



Case study

Transforming HR and reclaiming time at the City of Sydney

"Every process at work is just a way of converting time into output. The best systems aren't the ones that do more, they're the ones that waste less time."

Chris Youness
Chief of People & Culture @ City of Sydney



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Introduction



"How much of this is **still necessary and who is this process really serving?"**



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In every new role, Chris Youness reviews systems for one of two common time-wasters:

1. Outdated processes (built for problems that no longer exist).
2. Misaligned incentives (systems that reward the wrong things).

He says, "If we truly care about productivity, we have to start by asking: How much of this is still necessary and who is this process really serving?"

When Youness joined the City of Sydney as Chief of People & Culture, he inherited a neglected HR system. There was a fundamental misalignment that was costing employees and managers countless hours on administrative busywork instead of meaningful, strategic work.

Employees were stuck in forms. Managers were stuck in approvals. HR was stuck in admin.

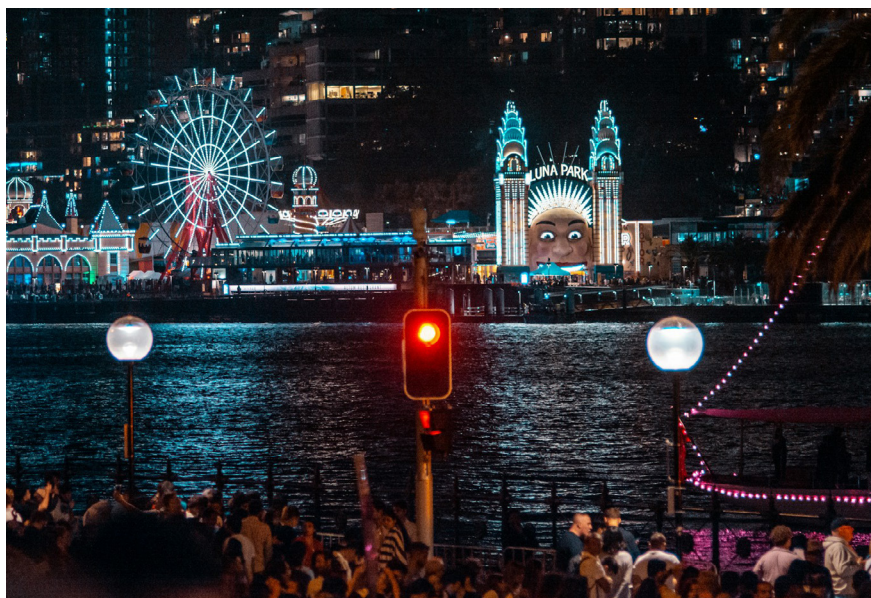
Youness then became the driving force behind a bold rethink, anchored in human-centred values, rigorous challenge, and strategic augmentation. In doing so, he enabled the City of Sydney to modernise the use of its HR technology stack, and fundamentally shift how employees spent their time at work.

Client
City of Sydney

Project
Transforming HR

Website
cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Platform
SAP SuccessFactors

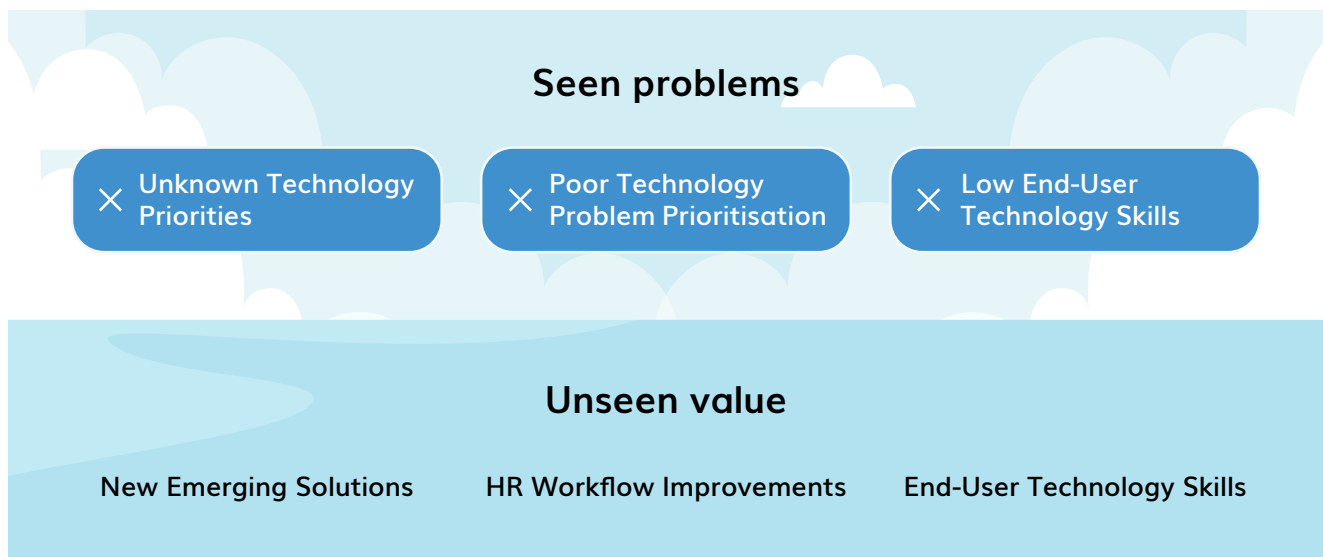


Transcending a legacy system

Like many public sector transformations, the City of Sydney's initial implementation of SAP SuccessFactors was driven by a desire to digitise manual processes.

The workflows were rigid. The system had been customised to reflect old paper processes. Approvals, forms, and signatures slowed everything down.

Youness said it clearly: "We didn't ask the hard questions about what we could let go of. As a result, we were stuck with something nobody was happy with."



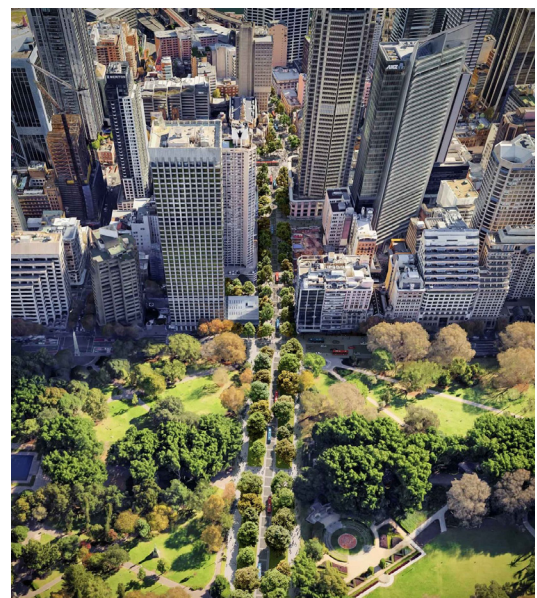
Unused and underpowered

Updates from SAP were available but unused. This rigidity was compounded by a chronic under-resourcing of HR systems teams.

"Every HR tech team I've ever worked with has been underpowered to realise the advertised benefits of technology," Youness said.

"At City of Sydney, we had two people administering an enterprise-grade system. That was simply not sustainable."

The result: stagnation. Time was wasted. Features were missed. Everyone felt the drag.





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It's not that the system can't do what we need. It is that we never engaged with it the right way.

From system blame to process ownership

With the support of Discovery Consulting, a long-time implementation partner, the team initiated a structured health check. Together, they examined four key dimensions:

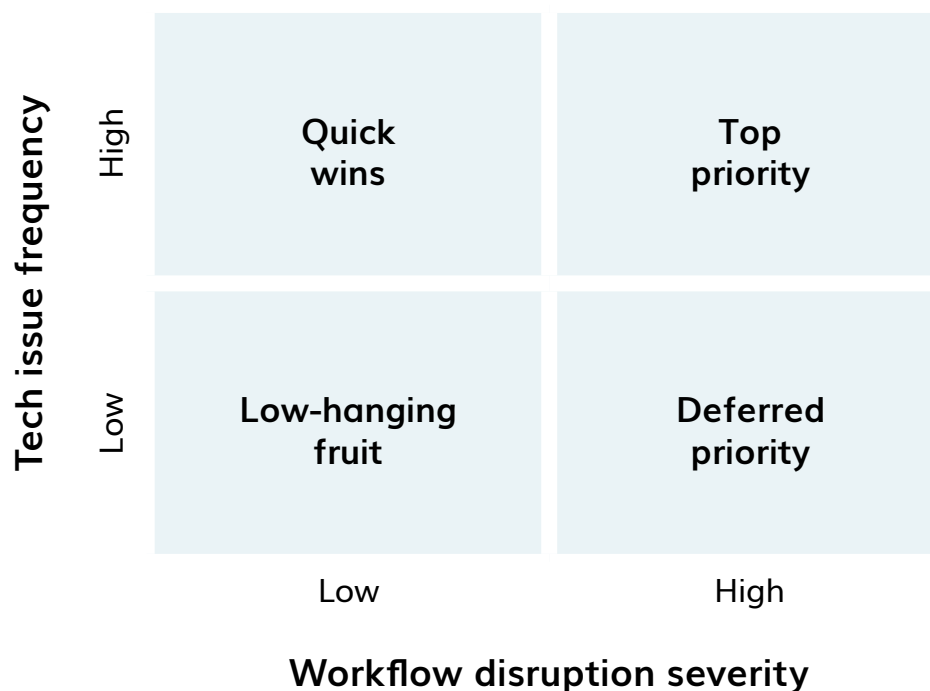
- Process and model alignment
- System configuration
- Administrator experience
- End-user experience

These areas were also central to the Discovery assessment, which reinforced the need to rethink both technical architecture and process governance. The outcome was clear:

at least 20 immediate opportunities for optimisation. Many weren't about technology per se. They were about process design and internal ownership.

Youness reframed the challenge: "It's not that the system can't do what we need. It is that we never engaged with it the right way."

To do this effectively, Youness refused to treat external partners like vendors. Instead, he brought them into the team's context: budget, challenges, pressures, and asked for solutions that made sense within those constraints.



Augmented HR

The power of partnership

A transformative idea to emerge from this engagement was the concept of augmented HR: leveraging specialist support to expand internal capability, not replace it.

Bringing the frontline in

"Every time our Discovery consultants work with us, our team gets stronger," he said. "It's not just about fixes. This has also been a journey of capability development."

"To fix the system, we had to fix the thinking" and so Youness embedded recruiters, learning and development teams, and administrators directly into the solution design.

"Our recruiters are in the system six or seven hours a day," he explained. "They understand the problems better than anyone. If we don't start with their perspective, we're missing the point."

In their insights sessions, one recruiter even suggested banning recruiter access to the system altogether because, in their view, clicking buttons to administer requisitions was time not spent actually recruiting.

"They weren't being flippant," Youness said. "They were asking: what does it mean to do our real job? How can we spend less time clicking buttons and more time finding great talent? It sparked a genuine conversation about purpose and value."

Recruiters, once excluded from tech discussions, became central voices meaning that changes weren't imposed, they were co-designed.





Results: Hours back, focus restored

The platform didn't change on its own. People changed how they used it. That made the difference.



27%

drop in HR admin workload



11

hours/week freed per HR team member



35+

minutes saved per approval flow



Self-service

improved across the board

A new way of working

Digital work isn't about the system. It's about how time is spent.

Youness built a culture where tech frees people to do meaningful work rather than digitising the old way.

He put it simply: "If the system can take something off your plate, let it. That's how we reclaim time for work that actually matters."

The standard is now: justify every process. If not, cut it. If the answer is no, show the path to yes.

This wasn't a tech upgrade. It was a shift in how work is valued.

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Dialogue over transactions

Changing the meeting culture

Typical meetings occur quarterly with HR leaders alone

 Typical meeting

 Additional meeting

Vendor partner meetings	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
HR tech leader				
HR tech end-user				

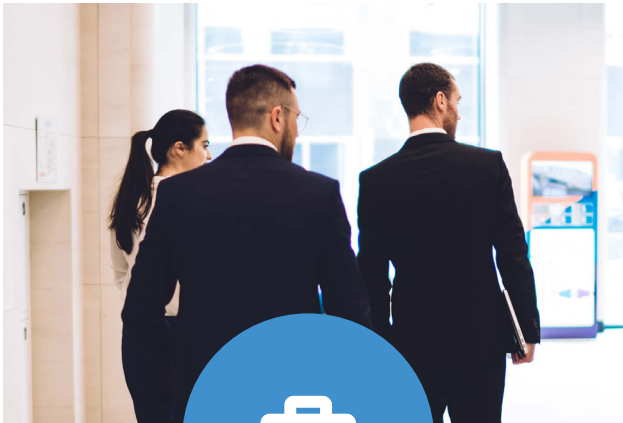
How the City of Sydney reframed vendor engagement cadence

In most organisations, vendor meetings are infrequent and focused solely on resolving existing problems. At the City of Sydney, that model was deliberately dismantled. Instead, the team:

- Established monthly meetings between HR tech leaders and vendors, and bimonthly sessions between vendors and end-users.
- Used these sessions not for updates, but for free-form dialogues, covering goals, emerging pain points, and future roadmap alignment.
- Created dual-track agendas: one for leadership priorities, one for end-user context (e.g., technology upskilling, HR process friction, satisfaction with change).

This restructured meeting cadence gave vendors deeper visibility and agency, turning them into thought partners rather than fix-it contractors.

It also reduced issue resolution time by increasing vendor understanding of day-to-day operational realities.



Building end-user confidence Through solution previews

Vendor walkthroughs helped demystify technology and reduce resistance

One of the lesser-known tactics used by the City of Sydney's HR tech team was mandating that vendors not only fix issues, but walk end-users through the resolution and preview upcoming solutions. These sessions:

- Increased technical confidence among staff who had previously felt overwhelmed by system complexity.
- Positioned new features not as impositions, but as responses to pain points end-users themselves had raised.
- Fostered a culture of collaborative feedback, where users helped shape, and not just receive, new capabilities.



Buy-in through understanding

This transparency turned uncertainty into buy-in, gave end-users the language and context to advocate for their needs, and ultimately saved countless hours that would have otherwise been spent on retraining and troubleshooting.

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They stopped wasting time. They gave people room to think, decide and lead.

That's what changed everything.



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About Discovery

Your SAP Partner for Practical, Powerful Solutions



Discovery Consulting is a specialist SAP consultancy founded in Melbourne in 2011, delivering expert services across Australia and internationally.

We commenced specialising in Human Capital Management and Finance consulting in SAP, and have since expanded our capabilities to deliver services across both on-premise and cloud-based SAP solutions, including SAP SuccessFactors, Ariba, and S/4HANA.

Discovery Consulting provides SAP and SuccessFactors consulting services and solutions, including programme and project management, functional and technical consulting, change management, and business engineering.

- World leaders in cloud extensions and integration
- SAP certified (integration with cloud solutions)
- Winners – 2014 development challenge for SAP HANA and SAP HANA cloud

We provide our clients with a practical approach to the implementation and support of their SAP systems. Our key focus is driving SAP to deliver tangible value for our customers. We are a certified SAP Services and SuccessFactors partner, and a recognised leader in cloud technical solutions, delivering world-class SAP outcomes across the enterprise.

Rod Gallagher
CEO

Your transformation could be next.





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We align.
We deliver.**