



Building safety and integrity capability across the Australian Public Service

Feeling safe at work is important. Our wellbeing, health, integrity, performance and ability to innovate are impacted by how safe we feel. People at work are more likely to reach their potential when they can be open and honest, voice opinions and make suggestions.

In our rapidly changing world, it is more important than ever for all leaders to focus on supporting psychosocial and psychological safety. Building psychological safety in the APS contributes to a culture of integrity and more effective governance, service delivery and trust.

Testing new ways to drive behaviour and shift culture

In 2024–25, the Capability Reinvestment Fund (CRF) supported a cross-APS initiative to test new ways of building safety and integrity capability through 3 pilot projects. The initiative operated at 3 levels:



Senior Executives (SES) Relational leadership and psychological safety



Senior Managers (EL2s) Embedding good work design into leadership practice



APS Teams Applying SMART Work Design to real workplace challenges

3 pilot capability programs



504
staff



64
APS agencies



40
stakeholders
and partners



100%
on time



100%
within budget

Governed by Comcare | Supported by Curtin University | Delivered by Comcare and the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC)

Advisory partners

- > Department of Education
- > Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- > Department of Defence
- > Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- > Commonwealth Ombudsman
- > National Indigenous Australians Agency
- > National Emergency Management Agency of Australia

Overview of the 3 projects

Project 1 – SES Skills Lab and Mentoring Program



Participants: 64 SES officers from 22 agencies (≈ 2% of the SES cohort).



Focus and approach: Tested relational leadership micro-skills using the [6Rs Relational Leadership Capabilities paradigm](#) (Regulation, Reflection, Relatability, Reciprocity, Repair, and Reliability) through small interactive labs and optional mentoring sessions through peer pods (small groups) or individually.



Result: 94% rated the program effective and valuable, with strong praise for the safe space to practise leadership skills.



Outcome: The [6R Relational Leadership Capabilities Skills Lab](#) is now available for all SES and EL2s.

‘The expertise of the facilitators was exceptional and created immediate trust for me in the content and their authority to drive the conversation.’

Project 2 – Good Work Design in the APS Leadership Edge program



Participants: 360 EL2s from 63 agencies.



Focus and approach: Embedded Good Work Design principles into leadership practice via a two-week sprint of digital learning, peer pods and applied reflection.



Result: 95% rated the program effective and valuable, with strong demand and uptake. The design was content-heavy, creating challenges for peer collaboration.



Outcome: New cohorts of [Leadership Edge](#) participants continue to undertake the sprint following its inclusion as a core module. The revised sprint design is regularly adjusted in response to evaluation insights.

‘This module revealed something new to me – SMART Work Design. After a 30-year career, it was nice to see a new management tool! I enjoyed it – well done!’

Project 3 – SMART Work Design in Teams



Participants: 80 staff across 9 teams from 9 agencies.



Focus and approach: Supported teams to redesign their work using SMART Work Design (Stimulation, Mastery, Agency, Relational, Tolerable demands) in a 12-week cycle (Diagnose → Revise → Test → Embed), led by internal team champions.



Result: 93% rated the program effective and valuable, proving champion-led facilitation is both feasible and impactful.



Outcome: Insights from the pilot are being used to inform the development of tools, resources and programs that help teams to redesign their work for better outcomes.

‘I really enjoyed the SMART Work Design program... it successfully identified some of the priority issues in the team and supported the resolution of these in an ongoing manner.’

For more information on Good Work Design and the ongoing program of work visit the [Comcare website](#) or contact goodworkdesign@comcare.gov.au.

An innovative approach to measuring what matters

The pilots delivered strong results and participants valued their experiences, but the real shift was the approach to capability building and measuring what matters.

To enable continuous improvement in learning design, the pilots were evaluated using an innovative evaluation framework called the **Access, Approach and Account Performance Framework (A3PF)**.

The evaluation looked at how well the pilots worked and how efficient they were. It also checked if they created the right conditions for learning and what to focus on if the pilots are scaled up for greater impact.

How A3PF enables continuous improvement



focuses on
effectiveness, efficiency
and the
right conditions
for learning.



600

data points



1000s

of comments

Foundations of A3PF

Key research insights embedded in the framework



Satisfaction doesn't equal learning

- > In A3PF satisfaction is treated as a credibility and trust signal, not evidence of learning impact



Memory and motivation matter

- > In A3PF these are measured to identify barriers to behaviour change



Transfer and long-term impact require support

- > In A3PF transfer is tracked through workplace support measures

Evaluation findings

People felt **engaged and supported**, fostering understanding and enthusiasm.

While the pilots achieved **credibility and trust**, this reflects perceptions of readiness rather than proof of workplace transfer.

The pilots were designed to **build capability**, but this **wasn't always achieved**, with memory and motivation presenting challenges.

Improving partnerships and resource management will be the main governance levers as the pilots are expanded across the APS.

Opportunities

Strengthen



memory



motivation



governance

3 options



independent projects



informal partnerships



formal, resourced partnerships

The evaluation findings are more than a record of success. They are grounded in real-world data and can be used to guide continuous improvement for learning design.

For more information on how this replicable evaluation framework can be used for future critical APS capability programs contact goodworkdesign@comcare.gov.au.