

Oxygen, a breath of fresh air in the SA public sector

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Many of the organisational conditions required to support innovation are not present in Government, yet the demand for efficient, effective and responsive service provision and policy advice is growing, not diminishing.

The technological and social landscape has changed rapidly in the last 20 years. The current generation entering the workforce (Generation Y) is native to sophisticated technology that Governments are yet to fully exploit. The expectations of this workforce are a multi-faceted mix of instant gratification and desire for constant improvement. As they enter the public sector workforce, they are generally faced with an older workforce who are 'immigrants' to the technological landscape and often sceptical of change, having experienced several significant waves of it.

The low retention rates of Generation Y employees in Government suggests that there is poor alignment between expectations and what is delivered. The South Australian Government has recognised the issues and is working on a number of strategies to address this trend. One of these strategies has been to empower its existing young professionals to tackle the issue in a collegial manner. This has spawned a first of its kind in Australia – a 'virtual village' for young professionals in the public sector, which is named Oxygen (tagline: a breath of fresh air in the SA public sector). Oxygen taps into the trends of social networking and work-life integration and attempts to encourage innovative thinking through its informal management structure and philosophy of open participation and personal responsibility.