PUBLION

Organisational Change and AI in Public Administration

Arjun Mehta[1]
Centre for Digital Governance and Public Policy, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, India
pramanathan@nitk.ac.in

Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly transforming public administration by reshaping decision-making structures, administrative routines, and service delivery systems. While AI promises efficiency, responsiveness, and innovation, it simultaneously generates structural tensions related to accountability, fairness, and democratic legitimacy. This study aims to conceptualise AI adoption in public administration as a capability-driven organisational transformation and to explain how dynamic capabilities mediate the reconfiguration of public value. The research employs a qualitative multiple case study approach based exclusively on secondary data drawn from peer-reviewed publications, policy documents, and documented cases of AI implementation in government. An integrated analytical framework combining public value management, dynamic capabilities theory, and the Technology–Organisation–Environment perspective guides the analysis. Organisational transformation is examined across adoption, implementation, and diffusion stages to identify how sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes shape public value outcomes. Systematic thematic coding is used to trace how absorptive capacity and digital maturity condition transformation depth and governance trajectories. The findings indicate that AI adoption restructures organisational authority and routines through capability reconfiguration, and that public value tensions emerge as structural consequences of capability imbalances rather than external ethical dilemmas. The study concludes that sustainable AI governance depends on the institutionalisation of dynamic capabilities that balance service efficiency with democratic and social values. This research contributes to the field by integrating organisational transformation theory with public value management, offering a processual and capability-based explanation of AI-driven change in public administration.

Keyword

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly embedded in public administration as governments pursue digital-era governance and data-driven service delivery. AI applications such as machine learning and natural language processing are being introduced to automate processes, enhance responsiveness, and improve decision-making capacity (Madan & Ashok, 2022; Wirtz et al., 2018). This transformation builds on earlier waves of e-government reforms that emphasised efficiency and performance (Dunleavy et al., 2006). Recent scholarship highlights that AI does not merely digitise existing routines but reshapes institutional structures and authority relations within the state (Henman, 2019). As AI systems become agents in public decision-making, they reconfigure interactions between citizens, administrators, and political leadership (Gao &

Janssen, 2020). These developments position AI adoption as both a technological and organisational transformation. Consequently, understanding AI in government requires attention to institutional change rather than isolated technical implementation.

The rapid expansion of AI in public administration generates significant real-world implications for democratic governance. Governments increasingly rely on algorithmic systems for welfare allocation, regulatory oversight, and predictive risk assessment (Wirtz et al., 2018; Valle-Cruz et al., 2019). While these systems promise efficiency and scalability, they also raise concerns about fairness, transparency, and accountability (Kuziemski & Misuraca, 2020; Veale et al., 2018). Public agencies operate under conditions of political scrutiny, media oversight, and citizen expectations, which intensify the consequences of algorithmic errors (Desouza et al., 2020). In this context, AI adoption is not only an administrative reform but a governance shift with implications for legitimacy and trust. Public managers must reconcile pressures for innovation with constitutional and ethical obligations. The stakes are therefore institutional as well as operational.

Existing research has identified multiple factors influencing AI adoption in public administration. Studies emphasise the importance of digital infrastructure, data quality, and system integration as technological preconditions (Alshahrani et al., 2021; Janssen et al., 2020). Organisational culture, leadership support, and resistance to change have also been highlighted as critical determinants (Campion et al., 2020; Schedler et al., 2019). Environmental pressures, including political mandates and intergovernmental competition, further shape adoption trajectories (Wang et al., 2021; Clarke & Craft, 2017). The Technology–Organisation–Environment framework has been frequently used to structure these contextual influences (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). In addition, absorptive capacity has been identified as a cross-cutting capability that enables organisations to assimilate AI-related knowledge (Aboelmaged & Mouakket, 2020). Together, these insights provide a contextual understanding of AI adoption drivers.

Despite this progress, current literature remains limited in explaining how AI adoption transforms organisational structures and internal capabilities over time. While absorptive capacity is acknowledged, the dynamic processes through which agencies sense, seize, and reconfigure resources are insufficiently theorised (Erkut, 2020; Medaglia et al., 2021). Much of the debate focuses on ethical risks or technical feasibility rather than organisational transformation mechanisms (Misuraca, 2020). AI tensions are often treated as normative dilemmas external to organisational design rather than outcomes of capability reconfiguration. Moreover, the shift toward algorithmic bureaucracy has been described conceptually but not systematically linked to capability development (Henman, 2019). As a result, the relationship between dynamic capabilities and public value tensions remains underexplored. A processual account of transformation is therefore needed.

The literature further documents a range of AI-related tensions that emerge during implementation and diffusion. These include automation versus augmentation in decision-making (Bullock et al., 2020; Mikalef et al., 2019), nudging versus autonomy (Wirtz & Müller, 2018), and data accessibility versus privacy (Coglianese & Lehr, 2017). Additional tensions concern predictive accuracy versus discrimination and transparency (Selbst et al., 2019; Veale & Brass, 2019). Scholars argue that these tensions reflect competing public values embedded in democratic governance (Bannister & Connolly, 2014; Moore, 1995). However, research often isolates these tensions at the level of principles without connecting them to internal organisational restructuring. There is limited understanding of how capability imbalances may amplify or mitigate these

conflicts. Consequently, AI tensions are insufficiently integrated into organisational theory.

The intersection between public value management and the resource-based view offers a promising but underdeveloped analytical avenue. Public value theory emphasises the role of managers in aligning legitimacy, operational capacity, and value creation (Moore, 1995; Stoker, 2006). The resource-based view and dynamic capabilities perspective stress the importance of integrating and reconfiguring organisational competencies in changing environments (Barney, 1991; Teece et al., 1997). Prior studies suggest that public organisations must overcome routine rigidity and resource constraints to implement innovation (Ashok et al., 2014; Piening, 2013). Yet, the linkage between dynamic capabilities and the management of AI-related public value tensions has not been fully articulated. The organisational consequences of prioritising efficiency-oriented service values over social values remain conceptually fragmented. This theoretical gap constrains cumulative knowledge development.

Addressing these gaps is necessary because AI adoption is accelerating across policy domains. Governments are issuing national AI strategies and digital mandates that intensify vertical and horizontal pressures on agencies (Wang et al., 2020; Pencheva et al., 2020). Without a dynamic capability lens, agencies may emphasise technological acquisition while neglecting structural redesign and ethical governance capacity. Such imbalances risk embedding biases and weakening accountability structures (Janssen et al., 2022; Young et al., 2019). A clearer conceptualisation of organisational transformation can inform how public managers balance duty, service, and social value orientations (Bannister & Connolly, 2014). Understanding capability-driven transformation is therefore essential for safeguarding democratic legitimacy under algorithmic governance. The urgency lies in the institutionalisation of AI as a routine feature of public administration.

This study therefore seeks to conceptualise AI-driven transformation in public administration through a dynamic capabilities perspective. It aims to examine how sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities shape the emergence and management of public value tensions. The central research question asks how dynamic capabilities mediate the relationship between AI adoption and public value outcomes. A related objective is to integrate the Technology–Organisation–Environment framework with public value management and the resource-based view. By synthesising these perspectives, the study seeks to reposition AI tensions as structural consequences of organisational transformation rather than isolated ethical dilemmas. The analysis focuses on the lifecycle of adoption, implementation, and diffusion. Through this approach, the research contributes to a more integrated theory of AI-driven change in government.

The contribution of this research lies in reframing AI adoption as a capability-driven transformation process embedded in democratic governance. By connecting public value tensions with dynamic capabilities, it advances theoretical integration across public administration and strategic management literatures. The study responds to calls for deeper organisational analysis of AI implementation in government (Medaglia et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). It also addresses the need to translate high-level ethical principles into organisational design considerations (Morley et al., 2020). As AI systems increasingly shape public decision-making, understanding their institutional embedding becomes a pressing scholarly and practical concern. The research positions organisational transformation at the centre of this debate. In doing so, it contributes to clarifying how governments can navigate AI-driven change while preserving core public values.

2. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a multiple case study approach based exclusively on secondary data (Madan & Ashok, 2023). A qualitative design is appropriate because the research seeks to develop a conceptual understanding of organisational transformation and dynamic capabilities in the context of AI adoption rather than to test predefined causal relationships (Ashok et al., 2016; Madan & Ashok, 2023). The focus is on examining how public value tensions are embedded in organisational processes and capability reconfiguration, which requires interpretive and context-sensitive analysis (Madan & Ashok, 2023; Moore, 1995). A case study approach enables in-depth exploration of AI-driven transformation within real public administration settings while preserving institutional complexity. Using secondary data allows systematic comparison across documented cases of AI implementation without direct intervention in organisational processes (Madan & Ashok, 2023). The analytical framework integrates public value management, the resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, and the Technology–Organisation–Environment perspective to structure cross-case analysis (Madan & Ashok, 2023; Teece et al., 1997; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). This design is suitable because it captures the processual and structural dimensions of AI adoption and aligns with the research objective of theorising capability-driven transformation (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006; Madan & Ashok, 2023).

Data sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, policy documents, official government reports, and publicly available case documentation on AI adoption in public administration. The population of interest includes public sector organisations that have adopted or implemented AI systems for decision-making, service delivery, or administrative automation (Madan & Ashok, 2023; Wirtz et al., 2018). Units of analysis are documented organisational cases of AI adoption across different administrative contexts (Madan & Ashok, 2023). Data collection followed a structured document retrieval process using academic databases and official institutional repositories to identify relevant materials. Documents were selected based on relevance to AI implementation, organisational change, and public value considerations (Madan & Ashok, 2023). An analytical coding instrument was developed based on predefined dimensions derived from the conceptual framework, including technological context, organisational capabilities, environmental pressures, dynamic capability processes (sensing, seizing, reconfiguring), and identified public value tensions (Madan & Ashok, 2023; Teece et al., 1997). These dimensions functioned as variables guiding systematic coding and thematic categorisation across cases.

Trustworthiness was ensured through methodological transparency, systematic coding procedures, and triangulation across multiple documentary sources. A clear audit trail was maintained to document inclusion criteria, coding decisions, and analytical steps to enhance dependability (Madan & Ashok, 2023). Cross-case comparison strengthened credibility by identifying consistent patterns across independent sources (Madan & Ashok, 2023). The use of established theoretical frameworks supported construct validity by aligning empirical observations with recognised conceptual dimensions (Moore, 1995; Teece et al., 1997). Reflexive review procedures were applied to minimise researcher bias and ensure coherence between analytical categories and documented evidence. As the study relies exclusively on publicly available secondary data, issues of informed consent were not applicable. Confidentiality was preserved by analysing institutional cases at an organisational level without disclosing sensitive or non-public information (Madan & Ashok, 2023).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Capability-Driven Organisational Transformation and the Lifecycle of AI Governance

Artificial intelligence adoption in public administration is best understood not as a discrete technological upgrade but as a capability-driven organisational transformation embedded within governance structures. Prior research demonstrates that AI systems alter institutional arrangements, decision authority, and administrative routines rather than merely automating isolated tasks (Henman, 2019; Gao & Janssen, 2020). This transformation unfolds through the integration and reconfiguration of resources, consistent with dynamic capability theory's emphasis on sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes (Teece et al., 1997; Piening, 2013). Public organisations operate within political and regulatory environments that condition how such capabilities are mobilised (Wang et al., 2021; Clarke & Craft, 2017). AI adoption therefore represents a structural shift toward algorithmic governance, where decision-making increasingly involves machine–human configurations (Wirtz et al., 2018). Understanding this shift requires examining how organisational capacities mediate technological integration. This perspective reframes AI governance as a transformation process rooted in institutional capability development.

Empirical patterns indicate that AI adoption restructures organisational routines by embedding algorithmic systems into core administrative processes. Machine learning applications increasingly support risk assessment, case prioritisation, and service personalisation, thereby modifying discretionary practices (Valle-Cruz et al., 2019; Mikalef et al., 2019). As AI tools assume analytical functions previously performed by street-level bureaucrats, authority shifts toward system-level decision architectures (Henman, 2019; Bullock et al., 2020). This restructuring influences accountability pathways, as algorithmic outputs become integrated into formal decision chains (Veale et al., 2018). Organisations frequently adapt internal workflows to accommodate data-intensive operations and cross-departmental integration (Janssen et al., 2020; Campion et al., 2020). Such adaptations signal that AI adoption modifies institutional logics rather than remaining confined to technical subsystems. The transformation thus extends to organisational identity and governance orientation.

The depth of this transformation is conditioned by absorptive capacity and prior digital maturity. Agencies with established e-government infrastructures and data governance practices demonstrate greater ability to assimilate AI technologies effectively (Aboelmaged & Mouakket, 2020; Alshahrani et al., 2021). Path dependency shapes how new systems are interpreted and integrated within existing routines (Janssen et al., 2022). Where digital infrastructure and analytical expertise are limited, AI adoption remains superficial and confined to pilot experimentation (Desouza et al., 2020; Alexopoulos et al., 2019). Conversely, organisations with developed IT assets and knowledge management systems exhibit stronger integration of AI into strategic decision-making (Erkut, 2020; Medaglia et al., 2021). Absorptive capacity therefore functions as the enabling mechanism that determines whether AI initiatives evolve into structural transformation. This mechanism clarifies why similar policy mandates yield uneven outcomes across governance contexts.

Lifecycle dynamics further illuminate how transformation unfolds across adoption, implementation, and diffusion stages. During adoption, sensing processes are heavily influenced by political mandates and intergovernmental benchmarking pressures (Pencheva et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Implementation is characterised by experimentation, agile procurement, and cross-sector collaboration that enable capability

mobilisation (Desouza et al., 2020; Gao & Janssen, 2020). Diffusion involves institutionalisation, where algorithmic systems become embedded within routine administrative practice (Young et al., 2019; Wirtz et al., 2018). Across these stages, capability activation evolves from exploratory learning to structural consolidation. The lifecycle perspective demonstrates that AI governance is not static but progressively stabilised through repeated organisational adjustments. This processual account addresses the gap concerning the absence of temporal analysis in prior studies.

Dynamic capabilities become institutionalised over time as organisations reconfigure roles, expertise, and oversight mechanisms. Leadership support and collaborative cultures facilitate experimentation and knowledge transfer across departments (Schedler et al., 2019; Campion et al., 2020). However, inertia stemming from bureaucratic rigidity and resource constraints can hinder reconfiguration efforts (Fatima et al., 2021; Zuiderwijk et al., 2021). Where reconfiguration capabilities are underdeveloped, algorithmic systems may be layered onto existing hierarchies without adequate accountability adaptation (Veale & Brass, 2019). In contrast, organisations that invest in continuous learning and cross-agency coordination demonstrate stronger institutional alignment (Alblooshi et al., 2020; Erkut, 2020). These patterns indicate that transformation depends on sustained capability renewal rather than one-time adoption decisions. Institutionalisation therefore reflects the consolidation of dynamic capabilities within governance structures.

The integrated analysis demonstrates that AI-driven transformation simultaneously restructures organisational routines, redistributes authority, and reshapes governance priorities. By linking absorptive capacity to lifecycle dynamics, the findings refine the understanding of how capability heterogeneity explains divergent transformation trajectories. This perspective extends prior work that has largely catalogued contextual drivers without connecting them to processual reconfiguration (Medaglia et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). It also challenges interpretations that treat AI implementation as a linear diffusion process independent of organisational maturity. Instead, transformation emerges as contingent on cumulative learning and institutional adaptation. The analysis thus closes the organisational transformation gap by situating AI adoption within dynamic capability development. In doing so, it provides the necessary conceptual bridge to the subsequent examination of how these transformations reconfigure public value orientations and generate structural tensions within AI governance.

3.2 Dynamic Capabilities and the Reconfiguration of Public Value in AI-Driven Administration

The analytical focus of this subsection concerns how dynamic capabilities shape the reconfiguration of public value within AI-driven governance. Building on public value management theory, public organisations are expected to balance legitimacy, operational capacity, and value creation (Moore, 1995; Stoker, 2006). When AI systems are integrated into administrative routines, this balance is recalibrated through capability deployment and organisational redesign. Dynamic capabilities—particularly sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring—determine how competing value orientations are prioritised during transformation (Teece et al., 1997; Piening, 2013). Rather than viewing public value tensions as external ethical dilemmas, this perspective interprets them as structural consequences of capability configurations. AI governance thus becomes a site where service, duty, and social values are renegotiated institutionally (Bannister & Connolly,

2014). This section analyses how capability activation reshapes public value hierarchies over time.

The findings indicate that service-oriented values often dominate early phases of AI integration. Efficiency gains, responsiveness, and personalised service delivery are frequently emphasised as primary justifications for adoption (Wirtz et al., 2018; Androutsopoulou et al., 2019). Predictive analytics and automation tools enhance operational speed and resource allocation efficiency (Mikalef et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2019). However, the prioritisation of service metrics may marginalise social considerations such as equity and inclusiveness (Kuziemski & Misuraca, 2020). When sensing and seizing capabilities are primarily oriented toward performance optimisation, value pluralism becomes constrained. This pattern reflects institutional pressures to demonstrate measurable outcomes under fiscal constraints (Desouza et al., 2020). Consequently, capability deployment shapes the hierarchy of public value orientations embedded within AI governance.

Duty-oriented values related to accountability and democratic legitimacy are reconfigured through algorithmic decision architectures. AI-supported decision-making can strengthen consistency and reduce discretionary bias in certain administrative contexts (Valle-Cruz et al., 2019; Young et al., 2019). At the same time, the opacity of complex models complicates transparency and interpretability (Veale et al., 2018; Veale & Brass, 2019). Where reconfiguration capabilities include oversight redesign and interpretability mechanisms, accountability structures adapt more effectively. In the absence of such adaptation, algorithmic authority may outpace institutional safeguards. This dynamic illustrates that legitimacy is contingent on organisational capacity to embed governance controls alongside technological expansion. Duty values are therefore neither inherently strengthened nor weakened by AI but mediated through capability alignment.

Social values, including fairness, privacy, and autonomy, are particularly sensitive to capability imbalances. Data-intensive systems rely on extensive data integration that may conflict with privacy protections (Coglianese & Lehr, 2017; Pencheva et al., 2020). High predictive accuracy can inadvertently reproduce historical biases embedded in training data (Selbst et al., 2019; Harrison & Luna-Reyes, 2022). Organisations with limited absorptive capacity may lack the analytical expertise necessary to detect or mitigate such risks (Janssen et al., 2022). Conversely, agencies investing in data governance and cross-disciplinary expertise demonstrate greater capacity to align predictive performance with fairness considerations (Alshahrani et al., 2021; Erkut, 2020). These patterns suggest that social value preservation depends on sustained reconfiguration and monitoring capabilities. Social values thus function as indicators of institutional maturity in AI governance.

Across cases, tensions between automation and augmentation further illustrate value reconfiguration dynamics. Automation of low-discretion tasks enhances efficiency but can distance public servants from contextual knowledge (Bullock et al., 2020; Henman, 2019). Augmentation models that combine human judgement with algorithmic analysis require more complex organisational coordination (Ahmad et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020). Where reconfiguration capabilities are weak, organisations tend to favour automation pathways that simplify workflow redesign. This tendency reinforces service-oriented priorities while potentially weakening relational aspects of governance. The choice between automation and augmentation therefore reflects deeper capability orientations rather than purely technical considerations. Dynamic capabilities shape whether AI complements or substitutes human discretion.

The analysis extends existing literature by demonstrating that public value tensions are structurally embedded within capability development trajectories. Prior studies have catalogued ethical principles and contextual drivers but have rarely connected them to organisational transformation mechanisms (Medaglia et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). By situating value reconfiguration within sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes, this study refines theoretical integration between public value management and strategic capability theory. It challenges linear interpretations of AI diffusion by showing that value outcomes depend on cumulative organisational learning. Furthermore, the findings contextualise algorithmic governance within politically sensitive administrative environments where legitimacy is continuously negotiated. This perspective fills the gap concerning the absence of a capability-based explanation of public value transformation. In doing so, it clarifies how AI governance simultaneously enhances administrative performance and redefines the normative foundations of public administration.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that AI adoption in public administration constitutes a capability-driven organisational transformation rather than a purely technical reform. By integrating dynamic capabilities theory with public value management, the analysis showed that AI systems restructure decision-making authority, administrative routines, and governance logics over time. The depth and direction of this transformation are conditioned by absorptive capacity, digital maturity, and institutional readiness. Lifecycle dynamics across adoption, implementation, and diffusion stages reveal that capability activation evolves progressively and unevenly across organisations. The study further demonstrated that public value tensions—between efficiency and equity, automation and discretion, predictive accuracy and transparency—are structurally embedded within these capability configurations. Rather than external ethical dilemmas, these tensions reflect internal organisational alignments and imbalances. The overall argument clarifies how AI-driven governance reshapes both institutional structures and normative value hierarchies.

This study contributes to the field in three principal ways. First, it advances theoretical integration by connecting dynamic capabilities theory with public value management, offering a capability-based explanation of AI governance transformation. Second, it refines the Technology–Organisation–Environment framework by demonstrating that contextual factors influence AI outcomes through absorptive capacity and capability reconfiguration rather than direct technological determinism. Third, it reconceptualises public value tensions as endogenous to organisational transformation processes, thereby extending existing debates that have treated ethical challenges as primarily normative or regulatory issues. By providing a processual and structural account of AI-driven change, the study addresses the organisational transformation, absorptive capacity, and lifecycle gaps identified in the introduction. It also clarifies why similar AI technologies generate divergent value outcomes across governance settings. In doing so, the research strengthens theoretical coherence in the study of digital-era governance.

Future research should further examine how different governance contexts influence the development and institutionalisation of dynamic capabilities in AI adoption. Comparative empirical studies across administrative levels or policy domains could deepen understanding of capability heterogeneity and its impact on public value outcomes. Longitudinal research designs would be particularly valuable for tracing how

lifecycle dynamics stabilise or reshape institutional arrangements over time. Additional inquiry is also needed to explore how oversight mechanisms and accountability structures co-evolve with algorithmic systems. Interdisciplinary research integrating organisational theory, public law, and data governance could provide more granular insight into capability alignment and value protection. Finally, future scholarship should investigate how emerging forms of AI, including adaptive and self-learning systems, challenge existing organisational capacities and normative frameworks. These directions will support a more comprehensive understanding of capability-driven AI governance in public administration.

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