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UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

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Overcoming barriers to change

Adaptive approaches in public sector management

Johtamisen akateeminen yksikkö  
Hallintotieteiden maisteriohjelma  
Julkisjohtaminen

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**VAASAN YLIOPISTO****Johtamisen akateeminen yksikkö**

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<b>Tutkielman nimi:</b>	Overcoming barriers to change: Adaptive approaches in public sector management		
<b>Tutkinto:</b>	Hallintotieteiden maisteri		
<b>Oppiaine:</b>	Julkisjohtaminen		
<b>Työn ohjaaja:</b>	Esa Hyyryläinen		
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**TIIVISTELMÄ:**

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee julkisen sektorin muutoksenhallintaan sovellettavia vaihtoehtoisia lähestymistapoja. Tutkimus perustuu narratiiviseen integroivaan kirjallisuuskatsaukseen ja se pyrkii vastaamaan seuraaviin kysymyksiin: (i) Miten muutosjohtamista on tutkittu viimeisen kahden vuosikymmenen aikana? (ii) Millaiset muutosjohtamisen strategiat olisivat tehokkaimpia nykyaikaisten haasteiden käsittelemisessä julkisissa organisaatioissa?

Kirjallisuuskatsauksessa keskitytään sekä perinteisiin että moderneihin muutoksenhallintaa käsitteleviin akateemisiin artikkeleihin ja pohdintaan niiden merkitystä erityisesti nykyisten, entistä monimutkaisempien muutosten hallitsemisessa julkishallinnollisissa organisaatioissa. Näitä organisaatioita koskevat tyypilliset nykyaikaiset haasteet kuten digitaalinen muutos sekä joustavuuden ja reagointikyvyn lisääminen. Tämän lisäksi muutosten toteuttaminen julkishallinnollisissa organisaatioissa on erityisen haasteellista mm. niihin kohdistuvien regulatoristen ja läpinäkyvyyttä koskevien erikoispiirteiden vuoksi.

Tulokset osoittavat, että perinteiset muutoksenhallintamallit tarjoavat rakenteellista tukea suoraviivaisten muutosten läpiviemiselle, mutta toimivat huonommin monimutkaisissa hallintoympäristöissä. Tutkimusten mukaan modernit lähestymistavat kuten sidosryhmäyhteistyö, iteratiivinen päätöksenteko ja dataohjautuvat ratkaisut ovat julkisella sektorilla avainasemassa onnistuneessa muutoksenhallinnassa. Tutkielman lopussa esitellään vielä kaksi tapaustutkimusta, jotka illustroivat, kuinka modernit menetelmät parantavat julkishallinnossa tehtävien muutosten toteuttamista. Tapaukset ovat Ison-Britannian Government Digital Service - yksikkö (GDS) ja Viron e-hallintomalli.

Tutkielma kontribuoi julkisen hallinnon tutkimukseen osallistumalla keskustelun julkishallinnollisten organisaatioiden erityispiirteiden, nykyaikaisten muutosten luonteen ja erilaisten muutoshallintakäytäntöjen suhteista julkishallinnollisissa organisaatioissa.

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**AVAINSANAT:** Julkinen sektori, organisaatiomuutos, osallistaminen, johtaminen

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**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA****Johtamisen akateeminen yksikkö**

<b>Tekijä:</b>	Camilla Järventie		
<b>Tutkielman nimi:</b>	Overcoming Barriers to Change: Adaptive Approaches in Public Sector Management		
<b>Tutkinto:</b>	Master of Administrative Sciences		
<b>Oppiaine:</b>	Public Management		
<b>Työn ohjaaja:</b>	Esa Hyyryläinen		
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**ABSTRACT:**

This master's thesis examines alternative approaches to change management applied in the public sector. The research is based on a narrative integrative literature review and aims to answer the following questions: (i) How has change management been studied over the past two decades? (ii) What type of change management strategies would be most effective in handling contemporary challenges in public organizations?

The literature review focuses on both traditional and modern academic articles on change management and considers their relevance, particularly in managing today's increasingly complex changes in public administrative organizations. These organizations typically face contemporary challenges such as digital transformation and the need to increase flexibility and responsiveness. In addition, implementing change in public administrative organizations is particularly challenging due to specific features such as regulatory demands and requirements for transparency.

The findings show that traditional change management models provide structural support for carrying out straightforward changes but are less effective in complex governance environments. According to studies, modern approaches, such as stakeholder collaboration, iterative decision-making, and data-driven solutions, play a key role in successful change management within the public sector. At the end of the thesis, two case studies are presented to illustrate how modern methods enhance the implementation of changes in public administration. The cases are the United Kingdom's Government Digital Service (GDS) and Estonia's e-governance model.

This thesis contributes to public administration research by engaging in the discussion on the unique characteristics of public sector organizations, the nature of contemporary changes, and the relationship between various change management practices within public administration.

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**KEYWORDS:** Public sector, organizational change, leadership, engagement

## Table of contents

1	Introduction	7
1.1	Background and context of the study	9
1.2	Purpose and goals	9
1.3	Structure of the thesis	10
2	Research approach and data collection	12
2.1	Literature review	12
2.2	Literature review process	13
2.3	Thematic analysis and categorization	15
3	Context and nature of change	17
3.1	Characteristics of the public sector organizations	17
3.2	Traditional dimensions of change management	18
3.3	Traditional change management theories	20
3.4	Increasing complexity of change	24
3.5	Complexity in modern organizational change management	25
4	Contemporary challenges in implementing change	29
4.1	The limitations of traditional change management theories	29
4.2	The need for upgraded change management theories	30
4.2.1	New public management (NPM)	31
4.2.2	Agility and flexibility in public sector change	32
4.2.3	Incorporating technology and innovation	33
4.2.4	Networked and collaborative approaches	34
4.2.5	Continuous learning and improvement	35
5	The shift toward modern change management	37
5.1	Responding to complexity in the public sector	38
5.2	Agile change management in the public sector	39
5.2.1	Core elements of agile change management	41
5.2.2	Benefits of agile change management	41

5.3	Stakeholder-centered change	44
5.4	Digital transformation and data-driven change	46
5.4.1	Technology's role in public sector change	47
5.4.2	Big data and evidence-based decision making	48
5.4.3	Challenges in public sector digitalization	49
5.5	Adaptive governance and systems thinking	50
5.5.1	What is adaptive governance?	50
5.5.2	Challenges in implementation	52
6	Applying change management in practice	53
6.1	Introduction to real-world applications of change management	53
6.1.1	Case study 1: agile change management in the public sector	53
6.1.2	Case study 2: digital transformation in public administration	55
6.2	Lessons learned from public sector change management	56
7	Conclusion and discussion	59
7.1	Key findings	59
7.2	Implications for public administration	61
7.3	Limitations and future research directions	62
	References	65

## Figures

Figure 1 Demonstration of the review process .....	13
Figure 2 Key dimensions of change management (Murthy, 2007, p. 23).....	19
Figure 3 Tame and wicked problem (Lindell et al., 2013, s. 20) .....	26
Figure 4 Benefits and challenges of agile change in public sector (Ribeiro & Domingues 2018).....	43
Figure 5 Comparison of lessons learned in public sector change .....	57

## Tables

Table 1 Main articles used in thematic analysis .....	16
Table 2 Methods, strengths and limitations of the traditional theories .....	23
Table 3 Traditional and agile change management (Ribeiro & Domingues, 2018) .....	40

## 1 Introduction

Change is an unavoidable and fundamental aspect of organizational life. It shapes how institutions respond to both internal and external dynamics. In the field of management, change covers a wide range of transformations, including strategic shifts, technological advancements and modifications to organizational structure and culture. Effective change management is essential in ensuring that organizations adapt successfully, particularly in today's rapidly evolving business environment.

Complex changes and transformations, such as digitalization, organizational restructuring and market shifts, require a structured approach to implementation. Change management plays a crucial role in supporting these complex transformations. This study draws from academic literature to explore both traditional and modern change theories. Previous research highlights the significance of past experiences in shaping future organizational change, emphasizing that attitudes toward transformation are often influenced by historical shifts (Smith et al., 2018, p. 4). Understanding this dynamic is key for assessing how organizations navigate and implement change most effectively (Johanson, 2020, p. 6).

Traditional change management models covered in this thesis are John P. Kotter's eight-step model, Lewin's three-step model and the McKinsey 7-S framework have historically treated change as a structured, top-down process. However, these models show limitations when applied to the unpredictable and fast-paced conditions of today's public sector which is increasingly characterized by ongoing nonlinear transformation (Buller, 2014, p. 88).

Scholars such as Tsoukas & Chia (2002) have noted a shift in thinking, suggesting that change should be viewed as continuous organic process rather than an episodic event with a clear beginning and end. Historically, change was seen as an option, something that could either be implemented or not, whereas in reality, it is often a constant undercurrent in organizational life

When resistance to change is overlooked, it can escalate into complex or even wicked problems, making adaptation even more difficult (Lindell, 2017, p. 25). Therefore, investing in structured change management is vital to support functionality and ensure the initiatives succeed. Change can also trigger a chain reaction, where a single overlooked element disrupts broader operations (Juppo, 2011, p.3). As a result, change cannot be isolated from an organization's broader activities thus it is an interconnected and pervasive force that is shaping long term success.

The increasingly rapid pace of change faced by organizations stems from shifts in both their external and internal operating environments. Change management and the ways in which organizations seek to support and manage these complex changes plays a central role in how successfully they adapt to an ever-evolving business landscape. In recent years, organizational leadership has also undergone a shift away from hierarchical models toward self-management, emphasizing agility, flexibility, and flatter organizational structures (Lee & Edmondson, 2017; Martela, 2019).

Although change management is a widely researched area, existing academic literature rarely distinguishes between the practices of private companies and those of public sector organizations (Kuipers et al., 2014, p. 16). Yet implementing change in public administration presents unique challenges, particularly due to regulatory requirements and the need for transparency. This study seeks to address this gap by drawing on both established academic literature on change management and the contemporary challenges that shape how public organizations can approach and lead change.

Based on a narrative literature review, this thesis examines both traditional and modern theories of change. While classic top-down change management models such as John P. Kotter's Eight-Step Model, Lewin's Three-Phase Model, and the McKinsey 7-S Framework remain widely used, they show limitations when applied to today's unpredictable and fast-paced public sector environments, which are increasingly marked by continuous, nonlinear change (Buller, 2014, p. 88).

## **1.1 Background and context of the study**

This study emerges from the growing need to understand how change is managed in public sector organizations. As technology evolves and societal expectations shift, governments are under increasing pressure to modernize services, improve efficiency, and respond to citizen needs. However, public organizations often encounter distinct challenges compared to private enterprises when implementing change.

Many traditional models were designed for more stable, hierarchical environments and often fall short in today's complex public sector, where change can be rapid, multilayered, and influenced by diverse stakeholders. Simultaneously, digital transformation, transparency demands, and participatory governance are pushing public institutions to explore more adaptive and inclusive change strategies.

Although this thesis is based on secondary data, the topic is highly relevant to real-world situations. The research questions explored here are the same ones many public organizations are grappling with today. The aim is not only to synthesize what the literature says but also to highlight practical insights that could inform future action.

## **1.2 Purpose and goals**

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the challenges associated with implementing change in the public sector and to explore modern approaches that support more effective change management. The study contributes to the existing literature by critically examining both traditional and contemporary change theories, especially as they relate to public administration.

This thesis seeks to answer three key questions:

1. How has change management been studied over the past two decades?

2. What type of change management strategies would be most effective in handling contemporary challenges in public organizations?

To explore these questions in context, the thesis examines two cases: the UK's Government Digital Service (GDS) and Estonia's national digital transformation. By comparing traditional and modern change management theories, such as John P. Kotter's eight-step model, Lewin's three-step model and the McKinsey 7-S model, with newer, adaptive frameworks, this thesis critically assesses how well these approaches meet the demands of contemporary public administration.

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured into seven chapters, each destined to build a layered understanding of change management in the public sector. The structure has been designed to guide the reader from the background and motivation of the study through theoretical frameworks, current challenges, modern solutions, and practical applications.

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** introduces the topic of change in public organizations and outlines the background, purpose, and research questions of the thesis.
- **Chapter 2: Research approach and data collection** explains the methodology, specifically the use of a narrative literature review, and describes the data selection and analysis process.
- **Chapter 3: Context and nature of change** explores the theoretical foundations of change management, the special characteristics of public sector organizations, and how these influence the implementation of change. It also introduces both traditional and modern dimensions of change theory.

- **Chapter 4: Contemporary challenges** in implementing change focuses on the limitations of traditional models and highlights the growing need for updated and more flexible change management strategies in response to today's complex environment.
- **Chapter 5: The shift toward modern change management** introduces agile, stakeholder-centered, and technology-driven approaches as alternatives to traditional frameworks. This chapter explores how public organizations are moving toward more adaptive and iterative models of change.
- **Chapter 6: Applying change management in practice** presents real-world examples and case studies from public administration, showing how different strategies are applied and what lessons can be drawn from those experiences.
- **Chapter 7: Conclusion and discussion** summarize the key findings, reflect on their relevance to public administration, and suggest potential avenues for future research.

The structure supports a gradual movement from theory to practice, offering both conceptual depth and practical relevance for understanding and improving change management in the public sector.

## **2 Research approach and data collection**

This chapter presents the methodological approach and materials used in this thesis. It begins by introducing the chosen research method and continues with an overview of the literature review process. It also outlines how the reviewed sources were categorized thematically to explore change management in public administration, covering both traditional theories and the challenges of contemporary reforms.

### **2.1 Literature review**

A literature review is both a research method and a technique for examining previous studies in order to synthesize findings and build on established knowledge. As Salminen (2011, pp. 6–14) notes, literature reviews go beyond summarizing, they critically evaluate and integrate existing research, offering a basis for new insights. This study aims to conduct "research on research" by gathering, analyzing, and assessing prior studies on change management in the public sector.

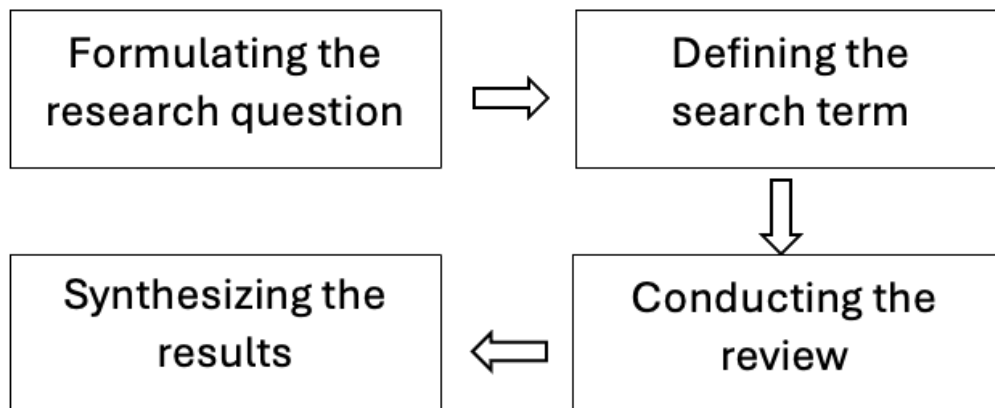
A narrative (integrative) literature review was chosen over a systematic review or meta-analysis due to its suitability for complex and evolving topics like public sector change. Unlike systematic reviews, which rely on strict inclusion criteria, or meta-analyses that focus on quantitative synthesis, the narrative approach allows for a broader and more flexible examination of diverse themes (Salminen, 2011, pp. 6–14). It integrates theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and case-based evidence to create a more holistic view.

This method supports the analysis of existing research on change management in public administration by combining insights from academic sources, government reports, and practical examples. It provides an in-depth understanding of issues such as bureaucratic resistance, stakeholder involvement, digitalization, and adaptive governance.

The literature review method allows for a critical comparison of both theoretical and practical aspects of change management, without the constraints of primary data collection. Research materials were gathered from the Tritonia university library and online academic databases such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate. OpenAI's ChatGPT was used for proofreading and language refinement, but all content, analysis, and interpretations are my own.

## 2.2 Literature review process

The review process for this study followed a systematic, transparent, and structured approach to ensure the credibility and relevance of selected sources as seen in figure 1. An extensive search was conducted using multiple academic databases, library catalogs, and government repositories.



**Figure 1** Demonstration of the review process

To maintain academic standards, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined as follows:

- **Relevance to public sector change management:** Studies focused on governmental organizations or offered transferable insights for public administration.

- **Timeframe:** Research published primarily between 2000 - 2025, with foundational theories included regardless of publication date to ensure historical context and theoretical depth, ensuring the inclusion of contemporary discussions on change management.
- **Source quality:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and reputable government reports.
- **Type of research:** Both empirical case studies and theoretical frameworks were analyzed to balance practice and conceptual understanding.
- **Sector focus:** Public sector studies were prioritized; private-sector literature was only used if clearly relevant for comparison.

**Search terms included:**

- “Change Management in Public Administration”
- “Governmental Change Implementation”
- “Agile Change in the Public Sector”
- “Stakeholder Engagement in Public Policy Reform”
- “Digital Transformation in Government”

Primary data sources included Tritonia, the university library, and online academic databases such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate. The combination of inclusion criteria and search terms was designed to ensure a well-rounded view of change implementation across diverse public sector settings.

## **2.3 Thematic analysis and categorization**

To structure the findings from the literature review, a thematic analysis was conducted. This allowed key themes to be grouped into core categories, enabling a more focused and analytical discussion of change management in public administration.

The analysis concentrated on the following themes:

- 1. Traditional change management models**
  - Kotter's eight-step model
  - Lewin's three-step model
  - McKinsey 7-S framework
  
- 2. Complexity and change in public administration**
  - Nonlinear change processes
  - Bureaucratic structures and resistance
  - Adaptive vs. rigid governance approaches
  
- 3. Challenges in implementing change in the public sector**
  - Organizational inertia and cultural barriers
  - Political and regulatory constraints
  - Leadership and stakeholder conflicts
  
- 4. Modern approaches to change management**
  - Agile change management
  - Digital transformation in government
  - Stakeholder-centered change and co-creation

These thematic categories form the foundation for analyzing the effectiveness, limitations, and contextual fit of different change management models in the public sector.

The selected literature reflects both foundational theories and current developments in the field. Together, they offer insight into how change is understood and practiced in public administration today.

<b>Thematic</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Focus of the article</b>
Traditional change management models	Kotter (1996)	Eight-step change model for managing transformation
Traditional change management models	Lewin (1947)	Three-step model outlining unfreezing, changing, refreezing
Traditional change management models	Peters & Waterman (1982)	7-S framework focusing on organizational alignment
Complexity and change in public administration	Burnes (2004)	Understanding complexity in organizational change
Complexity and change in public administration	Van de Ven & Poole (1995)	Emergent properties in complex systems
Challenges in implementing change in the public sector	Lindell (2017)	Resistance and complexity in change implementation
Challenges in implementing change in the public sector	Ford & Ford (2009)	Stakeholder dynamics in public change processes
Modern approaches to change management	Teece et al. (1997)	Dynamic capabilities and adaptability
Modern approaches to change management	Ribeiro & Domingues (2018)	Agile methods in change management
Modern approaches to change management	Powell et al. (2005)	Networked and collaborative governance approaches

**Table 1** Main articles used in thematic analysis

The table 1 outlines the primary articles used in the analysis, organized by thematic category. Each entry includes the authors, publication year, and a brief description of the article's focus, demonstrating how these works contribute to the broader understanding of change implementation in public sector organizations.

### **3 Context and nature of change**

This chapter introduces the core concepts of change within the context of public administration. It begins by examining how several authors have addressed traditional models of change management and their relevance in structured organizational settings. The chapter then explores how complexity, stakeholder dynamics, and emerging digital challenges influence the nature of change in the public sector. This theoretical background provides the foundation for understanding why alternative approaches modern and adaptive strategies are needed, as discussed in the next chapter.

#### **3.1 Characteristics of the public sector organizations**

Organizational change refers to the intentional and structured modification of strategies, processes, structures, technologies, or culture to achieve specific goals (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). However, change is not a one-size-fits-all process. Its form, scope, and impact vary significantly depending on the organization's context and operating environment. Organizations that overlook these nuances often struggle with ineffective or unsustainable transformations. Organizations considered more adaptive tend to respond quickly to external changes, integrate learning into their practices, and turn transformation into opportunity, the so-called winners. In contrast, organizations that focus heavily on maintaining control often find themselves overwhelmed by change, a strategy that is rarely feasible or sustainable in the long term (Ulrich, 2007, p. 189).

Public administration organizations possess distinct characteristics that influence how change is approached (Kuipers et al., 2014, p. 14). These organizations must operate within strict legal frameworks and are held to high standards of transparency, ethics, and accountability. While these bureaucratic structures ensure fairness and stability, they can also slow down decision-making and reduce the flexibility needed for effective change management (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011, p. 409–410).

Unlike private sector organizations, which often focus on efficiency and competitiveness, public organizations must balance the interests of multiple stakeholders including politicians, citizens, civil servants, and advocacy groups. This often results in conflicting priorities, especially when political influences, regulatory constraints, and public trust must be considered simultaneously (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017, p. 16).

In addition, emerging pressures such as digital transformation, increasing citizen expectations, and tighter regulatory demands add new layers of complexity to change initiatives (Mergel, 2019, p. 1). Successfully navigating these challenges requires proactive stakeholder engagement, adaptive leadership, and governance models that support both innovation and accountability (Van der Voet, 2014, p. 521).

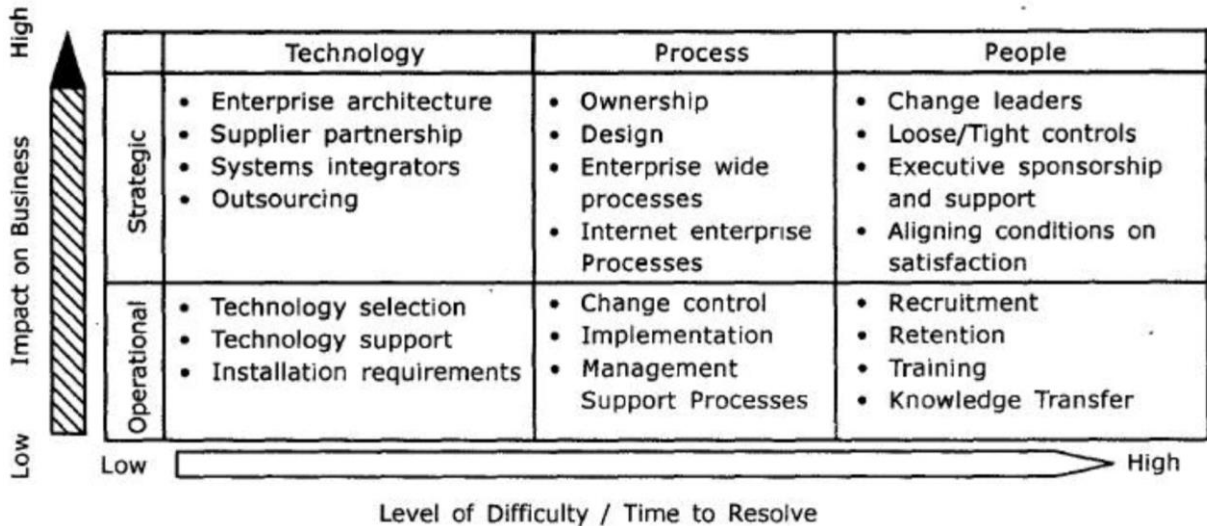
As Christensen and Lægreid (2011, p. 410) point out, public organizations today are increasingly hybrid and complex. They must simultaneously manage overlapping ideas, structures, values, and priorities. In this environment, change is often unexpected and unplanned a natural consequence of operating in a volatile context (Juholin, 2016, p. 32). While it may be difficult to prepare in advance, it is possible to build organizational capacity to manage change when it arises (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014, p. 27).

### **3.2 Traditional dimensions of change management**

Change management is a structured approach aimed at helping individuals and organizations successfully transition through change, while minimizing resistance and uncertainty (Taborda, 2011, p. 22). Despite the inevitability of change, people often prefer stability, routine, and predictability. As a result, organizations must address human resistance and deeply rooted cultural inertia when initiating change (Sung & Kim, 2021).

Key barriers include entrenched organizational cultures, reliance on outdated strategies, lack of resources, and both conscious and unconscious resistance to new ideas.

Successful change typically occurs when the driving forces for transformation outweigh these barriers.



**Figure 2** Key dimensions of change management (Murthy, 2007, p. 23)

As illustrated in figure 3, the key dimensions of change, people, processes, and technology, are closely interconnected (Murthy, 2007, p. 23). Neglecting any one of these can undermine the entire effort, while managing them in alignment increases the likelihood of sustainable, long-term change. The figure also highlights key aspects of change management, including the complexity, time required for resolution, and the potential impact on the business. These dimensions are closely connected.

Organizational change often requires strategic adjustments across multiple dimensions and levels, from strategic shifts and structural reforms to process reengineering, technology adoption, and cultural renewal (Lindell, 2017, p. 25). Given its complexity, change is highly context-dependent, influenced by industry-specific dynamics and organizational goals.

In the literature of organizational change theory, classification models are commonly used to conceptualize the change process. One of the foundational models is Kurt

Lewin's Three-Step Change Model (Lewin, 1947), which outlines three key phases: unfreezing, moving and refreezing. Without strong change management organizations transitions can become chaotic and costly, consuming both time and resources inefficiently (Stobierski, 2020).

Building on this foundation, John P. Kotter's eight-step change model (Kotter, 1996) presents a more structured, phased approach, emphasizing urgency, coalition-building, vision formation, and reinforcement of early successes. These models have served as essential blueprints for managing change and continue to shape modern organizational strategies.

In addition to structured frameworks, contemporary literature increasingly emphasizes the strategic importance of change as a driver of adaptability, innovation, and long-term competitiveness (Ripatti, 2011, p. 8). Change is seen not only as a response to technological advancements, globalization, and shifting market conditions (Lindell, 2017, p. 18), but also as a catalyst for improved employee engagement, productivity, and sustainability (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014, p. 315).

Although traditional models have long offered structure and clarity, their relevance in today's rapidly evolving public sector is being re-evaluated. Modern approaches tend to place greater value on adaptability, continuous learning, and stakeholder co-creation, moving beyond linear, top-down planning.

### **3.3 Traditional change management theories**

Traditional change management theories provide structured methodologies for navigating organizational transformation. A strong understanding of these models allows organizations to select appropriate strategies to manage change effectively. By applying these models, organizations can better anticipate resistance, support employees through transitions, and embed lasting improvements into their operations.

John P. Kotter's eight-step change model introduced eight-step change model in leading change (1996), offering a detailed framework for managing transformations, both large-scale and incremental. The model consists of:

1. Create urgency: Establish a compelling need for change to mobilize commitment.
2. Build a guiding coalition: Form a leadership team to drive the change effort.
3. Form a strategic vision and initiatives: Develop a clear vision and roadmap.
4. Enlist a volunteer army: Gain broad organizational support.
5. Enable action by removing barriers: Eliminate obstacles that impede progress.
6. Generate short-term wins: Achieve early successes to sustain momentum.
7. Sustain acceleration: Build on early gains to drive long-term change.
8. Institute change: Embed new approaches into organizational culture.

Previously mentioned Kurt Lewin's three-step model (Lewin, 1947) remains foundational in change management theory. It focuses on preparing the organization for change, introducing new processes and ensuring the change is sustained over time. These three steps are:

1. Unfreezing: Challenging existing norms and preparing the organization for transformation.
2. Change (moving): Implementing new behaviors, processes, or structures.

3. Refreezing: Reinforcing and institutionalizing the change to ensure permanence.

The McKinsey 7-S framework (Peters & Waterman, 1982) offers a holistic approach to organizational change by analyzing seven interconnected elements that helps organizations evaluate and match key internal elements to improve effectiveness and manage change. These are divided into hard elements, strategy, structure, and systems, which are easier to identify and manage. And soft elements, shared values, skills, style, and staff, which are more intangible and influenced by organizational culture.

1. Strategy: The organization's long-term direction, to gain a competitive advantage or achieve its mission.
2. Structure: How tasks and responsibilities are divided.
3. Systems: The processes and procedures in place.
4. Shared Values: The core principles and company culture, the organization's "guiding principles".
5. Style: Leadership approach and management style in organization.
6. Staff: Workforce capabilities and human resource management. How people are developed and motivated.
7. Skills: The organization's core competencies and capabilities.

Unlike Kotter's step-by-step method, the 7-S model emphasizes interconnectedness and the need for alignment across different organizational dimensions to drive successful change.

While these traditional models emphasize structured, top-down approaches, they have limitations in today's increasingly complex and unpredictable business environments. See table 2 below.

<b>Model</b>	<b>Fundamental method</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
<b>Lewin's model (1947)</b>	3-Step process (Unfreeze, Change, Refreeze)	Simple, structured and generally suitable	Assumes stability, not suited for continuous change
<b>Kotter (1996)</b>	8-Step process with strong leadership focus	Structured, highlights urgency and stakeholder involvement	Linear approach may not fit unpredictable situations
<b>McKinsey 7-S model (1982)</b>	Interconnected organizational factors	Holistic view, considers multiple organizational elements	No clear step-by-step process, difficult to implement

**Table 2** Methods, strengths and limitations of the traditional theories

Different perspectives on change may exist, but a common conclusion remains; there are effective and ineffective ways to manage it. According to Buller (2014, p. 82), change processes tend to follow a similar pattern across various organizations. Models such as those developed by Lewin, McKinsey, and Kotter outline specific stages that are expected to occur in a particular sequence. While these structured models may create a sense of clarity in the often-unpredictable change processes within public sector, they do not always align with the real-life challenges faced when implementing change in institutions. After the fact, it may be possible to frame events to fit these models, but they often fail to capture the reality of change, which can be disorganized, contentious, and slow-moving, especially in the public sector (Buller, 2014, p. 82). To gain a more comprehensive understanding, it is essential to explore additional theoretical perspectives on change.

### **3.4 Increasing complexity of change**

In the today's modern public sector, change has become increasingly complex due to interwoven factors such as globalization, technological advancements, and rapidly evolving policy environments (Taborda, 2011, p. 23-24). Unlike traditional change processes, which assume linear style, complex changes require organizations to adopt more flexible, adaptive approaches (Burnes, 2004). Unlike traditional change models suggest, no institution goes through change in the exact same order or follows the same steps as another (Buller, 2014, p. 88). Change today is often nonlinear, unpredictable, and marked by emergent consequences

A defining feature of complex change is nonlinearity, where cause-and-effect relationships are difficult to predict. Small interventions can lead to outsized ripple effects, while large reforms may not deliver expected results. This unpredictability challenges traditional change models, which rely on stable environments and controlled transitions (Buller, 2014, p. 88). Successful change doesn't come from simply following a set formula. Every change process is unique, and there's no reason to assume they should all unfold the same way (Buller, 2014, p. 93). Public sector organizations must instead adopt iterative and adaptive strategies that allow for flexibility in decision-making.

Another critical aspect of complexity consists of "emergent properties", unintended consequences that arise from interactions within the system. Government agencies operate within intricate networks of policies, regulations, and social expectations. A policy shift in one area, such as digitalizing public services, can create ripple effects across administrative processes, workforce structures, and citizen engagement (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). To navigate such uncertainty, organizations need iterative and adaptive approaches, ones that allow for real-time learning, feedback loops, and stakeholder input

To manage complexity effectively, public institutions must develop adaptive capacity, fostering a culture of learning and continuous improvement. Traditional bureaucratic structures often resist change due to formalized hierarchies and risk-averse cultures. However, organizations that encourage experimentation and flexibility are better equipped to navigate uncertainties (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

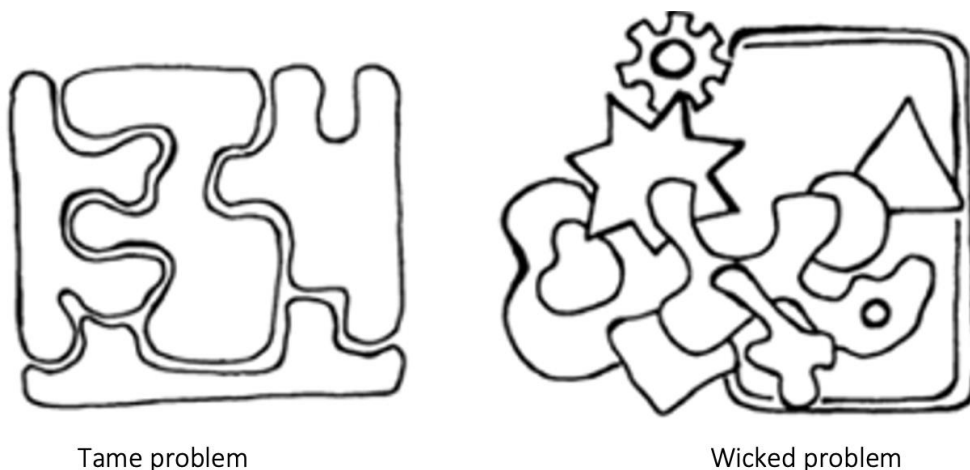
Moreover, public sector change involves multiple stakeholders with competing interests. Policy reforms and administrative shifts affect government agencies, employees, unions, policymakers, and the public. Engaging these groups strategically and managing resistance is crucial to ensuring the successful implementation of change (Ford & Ford, 2009).

### **3.5 Complexity in modern organizational change management**

Public organizations are becoming more complex and hybrid as they try to deal with many, often conflicting, demands, ideas, structures, and cultural factors at the same time. This growing complexity makes it harder to manage change and deliver services efficiently (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011, p. 407). While many governments have yet to fully digitize all public services and administrative processes, the growing adoption of new digital technologies has already driven significant change within public sector organizations (Haug, Dan, & Mergel, 2024, p. 1964).

As shown in figure 5. below, public organizations may face "wicked problems", issues that are difficult to define and lack clear solutions. A wicked problem is typically described as one that is difficult to define clearly, challenging to analyze, and often lacks a clear or final solution (Vartiainen, 2012, p. 102). Wicked problems are quite different from regular or complicated problems, which can usually be solved within a limited time using standard methods that have demonstrated effectiveness. Traditional problem-solving processes often don't work for wicked problems and can sometimes make things worse by causing unexpected side effects (Camillus, 2008). These challenges often

involve political and ethical tensions, making it nearly impossible to fully “solve” them in the traditional sense (Raisio et al., 2018, p. 37). Instead of trying to find a single solution, organizations should focus on understanding the problem and directing attention and resources toward dealing with its complex and uncertain nature.



**Figure 3** Tame and wicked problem (Lindell et al., 2013, s. 20)

Hybridity in the public sector can mean different things depending on how it's used. For some, it's closely linked to the idea of complexity. For others, it refers to the mix of different structures or cultures that exist within the same organization. Hybridity often sits between the public and private sectors, and they can include semi-governmental bodies, market-based organizations, or civil society groups (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011, p. 410).

The complexity of change is further increased by external factors that influence modern governance. Globalization, technological advancements, and the rapid dissemination of information have heightened the need for dynamic and responsive change strategies. Organizations must now operate in an environment where public expectations are evolving, regulatory landscapes are shifting, and digital transformation is boosting (Vartiainen et al., 2019). Researchers have focused on two main types: vertical and horizontal complexity which explain how public organizations are built and how they operate both within and across agencies (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011, p. 409).

- **Vertical specialization:** Vertical specialization refers to how authority and control are spread through different levels in an organization. Inside one organization, strong vertical specialization means many levels of leadership with clearly divided responsibilities. Between organizations, it might mean a ministry with many smaller agencies under it. Less vertical specialization could mean fewer levels or more centralized ministries. Example in many countries, the Ministry of Health sits at the top of the health governance hierarchy, responsible for setting national health policies and strategies
- **Horizontal specialization:** Refers to how work is divided at the same level, like departments within a ministry or between agencies working on different tasks. This affects how teams or agencies collaborate and share information.

By looking at both vertical and horizontal structures, we can better understand how public organizations function, where challenges might arise, and how they might improve. As public needs grow more complex, understanding these structures is key to managing change and improving service delivery (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011, p. 409).

Governments worldwide are increasingly pressured to modernize services while maintaining transparency and efficiency. However, integrating new technologies and policy reforms into traditional bureaucracies presents significant challenges. Old systems, strict regulations, and a lack of necessary skills in the workforce can make it hard for organizations to successfully implement changes (Raisio et al., 2018, p. 14-15). To navigate these complexities, public sector leaders must adopt governance models that prioritize agility, stakeholder collaboration, and evidence-based decision-making. Change is therefore an absolute state in which everything shifts and nothing remains permanent. The challenge lies in organizations' inability to change as quickly as their environment (Talja, 2006, p. 86).

Failure to recognize the inherent complexities of change can lead to unsuccessful initiatives and organizational stagnation (Lindell, 2017, p. 6). As complexity increases, organizations must adopt a systems-thinking approach to navigate change effectively (Raisio & Vartiainen, 2020, chapter 17). By acknowledging and addressing these complexities, organizations can enhance resilience, improve decision-making, and increase their ability to manage change successfully.

## **4 Contemporary challenges in implementing change**

This chapter explores the key challenges public sector organizations face when implementing change. Drawing on the literature, it highlights the limitations of traditional change management theories in today's complex, fast-paced, and stakeholder-driven environments. The chapter also introduces the growing need for updated models that are more flexible, participatory, and responsive. These challenges set the stage for the next chapter, which looks at how modern approaches can better support successful transformation in public administration.

### **4.1 The limitations of traditional change management theories**

In today's dynamic environment of contemporary public sector organizations, the limitations of traditional change management theories are becoming increasingly evident. Public sector organizations are under constant pressure to adapt to changing policies, economic uncertainty, and evolving public expectations. Because of this, traditional models like Kotter's Eight-Step Model, Lewin's Three-Step Change Model, and the McKinsey 7-S Framework often fall short when it comes to managing today's more complex and fast-moving change processes. This chapter highlights why there is a need to rethink and update change management theories, so they better support public organizations facing increasingly complex and constantly evolving environments.

Public sector organizations often face bureaucratic inertia, political influences, and regulatory constraints, making change implementation particularly challenging. Studies indicate that approximately 70% of all organizational change initiatives fail (Beer & Nohria, 2000, p. 133). Referring to a statistic that applies not only to businesses but also to government agencies striving for reform. Many change efforts fail because leaders, in their eagerness to act, become overwhelmed by a flood of initiatives and advice, leading to confusion and fragmented implementation. This often results in costly outcomes, both

economically and socially highlighting the need for a clearer understanding of the change process (Beer & Nohria, 2000, p. 134).

Traditional change models typically follow a linear and sequential approach, assuming a stable and predictable environment (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). However, the public sector is inherently dynamic, influenced by political cycles, policy changes, and shifting public expectations (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997). Kotter's model, for instance, may be too time-consuming in governmental settings where rapid responses to crises, budgetary shifts, or legislative mandates are required (Ford & Ford, 2009). Similarly, Lewin's model assumes a period of stability between change phases, which does not align with the constant evolution seen in public administration (Dawson, 1994).

Furthermore, the McKinsey 7-S Framework emphasizes internal organizational alignment but may overlook external complexities, such as intergovernmental relations and citizen engagement (By, 2005). Resistance to change, compounded by bureaucratic hierarchies, further exacerbates challenges in the public sector (Lindell, 2017, p. 25). Given these limitations, it is essential to explore adaptive change management approaches that suit the unique needs of public administration.

## **4.2 The need for upgraded change management theories**

Historically government agencies played the main role in creating public value by carrying out politically defined goals (Bryson et al., 2014, p. 447). The focus was mostly on making government operations as efficient as possible. Citizens were generally seen as voters, clients, or constituents. However, public administration has always been more influenced by politics than the ideal version suggests, and government agencies themselves have not been immune to failure (Bryson et al., 2014, p. 448).

To effectively navigate an increasingly uncertain and complex environment, public sector organizations must adopt change theories that emphasize agility, innovation, and

collaborative governance. While traditional models provide foundational insights, they must evolve to accommodate the rapid pace of policy shifts and technological advancements in government operations (Burnes, 2004).

#### **4.2.1 New public management (NPM)**

New Public Management (NPM) emerged in the late 20th century as a response to growing demands for efficiency, accountability, and performance in public administration. Drawing inspiration from the private sector, NPM introduced ideas like cost-efficiency, market orientation, customer service, and performance-based management into public institutions (Hood, 1991). At its core, NPM aimed to make the public sector more business-like, reducing bureaucracy and promoting managerial autonomy.

In the context of change management, NPM brought a major shift in how reforms were designed and implemented. It pushed for clear targets, measurable outcomes, and decentralized control, all of which changed how public organizations approached internal change. Traditional top-down decision-making was increasingly replaced by management models focused on results, often linked to performance contracts or service-level agreements (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

While NPM helped introduce a stronger focus on outcomes and accountability, it also revealed significant limitations. Critics have pointed out that it often overlooked the complexity of public services and undervalued collaboration and long-term learning (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011). In many cases, the emphasis on measurable performance conflicted with broader democratic values or social goals.

Despite its drawbacks, NPM laid the groundwork for more modern approaches to change. It marked a transition point between traditional bureaucratic systems and newer models that emphasize co-creation, adaptability, and stakeholder engagement. In this way, NPM remains a key part of the broader evolution of change management in the public sector.

#### **4.2.2 Agility and flexibility in public sector change**

Traditional bureaucratic structures often limit the flexibility needed for effective change management in the public sector. These inflexible hierarchies can slow down decision-making and make it difficult to respond to complex and rapidly evolving challenges. To address this, change management theories should place greater emphasis on agile leadership, enabling public administrators to adapt to uncertainty, encourage innovation, and make timely decisions (Kettl, 2005, p. 35).

One relevant concept in this context is organizational ambidexterity, introduced by Tushman and O'Reilly (1996). It refers to the ability to balance exploration, pursuing innovation and reform, with exploitation, maintaining stability and efficiency. This dual capability is especially important in government, where public organizations must manage ongoing essential services while also developing and testing new policy initiatives. In a similar vein, Volberda (1996) argues that in order to respond to dynamic environments, organizations, including those in the public sector, must move beyond rigid structures and adopt more adaptable and flexible governance models.

Further supporting this need for adaptability is the concept of dynamic capabilities, developed by Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997). This framework focuses on an organization's ability to build, integrate, and reconfigure both internal and external resources in response to rapid environmental changes. In the public sector, these capabilities are vital for navigating policy shifts, technological advancements, and changing societal needs. Public institutions that cultivate such competencies are better positioned to remain responsive and effective in the face of ongoing transformation.

Finally, Taborda (2011, p. 23-24) emphasizes that modern organizations including those in the public sector must balance their current operations with long-term strategic goals. He argues for an agile, responsive approach that allows strategy to evolve based on changing conditions. This highlights the importance of flexibility not just in execution, but also in planning and overall governance.

Together, these perspectives point to the growing importance of agility and flexibility in public sector change efforts. While stability remains essential, the ability to adapt, experiment, and reconfigure in response to uncertainty is now equally critical for achieving sustainable, citizen-centered outcomes.

#### **4.2.3 Incorporating technology and innovation**

Traditional change models often expect slow and predictable changes, which don't work well when technology is advancing so quickly. The COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated how rapidly the world can shift and how quickly organizations must, and are able to, adapt in response (Emerson, 2022). Digital transformation involves change on two main levels: internally, in the organization's core processes and routines, and externally, in its environment, including business models, services, products, and how users interact with the organization (Haug, Dan, & Mergel, 2024, p. 1964). These changes are mainly driven by new digital technologies, which raise expectations from citizens and users, for example, smoother service experiences and easier access. They also introduce new ways of delivering public services. Some recent research suggests that digital transformation is not a one-time shift but a continuous process, due to its wide reach and complexity (Haug, Dan, & Mergel, 2024, p. 1964).

New technologies like digital platforms, artificial intelligence, automation, and big data are changing how governments work. These fast-moving developments make it hard for traditional change models, built on stability and slow, predictable steps to keep up (Yang, Gu, & Albitar, 2023, p. 1).

Since the 1990s, terms like "Electronic Government" and "Digital Government" have shown how technology is playing a bigger role in public administration (Emerson, 2022). Countries like the U.S. and the UK launched national digital strategies in 2012 to improve services and make government more efficient through digital tools (U.S. Government,

1993). More recently, countries such as Japan and China have made digital transformation a top priority (Emerson, 2022). Still, bringing new technologies into public organizations isn't easy. Outdated systems, strict regulations, and limited digital skills often slow things down.

On top of that, many transformation efforts focus too much on technology and forget the human side, how change affects people and communities. Public services should be built around citizens, but challenges like poor data sharing, slow decision-making, and strict structures get in the way. Today's citizens expect simple, fast, and secure digital services, just like they get from private companies. To meet those expectations, governments need to be more flexible, break down data silos, support innovation, and focus on ongoing improvements instead of one-time reforms (Chesbrough, 2003; Emerson, 2022). Without these changes, digital transformation risks becoming more about checking boxes than making a difference for people. Change theories must evolve to incorporate principles of digital transformation, ensuring public institutions can adapt to technological disruptions while maintaining accountability and transparency.

Innovation in the public sector is also driven by external pressures, such as citizen expectations for digital services. Traditional change models, which emphasize stability, may struggle to accommodate the continuous need for public sector innovation (Chesbrough, 2003). Consequently, public change management strategies must support iterative, technology-driven adaptations rather than static reform processes.

#### **4.2.4 Networked and collaborative approaches**

Public sector challenges often go beyond the scope of one single organization, which is why collaborative and networked approaches to governance are becoming increasingly important. Powell et al. (2005) emphasize the importance of building partnerships between government agencies, non-profits, businesses, and international actors to deal with complex societal problems that cannot be solved in isolation.

Change theories should also reflect this shift away from centralized decision-making towards more open and participatory models. Open government initiatives, for instance, highlight the value of transparency, public engagement, and inter-agency cooperation. According to Powell et al. (2005), organizations that operate in interconnected environments need to strengthen their capacity for networked governance if they want to remain responsive to changing public needs.

This kind of collaboration is especially relevant in policy areas like climate action, public health, or urban development where joint efforts across sectors tend to lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes. For example, the European Union's Urban Agenda promotes partnerships between city governments, civil society, and the private sector to address issues like affordable housing, clean transport, and digital innovation in urban areas (European Commission 2016). Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments quickly formed cross-sector networks involving health authorities, private logistics firms, and research institutions to coordinate public services and emergency responses.

The growing focus on co-creation, where citizens and stakeholders are actively involved in shaping policies and services, reinforces the need for change management strategies that are built on openness, trust, and shared responsibility. In today's public administration, successful change often means not just managing processes internally but also engaging with people and partners externally.

#### **4.2.5 Continuous learning and improvement**

Public institutions must embrace a culture of continuous learning and iteration to remain effective in an era of rapid change. Helfat and Peteraf (2003) emphasize that dynamic capabilities, including the ability to learn and adapt, are essential for sustained success.

Traditional bureaucratic structures often resist continuous learning due to strict hierarchies and risk-averse cultures. However, modern governance demands adaptive policy-making, where feedback loops, pilot programs, and evidence-based decision-making drive reforms. Change theories must incorporate mechanisms for continuous learning, ensuring that public sector organizations evolve based on real-time insights and stakeholder engagement.

For example, the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has implemented phased pilot projects during the preparation of the social and health care reform (sote-uudistus). These pilots enabled feedback-driven adjustments before scaling solutions nationally, illustrating how learning-by-doing can more effectively align reforms with local needs.

Fostering continuous improvement also demands a shift in organizational culture. Institutions need to embrace uncertainty, view setbacks as integral to the learning process, and invest in internal capabilities such as data literacy, experimentation, and collaborative learning. Although this can challenge conventional bureaucratic norms, it is essential for cultivating resilience and strengthening innovation capacity.

This approach also ties into earlier themes of agile governance and networked collaboration. Together, they reflect a broader shift away from rigid, top-down control and toward more responsive, people-centered change. By embedding dynamic capabilities into governance structures, governments can better navigate complexity while maintaining public trust and relevance.

## 5 The shift toward modern change management

This chapter shifts the focus from traditional change management theories to the modern approach that seem to be reshaping public sector transformation today. While structured models like Kotter or Lewin still offer value, according to the literature they don't always reflect the complexity, speed, and unpredictability of public sector change. As demands grow and technology advances, public organizations are turning toward more flexible, collaborative, and iterative approaches. The following sections explore these key developments, agile change, stakeholder-centered models, digital transformation, and systems thinking and show how they offer more adaptive tools for navigating today's change landscape.

This chapter explores the key trends in modern change management and their applicability to the public sector. Specifically, it focuses on:

1. Agile change management: How agile methodologies support continuous development in the public sector.
2. Stakeholder-centered change: Why stakeholder involvement and collaboration are crucial to the success of change innovations.
3. Digital transformation and data-driven decision-making: How technology and analytics can enhance change management.
4. Systems thinking and adaptive governance: How organizations can build resilience and better anticipate change needs.

## 5.1 Responding to complexity in the public sector

Traditional change management models, such as Kotter's Eight-Step Model, Lewin's Three-Step Model, and the McKinsey 7-S Framework, have long provided organizations with structured frameworks for planning and implementing change. While these models remain useful in certain contexts, they often fail to address the challenges of change management in today's public sector (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006).

Traditional change management theories assume that change occurs linearly and in a controlled manner. However, in public administration, change is rarely predictable or straightforward. Rather than occurring as isolated projects, change is a continuous process, influenced by various stakeholders, political factors, and administrative constraints (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Consequently, modern change management cannot rely solely on predefined steps but must instead be flexible, participatory, and data driven.

Public sector organizations face unique challenges in implementing change, including bureaucratic inertia, multi-level decision-making, political pressures, and stakeholder resistance (Ford & Ford, 2009). These challenges highlight the need for modern change management approaches that enable a more agile and adaptive operating model. Strategies such as agile change management, stakeholder-centered change, digital transformation, and systems thinking offer alternative approaches that better align with the demands of contemporary public administration.

Through these perspectives, this chapter aims to demonstrate how public administration can transition from traditional, strict models to more flexible and dynamic change management practices. The following sections will delve deeper into each of these approaches and their practical applications in public governance.

## 5.2 Agile change management in the public sector

Agile methodology started gaining major attention in 2001 when the Agile Manifesto was released, a document that outlines the core values and principles of the agile philosophy, designed to support development teams in working more effectively and sustainably (Ribeiro & Domingues, 2018, p. 622). Agile methodologies were originally developed to address key limitations of traditional software development processes, such as excessive documentation and slow delivery timelines. These traditional models often failed to meet the growing expectations of clients who increasingly valued faster delivery and lower costs in a competitive business environment. At the same time, suppliers were under pressure to optimize their use of resources and deliver more projects in shorter time frames (Ribeiro & Domingues, 2018).

Many researchers have pointed out the need for further investigation into how agile methods are applied across different contexts, including public organizations, which often face unique constraints compared to the private sector. These include strict legal regulations, complex and outdated technological systems, slower innovation cycles, and hierarchical organizational cultures with rigid communication practices (Ribeiro & Domingues, 2018, p. 622).

Evolution from traditional to new agile practices is not as transparent as in the public sector (Ribeiro & Domingues, 2018, p. 621). Agile change management is an approach that emphasizes flexibility, adaptability, and iterative progress over hierarchical, top-down planning. Unlike traditional models, like Kotter's 8-step model or Lewin's model that rely on long-term roadmaps and structured hierarchies, agile change management encourages organizations to adapt in real time based on feedback, shifting conditions, and evolving priorities (Rigby, Sutherland, & Takeuchi, 2016).

<b>Traditional Change Management</b>	<b>Agile Change Management</b>
Linear and sequential	Flexible and adaptive
Focus on large long-term projects	Small changes implemented quickly
Top-down decision making	Bottom-up participation
Change, seen as given	Change is continuous and continuous
Full implementation before evaluation	Adjustments real-time and continuous feedback

**Table 3** Traditional and agile change management (Ribeiro & Domingues, 2018)

Like in table 6. changes are introduced in small, manageable increments rather than as large-scale transformations which allows organization to learn and adapt quickly. Agile management prioritizes employees, stakeholders, and end-users by involving them early and often. That encourages co-creation and bottom-up participation in change initiatives.

For example, Finland's Tax Administration has piloted agile practices in developing digital services. Rather than designing systems in full before launch, they engaged users early through prototypes and feedback loops, enabling iterative improvements and more user-friendly services.

Agile change management also encourages bottom-up involvement, fostering collaboration across departments and user groups. By involving frontline employees, citizens, and other stakeholders in shaping the change process, organizations can increase buy-in and reduce resistance. This participatory element is especially critical in the public sector, where legitimacy and trust are central to success.

### **5.2.1 Core elements of agile change management**

One of the foundational principles of Agile is the use of continuous feedback loops, which ensure that development and implementation processes remain flexible and responsive to real-time needs. Practices such as retrospectives, pulse surveys, and open communication enable organizations to gather timely input, make quick adjustments, and continuously improve their processes (Ribeiro & Domingues, 2018, p. 623).

Another key component of agile is collaboration. Cross-functional teams play a critical role in breaking down organizational silos and fostering alignment across departments. This approach allows large and complex problems to be divided into smaller, manageable tasks that are addressed by small, autonomous teams with diverse skill sets. Such team structures support faster decision-making and more effective problem-solving, particularly in dynamic environments (Denning, 2018, p. 7).

Agile also seeks to fight complexity with simplicity, enabling organizations to maintain a sharp focus on what truly adds value. In the public sector, this means prioritizing outcomes that directly benefit citizens. By cutting through bureaucratic complexity and aligning efforts around clear value delivery, public institutions can become more responsive, transparent, and effective (Denning, 2018, p. 7).

Together, these core elements; feedback, collaboration, and value-driven simplicity, form the foundation of agile change management and provide practical tools for public sector transformation.

### **5.2.2 Benefits of agile change management**

Agile change management offers a compelling alternative to traditional top-down models, especially for public sector organizations navigating uncertainty, political complexity, and rapidly evolving societal expectations. Rather than viewing change as a fixed

destination, agile encourages organizations to approach transformation as a continuous, learning-driven process.

**Experimentation and Adaptability:** A key benefit of agile change management is its recognition that not all initiatives will succeed on the first try. Agile promotes a culture where experimentation is not only accepted but expected. This mindset allows public institutions to test ideas, learn from failures, and adapt approaches quickly an essential quality in environments where policies and external conditions shift constantly (Rigby, Sutherland, & Takeuchi, 2016).

**Short Planning and Execution Cycles (Sprints):** Agile frameworks like Scrum or Kanban break down change initiatives into short, actionable cycles known as “sprints.” These time-bound phases allow teams to make continuous progress, assess results, and pivot if needed. This iterative structure is especially useful in the public sector, where long-term planning often clashes with real-time political or economic shifts (Ribeiro & Domingues, 2018, p. 623).

**Focus on Value Delivery:** Unlike traditional models that wait until the end of a project to show results, agile methods aim to deliver value early and consistently. This approach aligns change efforts with public sector goals such as improving service delivery, increasing transparency, or responding to citizen needs while ensuring measurable outcomes throughout the process (Denning, 2018).

One of the key advantages of agile approaches is the reduction of resistance to change. By involving employees and key stakeholders early in the process, organizations can build trust, gather valuable input, and promote a shared sense of ownership. This early engagement often leads to smoother transitions and stronger commitment to new practices. Agile methods also help to speed up implementation by breaking down large changes into smaller, manageable parts. These short, feedback-driven cycles allow for

quicker adjustments and continuous improvement, which is particularly valuable in dynamic governance contexts.

Another major benefit is greater adaptability. Agile frameworks are designed to function in uncertain or fast-changing environments, making them well-suited for public sector challenges that require rapid response or policy shifts. Furthermore, agile encourages collaboration and engagement across organizational boundaries. It supports active participation not only from internal teams but also from external stakeholders, fostering a more inclusive and responsive change process.

Finally, agile change management emphasizes delivering value in small, incremental steps, rather than relying on large, one-time reforms. This reduces the risk of failure and helps maintain momentum by demonstrating progress early and often.

Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="268 1189 767 1335">✓ Increased responsiveness to shifting policy, social, and economic conditions (OECD, 2018)</li> <li data-bbox="268 1357 767 1462">✓ Enhanced stakeholder engagement through ongoing collaboration</li> <li data-bbox="268 1485 767 1590">✓ Improved efficiency via short feedback loops and quicker decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="823 1189 1323 1294">✗ Bureaucratic constraints that limit iteration and flexibility (Christensen et al., 2016)</li> <li data-bbox="823 1317 1323 1422">✗ Cultural resistance from employees accustomed to hierarchical systems</li> <li data-bbox="823 1444 1323 1550">✗ Difficulties scaling agile methods to large, complex systems</li> </ul>

**Figure 4** Benefits and challenges of agile change in public sector (Ribeiro & Domingues 2018).

Agile change management is not a quick fix or one-size-fits-all approach. But as public institutions continue to face complex challenges from digital transformation to climate adaptation agile offers a flexible and resilient model. With the right mindset, structure,

and stakeholder engagement, it has the potential to transform not only how governments manage change but how they serve society.

### **5.3 Stakeholder-centered change**

Public sector change doesn't happen in isolation. Unlike private firms, government institutions operate in complex, multi-stakeholder environments where the success or failure of change initiatives is deeply influenced by the involvement of a wide range of actors. These include not only internal stakeholders like employees and managers, but also external ones such as citizens, interest groups, unions, and policymakers (Bryson, Crosby & Bloomberg, 2014).

In fact, one of the most common reasons for failed change in the public sector is insufficient stakeholder engagement. Change efforts that are planned behind closed doors often encounter resistance once implementation begins. Employees may feel excluded, citizens may distrust the process, and unions may push back against reforms they weren't consulted on (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Change is not just a technical or administrative issue it is political, social, and deeply human. Recognizing this complexity is a key step toward more successful change implementation.

Public organizations serve broad and diverse populations. They must remain accountable and transparent, often balancing competing demands. Change initiatives that neglect to consider the perspectives of key groups risk triggering resistance that can stall or derail progress entirely (O'Flynn, 2007).

Stakeholder-centered change means more than simply informing people of upcoming changes. It involves meaningful engagement creating opportunities for dialogue, feedback, and collaboration throughout the entire change process. Whether it's a digital service reform or a policy shift, stakeholder engagement builds legitimacy, improves outcomes, and reduces resistance (Van der Voet, 2016).

Governments operate within multi-stakeholder ecosystems, where legitimacy is as important as efficiency. Citizens, public servants, unions, and political leaders all hold stakes in reform. Without buy-in from these groups, even well-planned change can become stuck in bureaucratic gridlock.

Modern public management increasingly emphasizes participatory methods such as co-creation, where change is designed with stakeholders rather than for them. Co-creation enhances ownership and increases the likelihood that changes will meet real needs on the ground. A well-known example is participatory budgeting, where local governments allow citizens to propose and vote on how parts of public budgets are spent. This bottom-up model increases civic engagement and builds trust between government and the public (Sintomer, Herzberg & Röcke, 2008, p. 167). Similarly, internal co-creation efforts like employee-driven innovation programs can empower public servants to shape the change they're expected to implement.

For instance, in Finland's public sector, the Innokylä platform allows healthcare professionals and service users to co-design welfare solutions together, resulting in more practical and user-centered innovations (Anttiroiko, 2015). These approaches represent a shift away from hierarchical, top-down planning and toward more interactive, democratic, and iterative models of governance.

While stakeholder involvement is essential, it's not without challenges. One of the biggest difficulties is managing conflicting interests. Public sectors change often involves trade-offs some groups stand to gain, while others may perceive losses. For example, unions may resist changes that affect employment terms, while citizen groups might oppose reforms that reduce public access to services.

To navigate these tensions, trust and transparency are key. Structured consultation processes, open forums, and digital engagement platforms can all serve as tools to build dialogue and reduce conflict (Roberts, 2004, p. 315).

Best practices for stakeholder-centered change include:

- Early engagement: Involve stakeholders from the beginning, not just at the implementation stage.
- Transparent communication: Clearly explain the goals, timelines, and trade-offs of the change.
- Feedback loops: Incorporate continuous feedback mechanisms and show how stakeholder input is being used.
- Empowerment: Give employees and citizens meaningful roles in shaping the change process.

Organizations that succeed in change often cultivate a participatory culture that values openness and shared responsibility. This not only improves implementation outcomes but also strengthens the democratic legitimacy of public administration.

## **5.4 Digital transformation and data-driven change**

Digital transformation is no longer a future objective, it is a present necessity in the public sector. From automating services to using real-time data in policymaking, technology plays a critical role in reshaping how governments operate. This chapter explores the role of digital transformation and data-driven decision-making in public sector change management. It highlights how technology, ranging from e-governance platforms to artificial intelligence can support more efficient, transparent, and citizen-

centered governance. At the same time, it examines the challenges that accompany digital change, including legacy systems, ethical concerns, and cybersecurity risks.

Adapting to digital transformation shift isn't always straightforward. Many public institutions face structural, cultural, and technological challenges that slow down their digital transition.

#### **5.4.1 Technology's role in public sector change**

Modern technologies, such as e-governance platforms, AI, and robotic process automation (RPA), have introduced new ways for public organizations to deliver services. These tools promise efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness but only if governments can use them effectively.

E-governance platforms, for example, simplify interactions between citizens and government by making processes like tax filings or permit applications accessible online (United Nations, 2022). Automation helps reduce delays and minimizes errors in routine tasks like form processing, while AI tools can analyze vast amounts of data to predict outcomes or flag irregularities. Yet, despite these advancements, many governments still struggle with old IT infrastructures and slow decision-making processes (Dunleavy et al., 2006). This gap between technological potential and practical implementation creates friction in digital reforms, particularly in large institutions with legacy systems.

Emerging technologies bring their own set of challenges and opportunities. Blockchain, for example, offers secure and tamper-proof data storage for sensitive records like land ownership or healthcare transactions. In theory, this enhances transparency and accountability but in practice, adoption has been slow due to legal uncertainties, limited expertise, and unclear value propositions in the public domain (Edelmann, Haug, & Mergel, 2023, p. 338).

Artificial intelligence also presents exciting possibilities for predictive governance and service personalization. However, concerns over algorithmic bias, lack of explainability, and cybersecurity risks have raised caution. Public institutions must navigate these issues carefully to balance innovation with privacy, fairness, and public trust (Margetts & Dorobantu, 2019).

#### **5.4.2 Big data and evidence-based decision making**

Data is now considered one of the most valuable resources for modern governance. Big data analytics allow public institutions to make faster, more informed, and targeted decisions. This shift marks a move from reactive policies to proactive, evidence-based policymaking.

Governments use real-time data to monitor traffic flows, forecast economic trends, and even respond to public health crises. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments relied on mobility data, hospital capacity dashboards, and predictive models to allocate resources and adjust policies on short notice (OECD, 2021).

Still, making use of big data isn't just about having the right tools. Public organizations need proper infrastructure, cross-sector cooperation, and digital competencies to turn raw data into useful insights. Without these, data may be underused or worse, misused resulting in mistrust or ineffective policies.

Estonia stands out globally for its forward-thinking approach to digital governance. Through its e-Estonia initiative, the country has successfully digitized almost all public services from voting to healthcare access by building a unified digital identity system and secure data exchange platform (e-Estonia, 2023).

### 5.4.3 Challenges in public sector digitalization

Despite promising case studies, digital transformation still faces significant obstacles in many public institutions. Some of the key barriers include:

- **Legacy Systems:** Outdated technologies make integration difficult and slow down new initiatives.
- **Bureaucratic Inertia:** Hierarchical structures and rigid procedures discourage experimentation and fast iteration.
- **Cybersecurity Risks:** The more services move online, the more vulnerable they become to attacks especially in underfunded IT environments.
- **Ethical Concerns:** From data surveillance to algorithmic discrimination, the ethical risks of digital governance can't be ignored.

To overcome these challenges, digital transformation must be approached not only as a technical upgrade but as a cultural shift. It requires collaboration across departments, upskilling of public sector employees, and inclusive policymaking processes.

The future of digital change in the public sector lies in creating adaptive, citizen-focused institutions that treat data and technology as core assets. But just implementing tech isn't enough governments need to pair it with agile governance structures, ethical safeguards, and strong leadership to make real progress. Digital transformation in the public sector is a continuous journey. Its success depends on the ability to balance innovation with trust, speed with accountability, and automation with human-centered design.

## **5.5 Adaptive governance and systems thinking**

In today's volatile and interconnected world, public sector organizations face increasingly complex challenges that cannot be solved through linear processes or rigid command-and-control models. Adaptive governance and systems thinking offer alternative approaches that emphasize flexibility, feedback, and interconnectivity. These models move beyond siloed decision-making and instead focus on how different parts of a system interact and evolve over time.

Public governance today is expected to respond to shifting political landscapes, social demands, and global crises from climate change to pandemics and digital disruption. Traditional bureaucratic systems, often designed for predictability and control, are not equipped to handle these dynamic, multifaceted problems (Gerrits & Verweij, 2015). Adaptive governance recognizes that uncertainty is not an exception, but the norm and that responsiveness, collaboration, and learning are crucial to successful public sector change.

### **5.5.1 What is adaptive governance?**

Adaptive governance refers to the capacity of institutions to respond flexibly to change while maintaining legitimacy and effectiveness. It focuses on iterative decision-making, where organizations experiment with policies, monitor results, and adjust course as needed (Folke et al., 2005). In contrast to traditional governance, which emphasizes top-down control, adaptive governance embraces feedback loops, shared authority, and decentralized problem-solving.

This model is particularly useful in uncertain policy environments, where the outcomes of interventions are difficult to predict. For example, managing climate resilience in cities or responding to emerging health threats requires constant monitoring, stakeholder

engagement, and the ability to shift strategies based on real-time insights (Duit & Galaz, 2008).

Key features of adaptive governance include:

- Polycentricity, multiple centers of decision-making authority
- Flexibility, ability to adjust rules and processes based on changing needs
- Stakeholder collaboration, active participation across sectors and levels of government
- Learning mechanisms, built-in processes for continuous evaluation and improvement

Systems thinking complements adaptive governance by offering tools to understand the complex, nonlinear dynamics within public organizations and society. Rather than looking at problems in isolation, systems thinking encourages policymakers to analyze the broader context how components influence one another and how feedback can create ripple effects (Meadows, 2008). For instance, a reform in healthcare policy might impact education, labor, and welfare systems. Without a systems-thinking approach, these interdependencies are often overlooked, resulting in fragmented reforms or unintended consequences. Systems thinking promotes a more holistic understanding of public problems, recognizing that cause and effect are rarely direct or immediate.

This approach has gained traction in areas like urban planning, sustainable development, and social innovation domains where the success of one policy hinges on the alignment of others. By mapping feedback loops, leverage points, and interconnections, decision-makers can better design change initiatives that account for real-world complexity.

### 5.5.2 Challenges in implementation

While adaptive governance and systems thinking are promising, they are not without difficulties. Many public institutions are still structured around hierarchy and compliance, making it difficult to adopt iterative processes or empower decentralized teams (Christensen et al., 2016). In addition, systems thinking requires new skills from interdisciplinary analysis to facilitation of cross-sector dialogue which are not always present in traditional bureaucracies. There is also the risk of overcomplication. Systems models can become overly complex or abstract, limiting their practical application. Balancing analytical depth with usability remains a core challenge for public managers embracing these approaches.

Despite these challenges, the potential of adaptive governance and systems thinking lies in their capacity to future-proof public institutions. As public issues become more interdependent and fast-moving, these approaches offer a way to keep governance relevant and resilient. Building adaptive capacity through continuous learning, data integration, stakeholder collaboration, and flexible regulatory frameworks can help governments become more proactive rather than reactive. Examples such as New Zealand's Living Standards Framework or Finland's work on foresight and anticipatory governance illustrate how systems thinking can be embedded into national policy frameworks (OECD, 2020). These cases show that with political support and institutional innovation, adaptive models can lead to better public outcomes.

## **6 Applying change management in practice**

While theories and models of change management offer valuable frameworks, it is equally important to understand how these strategies function in real-world settings. This chapter explores the practical application of change management approaches within the public sector by examining real-life examples and case studies. Through these cases, the chapter highlights how governments have implemented change successfully, often adapting strategies to meet the unique challenges of public institutions. By focusing on concrete examples, the aim is to bridge the gap between theory and practice, illustrating how agile, adaptive, and collaborative methods are being used to transform public services and improve outcomes for citizens.

### **6.1 Introduction to real-world applications of change management**

Agile change management is about handling change in a flexible, fast, and people-focused way. Unlike traditional approaches, which often follow strict bureaucratic plans from start to finish, agile methods allow organizations to adapt as they go. This is especially useful in fast-changing environments where needs and priorities can shift quickly.

In practice, agile change management means working in short cycles, getting regular feedback, and involving employees throughout the process. It supports continuous learning and helps teams respond to challenges as they arise, rather than waiting until the end of a project to adjust.

#### **6.1.1 Case study 1: agile change management in the public sector**

Originating from software development, agile principles have increasingly been applied in public administration to manage change dynamically (Rigby, Sutherland, & Takeuchi,

2016). One of the most notable examples is the UK Government Digital Service (GDS), which has played a pivotal role in transforming how digital services are delivered within the UK government.

Established in 2011, GDS was created to lead the digital transformation of government services using agile principles such as iterative development, continuous user feedback, and cross-functional collaboration (UK Government Digital Service, n.d.). By shifting away from strict, traditional project management structures, GDS implemented a more adaptive and user-focused approach to policy and service delivery. This allowed departments to experiment, test, and refine digital products quickly responding to user needs in real time rather than waiting for large-scale, top-down changes to be fully completed (Mason, 2017).

Through this agile transformation, GDS significantly reduced inefficiencies and costs by replacing outdated systems with streamlined digital services. At the same time, citizen satisfaction improved as users encountered simpler, more accessible interfaces across key public platforms like GOV.UK (Mason, 2017). However, the success of agile adoption in GDS also underscored the importance of organizational change. Cultural and structural shifts, such as flattening hierarchies, enabling empowered teams, and fostering openness to experimentation were critical in allowing agile methods to take root (Lindquist et al., 2013).

The GDS case demonstrates the potential of agile change management to modernize public services but also highlights that agility cannot be achieved through methodology alone. Structural reform, leadership commitment, and a cultural shift toward collaboration and learning are all essential to sustaining long-term change in the public sector.

### 6.1.2 Case study 2: digital transformation in public administration

Estonia's journey toward digital transformation is widely regarded as one of the most successful examples of e-governance in the world. Following its independence in the early 1990s, Estonia chose to rebuild its public sector infrastructure with a digital-first mindset, laying the groundwork for what would become a globally recognized model of digital governance (Kalvet, 2012).

Driven by a vision of lean, transparent, and accessible government, Estonia developed key digital infrastructure including the X-Road data exchange layer, a secure and decentralized system that allows government agencies and private entities to securely exchange information in real-time (Vassil, 2015). This platform became the foundation for digital identity systems, paperless administration, and fully online public services.

Central to Estonia's model is the use of digital ID cards, which provide secure access to over 99% of government services, such as e-voting, tax filing, business registration, and healthcare records. This digital identity system not only increased efficiency and reduced costs but also allowed citizens to interact with the state from anywhere, any time (e-Estonia, 2023). Additionally, Estonia's e-Residency program, launched in 2014, enables non-citizens to open and manage EU-based businesses online, demonstrating the scalability and international reach of its digital governance model.

The success of Estonia's digital transformation is also linked to its emphasis on citizen trust, cybersecurity, and transparent service delivery. For example, citizens can monitor who accesses their personal data through secure log systems—building a culture of accountability and trust in public services (Tikk, Kaska, & Vihul, 2010).

However, the Estonian model also faced challenges, particularly in the areas of digital inclusion and cybersecurity. A major cyberattack in 2007, which disrupted multiple government and private sector services, became a turning point that led to deeper investment in cyber defense infrastructure and resilience strategies (Tikk et al., 2010). Similarly,

ensuring equal digital access and skills across all population groups remains a key issue, especially in rural areas.

Estonia's experience illustrates how long-term vision, agile adaptation, and systemic alignment can enable successful public sector change. Rather than approaching digital transformation as a one-time upgrade, Estonia embedded change into its core governance logic treating technology, data, and citizen needs as interconnected drivers of reform. The case highlights the importance of cross-sector collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and a willingness to experiment in rethinking the role of government in the digital age.

## **6.2 Lessons learned from public sector change management**

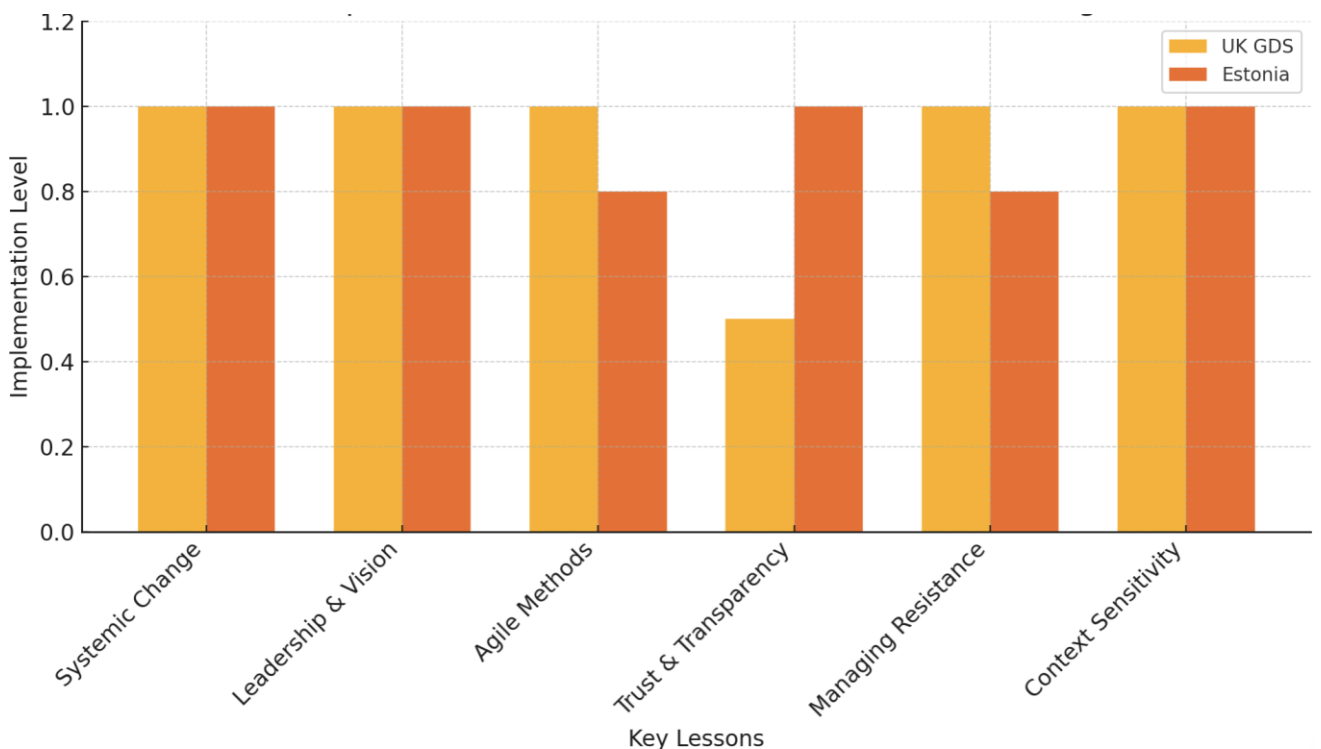
The case studies above show different ways public sector organizations manage change, from agile project delivery in the UK's Government Digital Service (GDS) to large-scale digital transformation in Estonia. While each example was shaped by its own institutional, political, and cultural context, a few key lessons stand out that can apply broadly across government settings.

The case studies of the UK's Government Digital Service (GDS) and Estonia's digital transformation reveal several important lessons for managing change in the public sector. First, successful transformation must be systemic, not just technological. Change should be embedded across the organization including its culture, leadership, workflows, and service delivery not treated as a simple technical upgrade (Kalvet, 2012; Lindquist et al., 2013). Leadership and vision play a critical role in driving reform. Both cases benefited from strong political and administrative backing, with long-term investments, clear governance structures, and a willingness to experiment (Vassil, 2015; Mason, 2017).

To remain responsive in complex and fast-changing environments, agile and iterative approaches proved more effective than rigid, top-down methods. These promote flexibility,

co-creation with users, and rapid feedback loops, especially relevant in the face of digital disruption, climate change, and public health challenges (Rigby et al., 2016; Denning, 2018). Trust and transparency emerged as foundational pillars, especially when handling sensitive data or digital identity systems. Estonia’s citizen-facing data access model illustrates how openness builds public confidence and legitimacy (Tikk et al., 2010).

At the same time, resistance to change is both natural and manageable. Rather than viewing resistance as obstruction, both cases show the value of inclusive communication, clear incentives, and support for capacity-building (Christensen et al., 2016; Ford & Ford, 2009). Finally, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Context matters—what works in Estonia may not apply elsewhere. Effective change strategies must be adapted to fit local governance systems, institutional cultures, and stakeholder dynamics (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).



**Figure 5** Comparison of lessons learned in public sector change

The lessons from the UK's agile transition and Estonia's digital transformation reveal both shared principles and unique pathways to change. While the UK Government Digital Service (GDS) emphasized adaptive methodologies and quick iteration, Estonia took a more systemic and infrastructure-driven route. To highlight these differences and similarities, Figure 8. presents a comparative overview of the key lessons drawn from both case studies across multiple dimensions, including leadership, implementation strategy, technology use, and organizational culture.

## 7 Conclusion and discussion

This final chapter brings together the key findings of the thesis and reflects on what they mean for change management in the public sector. Through a narrative, integrative literature review, the study has explored both traditional and modern approaches to change, with a focus on how public organizations manage complex transformations. The chapter begins by revisiting the main research questions and showing how the analysis has responded to them. It then moves on to discuss the broader implications of the findings, both in theory and practice while offering practical suggestions for public sector leaders. Finally, the chapter addresses the limitations of the research and presents ideas for future studies in this field.

### 7.1 Key findings

This thesis examined how change is implemented in public organizations by comparing traditional and modern change management approaches. The research questions were:

1. How has change management been studied over the past two decades?
2. What type of change management strategies would be most effective in handling contemporary challenges in public organizations?

Based on the literature review and thematic analysis, several key findings emerged:

**1. Complex changes share common challenges.** Difficult-to-implement changes in public administration are often marked by high complexity, multiple stakeholders, unclear goals, and resistance rooted in organizational culture and structure. These changes typically involve technological transformation, restructuring, or shifting governance models.

**2. Implementation challenges are shaped by both the nature of the change and the organization itself.** While some barriers are tied to the specific change (e.g., scope,

speed, or technical difficulty), many challenges stem from public sector features such as bureaucratic rigidity, political influence, and lack of flexibility. This suggests that successful implementation is not just about managing the change itself but also adapting the organizational environment around it.

**3. Traditional change models offer structure but lack flexibility.** Models like Kotter's eight-step or Lewin's three-step provide helpful guidance in structured settings but struggle to accommodate rapid, nonlinear changes typical in the public sector today. These models often fail to address continuous learning, iterative development, or stakeholder co-creation.

**4. Modern approaches such as agile change management, digital transformation, and stakeholder involvement offer valuable tools.** Agile methods and adaptive governance help public organizations respond more quickly and inclusively to change. Case examples, such as the UK's Government Digital Service and Estonia's e-Governance model, show that agile strategies can work well when combined with cultural and structural shifts.

**5. Successful change in the public sector requires a shift in mindset.** Beyond following a specific model, public organizations must embrace a mindset of collaboration, learning, and adaptability. Change should be seen as ongoing, not a one-time event, and strategies should reflect that dynamic nature.

Writing this thesis has deepened my understanding of the complexity of public sector change and the evolving nature of governance in today's world. While this study is based on existing literature, the insights gathered offer not only a theoretical overview but also practical value for public administration. The need for continuous learning, openness to innovation, and inclusive change strategies has become increasingly clear. Hopefully, this work contributes to ongoing conversations about how public institutions can remain responsive, resilient, and trusted by the people they serve.

## **7.2 Implications for public administration**

The literature suggests that more iterative and inclusive models are increasingly necessary to ensure organizational resilience in an era of continuous change. The findings of this thesis suggest that public administration must evolve its approach to managing change. While traditional change management models continue to offer structure and clarity, they are often too inflexible to meet the needs of modern public organizations operating in fast-changing and complex environments. Public institutions can benefit from adopting more agile, collaborative, and iterative approaches to change. This includes involving stakeholders early, using short feedback loops, and building cross-functional teams that can respond quickly to challenges. For example, the successful application of agile methods in the UK's Government Digital Service demonstrates that public sector organizations can modernize service delivery by embracing flexibility and innovation.

The results also emphasize the importance of organizational culture. Change is not only a technical process but also a social one, requiring strong leadership, open communication, and a willingness to adapt. Public managers must foster environments that support continuous learning and experimentation, especially in the context of digital transformation.

Furthermore, policy-level implications arise from this study. Governments must support adaptive governance models that allow for decentralized decision-making, stakeholder participation, and real-time responsiveness. These strategies can enhance trust in public institutions, improve implementation outcomes, and ensure that public services remain relevant and effective in the face of ongoing societal changes.

### 7.3 Limitations and future research directions

Based on the findings of this thesis, there are several areas where future research could expand the understanding of change management in the public sector.

Firstly, since this study was based on literature, further empirical research would be valuable to test how the theories and approaches identified here work in real-life situations. Case studies, interviews, or surveys could offer more detailed insights into how agile practices, stakeholder involvement, or digital change are implemented in different government organizations.

Secondly, comparative studies between countries, regions, or even different levels of government could help explain how context affects the success of change initiatives. While this thesis focused mainly on research from democratic Western countries, there is room to explore how change happens in other administrative cultures or political systems.

Thirdly, the long-term impact of digital transformation in the public sector deserves more attention. Technology is changing fast, and while many governments are experimenting with digital services, it's still unclear what this means for accountability, citizen trust, or administrative capacity over time. Future work could investigate how agile and iterative approaches are being adapted in different policy domains, especially in response to emerging challenges like climate change, AI adoption, and cybersecurity. Additionally, examining the long-term impacts of digital transformation on employee engagement, service delivery outcomes, and citizen trust would offer valuable insights.

Finally, I think it's important that future research continues to explore the more human aspects of change, such as how leadership, communication, and employee engagement influence outcomes. These soft elements often make or break change efforts, yet they are sometimes underrepresented in public administration literature. Overall, the field

would benefit from a closer link between theory and practice, where research findings are applied to real-world problems and then reflected back into academic knowledge.

As a literature-based study, this research has certain methodological limitations, especially in comparison to empirical research, this thesis does not include primary data collection such as interviews or surveys, meaning the findings are dependent on secondary sources and scholarly debates.

This study is subject to certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it relies on published research, which inherently limits the scope of available findings and may introduce biases based on what has been documented and made accessible. Second, while the review includes sources in both English and Finnish offering a broader linguistic perspective it excludes literature in other languages, potentially omitting valuable insights from non-English or non-Finnish contexts. Third, although the study incorporates a range of geographical and institutional viewpoints, the findings may not be fully generalizable across all governance settings, especially those with significantly different administrative traditions or capacities. Finally, most of the literature reviewed is relatively recent mainly from the 2000s onward ensuring that the analysis remains relevant to contemporary public sector challenges. This focus on up-to-date research is complemented by the inclusion of classic change management theories, providing both a modern and foundational perspective.

Future research could build on this study in several ways. First, empirical validation through case studies, interviews, or policy evaluations would help test the findings in real-world public sector settings. Second, cross-country comparative studies could offer valuable insights into how different governmental structures approach change, potentially revealing globally transferable best practices. Third, longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of change management strategies would contribute to understanding their sustainability and practical impact over time. By acknowledging these

opportunities for further research, this study maintains transparency while also identifying clear avenues for expanding knowledge on change management in the public sector.

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