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Future-Ready Public Service: An Integrated Framework for Institutional Adaptability

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Abstract

Public institutions increasingly operate under conditions of technological disruption, workforce transition, fiscal constraint, environmental uncertainty, and complex cross-boundary problems. The phrase 'future-ready public service' is now visible in international and national reform discourse, but existing formulations vary in unit of analysis and emphasis: workforce preparedness, anticipatory governance, broad civil-service transformation, or organizational renewal. This article does not claim novelty for the phrase. Instead, it develops Future-Ready Public Service (FRPS) as an integrated institutional capability construct through a theoretical integrative review of recent literature published primarily between 2021 and 2026. Five core capabilities are identified: strategic foresight; digital capability; workforce capability; adaptive leadership; and resilience. The framework argues that future readiness is not adequately represented by isolated or purely additive capability scores: individual capabilities can make direct contributions, but their value also depends on complementarity, the absence of critical bottlenecks, and the institution's ability to mobilize them together as conditions change. Systems thinking, collaboration, and organizational learning are treated as cross-cutting enablers, while public value, ethics, accountability, and stewardship define the normative boundary of public-sector adaptability. Six theoretical propositions specify the contribution of each capability and the integrative effect of a balanced capability configuration. The article also develops indicative measurement domains for subsequent empirical validation. The contribution is therefore the integration, theorization, and operational positioning of future readiness as an institution-level public-administration construct rather than the introduction of a new policy label.

Keywords: *Future-ready public service, Institutional adaptability, Strategic foresight, Digital government, Workforce capability, Adaptive leadership, Resilience, Public value*

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1.0 Introduction

Public institutions worldwide are operating under conditions of escalating complexity and accelerating change. Technological disruption, demographic transition, environmental pressures, fiscal constraint, geopolitical uncertainty, and changing public expectations interact across policy domains and administrative boundaries. Contemporary public-administration scholarship increasingly describes this environment as one of sustained turbulence: conditions in which demands, events, and institutional responses interact in variable and difficult-to-predict ways. Institutional effectiveness, however, requires not only continuity in the institution, but also the ability to adapt, improvise, learn and innovate while retaining the institutions core public purpose (Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2023; Ansell, Sørensen, Torfing, & Trondal, 2024).

Technological change intensifies these pressures. While opportunities for the use of artificial intelligence (AI), data intensive administration, automation and digital platforms for better analysis, coordination and delivery of services exist, research over the past few years has demonstrated that technology creates public value only when supported by appropriate organizational capabilities. Technical expertise, data governance, proper organizational procedures, implementation capacity and the identification of technological tools that fit in core administrative processes are required of public administrations (van Noordt & Tangi, 2023; Selten & Klievink, 2024; Van Impe, Danneels, & Suykens, 2026). However, while it is possible to address these issues technically, issues of accountability, ethical governance, and prioritization of public value remain, as addressed by de Almeida & dos Santos Júnior (2025), Chen, Gascó-Hernandez, & Gil-Garcia (2026), and Oostvogel, Young, & Klievink (2026).

The workforce implications are equally significant. Public sector roles are undergoing a gradual transformation towards the digital era, with a growing need for hybrid and cross-functional positions and the need for ongoing learning and modernisation of skills and career paths (Aluko, Burgess, & Akomea-Frimpong, 2026). Mobility can help to expand contacts beyond organizations, and can enable access to knowledge that is spread across a wide area, but can also result in integration cost upfront, which will need to be managed intentionally (Vantaggiato, Murdoch, Kassim, Geys, & Connolly, 2024). Meanwhile, the concept of systems thinking is gaining a growing traction in public management due to complementarities and interactions between institutions, policies, and implementation contexts in complex public-management problems (Mansoor & Williams, 2024; Regenold, Murphy, & Reed, 2025).

These developments illustrate a general trend in the meaning of institutional preparedness. Efficient service under stable conditions may become ineffective when conditions change because of disruption, technological change, cross-boundary problems, or prolonged uncertainty. Adaptation, on the other hand, that lacks continuity, legality, accountability, or public value can threaten the very purpose of public institutions. Stability is not the goal; rather, institutions need to ensure that essential functions and values are maintained while adapting appropriately to changing conditions (Ansell et al., 2023; Mergel, 2026). This tension between continuity and adaptation is analytically important to the concept of the Future-Ready Public Service (FRPS).

1.1 Problem Statement

Historically, public institutions have been designed to guarantee continuity, consistency of processes, accountability among specialists, and stability of procedures. These are the same attributes that are vital for legality and reliable service delivery. When institutions have to deal with new risks, new technologies, interdependencies, and new demands from citizens, arrangements that are optimised primarily for known tasks and stable routines can create

friction. This tension is captured in robust-governance research, which provides evidence that institutions need to be prepared and resilient in the face of turbulence. This means they need to be both stable and adaptable, flexible enough to experiment, coordinate, learn, and implement change, while being able to do so in a coordinated manner (Ansell et al., 2023, 2024). The resulting challenge is not simply one of acquiring new capabilities, but of ensuring that institutions can adapt without undermining continuity, accountability, and public purpose.

The problem is compounded by fragmentation. Digital transformation, workforce development, strategic foresight, leadership reform, risk management, and resilience are often managed through separate organizational units, budgets, professional communities, and policy instruments. However, empirical public sector research indicates that there are linkages between capability domains. In the case of local government in Greece, dynamic capabilities that included coordination, learning, and reconfiguration were linked to better ICT use and performance, while human, relational, and technological resources were important factors that preceded the development of these capabilities (Panagiotopoulos, Protogerou, & Caloghirou, 2023). Digital maturity research in recent years also reveals that organizational capacity is an important factor in sustaining digital transformation beyond the first phase of institutional pressure (Van Impe et al., 2026).

Fragmentation is also found between organizations. Coordinated efforts by actors from various jurisdictions and professional fields are needed to address wicked and cross-cutting policy issues, but this is not always easy to achieve. Studies on cross-sector strategists reveal that connective roles can be important in establishing workspaces that can generate action and accountability across jurisdictions (Kanon & Andersson, 2023). Evidence from Kenya similarly highlights coordination deficiencies, inter-agency conflict, layered fragmentation, and overlapping competencies as practical barriers to collaborative public action (Onyango, 2025).

The central problem addressed by this article is therefore the fragmentation and weak integration of institutional capabilities required for adaptation. Public institutions may possess individual modernization capabilities, but the critical question is whether those capabilities form an appropriate configuration that can be connected and mobilized together when conditions change. Without such integration, investment in one domain may generate limited returns because complementary capabilities remain weak or because organizational structures prevent their joint deployment.

The phrase 'future-ready public service' has gained substantial institutional prominence, but its academic meaning remains unsettled. The OECD (2021) uses the term primarily in relation to a public-service workforce that is forward-looking, flexible, and capable of anticipating skills needs and redeploying talent. The OECD's FIELD/SCOPES framework identifies five dimensions of anticipatory governance and the conditions that support them. Future-readiness is one of these dimensions, alongside innovation, endurance, long-term perspective, and direction (Tönurist & Orlik, 2025). The concept has also broadened in public-service practice: the ASEAN Declaration on Future-Ready Public Service frames future readiness around an adaptive, innovative, inclusive, people-centred, and resilient public service, while Singapore's Public Service Division links a future-ready public service to future workforce capability, forward-looking leadership, organizational transformation, good governance, values, and public trust (ASEAN Secretariat, 2025; Public Service Division, 2025).

These formulations establish the practical salience of future readiness, but they serve different purposes and operate at different analytical levels. The OECD workforce formulation is principally a people-management model; FIELD/SCOPES treats future-readiness as an outcome dimension of anticipatory governance; the ASEAN declaration is a regional normative

reform agenda; and Singapore presents an integrated national practice model for workforce, leadership, organizational transformation, and governance. FIELD/SCOPEs also recognises that its components interact and provides questions to help organisations assess their anticipatory governance practices (Tönurist & Orlik, 2025). Building on these contributions, this article examines how strategic foresight, digital capability, workforce capability, adaptive leadership, and resilience work together to help public institutions prepare for and respond to change.

Robust-governance research explains how public institutions can preserve core functions, goals, and values under turbulence through flexible adaptation and proactive innovation (Ansell et al., 2023, 2024). Dynamic-capabilities research explains organizational processes of observing change, learning, coordinating, and reconfiguring resources and routines (Miller & Ghaffarzadegan, 2025; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2023). Policy-capacity, digital-government, agile-governance, anticipatory-governance, and resilience scholarship provide further insights into decision capability, technology, adaptation, preparedness, continuity, and learning (Brenton et al., 2023; Mergel, 2026; Li et al., 2026).

The conceptual gap therefore lies not in the absence of future-oriented public-service ideas, but in their fragmentation and under-specification as an integrated institutional construct. What remains underdeveloped is a parsimonious framework that identifies the core capabilities of FRPS, distinguishes them from enabling qualities and adjacent theories, explains complementarity and bottlenecks among capabilities, and provides a basis for empirical operationalization. The gap is therefore one of integration, conceptual specification, and operational clarity.

1.2 Research Objective

To develop and articulate an integrated conceptual framework - the Future-Ready Public Service (FRPS) framework.

2.0 Conceptualizing Future-Readiness in Public Service

2.1 Existing Meanings of “Future-Ready”

Future readiness is used across public-service policy and practice to denote preparedness for uncertain change, but the term varies considerably in scope. The OECD (2021) offers one of the clearest formal uses, framing a future-ready public service workforce as forward-looking, flexible, and fulfilling. The forward-looking dimension concerns anticipating how work and skill needs will change; flexibility concerns the ability to deploy talent toward emerging priorities; and fulfilment concerns attracting, retaining, and motivating a diverse workforce. This formulation is important because it shifts workforce policy from static staffing toward anticipation, mobility, and adaptability.

A second usage appears in anticipatory governance. Tönurist and Orlik (2025) position future-readiness as one of five FIELD dimensions of anticipatory governance, alongside innovation, endurance, long-term perspective, and direction. These dimensions are enabled through leadership support, competencies, observation of trends and signals, participatory processes, intelligence exchange, and structures and procedures. In this formulation, future-readiness is an outcome of an anticipatory governance system rather than a comprehensive public-service construct.

A third usage is broader and explicitly reform-oriented. The ASEAN Declaration on Future-Ready Public Service places future readiness within an agenda of adaptive, innovative, inclusive, people-centred, and resilient public service responding to digital transformation, climate change, demographic shifts, economic pressures, and other emerging challenges

(ASEAN Secretariat, 2025). Singapore's Public Service Division similarly links a future-ready public service to a future-oriented workforce, forward-looking leadership, future-ready organizations, organizational transformation, good governance, values, and citizen trust (Public Service Division, 2025). These formulations demonstrate that the term has moved beyond workforce planning into wider public-sector transformation practice.

The present article treats these formulations as evidence of an emerging policy and practice domain rather than as competing definitions. They also reveal an analytical opportunity. While workforce preparedness is essential, it is less comprehensive than institutional readiness; anticipatory governance brings in a forward-looking perspective but does not necessarily provide a complete implementation architecture; and broad reform agendas list desirable characteristics without making causal claims, establishing capability boundaries, or outlining the logic for measurement. In this regard, FRPS is developed here as an institution-level construct that captures these concerns without becoming too abstract for empirical testing.

2.2 Distinguishing FRPS from Adjacent Constructs

Conceptual differentiation is necessary because FRPS overlaps with several established constructs. If future readiness merely repackages existing concepts, it adds little theoretical value. The distinction proposed here rests on scope, temporality, and integration.

Table 1: Positioning Future-Ready Public Service in Contemporary Policy and Academic Frameworks

Framework / formulation	Primary unit and emphasis	Relationship to FRPS	What remains under-specified for FRPS
OECD Future of the Public Service (2021)	Public-service workforce; forward-looking, flexible, fulfilling	Establishes workforce anticipation, mobility, skills, and leadership as core future-oriented concerns	Institution-level digital, governance, resilience, and capability-interaction architecture Future readiness is nested within
OECD FIELD/SCOPES (Tönurist & Orlik, 2025)	Anticipatory governance; future-readiness as one of five outcome dimensions	Provides a strong account of sensing, foresight, leadership support, competencies, participation, and enabling structures Confirms broad policy relevance and links future readiness to digital, societal, demographic, climate, and governance challenges	anticipatory governance rather than theorized as the broader institutional capability configuration
ASEAN Declaration on Future-Ready Public Service (2025)	Regional civil-service reform vision; adaptive, innovative, inclusive, people-centred, resilient National public-service practice model;	Shows how future readiness can be operationalized across people, organizations, leadership, and whole-of-government practice	Analytical construct, capability relationships, propositions, and measurement architecture Formal theory of capability complementarity, bottlenecks, and institutional adaptive performance
Singapore Public Service Division (2025)	workforce, leadership, organizational transformation, governance and values Governance under turbulence; maintaining core purposes through adaptation and innovation	Provides the strongest governance logic for continuity-through-change, experimentation, and adaptive response	A full ex ante portfolio of foresight, digital/data, workforce, leadership, and resilience capabilities The substantive public-service capability domains and public-value boundaries that constitute future readiness
Robust governance (Ansell et al., 2023, 2024)			Requires empirical validation, boundary testing, and context-sensitive operationalization
Public-sector dynamic capabilities (Miller & Ghaffarzadegan, 2025)	Organizational renewal; observing, learning, reacting, coordinating, reconfiguring	Provides a process mechanism explaining how public organizations renew capabilities under change Integrates foresight, digital/data, workforce/learning, adaptive leadership, and resilience/risk preparedness	
Future-Ready Public Service (this article)	Institution-level capability configuration for uncertain change		

Table 1 shows why the article's originality claim must be carefully bounded. Future-ready public service is not a new policy phrase. It is an analytical contribution, that is, the transformation of a growing policy and practice idea into an institution-level capability construct with clear boundaries, mechanisms, propositions and measurement implications.

Robust governance is the closest academic neighbour to the resilience dimension of FRPS. It poses the question of how governance can remain flexible and adaptable, and be innovative and proactive in the face of turbulence, while maintaining its core functions, goals and values (Ansell et al., 2023, 2024). What portfolio of institutional capabilities must be available before and during change for a public institution to be able to anticipate, prepare, adapt and continue to provide public value? In turn, robust governance is a critical aspect of governing under

turbulence, while FRPS is a broader capability configuration for readiness for shocks and slower-moving transitions.

Dynamic capabilities offer the best mechanism-level support to FRPS. Miller and Ghaffarzadegan's (2025) systematic review outlines observing, learning, reacting and transformational renewal, while Panagiotopoulos et al. (2023) demonstrate empirically how coordination, learning and reconfiguration can help with ICT utilization and performance. While FRPS offers a similar logic of adaptation, it details the substantive public-sector capability domains within which adaptation is possible. As such, dynamic-capabilities theory facilitates the understanding of the process of renewal, while FRPS provides an understanding of the institutional capability portfolio that is to be renewed and mobilized.

Policy capacity, digital maturity, agile governance, anticipatory governance and resilience similarly illuminate parts of the construct. These concepts are not superseded by FRPS. It leverages them to establish a boundary around a higher-order question: Can a public institution anticipate consequential change, prepare people and systems, marshal authority and resources, maintain core functions, learn and adapt within public-value constraints? Therefore, its theoretical value does not depend on relabelling existing constructs, but on integration and discriminant validity.

2.3 Proposed Definition and Construct Boundaries

A future-ready public service is one that can anticipate emerging change, prepare its people and systems, adapt decisions and resources as conditions change, maintain essential services during disruption, and continuously improve the delivery of public value.

There are six implications in the definition. First, FRPS is prospective; that is, institutions need to identify and understand changes before their impacts are fully realised. Second, it is capability-centric – in other words, readiness for the future is about what institutions can consistently do, rather than whether they have plans or technologies in place. Third, it is adaptive – resources, routines, structures and decisions need to be flexible. Fourth, it is continuity-sensitive, meaning that public institutions must adapt without giving up essential functions, rights or obligations. Fifth, it is public-value bounded: speed and flexibility are insufficient if adaptation undermines accountability, fairness, ethics or legitimate public purposes. Sixth, the primary unit of analysis is the public institution or organization, although the framework may later be extended and tested at sectoral or whole-of-government levels.

The framework therefore distinguishes three analytical layers. The first consists of five core institutional capabilities. The second consists of cross-cutting enablers – systems thinking, collaboration and organizational learning – that strengthen the connections among capabilities. The third is a normative boundary of public value, ethics, accountability and stewardship. These layers are analytically distinct: the enablers are not treated as additional capability dimensions, and the normative boundary is not an outcome that can be traded away for greater adaptability.

3.0 Conceptual Review Approach

3.1 Design

This article adopts a conceptual, theory-development approach based on a theoretical integrative review. The purpose of a theoretical integrative review is to bring multiple theoretical perspectives into conversation in order to reformulate, integrate or construct a more coherent explanation of a phenomenon (Battistone, Kemeyou & Varpio, 2023). Conceptual

articles similarly require explicit construct definition, careful specification of relationships and a theoretical argument that extends beyond a descriptive summary of prior literature (Reese, 2022).

The article therefore does not seek to estimate an average effect or claim exhaustive coverage of every study relating to public-sector adaptability. Nor is it presented as a systematic review. It is designed for theory synthesis, that is, to identify a concise set of capabilities that can explain future readiness across different public institutions and be expressed through propositions that can subsequently be tested empirically.

3.2 Scope and Literature Streams

The review focuses on the latest literature (2021–2026) in public administration, public management, digital government, policy studies, organization studies and related fields of governance. Literature was identified through a purposive and iterative search process around concepts associated with future-ready public service, institutional adaptability, strategic foresight, anticipatory governance, digital capability, workforce capability, adaptive leadership, resilience and related organizational capabilities. Relevant references within key publications were also examined where they contributed to construct definition, theoretical mechanisms, capability relationships or conceptual boundaries. Two classes of sources were used for different purposes. The first was a conceptual-positioning scan that identified instances of ‘future-ready public service’ and related phrases in authoritative public-service documents, such as those from OECD, ASEAN and national public-service practice. Provenance, scope and practitioner meaning were established from these sources, not to suggest causal relationships. Second, theory development, capability relationships, mechanisms and construct boundaries were based on peer-reviewed academic research.

Five academic literature streams were chosen because each provides a unique, but essential, explanation of one of the five elements of institutional preparedness for uncertain change: strategic foresight and anticipatory governance; digital capability; workforce capability; adaptive leadership; and resilience. To provide further clarity on mechanism, boundary and cross-cutting enablers, neighbouring research on dynamic capabilities, policy capacity, systems approaches, public value, ethical AI and collaboration was drawn on. This dual positioning – direct-term mapping plus academic synthesis – minimises the danger of promoting an existing policy formulation as a new theoretical construct.

The literature was not restricted at the outset to a predetermined number of capability dimensions. Instead, recurring institutional functions associated with preparedness and adaptation under uncertain change were compared across the literature. The synthesis drew particularly on research relating to strategic foresight and anticipatory governance, digital capability, workforce capability, adaptive leadership and resilience, together with neighbouring research on dynamic capabilities, policy capacity, systems approaches, public value, ethical AI and collaboration.

3.3 Synthesis Logic

The synthesis was done in four steps. To determine what the term means in current practice, the uses of future-ready public service were first mapped according to the following dimensions: (1) unit of analysis, (2) substantive emphasis and (3) purpose. Second, each academic stream of literature was explored regarding the institutional problem that it addresses, its mechanisms and the consequences of higher capability. Third, the concepts were compared in order to identify overlaps, boundary issues and possible relabelling between the concepts and adjacent theories. Fourth, recurring mechanisms were classified into a five-capability

architecture based on the following three criteria: conceptual distinctiveness, practical observability and non-redundancy with an existing construct.

Candidate concepts were retained as core capabilities where they represented a distinct institutional function required for anticipating, preparing for, responding to, or recovering from uncertain change. Concepts operating across several capability domains, rather than representing a distinct capability in their own right, were classified as cross-cutting enablers. Concepts primarily concerned with the legitimacy and direction of capability use were located within the normative boundary. This classification produced the five-capability architecture while limiting conceptual overlap and unnecessary expansion of the construct.

This classification also explains why several important qualities were not retained as separate capability dimensions. Systems thinking, collaboration and organizational learning are present in several streams and are therefore considered cross-cutting enablers. Ethics, accountability, stewardship and public value are seen as a normative boundary of legitimate capability use and are therefore not counted as additional capability scores. The synthesis also clarified the relationship with neighbouring theories: robust governance is central to adaptive governing under turbulence and dynamic capabilities provide the mechanism of organizational renewal. FRPS draws on these insights and concentrates on the substantive capability configuration that makes a public institution future-ready.

The integrative and purposive nature of the review should be taken into account in interpreting the framework, which is a theory-based framework intended for empirical validation and not a validated measurement instrument. Section 7 is therefore not an actual scale, but presents indicative measurement domains.

4.0 Literature Review by Capability

4.1 Strategic foresight

Strategic foresight is the institutional capacity to identify early trends, consider possible futures, understand the consequences of these trends and link these understandings to current choices. Recent foresight literature focuses on the importance of institutionalizing foresight in governance processes for it to have practical value. Umbach (2024) suggests three ways strategic foresight can be used to enhance adaptive policymaking: linking future-oriented intelligence to the policy cycle and preparing institutions for various types of uncertainty. Other theoretical dimensions connecting anticipatory governance and scientific foresight with public-policy design are also highlighted by Panizzon and Janissek-Muniz (2025), who argue for a more systemic approach than one that involves only forecasting.

Todisco et al. (2026) also demonstrate the relevance of anticipatory governance in the public sector, examining its potential to redesign decision-making processes and support new ways of working in response to technological and managerial change. Tönurist and Orlik (2025) likewise emphasize that anticipatory governance requires leadership support, competencies, observation of trends and signals, participation, intelligence exchange and enabling structures. Across these sources, foresight becomes an institutional capability when it affects decisions rather than merely producing reports.

Strategic foresight is also closely connected to systems thinking. Public-service outcomes frequently depend on complementarities among policies, institutions and implementation environments. Mansoor and Williams (2024) argue that systems approaches are valuable precisely because they foreground multidimensional complementarities as a first-order problem of public-service design and evaluation. Regenold et al. (2025) further show that systemic-thinking tools can be developed for public managers. In FRPS, systems thinking

therefore strengthens foresight by helping institutions interpret interactions, second-order effects and cross-boundary consequences rather than viewing emerging trends in isolation.

Preparedness extends foresight into action. Horizon scanning, scenario building and early-warning processes need to be linked with strategy, budgeting, policy design, procurement, workforce planning and contingency options in a future-ready institution. The main difference is between foresight production and foresight use. The existence of scenarios or a foresight unit is a weak indicator of readiness unless the institution can demonstrate that future-oriented intelligence changes priorities, investments or operational choices.

4.2 Digital Capability

Digital capability is the institutional capacity to leverage trusted data, digital infrastructure, interoperable systems and new technologies for better sensing, analysis, coordination and service provision. This capability has been consistently shown by recent research to be an organizational one, and not just a technical one. Panagiotopoulos et al. (2023) demonstrate how coordination, learning and reconfiguration capacities can impact local government ICT usage and effectiveness. Van Impe et al. (2026) also conclude that administrative capacity is more important than institutional pressure in supporting and developing digital maturity in local governments.

AI capability for public administrations needs a tangible, intangible and human dimension, with important differences between the capability to develop AI and the capability to implement it sustainably, as outlined by van Noordt and Tangi (2023). Selten and Klievink (2024) reveal that public organisations go through different structures for the use of AI, ranging from separation to integration of data teams, with different barriers and routines. The results suggest that not only is it important to be technologically capable, but it is also crucial that technology is aligned with primary administrative processes in order to be future-ready.

Digital capability must also be responsible. AI-governance scholars have recently agreed that the adoption and use of AI needs to be guided by risk assessment, underpinned by internal ethical processes, accompanied by clear accountability mechanisms and attentive to public values (Wirtz et al., 2022; de Almeida & dos Santos Júnior, 2025; Chen et al., 2026; Oostvogel et al., 2026). Kinder et al. (2023) also demonstrate that ethical appraisal is part of the process of implementing AI in the local public service. Safeguarding public value is thus an integral part of digital readiness.

4.3 Workforce capability

Workforce capability relates to the institutional capacity to anticipate skills requirements, build and transfer skills, support interprofessional working and translate experience into better practice. While the OECD's (2021) future-ready workforce formulation is helpful, it links both anticipation and flexibility together it is important to identify what skills will be needed and to be able to deploy skills to the areas where they are needed. Recent empirical studies have been able to provide more detail on this.

Aluko et al. (2026) demonstrate that technological innovation is linked to job redesign, hybrid jobs, a greater need for cross-functional skills, redeployment and upskilling in Australian local governments. Vantaggiato et al. (2024) conclude that intraorganizational mobility expands employees' work-related networks beyond their own departments and also results in a temporary reduction in the depth of local contacts. This means that mobility can enhance institutional connectivity and knowledge diffusion; however, it needs to be planned for reintegration and supported with adequate time and resources.

Future-ready workforce capability also involves cognitive and relational skills. Systems thinking can support public managers to gain insights into the relationships among policies and institutions (Mansoor & Williams, 2024; Regenold et al., 2025). Cross-functional work is a team effort and a process that transcends boundaries. Kanon and Andersson (2023) demonstrate how connective professional roles can be used to help jurisdictions collectively solve wicked policy problems through bridging, brokering and the creation of shared accountabilities. The technical skills of the workforce are not the only skills that are important; problem framing, data literacy, systems thinking, collaboration, values and learning in the face of ambiguity are also key.

Organizational learning is the mechanism through which workforce experience becomes institutional capability. Learning requires more than training provision. Training can only be part of the learning process. Institutions should have processes for reflection, knowledge sharing, after-action reviews, experimentation, coaching, peer exchange and learning from experience and embedding lessons in standard operating procedures. Mergel's (2026) analysis of agile ambidexterity suggests that public managers have to learn when to use the routines that they already have and when to use exploratory practices. In order to be ready for the future, the workforce must be competent, and the organization must create conditions in which competence can translate into changed practice.

4.4 Adaptive leadership

Adaptive leadership is the capability of an organization to make timely decisions, act across divisions and boundaries, marshal resources, flexibly change routines and choose the right modes of action in response to changing conditions. This is a capacity that is at the nexus of formal authority and adaptive practice. In the context of turbulence, robust-governance scholarship suggests that there is a need for public institutions to have stable infrastructure and legitimacy, but also to be able to improvise, experiment, involve relevant actors and reconfigure resources (Ansell et al., 2023, 2024).

Mergel (2026) provides a complementary organizational perspective. Public bureaucracies can find themselves faced with the dilemma of either continuing with their routines or making a leap towards agile work practices. The challenge is not about being agile instead of bureaucratic, but about exercising ambidextrous judgement as to which approach is most appropriate to the problem. This implies that adaptive leadership has the ability to establish 'protected zones' for experimentation, leverage cross-functional teams, integrate feedback in an iterative process and subsequently institutionalize useful practices without compromising accountability.

Cross-boundary coordination is a central component. As collaborative efforts are often needed to tackle wicked problems, Kanon and Andersson (2023) show that there are, in many cases, dedicated connective roles required for collaborative action. Kenyan evidence from Onyango (2025) also illustrates how unclear governance, coordination deficits, inter-agency disagreements and overlapping competences can hinder collaborative efforts. Structural means of collaboration are therefore needed in adaptive leadership, such as shared outcomes, cross-agency decision forums, joint accountability, delegated authority and the ability to mobilize people and resources across organizational boundaries.

Leadership in this framework is not confined to formal executives. Senior leaders establish an authorizing climate, distribute resources, defend valuable explorations and decide conflicts between public values. But adaptive behavior needs to be spread across levels as well, so that employees are able to recognize issues, make professional judgment calls and escalate or act

within boundaries. Adaptive leadership is the integration of strategic direction, empowerment, evidence use, coordination and accountability.

4.5 Resilience

Resilience is the institutional capacity to maintain essential services, resist disruption, rebound when it is possible to do so, adjust when conditions have altered and learn from experience to enhance future capacity. Li et al. (2026) provide an important contemporary synthesis by distinguishing three public-sector resilience narratives: maintenance, recovery, and adaptability. This distinction helps to explain why resilience should not be reduced to 'bouncing back'. There are some disturbances that need continuity; there are some disturbances that need restoration; there are some disturbances that reveal the need for structural change.

Robust-governance research reinforces this point which suggests that maintaining public value might need to change the way the functions are delivered (Ansell et al, 2023, 2024). The stability of public purpose may therefore depend on adapting structures, partnerships, technologies and routines. This is particularly relevant to future readiness, as essential functions cannot be put on hold in order to try out new models in public institutions.

Continuity planning, fiscal and staffing flexibility, cyber and data resilience, redundancy where appropriate, contingency authority, scenario testing and interorganizational networks are all considered part of risk preparedness within FRPS. It also contains features for institutional learning. Whether disruption leads to temporary improvisation or to lasting capability improvement depends on after-action reviews, post-event evaluation and the updating of procedures, skills and risk assumptions.

Resilience, therefore, is a protective and developmental capacity. It safeguards critical functions and provides learning and reconfiguration opportunities. It is a link between what has happened in the past and what is being prepared for in the future and between continuity and transformation.

4.6 Convergence and Gaps across the Five Streams

The literature converges on the same basic conclusion: adaptability in the public sector is not the result of individual reform tools, but rather of combinations of tools. Foresight increases the time horizon, but requires governance authority and implementation capacity. Digital systems increase information and coordination opportunities and rely on workforce skills, organizational practices and ethical protection. Mobility, collaboration and learning within organizations are necessary for workforce capability, which in turn supports interpretation and implementation. Adaptive Leadership requires the mobilization of power and resources, but also relies on information, expertise and legitimate discretion. Resilience ensures continuity and requires learning, foresight and the reconfiguration of vulnerable systems.

There are three enablers that cut across the literature. Systems thinking aids in the understanding of unintended consequences and interdependencies in institutions. Collaboration helps knowledge, power and resources move across organizations. Organizational learning is the process of transforming experience into changed routines and capabilities. These enablers are spread across several capability domains and would be difficult to distinguish without creating overlap and reducing parsimony if they were considered separate dimensions.

The literature also points to a normative requirement. Legitimate adaptability in the public sector can only be maintained in accordance with public values, ethics, accountability and stewardship. This is particularly apparent in the context of AI governance, where decisions about AI adoption can affect accountability, rights, fairness and trust (Kinder et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2026; Oostvogel et al., 2026). Future readiness, therefore, is not the same as

organizational flexibility alone, but is rather a capability configuration that is bounded by public values, as developed in the integrated framework next.

5.0 The Integrated Conceptual Framework

5.1 Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents the integrated FRPS framework as a three-layer architecture. The five substantive capabilities form the core capability portfolio and collectively generate Future-Ready Public Service, which is expected to support adaptive, responsive, and resilient public-service performance. Systems thinking, collaboration, and organizational learning span the five capabilities as cross-cutting enablers. Public value, ethics, accountability, and stewardship form an outer normative boundary that constrains how adaptability is exercised across the framework.

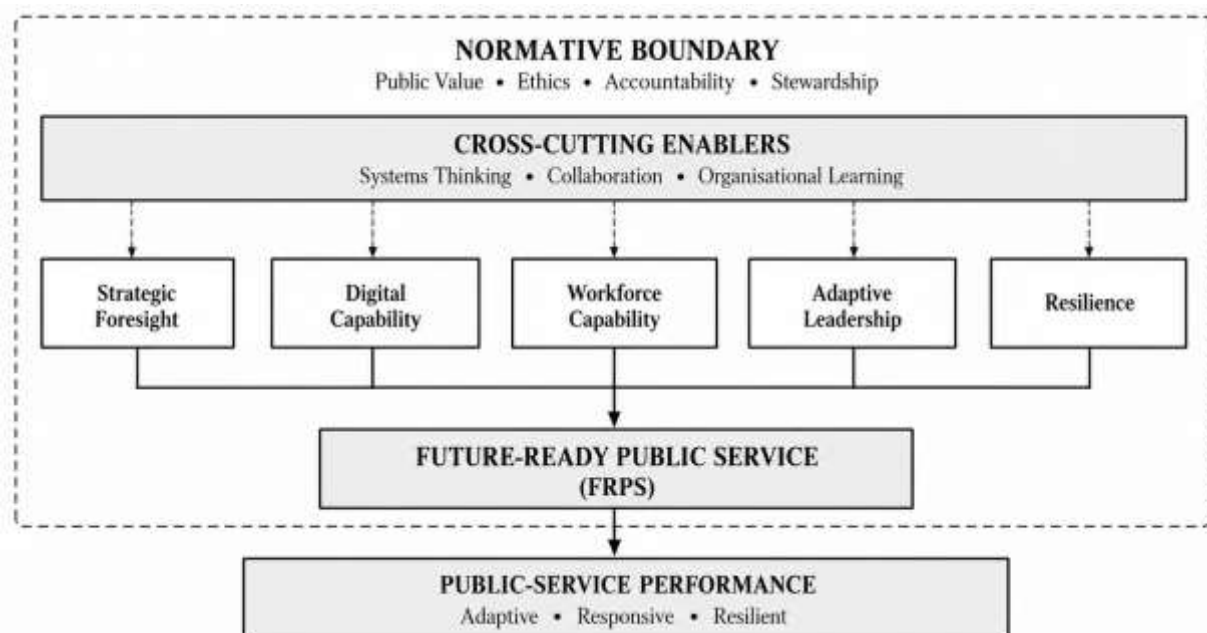


Figure 1: Integrated Future-Ready Public Service Framework

The model deliberately separates FRPS from its performance consequences. Future readiness is conceptualized as an institutional capability configuration; adaptive, responsive, and resilient performance are observable manifestations expected to follow when that configuration is effectively mobilized. This avoids defining future readiness circularly as both the capabilities and their outcomes.

5.2 Complementarity among Capabilities

The framework's central theoretical claim is complementarity. A capability is more adaptive if the complementary capabilities are well developed. The value of digital infrastructure is increased when staff can make sense of and utilise data, governance structures can enable decision-making to shift, and ethical protection can help to ensure that the infrastructure is deployed in the right way. The value of strategic foresight is enhanced when leaders can make decisions about where to invest resources and when the workforce and digital systems are able to make decisions based on the foresight. The value of resilience is enhanced by integrating lessons from disruption into foresight, workforce development and institutional redesign.

The reason for this complementarity lies in how adaptive action is produced. Institutional adaptation is not a single act but a connected process in which change must be sensed and

anticipated, information gathered and shared, implications interpreted, decisions taken and resources reallocated, and new arrangements implemented and sustained while essential services continue. This process is consistent with the observing, learning, reacting and reconfiguring processes identified in public-sector dynamic-capabilities research (Miller & Ghaffarzadegan, 2025), and with robust-governance accounts of adaptation that preserves core functions (Ansell et al., 2023, 2024).

Each FRPS capability supplies a distinct contribution to this adaptive process. Strategic foresight provides direction by identifying what is changing and which responses warrant preparation. Digital capability provides the information and coordination infrastructure through which signals are detected, analysed and shared. Workforce capability provides the expertise required to interpret those signals and implement new practices. Adaptive leadership provides the authority and coordination needed to make decisions, reallocate resources and act across organizational boundaries. Resilience maintains continuity while adaptation takes place and converts lessons from disruption into improved preparedness and future capability.

Because these contributions are interdependent, the output of one capability often becomes an input to the effective functioning of others. Foresight that cannot be acted upon, data that cannot be interpreted, expertise that lacks authority, and decisions that cannot be implemented without undermining essential services each represent points at which adaptive action can break down. The value of any one capability is therefore conditional on the availability and mobilisation of complementary capabilities: improvement in one domain increases adaptive capacity only to the extent that the wider capability configuration can carry its contribution forward. This is the mechanism underlying complementarity in FRPS.

This complementarity logic aligns with empirical evidence on how dynamic capabilities, human resources, coordination, learning and technology are interconnected in the public sector to drive performance (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2023) and how the capability to use AI relies on a combination of tangible, human, organizational and governance factors (van Noordt & Tangi, 2023). It also aligns with systems approaches that emphasize the importance of multidimensional complementarities as a key consideration for developing and assessing policies (Mansoor & Williams, 2024).

5.3 Capability Gaps and Bottlenecks

Complementarity creates the possibility of bottlenecks. Where a critical capability is not at a functional level, there may be diminishing returns to investment in other domains. An organization could have high-end AI capabilities but lack the ability to scale them due to limited data governance, lack of internal skills, lack of accountability or lack of process integration. A foresight function might recognise a potential future risk but not be effective because budgeting and decision-making processes do not allow resources to be moved. Even with a highly skilled workforce, authority may be divided or staffing rules rigid.

The complementarity mechanism described above explains why such bottlenecks arise. If one capability cannot receive, translate or carry forward the contribution of another, the adaptive process is interrupted even where the remaining capabilities are comparatively strong. A bottleneck therefore represents more than a low score in one domain; it is a constraint on the joint mobilisation of the wider capability configuration.

The practical implication is that future-readiness diagnosis should not simply rank low-scoring dimensions. It should recognize the capability that limits the simultaneous use of others. This ‘weakest critical capability’ logic is more consistent with the framework than an additive index in which a very high score in one domain might statistically balance out a near-zero score in another.

5.4 Cross-Cutting Enablers and the Public-Value Boundary

Cross-cutting enablers include systems thinking, collaboration and organizational learning. The use of systems thinking enhances the framing of problems and uncovers linkages between policy and administrative areas. Knowledge, power and resources are linked across boundaries through collaboration. Organizational learning provides a way to change future practice based on experience. These enablers enhance the transformation of capability stocks into actual adaptive behavior.

Their role is therefore connective rather than substitutive. Systems thinking helps institutions understand how changes in one capability or policy domain affect others; collaboration enables information, authority, expertise and resources to move across organizational boundaries; and organizational learning feeds experience from implementation and disruption back into foresight, workforce development, digital practice, leadership and resilience. The enablers strengthen the relationships among the five capabilities but do not replace the substantive functions performed by those capabilities.

The framework is also explicitly normative. Fast adaptation by public institutions that compromises legality, accountability, fairness, rights and/or public value cannot be considered fully future-ready. This is particularly highlighted by recent AI research: public values influence decisions about adopting an AI tool, accountability mechanisms must be explicitly designed and ethical governance should be integrated into the work of an organization (de Almeida & dos Santos Júnior, 2025; Chen et al., 2026; Oostvogel et al., 2026). The normative boundary is thus between future readiness in the public sector and organisational agility in general. The normative boundary therefore defines the conditions under which capability mobilisation remains legitimate and directed toward public purpose. It does not constitute another stage in the adaptive process or another capability dimension; rather, it constrains how each capability and their interactions may be exercised. The normative boundary is thus between future readiness in the public sector and organizational agility in general.

6.0 Theoretical Propositions

6.1 Strategic foresight

Strategic foresight expands the time horizon within which institutions recognize risks, opportunities, and alternative courses of action. When foresight is connected to decision and resource processes, it should increase preparedness by allowing institutions to develop options before pressures become acute (Umbach, 2024; Todisco et al., 2026).

Proposition 1. Strategic foresight strengthens Future-Ready Public Service by increasing the institution's capacity to identify consequential change early, interpret its implications, and develop actionable response options.

6.2 Digital capability

Digital capability improves the speed and quality of information, supports coordination, enables new service models, and increases the institution's ability to sense and respond. However, research shows that digital maturity depends on organizational capacity and implementation capability rather than technology alone (van Noordt & Tangi, 2023; Van Impe et al., 2026).

Proposition 2. Digital capability strengthens Future-Ready Public Service by improving institutional sensing, analysis, coordination, reconfigurability, and responsible technology-enabled service delivery.

6.3 Workforce capability

Public-sector adaptation is enacted through people. Workforce mobility can broaden organizational contacts, technological change increases demand for hybrid and cross-functional skills, and systems-oriented thinking supports work on complex problems (Vantaggiato et al., 2024; Aluko et al., 2026; Regenold et al., 2025). Organizational learning then converts individual and team experience into durable institutional practice.

Proposition 3. Workforce capability strengthens Future-Ready Public Service by enabling institutions to anticipate skills requirements, mobilize expertise, implement new practices, and adapt workforce capabilities as conditions change.

6.4 Adaptive leadership

Institutional adaptation depends not only on foresight, technology and workforce capability, but also on the authority, coordination and flexibility required to translate these capabilities into action. Robust and agile governance research emphasizes the importance of structured flexibility, cross-functional work, experimentation and context-sensitive use of administrative routines (Ansell et al., 2023; Mergel, 2026).

Proposition 4. Adaptive leadership strengthens Future-Ready Public Service by enabling timely decisions, cross-boundary coordination, delegated action, experimentation, and resource reallocation while preserving accountability.

6.5 Resilience

Resilience protects essential functions but also creates learning opportunities. Institutions that combine continuity planning with adaptive learning should be better able to sustain performance while reducing future vulnerability (Li et al., 2026; Ansell et al., 2024).

Proposition 5. Resilience strengthens Future-Ready Public Service by enabling continuity under disruption, adaptive recovery, and institutional learning that improves subsequent preparedness.

6.6 Integrative Capability Configuration

The first five propositions describe domain-specific contributions, but the framework predicts that their joint configuration matters more than isolated strength. Complementarity means that the marginal value of one capability depends on the availability of others, while bottlenecks constrain overall readiness. This systems logic is consistent with recent public-sector capability and public-service delivery research (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2023; Mansoor & Williams, 2024).

Proposition 6. Public institutions with balanced and mutually reinforcing configurations across the five FRPS capabilities are expected to exhibit greater future readiness, particularly when compared with institutions that have similar overall capability levels but substantial weakness in one or more critical domains.

7.0 Indicative Measurement Ideas

The framework is intended to be operationalizable, but this article does not claim to provide a validated scale. Measurement should distinguish capability stocks from capability use. The existence of a foresight unit, for example, is a structural indicator; documented use of foresight in budget or policy decisions is a utilization indicator. Possession of a data platform differs from effective cross-organizational use. Training provision differs from demonstrated workforce competence. Continuity plans differ from tested recovery and learning mechanisms.

Table 2: Indicative Operationalisation of the Future-Ready Public Service Framework

FRPS component	Indicative domains	Illustrative indicators
Strategic Foresight	Sensing, scenarios, anticipatory decision linkage	Regular horizon scanning; scenario use; weak-signal mechanisms; foresight-to-budget/policy links; early-warning systems; systems analysis; documented use of foresight in major decisions
Digital Capability	Infrastructure, data, interoperability, AI, responsible governance	Data quality; interoperability; analytics use; in-house digital competence; AI governance; cybersecurity; human oversight; technology-to-process alignment; evaluation of digital outcomes
Workforce Capability	Skills anticipation, mobility, cross-functional work, learning	Skills forecasting; reskilling; mobility; multidisciplinary teams; systems-thinking competence; knowledge transfer; learning routines; time to mobilize specialist expertise
Adaptive Leadership	Authority, coordination, evidence use, flexibility	Decision-cycle time; delegated authority; cross-agency forums; shared outcomes; budget/resource flexibility; iterative policy adjustment; evidence use; ability to stop obsolete activity
Resilience	Continuity, contingency, recovery, adaptation, learning	Continuity testing; redundancy; contingency authority; cyber/data resilience; recovery time; scenario stress testing; after-action review; lessons incorporated into procedures
Cross-cutting enablers	Systems thinking, collaboration, organizational learning	Quality of inter-agency collaboration; systems-oriented problem framing; learning culture; knowledge transfer; cross-boundary problem solving; evidence of lessons incorporated into routines
Normative boundary	Public value, ethics, accountability, stewardship	Public-value assessment; transparency; accountability safeguards; ethical review; fairness and rights checks; human oversight; stewardship criteria in major adaptive or technology decisions

A future empirical instrument should first establish the measurement structure of the five core capabilities. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) can test the dimensionality and discriminant validity of the capability measures. Because FRPS is theorised primarily as a multidimensional institutional capability configuration, subsequent analysis should determine how the relationships among the five capabilities are most appropriately represented empirically. This may include higher-order, formative or composite specifications, depending on the observed measurement properties and the theoretical logic of the construct. The empirical specification should therefore not assume in advance that the five capabilities are interchangeable manifestations of a single latent factor. These tests provide a parsimonious first stage of validation and establish whether the proposed capability structure is empirically distinguishable and consistent with the conceptualisation of FRPS.

Once the measurement structure has been established, structural models can test the relationship between FRPS and public-service performance. Propositions 1–5 describe the contribution of the five core capabilities to future readiness, while Proposition 6 adds a complementary configurational hypothesis. The latter requires a different analytical logic because it concerns the balance and joint configuration of capabilities rather than their individual effects alone. Interaction terms, latent interactions, threshold models or configurational methods such as fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis can therefore test whether balance, complementarity and bottlenecks explain outcomes beyond average capability levels. SEM can establish the core nomological relationships, while configurational methods can test the stronger claim that substantial weakness in a critical domain may not be fully compensated for by strength elsewhere.

Cross-cutting enablers and the normative boundary should initially be operationalized as analytically distinct components rather than combined into a single index. Systems thinking,

collaboration and organizational learning may strengthen capability development and the relationships among the five core capabilities, although their precise empirical role requires testing. Public value, ethics, accountability and stewardship should likewise be assessed separately because they define the conditions under which institutional adaptability remains legitimate and consistent with public purpose.

8.0 Theoretical and Practical Implications

8.1 Theoretical Implications

The first theoretical contribution is conceptual positioning and integration. FRPS does not introduce the phrase 'future-ready public service'; that language is already established in workforce policy, anticipatory governance, regional civil-service reform, and national public-service practice. The contribution is to specify the term as an institution-level construct with a defined capability architecture, cross-cutting enablers, normative boundary, theoretical propositions, and a path toward empirical validation.

The second contribution is differentiation from adjacent theories. Robust governance explains how public institutions can maintain core functions, goals and values under turbulence through flexible adaptation and innovation (Ansell et al., 2023, 2024). Dynamic-capabilities research explains processes of observing, learning, coordinating, reacting and reconfiguring under change (Miller & Ghaffarzadegan, 2025). FRPS is complementary to both: it specifies the substantive institutional capability portfolio of strategic foresight, digital capability, workforce capability, adaptive leadership and resilience that must be available and jointly mobilizable for future readiness.

The third contribution is configurational logic. Much modernization discourse remains functional: institutions assess digital maturity, workforce skills, risk preparedness, or innovation capability separately. FRPS argues that future readiness depends both on the strength of individual capabilities and on the way they interact when conditions change. This shifts attention from 'Which capability is strongest?' to 'Can these capabilities be mobilized together?' and from average maturity alone to complementarity, thresholds, and bottlenecks. Proposition 6 adds an empirically testable expectation that institutions with similar overall capability levels may differ in readiness because of imbalance or a critical weak point. The configurational claim therefore complements, rather than replaces, tests of direct and mediated capability effects.

The fourth contribution is the distinction between core capabilities, cross-cutting enablers, and the normative constraints. Systems thinking, collaboration, and organizational learning influence multiple capabilities and therefore do not need to become additional overlapping dimensions. Public value, ethics, accountability, and stewardship are not merely desirable outcomes; they bound the legitimate exercise of adaptability. This architecture helps prevent conceptual inflation while preserving what makes FRPS specifically a public-service construct and allows future empirical work to test whether the proposed layers are discriminant and consequential.

8.2 Practical and Policy Implications

For reform leaders, the framework implies that future readiness should be managed as a capability portfolio rather than as a set of disconnected projects. Digital transformation, civil-service reform, foresight, leadership development, and resilience planning should be governed with explicit attention to cross-capability dependencies. A digital programme that requires new skills, cross-agency data access, and changed decision rights should be managed as an institutional transformation rather than as an ICT procurement.

Strategic foresight should be linked to decisions with resource consequences. The practical test of foresight is not the sophistication of scenarios but whether anticipatory intelligence affects priorities, budgets, workforce plans, regulations, procurement, or contingency choices. This connection is central to anticipatory-governance research (Umbach, 2024; Todisco et al., 2026).

Digital and AI reform should combine technology, organizational capacity, and public-value safeguards. Public administrations need in-house capability to evaluate technologies, manage data, integrate systems with operational processes, and govern accountability. Recent studies show that organizational capacity sustains digital maturity (Van Impe et al., 2026), that AI capability depends on human and organizational resources (van Noordt & Tangi, 2023), and that public values and accountability must be actively safeguarded during AI adoption (Chen et al., 2026; Oostvogel et al., 2026).

Workforce reform should move beyond training volume toward capability orchestration. Mechanisms for skills forecasting, reskilling, mobility, multidisciplinary working and knowledge transfer are needed in institutions. Vantaggiato et al. (2024) propose that mobility can widen cross-functional networks, and Aluko et al. (2026) demonstrate the rising need for cross-functional skills and adaptable career pathways due to technological innovation. Such mechanisms need to be carefully designed so as not to result in excessive mobility that reduces expertise within a locality or team.

Adaptive leadership requires formal support for horizontal collaboration. Complex public problems cannot always be solved within single-agency boundaries, yet collaboration is often undermined by unclear structures, conflicting mandates, and fragmented accountability. The Kenyan evidence reported by Onyango (2025) is instructive: successful collaboration requires attention not only to formal mandates but also to trust, knowledge sharing, coordination, and the social processes through which joint action is produced. This suggests a practical need for cross-agency governance forums, shared outcomes, boundary-spanning roles, and clear mechanisms for joint accountability.

Finally, resilience planning should distinguish restoration from transformation. After a disruption, public institutions should ask not only whether services were restored, but what the event revealed about structural vulnerability and which temporary adaptations should become permanent capabilities. This makes after-action learning, scenario testing, and updating of procedures central components of future readiness rather than post-crisis administrative exercises.

9.0 Limitations and Future Research

9.1 Limitations

The framework has four limitations. First, it is conceptual rather than empirical. The five-capability structure, the distinction between core capabilities and enablers, and the complementarity logic remain propositions requiring measurement and validation. Second, the review is integrative and purposive rather than systematic. The targeted scan of direct future-ready public-service formulations was designed for conceptual positioning, not for exhaustive mapping of every jurisdiction, policy document, or use of the term. The academic review similarly prioritizes theoretical synthesis and recent research rather than formal screening of every potentially relevant study.

Third, the deliberate emphasis on 2021-2026 literature means that foundational theories are represented primarily through recent reviews, extensions, and empirical applications rather than through extensive citation of older seminal work. This strengthens contemporary

relevance but may understate historical development within each literature stream. Fourth, the model is intentionally general. Administrative tradition, political centralization, decentralization, fiscal capacity, legal constraints, societal trust, and state capability may alter both the meaning and the feasible sequencing of future-readiness capabilities. National and regional formulations also show that the term can carry different institutional meanings, making boundary testing essential.

9.2 Future Research Directions

The first priority is construct validation. Future research should develop multi-item measures for each capability, use confirmatory factor analysis and SEM to test dimensionality and discriminant validity against adjacent constructs such as robust governance, resilience, digital maturity, policy capacity, dynamic capabilities, and agility, and determine how the theorised multidimensional configuration of FRPS is most appropriately represented empirically, including whether higher-order, formative/composite, interaction-based, or configurational specifications provide the strongest representation.

The second priority is complementary configurational and longitudinal testing. Once core measurement and structural relationships are established, large-N interaction or latent-interaction models can test complementarity and threshold effects, while qualitative comparative analysis can identify alternative capability configurations associated with adaptive performance. Longitudinal designs are especially important because future readiness should predict how institutions perform when conditions change, not merely how they are rated at one point in time. Variable-centered and configurational approaches should therefore be treated as complementary tests of different propositions within the same framework.

The third priority is comparative research across administrative contexts. Much of the recent literature remains concentrated in Europe, Australia, and other high-capacity settings. Evidence from Kenya suggests that coordination, authority, institutional fragmentation, and trust may operate differently in African public-administration systems (Onyango, 2025). Comparative work across ministries, agencies, subnational governments, sectors, and countries is therefore necessary to identify boundary conditions and context-specific sequencing strategies.

The fourth priority concerns the cross-cutting enablers. Future studies should test whether systems thinking, collaboration and organizational learning strengthen capability development and the relationships among the five core capabilities. Similarly, research should examine how the normative boundary of public value, ethics, accountability and stewardship shapes the legitimate exercise of adaptability, particularly where AI, automation, data-intensive services or emergency discretion are involved.

Finally, future research should examine sequencing under resource constraints. Under-resourced institutions may be unable to invest simultaneously across all five capabilities. The relevant question then becomes which capability acts as the highest-leverage intervention given the institution's starting configuration. This sequencing problem is likely to be especially important for low- and middle-income public administrations.

10 Conclusion

Public institutions increasingly operate in environments where continuity and change are interdependent. Stable mandates, legal accountability, and reliable routines remain essential, but they are no longer sufficient when technological disruption, fiscal pressure, complex cross-boundary problems, and recurrent shocks alter the conditions of public action. Future-ready public service is already an established reform aspiration in international, regional, and national practice. The analytical challenge is therefore not to invent the label, but to specify what

institutional future readiness consists of, how it differs from adjacent constructs, and how it might be assessed.

This article has developed FRPS as an integrated institutional capability configuration built from five domains: Strategic foresight; Digital capability; Workforce capability; Adaptive leadership; and Resilience. These capabilities are strengthened by systems thinking, collaboration, and organizational learning and bounded by public value, ethics, accountability, and stewardship.

he framework's central claim is that future readiness is configurational: no single capability is sufficient, even though each can make a distinct contribution. Foresight without execution produces awareness without adaptation. Technology without skills and governance produces fragile modernization. Skilled staff without authority remain constrained. Adaptive leadership without reliable systems lacks implementation capacity. Resilience without learning restores vulnerability. The practical and theoretical question is therefore not only how strong each capability is, but whether institutions can mobilize them together when conditions change.

Future readiness should consequently be understood not as a destination, certification, or one-time reform programme, but as an institution's repeatable capacity to anticipate, prepare, adapt, withstand disruption, learn, and continue delivering legitimate public value as the future unfolds. The contribution of the FRPS framework lies in making that capacity conceptually explicit, theoretically differentiated, and empirically testable.

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