

A RESEARCH & ADVISORY

Community Intelligence Report

Winning with AI: The Strategic Playbook for Australian Digital Leaders



Executive summary

Australian digital leaders are caught in an AI paradox: boards demand immediate AI returns while the foundational systems needed for AI success remain broken. This report reveals how successful CDOs are turning AI pressure into strategic advantage, and why the next 12 months will determine who survives the transition.

We're increasingly hearing that digital transformation budgets are being absorbed by AI initiatives. Leading CDOs aren't just implementing AI, they're leveraging AI-driven demands to finally address long-standing challenges they've been battling for years:

- using AI readiness as justification for data governance budgets
- leveraging AI customer service demands to fix broken omnichannel experiences
- establishing AI governance to regain control over shadow IT adoption.

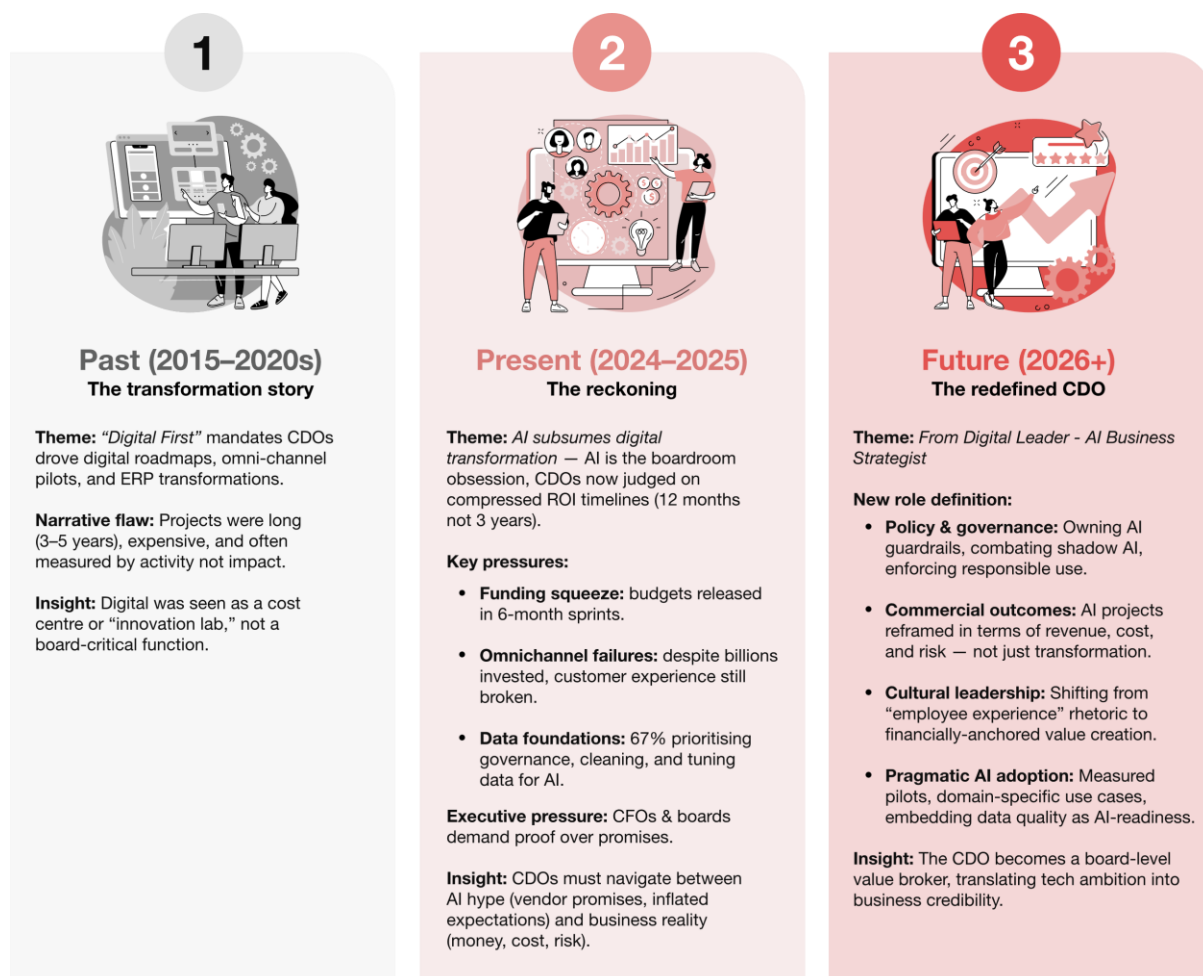
Three voices frame this approach. **Peter Tsakissiris**, advisor to boards and executives, cuts through the noise: value conversations come down to money, cost, and risk.

Simon Kriss, executive advisor, challenges leaders to decide whether they're exploiting AI for efficiency or exploring it for new markets.

Nicholas O'Connor, CDO at NHP's Electrical Engineering Products, shows the reality: ROI remains elusive, but practical AI applications are already augmenting his 800-strong workforce.

Their message is clear: digital transformation has been subsumed into AI. The survivors won't be those with flashy roadmaps, but those who deliver real outcomes under compressed timelines and tighter governance.

The Digital Reckoning — Past, Present & Future of the CDO



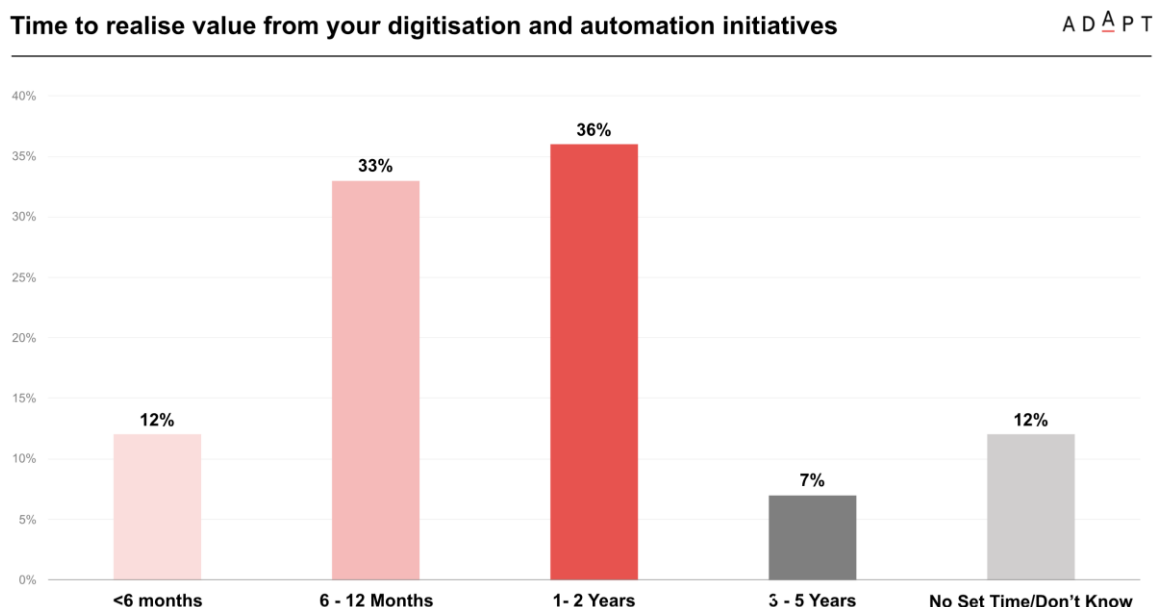
The compressed timeline pressure: From 3 years to 12 months

Insights from ADAPT’s Digital Edge Survey (Jun 2025), capturing perspectives from over 115 Australian Chief Digital Officers, reveal mounting pressures as ROI timelines shrink sharply.

For 33% of organisations, expected time to value has fallen to just 6–12 months, with a further 36% limited to 12–24 months—down from the traditional 3–5 year horizon.

The funding landscape has fundamentally shifted, creating an environment where digital leaders operate under unprecedented time constraints.

Figure 1: Expected time to value.



Source : ADAPT Digital Edge Survey in June 2025. Sample size : 118 Australian CDOs

Peter Tsakissiris, seasoned digital transformation advisor at ADAPT cuts through the complexity:



Executives ultimately care about three things: making money, controlling costs, and managing risk. Those are the levers that matter.”

This isn't revolutionary thinking, but the urgency has intensified dramatically.

“The appetite for three-year programs is gone. Today it's six months of funding — then you prove value to get the next six, and the next”, Tsakissiris explains.

“You used to get funding for three years to go off and implement an ERP system. Now it's more like: ‘Hold on, hold on—let's break it down into smaller chunks.’”

The implications cascade through every aspect of digital strategy. Projects that once had the luxury of long-term strategic planning now operate in six-month sprints, with 45% of initiatives expected to show ROI within 12 months.

The AI imperative is driving these compressed timelines. Boards see competitors launching AI initiatives and demand immediate action, not understanding that successful AI requires the foundational work that digital teams have been requesting for years.

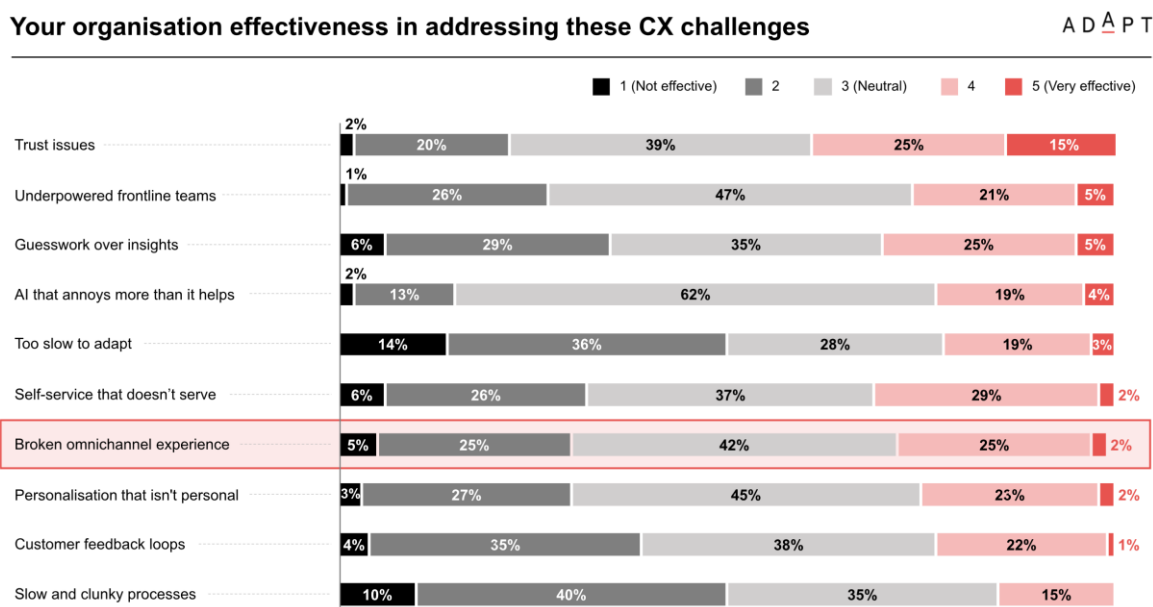
This compressed timeline isn't just changing project management—it's fundamentally altering what gets prioritised and how success is measured.

The persistent omnichannel failures: Internal focus over customer needs

Despite years of investment and executive attention, 75-85% of digital leaders acknowledge their omnichannel experience remains broken.

Insights from ADAPT's Digital Edge Survey (Jun 2025), also showcase how only 2% of organisations consider themselves as effective when fixing omnichannel experiences.

Figure 2: Effectiveness in addressing CX challenges



Source : ADAPT Digital Edge Survey in June 2025. Sample size : 107 Australian CDOs

Simon Kriss, a customer experience strategist, and an ADAPT executive advisor identifies the core problem with surgical precision:



The mistake they make is they're trying to fix their processes, or they're trying to make their data accessible... instead of saying, hang on, what does the customer truly want and truly need?"

This inward focus creates what he calls “channel non parity”—a fundamental design flaw where channels aren't equal.

“It often comes from a small comment by the legal or risk team, like: ‘Oh, you can't take a payment over chat.’ So, you're on chat, handling everything—it's your preferred channel—then you reach the point in the conversation where the chat team says, ‘I'm really sorry, but you can't make a payment here. You have to call.’”

The result is predictable:



Customers bomb out of the omnichannel experience and just go back to whatever channel they believe they're going to get the broadest range of service from in the fastest time. And that's usually the telephone. Which is the most expensive.”

The measurement gap compounds this problem, revealing how organisational metrics often contradict customer expectations.

“We've been measuring our call centres as x percent of calls answered in 20s. And yet when somebody emails us, we send back a response that says, we've got your email. Somebody will respond in 24 hours. So, you've got seconds versus hours. What's the customer going to do?”

Chief Data Officers sit at the centre of this challenge. These omnichannel gaps become AI blockers. Organisations rushing to implement AI customer service discover their fragmented data and broken processes make effective AI impossible—finally giving CDOs the business case for fixes they’ve long advocated.

The data foundation challenge: Where AI dreams meet reality

Insights from ADAPT's Digital Edge Survey highlight that 67% of CDOs are prioritising establishing data governance initiatives as their top priority.

Real-world AI implementation reveals a fundamental truth: many organisations prefer to spend resources securing more on data quality than algorithmic sophistication.

Full report available as part of
ADAPT's Transformation Services

Book a Discovery Session to talk with our team
about unlocking full access this report and more.

[Request Full Access](#)