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IMPORTANCE OF MORAL PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**Maxhobandile Ndamase ^{1*}, Yamkela Ntando ², Talente Ncama ³**^{1*,2,3} Walter Sisulu University, South Africa*E-mails:* ^{1*} mndamase@wsu.ac.za (Corresponding author); ² yntando@wsu.ac.za; ³ tncama@wsu.ac.za*Received 14 November 2025; accepted 22 February 2026; published 30 March 2026*

Abstract. Moral public service delivery is becoming increasingly important as a strategic component of public service competence, as the public sector adopts artificial intelligence (AI), transforming the skills required for efficient governance. This paper critically examines the significance of Moral public service delivery in the AI era and its implications for the transformation of public service in South Africa. The study uses a qualitative secondary research approach to analyse current literature, policy papers, and institutional reports released between 2019 and 2025, drawing on theories of human capital and socio-technical systems. The findings demonstrate that while AI increases productivity by automating repetitive tasks, it also increases the demand for skills that are uniquely human, such as communication, emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, flexibility and cooperative problem-solving. It has been discovered that soft skills significantly enhance service quality, foster public trust and ethical governance, promote a positive organisational culture, facilitate human-AI collaboration, and encourage creativity and lifelong learning. According to the study's findings, Moral public service delivery is essential for facilitating citizen-centred, moral and humanised public service delivery in the digital age, rather than being only supplementary qualities. As a result, it recommends that moral service delivery be incorporated into public sector competency frameworks, that training be redesigned to prioritise experiential and behavioural learning, that ethical and adaptive leadership be encouraged, and that human-centred AI implementation strategies be used. The paper notes the limitations of using secondary data and recommends further empirical research to confirm the applicability of the framework. Building a competent, creative, and people-focused public service equipped for the AI-driven future requires strengthening moral competence in public service delivery.

Keywords: moral public service delivery; artificial intelligence (AI); public service transformation; digital governance; public service

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1. Introduction

The skills required in contemporary public service are evolving as artificial intelligence (AI) advances rapidly. Artificial Intelligence is being utilised by governments worldwide to enhance productivity, automate repetitive tasks, increase transparency, facilitate better decision-making, and deliver services tailored to their citizens' needs (Alshahrani et al., 2024). Roles in the public sector are being redefined by technologies such as digital self-service platforms, virtual assistants, robotic process automation, machine learning, natural language processing, and predictive analytics (Al-Besher & Kumar, 2022; Malatjie et al., 2024; Feni & Lukamba, 2025). Ciaschi and Barone (2024) argue that moral public service delivery, a distinctively human quality, is becoming increasingly essential for efficient administration as AI assumes monotonous, data-driven tasks.

Around the world, the digital shift has sparked discussions about the future of public-sector employment and the skills required for ethical, inclusive, and adaptable management (Maxhobandile & Yusuf, 2024; Ndou & Miccoli, 2025). Although technical and digital skills remain essential for adopting AI, research indicates that behavioural

and interpersonal skills, including empathy, problem-solving, teamwork, emotional intelligence, flexibility, and ethical reasoning, are increasingly in demand (Hutson & Ceballos, 2023; Denysenko et al., 2024). Since AI can run the risk of producing impersonal, detached bureaucracies if it is not balanced with human sensitivity, these abilities are crucial for maintaining legitimacy, public trust, and human-centred service delivery (Schmager, 2025; Lomsadze-Kutchava et al., 2025). As a result, national competence frameworks for public sector reform in countries such as Singapore, Canada, and the UK now incorporate soft skills (Brown & Tholen, 2025).

African Union Commission (2021) notes that the use of AI is growing throughout Africa, driven by the African Union's commitment to leveraging AI for development and its continental digital transformation goals. However, issues such as cultural diversity, digital inequality, fragile public trust, a lack of ethical governance and capacity limitations make soft skills even more crucial (Imran, 2023). It is increasingly acknowledged that soft skills, such as communication, moral leadership, cultural intelligence, conflict resolution, and flexibility, are essential for navigating AI-driven change and ensuring inclusive, human-centred service delivery.

The Batho Pele principles, democratic accountability and constitutional values form the foundation for public sector reform in South Africa (Social Development, n.d). A growing dedication to digital governance is evident in policies such as the National e-Government Strategy (2017), the Presidential 4IR Commission Report (2019), and the establishment of the National Artificial Intelligence Institute in 2023. However, capacity evaluations continue to reveal that public officials often lack essential soft skills, particularly professionalism, responsibility, leadership, ethics, communication, and emotional intelligence (Public Service Commission, 2023; National School of Government, 2024). These inequalities erode public trust, lower service quality, and increase resistance to change, risks that may be exacerbated if AI is implemented without concurrent investment in human-centred skills (Piccirilo, 2025).

Therefore, this paper argues that AI enhances the value of soft moral public service rather than diminishing its necessity. South Africa needs to reconsider the definition, development, and integration of a moral public service within public-sector capacity-building frameworks to achieve an ethical, people-centred, and transformational government. In the digital age, maintaining public trust, encouraging responsive service delivery, and building professionalism all depend on strengthening moral public service. Therefore, this paper aimed to examine the role of the moral public in the era of artificial intelligence and its implications for the transformation of public service.

2. Materials and methods

A qualitative secondary data research approach was employed in this study to examine the existing body of knowledge on the importance of moral public service in the services provided by artificial intelligence. Instead of creating original data, the study aimed to synthesise and understand already published literature, policy documents, and institutional reports; hence, a desk-based method was suitable. Through secondary analysis, the researchers were able to compare viewpoints on AI, moral public service, and the transformation of public service, drawing on a variety of contexts. To ensure relevance to current developments in AI and public service, data were obtained from credible institutional publications, government papers and peer-reviewed academic articles published between 2019 and 2025. Publications from the Department of Public Service and Administration, the Public Service Commission, the National School of Government, and foreign organisations, including the OECD, UNDESA, the World Economic Forum, the African Union, and McKinsey, were important sources. Google Scholar, Scopus, and EBSCOhost all employed the terms moral public service and public service, AI in government, digital transformation in the public sector, and human capital development. A preliminary search across Google Scholar, Scopus, and EBSCOhost produced over 320 papers published between 2019 and 2025. After applying the inclusion criteria, which included peer-reviewed papers, government and institutional reports, English-language sources, and direct relevance to AI, moral public service and public sector transformation, 72 publications were chosen for in-depth research. Only publicly accessible, English-language

sources directly related to the study topic were included. A thematic content analysis was conducted to find patterns within the selected materials. Reading, categorising, classifying, and synthesising essential concepts into themes that addressed the study goal were all part of this process. The findings were presented under the respective topics. Only trustworthy, academic, or institutional sources were used, and data were triangulated across multiple sources to enhance the study's reliability. Although ethical approval was not required because the study utilised secondary data, academic integrity was maintained by properly citing all sources.

3. Theoretical framework

The Socio-Technical Systems (STS) Theory and Human Capital Theory (HCT) serve as the foundation for this study, as they offer complementary perspectives on the value of soft skills in an AI-enabled public sector. According to the Human Capital Theory (HCT), developed by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1993), people's knowledge, abilities, and competences serve as forms of capital that, when invested in, enhance productivity and organisational performance. According to HCT, the ongoing improvement of human skills, including behavioural and interpersonal skills, is essential for the efficient provision of services in the framework of public administration. Soft skills, such as emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, flexibility, communication, and professionalism, become increasingly valuable as strategic forms of human capital that computers cannot replicate, as artificial intelligence automates repetitive administrative tasks. Therefore, HCT backs up the claim that funding the development of soft skills enhances the public service's professionalism, responsiveness, and capacity, making it a vital component of state capabilities in the AI era.

Socio-Technical Systems (STS) Theory offers a framework for understanding how technical and human elements must collaborate for organisational efficiency, whereas HCT emphasises the benefits of investing in human capabilities. The STS Theory, with its roots in the work of Trist and Bamforth (1951), emphasises that social systems (encompassing people, skills, and culture) and technological systems (including AI, digital tools, and automation) must be optimised in combination for organisational transformation to be effective. When applied to this study, STS Theory emphasises that technology alone will not be sufficient for AI-driven public service change; rather, the incorporation of soft skills that allow public servants to evaluate data, apply judgment, interact with citizens, and ethically use technology is essential.

Three factors make these theories highly relevant to this study. First, HCT supports the main argument that soft skills are an essential component of human capital required to optimise the advantages of AI in public service. Albertus and Hamman-Fisher (2021) indicate that without purposeful investment in soft skills, the public sector risks generating a technologically proficient but behaviourally poor workforce. Second, STS Theory supports the idea that public service transformation must strike a balance between the growth of human capabilities and the adoption of technology, ensuring that AI tools complement human judgment, empathy, and ethical governance rather than replace them. Lastly, when considered together, the two theories provide a solid conceptual foundation for understanding why South Africa must prioritise the development of moral public service delivery to achieve human-centred, moral, and sustainable AI-driven public sector reform. The conceptual model of human-centred AI in public service transformation is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

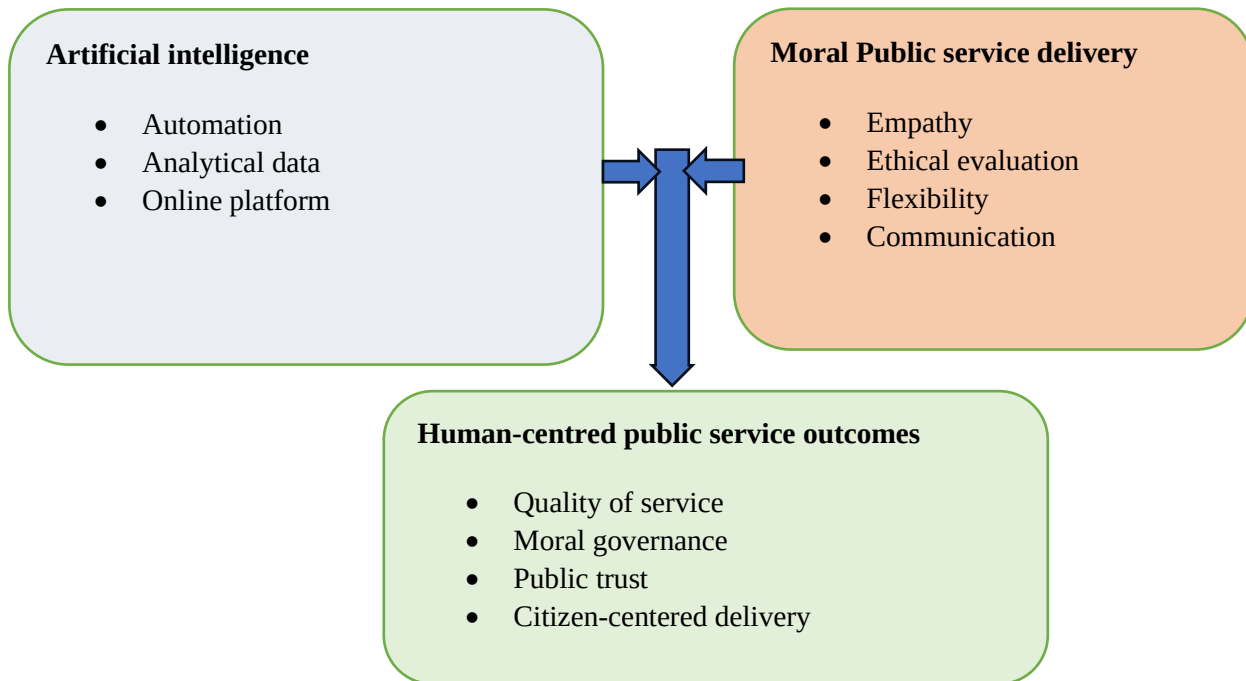


Figure 1. The conceptual model shows how moral public service delivery and artificial intelligence capabilities interact to achieve human-centred public service results. It is based on Human Capital Theory and Socio-Technical Systems Theory.

Source: Authors' own

The model illustrates the interconnection between moral public service delivery and artificial intelligence capabilities as forms of human capital. Automation, data analytics, and digital service platforms are made possible by AI; however, their use is mediated by moral public service delivery, such as empathy, ethical judgment, communication, and flexibility. Human-centred public service outcomes, including enhanced service quality, ethical governance, public trust and citizen-centred service delivery, are achieved when AI and moral public service delivery are combined. The model, based on theories of human capital and socio-technical systems, emphasises that successful public sector reform necessitates the simultaneous optimisation of both technological and human systems, rather than relying solely on technology.

4. Results and discussion

The following major themes related to the growing significance of moral public service delivery in an AI-driven public sector were identified through a thematic analysis of secondary literature and policy papers.

Growing importance of moral public service delivery in the AI era

The finding that moral public service delivery is becoming increasingly important aligns with worldwide research suggesting that AI is increasing the demand for human skills that computers cannot replicate. According to the African Union Commission (2021), preserving human-centred public services in the AI era requires skills such as emotional intelligence, empathy, ethical judgment, complex problem-solving, and effective interpersonal communication. According to Mhlanga (2022), governments that utilise AI should prioritise human-centred values to prevent the emergence of "impersonal digital bureaucracies."

This aligns with African perspectives that emphasise the importance of cultural intelligence, ethical leadership and flexible thinking in navigating technological innovations (African Union Commission, 2021). These findings are supported by South African literature, which argues that when the government automates repetitive jobs, the

quality of services and the citizen experience will be determined by human abilities (Nhede et al., 2022; Ndamase et al., 2023; Ndamase & Lukman, 2024). The literature, therefore, confirms that moral public service delivery is an essential adjunct to AI and is necessary to uphold Batho Pele principles in the provision of technologically mediated services.

Based on the researchers' professional experience with public-sector capacity-building initiatives, they have noted that technology tends to take priority over human interaction. This discovery reinforced the researchers' conviction that human judgment, humanity and compassion are essential in-service delivery and cannot be replaced by AI. The WEF's claim that moral public service delivery is the human differentiator resonated with the researchers' views, as they have observed how people react more favourably to officials who show empathy than to those who react preprogrammed. This confirms that South Africa must adopt a balanced approach to technology and people, as Ntando and Mofolo (2024) noted in their study.

Case-based evidence of the need for humanised public services in the AI era

The South African Social Security Agency's (SASSA) digitalisation of social assistance administration serves as an example of the efficiency improvements and human difficulties that come with AI-supported service delivery in South Africa. Although automated systems have increased administrative efficiency and turnaround times, reports from the Public Service Commission (PSC, 2023) indicate that poor communication, a lack of empathy and insufficient human support during system malfunctions or eligibility disputes are the primary causes of ongoing citizen dissatisfaction. Particularly impacted were vulnerable populations, such as elderly beneficiaries and people with impairments. These flaws were mainly behavioural rather than technological, revealing deficiencies in frontline officials' emotional intelligence, moral judgment and communication skills. This instance supports the claim that public trust and service quality may be compromised by AI's efficiency in the absence of strong moral public service delivery.

Studies on digital service delivery platforms in South African municipalities at the local government level show comparable trends. According to research conducted in King Sabata Dalindyebo Local Municipality, citizens remained dissatisfied when officials lacked responsiveness and interpersonal skills, despite digital tools reducing physical lines and improving access to information (Ntando & Mofolo, 2024; Ndamase et al., 2023). When compassionate human interaction was not accompanied by automatic technology, residents reported feeling alienated. These results support the idea that morally upright public employees with strong interpersonal skills are necessary to uphold Batho Pele values, rather than relying solely on technology.

Estonia's digital government model serves as an international example of the need for humanised public services. The OECD (2023) notes that Estonia maintains human control over sensitive public services, including healthcare, social protection, and migration services, despite the country's widespread use of AI and automation. When automated judgments affect the rights and welfare of citizens, ethical reasoning, discretion, and empathy remain crucial. In a similar vein, the UNDP (2022) emphasises that to avoid exclusion and maintain institutional legitimacy, AI systems must be integrated into human-centred governance frameworks.

When considered as a whole, these examples demonstrate that service delivery problems in digital governance are often due to a lack of moral public service rather than technical constraints. The paper's central claim that AI increases the need for moral public service, grounded in empathy, communication, professionalism, and ethical judgment, is empirically supported by Mhlanga (2022) and Schmager (2025). To achieve citizen-centred and ethical governance, technological efficiency must be balanced with human judgment and discretion. Table 1 summarises the complementary roles of artificial intelligence capabilities and morals in public service delivery.

Table 1. Comparative functions of moral public service and AI capabilities in public service provision

Dimension	AI Capabilities	Complementary moral public service delivery
Administrative effectiveness	Automating repetitious tasks	Flexibility and problem-solving skills
Decision-making	Data processing and predictive analytics	Contextual reasoning and ethical judgment
Citizen interaction	Digital platforms and chatbots	Communication and empathy
Accessibility of services	Constant access to the internet	Cultural awareness and inclusivity
Legitimacy of governance	Rule-based consistency	Professionalism and accountability

Source: OECD (2023), UNDP (2022), African Union Commission (2021)

Table 1 illustrates how moral public service delivery and artificial intelligence capabilities complement each other in the provision of public services. Moral public service delivery, encompassing ethical judgment, communication, flexibility, and empathy, is crucial for evaluating AI outputs and implementing them in a fair, transparent, and citizen-centred manner, even as AI enhances efficiency through automation, data analytics and digital platforms. The table emphasises that high-quality public service outcomes result from the balanced integration of technological efficiency and human judgment within a socio-technical system; AI alone cannot guarantee quality or legitimacy in service delivery.

Challenges of moral public service delivery in South Africa's public sector

The ongoing moral deficiency in public service delivery among public officials, as found in the study, is largely confirmed by South African research and government evaluations. Ongoing problems in professionalism, communication, responsiveness and ethical behaviour are documented by the Public Service Commission (2023). According to the National School of Government (2024), although technical training has increased, behavioural competencies remain lacking, resulting in low levels of public participation and strained relationships at work. Mamokhere (2024) and Sebola (2024), in their studies, emphasised that shortages in moral public service delivery led to poor accountability, opposition to innovation, and failures in service delivery. These sources support the conclusion that, to ensure a capable and moral public service in the AI era, South Africa's human capital development programmes must be revised to prioritise moral public service delivery.

This theme struck a deep chord with the researchers' observations of interactions between community members and government leaders. The researchers have firsthand experience with situations in which a lack of empathy, inadequate communication, or unprofessional attitudes intensified citizen concerns. The research supported the researchers' long-held belief that the public service's change involves not just digital competency but also emotional and ethical competency. The researchers' understanding of the need for behavioural change, in addition to system enhancements, for sustainable transformation has improved because of this contemplation.

Obstacles to the integration of public sector reform and moral public service delivery

The challenges identified, including resistance to change, hierarchical organisational cultures, fragmented training systems, and inadequate tracking of training impact, align with the findings of the reviewed literature. The public sector continues to be compliance-driven, with little incorporation of moral public service delivery development into performance management, according to DPSA (2022). According to African literature, measures meant to humanise digital transformation are undermined by a lack of institutional coherence (UNECA, 2023). Many governments worldwide are adopting technology more quickly than they are reforming personnel capabilities, leading to "digitally enabled but behaviourally weak" public services, according to Soetan and Deloitte (2023). Therefore, the research supports the conclusion that to effectively integrate moral public service delivery into HR, leadership and development systems, South Africa's public sector reform must address institutional and cultural

obstacles. Reflecting on these obstacles led the researchers to wonder why moral public service delivery training often fails to yield long-lasting improvement. In the researchers' experience, leaders often fail to demonstrate appropriate behaviours, even when training is offered, leading to inconsistency. This reflection reminded the researchers that effective leadership is the first step toward cultural change. Staff members cannot internalise moral public service delivery as a professional need if leadership responsibility is lacking. The researchers also realised that the most significant obstacle to behaviour change is frequently organisational culture rather than a lack of training.

Human-centred transformation in public service

The findings align with new research supporting a stronger human-centred approach to digital governance. To ensure that AI enhances human connection rather than replaces it, the UNDP (2022) and the WEF (2024) stress the importance of integrating moral public service delivery into competency frameworks. To maintain inclusive governance in the digital age, research from the African Union (2024) suggests incorporating ethics, empathy and cultural intelligence into training. Ncamphalala (2025), both in their respective work, indicate that to improve service quality and rebuild public confidence, South Africa should coordinate moral public service delivery training with Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) public-sector reforms. Therefore, the literature demonstrates that South Africa has the opportunity to utilise moral public service delivery as a strategic lever for AI-enabled transformation that is moral, responsible and citizen-centred. This theme reinforced the researchers' optimism about South Africa's capacity for transformation. The researcher noticed that, when combined with a solid foundation of professionalism, ethics and empathy, AI presents an opportunity rather than a danger. The researchers considered how AI might relieve public employees of administrative duties, allowing them more time to interact with citizens in a meaningful way. This made me realise that technology should not make government less human, but rather more.

Impact of soft skills in the public sector

The findings revealed that, particularly in the context of AI-enabled governance, moral public service delivery has a significant and diverse impact on the efficacy, legitimacy and transformation of the public sector. The findings suggest that moral public service delivery has a significant impact on service quality, ethical governance, organisational culture, human-AI collaboration, and creativity in public institutions.

Table 2. Essential moral public service delivery for AI-powered humanised public service

Moral public service delivery	Role in AI context	Governance Contribution
The capacity for emotional intelligence	Managing citizen frustration	Increases trust and dignity
Reasoning ethically	Supervision of choices made with AI assistance	Prevents bias and unfairness
Communication	Explaining the results of AI	Enhance transparency
Flexibility	Adapting to rapid change	Encourages sustainable reform
Collaboration	Human-AI collaboration	Enhances the culture of the institution

Source: African Union Commission (2021); WEF (2024); NSG (2024)

The essential moral public service delivery needed for humanised public service in AI-enabled governance situations is compiled in Table 2. Public employees can effectively manage citizen interactions, ethically monitor AI-assisted judgments, and adapt to rapid technological change with skills such as emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, communication, flexibility, and teamwork. The table shows that these skills are fundamental human capital, guaranteeing that the deployment of AI enhances rather than diminishes public trust, ethical governance and service quality.

Improving service delivery's responsiveness and quality

Frontline interactions between citizens and public officials are significantly influenced by moral public service delivery, including empathy, active listening, effective communication and interpersonal sensitivity. Research demonstrates that service delivery becomes more responsive, citizen-centred and efficient when public personnel show professionalism, patience and emotional intelligence (Van der Walddt, 2020; NSG, 2024). Moral public service delivery plays a crucial role in an era of AI-powered platforms, such as chatbots and automated service systems, by humanising digital service channels and ensuring that technology does not replace human interaction. Reinforcing the Batho Pele ethos still heavily depends on public authorities' capacity to understand residents' issues and offer sympathetic direction.

The researchers suggest that empowering officials to interact with citizens in a courteous, straightforward and emotionally intelligent manner enhances the quality, empathy and responsiveness of public service delivery by developing their moral skills. These human abilities ensure that AI-supported service channels maintain their compassion and focus on citizens as services become increasingly digitalised, thereby avoiding discontent and estrangement.

Increasing public trust and ethical behaviour

Transparency, accountability, ethics, and integrity are acknowledged as fundamental moral values in public service delivery that support the professionalism of the public service (Palmer & Pillay, 2025). To ensure responsible technology use and protect people's rights, ethical and moral public service delivery is becoming increasingly important as AI systems raise issues related to data privacy, fairness, and algorithmic bias (Modi, 2023). Strong ethical reasoning makes public officials more likely to support moral AI-assisted decision-making and preserve constitutional principles.

The researcher's view is that building public trust and confidence in government institutions requires ethical, moral public service delivery, including honesty, responsibility, equity and respect for people's rights. The researchers believe that in the era of AI, ethical judgment safeguards against threats such as algorithmic bias, data exploitation and depersonalised decision-making, ensuring that digital transformation aligns with constitutional values and Batho Pele principles.

Enhancing collaboration, teamwork and organisational culture

Moral public service delivery has a positive effect on teamwork, organisational culture and workplace cohesiveness. Research demonstrates that skills such as collaborative communication, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution and flexibility enhance internal connections and foster a respectful and cooperative culture (Sharma et al., 2024). These abilities help ease workplace conflicts, improve departmental cooperation and facilitate the smoother execution of organisational changes. When it comes to integrating AI, collaborative, moral public service delivery enables public servants to work effectively in interdisciplinary teams where digital technologies and human knowledge must interact.

Improving collaboration, communication, flexibility, and conflict resolution, and fostering moral public service delivery, fosters strong working relationships, productive teamwork, and a positive organisational culture. Organisational performance improves when authorities behave professionally and encourage cooperation across departments, enabling greater adoption of digital transformation projects.

Support of successful human-AI cooperation

Moral public service delivery is essential for maintaining a balanced human-technology interaction as AI becomes more integrated into public sector operations. Public officials are better equipped to understand and utilise AI results in public service contexts when they possess skills such as critical thinking, ethical judgment, contextual reasoning and decision-making (OECD, 2023; WEF, 2024). Moral public service delivery is essential to ensuring

that AI complements, rather than replaces, human judgment, particularly in delicate or complex situations involving vulnerable populations. These abilities guarantee that AI upholds rather than undermines human dignity by maintaining equity and inclusion in decisions mediated by technology.

Moral public service delivery enables public servants to apply context, properly interpret AI outputs and maintain human oversight as AI increasingly influences decisions in the public sector. To preserve equity and inclusion in public judgments, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and cultural sensitivity help ensure that AI enhances human judgment rather than replaces it.

Promoting creativity, flexibility and continuous education

According to research, moral public service delivery helps individuals become more innovative, creative, resilient and adaptable, qualities necessary for navigating the changing demands of the digital age. Strong moral public service delivery by public officials is associated with increased reflective practice, openness to change, and readiness to embrace new technology (UNDP, 2022; African Union, 2024). These qualities make possible a growth mindset that encourages continuous learning, experimentation, and problem-solving. Moral public service delivery enables workers to focus on value-added jobs that require creativity and human judgment as AI automates repetitive tasks. Moral public service delivery speeds up long-term change and institutional adaptability in this way. Researchers believe that moral public service delivery enables public officials to welcome technological change rather than fight it by fostering creativity, resilience, transparency in learning and innovative thinking. Fostering a growth mindset and a willingness to adopt new digital technologies, these abilities enhance the public service's institutional agility and potential for long-term transformation.

Conclusions and recommendations

The goal of this paper was to examine the role of moral public service delivery in the era of artificial intelligence and its implications for transforming the South African public service. The results demonstrated how AI is changing the public sector by automating repetitive administrative tasks while also highlighting the value of uniquely human skills. Emotional intelligence, ethical judgment, communication, flexibility, teamwork and responsibility are examples of moral public service delivery that are increasingly recognised as key facilitators of an ethical, effective, and citizen-centred government. Based on the Human Capital Theory, the study verified that to improve individual and organisational performance, moral public service delivery is a type of human capital that must be consciously developed. The Socio-Technical Systems Theory further reaffirms that human capacity and technology must be balanced for AI-driven change to be effective, and that both systems must be jointly optimised.

The study findings indicate that moral public service delivery enhances service delivery quality, improves public trust and ethical governance, fosters a positive organisational culture, facilitates human-AI collaboration and promotes creativity and lifelong learning. The adoption of AI runs the risk of exacerbating inequality, increasing public discontent and eroding accountability systems in the absence of robust moral public service delivery capabilities. As a result, the study concluded that, in a rapidly digitalising governance landscape, moral public service delivery is essential for maintaining human dignity, service quality and professional behaviour, rather than being an outcome of public service performance.

Based on the findings, the study concludes that prioritising moral public service delivery at the forefront of capacity-building and digital transformation initiatives is essential for the future of South Africa's public sector. The study therefore recommends that public service training be redesigned to incorporate experiential, reflective, and behaviour-focused learning; that those soft skills be institutionalised within competency frameworks, professional development programmes, and leadership training; and that AI implementation strategies adopt a human-centred, ethical approach in line with Batho Pele principles. The study also suggests developing a culture

of ongoing innovation and learning, backed by systems to measure the impact of service and behavioural change. According to the study, moral public service delivery is a fundamental prerequisite for creating a competent, moral, creative and citizen-focused public service that is human in the digital age rather than an add-on to AI-driven transformation.

This paper has inherent limitations because it relies on existing literature, policy documents, and institutional reports. The study lacked primary empirical data from individuals, public officials, or policy practitioners. Second, to reflect the current advances in the AI era, the evaluated literature primarily focuses on recent publications (2019-2025); as a result, older contributions to the debate may be underrepresented. Thirdly, the lack of empirical study on moral public service delivery in AI-driven public administration throughout the continent limits the depth of African regional literature, even if global, African, and South African views were included. Finally, the study does not evaluate the framework in real-world settings; future studies should use case studies, pilot implementations, or mixed-methods research designs to empirically verify the framework.

Based on this paper's findings, it is recommended that the South African public service prioritise integrating moral public service delivery as a fundamental component of public sector capabilities in the AI era. Firstly, public service competency frameworks include emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, communication, adaptability, teamwork and problem-solving. These skills will impact hiring, performance management, advancement, and professional standards at all levels of government. Second, methods of training and professional development need to be changed to shift from content-focused, compliance-based delivery to experiential, reflective, and behaviour-centred learning strategies that create long-lasting competency. Mentoring, coaching, peer learning and courses on the moral and responsible use of AI are all examples of such changes. To drive cultural change throughout digital transformation, create psychologically secure and collaborative work environments and set an example of desirable values and behaviours, it is also crucial to strengthen ethical and transformational leadership. To ensure that technology adds value to people rather than undermines them, AI and digital transformation initiatives should also incorporate a human-centred approach. Moral public service delivery should guide the ethical, equitable, and inclusive use of AI in service delivery. Communities of practice, digital learning centres and innovation platforms that foster cooperation, creativity and flexibility should be utilised to promote a culture of ongoing learning and innovation. To evaluate the success of moral public service delivery development programmes, the government should ultimately establish clear behavioural indicators and monitoring and evaluation systems that focus not only on training attendance but also on actual behaviour change and improvements in service delivery outcomes.

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