

Thoughtworks Global CIO Survey 2026: Who governs enterprise AI?

Australia: Coordination across a relatively distributed operating model

Executive summary

Australia shows relatively little concentration around a single AI decision-making or budget model. Central IT is the most frequently cited source of greatest influence over AI decisions, but only by one in five respondents. Budget control is spread across IT, business units, shared models and executive leadership.

Actions taken or planned point toward coordination through embedded technology leadership, formal governance and standardization.

Key findings

No single source of decision influence dominates.

20% cite central IT or technology leadership as having the greatest influence over AI decisions, followed by the CEO at 16% and the executive leadership team at 14%.

Budget models are similarly dispersed. 22% say budgets are centrally managed by IT, 22% say they are controlled independently by business units, 20% describe a shared IT-business model, 18% cite executive or board control and 18% say structures are still evolving.

Architectural guardrails are the most frequently cited mechanism for influencing AI outside direct CIO control. 22% select mandatory architectural guardrails, ahead of embedded AI champions at 19% and procurement or vendor veto power at 18%.

Coordination features strongly in actions taken or planned. 55% are embedding a dedicated technology lead within each business unit and 48% are establishing a formal AI governance and operating model. 38% select standardizing software and digital transformation across business units, the highest country-level figure in the survey. 28% select upskilling technology staff, above the 24% global figure.

Preparedness is more often qualified than absolute.

44% of CIOs say they are very prepared and 54% somewhat prepared to govern AI consistently across business functions.

What this suggests

Australia's story is less about centralizing AI and more about coordinating a distributed set of decision and budget arrangements. The combination of embedded technology leads, formal governance, architectural guardrails and standardization suggests an emphasis on coordinating decisions across the business rather than centralizing them.