Collaborative Challenge Programme

Final Report – Unlocking Productivity in Financial Services

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Exec Summary

Productivity within the Financial Service sector has fallen by 11% since 2010 in real terms, driven by a 9% fall since 2017 (ONS, 2025). Furthermore, UK productivity has consistently lagged behind G7 counterparts, with financial services a particular area of concern (Correa-Jimenez A et al, 2025). Despite innovations, new technologies, and strong business activity, the UK continues to experience unclear definitions, inconsistent measures, and uncertain pathways to improvement.

The Future Finance Collaborative Challenge Programme brought together leading voices from across the financial services ecosystem to explore a central question:

How might financial services organisations unlock meaningful and measurable productivity gains in the face of persistent challenges, changing technologies, and evolving ways of working?

Across three workshops, participants from professional services, financial institutions, fintech innovators, academia, and regional bodies worked together to unpack the complexities of productivity. This mix allowed the group to surface challenges from different perspectives, including client delivery, regional economic development, regulation, and research.

The programme identified that while efficiency and profitability remain important, true productivity in financial services also depends on effectiveness, outcomes, wellbeing, and culture.

The first session established a shared understanding of productivity, revealing that progress depends on aligning people, processes, technology, and policy. The second session delved deeper, identifying root causes that limit productivity – from leadership capability and process inefficiency to skills gaps and data limitations. The final session focused on turning these insights into practical solutions, exploring where the sector holds the greatest influence to drive change.

Three high-influence opportunity areas were identified: ***responsible adoption of technology, process maturity***, and ***access to data and information***. From these, participants co-developed five concept areas for potential implementation:

1. A data literacy and leadership programme.
2. A shared innovation sandbox for responsible AI.
3. AI and technology adoption training for senior leadership.
4. A process maturity toolkit.
5. A standardised data audit framework.

These concepts together form a roadmap for meaningful, measurable, and collaborative improvement across the financial services sector. They recognise that productivity is not a single lever but an ecosystem challenge requiring a coordinated response across leadership, culture, data, and innovation. The call to action:

To turn insight into implementation. Building capability, confidence, and collaboration to enable productivity that delivers value for businesses, employees, and wider society.

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Introduction & Background

Future Finance is a collaborative programme, led by the University of Bristol, and co-funded by Innovate UK & ESRC. It aims to accelerate innovation adoption in Mid-Tier organisations and small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK Financial Services sector (Future Finance).

To build on the partnership's research base and expertise supporting innovation clusters, a rolling Collaborative Challenge Programme (CCP) brings together industry, academic, customer and social insights to explore and address barriers to innovation adoption. The challenge programme outputs inform the development of specific interventions for financial services firms and stakeholders to enable them to gain the skills and capabilities to innovate.

Challenge themes are identified by expert academics from each of the partner universities – University of Bristol (UoB), University of the West of England, Glasgow Caledonian, University and Glasgow University, who are at the forefront of technological and social change within the sector. Themes are informed by insights from industry leaders, international research, and policy experts to address the sector's most critical needs.

This CCP explores the topic of productivity, with a working hypothesis that Financial Services can unlock productivity through innovation and new ways of working. Led by UoB, a small team was formed to perform an initial review of existing research, establish the challenge statement, identify key stakeholders, and scope potential outcomes. The team comprised a Senior Project Manager responsible for logistics and managing key stakeholders, the Principal Investigator in charge of the core research and objectives of the CCP, and a Professional Facilitator to guide the discussion and capture key conversations, learnings, and outcomes.

Business insights, lived experiences, and a review of current research formed the basis for the Challenge Title. Over three sessions, participants are invited to share their knowledge and experience from across the sector, from banking, insurance and technology, to local authority, regulation, and policy. The aim of the CCP is to reveal insights and transform these findings into practical, scalable interventions through a collaborative and inclusive co-design process.

Background Research

> *"Businesses are the main drivers of productivity growth, yet it often remains unclear to leaders exactly how senior leadership teams and boards should be thinking about productivity, and how they can incorporate it into their everyday actions to add value." - Productivity Institute*

Productivity within the Financial Service sector has fallen by 11% since 2010 in real terms, driven by a 9% fall since 2017 (ONS, 2025). Furthermore, UK productivity has consistently lagged behind G7 counterparts, with financial services a particular area of concern (Correa-Jimenez A et al, 2025).

Despite innovations, new technologies, and strong business activity, the UK continues to experience what one researcher described as a "black box" problem – unclear definitions, inconsistent measures, and uncertain pathways to improvement.

Participants were asked to consider productivity not only in terms of efficiency and growth, but also in relation to broader societal goals such as inclusion, sustainability, and wellbeing.

Participant Overview

The CCP assembled a diverse mix of voices from across the financial services ecosystem, spanning large professional services firms, regional building societies, academic researchers, and business networks. This included:

- **Professional and Advisory Services**
  Contributed expertise in organisational strategy, regulation, digital transformation, and productivity measurement. These firms provided insights into how large institutions manage complexity, governance, and technology-driven change.
- **Financial Institutions and Brokers**
  Offered practitioner perspectives on operational efficiency, customer outcomes, and regulatory burden. Their input grounded discussions in the realities of delivering productivity within customer-facing environments.
- **Innovation, Enterprise, and Technology**
  Brought innovation-led thinking, focusing on data use, digital tools, and collaboration between fintech companies and traditional financial organisations to unlock new forms of productivity.
- **Public Sector and Regional Development**
  Represented the regional and policy perspective, highlighting the importance of place-based productivity, skills development, and the role of collaboration in regional economic growth.
- **Academic and Research Partners**
  Provided evidence-based insight and facilitated structured exploration through research framing, data interpretation, and conceptual grounding around productivity theory and measurement.

This intentionally mixed cohort reflected the broader financial ecosystem, ensuring the conversation combined lived organisational experience with broader institutional, academic, and policy perspectives.

Session Format & Outline

The methodology adopted for all of the CCPs is based on a 'Double Diamond' format for design and innovation. The method is iterative, which is flexible and allows the number of sessions required to be determined by the complexity of the challenge. This CCP used a 3-session Format:

1. **Session One (Discover & Define)**

This first session established a shared foundation for understanding productivity in financial services. Participants agreed that while efficiency and profitability are important, productivity must also reflect effectiveness, outcomes, and wellbeing. Strong emphasis was placed on people, skills, culture, and leadership, with technology seen as an enabler but not a guaranteed driver of gains. Definitions of productivity varied across organisations, from delivering high-quality outcomes and improving customer access to maximising market share. This diversity highlighted both the richness of perspectives and the lack of a common language or measurement framework.

Challenges identified included duplication and siloed working, regulatory burdens, unclear goals, weak skills pipelines, and consumer mistrust shaped by misinformation. The discussion underlined that there is no single lever for productivity. Instead, progress depends on aligning people, processes, culture, technology, and policy.

2. **Session Two (Define & Develop)**.

The second session built on the groundwork from Session One by unpacking the root causes of identified challenges and exploring opportunities and solution areas to create meaningful, measurable improvements for the sector. The focus shifted from defining productivity to understanding what holds it back. Using the PESTLE framework, participants examined the key challenges – from regulation and leadership to skills, technology, and working culture. The conversation revealed that while external pressures such as compliance and reputation weigh heavily, many productivity barriers stem from within: leadership capability, organisational culture, and how people, tools, and processes align.

This session deepened understanding of the systemic and behavioural roots of productivity challenges in financial services. While external factors such as regulation and perception remain influential, participants recognised that many levers for improvement lie within the sector's own control – particularly leadership, culture, data, and skills.

3. **Session Three (Develop & Deliver)**.

Session Three moved from insight to action, mapping influence areas and co-developing solutions around technology adoption, process maturity, and data access. Participants created "How Might We" questions and prioritised collaborative concepts (See Concept Development Section) to strengthen leadership, improve processes, and build data capability, driving meaningful, measurable productivity gains across financial services.

Productivity

Definitions of productivity amongst the group revealed diverse, and sometimes competing, priorities:

- **Collaboration-focused definitions**: Working across organisational and regional boundaries to deliver more effective funding and support, ensuring value for money and greater impact.
- **People-centred definitions**: Enabling staff to achieve their potential while being efficient, interested, and valued, with a focus on repeatable, high-quality client outcomes.
- **Customer-focused definitions**: Expanding services to reach new customers, for example helping more people own homes or strengthen financial resilience.
- **Technology-enabled definitions**: Using digital tools to enhance advice, outcomes, and value for money.
- **Political economy framing**: Recognising that productivity gains require broader economic conditions that enable businesses to thrive.
- **Commercial definitions**: Optimising labour and technology to maximise surplus, increase market share, and deliver "smart outcomes" for clients.

A few consistent threads ran through these definitions. They highlighted the importance of human capital, particularly the skills, motivation, and wellbeing of employees. They also emphasised the role of risk and regulation in shaping the space within which organisations could innovate. Finally, they pointed to the need for balance between short-term efficiency and long-term outcomes, with several warning against over-optimising processes that may ultimately prove insignificant in the bigger picture.

To explore the breadth of the productivity challenge, participants worked with **four interconnected lenses:**

1. **Efficiency** – inputs and outputs, cost-to-income ratios, and doing more with less

When discussing efficiency, participants cited familiar concepts of doing more with less, whether that meant increasing outputs from the same level of inputs or reducing costs and time while maintaining service levels. Efficiency was often equated with financial metrics such as transactions per employee or cost-to-income ratios, but there was unease about how far these capture the reality of productivity. It was noted that staff are frequently instructed to "work smarter," yet little explanation accompanies this directive. This vagueness created frustration, as employees are expected to deliver more without clarity on how to achieve it or what it should look like in practice.

2. **Effectiveness** – ensuring organisations are doing the right things, not simply doing things faster.

The group was clear that productivity cannot simply be about speed or volume; effectiveness is about ensuring that the right work is done in the right way. Participants described effectiveness in terms of better processes, improved decision-making, and fewer errors, with an emphasis on quality over quantity. A recurring theme was the lack of organisational goal-setting that links strategic priorities with day-to-day tasks. While boards and senior leaders often focus on profit and growth, frontline employees are left without a sense of how their daily actions connect to those ambitions. One described how staff may see productivity as little more than "ticking things off a list," highlighting the disconnect between strategic and operational levels.

3. **Outcomes** – the quality of services delivered and the value created for customers, society, and the wider economy.

Outcomes were seen as a more meaningful way to think about productivity, shifting attention to the value created for customers, communities, and the economy. Participants emphasised the need to measure productivity in terms of the quality of services delivered, not just the quantity. Examples included improving financial inclusion, strengthening trust in the sector, and enabling SME growth. There was consensus that outcomes such as enhanced customer resilience or long-term financial wellbeing provide a truer measure of whether financial services are being productive than raw efficiency metrics. Some pointed out that outcomes look very different across subsectors. For example, productivity in pensions or insurance carries distinct dynamics compared to mortgages or fintech. This reinforced the idea that productivity is context-specific and that sectoral nuance is essential when defining outcomes.

4. **Wellbeing and Growth -** sustainable growth, job creation, financial inclusion, and positive social outcomes.

Participants highlighted wellbeing and growth as essential yet often overlooked dimensions of productivity. There was a strong belief that employee engagement, satisfaction, and culture directly influence organisational performance. If employees are disengaged or cannot see the purpose of their work, productivity inevitably suffers, whereas engaged, supported teams are better positioned to deliver sustainable value. One participant also reflected on the erosion of informal learning and curiosity in the post-Covid workplace, suggesting that weakened social interaction has undermined development and, by extension, productivity. Beyond the workforce, it was stressed the societal aspects of productivity, including supporting regional economic growth, increasing access to finance, and promoting inclusion.

Six consistent **productivity themes** were agreed during the CCP discussions:

- **People & Skills**: Leadership, culture, workforce capability, employee engagement, and wellbeing were dominant themes. There was widespread recognition that employee satisfaction directly affects productivity, with several participants highlighting the risk of disengagement when staff cannot see how their work connects to organisational goals.
- **Processes & Ways of Working**: Concerns were raised about siloed working, lack of collaboration, poor goal-setting, and inefficiencies in workflow. Several participants described being told to "work smarter" without guidance on what this meant or how to measure progress.
- **Customers & Communities**: Outcomes such as customer satisfaction, trust, and financial inclusion were emphasised. Some organisations defined productivity by their ability to reach more customers with sustainable financial products, contributing to regional economic resilience.
- **Technology & Tools**: While AI, automation, and digitalisation were seen as potential enablers, participants expressed scepticism. A common view was that technology has not historically delivered measurable productivity gains, with one participant observing that "there is no correlation in recent times between tech adoption and productivity." Instead, arguing that critical thinking and culture matter more.
- **Money & Resources**: Cost efficiency, profitability, and investment decisions were acknowledged, though less frequently raised than people and processes.
- **Environment & Context**: Regulation, competition, and macroeconomic conditions were identified as external factors shaping productivity opportunities and constraints.

Challenges

> *"Technology issues are everywhere, but they're not as important as people, leadership, and culture. You can have the best tools in the world, but if no one's motivated, it won't change anything."*

The group surfaced the issues that most often undermine productivity in financial services, noting a couple of key tensions. First, productivity was shown to be understood differently depending on seniority, with senior leaders framing it around profitability and growth, while junior employees focused on completing daily tasks, creating challenges for organisational alignment. Second, the group also debated the societal impacts of productivity, noting that national measures such as GDP or G7 comparisons often failed to resonate at the firm level, where organisations were more likely motivated by local and customer outcomes than by abstract national metrics.

A recurring theme was the burden of compliance and its impact on productivity. The group discussed the need for a risk-based approach to compliance, balancing accountability with efficiency. One example referenced an *Ernst and Young* finding that in a particular firm, 74 minutes of every 90-minute task was spent on rechecking work, illustrating the disproportionate cost of compliance activity. While compliance was recognised as essential, the discussion highlighted the challenge of finding the right *risk appetite* and avoiding *"compliance for compliance's sake."*

Key challenges

- **Duplication and silos**: Repeated work across departments, with poor sharing of data, insights, or expertise. Participants highlighted frustration at underused staff skills and knowledge, with individuals restricted by departmental boundaries despite having relevant expertise elsewhere.
- **Regulation and compliance culture**: While regulation was recognised as essential post-financial crisis, participants felt that duplication and overly cautious cultures stifled innovation. Some noted improvements in regulatory culture, with less fear of punitive consequences, but saw the volume of regulation as a persistent drag on productivity.
- **Media, misinformation, and trust**: Misinformed reporting, particularly around pensions, was seen to create poor consumer decisions and confidence. One described how *"isolated headlines"* drive harmful financial behaviour, with long-term consequences for savings and retirement.
- **Goal-setting and alignment**: Many organisations lacked clarity in their productivity goals. Employees often did not understand how their work contributed to larger objectives, leading to disengagement and inefficiency.
- **Culture and incentives**: Some cultures rewarded "busyness" rather than outcomes, creating perverse incentives to appear overloaded rather than deliver value. This was seen as a major barrier to rethinking productivity.
- **Technology scepticism**: While AI and automation were discussed as possible levers, participants felt that technology has historically failed to deliver productivity improvements. Some questioned whether current uses of AI (e.g., automating meeting minutes) addressed meaningful problems.
- **Skills and education gaps**: Organisational training and the wider education system were seen as insufficient in preparing people with critical thinking skills to harness new technologies effectively.

Other high-impact areas discussed included leadership capability, technology adoption, skills gaps, remote working behaviours, and cultural and regulatory constraints. The group agreed that while technology and regulation are external factors, leadership, skills, and organisational design offer greater scope for control and improvement.

Understanding the Root Causes of Productivity Challenges

> *"We can't rewrite regulation overnight, but we can decide how we lead our people through it."*

Through a structured cause-and-effect activity, participants explored the deeper factors underpinning productivity barriers across the financial services sector. The exercise revealed that many of the most significant challenges are *systemic and interconnected*, stemming from leadership capability, organisational culture, regulatory pressure, and skills alignment.

Leadership quality emerged as a defining influence. Participants observed that when leadership lacks diversity, long-term vision, or the ability to communicate strategy, motivation and productivity across the organisation decline. This set the tone for cultural and operational behaviours, often resulting in fragmented decision-making and short-term focus. Similarly, regional disparities in access to opportunity were seen as a social and economic constraint, widening the skills gap and limiting growth.

Other discussions highlighted the difficulty of getting the right tools adopted by the right people, with poor alignment between technology, process, and capability leading to wasted investment and reduced human capital. The legacy of post-Covid working patterns was noted – hybrid working offers flexibility and wellbeing benefits, but it can erode collaboration, mentoring, and knowledge-sharing if not managed deliberately.

Participants agreed that the increasing scope and complexity of regulation, while vital for consumer protection, can create a compliance culture that constrains innovation and productivity. Skills shortages and mismatched capability further compound these pressures, leading to inefficiencies, reputational risk, and customer dissatisfaction. Finally, the persistent negative perception of financial services, reinforced by media narratives and a culture of blame, undermines public trust and inflates the cost of redress.

There was broad agreement that leadership, culture, skills, and operating models represent the areas of *highest control* and therefore the greatest opportunity for change. Firms can choose how they lead, invest in people, and design processes that enable productivity rather than restrict it. In contrast, external factors such as legislation, regulation, or economic geography were viewed as *areas of lower influence*, but where the sector should lobby, collaborate, and share evidence to shape better policy outcomes over time.

Opportunities

> *"Businesses often don't know what technology they already have, or what it can do. Responsible adoption means starting there before buying the next thing."*

During the final session, participants explored where the financial services sector holds the greatest power to influence productivity outcomes. Building on the themes identified in Session Two, participants mapped key factors across a Control–Influence spectrum, examining how changes in one area might impact others. Three highly connected areas emerged as the most influential: **Adoption of Technology, Access to Data and Information,** and **Process Maturity.** Participants observed that strengthening these areas could generate ripple effects across multiple others, particularly by improving leadership decisions, workforce capability, and collaboration.

Participants reflected that **Adoption of Technology** represents both one of the sector's greatest opportunities and its most persistent challenges. Technology was widely recognised as an enabler of productivity, but only when paired with the right leadership behaviours, culture, and process maturity. Several participants noted that many firms have yet to fully exploit the tools already available to them, often due to a lack of strategic alignment or confidence in their application.

The group agreed that responsible adoption requires not just investment in systems, but in people – ensuring that technology augments rather than replaces human capability. *"Treat AI like people – some you trust, some you don't,"* one participant commented, highlighting the need for careful selection, ethical use, and governance frameworks that protect consumers and staff alike. The discussion also drew attention to the risk of applying automation to broken processes, reinforcing the principle that process must come before technology.

Alongside technology, participants emphasised that improving **Access to Data and Information** and strengthening **Process Maturity** would amplify impact across the system. Better data quality and accessibility support informed decision-making and continuous improvement, while mature processes enable efficiency, collaboration, and compliance. Together, these three areas were seen as high-leverage opportunities where meaningful change is both possible and within the sector's control.

Participants noted the tension between large organisations with sophisticated analytics functions and smaller firms that rely on more human-centred data. The consensus was that both approaches are valuable, and that access to accurate, usable data empowers better process design, resource planning, and client engagement.

The discussions made clear that productivity improvements will not come from innovation alone, but requires intentional and responsible implementation to ensure that technology, process, and people evolve together to deliver measurable value.

Concept Development

In the final workshop, the group reframed the three most influential themes as open innovation questions and worked in small groups to generate ideas under each question. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Solution Ideas

1. How might we responsibly adopt new technologies and AI?	2. How might we improve our process maturity to optimise productivity and decision-making?	3. How might we increase our access to data and information to improve interpretation and understanding in the sector?
What's Needed Discussion focused on ensuring that technology enhances, rather than replaces, human capability. Participants highlighted the need for cultural readiness, leadership buy-in, and responsible deployment.	**What's Needed** The group linked productivity gains to clarity, consistency, and empowerment. They discussed the need to review and streamline internal processes before layering in technology.	**What's Needed** Participants reflected that productivity is limited not just by lack of data, but by lack of understanding and interpretation.
Solution Ideas Ideas included developing shared guidelines for AI adoption in financial services, creating cross-industry learning networks to share examples of effective use, and supporting SMEs to assess existing digital tools before investing in new ones. The conversation also acknowledged the need to balance innovation with compliance and consumer protection.	**Solution Ideas** Participants suggested iterative process reviews, stakeholder feedback loops, and embedding decision-making authority closer to the work. Strengthening compliance and regulatory understanding was also viewed as an enabler for process improvement, not a barrier.	**Solution Ideas** Improved data literacy across organisations, investing in tools that make data accessible, and transparent data-sharing frameworks between firms and regulators. Open finance and data hygiene were discussed as critical areas for sector-wide collaboration. Across all solutions, the emphasis was on collaboration, capability, and alignment between people, process, and technology.

Five concept areas were prioritised for further exploration and potential implementation with Financial Institutions. These are summarised in the boxes on pages 12-14. Together, they form a roadmap for productivity improvement, combining leadership development, process maturity, responsible technology adoption, and enhanced data capability.

Concept 1 - Data literacy and leadership programme to help senior teams make evidence-based decisions. Including feedback mechanisms to ensure frontline insights inform strategic decision-making.

Discussion

Participants proposed a structured programme to build data confidence and competence across senior leadership teams. The initiative would help leaders interpret and apply data effectively in strategic decisions while embedding regular feedback mechanisms to capture insights from frontline teams.

Key Points of Innovation

- Shifts the focus from data access to data understanding.
- Encourages two-way communication between leadership and operations to close the insight gap.
- Builds a shared language and capability around data-informed decision-making.

Stakeholders

Senior leadership teams, data analysts, HR and L&D, regulators, and professional training bodies.

Examples in the Market

- Barclays' Data Academy initiative, upskills people in data interpretation (internal & external audience).
- Lloyds Banking Group's Senior Leadership AI training programme. Focused on increasing AI literacy and reimagining the future of banking with Generative AI.

Benefits and Impact

- Strengthens leadership confidence and accountability through evidence-based decision-making.
- Improves organisational agility by ensuring decisions are grounded in real-time insights.
- Enhances productivity by aligning leadership intent with operational reality.

Concept 2 - Shared innovation sandbox for responsible AI experimentation and cross-sector learning.

Discussion

Participants suggested a cross-sector "sandbox" environment where firms can safely test and learn about new technologies, including AI. The sandbox would enable collaboration between regulators, financial institutions, and technology providers to accelerate innovation while maintaining ethical and regulatory oversight.

Key Points of Innovation

- Provides a shared, low-risk testing ground for AI applications in financial services.
- Promotes open learning and knowledge exchange between firms of different sizes and maturities.
- Encourages responsible, transparent AI deployment across the sector.

Stakeholders

Senior leadership teams, regulators (e.g., FCA), financial institutions, fintech companies, technology partners, and academia.

Examples in the Market

- The FCA's Digital Sandbox and Innovation Hub.
- Singapore's MAS FinTech Regulatory Sandbox, which supports safe AI experimentation.

Benefits and Impact

- Accelerates innovation (e.g., investment in AI) while ensuring consumer protection and trust.
- Increased productivity, profit and market share
- Reduces duplication of effort & builds sector confidence and consistency in technology adoption.

Concept 3 - AI and tech adoption training for senior leadership *(could be combined with Concept 1)*

Discussion
Participants recognised a gap in leadership understanding of AI and technology's real-world potential and limitations. They proposed a training and mentoring offer for senior leaders, focused on strategic implementation, responsible use, and alignment with organisational culture.

Key Points of Innovation
- Positions AI literacy as a leadership competency, not a technical skill.
- Encourages informed decision-making about investment, ethics, and process integration.
- Links technology adoption directly to productivity, customer outcomes, and people strategies.

Stakeholders
Senior leadership teams, HR and L&D, tech and digital transformation leads, and professional training bodies.

Examples in the Market
- Deloitte's AI Academy ('off the shelf' option)

Benefits and Impact
- Increases technology adoption maturity across the leadership pipeline.
- Ensures responsible, ethical, and purpose-driven use of emerging technologies.
- Strengthens alignment between digital investment and strategic productivity goals.
- Manage resistance to change
- Align strategy with effort

Concept 4 - Process maturity toolkit co-designed across firms, to benchmark and improve operational consistency.

Discussion
Participants emphasised that productivity gains depend on clear, consistent, and efficient processes. They proposed developing a cross-sector toolkit to benchmark process maturity and share best practice examples. The toolkit would support firms in identifying inefficiencies, improving workflows, and embedding continuous improvement cultures.

Key Points of Innovation
- Encourages collaborative benchmarking across organisations.
- Provides a structured, repeatable framework for assessing and improving processes.
- Links process design to compliance, governance, and innovation readiness.

Stakeholders
Operational leaders, compliance, business improvement managers, regulators, and professional networks.

Examples in the Market
- Lean Six Sigma/Lean Competency could be a good starting point

Benefits and Impact
- Enhances operational efficiency and consistency across the sector.
- Reduces duplication, error, and rework.
- Creates a foundation for technology enablement and cross-firm collaboration.

Concept 5 - Standardised data audit to improve the quality, accessibility, and usefulness of information across financial services organisations.

Discussion
Participants proposed a sector-wide data audit framework to assess what data organisations hold, how it is used, and its quality, relevance, and accessibility. The audit would help firms move from reactive compliance-driven reporting towards proactive, insight-led decision-making.

Key Points of Innovation
- Promotes a shared approach to data quality, governance, and ethics.
- Encourages firms to understand *why* data is collected and how it drives value.
- Builds the foundation for open finance and data-sharing initiatives.

Stakeholders
Data governance teams, compliance officers, regulators, IT departments, and analytics professionals.

Examples in the Market

The EDM Council's Data Management Capability Assessment Model (DCAM).

Benefits and Impact
- Improves data reliability, integration, and usability.
- Enables more consistent and confident decision-making.
- Reduces duplication, enhances compliance, and strengthens consumer trust.

Conclusion

Across this Collaborative Challenge Programme, a consistent message emerged: the financial services sector has both the opportunity and the responsibility to redefine what productivity means. Productivity should not be reduced to efficiency metrics or cost ratios alone. It must encompass effectiveness, adaptability, wellbeing, and the ability to create long-term value for customers, businesses, and society. The discussions highlighted that while financial services operate within complex regulatory and market environments, many of the barriers to productivity are internal and therefore within reach of change.

Leadership quality and capability emerged as a defining influence and pivotal lever. Discussions revealed that productivity improves where leadership communicates purpose and where culture values learning and inclusion. Process maturity, and data confidence were also key contributors - processes should be designed for clarity and flow, and data should inform action rather than compliance.

Technology, though central to the sector's transformation, was not seen as a cure-all. Participants stressed that technology must follow purpose. Responsible adoption means understanding existing tools, building digital confidence, and ensuring that innovation enhances human capability rather than replaces it. Similarly, data is only as powerful as the decisions it informs, and the collective call was for greater data literacy, interoperability, and transparency across the ecosystem.

The obvious opportunity lies in integration: aligning people, processes, and systems to work together. Collaboration between financial institutions, regulators, technology providers, and academia is essential to build the shared frameworks and learning environments that allow good practice to spread. The five concept areas developed through this programme span data capability, process maturity, responsible AI, and leadership development, and can provide tangible starting points for this alignment.

Ultimately, improving productivity in financial services requires more than new tools or efficiency drives. It demands a cultural and strategic shift.

The call to action:

- Build **data confidence and literacy** at every level.
- Strengthen **process maturity** through shared standards and continuous improvement.
- Adopt **technology responsibly**, focusing on purpose and people first.

Collectively, these actions will help financial services organisations unlock productivity that is not only measurable, but meaningful for businesses, employees, and customers alike.