes access to good jobs for those people who have the competencies but not the right formal qualifications for a role.*

Skill-based approaches can be implemented across the employee lifecycle, including hiring, learning and development, and career progression.

Well designed and implemented skills-based approaches can broaden the talent pool for employers experiencing shortages, improve access to jobs for individuals who have developed skills through alternative pathways to higher education, and improve matching of skill supply and demand.

If poorly planned or implemented, skills-based approaches can also present risks including the potential to introduce new forms of bias, limit adaptability and the development of transferable skills, disrupt workplace arrangements tied to job classifications and formal qualifications, or lower professional standards (OECD, 2025).

A skills-based approach at Workday

This case study focuses on the experiences of Workday as a firm that is transitioning to be a skills-based organisation, as well as supporting its customers to make this transition in its capacity as a provider of human resources (HR) software and solutions.

This case study draws on evidence from semi-structured interviews with Workday employees responsible for leading and implementing the transition to a skill-based organisation. This evidence is supplemented and supported by insights JSA gathered from analysis of a range of articles and resources on skills-based approaches published by Workday.

Workday is a multinational provider of enterprise cloud applications powered by AI for finance and human resources. According to its website, Workday has more than 250 employees in Australia and over 650 customers in Australia and New Zealand including organisations in financial services, professional business services, higher education, and the public sector (Workday, 2025).

Workday has been progressively integrating a skills-based approach into multiple people management processes over the past three-and-a-half years.

A skills-based approach to hiring

Workday's skills-based approach to hiring is grounded in identifying the critical skills for the role and making these skills the focus of the hiring process. Workday has identified five key questions for recruitment teams to consider when implementing skills-based hiring:

- **Do your job descriptions focus on the key skills necessary for the job?** Qualifications should only be included if absolutely necessary or when required by regulation.
- **Are your job postings promoted in channels that widen the talent pipeline?**
- **Does your interview process effectively assess the required skills?**
- **Are you providing new opportunities for existing employees?**
- **Are you highlighting your employee success stories?** This includes highlighting the successes of your employees without degrees to combat biases around credentials, encouraging an even more diverse range of candidates to apply in the future (Radley, 2025).

Workday identifies AI as an enabler and accelerator of a skills-based approach to hiring. For instance, the company highlighted how a skills library/taxonomy, augmented by AI inference, can assist in isolating necessary and preferred skills from unstructured data such as position descriptions or previous job advertisements.

Workday also highlighted the potential for skills-based hiring to combat bias in the recruitment process. For example, Workday reflected in relation to a pilot project they ran in their sales division:

> *When you consider an organisational sales leader hiring salespeople, they often have their own established approach and preferences, which can unintentionally introduce various biases. As part of the pilot, we had deliberately stripped that back to focus on objective criteria. We embarked on a significant change management effort to establish that we're hiring based on skills—rather than personal connections, educational background, or other unrelated factors. (HR practitioner, interview)*

The use of AI to support skills-based hiring is not about automating the hiring process. The human-in-the-loop and their skills and capabilities remain vital. Workday recognises this by creating and mandating the completion of Workday Hire certification courses.

> *One of the things that Workday has done is to implement a certification internally for skills-based hiring. So if someone is slated to be an interviewer at Workday, before they are able to interview a candidate, they must complete this skills-based hiring certification. (HR practitioner, interview)*

Results reported by Workday from the first 6 months after expanding skills-based hiring to all open positions include:

- 900 new hires
- a 15% reduction in time to hire, and
- an 8% increase in offer acceptance.

A skills-based approach to mobility, learning and development

Workday's skills-based approach extends beyond hiring and recruitment. Workday indicated that around two-thirds of its workforce has adopted the 'Career Hub' platform which provides AI-enabled recommended matches to learning, mentoring and job opportunities.

One of the primary vehicles for internal mobility and development opportunities at Workday is through the use of 'gigs' providing the opportunity for a worker to devote a percentage of their time to a specific project/business problem that aligns with worker's current skills and their desired future skills and career pathways.

Results reported by Workday from their skills-based approach to mobility, learning and development include:

- a 42% increase in internal mobility (includes lateral and upward movements), and
- an 11% increase in employee sentiment regarding career growth.

Gen AI and entry-level roles in legal, health care, and creative industries

Key insights

- In the legal industry, firms mostly use Gen AI for research and drafting and are still hiring entry-level graduates.
- Gen AI is increasingly handling administrative tasks in health care, potentially reducing the need for some entry-level roles, but clinical roles will still require human involvement and decision-making.
- In the creative industry, Gen AI tools are impacting entry-level jobs (e.g., voice actors) by producing high-quality content quickly and cheaply, making it difficult for new creatives to compete.

Testing early evidence on career pathways and workforce renewal

There has been particular interest in whether Gen AI will reduce reliance on or transform entry-level positions across various industries as it is integrated into work. Entry-level roles, often aimed at recent graduates or those with little experience, include internships, vacation jobs, and positions with on-the-job training. These jobs help new employees gain valuable formative experiences that are the foundations for their careers and industries' workforce pipelines.

With AI now handling tasks like summarising documents, drafting, and routine analysis, some stakeholders in our Study have highlighted concerns about how workers will learn important entry-level skills, build professional connections and hone their professional practice and judgment at the early stages of their careers. Additionally, the breadth of Gen AI's applications, from automating repetitive tasks to assisting with complex and creative processes, also raises questions about whether new entrants would be expected to undertake broader or more difficult work.

To add real-world perspective and practical experiences to the main data analysis in our Study, this case study explores how Gen AI is starting to affect entry-level employment pathways in three industries: legal, health care, and creative industries. It draws on insights from participants in our focus groups and consultations, as well as public submissions[2] to assess how Gen AI affects skill development, workforce renewal and growth, and equitable career progression.

Gen AI is being applied to entry-level work in legal, healthcare and creative industries

In the **legal** industry, Gen AI is increasingly used for tasks such as legal research, analysis and drafting, knowledge management, and marketing. According to some estimates, Gen AI could automate 44% of legal work (Microsoft, 2024). In the Australian context, Microsoft and the Tech Council of Australia found that 10% of legal tasks could be automated and 32% augmented (Microsoft, 2024).

[2] Public submissions include those provided to the Study's Gen AI – Consultation Hub and the Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Despite this, some law firms including larger ones are not reducing entry-level hiring – they are instead integrating AI tools to enhance efficiency. Firms like Gilbert + Tobin and Ashurst are investing in AI while continuing to recruit graduates, recognising that human oversight remains crucial for tasks requiring judgment and client interaction. That is, AI is being used as a complement rather than a substitute in legal practice, helping to focus on strategic and client-oriented work by reducing time on routine tasks. But as a result, new job entrants are being required to have new skills like prompt engineering and a broader understanding of how Gen AI technologies can intersect with legal work (Dudley, 2024).

To this end, the Future Skills Organisation (FSO) has observed that the scope of entry-level roles is changing, with specific tasks being adapted to incorporate AI-driven insights or actions (FSO Submission 238, 2024). As a result, and to support this transformation, workers are required to interpret, validate, or combine these outputs, playing a quality assurance role. For example, tasks such as classification and editing AI-generated text require humans to check and correct the output of AI (FSO Submission 238, 2024).

Similarly, the Australian **health care** industry, which employs thousands of people in entry-level roles, is increasingly utilising Gen AI tools. For instance, the ANMF submission to the Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) noted that Gen AI is being integrated in health care for various applications, including streamlining administrative tasks, enhancing diagnostics, supporting remote health monitoring, accelerating drug discovery, and facilitating professional education and training (ANMF Submission 30, 2024). In their submission to this Study, ANMF emphasised that while AI may take over some administrative tasks, allowing health care workers to dedicate more time to patient care, it should not be seen as a substitute for human workers. Instead, AI should be used under human supervision. Additionally, health care workers need proper training to interact with Gen AI both effectively and ethically.

Gen AI is also widely used in the **creative** industries for tasks such as special effects, post-production, and content recommendation, enhancing efficiency and creativity (ANZSA Submission 111, 2024). For instance, according to the survey conducted by the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) and Arts Law, nearly 40% of artists incorporate Gen AI into their creative process (this includes using AI for tasks such as editing, grant applications, content development, and ideation), and 86% attribute approximately 10% of the final work directly to the influence of Gen AI (NAVA Submission 115, 2024). In addition, AI offers new income opportunities for artists and authors through licensing and innovative tools, while also raising concerns about accuracy, transparency, and the impact on traditional creative roles (Arts Law Submission 98, 2024).

Despite its benefits, Gen AI also poses a threat for creative workers. The submission to the Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) by the Australasian Performing Right Association and the Australasian Mechanical Copyright Owners Society (APRA AMCOS) highlights that the increasing prevalence of AI platforms poses a significant threat to opportunities for young trainees and apprentices in the creative industries. AI systems are becoming capable of generating tasks such as design, writing, editing, content creation, and music composition with efficiency and precision, potentially reducing demand for entry-level workers (APRA AMCOS Submission 169 , 2024). Similarly, Screen Producers Australia (SPA) acknowledges the potential benefits of Gen AI for the screen industry but warns that widespread and rapid adoption could significantly harm the labour market by reducing job opportunities for creatives and crew members and eliminating entry-level career pathways (SPA Submission 141).

What we heard

Legal industry

Participants in our focus groups and consultations from the legal industry shared diverse experiences with Gen AI, using it for various tasks ranging from basic document review to more complex activities such as legal research and drafting letters to clients. They also expressed a range of views regarding its role in the legal field.

Some believed that the technology has the potential to make certain tasks easier but are wary of its reliability, particularly concerning accuracy, privacy, and the risk of errors that could damage a firm's reputation. Others acknowledged the usefulness of Gen AI for research and drafting but emphasised the need for human oversight to ensure the quality of output. However, there is a consensus that, while Gen AI can assist in tasks, it cannot replace the critical thinking and expertise that lawyers provide.

Gen AI tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and firms' own bespoke legal tech software are increasingly used in law firms to draft client communications, conduct basic research, and summarise documents.

> *[…] But in terms of like something like ChatGPT that's like enter a question, come up with an answer, I'd probably say a year-and-a-half–two years that I've really like started using it heavily. But yes, like our firm has used these sorts of – I suppose we sort of call it like pick your own adventure. Like you enter what you want, and it generates the outcome. We've been using that since I started. (Legal assistant, interview)*

> *But it's more of like me using it for the work and just trying to get a use of – I know other firms which I've worked in before having used AI to do like kind of drafting documents or like making templates and things like that. And also, like especially big documents and like with a lot of words and lengthy documents just summarising what it's about, especially if it's from a client. Just getting a feel of what it is and what's the important aspects. But I felt like when I was using it, I felt like it's not as accurate as it could be by obviously doing it by yourself and looking through each word for word. So, there is a few things that it did kind of miss. (Graduate lawyer, interview)*

These were once staple tasks for junior legal staff and interns, creating a potential gap in early-career opportunities and learning. One of the focus groups participants shared a perceived risks of AI replacing some entry-level roles:

> *I guess there's been some rumour, talk sort of situation of paralegals – they do the more researching and preparing standard-form documents – I guess there's a risk there that if AI was developed enough so it could essentially just do that job for the paralegal. (Lawyer, focus group)*

Another focus group participant shared similar concerns of entry-level jobs being replaced by AI:

> *Yeah, I think that the research jobs are more at risk to be replaced by AI. I know that, as firms are rolling out these firm-specific AI services, my understanding is that that's already happening, because paralegals at some of these firms are using these services. And for those more menial tasks that law students who haven't yet graduated – that's something that can be more easily automated. But I think, at a higher level, it's more speculative. Yeah, so I think, at the moment, my understanding is that it's those lower-level research roles that are at risk. (Graduate lawyer, focus group)*

In contrast, the Managing partner of a small law firm, while acknowledging that Gen AI made some tasks easier and quicker, did not believe that junior legal jobs would disappear anytime soon. They argued that the technology was not yet reliable, citing examples from the United States where reliance on AI led to mistakes such as presenting wrong precedents or fake cases in court, which could severely damage a law firm's reputation. Therefore, they believed it is not worth the risk to save costs.

> *I think it's made some of the little stuff easier and quicker. But my industry's been told for at least a year that a lot of the junior lawyer jobs will be disappearing, and I don't see that happening any time soon. (Managing partner, interview)*

Many participants acknowledged that legal work requires oversight and professional judgment, which Gen AI may not be able to replicate. As a result, many firms remain cautious about full adoption. For instance, one of the consulted law firms discussed the use of Gen AI tools for handling low-level tasks, which could lead to changes in job roles and responsibilities within the firm.

They emphasised the firm's cautious approach to adopting Gen AI for legal work, ensuring it is used responsibly to assist rather than replace human workers. This approach guarantees that lawyers continue to play a crucial role in reviewing and validating AI-generated output to ensure quality and compliance with legal standards. Similar sentiment was shared by a law firm partner, who emphasised the importance of not relying solely on AI outputs and the need for human expertise and experience in reviewing AI-generated content:

> *It's still my input and my expertise and experience, I still think is something that needs to be put into what I do. And I can't just 100% rely on what the AI's producing. (Partner, interview)*

They further mentioned that while AI might reduce the amount of simple research tasks given to juniors, it is not a replacement for them:

> *The purpose of giving juniors work is not just to assist yourself, you also need to assist them. As a partner of the firm, I understand my role is to educate the young lawyers, is to help them professionally, to help them grow as lawyers, give them the skills they need to be good lawyers. (Partner, interview)*

One of the consulted law firms stated that lawyers who work with AI may potentially replace those who do not use it. They explained that while AI can assist with lower-level tasks, it is essential for lawyers to understand how to frame questions and validate AI-generated insights. This blended model of supervision and delegation ensures that lawyers still develop critical legal skills while leveraging AI to enhance their efficiency and productivity.

Health care industry

The focus groups participants highlighted that while Gen AI is not widely used in direct patient care, it is increasingly being considered in administrative tasks. For instance, a social worker mentioned that AI is being explored for generating clinical notes to enhance efficiency while maintaining patient privacy. Another participant noted the potential for Gen AI to assist in diagnosing conditions, although concerns about patient confidentiality remain prevalent.

Some participants proposed innovative uses of Gen AI in aged care settings. For example, one participant mentioned the implementation of an 'AI cat' designed to interact with elderly patients, detecting signs of distress or loneliness.

However, several participants expressed scepticism about the practical applications of Gen AI in health care, particularly in hands-on roles. For instance, a disability support worker emphasised the importance of human interaction in their work and noted that while Gen AI could assist with administrative tasks, it may not be suitable for direct patient care.

> *I do imagine that AI will be relevant in health. I just don't know how. I just feel as though – for example, the nursing role, I'm sure that with our notetaking and everything, it'll become prominent. But the actual nursing role is very hands on and we're constantly with patients – everything. So that particularly is OK, but there'll be aspects of it that you'll need AI, and I'm sure it'll come through. (Disability support worker, focus group)*

Gen AI's potential to enhance productivity was a recurring theme. For instance, one medical researcher shared that AI significantly reduced the time required for data analysis from days to just minutes, demonstrating its efficiency in research settings. Another participant described using Gen AI to draft patient notes and generate referrals, reducing time spent on administrative tasks. This streamlining was appreciated, especially by overworked professionals, and allowing health care professionals to focus more on patient care rather than administrative burdens.

> *Now I can review the client more … rather than spend time writing. (Therapist, focus group)*

Another key theme emerging from our focus groups and consultations is the importance of human oversight in health care settings when adopting Gen AI.

> *I'm not afraid of AI. I think it's fantastic. I think that it guides innovation and we can implement particular thresholds to preserve human insight as a result too,*

provided that we continue to keep control and not have a luddite revolt from all the jobs being taken away. I use AI – generative AI – all the time. I use it for rapid information retrieval, just to look at drug interactions. And this is with the caveat that it's always with like the human oversight, that it's always based on evidence. (ED physician, focus group)

The emphasis on human oversight in health care suggests that human involvement remains critical, especially in decision-making and patient safety and care. In terms of its impact on certain jobs in health care, including entry-level roles, participants shared their views that entry-level roles, especially those involving repetitive or administrative tasks, could be most impacted. Some mentioned that AI is reducing the need for administrative roles by automating tasks such as writing referral letters and transcribing case notes. One participant highlighted that AI reduced the need for hiring full-time bioinformaticians, as it can perform data analysis tasks more efficiently.

We used to hire bioinformaticians so that they could analyse the data we collected from patients. But now we don't need that position anymore because AI can do it. (Medical researcher, focus group)

Creative industries

This study revealed a divide in views in the creative industries across our focus groups and consultations. Some participants viewed Gen AI as beneficial for brainstorming, generating ideas, and streamlining processes, including its ability to save time on administrative tasks, allowing them to focus on creative aspects. While some are embracing Gen AI as a creative tool, others felt threatened by its presence, fearing that AI-generated products could flood the market and diminish the value of human-made efforts and impact future career opportunities, including for those wishing to join the industry.

For instance, one participant in the focus group highlighted the contrasting views within the design community about Gen AI:

So we've been talking a lot in the design world, particularly generative AI is coming for our jobs and how it's pretty unethical that it's stealing imagery that it's been fed and learnt from other sources, and then utilising it and producing it as its own final product, because it doesn't generate anything from scratch; it's taking information that it's learnt. So, in the design field, people are either like, oh it's going to replace us, or we have to get on board with it. (Marketing designer, focus group)

Rather than fearing Gen AI, a literary agent from our focus groups embraced it. They explained how they incorporate Gen AI in their creative work:

I use it on a weekly basis, both to kind of explore what its capabilities are, but also within – setting up of my business and brainstorming ideas. The images I play with just to get inspiration for different things. (Literary agent, focus group)

Some participants described significant AI adoption in design, voiceover, and writing roles. These participants indicated that entry-level roles in voiceover, junior design, and freelance content creation are being displaced, as AI tools can generate passable work instantly, and often at lower or no cost.

> *The entertainment industry has a big problem at the moment of the theft of intellectual property. And the voiceover industry is a good example, which is probably going to disappear pretty soon I think. (Performer and theatre manager, focus group)*

A similar view was shared by an organisation participating in our consultations. According to this organisation, Gen AI outputs are replacing voice actors, with half of their work done by AI, making entry-level roles easily replaceable.

Conclusion

Gen AI is starting to change the way entry-level roles are structured across some Australian industries. There are examples where the legal industry is incorporating Gen AI as a collaborative tool; health care systems are automating some administrative tasks while focusing on patient care; and creative industries are being pushed toward a blended model of creative and Gen AI input (Table 1). These shifts provide potential challenges but also new opportunities for traditional career paths, especially for people entering occupations.

Table 1: Comparative impact of Gen AI on entry-level roles across these industries

Category	Legal industry	Health care industry	Creative industries
Key Entry-Level Tasks Affected	Legal research, document review, first-draft writing	Scheduling, data entry, triage support, report drafting	Copywriting, image editing, voiceover, script writing
Type of Gen AI Use	Augmenting work (co-pilot model)	Administrative automation	Direct content creation
Potential Impact on Entry-Level Roles	Tasks are being restructured, not removed. Juniors redirected to more strategic/client-facing work.	Some administrative work restructured; patient-facing and clinical work still human-led.	Entry-level roles being reduced or eliminated due to AI-generated content being faster and cheaper.
Opportunities Created	More meaningful work for juniors; faster onboarding to higher-value tasks	Reduced admin load; focus on patient care	Evolution of creative roles
Stakeholder Concerns	Confidentiality, data privacy, accuracy, and professional judgment	Dehumanisation of care, data security and privacy, replacement of junior admin/technical roles	Loss of creative identity, devaluation of early-career experience, job insecurity

Source: JSA in-depth interviews and focus groups.

The changing nature of work – perspectives on Gen AI adoption from workers and small business operators

Key insights

- Adoption is driven by practical benefits (e.g., to increase productivity) rather than an abstract interest in Gen AI.
- Small businesses often lack the time, resources, skills, and infrastructure to adopt Gen AI.
- Policy uncertainty and lack of institutional clarity on the use of Gen AI; application in only certain tasks; cultural attitude (e.g., use of Gen AI is taboo); and limited AI training can further hinder the adoption of Gen AI.
- Gen AI adoption in workplaces is shaped by organisational setting, leadership, and workforce demographics.

This case study delves into the perspectives and experiences participants in our qualitative research shared on their adoption of Gen AI across various Australian industries. They provide insights into the factors that enable and hinder adoption, the workplace settings, the depth of user experience, and productivity. These enablers, blockers, and settings help us to understand why some workplaces adapt quickly while others lag.

Based on in-depth interviews, focus groups, and several consultations, the findings provide insights from a diverse group of stakeholders who participated in our research. This case study features the stories of some interview and focus group participants by summarising their specific experiences.

To protect privacy, all participant stories have been anonymised, and pseudonyms have been used (marked with an asterisk* after the pseudonym). In some stories, details have been slightly modified to further protect participant confidentiality or to clarify the narrative. However, all experiences and sentiments included in these stories accurately reflect the participants' experiences as reported to us during the research.

Enablers and blockers of Gen AI adoption

In our consultations and focus groups, a recurring theme across many sectors is that adoption is driven by practical benefits of AI and not driven by an abstract interest in the technology.

In finance and consulting, Gen AI tools are being adopted and used rapidly because they reduce the time and effort required for repetitive tasks. In one case, a consulted finance professional described how the AI bot handled the loan assessment and created the file in a fraction of the time it would normally take. One focus group participant, Dr. Ronen*, has integrated Gen AI into his medical practice, viewing it as a personal assistant or consultant that drives innovation, enhances professional development, improves cultural sensitivity and questioning techniques, and critical thinking. These perceived benefits played a crucial role in enabling progress.

Ronen's* story		Using Gen AI for professional development as a physician
Occupation:	ED physician	Dr. Ronen* is an Emergency Department (ED) physician that has been integrating Gen AI into his daily medical practice to drive innovation and enhance his professional development. Initially using it as a brainstorming tool for diagnosing patients, he now views Gen AI as 'more like a consultant' helping him 'guide innovation [and identify] ways to expand knowledge'. Ronen* highlighted several ways Gen AI has contributed to his professional growth and confidence, including improving the cultural sensitivity of his consultations with CALD communities, refining his questioning techniques and strengthening his critical thinking. Ronen* now leverages ChatGPT's audio features to engage in conversations with Gen AI during his workday, using it to reinforce his learning, explore new practices and advance his development.
Age:	31	

However, not all businesses are equally ready to realise these benefits. In small businesses, sufficient time, resources and digital and AI capabilities are often lacking. Many organisations do not have the skills or infrastructure to make use of Gen AI, even if they are aware of the tools. Some interviewed small business operators reported having competing priorities and resources which limited how much they could invest in Gen AI integration. This included the time required to learn how to use Gen AI effectively, explore how it could be used for different tasks, and the financial cost involved in allocating time to adopt. A small business interviewee explained:

> *[Cost of training and upskilling on Gen AI] will be a major barrier for most businesses, particularly those who are trying to keep their heads above water. (Small business operator (legal industry), interview)*

However, some small business operators we interviewed felt that adopting Gen AI was essential to remain competitive in the market, as illustrated by Jeremy's* story:

Jeremy's* story		Cautious optimism using Gen AI as a business owner
Occupation:	Entrepreneur	Jeremy* is a small business owner who helps authors get published online, including building websites for them and marketing their work. He has embraced the potential of Gen AI with open arms. His enthusiasm for Gen AI was clear during the focus group. He saw it as a valuable tool for staying competitive and driving growth for his business. While largely optimistic, Jeremy* also acknowledged the technology's limitations and emphasises the need for human oversight, especially in relation to nuances like understanding his business context. He envisions a future where small businesses leverage Gen AI to streamline operations and unlock new possibilities.
Age:	53	

Another barrier is policy uncertainty within organisations and industry associations, or the lack of institutional clarity. Some participants noted that the lack of clear instructions has caused confusion. For example, Amina* and Caitlin* mentioned that they had not received any direction yet. With no policy in place, they had to be cautious about how they used Gen AI tools.

Amina's* story		Balancing administrative tasks & caution in Gen AI use
Occupation:	Psychologist	Amina* is a psychologist who initially began using Gen AI about 12 months ago to help her draft articles for her blog and maintain her schedule. Recently, she expanded her use to summarise research articles and draft hand-outs for clients. During the focus group, Amina* shared that she limits Gen AI use to administrative tasks and is unlikely to expand its role without guidance from her industry association on appropriate usage. She doesn't plan to use Gen AI for analysing case notes or providing client care, as she sees these tasks as relying more on her professional knowledge and experience.
Age:	34	

Caitlin's* story		Self-directed Gen AI use in a law firm
Occupation:	Legal Assistant	Caitlin* is a legal assistant at a large personal injury law firm, and uses ChatGPT frequently to help her with tasks such as writing client letters and drafting court documents (which make up the bulk of her responsibilities). She finds that using Gen AI saves her time and effort, and that this benefit is passed onto her clients as their claims are therefore processed more quickly and cost effectively. However, Caitlin's* firm has not provided any guidance on how Gen AI could or should be used for legal practice. Her use has been entirely self-directed. As a result, she doesn't feel equipped to use it as effectively and safely as possible, or to guide her team of other legal assistants on how to do so.
Age:	28	

In some sectors that deal with sensitive information, such as health and legal services, concerns about data privacy, regulatory compliance, and ethical use can further constrain Gen AI adoption for specific tasks, as highlighted by Theo's* story:

Theo's* story		Avoiding use of Gen AI in the courtroom
Occupation:	Business owner – law firm	Theo* is a small law firm owner who has experimented with Gen AI for summarising case notes and meetings at his firm. He finds ChatGPT particularly useful when needing to adjust the tone of client-facing documents, especially to remove legal jargon and unnecessary detail. While Theo* hasn't explored its use beyond these tasks, he said that he is unlikely to apply it in the courtroom context, citing cases in the United States where other firms faced negative outcomes due to inaccurate Gen AI outputs. He also emphasised the need to protect confidential client information.
Age:	47	

Cultural attitudes also play a significant role. Some workers see AI as a threat to their professional identity or job security. This was especially evident among the participants from the creative industries. Participants like Ryan*, working in creative industries, reported that Gen AI was considered 'taboo' due to its direct perceived association with job replacement. However, Ryan* admitted to using it discreetly to maintain his productivity.

Ryan's* story		Shadow use of Gen AI
Occupation:	Consultant – creative industry	Ryan* works at a communications agency where the adoption of Gen AI has been met with resistance, particularly from senior management. Despite what Ryan saw as the potential for Gen AI to streamline content creation and administrative tasks, his direct supervisor expressed a strong stance against the use of Gen AI, equating its use with a lack of originality and a shortcut to critical thinking. This fostered a workplace environment where the mention of Gen AI was taboo. Ryan* has resorted to using Gen AI secretly to maintain his productivity. He utilises ChatGPT to assist with drafting social media content, but to avoid suspicion he deliberately delays submitting his work, often waiting 15-30 minutes extra before providing it to his manager to make it look like he didn't use it.
Age:	29	

Finally, most participants, including Hana*, reported learning about Gen AI tools through informal channels, such as peers, online tutorials, or trial and error, rather than formal workplace training.

Hana's* story		Unsure but eager to learn
Occupation:	Teacher	Hana* is a special education teacher who first learnt about Gen AI at the end of 2024 when a STEM teacher at her school started talking about it during a meeting. However, teachers at her school have not received any formal training about Gen AI and she hasn't really used it much: 'I'm sure there's a million things I could be using it for, but I just don't know about them.' Hana* has seen some 'amazing' uses of Gen AI posted by other educators in teaching groups on Facebook, where they used Gen AI to create lesson plans in as little as '30 seconds.' However, frustratingly, she had 'no idea how to do it'. In the afternoon before the focus group, Hana* needed to update a behaviour plan for one of her students. She said that she had considered using ChatGPT to help her save time but wasn't sure if she could.
Age:	47	

According to some participants, there is little to no structured AI training available at scale in some industries, and most workplaces do not offer such training. Participants like Mark* advocated for creating accessible, industry-specific resources and online forums to help professionals use Gen AI and foster a community of practice within their sectors.

Mark's* story		Fostering a community of practice
Occupation:	Marketing Consultant	Mark* is a marketing academic and consultant who began experimenting with Gen AI about 12 months ago for content creation. Initially, Mark* saw Gen AI as a means to increase the efficiency of article writing, which is integral to his role. However, he soon discovered that while Gen AI could provide a starting point for articles, the content often required substantial editing to meet his standards of publication. This led Mark* to realise he understood little about Gen AI's capabilities and limitations. Despite the lack of formal guidance or resources within his industry, Mark* continued to refine his use, learning through trial and error. Mark's* experience led him to advocate during the focus group for the creation of accessible, industry-specific resources that could guide professionals in effectively leveraging Gen AI in their sector. He spoke about online modules and professional forums where peers could share insights and strategies, fostering a community of practice within the education sector.
Age:	57	

Workplace settings

Across workplaces, Gen AI adoption is heavily influenced by organisational setting, leadership, and workforce demographics. Workplaces that encourage grassroots innovation and create safe spaces for experimentation tend to see more rapid integration and meaningful uptake. Some organisations we consulted have established sandbox environments, controlled spaces where employees could test Gen AI tools without fear of reprimand. This type of permissive and supportive culture is emerging as a strong predictor of adoption quality. However, without formal pathways or support, such innovations can remain fragmented or inconsistent. In this instance, leadership matters, where leaders openly endorse experimentation and provide frameworks for safe use (e.g., sandbox environments), adoption becomes more systematic.

In firms with younger staff, Gen AI tools are often brought in informally from the bottom up. Younger employees and student participants in our focus groups were more likely to use Gen AI compared to older participants, which reflected their greater familiarity and comfort with adopting new technologies and adapting to technological change. Some participants studying or who had recently graduated reported that their universities had started integrating Gen AI directly into their curricula (e.g., dedicated classes or units) or had provided official guidelines about its use in education.

Mehdi's* story		Understanding Gen AI
Occupation:	Support worker	Mehdi* recently graduated with a Bachelor of Psychology and has just begun his first job as a disability support worker. He started using ChatGPT around 9 months ago and used it to create revision notes and support his final year of study. Mehdi* felt he knew the basic of Gen AI and liked using it for fun and to explore his interests. However, he doesn't see how Gen AI could be practically applied to his current role in disability support and hasn't looked for much information about it.
Age:	22	

Recent graduates were more familiar and comfortable with using Gen AI tools like ChatGPT from their university experience. Some younger participants felt that their voices and suggestions for integrating these tools into workplace procedures are not being heard or considered. However, these younger employees tend to experiment with AI tools independently (i.e., shadow use), acting as early adopters.

Routine tasks like summarising documents, drafting emails, and generating reports are increasingly being handled by Gen AI. This frees up workers to focus on less routine and higher-skilled tasks but also requires new skills. Employees now need to know how to prompt a Gen AI effectively, evaluate its output, and manage data ethically. Older focus group participants in particular reported that understanding prompts was required to keep pace with the evolving capabilities of Gen AI and increase skills to use Gen AI as effectively as possible (e.g., prompt engineering to support utility of generated outputs), particularly given that those recently graduating would likely be receiving training through their studies.

Conclusion

This case study, through participants' stories and insights, highlights the complex interplay of operational considerations (such as practical benefits in the form of increased productivity and resource constraints), workforce capability (including training, skills, and cultural attitudes), and structural factors (like policy, institutional, and organisational) that enable and hinder adoption of Gen AI across various Australian industries.

Hybrid co-design

Implementation

The University's governance model has been key to responsible use

A homegrown learning series builds confidence in teaching with AI

Co-design

Staff and students co-designed tools and assessment settings

Engagement focused on redesigning teaching and learning with Gen AI

Educator oversight is built into workflows and student use policies

Gen AI implementation and co-design at the University of Sydney

Key insights

- While Gen AI has significant potential in higher education settings, it also has complex implications for staff and students. Universities vary in their adoption of the technology, and the University of Sydney has embraced it to a greater extent than most in the sector.
- Co-design has been a key part of the University's design and implementation of Gen AI solutions. Engagement occurred not only with staff but also students.
- The process empowered teaching staff to design AI agents to suit their needs. Students are encouraged to use Gen AI within clear bounds.

Gen AI technologies like ChatGPT, DALL-E, and Microsoft Copilot, have significant promise to transform how higher education is delivered and experienced. The University of Sydney has moved further and faster than most others in integrating AI into teaching, learning, and research. Recognising the potential of Gen AI to enhance productivity and pedagogy, the University has adopted a proactive and inclusive approach that empowers both educators and students (University of Sydney Submission 164, 2024).

Rather than taking a defensive stance, the University of Sydney has embraced Gen AI with a strategy centred on productive and responsible engagement (University of Sydney, n.d.). From the beginning, it rejected outright bans in favour of encouraging educators and students to collaborate in discovering and fostering productive and responsible ways to engage with AI.

The University's governance model has been key to this journey. In early 2023, the University established the AI in Education Working Group, bringing together educators and students to discuss practical uses of Gen AI across faculties. Later, the Generative AI Steering Committee was created to set strategic direction, supported by a Generative AI Coordinating Group to monitor progress. These efforts are guided by the Dynamic Generative AI Roadmap, which articulates principles and aspirations to lead in the safe and responsible application of Gen AI within the higher education sector (Liu & Bridgeman, 2024).

How were students and teachers engaged in co-design?

A central feature of this approach has been co-design. Rather than implementing top-down mandates, the University has empowered academic staff to lead the development of AI-integrated practices. Faculty members have trialled a variety of innovative practices, from using AI for instant and personalised student feedback to designing workplace conversations, that incorporate Gen AI tools (Liu, 2023).

In support of this innovation, the University launched Cogniti, a homegrown platform that enables educators to create tailored AI agents specific to their course requirements. Cogniti supports responsible experimentation by giving staff control over prompts, datasets, and student interactions. The platform is now used by more than 60 educational institutions. This technical empowerment is reinforced through targeted professional development, with

workshops and learning series designed to build confidence in teaching with AI (Liu & Bridgeman, 2024).

> *[…] So, what we're doing at Sydney is we're actually helping academics think about how they can create their own agentic AIs to act on their behalf with their students in order to enhance the work that they do. The analogy that we like using with academics is a stunt double. And so in a movie, a stunt double's role is not to replace the actor, but to basically do things which are physically impossible for the actor to do. And in a similar way, AI now can do things which are physically impossible for you to do as an academic because it can be with your students 24/7 and one to one. So how do you, as an academic, think about how you can augment your teaching with the help of an AI which you design in order to basically be your agents, be your stunt double to your students all the time. And our academics have a lot of fun thinking about this and thinking about how. And basically pick up a new skill of working with AI in this different way. (Professor Danny Liu, JSA Roundtable consultation)*

Importantly, students have been a cornerstone of the university's AI strategy. They have contributed to the design of resources, including a dedicated student-staff guide and the AI in Education website, which serves as a hub for responsible AI use (Liu & Bridgeman, 2024). This inclusive model makes sure that students are not just following policies but are actively involved in deciding how Gen AI is used in their learning experiences.

How has Gen AI been incorporated into teaching and assessment?

To provide structure and clarity amid this rapid change, the University has developed a 'two-lane' approach to assessment design, which has been incorporated into the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) emerging practice toolkits and adopted by various institutions both locally and internationally.

In **Lane 1**, assessments are conducted under secure, supervised conditions so that students' capabilities can be reliably determined. AI may or may not be permitted in Lane 1 assessments, and it can be controlled under these supervised, live conditions.

In **Lane 2**, students are allowed to use AI tools but are required to document and reflect on their process.

This two-lane approach offers a balanced and forward-thinking way for educators and students to engage with Gen AI in education (Liu & Bridgeman, 2024).

The University's broader vision is to support a culture of continuous learning, ensuring all members of the academic community have equal access to opportunities and resources to leverage AI as they see fit (University of Sydney Submission 164, 2024).

In a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education, and Training regarding the use of Gen AI in the Australian education system, Professor Danny Liu highlighted that students and teachers have mixed feelings about AI, from confusion and fear to exploration and experimentation. Liu stressed the importance of safe, secure access to AI tools and giving teachers and students time to get familiar with them. Professor Liu advocates for safe and familiar access to these tools and argued that AI literacy should prioritise 'familiarity' over 'skill'. In other words, what matters most is not

mastery of the technology itself, but an informed and confident understanding of how to use it well (Liu, 2024).

With strong governance, a co-designed infrastructure, and inclusive teaching methods, the University of Sydney offers a compelling case study of how higher education institutions can help educators and students shape the future of Gen AI-driven education.

Inclusion & cultural authority

Balancing inclusive potential and risks

Inclusive Gen AI reduces communication and information management barriers

Poorly specified Gen AI increases bias, discrimination, and misses disability need

Inclusive tech pathways empower Indigenous communities and careers

Cultural ownership as digital capability

Community ownership (DeafMobDoRite) turns exclusion into empowerment

Two-way, bilingual pedagogy strengthens identity and lifts educational outcomes

Community authority and Indigenous data sovereignty protect cultural knowledge

AI models should reflect Indigenous knowledge systems and operate under cultural safeguards

Inclusive design, disability, and Gen AI

Key insights

- Gen AI can reduce barriers to employment related to communication, physical access, and information management. It can also introduce or increase bias and discrimination, or fail to meet the needs of people with disability.
- Many deaf people face communication barriers that extend to digital tools. Gen AI can fail to recognise some of the sign languages or symbolic communication systems used. Without culturally sensitive design, Gen AI can reinforce barriers.
- The experience of the DeafMobDoRite app shows how inclusive design, ownership, and application of Gen AI can address existing barriers in communication. This can have a material effect on people with disability, creating a shift from exclusion to empowerment.

There are more than 1.3 billion people with disability, accounting for 17% of the global population. This makes them the largest global minority group (World Economic Forum, 2025).

According to the World Health Organization (2024), currently over 2.5 billion people worldwide require assistive products. With the global population ageing and an increase in noncommunicable diseases, it is projected that by 2050, approximately 3.5 billion people will need assistive technology (World Health Organization, 2024).

Gen AI offers opportunities for both empowerment and societal inclusion (Hadar Souval, et al., 2025), particularly for participation in employment (Gladkov, 2025). For instance, AI technologies including Gen AI can support the lives of individuals with disability by improving assistive devices and robotics, as well as offering tailored solutions in education and healthcare (Zhao, Cox, & Chen, 2025). However, it also introduces new challenges and risks for people with disability. For example, absence of lived experience and input from people with disability in the AI design process can result in tools that do not meet their actual needs or might even inadvertently cause harm (Hadar Souval, et al., 2025).

Individuals with disability often face challenges in securing employment. According to the World Economic Forum (2025), the inclusion of people with disability presents a compelling business case. In some countries, the potential economic benefit of increasing the employment of people with disability could be as high as 7% of GDP. Companies that adopt a disability-inclusive strategy can see benefits such as 28% higher revenue, double the net income, 30% higher profit margins, and improved talent acquisition and retention for the next generation, leading to substantial returns on investment (World Economic Forum, 2025). The recent analysis by the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre indicates that that increasing employment of people with disability by 10% could add $16 billion to economic output each year in Australia (Buckland, et al., 2024).

AI-powered tools can significantly reduce barriers to employment by addressing challenges in communication, physical access, and information management. Tools like ChatGPT can improve accessibility and communication for employees with disability, including invisible disabilities such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and dyslexia (Mercer, 2023).

Cephable, an AI-driven platform, empowers employees with physical disabilities to engage with technology through alternative input methods like voice commands. The platform uses speech-to-text, facial expressions, tilt controls, and head movements to create an accessible tech experience. This advancement has allowed individuals with conditions such as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) to continue their professional roles despite progressive physical limitations (Howard, 2025).

Other notable industry examples include Cognii's virtual writing assistant for dyslexia; Kuki's virtual assistant for autism (Mercer, 2023); SignAll that leverages AI and computer vision to recognise and translate sign language (SignAll, n.d.); and Signapse's real-time Gen AI sign language translation software, designed to break down communication barriers instantly (Signapse, n.d.).

While there are clear benefits, Gen AI systems can also inadvertently introduce or increase bias and discrimination, particularly in hiring and promotion processes. If AI tools are trained on datasets that underrepresent people with disabilities, they may produce discriminatory outcomes, limiting access to job opportunities and fair treatment in the workplace. Recent UN discussions highlighted the need for inclusive design and oversight to ensure that AI systems do not exclude or disadvantage disabled workers (United Nations, 2025).

Similarly, Gen AI can impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability by either reinforcing existing systemic barriers or serving as a tool to dismantle them and promote greater inclusion. This case study explores the effects of Gen AI on people with disability, aiming to uncover insights into its potential impacts and transitions through an intersectional lens focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability.

The case study draws on the written response from the Inclusive Design Collective to our Study's consultations.[3] The authors' response is based on the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) funded project Breaking the Silence: AI for Deaf Mob. This project, along with its prototype DeafMobDoRite app,[4] demonstrates how AI, including Gen AI, can be utilised to foster inclusion and equitable participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, including in the labour market.

Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Aboriginal Australians

David's story

David is a proud Wiradjuri man, who faces significant communication barriers. He does not use formal Auslan; instead, he communicates through own Aboriginal 'home sign.'

Communication barriers

Individuals like David often faces barriers and confusion when trying to access essential services like health care, justice, or employment. The legal system, for example, presumes

[3] We would like to acknowledge and thank Professor Katie Ellis, Dr Manisha Amin and Simon Lillis from the Inclusive Design Collective, who kindly contributed their written response to several of this Study's questions and focal points. In their response, the authors employed the persona of David, a proud Wiradjuri man, to highlight the real-world communication barriers faced by individuals. With the permission of the Inclusive Design Collective, we would like to retain this persona in this case study to highlight key issues.

[4] DeafMobDoRite is an AI-powered mobile app prototype designed to improve communication for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Aboriginal Australians (Deaf mob). This app was developed in Wiradjuri country (a large part of central NSW).

that participants understand and respond accurately to questions about their rights and obligations.

When David was required to attend court, he struggled to understand complex legal concepts without a qualified interpreter who could grasp both his cultural background and unique communication style. The absence of such support meant that his rights and responsibilities were unclear, putting him at risk of misunderstanding or even legal jeopardy.

Deaf Australia's submission to the Disability Royal Commission provides a broader perspective of these issues. It highlights the lack of employment opportunities, the shortage of qualified Auslan interpreters, and an even greater scarcity of interpreters who are both Indigenous and male (Hodge, Murray, Thornton, & Blyth, 2023). This shortage affects key elements of a person's life and interactions with others, whether it be job interviews and workplaces, courtrooms, hospitals, or other settings. Without interpreters who understand both language and culture, Deaf Indigenous people are at risk of misunderstanding, misrepresentation, or even harm.

Digital and AI literacy

The communication barriers extend into everyday digital spaces as well. According to the Inclusive Design Collective, many deaf Aboriginal people are not confident with standard digital tools like typing or using email. Some use different sign languages or symbolic communication systems, which standard Gen AI tools fail to recognise. Even the concept of AI itself can be unfamiliar and abstract until explained and demonstrated with concrete examples. Without culturally sensitive design, AI becomes another gatekeeper, reinforcing the very barriers it promises to remove.

Culturally informed digital solution

Recognising these challenges, the Breaking the Silence: AI for Deaf Mob project sets out to create a solution. The team collaborated closely with the deaf Indigenous community in Wiradjuri country to co-design an AI-powered prototype communication app (DeafMobDoRite) for translating between English, Auslan, and Aboriginal sign language. Rather than assume a one-size-fits-all approach, the project prioritised cultural relevance, user agency, and multimodal interaction.

Empowerment through AI

For David, DeafMobDoRite app represents a shift from exclusion to empowerment. When he needs to understand a legal document (e.g., a court summons), he can upload a photo of it into the app. The AI chatbot (AskAura), trained specifically for Deaf mob and legal contexts, explains the content in simplified, accessible language.

When entering unfamiliar spaces, David can use pre-recorded avatar messages to introduce himself and outline his communication preferences. This reduces his anxiety and ensures others know how best to engage with him.

The app's live translation feature enables real-time conversations, converting speech to text and vice versa. And for those like David who prefer non-verbal forms of communication, the app supports a symbol-based interface. David selects personalised symbols that represent his thoughts, which the app then translates into spoken or written language. The app is inclusive of users with additional cognitive or physical impairments, and it adapts to each person's needs.

As the Inclusive Design Collective notes, DeafMobDoRite app is designed to provide AI-powered communication support in situations where interpreters are unavailable or inappropriate. By offering various modes of communication such as text, voice, pictures, and symbols, it accommodates different communication preferences and literacy levels, thereby reducing the reliance on formal Auslan or English proficiency. This approach directly addresses a significant barrier to accessing services and participating in contexts that affect labour market outcomes. Additionally, by tackling communication barriers, the prototype serves as a potential intervention to improve access to legal services and information, which can indirectly influence labour market participation and outcomes for deaf Indigenous people.

Community concerns

The technology alone does not tell the whole story. The app development process revealed important lessons about trust, representation, and inclusion. Participants expressed concern over avatars that looked ‘too real’ or images that did not reflect their identities. Some worried about who owned the data, and where it would go.

These issues are not just technical; they are ethical as well. The project emphasised Indigenous leadership, community control, and long-term relationships as essential components of ethical AI development.

Adapting AI to the user

One powerful insight came from the community’s reaction to AI-generated examples. ChatGPT’s initial responses were too complex, relying on standard English structures. Users when asked for input, often responded with ‘I don't know’, not because they lacked opinions, but because they did not feel confident offering their perspectives. This finding reinforces a core message: AI systems must be able to adapt to users, not the other way around.

Balancing AI with human connection

The project’s work also revealed tensions around interpretation. Some individuals prefer not to rely on interpreters at all, as it can erode personal connection. Gen AI tools, while helpful, cannot replace human relationships. However, they can create space for autonomy, allowing users like David to set the terms of their communication.

Aboriginal sign language preservation and data creation

There is also a broader opportunity here. By supporting Aboriginal sign language documentation and multi-modal communication strategies, tools like DeafMobDoRite app can contribute to language preservation and data creation. This is vital not only for inclusion but for future-proofing AI development itself.

Evolving skills systems

Moving forward, the implications are clear. Skills systems must adapt to support both users and developers. For users, this means accessible digital literacy programs that accommodate different communication styles. For developers, it means training in culturally responsive design, Indigenous-led research methods, and ethical technology practices.

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates the transformative potential of Gen AI when Indigenous people lead its design, ownership, and application. David's story, which highlights real barriers and opportunities, serves as a powerful reminder of how technology can advance equity, inclusion, and cultural preservation.

The DeafMobDoRite prototype exemplifies how AI, including Gen AI, can enhance equity and access for the Deaf community by addressing communication barriers highlighted in David's narrative. Its multi-modal approach and cultural sensitivity showcase how Gen AI can also support inclusive participation in the labour market.

The Mamutjitji Story App

Key insights

- The Mamutjitji Story App is the first interactive resource in the endangered Ngalia language, blending cultural preservation with digital innovation.
- The app revitalises and preserves cultural stories, like the Mamutjitji Story, and supports two-way, cross-cultural learning.
- The project highlights the need for community leadership and cultural safeguards, advocating for Indigenous control over cultural data and AI models that reflect Indigenous knowledge systems.

In 2024, in the Goldfields-Esperance region of Western Australia, the remote town of Leonora became the launch site for a unique Indigenous-led education and technology project and application (app) – The Mamutjitji Story App. The App reflects a thoughtful blend of cultural preservation and digital innovation. It is the first interactive resource presented in the endangered Ngalia language, uniquely connecting today's youth with ancient traditions. The Ngalia dialect family of the Mantjiltjara language group, spoken fluently today by only three individuals, encompasses not only vocabulary but also the collective memory and identity of its people. Kado Muir is one of the only three speakers. He is a senior leader and Ngalia Traditional Owner, a knowledge holder and custodian of the language and cultural stories, and responsible for the project.

Additionally, the App serves as a digital tool for revitalising, preserving, and presenting cultural stories, specifically the traditional Mamutjitji Story, a Dreamtime story belonging to the Ngalia Western Desert Aboriginal People. The Ngalia term 'Mamutjitji' refers to the antlion, which is the larval stage of the lacewing. These larvae resemble small insects and have large jaws that extend from their heads, used for capturing prey. Antlions create circular pits to trap unsuspecting prey, where they lie in wait. The Mamutjitji Story conveys this lifecycle knowledge shared through storytelling from the Western Desert of Western Australia (Hildyard, 2024).

The Mamutjitji Story App is a joint initiative with support from WA's Ngalia Heritage Research Council, Walkatjurra Cultural Centre, CSIRO, and Australia's National Science Agency (Dilji Labs, n.d.). It was produced by a Māori technology company Kiwa Digital with experience of capturing and presenting cultural stories in New Zealand.

This project and App exemplify the role digital tools like AI can play in supporting Indigenous language and cultural transmission. It highlights the fundamental importance of community leadership and cultural safeguards.

Technology and cultural safeguards

In our consultation, Kado Muir emphasised the importance of storytelling in his childhood and cultural background:

> *The Mamutjitji Story is a traditional story song that was taught to me and my siblings, when we were young, sitting around the flickering light of our campfires in the desert. (Kado Muir, consultation)*

Mr Muir and other Ngalia Elders recognised that sustaining the Ngalia language and its associated oral traditions, such as storytelling, would require appropriate digital tools for preservation and maintenance, as well as approaches capable of engaging younger generations.

Before the launch of AI language models like ChatGPT, Kado Muir sought to develop a language learning system for the Ngalia language. Despite initial scepticism about data requirements, the advent of large language models inspired renewed efforts to build AI-driven language tools.

In the current form, the App's bilingual framework supports two-way, cross-cultural learning. In our conversation, Kado Muir described the concept of 'Two-Way Science', a form of science for remote Aboriginal students that links traditional Aboriginal knowledge with Western science as equal knowledge sources. Ngalia children can build pride in their heritage through a contemporary software program, while non-Ngalia users, such as local teachers and students can gain respectful access to Aboriginal knowledge systems. In doing so, the App helps to normalise the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives within mainstream education, fostering mutual understanding and respect. Building on The Mamutjitji Story App, Mr Muir's current projects include curating cultural content with AI to create learning management systems (LMS) that facilitate cultural awareness training and support parents and educators in Indigenous language teaching.

> *It's about using technology to present cultural knowledge, cultural learning in a way that supports the transmission of that knowledge. So, part of my role is discharging responsibilities. As an Elder is to be able to pass on the knowledge you know. Obviously, it's this much that I'm passing on because there's other knowledge [governed by] hierarchies around gender and age, and all those sort of things, and location. (Kado Muir, consultation)*

Today, Kado Muir envisions an agentic AI model that can interact with curated cultural data to automate teaching and knowledge transmission, including the creation of culturally appropriate digital content such as the Mountain Devil and Echidna Dreaming stories. Mr Muir explained, '[What] I'm doing here is looking at a use scenario for AI in discharging my cultural responsibilities.'

However, he expressed concern about the negative discourse surrounding AI and stressed the need for policies that position Australia competitively in the global AI landscape. He also highlighted the importance for developing AI models that reflect Indigenous knowledge and cultural frameworks rather than dominant Western or US-centric AI paradigms. Kado Muir explained that Indigenous knowledge systems are complex, involving gendered, location-based, and age-based access, which must be preserved in digital formats. He advocated for adequately resourced partnerships that empower Traditional Owners to manage and control their cultural data, avoiding exploitation and extraction by external entities.

Outcomes and implications from the Mamutjitji Story App

- Language Revitalisation: The Mamutjitji Story App demonstrates that digital tools (including Gen AI) can play a role in supporting the learning of endangered languages and the transfer of cultural knowledge between generations.
- Community Authority and Indigenous Data Sovereignty: The project provides an example of keeping Indigenous control at the heart of any AI initiative involving cultural heritage, with strong safeguards against appropriation, misuse, or the commodification of Indigenous data.
- Educational Innovation: It provides an example of how a two-way science, blend of bilingual materials, multimedia interactivity, and endorsement by Aboriginal Elders can allow for culturally relevant pedagogy that strengthens both Indigenous identity and educational outcomes.

Indigitek

Key insights

- Indigitek empowers Indigenous communities through a culturally grounded, community-led model that fosters belonging in the tech industry.
- It promotes inclusive, non-traditional learning pathways that reflect the diverse strengths and circumstances of Indigenous learners.
- Its strategic partnerships with educators and tech companies create sustainable, culturally safe career opportunities and economic participation.

Indigitek is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to increase the participation and success of Indigenous people in the technology industry (Indigitek, n.d.). Founded in response to exclusion and cultural dissonance experienced by Indigenous professionals in corporate tech environments, Indigitek was established to normalise the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the technology industry, foster culturally safe workplaces, and create accessible pathways into the digital economy.

This case study explores how Indigitek is increasing Indigenous participation and success in the tech industry through a culturally grounded, community-led model.

Founding vision: from exclusion to empowerment

This story started in a Redfern pub with a small group sharing their experiences and challenges as Indigenous individuals in tech. They discussed the difficulty of growing up with tech interests in environments where such passions were uncommon, and the barriers faced in pursuing careers in tech – especially in spaces dominated by non-Indigenous people. From this, Indigitek was formed and evolved into an organisation with a national reach, enabling Indigenous tech professionals to share stories, support one another, and inspire the next generation (Johnston, 2020a).

> *We're made up of a community of passionate Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people who are continuing a proud tradition of 85,000 years of innovation and entrepreneurship in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) (Indigitek, n.d.).*

Training and career pathways

A central pillar of Indigitek's strategy is the promotion of diverse and accessible training pathways. Recognising that university is often not the most accessible route into tech, the organisation supports vocational training, certifications, and on-the-job learning. This approach is particularly important for Indigenous learners who may face financial, geographic, or cultural barriers to higher education (Thoughtworks, 2022).

To reflect the diverse strengths and interests of Indigenous learners, Indigitek promotes a broad and inclusive approach to tech education that includes:

- Non-university pathways: Encouraging participation in short courses, bootcamps, and industry certifications that build practical, job-ready skills (Hendy, 2023).

- Later-in-life learning: Supporting individuals who discover tech later in life, including those transitioning from other careers or re-entering the workforce (Hendy, 2023).
- STEAM integration: Expanding the traditional STEM model to include the Arts (STE**A**M), recognising the value of creative and cultural skills in digital innovation (Indigitek, n.d.).

This inclusive approach not only broadens access but also aligns with Indigenous strengths in storytelling, design, and community engagement – skills that are increasingly valuable in user experience design, digital content creation, and AI training.

Partner engagement: building pathways through collaboration

The organisation's approach to increasing Indigenous participation in the tech industry is underpinned by a strong network of partnerships with training providers and technology companies. These partnerships are not transactional but are built on shared values and a commitment to long-term, systemic change (Indigitek, n.d.).

With training providers, the organisation collaborates to design and deliver technology learning pathways that are tailored to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. These pathways are structured to equip participants with the practical skills and confidence required to pursue internships or employment with tech companies. The focus is on creating accessible, culturally safe learning environments that support both technical proficiency and personal development (Indigitek, n.d.).

Engagement with tech companies is equally strategic. Partner organisations are expected to go beyond symbolic support by participating in regular events, aligning with the organisation's strategic priorities, and offering tangible opportunities such as internships and employment placements (Indigitek, n.d.).

Improving job outcomes

Indigitek works closely with their tech partners to support the development of job opportunities that are realistic, achievable, and aligned with the aspirations of Indigenous candidates. This includes ongoing dialogue to support inclusive workplace environments and clearly articulated career pathways.

The organisation educates employers about the cultural dimensions of Indigenous life that are often misunderstood in corporate settings.

Indigitek also addresses the spectrum of cultural connection among Indigenous people – from those deeply embedded in traditional practices to those disconnected due to historical trauma or other factors. This nuanced understanding is essential for creating inclusive, respectful workplaces (O'Reilly, 2019).

On-Country opportunities and economic participation

Indigitek's work is grounded in the belief that economic participation should not require cultural dislocation. Many Indigenous people are forced to leave their communities to access training and jobs in tech. Indigitek envisions a future where people can live, learn, and work on country (Ruben, 2022).

Indigitek is working to build local capacity and create pathways that allow people to stay connected to their land and culture. They aim to create a more connected and supportive ecosystem – one that enables Indigenous people to access, navigate, and succeed in the tech sector (Ruben, 2022).

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