

Artificial intelligence (AI) holds significant promise for enhancing efficiency and responsiveness in public organizations, yet its adoption across the public sector remains limited. This qualitative study examines how public sector employees perceive both their own readiness and their organizations' readiness to adopt AI.

The analysis draws on semi-structured interviews with 17 employees from Israeli government ministries and local municipalities and applies an inductive thematic approach. The findings point to a personal readiness is shaped by tensions between established and emerging professional identities, between recognized potential and everyday integration, and between individual openness and concerns over legitimacy. Organizational readiness is characterized by tensions between regulation and temporary suspension, between technological infrastructure and operational capacity, and between competing priorities and repeated postponements.

These dynamics suggest that while AI is increasingly familiar and experimentally used, it has yet to become embedded in routine public sector practice. The study contributes to emerging debates on public sector digital transformation by conceptualizing readiness as an unsettled, multi-level process and by identifying conditions that may support the transition from experimentation to everyday use of AI.