



Innovative Leadership Approaches for Enhancing Digital Governance and Collaborative Networks in Public Administration

Faiz Fannur¹, Ilham Sabaruddin¹, Nia Ramdhani¹

¹Universitas Muslim Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: Faiz Fannur

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Abstract

In particular, this research investigates competencies of leadership in public administration as a way of understanding how public administrators are positioning themselves in the current complex governance environment. Exploring leadership themes of digital media, communities, flexibility, and professionalism, the work employs a qualitative research method and outlines leadership priorities for practice and scholarship. Qualitative data were collected from interviews with public administrators to show how they use digital resources, cooperation between organizations, and response to new issues for enhancing public services. The study concludes that these models have the potential not only of increasing the efficiency of organizations but also transparency, accountability and citizens' participation. Also, the study shows that despite adopting these strategies, public administrators experience some barriers including, resistance to change, poor digital literacy, and limited resources. In doing so, the current study adds to existing scholarship focusing on digital and collaborative leadership in responding to the ad hoc nature of leadership scholarship in the context of public administration. The present findings offer applied suggestions to public sector organizations such that they might develop better leadership and remain effective in managing future governance issues. This study stresses the centrality of leadership innovation as a driver of change in the public sector and provides an ideal background for subsequent research on combining adaptive, ethical leadership models in various governance environments.

Introduction

Public administration as the public has come to know it is an integral part of the governance system and is mostly responsible for the execution of policies, management of services and the public good as well as the efficient and proper use of public resources. Over the last few decades, leadership in public administration has undergone considerable changes in response to the multitude and diverse tasks that exist in governments and organizations across the globe. Whether it is about pandemic, calamities, call for sustainable development or social justice, the leadership in public administration has to be versatile and creative. Thus, it is imperative that future developments in this concept be recognised or incorporated so that public institutions are prepared and capable of being effective in addressing future issues. Thus, this research focuses on the advance tactics of leadership currently being used in the context of public administration with particular emphasis on how they can be utilised to reconstitute the concept of governance.

An acute requirement is in the leadership that is adaptive, capable of fast solutions in responding to the altered political, economic and social environment. Most of the conventional leadership styles practiced earlier that used to well suit the stable and deterministic context today are inadequate to provide solutions in a context of dramatic technological revolution, globalization and enhanced citizen demand. Glover et al. (2020) defined adaptive leadership as a process while which organizations centre on complexity to engender innovation, learning, and reactivity. Somewhat, this shift to adaptive leadership is most needed in the domain of public administration given that bureaucratic systems are usually accused of being fixed and unadaptable (Freeburg, 2020).

The increase in public sector innovation has also been another reason for the increased call for promotion of innovative leadership in public administration. Modern public organizations are in a position where delivering services to citizens through using complex organizational structures and engaging with the public in new ways has become mandatory. As pointed by Osborne and colleagues, in influencing and changing public administration, innovation is not a simple question of installing new technologies of working but a question of redesigning the organizational culture, leadership, and governance arrangements. Indeed, the role of leadership in facilitating an enabling environment for innovation has been stressed by many scholars in public administration (Akbari et al., 2021). Administrators in the public organizations need to be able to question the current practice, promote innovation, and model proper behavior in their organizations.

Developing collaboration and empowering or allowing the employee to contribute are amongst the management practices that are currently acknowledged to be critical in public administration. Lopes & Farias (2022) defined collaborative leadership in public sector to mean the process of developing partnership with other governmental, non-governmental organizations and business entities to solve multi-faceted social issues. It becomes more desirable in the contemporary environment as no organization or sector can address issues, including climate change, social disparity, and public health threats, on their own. Public leaders who can convene stakeholders, engage in resource acquisition, and capacity building, and orchestrate interests are strategic to the creation of public value and sustainable development (Sørensen et al., 2021).

Another important change in the leadership of the public administration was the turn to the concept of servant leadership oriented at the growth of the employees and the communities. The concept of servant leadership according to Adesina (2020) seeks to disagree with the conventional ways of leadership and boasts of the leader as a steward. This approach has witnessed its adoption in public administration especially under the leadership of social justice and equity. Beautiful and a servant leader is one who works for the betterment of his team or community so that they may be able to express their own best. It can be used as a leadership style at this time, when governments have become more responsible to the public, and are therefore more open and answerable to the people (Davis & Rhodes, 2020).

New to the roles of public administration leaders is the need to manage bureaucratic issues while figuring out ways to deliver more nimble services. Public organizations are sometimes characterized by bureaucratic structures policies and procedures that limit creativity and may restrict the executive branch from making swift decisions that would benefit their larger organizations (Suzuki & Hur, 2020). Some of these constraints thus can only be addressed by innovative leadership which should focus on how effectively and efficiently to handle these constraints so as to encourage the uptake of agility. Mutonyi et al. (2020) also notes that leadership in the public sector needs to be more of shearing, learning, and of scouting the

external environment. For leaders to be effective they need skills to deal with change, how to encourage and foster innovation to maintain balance between steadiness and dynamism.

Moreover, the increase of the digital environment that is observed globally has also influenced the changes in the field of public administration. This paper aims at establishing that; with adoption of e-Governance and data solutions to support governance, political leaders must embrace technology as a tool that supports improvement on the processes within the governance structure. This is particularly true according to Benitez et al. (2022) has noted that digital leadership is central in the public sector and has key benefits to increase the utility of public services, to boost transparency and to incorporate citizens in policy decisions. The public administrators should possess skills to apply technology to enhance operations, increase citizen interactions, and facilitate delivery of publicly needed services in the accordance with the population needs.

Examination of trends that characterize present and future public administration reveals that leadership strategies that have being implemented in the past to support governments may not be effective enough to fit present day governance challenges. Fresh leadership tactics that would enhance agility, team work, decentralization and technological skills shall be vital to enable public administration to meet the increasing and dynamic issues of the future. Based on Schwarz et al. (2020) work on public leadership it is clear that the future of public administration will depend on those leaders who in addition to possessing technical and strategic skills will be able to embrace organizational culture of innovation, diversity, and citizen engagement.

Therefore, it is up to new leaders of public organizations to be effective not only in traditional managerial practices but also flexible, creative and able to cooperate owing to the fact that the world becomes more and more complex. The study undertaken in this research aims at identifying possible approaches that are being used by leaders in public administration as they address these challenges as part of gaining insights into emerging leadership trends in determining the future of governance.

Method

To examine these strategies in public administration, this study was informed by a qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach was considered optimal as it enabled the collection of the various perceptions, regard to the strategies which are being employed by the leaders in public administration as well as the various challenges which they encounter. In this paper adopting qualitative research, the intention was to get detailed understandings of the phenomenon of leadership in public sector with respect to innovation and future governance. This research work adopted the case study research approach since it made it easier to delve deeper into the nature of leadership strategies in actual public administration contexts. This approach of carrying out a case study allowed the researcher to gather large amount of data from few participants by providing better understanding of the innovative leadership strategies and practices that are most suitable for public sector organizations. In the context of study participants, the purposive sampling technique was used to identify participants with extensive leadership backgrounds in public administration.

This involved targeting participants who work as public administrators, policymakers and senior managers in governmental organizations of British Columbia that designed or executed innovative leadership initiatives. This necessary involved participants at local, regional as well as national levels of government. The sampling ensured that different views of leadership practices were included in the study so that the study had a wider perspective on the topic was developed. And in general, 15 participants were chosen for carrying out more detailed

interviews. The criteria for the selection of participants for the study was the leadership position of individuals encountered in the course of the research and their responsibilities as the managers or promoters of the leadership of change and innovation within their organizations. For this reason, using purposive sampling strategy made it easier to select the participants since they were well placed to give meaningful information about the research question. Data used in this study were mainly gathered through interviews that were conducted in the organizations.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because it provides a more or less free flowing conversation; however, there are some subject areas that must be discussed. The interviews were conducted either in person or through technical means such as Skype in cases where interviews were difficult to hold face to face. The interviews took 45–90 minutes, and the participants were asked questions such as: ‘Tell me about an experience you consider direct from/related to innovative leadership in public administration?’, ‘What are your opinions on innovative leadership in public administration?’. The interview questions were designed to explore a variety of themes, including: The nature of the innovation in leadership that is being practiced today. De imitatione, the extent to which the touted strategies can effectively respond to present and anticipated issues in public administration. More so, the difficulties that leaders encounter when implementing new change strategies. It focused on understanding the importance of technology, the need for collaboration and work inclusive of all leadership strategies. The trend in leadership of public administration in the future. Apart from the interviews, the documentation analysis was also carried out to complement the data generated from the participants. Ministerial-economic council and administration documents and reports, attached plans, and policies were also considered to explore the overall environment where leadership approach was being applied. These documents supplemented other sources of information about the organisational structures and formulations regulating leadership practices in the public sector.

Data gathered from the interviews and analysis of documents were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected because it is common and adaptable in a qualitative research process that is oriented toward defining themes, patterns, and connections in data. The process involved several stages: It was deemed necessary for the transcriptions of the interviews to be done by the researcher in addition to reviewing the transcripts at least three times. At this stage, researcher also recorded memo notes and is also making notes and observations. The given parts of the raw material were found meaningful and labeled by the researcher using first set of codes. This involved labeling of words, expressions or text that reflected the research questions or themes that were arising. The first codes were then clustered into the more general overarching codings themes that describe patterns of the data. The researcher reported on specific themes concerning visioning, policies and practices in leadership, inhibitors to innovation and leadership and the use of collaboration and technology. The researcher went around and back between the quantitative and qualitative data to revise the themes as they applied to the data and the research goals and objectives. This entail reviewing the codings carried out on the data and modifying the themes as the case may be. After the themes have been established then the researcher also determined and provided a label to each of them. The final themes were generated to accrue answers to the research questions; they were considered to form the essence of the study.

Results and Discussion

There is a growing evolution in public administration, as political executives manage new challenges in government. Pressure from advancing technology, more awareness, and growing concern for quality services and governance make the public sector leaders to embrace change. It stresses that the old-fashioned vertical and bureaucratic approach to leadership is considered

inadequate in meeting the complex and complicated issues in the contemporary public organizations. Therefore, there is a need to work on leadership approaches that are flexible, collaborative and integrated with the right technology in order to transform the delivery of public services and improve trust with citizens (Chowdhury et al., 2022). This paper aims at examining how public administrators have begun to transition towards reflective leadership practices that embrace technological application, embracing network, learning-oriented management, and innovative methods of governance. This research aims at assessing the applicability of these strategies as well as the obstacles encountered during their realization with a view of enriching literature in leadership innovation on the public sector. Consequently, the findings should provide useful information to public sector leaders to realize more organizational resiliencies and efficacies in the growing challenging governance landscape.

Key Innovative Leadership Strategies Identified by Public Administrators

The study identified several innovative leadership strategies utilized by public administrators to address the evolving challenges in public administration. These strategies included embracing digital transformation, fostering collaborative governance, prioritizing adaptive leadership, and emphasizing ethical decision-making. Each of these approaches has been pivotal in navigating the complexities of modern public sector management. One of the most prominent strategies highlighted by public administrators was the integration of digital technologies into public administration processes. Leaders recognized the potential of digital tools to streamline operations, enhance service delivery, and improve citizen engagement. By adopting technologies such as data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud computing, public administrators were able to improve efficiency and transparency in government operations.

For instance, a senior public administrator noted,

"The use of data analytics has been transformative in how we assess community needs and allocate resources. It allows us to make evidence-based decisions that are more targeted and effective."

This emphasis on digital transformation was seen as a proactive approach to modernize public services and meet the increasing expectations of citizens in the digital age. Administrators acknowledged that embracing digital tools not only improved internal processes but also enhanced the public's trust in government by promoting transparency and accountability. Another key strategy identified was the focus on collaborative governance. Public administrators emphasized the importance of working across different sectors and agencies to address complex societal challenges. By fostering partnerships with other government entities, non-profit organizations, and the private sector, leaders were able to leverage diverse expertise and resources to implement innovative solutions.

As one participant explained,

"We can't operate in silos anymore. The challenges we face whether it's climate change, public health, or economic recovery require a coordinated effort. Collaborative governance is about breaking down those barriers and working together towards a common goal."

This approach was seen as essential in enhancing the effectiveness of public administration, as it allowed for the pooling of knowledge, skills, and resources from various stakeholders. Collaborative governance was also linked to the idea of co-creation, where public administrators actively engage with citizens to develop policies and programs. This inclusive

approach was considered crucial for building trust and ensuring that public initiatives align with the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

The study also found that public administrators are increasingly adopting adaptive leadership strategies to navigate the rapidly changing public sector landscape. Unlike traditional leadership approaches that focus on maintaining the status quo, adaptive leadership emphasizes flexibility, resilience, and a willingness to experiment with new ideas.

One administrator shared,

"In today's environment, being rigid doesn't work. We have to be adaptable and ready to pivot when things change unexpectedly. This means encouraging innovation, taking calculated risks, and learning from both successes and failures."

By adopting an adaptive leadership style, public administrators were able to respond more effectively to challenges such as budget cuts, policy changes, and shifts in public expectations. Adaptive leadership also involves empowering teams to think creatively and embrace change. Leaders highlighted the importance of fostering a culture of innovation within their organizations, where employees are encouraged to bring new ideas to the table and experiment with different approaches to problem-solving. This focus on adaptability was seen as critical for ensuring the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of public administration in a dynamic environment.

Ethical decision-making emerged as another core strategy among public administrators. Given the increased scrutiny on government actions and decisions, leaders emphasized the need to uphold ethical standards and prioritize integrity in their leadership practices. This focus on ethics was seen as a way to build public trust and ensure accountability in government operations.

A participant stated,

"Ethical leadership is not just about following rules; it's about doing what's right even when no one is watching. In public service, we have a responsibility to be transparent, fair, and accountable to the people we serve."

Public administrators recognized that ethical decision-making involves not only adhering to legal and regulatory frameworks but also considering the broader social and moral implications of their actions.

By prioritizing ethical leadership, public administrators aimed to create a culture of trust and accountability within their organizations. This, in turn, was expected to enhance public confidence in government institutions, especially in times of crisis or uncertainty.

Lastly, the study revealed a strong emphasis on leveraging innovation as a strategy for future preparedness. Public administrators highlighted the need to anticipate future challenges and proactively develop strategies to address them. This forward-thinking approach involved investing in research and development, promoting a culture of continuous learning, and staying abreast of emerging trends and technologies.

As one leader noted,

"We have to be proactive rather than reactive. It's about looking ahead, identifying potential challenges, and being ready to tackle them before they become crises."

This commitment to innovation was seen as crucial for enhancing the agility and resilience of public administration in a rapidly changing world.

By integrating these innovative leadership strategies, public administrators were able to navigate the complexities of modern governance and drive positive outcomes for their communities. The findings of this study highlight the importance of embracing change, fostering collaboration, and maintaining a strong ethical foundation in public sector leadership. These strategies not only enhance the effectiveness of public administration but also ensure its relevance and sustainability in the future.

Perceived Effectiveness and Challenges of These Strategies

The implementation of innovative leadership strategies in public administration was perceived to be highly effective by the participants. However, the study also uncovered several challenges that public administrators faced when adopting these strategies. The effectiveness and challenges varied depending on factors such as organizational culture, resource availability, and the broader socio-political context. These insights offer a nuanced understanding of both the potential and limitations of innovative leadership in the public sector.

The integration of digital technologies was widely regarded as a transformative strategy that significantly enhanced the efficiency and transparency of public administration. Participants reported that adopting digital tools such as data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud-based solutions had streamlined processes, reduced administrative burdens, and improved decision-making.

One public administrator remarked,

"Digital transformation has allowed us to deliver services faster and more accurately. It's not just about automation; it's about using data to make informed decisions that benefit the public."

The perceived effectiveness of digital transformation was particularly evident in areas like citizen engagement, where online platforms facilitated direct communication between the government and the public. Administrators noted that these digital tools enabled them to respond more swiftly to citizens' needs and feedback, thereby enhancing public satisfaction and trust.

However, the effectiveness of digital transformation was contingent on the availability of adequate technological infrastructure and skilled personnel. In regions where resources were limited, the benefits of digital transformation were less pronounced, highlighting disparities in technological readiness across different public administration contexts.

Despite its benefits, the adoption of digital technologies came with significant challenges. Participants cited issues such as cybersecurity threats, data privacy concerns, and resistance to change among employees. As one administrator explained,

"The biggest challenge with digital transformation is not the technology itself but getting people to adopt it. There's a lot of resistance, especially from those who are used to traditional ways of doing things."

This resistance was often linked to a lack of digital literacy and fear of job displacement among staff, which hindered the successful implementation of digital initiatives.

Moreover, public administrators expressed concerns about the financial costs associated with upgrading digital infrastructure and training employees. Budget constraints often limited the scope of digital transformation projects, particularly in smaller governmental organizations with limited resources.

Collaborative governance was perceived as highly effective in addressing complex societal issues that required multi-sectoral cooperation. Participants emphasized that partnerships with

non-profit organizations, the private sector, and community groups enhanced the government's capacity to deliver public services and address challenges such as public health, climate change, and social inequality.

A participant highlighted the value of this approach, stating,

"Collaborative governance has enabled us to pool resources and expertise that we otherwise wouldn't have access to. It's about creating synergies that lead to better outcomes for the community."

The effectiveness of collaborative governance was also reflected in the increased innovation and creativity that resulted from diverse perspectives coming together to solve common problems.

However, the success of collaborative efforts depended on the strength of the relationships between stakeholders and the presence of clear communication channels. Building trust among partners was seen as a critical factor in ensuring the sustainability of collaborative initiatives.

While collaborative governance offered significant benefits, it also posed several challenges. Public administrators noted difficulties in coordinating efforts among diverse stakeholders with differing agendas and priorities. One participant shared,

"Collaboration sounds great in theory, but in practice, it's hard to align everyone's interests. There's often a lack of trust and communication, which can derail projects."

These challenges were further compounded by bureaucratic red tape and the slow decision-making processes typical of public sector organizations.

Participants also pointed out the challenge of sustaining collaborations over the long term, particularly in the face of political changes and shifting policy priorities. Ensuring continuous engagement and commitment from all stakeholders required substantial effort and resources, which were not always available.

Adaptive leadership was perceived as highly effective in navigating the uncertainties and rapid changes facing public administration. Participants highlighted that being flexible and open to experimentation allowed leaders to respond more effectively to emerging challenges. This was especially relevant during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where adaptive leadership proved essential in managing public health responses.

As one leader noted,

"Adaptive leadership is about being able to pivot quickly when circumstances change. It's not about having all the answers but being willing to find new solutions as problems arise."

The effectiveness of adaptive leadership was further underscored by its ability to foster a culture of innovation within public sector organizations, encouraging staff to think creatively and embrace change.

However, the success of adaptive leadership often relied on the support of organizational culture that valued flexibility and innovation. In more rigid or hierarchical environments, the effectiveness of adaptive strategies was limited, as employees were less likely to take risks or propose unconventional solutions.

Despite its advantages, adaptive leadership also presented challenges, particularly in terms of risk management. Public administrators highlighted the difficulty of balancing the need for innovation with the constraints of public accountability. One participant mentioned,

"There's always a tension between being innovative and staying within the boundaries of what's acceptable in the public sector. Taking risks can be seen as reckless, especially when public funds are involved."

This cautious approach often led to a slower adoption of adaptive strategies, as leaders were wary of potential backlash from stakeholders or the public.

Moreover, adaptive leadership required a high degree of resilience and agility, which not all organizations were equipped to support. Public administrators noted that fostering an adaptive culture involved continuous training and development, which could be resource-intensive and time-consuming.

Ethical decision-making was perceived as a cornerstone of effective public administration, particularly in fostering trust and accountability. Participants emphasized that maintaining high ethical standards was essential for ensuring public confidence in government actions. One administrator explained,

"Ethical leadership is what keeps us accountable to the public. It's about making decisions that are not only legally sound but also morally just."

By prioritizing ethics, public administrators aimed to create transparent and fair processes that aligned with the public interest.

The emphasis on ethical leadership was seen as particularly effective in enhancing the credibility of public sector organizations, especially during periods of public skepticism and scrutiny. Ethical decision-making also provided a framework for addressing complex dilemmas, enabling leaders to navigate conflicting interests and values.

However, maintaining ethical standards in decision-making was not without its challenges. Public administrators pointed to the pressures of political influence, limited resources, and competing interests, which often complicated the decision-making process. As one participant shared,

"It's not always easy to do the right thing when there are so many pressures from different sides. Sometimes you have to make tough choices that not everyone will agree with."

This challenge was exacerbated by the need to balance short-term political gains with long-term ethical considerations, particularly in politically charged environments.

Overall, while the innovative leadership strategies identified in this study were perceived as effective in enhancing public administration, they also came with significant challenges. Addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach that includes capacity building, fostering a supportive organizational culture, and ensuring alignment with ethical and strategic goals.

Future implications for the development of public administration

The study's findings on innovative leadership strategies have several significant implications for the future development of public administration. These implications span areas such as the integration of digital governance, the enhancement of collaborative frameworks, the promotion of leadership adaptability, and the reinforcement of ethical standards. As public administration continues to evolve, these insights can inform strategic planning, policy formulation, and capacity-building initiatives to ensure that public institutions remain effective and resilient in addressing emerging challenges.

One of the critical implications for the future of public administration is the need to prioritize digital governance. The study highlighted that digital transformation is not merely a trend but

a fundamental shift in how public services is delivered. As one public administrator pointed out,

"Digital governance is the future of public service. If we don't adapt, we'll fall behind in meeting the needs of our citizens."

This underscores the importance of investing in technology infrastructure, developing digital literacy among public sector employees, and creating policies that support the ethical use of data and technology.

Going forward, public institutions must embrace digital tools to enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. This involves not only adopting new technologies but also rethinking traditional bureaucratic processes to make them more agile and responsive. The future of public administration will likely see a greater emphasis on data-driven decision-making, which can provide real-time insights into public needs and service delivery outcomes. However, this digital shift also requires addressing challenges related to data privacy, cybersecurity, and digital inclusivity to ensure that technological advancements benefit all segments of society.

The study also revealed that the future of public administration will depend heavily on the strength of collaborative networks. Participants emphasized the need for sustained partnerships across various sectors, including government agencies, private organizations, non-profits, and community groups. One administrator noted,

"The issues we face are too complex for any one agency to solve alone. Collaboration is not just a strategy; it's a necessity."

This suggests that future public administration initiatives must focus on building and maintaining strong, cross-sectoral partnerships to address multifaceted societal challenges.

Collaborative networks are expected to play a critical role in areas such as climate change, public health, and economic recovery. By leveraging the expertise, resources, and perspectives of diverse stakeholders, public administrators can co-create solutions that are more innovative and sustainable. This collaborative approach will require developing new frameworks for governance that emphasize inclusivity, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability. As such, future leaders in public administration will need to cultivate skills in negotiation, relationship management, and stakeholder engagement to drive successful collaborations.

The findings underscore the importance of adaptive leadership in the future landscape of public administration. With the increasing pace of change, leaders must be prepared to respond swiftly to new challenges and opportunities. One participant reflected on this need, stating,

"We have to be adaptable, ready to shift gears when situations change. The future of public administration is all about flexibility and resilience."

This highlights the necessity for leadership development programs that focus on enhancing adaptability, creativity, and strategic thinking.

In the coming years, public administrators will need to foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation within their organizations. This includes encouraging experimentation, supporting risk-taking, and being open to unconventional approaches to problem-solving. Adaptive leadership will be essential in navigating uncertainties, such as those posed by global pandemics, economic fluctuations, and technological disruptions. Therefore, public sector organizations must invest in leadership training that prepares their leaders to thrive in dynamic and uncertain environments.

Ethics will remain a cornerstone of effective public administration in the future. The study's participants consistently highlighted the need for ethical leadership to build public trust and ensure accountability. One administrator emphasized,

"The public expects us to act with integrity. Our credibility depends on making ethical decisions, even when it's not the easiest path."

This insight suggests that future public administration strategies must reinforce ethical frameworks and promote a culture of accountability.

As public institutions become more transparent and connected with the public through digital channels, the demand for ethical behavior will increase. Leaders will need to navigate complex ethical dilemmas, balancing competing interests while maintaining a commitment to the public good. Future policies should focus on strengthening codes of conduct, providing ethics training for public officials, and establishing mechanisms for monitoring and addressing ethical breaches. By doing so, public administration can sustain public confidence and enhance the legitimacy of government actions.

Lastly, the future of public administration will be characterized by a greater emphasis on innovation as a means of achieving long-term resilience. Public administrators recognized the value of staying ahead of emerging trends and proactively addressing future challenges. One leader shared,

"We can't afford to be reactive. We need to be proactive in our approach, always looking for innovative ways to serve the public better."

This perspective highlights the importance of fostering a proactive mindset that anticipates change and leverages innovation to improve public sector outcomes.

The future of public administration will demand new thinking and rely less on measures of the past the bureaucratic style of management. This include embracing organizational culture that support creativity, setting aside funds for R & D, and supporting public administrators to develop creativity. Innovation needs to become an unchangeable feature of public administration so that governments could improve their actions, respond to crises, and better address society needs and changes.

Lastly the finding of this study in regard to the leadership practices in public administration will fill literature gaps if the novel ways through which the leadership can effectively tackle the resulting rapid changes in the governance. Prior research concerned mainly with leadership in the public sphere and in its institutions has concentrated on harmonizing structures, bureaucratic decision-making, and compliance management strategies (Habermas, 2022). However, this type of neo-institutionalism is challenged in the current study, which looks at modern, progressive forms of leadership that embrace the digital age, flexibility, teamwork, and digital technology, consistent with the increased demand for dynamism in managing the public sector (Herranen, 2020).

As a result of the research gap, prior studies have not specifically addressed digital governance as a strategic leadership phenomenon, even when examining digital transformation from a technology or policy standpoint (Benitez et al., 2022). This study helps to fill this gap by revealing which leadership behaviors practiced by public administrators facilitate the use of digital technologies for the purpose of improving service delivery and citizen engagement. Table 4 and 5 both show how our research captured the fact that administrators are not only using these digital platforms but are also influencing these technologies to respond to their constituencies' wants and needs. the extent to which digital literacies and proactive data management are focused on, underscores the leader in digital transformation initiatives

(Ilomäki et al., 2023). This differs from prior research where digital governance is viewed more or less as an organizational top-down agenda that does not involve leadership considerations (Imperial, 2021)).

According to one participant, “It was not just a shift to digital governance, but a thinking revolution: how do we continue to deliver our services? how do we relate to our citizens?” This point shows how digital leadership can go beyond the simple use of technology to advanced management, and operation of public services, filling theoretical voids that exist in the current literature which lacks analysis of leadership in the digital transformation process (Erhan et al., 2022).

The study also has a practical contribution of filling a conspicuous literature gap on the part of collaborative leadership in public administration. The significance of intersectoral cooperation is recognised in the existing literature; however, the current literature lacks research finding regarding how public administrators applied it in daily work (Quilling, et al., 2020). A number of collaborative leadership networks have been identified by this study to be being deployed by public administrators to engage in constructing networks that tackle sundry problems affecting societies, including, for instance, public health emergencies and climate change. Whereas the nature of such networks has been discussed in the literature, this builds on that by drawing on the detailed, strategic level of how institutions employ these networks (Kar & Dwivedi, 2020).

This is contrary to the traditional model of the public administration and is in tandem with recent developments where the public administration is encouraged to involve more stakeholders in the co-production of public value (Rosenbloom et al., 2022). In providing clear examples of how collaborative leadership is implemented in practice this research enriches the literature on public sector collaboration by enhancing the theory-practice conversation. It is for this reason that adaptable leadership has emerged as a critical leadership style when facing unfathomable change and of course crisis, though literature on applying this within public administration sphere has been relatively limited (Shufutinsky et al., 2020). The present study helps fill this void by describing how public administrators have developed adaptability for expected and emergent conditions. However, this study has demonstrated that the concept of Adaptive leadership transcends crisis leadership; it embraces a learning perspective, adaptability, and recovery (Epps, 2021). In doing so, it builds on the work of scholars who have recently started to look into the concept of adaptive capacity within public organizations (Mehryar et al. 2022). This provides evidence to the more practical elements of the model of adaptive leadership which prior research could have feasibly excluded but for unclear circumstances particularly in the non-emergency situation. In so doing, this study extends the array of adaptive leadership studies with practical insights into the adaptation process as unfolded in the context of public administration.

Ethical leadership is a fairly popular concept in research, and priority is given to the role of such leadership in increasing public confidence and increasing accountability (Shafique et al., 2020). However, those insights are new to the current study hence giving investigators views on how ethical leadership is gradually developing to fit the newer challenges such as scrutiny by the public and the requirement of an open press owing to advance technology. This work identified that ethical measures are not a mere set of actions, but are embodied in execution of strategies for the achievement of organizational goals and objectives in conformity with societal standards as observed by Mitchell et al. (2023). With regards to ethical leadership, this perspective enriches the current ethical leadership repertoire by providing principals of public administration to incorporate ethical principles into leadership practices. It does this in contrast

with various previous research that centers on the rather reactive side of ethics in public administration (Wang & Wang, 2020).

Shelter Research's conclusions drawn will indicate several approaches to further research and application in public administration. First to test these propositions more empirical studies are needed to determine whether basically digital and collaborative leadership strategies will positively or negatively affect the performance of the public sector in the long run. Because of these dynamic changes, perhaps, longitudinal studies could offer promising information on the longevity of such emergent strategies (Neale, 2021). Second, there is a potential to broaden the current knowledge of adaptive leadership and investigate its efficiency in multicultural and organisational environments to get a richer picture of its prospects and outcomes (Ali et al., 2020).

From a pragmatic angle, public sector organizations would stand to gain from leadership development programs that include improvements on digital skills, team work, and flexibility. Furthermore, when teaching ethical leadership within these programs, these professionals stand prepared to accommodate the ethical challenges of the advanced digital age (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020). Thus, this work proves that by adopting new leadership approaches, the public administrators can improve their efficiency in managing public interest to fill the knowledge deficiencies in the field of public administration.

Conclusion

Here lays a systematic review of emerging concepts of leadership in public administration to reveal how public administrators are driving digital change, networked collaboration, adaptable organizations, and ethical leadership into the future of the public sector. With respect to the limitations of the existing literature highlighted in the present study based on digital and collaborative leadership, stress is placed on understanding the nature of new approaches that would be more suitable to the new environment based on new expectations and new problems. As such, the research seemingly brings out the fact that it is effective to train these public leaders into embracing and mastering the use of digital tools, collaborative work, and ethical decision making in order to improve on public sector performance in a fast-changing world system. These observations do not only enrich the theoretical debates of public administration but can also provide useful suggestions for educating current and prospective public administrators through leadership development endeavors designed to prepare the next generation of leaders for future challenges in governance.

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