

The perceptions of policymakers on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Public Administration.

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Abstract

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes more deeply integrated into public administration, its influence on policymaking is drawing growing interest. In Malta, AI has been largely framed as a driver of economic progress, however, there is limited scholarly attention on how policymakers view its application in the policymaking process. This dissertation seeks to fill that gap by examining the perceptions of Maltese policymakers regarding the use of AI within public administration, with particular emphasis on its role in policymaking.

This study adopts a qualitative approach, combining document analysis with semi-structured interviews (N=9) to explore real lived experiences, perceptions, and institutional perspectives. Thematic analysis was employed to draw out key themes in the data, while triangulation was used to enhance the reliability, validity, and richness of the findings. The research is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and supported by wider literature on digital governance and ethical AI.

The findings suggest that while policymakers recognise the potential of AI to enhance efficiency and productivity, they remain cautious about issues related to transparency, accountability, excessive dependency on technology, and the diminishing role of human judgement. These results point to the need for AI governance strategies that are not only technical but also ethical and context aware.

By shedding light on the unique challenges and opportunities of AI use in a small-state context, this study offers insight into the criteria necessary for responsible AI integration in public governance. As for future research, there is scope to examine the development of GPT-based models specifically designed locally and for public administration, along with the potential impact of Agentic AI in policymaking. In parallel, governance

frameworks should evolve to ensure ethical integrity, contextual sensitivity, and institutional readiness in the adoption of such technologies.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, policymaking, public administration, qualitative research, perceptions

Dedication

To those who reminded me who I am—and to myself, for becoming her.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Term
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIT	Artificial Intelligent Technologies
EU	European Union
G7	Group of Seven
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GenAI	Generative AI
LLM	Large Language Model
MDIA	Malta Digital Innovation Authority
ML	Machine Learning
NLP	Natural Language Processing
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEOU	Perceived Ease of Use
PU	Perceived Usefulness
RQ	Research Question
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background on the Topic

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become synonymous with advanced technological developments and the merging of machine learning (ML) and human intelligence. The Oxford Dictionary (2024) defines AI as “the capacity of computers or other machines to exhibit or simulate intelligent behaviour.” However, this definition does not fully capture the complexity and scope of modern AI systems. The European Commission (2018) offers a more comprehensive explanation, by describing them as technologies which exhibit intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment, capable of taking autonomous actions to achieve specific goals.

Today, AI is present across all sectors, including marketing, healthcare, and, increasingly, public administration. Governments are using AI to improve service delivery, policymaking, and citizen engagement. According to the OECD (2019), AI can enhance decision-making and efficiency in public services, although realising its potential requires careful planning and risk mitigation. Challenges such as data bias, cybersecurity, and a lack of data privacy (Jakub 2019).

To mitigate such risks, the European Union introduced the AI Act (European Parliament 2023), the first comprehensive legal framework for AI regulation. This legislation focuses more on risk and, as such, categorises AI systems according to risk level. It also condemns harmful applications and enforces transparency measures for Generative AI (GenAI) tools such as ChatGPT. The Act forms part of the EU’s broader digital strategy and is expected to shape how member states, including Malta, govern AI. However, although the AI Act provides a regulatory framework for the development of AI use, it does not directly address

how public administration should govern with AI or integrate it into the policymaking process.

1.2 Research Problem

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) as a new form of technology has prompted several discussions around its ethical use, boundaries, and adoption. AI governance is also making its way to the top of the discourse agenda in several areas of public policy. Thus, this study's research problem revolves around gathering a deeper knowledge of policymakers' perceptions about adopting the use of artificial intelligence in their area to ultimately find an intricate balance between the use of AI and traditional methods of policymaking. The use of AI does come with several benefits, however, there are barriers which need to be explored further.

1.3 Research Aims

1. To examine how policymakers in Malta's public administration perceive opportunities and challenges of using AI for policymaking.
2. To identify the organisational and ethical factors that influence policymakers' attitudes toward AI adoption in public administration.
3. To examine policymakers' views on how cultural context influences the use of AI in policymaking within Maltese public administration.

This research aims to understand the perspectives of policymakers on the integration of AI, more specifically GenAI within public administration. This research seeks to explore policymakers' attitudes, beliefs, and concerns regarding AI adoption while also identifying the external factors impacting their views. This study evaluates the perceived benefits and

challenges associated with AI implementation, considering its potential to enhance governance effectiveness while addressing ethical, transparency, and accountability concerns. Ultimately, this research aims to inform policymakers and AI developers about context sensitive deployments, contributing to improved overall governance.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions have been chosen specifically to address the research aims.

- a) What are the (1a) perceived benefits and (1b) perceived challenges associated with the implementation of AI in policymaking within public administration?
- b) What factors influence policymakers' attitudes towards the adoption of AI in public administration, specifically for policymaking?
- c) What are policymakers' views on the intersection between AI usage in policymaking and cultural context?

The first question is critical to help the reader understand the dual narrative around AI adoption. Exploring both sides of this discourse allows the study to provide a balanced perspective. Considering both the benefits and the constraints of AI ensures that policies are realistic, ethical, and aligned with public values (Misuraca et al. 2020).

The second question focuses on the individual, organisational, and contextual influences that shape attitudes toward AI. Understanding these factors is essential to inform potential future strategies for AI implementation that reflect every day real-world realities of policy environments in Malta

Finally, AI systems are not developed or deployed in a vacuum. This question highlights how local values, norms, and governance styles influence how AI is perceived and potentially applied in a specific small state like Malta; with its eccentricities, cultural considerations may significantly shape how AI is received. This research also explores the perceptions of policymakers on whether they believe AI is able to read cultural nuances and their stance on the matter. This question allows the study to explore how AI can be adapted to align with the local culture, thereby supporting context-sensitive outcomes to be deployed for policymaking.

1.5 Significance and Rationale

AI offers plenty of potential benefits such as increasing efficiency and productivity by analysing large quantities of data, yet it also raises concerns about bias, transparency, accountability, and the erosion of human judgement. As noted by Criado and de Zarate-Alcarazo (2022), policymakers significantly impact how AI is implemented in public administration, thus highlighting the value of a perception-based approach upon taking into consideration the benefits and concerns and an array of external factors.

A qualitative methodology was adopted to gain in-depth insights, using semi-structured interviews and documents analysis of strategies and policy documents which fall within the scope. As Aspers and Corte (2019) note, qualitative research enables deep understanding through interaction with participants, while triangulation (Patton 1999) enhances credibility by comparing multiple data sources. This study contributes to the growing debate and literature on AI in public administration by highlighting significant factors shaping AI adoption in Malta.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured to explore the perceptions of policymakers regarding the use of AI in public administration. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, outlining the research aims, questions, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents the literature and theoretical frameworks, particularly the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, detailing the qualitative approach adopted, namely semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results of the analysis. It first examines four key policy documents to establish the institutional context surrounding AI in public administration. This is followed by a thematic analysis of the interview data which highlights the perceptions, concerns, and expectations of policymakers. Both sources are compared through triangulation and the findings are applied to the Technology Acceptance Model. Finally, chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by answering the research questions and discussing the limitations and future policy directions. This ensures a clear and integrated understanding of how AI is perceived by policymakers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

AI is rapidly reshaping society and transforming industries, with its adoption in public administration garnering increasing attention from policymakers, scholars, researchers and practitioners alike. Governments worldwide are exploring the introduction of AI to enhance both decision-making and policymaking, streamlining public services and attempting to address complex societal challenges and wicked problems. This growing interest stems from AI's potential to increase efficiency, automate routine processes, and improve responsiveness in service delivery. However, the introduction of AI is shrouded in doubts and ethical implications as well as policymakers' readiness to leverage AI effectively in public administration. Among the key challenges are concerns over transparency, accountability and data protection. Moreover, limited technical capacity and unclear regulatory frameworks pose as barriers to successful implementation. The scope of this review is to gather published literature related to AI and its application in public administration.

The objective of this literature review is to synthesise existing research, identify gaps, and evaluate key debates in the field. By doing so, it aims to lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of how AI, more specifically generative AI, can be used for policy making and unveil factors that influence policymakers' engagement with AI. Fred Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (1989) , will be used as the ground foundation for this dissertation and will be employed to structure and analyse the findings. Through a structured approach, this review aims to contextualise the topic of AI's transformative role in public administration and pave the way towards answering the research questions. Although AI's institutional adoption has been widely discussed, relatively few studies have examined the subjective perceptions of policymakers themselves. Most literature focuses on technical or

operational aspects, with limited attention to how policymakers interpret or assess the value, risks, and usability of AI in the policy process. The gap further reinforces the need to investigate AI adoption not only as a technological or organisational phenomenon but also as a perceptual one.

Given the relative novelty of generative AI, and GPTs in particular, there is a limited body of academic literature focusing specifically on their adoption within public administration. As a result, this review adopts a broader approach by first looking into AI in general and its introduction into public administration before referring to generative models where relevant.

2.2 Defining Artificial Intelligence

In 1956, AI was simply defined as “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines” (Ng, Leung et al. 2021 p. 504). However, scholars now define AI as a constellation of emerging technologies. Such technologies are able to comprehend, act, sense, and learn intelligently and autonomously (Pautz 2023). Throughout this period, multiple definitions have been put forward in an attempt to define the concept of AI. According to the European Commission (2018 p. 1), AI is defined as “systems that display intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions with some degree of autonomy- to achieve specific goals.” The definition of AI was also broadened to an extent whereby AI was described as being able to perform cognitive tasks, particularly learning and problem-solving (Ng, Leung et al. 2021). However, according to Paul, Carmel et al. (2024), policymakers, regulators, and more positivist scholars tend to define AI primarily in terms of its technological characteristics and tend to shy away from using human-like terms such as

learning, adaptation, and intelligence. However, these human-like characteristics seem to be emerging fully with the introduction of generative pre-trained transformers (GPT). Artificial intelligence is a broad category and includes a vast range of different technologies. Thus, to narrow down the scope, this dissertation will mainly focus on the use of GPTs and similar technologies. While this dissertation discusses AI in a broad sense, particular attention is given to generative AI, reflecting its growing relevance in public administration and policymaking contexts.

2.3 Defining Generative Pre-Trained Transformers

GPTs are a form of advanced intelligent technologies (AITs), particularly in natural language processing (NLP) and deep learning. Prior to GPTs, AI models used structured data and algorithms, however, newer models are able to process text and images. GPT models are able to predict sequences and mimic human-like responses and have revolutionised language models. Chat GPT is an example of such technologies. This specific tool was built by OpenAI and combines unsupervised pre-training with supervised fine-tuning to be able to generate text answers to questions. Chat GPT has shown potential when asked to produce text or code, however, it has also raised a lot of concerns in academia over AI-generated content and its impact on traditional human roles (Dwivedi & Kshetri et al. 2023).

As a combination of both AI and NLP, the creation of a subcategory of generative AI, the versatile language models, has become revolutionary across all industries. GenAI is able to create new data using previous patterns and data. Versatile language models are able to create text, images, and music. The first model of Chat GPT was created by OpenAI in 2018, although it had been in the works for 3 years. The aim was to create a model that could output

coherent text that could easily be understood by humans. The model is able to learn and recognise syntax, grammar, and semantics. Since 2018, different versions of the models have existed as OpenAI was innovative and also produced specific model designs for specific industries, such as BioGPT designed to produce biomedical text (Ray 2023). ChatGPT differs from traditional chatbots. Traditional chatbots were first created in 1966. The commonly used models are keyword recognition chatbots and menu/button-driven chatbots¹. The most advanced chatbots are the contextual chatbots as they are able to interpret users' sentiments (Benown 2022).

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2024), chatbots are “a computer program that can hold a conversation with a person, usually over the internet.” However, not all chatbots are artificially intelligent. They cannot handle unexpected queries and tend to resort back to the instructed response. On the other hand, ChatGPT and similar chatbots use ML, deep learning, and large amounts of data to generate natural responses within the context, allowing for further engagement. Finally, traditional chatbots need to be manually set up and require regular maintenance whereas ChatGPT and similar chatbots are pre-trained and can be easily fine-tuned, making them more versatile (Panda, Kaur 2023).

2.4 The Role of AI in Public Administration

West (2004) defined e-government as a means of delivering government information and services online, through the internet or other digital means. At the time, this form of government was revolutionary. However, governments are now transitioning from e-

¹ Keyword recognition chatbots use AI to identify specific words in user input and generate tailored responses, whereas menu/button-driven chatbots rely on predefined options selected by users, making them less capable of handling complex queries (Benown 2022).

government to AI-driven governance. AI is reshaping public service delivery, workforce function, and citizen engagement. According to Madan and Ashok (2023), AI implementation in the governmental sphere impacts culture, processes, and the workforce. AI is increasingly being introduced and applied in public administration, primarily for process automation, predictive analytics, and resource management. Governments have also employed AI in areas such as energy consumption forecasting, agricultural management, healthcare, and social welfare (Pautz 2023). According to Kuziemski and Misuraca (2020), AI can even be used for decision-making purposes such as issuing immigration permits and for profiling benefit recipients.

According to Putri and Mayasari (2024), AI can be applied and leveraged at each stage of the policymaking process. In agenda settings, AI helps identify key societal issues through real-time data collection, problem analysis, and predictive modelling. During policy formulation, AI assists in analysing research, simulating policy outcomes, and identifying optimal solutions. In decision-making, AI supports policymakers by evaluating alternatives, conducting stakeholder analysis, and assessing potential risks. Policy implementation benefits from AI-driven monitoring systems and resource allocation tools. Finally, in policy evaluation, AI is able to analyse policy effectiveness and predicts long-term impacts, allowing for necessary adjustments. When applied accordingly, AI plays a crucial role by processing vast amounts of information, summarising key insights, and enabling simulations to test policy impacts. GenAI tools such as ChatGPT, can assist policymakers in drafting policy documents, synthesising research, and evaluating stakeholder feedback. AI's ability to recognise patterns and perform advanced calculations enables governments to optimise policy choices and anticipate unintended consequences (Putri & Mayasari 2024)

However, government employees' perceptions and willingness to adopt AI also play a crucial role in its implementation, as was noted in Ahn and Chen's (2022) study which examined AI adoption among U.S. government employees. The study revealed that employees with prior exposure to AI were more likely to support its use, particularly when they perceived AI as a tool to enhance efficiency rather than a threat to their employment. This demonstrates the importance of AI literacy programmes in public institutions to foster a culture of innovation and adaptation (Ahn, Chen 2022 p. 3).

Similar to all other forms of disruptive technology², AI presents both opportunities and challenges in governance. While its ability to process vast amounts of data, enhance decision-making, and improve service delivery is undeniable, concerns regarding data quality and algorithmic biases must be carefully considered (Pautz 2023). Striking a balance between its advantages and potential risks is essential to ensure ethical, transparent, and effective governance. With these complexities in mind, the next section will explore both the benefits AI brings to governance as well as the challenges and risks that must be addressed.

2.5 The Benefits of Using AI in Public Administration

Chen, Salem, et al. (2021, p. 9) identified several benefits of using AI for public governance and categorised them as follows “1) efficiency and performance benefits, 2) risk identification and monitoring benefits, 3) economic benefits, 4) data and information processing benefits, 5) service benefits, 6) benefits for society at large, 7) decision-making

² Disruptive technology refers to an innovative product that significantly alters the markets. Such technologies can completely change our perspective on reality and how we view and process information. These types of technologies have the potential to reshape social interactions and garner new opportunities for data collection and information processing (Malin et al., 2017).

benefits, 8) engagement and interaction benefits, and 9) sustainability benefits.” AI technologies are able to enhance efficiency in public administration by being able to automate mundane tasks, optimising resource allocation, and providing aid and support during the decision-making process. Officials can focus on more creative and more human-centric tasks (Consilium 2024). For example, GenAI tools provide round-the-clock assistance. They are also able to provide predictive analytics which helps governments anticipate needs and allocate resources efficiently and effectively to ensure a smooth process (Kulal, Rahiman et al. 2024).

As justification for risk identification (second point listed in previous paragraph), AI is able to mitigate risks in governance by enhancing traditional methods across industries through advanced monitoring, predictive tools, and automation. For example, it is able to ensure adequate levels of industrial safety by integrating risk assessment tools, predictive maintenance, and automation to enhance human-machine interactions. As a specific example, AI-powered hazard detection in energy production can recognise safety hazards progressively (Chen, Salem et al. 2021, Yaseen 2024). In the context of public administration, such application can be applied to areas such like emergency response and infrastructure management.

AI is also a driving force in productivity and economic growth as it not only improves efficiency but it is also creates new markets, products, new industries, and job opportunities. By creating the proper policies, governments from competing countries can enhance their global competitiveness by adopting a unified strategy that utilises AI for economic growth (Szczepański 2019). For public administration, this means that effective AI strategies can attract investments and improve the labour market. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (2017 p.7), “The greatest economic gains from AI will be in China (26% boost to GDP in

2030) and North America (14.5% boost), equivalent to a total of \$10.7 trillion and accounting for almost 70% of the global economic impact.”

AI also enhances data processing by being able to analyse large datasets in real-time without the need for human intervention. This is relevant to institutions which handle and process vast amounts of data. By efficiently leveraging AI capabilities, policymakers can improve the quality of public services while optimising service time and productivity. (Chen, Salem et al. 2021).

According to Dignum (2018 p.1) “Responsible Artificial Intelligence is about human responsibility for the development of intelligent systems along fundamental human principles and values, to ensure human flourishing and well-being in a sustainable world.” This reinforces the need for public administrations to embed ethical considerations and human-centred values into all stages of AI adoption and deployment.

When applied properly, AI can help humanity flourish and can benefit society as a whole. AI can transform the role of government and enable it to serve the population and improve the overall quality of life. In decision-making, ML supports government officials by identifying actionable insights and enabling more accurate decisions. For example, GPT tools can automate routine decision-making processes in terms of engagement and interaction. These applications can enhance citizen trust and satisfaction by improving the quality and responsiveness of governance and public services. AI can also contribute to sustainability efforts in the public sector by optimising natural resource management and advancing environmental initiatives. By addressing these diverse areas, AI demonstrates its potential to drive innovation and progress in public governance (Chen & Salem et al. 2021).

2.6 The Challenges of Using AI in Public Administration

Upon further review, three common concerns regarding AI adoption in government, specifically the use of AI for policy making, are all linked to efficiency, transparency, and decision making. Thus far, AI uptake in the public sector has revealed several challenges. The challenges concern procurement processes, difficulties in data management, and a lack of regulatory clarity. Bias in AI decision making is also a concern (European Commission , 2024)

Similarly, Chen, Salem et al. (2021) categorised the challenges of using AI in public governance. Firstly, AI is heavily dependent on the data it is given. Thus, a lack of data could lead to skewed results or biased algorithmic outcomes. Managing data could become difficult without proper data governance practices (Janssen, Brous et al. 2020). Organisational structures, career pathways, and competency development also need to be reimagined to mitigate AI's impact (Ernst & Young 2024). Organisational resistance, lack of proper strategies, lack of AI governance, and limited resources are areas of concern and can be challenging when using AI (Chen & Salem et al. 2021).

Historically, public administration has lagged behind in the adoption of new technologies in an attempt to not disrupt daily operations; the rigidity of bureaucratic operations often clashes with the rapid pace at which technology evolves. This notion can be seen specifically with AI integration (Presuel, Martinez 2023). Interpretation of data may also become challenging for policymakers as the results may be too complex to comprehend.

In the case of deep learning, information overload³ may also be of concern to the policymaker. AI and AI algorithms may also mislead policymakers into making the wrong decisions (Alexopoulos, Lachana et al. 2019). AI can also be used to cover behaviour and processes and limit transparency as it is not always clear who made the decision or what prompted the AI to come to that decision, leaving space for unequal protection (Bullock, 2019). Legal regulation and compliance issues also emerge when adopting AI as AI-driven decisions in public administration often lack legal justification and, in particularly high-stakes scenarios, this can be critical. Although AI regulation is evolving around the world, especially with the deployment of the AI Act in the EU, enforcement remains a major challenge (Sattar Butt, 2024). The use of AI could also lead to workforce displacement. Jobs in the policymaking sphere as well as the policymaker can be displaced or even replaced. According to Toll et al. (2019), although new job opportunities may arise, there will also be a loss of employment within public administration. The dehumanisation of daily activities is also concerning. AI adoption in the public sector is largely efficiency-driven; however, excessive automation could lead to the erosion of public values while also diminishing public trust. Understanding the interconnection between public value and AI is critical to leveraging the potential of AI in public administration (Chen, Salem et al. 2021). AI also takes its toll on the environment and raises economic challenges for administrations who want to invest in AI potential. Data storing and data mining require copious amounts of electricity and AI infrastructure is costly (United Nations 2024). A growing dependence on AI also raises

³ Information overload has become a major challenge in the digital age. This occurs when one is presented with copious amounts of information from various sources, affecting decision-making, productivity, and overall wellbeing (Shahrzadi, Mansouri et al. 2024).

concerns about over-reliance on technology as this could lead to unintended consequences, especially in complex situations where human intuition and context are crucial.

2.6.1 Bias and Heuristics

While reviewing the published literature, two common concerns, which have been persistent and present in almost all published work, were noted. They concern ethical behaviour, bias, and AI within public administration. The most common concerns, according to Wirtz, Weyerer et al. (2022), focused on the consequences resulting from AI-based decision-making and the difference in judgement between machines and humans which would lead to moral and ethical dilemmas among policymakers. Such dilemmas are particularly critical in public administration as decisions often effect the lives of citizens.

AI bias could also lead to discrimination, and skewed results would allow for inequality and unfairness amongst the public. A major issue is discrimination as AI systems rely on historical data which can be skewed with biases and inequalities, leading to unfair outcomes (European Parliament 2021). In fact, Cetin Persuel and Martinez Sierra (2023) warn against AI-driven administrative automation due to potential bias issues.

Privacy concerns also arise especially when handling sensitive data in fields where personal data is processed, such as healthcare thus ensuring privacy and data protection becomes critical responsibility for the public administration. Privacy and legal concerns also arise with regards to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance, further complicating matters regarding AI applications and the use of sensitive data (Alexopoulos, Lachana et al. 2019). Thus, a lack of regulatory presence might dishearten users.

Many of these ethical challenges arise when the human element is removed in essential decisions (Kuziemski, Misuraca 2020). In the public sector, this detachment can weaken

accountability, especially in policy areas which require human judgment and discretion. Yar, Hamdan et al. (2024) also refer to challenges that may come about once AI and policy are integrated, such as AI obedience, AI dominance, and dependence on the technology in itself. The authors also ask the following questions: “Who is held responsible and accountable for both ethical and legal aspects in case of incorrect ML predictions? How can ML predictions gain the trust of citizens in shaping public policies in case of wrong predictions?” (Yar, Hamdan et al.,2024 p.14)

After considering and weighing the benefits and challenges of AI and its implementation in public administration, it is essential to consider frameworks that explain how users perceive and adopt new technologies such as AI. One such framework is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which offers valuable insights into the factors influencing the acceptance and integration of AI in public administration. By applying TAM within this context, it becomes possible to explore how perceptions of usefulness and ease of use can shape the willingness of policymakers to use AI technologies

2.7 The Technology Acceptance Model

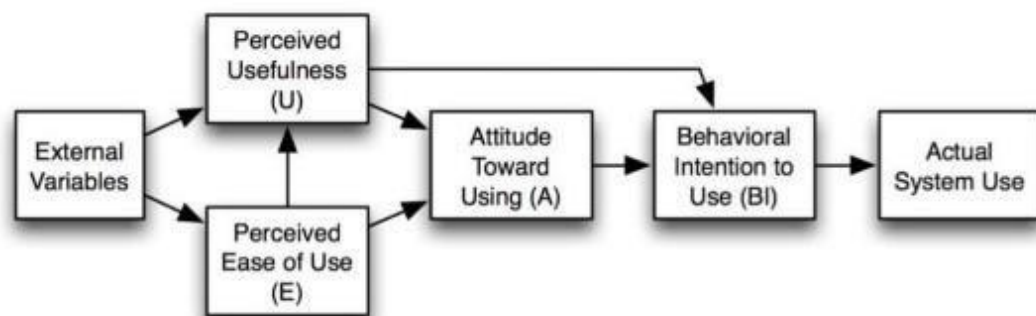


Figure 1: Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989))

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was first introduced by Davis in 1989 as illustrated by Figure 1. Since then, it has been applied to various frameworks which attempted to understand how users come to accept and adopt a new form of technology. It primarily focuses on predicting the acceptance of technology by individuals. The TAM was built on a previous theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action published by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975 which specifies that an individual's behaviours, in our case the policymaker's, are influenced by their intentions which are in turn influenced by their beliefs (Muona 2022). The TAM extends this theory and focuses on two primary determinants. Firstly, the perceived usefulness (PU) and the perceived ease of use (PEOU). The PU refers to the notion that for a user to use this specific technology such as Chat GPT, the policymaker (the user) needs to weigh the benefits. If the user, that is the policymaker, deems the tool as being more likely to improve efficiency and provide more accurate results, the user would be more inclined to use it. Secondly, the perceived ease of use (PEOU) computes the extent to which a person is most likely to use a new technology with minimal effort. If the technology is simple and user-friendly, the user is more likely to be inclined to use the technology. If a policymaker finds the technology intuitive and easy to use, requiring no previous technical knowledge, then said policymaker is more likely to use AI, adopt it, and accept it (Davis 1989). Moreover, as depicted in Table 1, Silva (2015, as cited in Benown, 2022) explained each specific component and how each one relates to another. In a study conducted by Saif, Khan et al. (2023), the TAM was used to analyse how users perceive and adopt AI technologies in education, particularly ChatGPT and other tools.

Model Component	Explanation
Actual system use	TAM proposes that a person's behavioural intention to use technology determines his or her actual use of that technology (referred to as 'BI' in Figure 1)
Behavioural intention to use technology (BI)	In turn, the behavioural intention to use technology (BI) is influenced by the attitude toward technology (referred to as 'A' in Figure 1)
Attitude towards using (A)	In turn, 'A' is motivated by the two major beliefs mentioned before, referred to as PU and PEOU
Perceived usefulness (U) & Perceived ease of use (E)	Perceived Ease Of Use has an immediate impact on Perceived Usefulness
External variables	Both PU and PEOU can be influenced by a variety of external factors, which researchers investigate according to the

	scenarios/context under consideration
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Table 1: Adaptation of TAM model explained (Silva 2015, as cited in Benown, 2022).

The TAM was used to examine the acceptance of the technology based on two factors, as previously mentioned: the perceived usefulness and the perceived ease of use. The TAM was applied to assess how individuals perceived the benefits of AI in facilitating learning and decision-making and also helped to assess whether the tool was perceived as productive, engaging, and efficient. Additionally, the TAM examined whether accessibility actually encouraged adoption. The TAM has also been used in conjunction with other theories. Na, Heo et al. (2022) applied the TAM to the factors influencing the acceptance of AI-based technology in the construction industry. Given the background of resistance towards adopting new innovations, the study focused on the challenges that hinder adoption using the aforementioned model. Similarly, the TAM was also applied to understand the factors influencing customer engagement with AI-driven e-commerce solutions, such as chatbots, recommendation systems, and personalised checkout experiences (Wang, Ahmad et al. 2023).

Finally, the TAM was also used as a theoretical framework in a study which focused on the adoption and engagement of generative AI systems such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot to understand the factors influencing user adoption and continued usage of these tools. The study focused on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use to understand factors which influenced user engagement where the perceived ease of use assesses how intuitive and accessible these tools are to particularly non-technical users. The study

confirmed that the behavioural intention to adopt AI tools is influenced by both the ease of use and the usefulness, meaning that users are more likely to integrate AI into their workflows if they find it useful and easy to use. External factors such as prior experience, knowledge, training, and organisational support also came into play. The study also looked into ethical concerns and algorithmic transparency (Singh 2024).

Researchers have identified several limitations to the TAM that impact its applicability across different contexts. The primary limitation outlined is that the term behavioural intention is subjective and is easily influenced by interpersonal factors like word-of-mouth or peer influence. Additionally, user behaviour is often shaped by social norms, values, and personality traits, which are challenging to quantify in empirical studies. The model also assumes that perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) directly influence technology adoption but in structured organisations, employees often use technology due to mandatory institutional policies rather than personal attitudes. Thus, in the context of this study, it is important to note whether AI is being pushed onto the participants. Furthermore, TAM does not adequately address external variables such as age, education, and organisational culture, which can significantly influence technology acceptance. Some critiques suggest that hidden personality traits may play a crucial role in determining technology adoption, limiting the model's scope. Overall, while TAM provides useful insights into technology acceptance, the limitations reduce its applicability in complex structured environments (Ajibade 2018).

2.8 Perceptions on Artificial Intelligence.

Even though literature directly addressing policymakers' perceptions of AI in public administration remains limited, research from related fields provides valuable insight.

Perceptions of AI are often shaped by factors. Perceptions, in this context, are understood as the subjective interpretations and attitudes formed by individuals based on prior experiences, institutional norms, and contextual knowledge (Ajzen, 1992) Within the public sector, such perceptions are considered pivotal, as they influence how emerging technologies are framed, prioritised, and ultimately integrated into policy making processes.

Perceptions of AI vary significantly across contexts and stakeholder groups, shaped by a range of attitudes and interpretations. Gerlich (2023 p.502), in a multi-dimensional study, highlights that trust, fairness and transparency are central to shaping acceptance of AI technologies. Building on this, Ingrams (2022) finds that while citizens may appreciate the efficiency AI brings to public services however, their trust in government often declines when AI replaces human decision-makers expressing concerns about competence, empathy, and accountability. In the healthcare sector, Beets et al. (2023) identify concerns around privacy and clarity of purpose as major obstacles to public acceptance, suggesting that perceptions are deeply influenced by context and personal relevance. Among professionals, Shinnars et al. (2022) report that direct experience with AI tends to improve perceptions, enhancing feelings of preparedness and highlighting perceived benefits to professional practice. Collectively, these studies underline attitudes towards AI where enthusiasm for innovation is tempered by concerns around trust, capability, and ethics.

Such insights, though not directly coming from policymakers, offer a conceptual bridge for understanding how Maltese policymakers may approach AI adoption. The absence of extensive empirical literature on this subgroup underscores the relevance of the present study. By directly engaging policymakers, this research contributes to an underexplored area,

offering an empirically grounded perspective on how emerging technologies are interpreted at policymaking level.

2.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of AI, more specifically GPTs into public administration and governance, presents both transformative opportunities and significant challenges. On one hand, AI promises to enhance efficiency, improve decision-making, and foster innovation in public services. However, its adoption is not without complications. The challenges of data management, procurement processes, and regulatory clarity hinder the effective deployment of AI in governance. Bias in AI algorithms, concerns over transparency, and the potential for job displacement are also critical issues that need to be addressed. Furthermore, the complexity of AI decision-making processes can lead to information overload, misinterpretation, and a lack of accountability in policy decisions. Legal and ethical concerns, such as ensuring compliance and protecting public values, must also be considered. Future research should focus on addressing these gaps, exploring the implications of AI in governance, and developing frameworks to guide responsible adoption. By doing so, AI's full potential can be harnessed while mitigating the risks associated with its integration into public service. Building on the aim to explore policymakers' perceptions this review has outlined the main debates, challenges and research gaps related to the use of AI in public administration, with particular focus on its role in policymaking. The next chapter presents the methodology used to investigate through qualitative inquiry.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will delve into the methodological approach adopted by the researcher in this dissertation, which explores policymakers' perceptions on the use of AI tools in public administration in Malta and for policymaking. Given that this study will primarily focus on perceptions, that is the views, beliefs, and experiences of policymakers, a qualitative approach was employed as it was deemed most suitable. According to Creswell (2011 p.129), "In qualitative research, the intent is to explore the complex set of factors surrounding the central phenomenon and present the varied perspectives or meanings that participants hold." Thus, qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for exploring in-depth, complex, and context-dependent phenomena such as attitudes towards emerging technologies as they allow for a deep understanding of participants' interpretations. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to gather in-depth insights into policymakers' perceptions and to contextualise these views within existing policy frameworks.

The methodology was designed to support the three key objectives of the study. This chapter provides further details on the rationale behind the chosen research design and the procedure employed to recruit participants. This chapter will also explain why the data collection tools were chosen and the techniques used for data analysis. Finally, it will also address considerations of validity and the ethical safeguards implemented throughout the research process.

3.2 Rationale

As AI continues to expand across all areas of daily life, its integration into public administration is no exception. It is ultimately reshaping the way governments function,

make decisions, and deliver their services. However, despite growing national interest, there is a noticeable gap in research focusing on how policymakers, perceive the use of AI in the field of policymaking. Previous literature highlights the importance of capturing individual perceptions and pre-adoption attitudes when exploring emerging technologies in the public sector. Criado and de Zarate-Alcarazo (2022) emphasise that the assumptions and expectations of key decision-makers, such as chief information officers, play a significant role in shaping the design and implementation of AI strategies in public administration. Their perception-based approach reinforces the suitability of using qualitative interviews to gain insight into how public officials understand and respond to AI integration.

In Malta specifically, discussions about AI have been held, focusing primarily on economic and technological development; however, areas addressing the use of AI in policymaking have not been raised and discussed. There is a critical gap in policymakers' perception regarding the use of AI that needs to be addressed regarding whether it is deemed a risk, an innovative tool, or both. Understanding their attitudes, beliefs, and concerns is crucial to significantly shape the adoption regulation and ethical boundaries of AI when integrated into the policy process. Additionally, exploring these perceptions is critical as policymakers are key players in creating and implementing national policies across Malta, including AI governance and implementation.

A qualitative methodology was chosen to explore the nuanced perceptions and experiences of policymakers regarding AI integration in public administration. As Aspers and Corte (2019) state, qualitative research is an interactive process that allows researchers to develop new distinctions and deepen understanding by engaging closely with participants. This study seeks to explore these perceptions, offering insight into how AI is currently

understood within Malta's policymaking environment. By focusing on the human, cultural, and organisational factors influencing AI adoption in public policy, this research aims to contribute to more effective context-sensitive strategies for AI government, integration, and implementation. Additionally, based on this reflection, documents and semi-structured interviews were used to explore the perceptions of policymakers. To ensure contextual depth four policy documents were chosen specifically based on the scope of this dissertation. The documents selected include: The Malta AI Strategy (MDIA 2019), The Malta Ethical AI Framework (MDIA 2020), The “G7 Toolkit for Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector” (OECD 2024) and lastly the official document “Governing with Artificial Intelligence: Are Governments Ready?” (OECD 2024)

Additionally, a set of open-ended questions were curated to fully grasp the perceptions of the participants and facilitating a flowing conversation, allowing for more flexibility. Document analysis is a useful tool in qualitative research, especially when combined with additional approaches such as interviews. It helps to strengthen the findings by adding a second source of data. In return it improves the credibility of the findings and reduces the risk of bias. In public administration document analysis can help identify the priorities present, how policies are shaped and how certain issues are addressed (Bowen 2009)

Alongside this, researchers have described the in-depth interview as one of the most powerful tools for gaining an understanding of human beings and exploring topics in depth (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius et al. 2014). In fact, semi-structured interviews are widely used by researchers to obtain a detailed understanding of a respondent's beliefs, perceptions, or experiences regarding a specific topic; in this case, the participants' perceptions of the use of AI. This research tool allows for much more flexibility in comparison to other tools such as

structured interviews or surveys as it allows the researcher to explore emerging themes and delve into interesting points brought up during the interview. By employing qualitative analysis, the research is able to capture the depth and richness of the responses rather than reducing them to predefined quantitative categories (Smith, Harré et al. 1995). This approach is particularly suitable for studies focused on exploring complex, subjective experiences such as policymakers' views on the integration of AI for policymaking within public administration.

According to Patton (1999), triangulation can be employed to better understand the phenomena at hand by combining multiple methods or starting sources in qualitative research. In this dissertation, triangulation strengthens the methodological design by combining semi-structured interviews and document analysis, thereby allowing the research to approach the perceptions of policymakers towards AI in public administration from different angles. Interviews will capture the attitudes, beliefs, and concerns of policymakers while the report will offer an institutional narrative on AI and public administration.

3.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions

This dissertation aims to assess and analyse the perceived benefits and challenges associated with the use of AI for policymaking as well as to examine the factors that influence these perceptions and attitudes towards AI. Additionally, it seeks to bridge the world of AI with the concept of culture in Malta. Hence, the following research questions have been specifically chosen to underpin this research:

1. What are the (1a) perceived benefits and (1b) perceived challenges associated with the implementation of AI in policymaking within public administration?

2. What factors influence policymakers' attitudes towards the adoption of AI in public administration, specifically for policymaking?
3. What are policymakers' views on the intersection between AI usage in policymaking and cultural context?

The first question is central to understanding the dual narrative around AI adoption. While AI promises enhanced efficiency, data-driven decision-making, and predictive capabilities, it also raises concerns about ethical implications, bias, accountability, and human oversight. Exploring both sides of this discourse allows the study to provide a balanced perspective on AI's role in policymaking and identify the main areas of optimism and resistance among policymakers. Weighing both sides also allows policymakers to make informed, context-sensitive decisions that maximise the value of AI while minimising risks and harm (Wirtz, Weyerer, et al. 2019 p. 598). Considering both the benefits and the constraints of AI ensures that policies are realistic, ethical, and aligned with public values (Misuraca et al. 2020).

The second question focuses on the individual, organisational, and contextual influences that shape attitudes toward AI. Policymakers' openness to innovation may depend on factors such as institutional culture, personal experience with technology, trust in AI, and political priorities. It is important to consider the various factors that shape policymakers' perceptions, such as institutional culture, national context, and personal experiences with technology, because these shape how AI is interpreted, communicated, and ultimately adopted within public administration (Wuttke et al. 2025). The reference to the technology acceptance model in the previous chapter has already paved the way and identified specific factors which may arise from the participants' responses and may be further analysed throughout the next

chapter. Understanding these factors is essential to inform potential future strategies for AI implementation that reflect the real-world dynamics of policy environments in Malta.

Finally, AI systems are not developed or deployed in a vacuum. The final question highlights how local values, norms, and governance styles influence how AI is perceived and potentially applied. In a small state like Malta with its eccentricities, cultural considerations may significantly shape how AI is received. As recent research suggests, cultural identity plays a significant role in how individuals interpret and relate to AI technologies. For example, individualist societies may perceive AI as a threat to autonomy and privacy. These culturally embedded attitudes influence how AI is received, governed, and applied in a policy context (Barnes, Zhang et al. 2024). This question allows the study to explore how AI can be adapted to align with the local administrative culture, thereby supporting context-sensitive policymaking.

3.4 Overall Procedure

This research employed a qualitative exploratory design aimed at investigating policymakers' perceptions of AI use in public administration. This study was conducted in two phases.

In the first phase of the study, a document analysis was carried out to examine key AI policy documents that set the context for how AI is framed and governed in Malta and internationally. This phase helped identify policy trends, guiding values, and gaps related to AI adoption and policymaking. The four policy documents are as follows: Malta AI Strategy (MDIA 2019), Malta Ethical AI Framework (MDIA 2020), G7 Toolkit for Artificial

Intelligence in the Public Sector (OECD 2024) and Governing with Artificial Intelligence: Are Governments Ready? (OECD 2024)

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected Maltese policymakers occupying leadership roles in public administration. The participants were contacted via email and provided with an information sheet and a consent form to sign. Using an interview guide, these interviews explored participants' attitudes, beliefs, and concerns regarding the use of AI in policymaking, with a focus on challenges, benefits, cultural influences, and ethical considerations as found in the table below. Nine interviews were conducted in total, two of which were conducted in person and seven online. The interviews all started with a brief introduction on the dissertation and an opening question to help the participant acclimatise. Audio recording of participants was not permitted, as per the conditions set by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC), which stated that government employees could not be recorded. However, notes were taken to ensure the appropriate amount of data was gathered.

Data from both the document analysis and the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The framework was used to identify emerging themes and answer the research questions at hand. This overall procedure ensured that the study remained flexible, reflective, and grounded in real-world experiences, enabling the researcher to grasp the complex and context-specific perceptions of AI in Maltese policymaking.

3.5 Sample and Recruitment

A purposive sampling strategy was employed in phase 1 of the analysis to select the policy documents. This technique was chosen to ensure that only documents with direct relevance to the topic of AI in public administration were included and those documents which fell out of scope were omitted. The focus of the documents centered around the notion of governing with AI rather than governing AI. As Bowen (2009) notes, purposive sampling allows researchers to select materials that are rich in context and closely aligned with the research objective. For ease of reference the selected documents included

- **The Malta National AI Strategy (2019)**
- **The Malta Ethical AI Framework (2020),**
- **The G7 Toolkit for Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector (OECD, 2024)**
- **The OECD-supported report Governing with Artificial Intelligence: Are Governments Ready? (OECD, 2024)**

These texts were chosen based on their official status, strategic significance, and direct relevance to AI adoption in policymaking. Data from the documents were coded thematically to identify references to strategic goals and opportunities, perceived benefits, implementation challenges, institutional readiness, and ethical considerations. Coding focused on how AI was framed in terms of risks and opportunities allowing for comparison with the perceptions expressed in the interviews.

According to Cresswell (2011), purposive sampling allows the researcher to identify groups of data subjects that are especially knowledgeable or share experience with a common background. The common factor among the chosen participants is their background and

expertise in policymaking. The participants come from different areas of public administration such as finance, environment, funding, and social change. However, they are all in positions where they are actively involved in the policymaking process. Participants were selected and recruited through purposive sampling, targeting individuals actively engaged in policy processes within Maltese public administration. This approach ensures the recruitment of policymakers coming from different backgrounds with varied experiences and levels of familiarity with AI. According to Palinkas, Horwitz et al. (2013), purposive sampling is used very frequently in qualitative research to identify information-rich participants.

Initial contact with participants within the public sector was made via email which included an invitation to participate, a brief overview of the study, and an informed consent form outlining the purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of participation. For public service, the interview guide was also disseminated to all permanent secretariates, directors general, and chief information officers across all ministries through the data protection office. Even though an experienced background is important, the participants must also be able to communicate their experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner for precise data collection (Palinkas, Horwitz, et al. 2013).

The researcher contacted 40 prospective participants within the public sector who occupied senior management positions. The recruited participants came from a range of senior positions across Malta's public administration covering areas such as policy development, regulatory oversight, data governance, scientific innovation, environmental management, financial supervision, and social affairs. Their roles involved strategic planning, compliance, research coordination, and decision-making within their respective

domains. This diversity provided a well-rounded and contextually grounded understanding of how AI is perceived and interpreted across different facets of government operations and policymaking. However, for confidentiality purposes and to adhere with FREC clearance, participants' identity and roles will not be revealed.

The recruited participants were asked a series of open-ended questions which were curated specifically to address various points explained throughout the dissertation. This design was specially selected to allow for both guided conversation and open-ended responses, allowing the participants to openly share details and insights while remaining in alignment with the research questions presented.

3.6 Data Collection

Collecting data from the selected policy documents involved a close reading and systematic review of their content to extract relevant information on AI use in public administration. The documents were analysed for language, themes, and policy framing related to AI governance, benefits, challenges, and cultural or ethical implications, with particular attention given to how these align with the research questions and interview data.

Next, the semi-structured interview questions, listed in the following table, were carefully designed to address the three research questions that underpin this dissertation. Questions 4, 5, 7, and 10 directly explore both the perceived benefits and challenges of implementing AI in policymaking (RQ1). Questions 3, 6, 7, and 8 aim to uncover the factors influencing policymakers' attitudes towards AI adoption (RQ2). Question 9 specifically targets the cultural dimension, helping to examine how local values shape attitudes and practices related

to AI in the public sector (RQ3). The remaining questions offer background context and allow participants to share broader insights, ensuring a deeper understanding of their perspectives.

Question No.	Interview Question	Theme / Focus Area	Linked Research Question(s)
Q1	Could you please describe your role within the organisation and provide a little background on your career thus far?	Participant context.	Contextual/background, supports all RQs.
Q2	How do you define or understand the concept of AI in the context of public policy and governance?	Understanding of AI.	RQ1, RQ2
Q3	Can you describe your personal experiences or interactions with AI technologies, if any, in your professional role?	Experience with AI.	RQ1, RQ2
Q3a	Have you ever encountered instances where you used GPTs specifically?	Experience with generative AI.	RQ1, RQ2
Q4	What benefits do you associate with implementing AI in public administration, more	Perceived benefits.	RQ1

	specifically for policymaking?		
Q5	What are your primary concerns about the use of AI for policymaking?	Perceived risks.	RQ1
Q6	Do you believe that Maltese public administration is adequately prepared to address ethical challenges related to AI? Why or why not?	Ethical preparedness.	RQ2
Q7	What challenges do you think Malta might face in adopting AI technologies for policymaking?	Organisational readiness.	RQ1,
Q8	What would you say are the key influencers/factors (such as AI literacy, resources, preparedness, and culture) that affect the adoption of AI within public administration?	Influencing factors.	RQ2
Q9	In your view, do Maltese cultural values influence the adoption of AI technologies within public administration?	Culture and AI.	RQ3

Q10	In your opinion, can AI improve decision-making processes in public administration?	AI and decision-making.	RQ1
Q11	Where do you see Malta in terms of AI adoption in the next 5–10 years?	Future outlook.	(Open-ended insight)
Q12	Is there anything else you would like to add about your perceptions of AI adoption in Malta's public administration within the context of policymaking?	Closing/reflections.	All RQs (open-ended insight).

Table 2: Semi-structured interview guide and alignment with research questions

The semi-structured interview design used in this study blended elements of informal conversational and the interview guide approach. This hybrid approach enables flexibility in questioning while ensuring key topics are consistently explored across interviews. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to express their perspectives in their own words, aligning with the aim of capturing nuanced perceptions of AI use in policymaking. This method ensured depth and richness in the collected data as this method allowed the researcher to probe further into unexpected but relevant areas. This flexibility helped to foster a more conversational, participant-led exchange. However, weaknesses include the possibility of inconsistencies in data due to varied question wording or sequencing across interviews.

This method is also justified given the exploratory nature of this study which seeks to understand complex and context-specific perceptions of policymakers (Patton 2002). The questions were specifically chosen to focus on different areas and to collect as much data as possible. The questions chosen also focus on behaviours and experiences, opinions and values, knowledge and background. They also establish a fixed sequence where, after the experience is described and opinions are given, the subsequent questions are able to probe for interpretations of the experience (Patton 2002).

3.7 Data analysis

The main scope of this section is to provide insight into how the data gathered from the document analysis and the interviews using the chosen research method was categorised and interpreted. By employing thematic analysis, patterns can be identified within qualitative data. Thematic analysis offers several advantages that make it particularly suitable for this study. It is a flexible and accessible method, and the results produced are generally clear and comprehensible to a wide audience, including policymakers. This approach also supports participatory research, allowing participants to be actively involved as collaborators. Thematic analysis enables the effective summarisation of large volumes of data while also allowing for rich, detailed interpretations. It highlights both similarities and differences across the dataset, can generate unanticipated insights, and accommodates both social and psychological readings of the data. Importantly, it is well-suited for producing analyses that can inform policy development (Braun, Clarke 2006)

In conducting thematic analysis, it was important to be aware of several common pitfalls that can compromise the quality and credibility of the research. One key issue is the absence

of actual analysis; researchers may rely heavily on a series of quotes without offering meaningful interpretation or insights beyond the surface content thus the researcher made sure to interpret the quotes in depth as themes should emerge from patterns across the dataset, not simply mirror the structure of interview questions. Additionally, poorly developed themes, such as those that overlap, lack coherence, or are insufficiently supported by data, can weaken the analysis. It was essential to ensure that each theme is internally consistent and backed by multiple, well-chosen examples. (Braun, Clarke 2006, Holloway, Todres 2003).

Manual coding was done using Microsoft Word to analyse the qualitative data gathered from the document analysis and the interviews. The documents were read thoroughly. Due to the limitation, only detailed notes could be taken. Following each interview, the notes were reviewed and immediately examined to ensure accuracy and preserve contextual meaning. Thematic analysis was conducted manually for both the interviews and the document analysis by identifying recurring concepts, keywords, and significant phrases relevant to the research questions. Initial codes were developed by annotating these notes and grouping similar ideas together. These codes were organised into broader themes.

According to Bryman (2012), a theme can be defined as the following: a category identified by the analyst through the data which relates to the focus and scope of the study. In line with this understanding, themes in this study were developed by identifying recurring patterns from the interview data and coding them accordingly. These codes which served as small identifiers, were consistently present throughout the interview notes. The themes constructed provided a grounding for a broader theoretical understanding and were used to contribute to wider discourse and literature.

In applying the guidance of Ryan and Bernard (2003), the data was examined for repeated ideas, recurring patterns across participant narratives. Careful attention was also given to missing data i.e. ideas which were not addressed or explored. The thematic analysis process followed the six-phase approach outlined below according Braun and Clarke (2006), which offered a clear guide.

Phase	
1.	Familiarising yourself with your data.
2.	Generating initial codes.
3.	Searching for themes.
4.	Reviewing themes.
5.	Defining and naming themes.
6.	Producing the report.

Table 3: Braun, Clarke 2006

The use of thematic analysis aided in unveiling the themes combined with each research question. This method allowed for a detailed exploration of how policymakers conceptualised both the potential advantages and disadvantages of AI in policymaking. It also helped uncover a range of influencing factors that shaped participants' attitudes toward AI adoption and use. By analysing the discourse used and the context in which opinions were shared, the analysis provided insight into how these factors interact to shape the outcome. The last research question specifically required an interpretative lens, which thematic

analysis supported by allowing for a deeper exploration into how cultural values and societal norms intersected with perceptions of AI.

3.8 Legitimation

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, several methodological steps were taken throughout the research process based on Creswell's (2011) recommendations. Legitimation in qualitative research (the equivalent of validity and reliability in quantitative research) is supported by several key practices. First, engagement with participants is crucial to building trust, allowing for a deeper understanding of their perspectives and enhancing authenticity. Reflexivity also ensures that the researcher acknowledges personal biases, contributing to greater objectivity and ethical integrity. Lastly, triangulation; through the use of multiple data sources, such as interviews and documents, the legitimacy of the findings is strengthened by allowing for cross-verification and reducing reliance on a single perspective (Ahmed 2024).

With this in mind, all interview notes were carefully reviewed to ensure they were free from any errors which occurred during notetaking and that they accurately reflect the participants' responses. To avoid inconsistencies in the coding process, particular attention was given to maintaining stable definitions of codes. This was done by continuously comparing new data with existing codes. Coding plays a central role in ensuring rigor as it allows for the systemic development of themes while staying close to the participants' accounts (Ba 2021). Additionally, rich descriptions of multiple perspectives on the themes were provided to enhance the depth and realism of this study, allowing readers to connect with the context. In line with qualitative research practices, the author acknowledges how

their background might influence the interpretation of the data, ensuring transparency in the research process. To further enhance the credibility of the findings, the author took a neutral stance during the interview process and made the interview guide available beforehand to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and at ease. By employing these strategies, this study aims to present findings that are credible, trustworthy, and reflective of the participants' true responses (Creswell 2011).

3.9 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The application of ethical principles is crucial to prevent harm (Orb, Eisenhauer et al. 2001). From the outset of this research study, ethical considerations were prioritised to protect the interests of all individuals directly or indirectly involved. Given that the research tool chosen for conducting interviews required a high level of trust between the researcher and participants, it was essential to foster a strong rapport, with the researcher assuming responsibility for maintaining this trust throughout the process. In line with this, the study adhered to the University of Malta's Research Ethics Review Procedures and Code of Practice. The Research Ethics and Data Protection (REDP) form was submitted to the Faculty of Economics, Management, and Accountancy Research Ethics Committee (FREC) for record-keeping after a self-assessment revealed no ethical concerns requiring formal review (see Appendix). All participants were asked to sign a consent form, ensuring they fully understood and accepted the conditions of this study (see Appendix). The consent form reassured participants that their data would be kept strictly confidential, used solely for the purposes of this study, and that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time.

A limitation of this study was the restricted access to participants due to strict data protection procedures within the Office of the Prime Minister. These regulations made it challenging to engage with certain participants and obtain comprehensive data, yet ethical compliance remained the main priority throughout. Additionally, the use of audio recordings was prohibited by FREC, which stated that government employees could not be recorded. This limitation reduced the ability to capture detailed responses and may have impacted on the depth of the information gathered, as the researcher was required to rely solely on written notes.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological approach used to explore policymakers' perceptions of AI integration in Malta's public administration. A qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews and document analysis, was adopted to address the research questions concerning the perceived benefits, challenges, influencing factors, and the cultural context of AI adoption in policymaking. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of participants with relevant policy experience, while thematic analysis enabled the identification of key patterns in the data. Despite limitations such as restricted access and the absence of audio recordings, ethical integrity and methodological rigour were maintained. The following chapter presents the findings, offering a thematic interpretation of how AI is perceived by policymakers.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analytical findings of this research which was carried out in two complementary phases: a document analysis and a series of semi-structured interviews. Both phases aimed to explore the perceptions of policymakers and public officials regarding the adoption of AI within Malta's public administration with a particular focus to its application in the policymaking process. The analysis follows a thematic approach, enabling the identification of patterns, recurring concepts, and underlying assumptions across both textual sources and participant narratives.

For clarity and continuity, the research questions are restated below, although they will be addressed in detail in the final chapter.

1. What are the (1a) perceived benefits and (1b) perceived challenges associated with the implementation of AI in policymaking within public administration?
2. What factors influence policymakers' attitudes towards the adoption of AI in public administration, specifically for policymaking?
3. What are policymakers' views on the intersection between AI usage in policymaking and cultural context?

The first phase consisted of a document analysis of four policy documents and strategic frameworks related to AI, data governance, and digital transformation. These documents were selected based on their institutional relevance, their recent publication, and

direct reference to AI policy, implementation, and ethics in Malta. The purpose of this phase was to examine how AI discourse is being framed at the policy level and to identify the official narratives, priorities, and gaps present in the strategic vision for AI in governance. This phase offers a foundation for understanding how AI is conceptualised in public documentation and serves as context for interpreting the perspectives of policy practitioners. In line with the TAM model, the documents were reviewed with the aim of identifying content that relates to the broader factors influencing the acceptance of AI in the public administration. Such as organizational readiness, political support, digital infrastructure, and ethical or legal frameworks, which may act as external variables affecting adoption. Attention was also given to discourse surrounding the attitudes towards AI as well as indications of long-term strategic intent or behavioral commitment to integrating AI into governance structures. By considering the model holistically, the document analysis seeks to contextualise the current scenario for comparison with the policymakers' perspectives gathered during the interviews.

The second phase involved nine semi-structured interviews with individuals working closely with the policymaking process within Maltese public administration. Participants were selected based on their expertise and engagement with the policy process. The interviews explored personal perceptions, professional experiences, and institutional insights regarding the use of AI in public governance. Thematic analysis was again employed to extract key themes and compare them with those identified in the document analysis. Together, these two phases provide a comprehensive and layered understanding of how AI is situated within both strategic discourse and practical experience in Malta's public administration.

4.2 Phase 1: Document Analysis

To guide the reader, the following table was created to highlight the themes which emerged from the document analysis, providing a brief description of each theme.

Theme	Description	References
Trust and Ethics	Focuses on transparency, fairness, and human-centric AI principles to foster trust and ensure ethical use.	Malta Ethical AI Framework (2019 p.11); G7 Toolkit (2024 p.30); OECD (2024 p.13)
Regularisation and Governance	Concerns the development of legal, regulatory, and strategic frameworks to guide AI integration in public services.	Malta AI Strategy (2019 p.45); Malta Ethical AI Framework (2019 p.18); G7 Toolkit (2024 p.23); OECD (2024 p.21)
Risk Management	Involves identifying and mitigating risks such as bias, privacy breaches, and system failures in AI implementation.	Malta Ethical AI Framework (2019 p.23); G7 Toolkit (2024 p.12); OECD (2025 p.16)
Capacity Building	Covers initiatives to improve digital skills and workforce readiness for AI integration.	Malta AI Strategy (2019 p.36); G7 Toolkit (2024 p.20); OECD (2024 p.6).
Innovation	Focuses on creating an environment that supports AI through R&D, start-ups, funding, and international collaboration.	Malta AI Strategy (2019 p.20)

Table 4: Thematic Overview from Document Analysis

4.2.1 Trust and Ethics

The first and most recurrent theme across the analysed documents was trust and ethical considerations. This theme echoed throughout the documents as **trust specifically emerged as a necessity and a driver for AI adoption in public administration. A lack of trust would stall the process** and the benefits of AI would not be reaped.

The Malta Ethical AI Framework positions trustworthy AI as a foundational pillar, asserting that **AI must be human-centric, transparent, and aligned with human rights and democratic values** (MDIA 2019). This document was specifically referenced by one of the interview participants, further validating its influence on the perceptions of policymakers and confirming its relevance in both phases of the analysis. Similarly, the G7 toolkit for AI in the public sector stated that a lack of public trust could lead to a lack of uptake of AI technologies across different sectors, particularly in sensitive areas such as healthcare and welfare. The OECD (2024) report also noted that **high-quality data is a necessity to foster trustworthy AI and a lack of it could lead to AI operating opaquely**, producing outcomes which could be perceived as biased or unjust.

4.2.2 Regularisation and Governance

All four analysed documents revealed a second theme, that of regularisation. The documents called for **strategic frameworks and a regulatory environment for AI within public administration**. The Malta AI Strategy outlines Malta's vision to become an AI launchpad by 2023 and lays a foundation through policies related to security, data

governance, and regulatory sandboxes. **The strategy called for regularisation without stifling innovation.**

The regularisation of AI needs to be comprehensive enough to provide policies that are general as well as refined. Both Malta's AI strategy and Malta's Ethical AI Framework suggest that governance must surpass technical deployment and look into the legal frameworks to support AI adoption in public administration. The G7 toolkit and the OECD reports provided a holistic overview of the progress regarding AI policy and regulation within public administration in the G7 countries and the European Union. Both **documents called for upholding standards and creating oversight bodies to ensure compliance.** They also suggested the importance **of evolution tools to be able to monitor the impact and accountability of AI use in public administration.**

4.2.3 Risk Management

A crucial aspect of AI adoption in public administration is risk management. Throughout the analysed documents, the theme of risk and security was present throughout. The documents emphasised **the importance of cybersecurity, data protection, and system resilience**, particularly in sensitive areas such as public health, infrastructure, and law enforcement. The Malta Ethical AI Framework **highlights concerns regarding data breaches, misuse, and unauthorised access to information.** The document further highlights the need for encryption and audit trails to mitigate risks during AI deployment and pilot testing in public systems. **The G7 toolkit also emphasised the need for cybersecurity protocols, more specifically across multi-national borders.**

The OECD document highlights the fact that a **lack of risk management** could result in AI systems becoming a target for **malicious activity from hacking incidents, which could lead to national security breaches** as well as internal misuse.

4.2.4 Capacity Building

The theme of capacity building and AI literacy was present throughout the four documents as well. **Capacity building is deemed a foundational requirement for the successful leveraging of AI within public administration.** The Malta AI Strategy highlights the importance of **adequate training and informative campaigns to embed the use of AI within our education system**; without proper training, public service and public sector employees cannot engage meaningfully with AI systems. The strategy calls for **AI educational programmes tailored to the specific needs of employees.** Similarly, the G7 Toolkit for AI in the public sector called for investment and cross-collaboration to increase overall institutional knowledge. The OECD report further reiterates the same point and implies that expert knowledge needs to be embedded within governmental organisational structures. Finally, the Maltese Ethical AI Framework complements these views by asserting that digital literacy and information would elevate a skilful workforce capable of upholding the ethical principles necessary when leveraging AI systems and applications. All four documents suggest that **AI readiness is not solely based on IT, procurement of resources, and regulation, but also on human capital and organisational learning**, especially when dealing with more complex and high-risk AI projects.

4.2.5 Innovation

The final theme of innovation was also constantly present in all four documents as a critical factor of AI adoption in the public sector. The Malta AI strategy pushes for the creation of a robust innovation ecosystem by offering support to start-ups, providing funding, and through collaborative efforts. The G7 toolkit also reiterates the **importance of innovation** by encouraging governmental systems to adopt regulatory approaches which leave room for experimentation under proper oversight. The OECD report correlates innovation with improving public service delivery, arguing that **institutions which are more likely to adapt and have forward-thinking mentalities are more likely to introduce AI responsibly in their daily operations**. Complementing the views of the previous documents, the Malta Ethical AI Framework stresses that innovation must be pursued responsibly while aligning with ethical principles such as transparency and fairness. Together, these documents suggest that **innovation is a must for unlocking AI potential**. However, it must be balanced with public values to ensure that the benefits are leveraged for the greater good. The key findings are displayed in the table below.

Theme	Key Findings
Trust and Ethics	Trust is a must for AI adoption in public administration Emphasis on transparency, human rights, and ethical governance. Poor data quality risks biased or generic outcomes.
Regularisation and Governance	Strong need for strategic, flexible regulation of AI. Policies should balance regularization and innovation, Governance must address legal, ethical and operational structures.

Risk Management	AI introduced risks in data protection and cyber security. Document stress proactive risk management. Cross-boarder cooperation and monitoring tools are needed.
Capacity Building	AI literacy and training are foundational for adoption. Public sector employees need tailored education. Capacity building goes beyond tech-it requires organizational learning.
Innovation	Innovation is key to unlocking AI's potential. Must be balanced with ethical oversight and in line with public values. Documents call for ecosystems that support experimentation.

Table 5: Thematic findings from document analysis.

4.3 Phase 2: Interview Analysis Using Thematic Coding

The second phase of this analysis focuses on the data collected from the interviews conducted. For context, nine Maltese participants from the public sector and public service were interviewed; five were men and four were women. Two of the interviews were conducted in person and seven were conducted online. Age varied among the participants, however, all occupied prominent roles within their organisation and were actively involved in the policymaking process. All participants were familiar with the concept of AI, however, some were more technically knowledgeable than others. ChatGPT was the most common tool referenced during the interviews, with only two participants expressing having knowledge of other tools such as Deep Seek⁴. All participants explained that they had used Chat GPT in the past, even for personal reasons. Some have used it out of curiosity while

⁴ Deepseek is an AI tool based in China which resembles ChatGPT. The model is thought to produce outcomes incrementally, simulating how humans think and reason (Ng 2025).

others expressed that they are heavy users and use it on a daily basis. Their perceptions ranged based on these elements and context. A common factor across interview responses was the fact that all organisations have spoken about the use of AI and their roles at an EU level. For anonymity purposes, the participants have been assigned a number from 1 to 9 and will be referred to as such. The themes presented in Figure 1 were selected after manual coding was applied to the interview notes, as previously described in the methodological chapter. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, themes were developed to be internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous. Each theme captured a coherent pattern of meaning within the data while remaining clearly distinct from other themes. This helped organise the data in a meaningful way and made it easier to understand the different perspectives shared by **policymakers**.

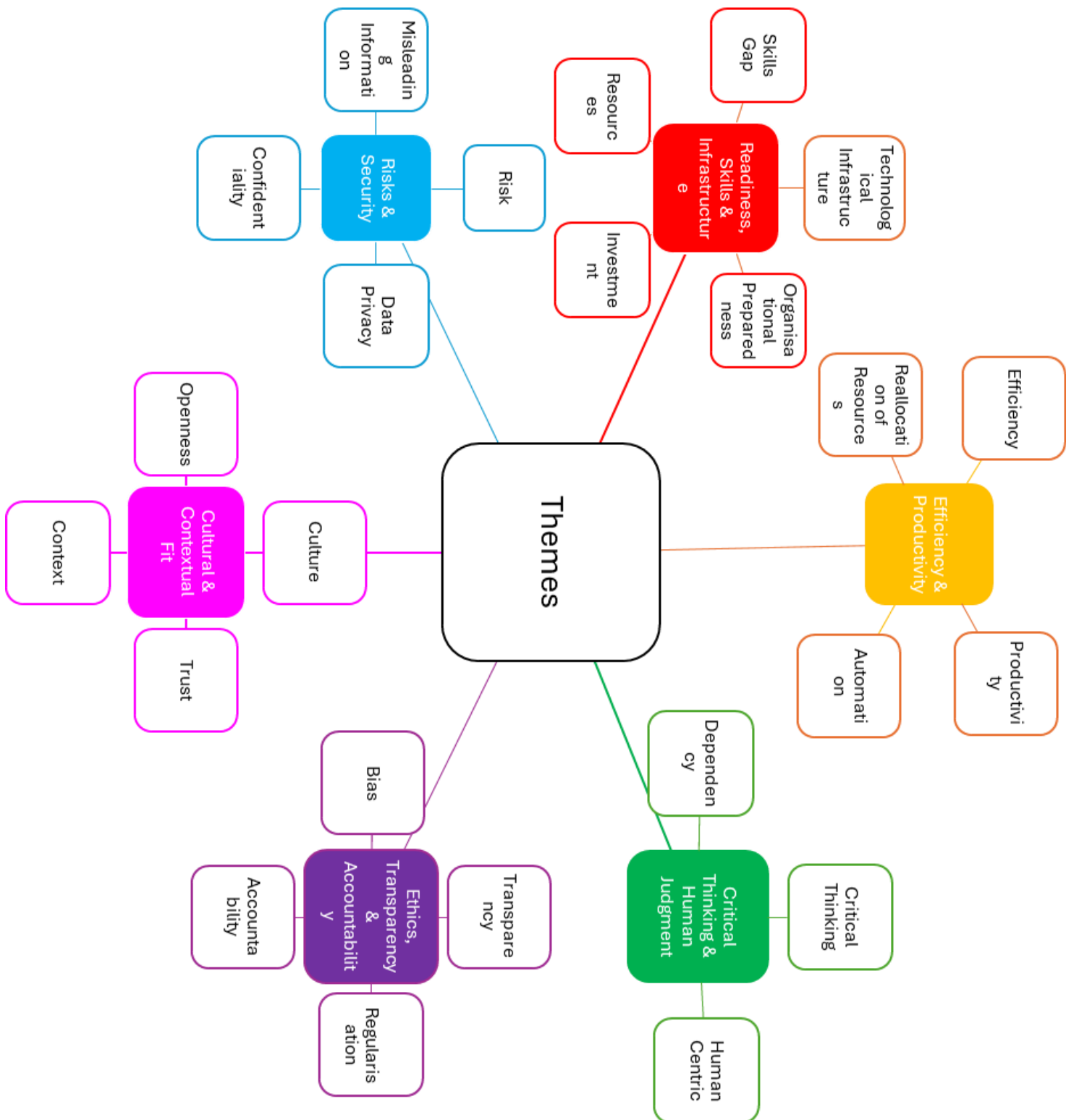


Figure 2: Mind Map depicting the themes and their corresponding codes

4.3.1 Efficiency and Productivity

A recurring perception among the Maltese policymakers interviewed is the view that **AI plays a critical role in enhancing efficiency and productivity**. All participants unanimously referred to efficiency. Participants coming from different backgrounds also acknowledged that AI technologies, specifically tools such as **ChatGPT, have the potential to improve the speed, clarity, and output of routine administrative tasks**.

Several participants spoke highly of AI's ability to streamline bureaucratic processes. For example, Participant 5 described how GPT-based tools are already being used in the organisation to summarise research output and prepare reports efficiently. Similarly, Participant 7 highlighted efficiency as one of AI's "*best qualities*" given that it automates repetitive processes, which would consume significant human resources. Such statements reflect the fact that **institutions and organisations have already recognised AI's potential to reduce administrative burden** and may have already deployed the tool to leverage AI's benefits.

Moreover, some participants framed AI as a tool which also enhances productivity. According to P3, "AI can never replace the policymakers ... it will only enhance the process." **The participant positioned the AI tool as a support mechanism which complements the process rather than removing the human aspect from the process**. This viewpoint was also expressed by P5 who stated that AI is also customisable as "*AI can assist in adjusting government services to meet the demands,*" thus improving both accessibility and effectiveness. However, Participant 4 expressed a critical viewpoint by stating that it is true

that AI offers reliability and efficiency, however, “*at what cost?*” This rhetorical question points to an underlying **concern that automation can lead to an impersonal, one-size-fits-all approach that overlooks complexities and niche qualities**. These sentiments suggest that although efficiency is a vital attribute, it should not be pursued at the expense of quality or contextual accuracy.

Additionally, Participant 7 suggested that dependency on AI tools, although efficient, might be contributing to a lack of intellectual stimulation, observing that “*We are becoming more dependent on it to carry out research ... it is making us lazier.*” This tension illustrates the **fine line between using AI for productivity and efficiency and eroding critical human capabilities**; an issue and concern among many which will be explored in the subsequent theme of critical thinking and human judgement.

In summary, efficiency and productivity are widely regarded as key benefits driving AI adoption in public administration. Certain participants viewed **AI as a way to enhance efficiencies and automate routine work**. However, a clear need for **balance was expressed to ensure that automation does not erode the human quality** of seeing the bigger picture necessary for policymaking. This nuanced perspective reflects both a general interest in digital transformation and culturally based concerns toward the implementation of AI

4.3.2 Human Judgement and Critical Thinking

This theme explores **concerns surrounding the potential erosion of critical thinking** and the **diminishing role of human judgement** in policymaking as a result of **increased dependency on AI tools**. Participants expressed apprehension towards the adoption of AI if it comes at the cost of human expertise.

A common concern amongst participants addressed the fact **that AI may inadvertently weaken the policymaker's ability to think critically** about complex policy issues. According to P3, *"While it is imperative that the policymaker assess the output with a critical eye, is a dependency on the tool jeopardising our critical thinking?"* This concern was also brought up by others who reflected on how AI is making professionals *"lazier"* by completing tasks that would require cognitive labour. Despite AI's potential to accelerate mundane tasks, **participants reiterated that the human element is very much necessary and cannot be replaced.** One respondent stated that although AI is effective, it cannot replace the value of *"human experience and expertise."* This further emphasises the point that **AI is simply a tool rather than a replacement**, and its intention should be to complement rather than substitute the nuanced role of the policymaker.

Participants also expressed their concerns about the one-size-fits-all quality that AI outputs often generate. Several noted that **AI tools fail to grasp the nuances of the Maltese context** and typically apply broader international standards to contexts which are niche in their existence. As a result, it is much more **imperative to have a critical eye and human interpretation** of the results at hand. This further reinforces the idea that even when AI is functionally correct, it still **lacks the accuracy that is garnered through experience and expertise**, which is highly irreplaceable and critical for the sensitive nature of policymaking.

In this regard, when paired with human engagement, **AI can be beneficial in restricting thoughts** and offering different angles on the topic, as suggested by P9. However, policymakers demonstrated a strong awareness of the risks associated with diminished critical thinking and neglect of the human element in policymaking overall. While some acknowledge the usefulness of AI, emphasis was also made on the **importance of resisting**

over-reliance, even though one might be tempted. This theme reveals that successful AI adoption is not only dependent on technical readiness but also **on preserving human judgement and contextual understanding**, which are the important factors present at the core of policymaking.

4.3.3 Ethics, Transparency, and Accountability

The integration of AI into public administration, particularly in policymaking, brings forth significant ethical implications. Several participants raised concerns about **transparency, accountability, and fairness**; three essential elements which connote ethical governance. These elements need to be present to **garner public trust and foster faith in the institutions**, especially when disclosing the use of AI-driven processes in policymaking.

This theme was actively present throughout the interviews. One of the interview questions clearly tackled the issue of ethics when leveraging AI in public administration, and ethical dilemmas did arise during the interview process. Ethical concerns came into play when the participants started questioning the validity of the work being generated by GenAI tools. According to several participants, **there is a lot of ambiguity when it comes to presenting findings** generated through GenAI, especially when being used to inform decision-making. According to P5, “*ensuring accountability and fairness ... may impact how AI is viewed,*” and a lot of participants agreed with this statement as participants weighed the risks and responsibilities tied to using GenAI tools within governance structures. Participants consistently highlighted the **need for robust ethical frameworks** to guide overall AI adoption. During the interview with P1 specifically, the previously analysed document “Towards Trustworthy AI, Malta’s Ethical AI Framework” was referenced. Participants

stressed that **without centric guidelines, the use of AI could put institutional credibility at risk**, especially if decisions based on AI are deemed to be biased or opaque.

Transparency emerged as a foundational principle throughout the interviews. Respondents argued that AI tools must operate in a clear and understanding manner. Given that GenAI tools **lack in providing clear reasoning, this could pose a potential risk** when incorporating such tools into the policymaking process. Several participants noted that while AI has its benefits, it must also **be implemented in a manner where scrutiny is allowed** and possible, ensuring that policymakers can act as oversight rather than blatantly adopting AI-generated recommendations. P3 emphasised that *“oversight needs to align with our societal values, ethical norms, and legal requirements.”* To ensure transparency and accountability, the participants called for **AI governance** which is tailored to our local needs, as clear boundaries on what is considered to be ethical use of AI in public administration could help steer it in the right direction.

Bias and fairness were also addressed and were of major concern among participants. Several of them pointed out that AI systems, particularly those trained and developed outside of the Maltese context, **might reflect values and assumptions that do not align with local needs**. As P2 noted, *“a sense of bias is always present; it is very difficult for the tool to be unbiased.”* This reflects a broader concern amongst participants on **AI bias**, especially when applied in sensitive areas. However, as P3 pointed out, *“The question of bias is very much a dichotomy as the policy maker is not free of bias and neither is AI,”* highlighting that bias is present in both human and machine decision-making. Rather than aiming to eliminate bias completely, the participant stressed the **importance of mitigating bias through frameworks that ensure AI supports human judgement**.

4.3.4 Culture and Context

The fourth theme which emerged from the interviews centres around the notion of culture and context within Maltese public administration as culture and context cannot be omitted from the discourse surrounding AI and public administration. Across all interviews, the participants frequently discussed **Malta's parameters and specificities as influential factors affecting AI adoption**. The overall perceptions of policymakers toward AI are not just technical matters or policy-related, but they are also embedded in Malta's cultural values, societal needs, and administrative norms.

Several participants referred to **Malta's peculiarities, such as size and location**. According to P1, *“Malta is a very good testbed to launch new and innovative ideas. The parameters make it the perfect haven to try out new and innovative technology and techniques.”* Additionally, participants also referred to **Malta's strong sense of community and deep-rooted trust in interpersonal relationships** which also affects how AI is implemented, such as P6 who stated that *“Maltese cultural values, which traditionally place a strong emphasis on personal relationships, trust, and cautiousness towards change, can influence the adoption of AI within the public service.”* As P1 reflected, *“Our culture is one of resilience and adaptability,”* adding that while **openness and adaptability are important**, any changes need to be sensitised to the context at hand.

The issue of context was raised time and time again in relation to a limitation posed by AI tools. Many participants voiced their concern over **whether AI can fully grasp the cultural context of Malta's legal, institutional, and societal environment**. P4 specifically remarked, *“The Maltese context is always imperative when dictating our position on a*

foreign playing field, and I believe that ChatGPT and similar tools are not capable of grasping the context to the fullest extent.” This limitation means that all forms of AI-generated output need to be properly vetted by a critical eye to be able to fully align with Malta's national interest and policy frameworks. **Participants warned against referring to and even publishing AI-generated content at face value**, especially when it may reflect assumptions which are relevant in jurisdictions outside of Malta and not within this particular context. In response, P4 also added, *“I believe that the tool does not fully comprehend and is not fully capable of understanding the local context as of yet.”* This statement highlights a **lack of trust towards AI being able to fully grasp the Maltese context and Maltese cultural nuances**. Across the board, participants also showed **concern regarding a vague approach deployed by AI systems** at the risk of applying generic solutions to uniquely local problems. Thus, for AI to be truly efficient and effective, it needs to be tailored to Malta's needs.

From a micro-perspective, organisational and institutional culture also comes into play. As one participant pointed out, cultural resistance can affect adaptability. According to P7, *“I do think that age is an underlying factor when it comes to adopting AI technologies. The older generation is not subject to change,”* indicating a generational divide. Resistance often stems from concerns regarding **job displacement, loss of control, and a lack of trust in automated systems**; factors which were all mentioned by the participants throughout the interview process. P6 also echoed that *“At the same time, Malta’s adaptability and openness to innovation, particularly among younger generations, can support gradual acceptance and integration of AI over time.”*

The sentiment of integrating AI with cultural and contextual factors may pose initial barriers, however, incorporating such factors can also serve as drivers for more thoughtful, human-centric AI adoption, which should be the end goal. Ultimately, integrating AI and Malta's unique eccentricities will require not only technical adoption but also **cultural sensitivity, inclusive discourse, and expertise tailored to Malta's needs and realities.**

4.3.5 Ethical Risks and Security

When interviewed, participants also expressed ethical risks and security concerns regarding the use of AI in public administration. This theme emerged clearly in **reflections on data privacy, security breaches, confidentiality, and overall trustworthiness** of GenAI tools. Many of these concerns were not merely fragments of imagination but were real-life experiences and perceived hesitation in using AI for specific tasks. Most participants were apprehensive about using AI for specific tasks based on these risks.

A key issue which was raised referred to the risk of relying on **inaccurate or incomplete information**. P6 highlighted the dangers of relying on uncritically screened AI-generated content, especially in policymaking scenarios: *“My primary concerns regarding the use of AI for policymaking centre around the risk of relying on inaccurate or incomplete information if outputs are not thoroughly cross-checked.”* This concern was also voiced by others who feared that, if not scrutinised, **oversimplified and misleading responses could badly influence decision-making.**

Data privacy and confidentiality were also recurring topics. As P7 noted, *“Confidentiality issues are also a concern of mine. I do have in my possession data sets which are not readily available to the public, which I am definitely not comfortable in uploading to*

ChatGPT.” This statement portrayed a sense of hesitation present amongst public officials in exposing data and relying on third-party platforms. Similarly, P8 stated that while their office does not handle sensitive data, strict protocols are still in place, providing a sense of direction and security amongst team members. Overall, while **digital convenience is attractive, many participants called for regulatory responsibility instead.**

Beyond dealing with personal data, **misleading information and gaps in information also come into play.** P9 raised an important question: *“Is it showing you the full picture or feeding us what it thinks is best?”* This question poses greater concern regarding who is determining what information is highlighted and removed and how it is framed, more specifically when such outputs are used to support and draft official documents. P9 was also the only **concerned participant who brought up the environmental impact posed by using large-scale AI systems** in public administration. Here, the participant added another ethical risk that goes beyond digital governance to broader considerations relating to ecological responsibility.

In response to these risks, P8 called for formal regulation, stating that *“It is high time that there is a protocol in place on how AI should be used. However, I personally do not feel totally knowledgeable to understand the full extent of AI.”* Although there are guidelines in place, such as the policy documents analysed in the previous phase, participants’ point of view suggests that there is a **significant gap, leaving the individual departments to make choices and decisions related to the use of AI at their own** discretion without having a national reference point. These concerns reflect the need for **trustworthy, secure, and transparent systems** while also having organisational preparedness, infrastructural readiness and in-house expertise.

4.3.6 Readiness, Skills, and Infrastructure

The interviews revealed that participants agreed that Malta's AI ambitions can only succeed if technical infrastructure is increased, human skills are leveraged, and rigorous oversight is embedded. All three factors must evolve together, according to participants. This was put into perspective by P3 who provided the following analogy: *"If we can compare AI to an engine, that engine needs fuel, and that fuel is data. The plumbing is digital infrastructure, and we are not moving at the same pace as AI is evolving."* While the strategy is the "skeleton", **there is still a gap in infrastructure readiness** which threatens performance and credibility.

However, hardware is not the only matter which is important. Human capital is also a necessity, as P8 admitted, *"I personally do not feel totally knowledgeable to understand the full extent of AI,"* highlighting a **shortfall in AI literacy**. While the basics are there, most participants fell short of grasping the full extent to which AI can be applied to public administration and to policymaking in general. From the overall interviews, all participants demonstrated basic knowledge, however, as P6 stated, there is a *"Lack of AI expertise among public officials"* and *"There is still a lack of sufficient training."* **In-house expertise is critical for AI adoption** and thus, without the internal capacity, reliance on external consultants becomes unsustainable. The **public sector must remain competitive with the private sector in attracting and retaining skilled professionals** to avoid "brain bleed," that is the loss of top talent to more lucrative or dynamic private sector opportunities.

AI literacy amongst public sector and public service employees goes beyond basic familiarity with chatbots; it involves understanding how models are trained, recognising bias

in outputs and missing information, and knowing the ethical and legal boundaries of data use. **A lack of knowledge slows down experimentation** and results in organisations resting on third parties and outsourcing. Additionally, P6 also highlighted that there is a direct **link between investment and capacity building**. The participant stated that the “*Pace of adoption will depend heavily on the level of investment.*” **Investment in knowledge**, therefore, covers courses tailored to public officials to deepen their AI literacy. Most participants also corroborated the fact that an increase in AI literacy would diminish the irresponsible use of AI.

Apart from individual proficiency, organisations need to be prepared. As P7 stated, “*We do have plans in the works to make sure that we are recruiting the necessary people to help us leverage AI to the best of our capabilities.*” However, recruitment is not the only solution; as P5 observes, “*Willingness to adapt ... greatly influences adoption,*” a reminder that **adaptability and attitude are two factors which determine whether new tools are introduced** and whether they are embraced. Both factors, along with **sustained education, discipline, and willingness**, can mitigate risks associated with unmanaged AI, and it is truly then when the benefits of AI can be reaped for the greater good.

4.4 Synthesis of Results

To conclude, the previously discussed mind map was created to aid the reader in understanding the thematic concepts which were found using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Most participants frame readiness as the starting point. Until **better infrastructure is put into place, skills are heightened, and a sense of readiness is fostered**, every other ambition remains a theory. Policymakers deem efficiency as a major

benefit of deploying AI systems, which cannot be harnessed without the starting point. However, **the human element should not be substituted in favour of chasing quick wins** and, in their view, the human element is what stops productivity from turning into rubber-stamping machine output. The Maltese culture and context are what set the pace for adoption and, according to participants, **both culture and context play a critical role in adoption as tools which fail to consider island realities tend to trigger a pushback**. Policymakers also perceive **transparency as the societal key** that unlocks cultural acceptance which **leads to more investment and readiness initiatives**. However, **oversight is mostly sought by the participants**, more specifically, oversight which aligns with societal values and legal requirements. Without oversight, public trust is eroded, leading to less investment, halting readiness, and losing the potential of deploying AI within public administration and, more specifically, for policymaking.

Themes	Key Findings
Efficiency & Productivity	AI is widely seen as a tool to streamline routine and mundane tasks. Policymakers view AI as an assistant not a replacement for human roles. Over-dependence concerns were raised leading to a lack of critical thinking
Human Judgement & Critical Thinking	Participants worry that AI may weaken critical thinking and the policymakers' role in complex scenarios. AI was seen as unable to grasp context and nuances. The human element is deemed as essential and needs to be preserved.
Ethics, Transparency & Accountability	Strong emphasis on the need for ethical frameworks, transparency and accountability. GenAI outputs were seen as “one-size-fits-all” and difficult to scrutinise.

	Concerns about bias and lack of alignment with local values were common.
Culture and Context.	Malta's cultural values, small size and tight-knit society shape how AI is perceived and adopted. AI tools often fail to grasp the local context which in turn may lead to a lack of trust. Generational resistance and cultural hesitation were deemed as barriers to adoption.
Ethical Risks and Security	Concerns include data privacy, confidentiality and inaccurate outputs. Some participants were hesitant to use AI for sensitive or official tasks. A lack of national guidelines leaves departments to set their own rules and pace.
Readiness Skills and Infrastructure.	AI adoption is hindered by insufficient infrastructure, low AI literacy, and a lack of in-house expertise. Reliance on external consultants is unsustainable; the public sector must build internal capacity. Participants stressed the need for investment, training and willingness to adapt

Table 6: Thematic Findings from Interviews.

4.5 Triangulation and Discussion of Results

To strengthen the validity, reliability, and depth of the findings, this study adopted a methodological triangulation approach by comparing the findings from the document analysis with the semi-structured interviews. This comparison of data offers a more holistic understanding of AI adoption as the perceptions of the policymakers do not exist in a vacuum but are affected directly and indirectly by the policy context which is already present.

“Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena” (Patton 1999 p. 545). The triangulation of the data gathered from the document analysis and the interview data revealed key areas of convergence. The presence of convergence suggests validity as expressed by different sources (Carter & Bryant-Lukosius et al. 2014). As presented above, the findings from both the document analysis and the participants highlighted areas such as ethical governance, institutional capacity, and the need for risk mitigation. However, the analysis also exposed important divergences. While the documents presented a largely optimistic and forward-looking vision of AI integration, data from the interviews suggests that a more practical angle is missing. The participants focused on challenges such as lack of resources, organisation resistance, and regulatory ambiguity. Such divergences are particularly important as they highlight the gap between policy aspirations and hands-on experiences.

4.5.1 Convergence

The convergence of themes present in both the policy documents and the interviews relate to **trust, ethics, and accountability, which underscore the central role of human-centric values which should be present amidst the core of AI governance**. As previously stated by Kuziemski and Misuraca (2020), ethical challenges arise when the human element is missing. **Both policy documents and interview data emphasised the need for transparent and fair AI systems to foster public trust and mitigate risk and irresponsible use**. Malta's Ethical AI Framework (2019) and the G7 toolkit (2024) highlight

accountability mechanisms as essential for ensuring ethical alignment and legitimacy. This was also expressed by P1, P3, and P7. These findings align with EU policy briefings such as the EU guidelines on ethics in AI (2019), which highlight ethical AI rules that are recommended when designing, developing, and deploying AI products and services. Such recommendations call for regularisation, a common theme amongst participants who called for clear guidelines. This also aligns with Dignum (2018), who argues that trust in AI is built through clear governance, robust oversight, and shared ethical standards. Transparent and ethical AI systems should also be able to mitigate bias, however, as participants pointed out, having AI systems that are free from bias is nearly impossible. Thus, precautions should be taken. Centin, Presuel et al. (2023) warn that AI-driven administrative automation without proper oversight can embed or even amplify systemic bias, potentially disadvantaging already marginalised groups.

Additional research also supports the idea that successful AI implementation is very reliant on public trust and not just on how the technology operates in silos. According to Ahmad et al. (2024), finding a balance between innovation and ethical principles is critical. Through collaboration, policymakers and industry leaders can harness AI's potential to leave a positive impact. According to Ravuri (2023), trust and ethical values intertwine as trust in AI increases when ethical values such as fairness and accountability are taken seriously. Furthermore, David, Choung et al. (2024) also found that people are more likely to rely on AI if the people's interests are kept “in mind”. Overall, ethical governance frameworks and public trust are not peripheral; they are central to the sustainable implementation and perception of AI by public policymakers.

According to Chatterjee (2019), well-structured institutional frameworks clarify the legal and ethical responsibilities and the risk of harm decreases; thus, policy direction is necessary. According to the literature, policymakers' willingness to support AI adoption is influenced by clear and strong governmental frameworks. **AI policy must not only regulate technology but also hold society's values at its core.** This coincides with the fact that policy and governance enable trust and adoption by providing clarity and security for the policymakers while leveraging the benefits of AI and mitigating the risks.

Convergence also occurred when dealing with the theme of **risk management and security.** **Both themes emerged consistently across both interview data and policy documents, reflecting a shared recognition of the vulnerabilities associated with AI adoption in public administration.** The documentation suggests the need for robust risk mitigation strategies, including clear protocols for cybersecurity, data protection, and risk assessment. Continuous monitoring was also suggested to pre-empt unintended consequences which may arise. Interview participants echoed these concerns, citing fears of data breaches, misleading information, and skewed output.

Wirtz, Weyerer et al. (2022) propose a four-layered AI governance framework that categorises AI risk as technological, ethical, legal, economic, and communicational, and links them to mitigation strategies through a tailored risk management process. According to Popa (2024), risk management is a foundational element in governing the use of AI in the public sector. The paper highlights how risk goes beyond just technical reliability; it goes into risks related to fundamental rights such as privacy and discrimination. Oversight tools help ensure that there is a human-centric presence when dealing with sensitive risks. However, full transparency is not always possible, and systems which have been deployed in areas such as

policing are exempted to prevent security breaches. Lee, Kim et al. (2025) recognised the potential of adopting GPT-based systems for their advances in natural language capabilities, flexibility, and efficiency, however, they also introduced new risks. A framework was developed to test these vulnerabilities and create simulations mirroring high-risk situations. The overall goal of this framework is to identify vulnerabilities when deploying GPTs to be used responsibly and in line with the public institution's legal and ethical obligations.

Again, the themes of capacity building, institutional readiness, AI-related skills, and digital infrastructure were evident across both the interviews and the policy documents. Participants highlighted the uneven distribution of AI literacy, technical expertise, and organisation preparedness within public administration, often pointing to a lack of tailored courses and a lack of investment in upskilling that hinders AI integration. These perceptions are echoed in documents such as the Malta National AI strategy (2019), which stressed the need for a future-ready public administration supported by digital infrastructure and continuous professional development. Investment in upskilling and AI literacy in Maltese public administration is imperative, more so now than ever, as the Prime Minister recently launched a 4-million-euro investment to leverage Microsoft Copilot, a digital AI tool for productivity, within public administration (Office of the Prime Minister 2025).

Van Noordt and Misuraca (2020) emphasise that the successful implementation of AI does not only depend on the technology and the infrastructure but also on human and organisational capabilities. According to the authors every technology offers very limited values if people do not have the intention or the abilities to use it to its full potential. Building AI literacy and digital skills within public administration is necessary for ensuring the smooth

integration of AI within the public administration. According to Vatamanu and Tofan (2025), a digitally skilled workforce contributes significantly towards digital transformation but also plays a significant role in good governance. The researchers' findings revealed that there is a correlation between digitally skilled human capital and improved governance and service delivery.

According to (Ng, Leung et al. 2021), AI has become such a fundamental skill for everyone that it should be added to every learner's technological literacy. Learners should not just be able to use and apply it accordingly, but know and understand as well as evaluate and create AI while also fostering social responsibility and ethical awareness. Additionally, according to Grimmelikhuijsen and Tangi (2024), in-house expertise in AI is also necessary as this should go beyond just technical expertise; it should include expertise in ethics, governance, and law. Institutions and entities looking to leverage AI-driven solutions should look beyond hiring just data scientists but also employees with legal and social science backgrounds to ensure a broad range of expertise.

4.5.2 Divergence

The theme of innovation emerges primarily from the policy documents, which positioned AI as a driver for enhancing service delivery. **Innovation in the public sector is increasingly seen as essential for government to meet rising citizen expectations and complex societal challenges.** It is necessary to adapt to a fast-paced society driven by technology. According to Demir (2022), innovation is deemed as a structural necessity. As AI continues to change society, institutions need to be more flexible, open to new ideas, and willing to try new approaches. Innovation is not just about the creation of new tools but about

changing how government services are designed and delivered. It requires strong leadership, a culture that supports learning, and a focus on meeting people's needs in new and better ways. However, **the theme of innovation was not a prominent theme in the interviews, as participants rarely mentioned innovation unprompted, suggesting a potential gap between policy aspirations and real-life experience.** It may also suggest that **innovation is still viewed as a top-down initiative** rather than an embedded cultural or operational value within public administration.

The theme of critical thinking and human judgement was mostly present when analysing the interviews, however, it was not present among the strategic frameworks, indicating a disconnect. This gap suggests that while practitioners recognise the importance of maintaining human oversight in AI-assisted decision-making, **current policies may not.** Thus, certain human preserving faculties necessary for responsible policy formulation are missing from the governance strategies. According to Ennis (2011), technological tools such as ChatGPT significantly shape human cognition, emotions, and behaviours. Additionally, according to Fabio, Plebe et al. (2024), such interaction can affect cognitive functions such as attention, memory, reason, and, more specifically, critical thinking over time. According to the researcher, critical thinking is defined as a high-level cognitive skill whereby the individual is able to recognise bias and make informed decisions. The study suggests that experience coupled with high levels of caution can improve the user's critical thinking skills. However, awareness is equally as important to mitigate detrimental effects.

The adoption of GenAI in public administration is deeply influenced by cultural context, as both national and organisational cultures shape how technologies are perceived, trusted, and implemented. With its small scale, tight-knit governance structures, and layered

institutional dynamics, Malta serves as an ideal test bed, as described in the Malta AI Strategy (2019). While the policy documents briefly acknowledge the need to consider cultural factors, **it was the interview participants who strongly emphasised the role of organisational culture, particularly resistance to change, hierarchical decision-making, and varying levels of digital readiness,** as key determinants of AI adoption. A critical dimension of this discourse is whether GenAI is **capable of recognising and adapting to cultural nuances such as, value systems,** norms, and context-specific decision-making processes. Scholars argue that AI systems, trained primarily on large global datasets, often lack sensitivity to local cultural signals, which can lead to misalignment or even harm when deployed in culturally specific environments (Ożegalska-Łukasik, Łukasik 2023). However, as Messner (2022) notes, ensuring culturally responsive AI requires embedding local values into system design and implementation through a process which is referred to as machine enculturation. The concept of AI enculturation, as coined by the author, integrates sociocultural values into AI systems to enhance human alignment and reduce harm and is gaining traction. Scholars have shown that embedding cultural features can humanise AI and improve its accuracy in decision-making, underscoring the importance of cultural awareness in AI development. Thus, the need for Malta’s AI policy to go beyond generic ethical principles and engage more deeply with the cultural and organisational realities is imperative. The findings have been synthesised and are presented in the table below.

Convergence:

Theme	Main Findings
Trust and Ethics, Transparency	Both sources stress the need for transparent, fair AI systems to foster trust and prevent misuse.

Regularisation and Governance	Both sources shared the importance of regulatory frameworks and oversight mechanisms
Risk Management & Security	Consensus on the need for cybersecurity protocols, data protection, and continuous risk management.
Capacity Building & Skills	Both sources agreed on the need for training, AI literacy and organizational capacity building.
Readiness Skills and Infrastructure.	Both highlight the need for infrastructure investment and internal expertise to support AI deployment.

Table 7: Convergence between document analysis and interviews.

Divergence:

Theme	Main Findings
Innovation	Policy documents deem innovation as essential however, it was rarely mentioned by participants unless prompted.
Critical Thinking and Human Judgement	Interview data strongly suggests the need to preserve critical thinking, largely absent from policy documents.
Culture and Context	Participants highlighted cultural resistance and context sensitivity, which were only briefly noted in documents.

Table 8: Divergence between document analysis and interviews.

4.6 Applying the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to Policymakers' Perceptions of AI Adoption

Since the creation of the TAM model, its framework has been applied to several technology-related contexts, including email, voicemail, word-processing, and chatbots. It has also been used in many studies to investigate the effects of TAM constructs in public

administration, for example, to test the adoption of e-government service (Benown 2022, Belanche, Casaló et al. 2012).

In applying the triangulated dissertation findings related to AI integration into public administration in Malta, the perceived usefulness emerged strongly. **The documents as well as the policymakers identified numerous benefits linked to efficiency and productivity.** As P3 states, *“if the AI tool is assisting the policy maker, the tool can actually help you.”* P7 stated that *“I personally think that efficiency is one of the tool’s best qualities.”* AI’s ability to rapidly process large quantities of data and generate analytical insights significantly reinforced policymakers perception of its usefulness. P2 also noted that *“Chat GPT is trained to emulate empathy, patience and understanding, benefits which are not commonly looked into”*. **The way ChatGPT is designed and trained to respond with patience and understanding contributes to its perceived usefulness, making the participant more inclined to engage with the tool.** However, perceived usefulness is also impacted by perceived ease of use, according to Davis (1989).

With regards to perceived ease of use, **findings revealed mixed sentiments.** On a superficial level, the participants viewed the technology as easy to use. However, **in-depth, their perceived ease of use was also diminished by concerns** about being unable to comprehend the complex reasoning behind AI systems as well as finding it difficult to interpret the output. According to the findings, **the participants deemed that the output may be biased, incomplete, skewed or misinformed;** this might not be easy to detect without a critical eye. Such concerns notably negatively influenced policymakers’ ease of use perceptions.

According to (Silva 2015 cited in Benown, 2022) attitudes towards using technology are motivated by two central beliefs: the perceived ease of use and the perceived usefulness. Thus, if the participant deems GenAI tools such as ChatGPT as easy to use and, despite the concerns, they are more inclined to use it. However, if participants find it difficult to use and do not see the benefits of using it, they are less likely to use it. Behavioural intention, another essential component of TAM, closely correlates with attitudes toward AI. In turn, **policymakers who held positive attitudes towards technology such as P2 were deemed more credible and more willing to adopt it. However, other policymakers who responded negatively and showed signs of scepticism were likely less willing to use AI tools in policymaking.**

However, it would be unwise to stick to the perceived ease of use and the perceived usefulness as the only determinants in accepting the technology. An array of external factors which were present in the findings also affect the adoption of AI technologies. Such factors include ethical concerns, risk perception, institutional readiness, cultural context, support and resources, regulatory environment, and social influence. **Participants who exhibited heightened awareness of risks and a lack of trust demonstrated more negative attitudes towards adopting AI,** aligning with the TAM. According to Belanche, Casaló et al. (2012), trust is deemed as a key driver for adoption as it correlates directly with uncertainty and vulnerability risks. The effectiveness of implementation is highly dependent on the acceptance level from users, in this case, policymakers. Thus, it would be unwise not to comprehend the factors that influence users' intentions in adopting AI tools (Amali, Katili et al. 2022).

Beyond the external variables, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use, the findings of this study offer a more integrated understanding of the full TAM framework in the context of AI adoption within the public administration. **Participants expressed a cautiously optimistic attitude towards using AI, driven not only by strategic ambitions to modernise policymaking but also by a growing sense of urgency.** The participants recognised its potential for efficiency and innovation however, these attitudes were moderated by concerns around ethical implementation, organisational readiness, and regulatory clarity. These factors, as Wang et al. (2023) explain, along with perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, contribute to the formation of attitude, which is shaped by experience and serves as the hidden yet foundational driver of behavioural intent.

In this regard, the findings support the notion that attitude positively influences behavioural intention, with policymakers showing growing strategic intent to implement AI, even in the face of uncertainty. Ma (2024) identifies behavioural intention as a mediator between these core constructs and actual system use, which was also observed in the current study. Taken together, the findings validate TAM as a holistic framework and underscore the importance of nurturing positive attitudes, strengthening intention, and removing systemic barriers to foster meaningful AI adoption in policymaking. However, **despite strong intentions, actual system use remains limited,** often constrained by contextual challenges such as infrastructure, training, and governance mechanisms, which was also coined by other authors who viewed that intention alone is insufficient without supportive systems and policy environments.

Finally, the actual use of AI in the context of Malta's public administration is now being tested with the latest introduction of Microsoft Copilot (Office of the Prime Minister

2025). Thus, the acceptance of this emerging technological tool can be understood through the core components of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) alongside key external factors. The TAM effectively frames the complexities influencing policymakers' acceptance of AI within Malta's public administration. Future efforts to increase acceptance of AI tools must address concerns around perceived ease of use in order to reinforce their perceived usefulness. This, in turn, can foster more positive attitudes toward such technologies, including tools like Microsoft Copilot.

4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the dual layers of analysis underpinning this study: a review of key policy documents and the thematic insights drawn from interviews with policymakers. Together, these phases have revealed both alignment and disjuncture between strategic intentions and lived experiences in Malta's public administration. While policy frameworks emphasise principles such as ethical governance, transparency, and innovation, the interview findings brought forward more nuanced practical concerns, highlighting challenges related to organisational culture, human judgement, critical thinking, and the lived experiences of AI adoption. Notably, themes like culture and contextual relevance were more deeply addressed by participants than by policy, suggesting that successful implementation of AI in policymaking requires a deeper engagement with the sociocultural environment in which these technologies operate. This study's findings align with TAM, showing that perceived usefulness, ease of use, and external factors like trust and risk strongly influenced policymakers' attitudes and intentions toward AI adoption. This

chapter demonstrates that AI adoption is not merely a technical or administrative matter, but a complex process shaped by human values, institutional readiness, and contextual sensitivities. As such, a more adaptive, culturally responsive approach may be necessary to bridge the gap between high-level policy goals and practical integration on the ground.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This chapter synthesises the findings of the overall study and addresses the research questions that have guided the research throughout. The research questions will be answered by integrating evidence from the document analysis, the interviews, and the relevant literature. It will also discuss further the implications through the lens of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and concludes by considering the future of AI in public administration, particularly in light of emerging concepts such as agentic AI, and by presenting directions for future research.

5.2 Addressing the Research Questions

5.2.1 What are the (1a) perceived benefits associated with the implementation of AI in policymaking within public administration?

AI was largely viewed as a tool with transformative potential. Such benefits were noted by participants who acknowledged its usefulness in enhancing **policy efficiency, improving the accuracy and speed of data analysis, and enabling timely decision-making**. Interviews frequently highlighted AI's ability to reduce repetitive administrative tasks, allowing human actors to focus on more strategic functions. This aligns with national and international policy frameworks, such as the Malta AI Strategy (2019) and the G7 Toolkit (2024), which also promote AI as a catalyst for innovation in public administration. According to the literature, Chen, Salem et al. (2021) categorised the benefits of AI in public governance into nine areas: efficiency, risk mitigation, economic growth, data processing, service delivery, societal wellbeing, decision-making, citizen engagement, and sustainability.

AI also enhances productivity by automating tasks, improving decision-making through predictive analytics, and supporting a citizen-centric public service model (Consilium 2024, Kulal, Rahiman et al. 2024). It also contributes to economic competitiveness (Szczepański 2019, PWC 2017) and sustainable development by optimising resource management and environmental efforts (Yaseen 2024, Coeckelbergh 2021).

5.2.1.1 What are the (1b) perceived challenges associated with the implementation of AI in policymaking within public administration?

During the interviews, participants cited concerns about limited internal **expertise, rigid procurement systems, and the lack of AI governance structures**. Several participants expressed concerns about growing **dependency on AI tools, which would in turn have negative effects on critical thinking**, potentially sidelining expert judgement. **Organisational readiness, resistance to change, and the absence of specialised training** further constrained adoption, according to participants. The literature also identified a wide range of perceived challenges associated with the use of AI in policymaking, notably data bias, lack of regulatory clarity, and ethical concerns. AI systems depend heavily on data quality, thus skewed or incomplete datasets can result in discriminatory outcomes and unfair policy decisions (Chen, Salem et al. 2021, Janssen et al. 2020, Wirtz et al. 2022). The complex nature of AI outputs might overwhelm policymakers, making it difficult for them to interpret and risk errors (Alexopoulos et al. 2019). **Legal issues, such as data privacy, transparency, and accountability issues**, also complicate matters (European Parliament 2021, Sattar Butt 2024). Scholars also warn of **dehumanisation, workforce displacement, and environmental costs** tied to the use of AI in policymaking (Toll et al. 2019, United

Nations 2024, Kuziemski, Misuraca 2020). These concerns were noted by participants and also reflected in the Malta Ethical AI Framework and the G7 Toolkit, which stress human oversight, transparency, and institutional readiness. These insights revealed that while AI offers clear potential, its integration into policymaking must be approached cautiously, with safeguards that **uphold public trust, reinforce human-centred decision-making, and ensure readiness** at all institutional levels

5.2.2 What factors influence policymaker's attitudes towards the adoption of AI in the public administration specifically for policy making?

Policymakers' attitudes toward AI adoption in public administration are shaped by a range of interdependent factors, spanning efficiency, human judgement, ethics, and organisational readiness. When AI is perceived as **enhancing efficiency and productivity**, policymakers' attitudes tend to be more favourable. However, concerns still persist about the **erosion of critical thinking and human judgement**, especially in complex policy contexts where a critical eye and attention to detail are essential (Ennis 2011, Fabio, Plebe et al. 2024). Ethical concerns, especially those centred **around transparency, bias, and accountability**, play a critical role in shaping trust towards the AI tool. Interview participants in this study cited the fact that AI output, which lacks explainability, undermines confidence in its use. These concerns are echoed in the Malta Ethical AI Framework (MDIA 2019) and the G7 Toolkit (OECD 2024), both of which stress the importance of human oversight and ethical governance.

Additionally, **cultural and contextual fit** play a significant role in shaping attitudes. Policymakers are often resistant towards externally developed AI tools as they are deemed as incapable of aligning with local administrative realities, a dynamic reinforced by research on culturally responsive AI (Fabio, Plebe et al. 2024). **Security risks, including confidentiality concerns, data privacy, and misleading information**, further hindered policymakers' willingness to fully embrace AI as these risks raise doubts about the **reliability, legality, and ethical soundness** of AI-driven decisions, particularly in sensitive policy areas. Finally, **institutional readiness**, including adequate **infrastructure and AI literacy**, significantly impacts acceptance. Policymakers with low confidence in their technical skills or organisational capacity express greater caution (Vatamanu, Tofan 2025, Ng, Leung et al. 2021, Van Noordt, Misuraca 2020).

The findings of this study also aligned with the TAM model, particularly perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis 1989). Policymakers who viewed AI as improving efficiency, automating mundane tasks, and increasing productivity expressed more openness toward adoption, thus perceiving the GenAI tools as useful. However, although deemed easy to use on a superficial level, profound concerns and doubts around AI literacy, the interpretability of output, and the possibility of hallucinations and misinformation negatively influence the perceived ease of use. External variables such as ethical concerns, institutional readiness, and organisational culture also further influenced adoption attitudes.

Overall, these findings suggest that policymakers' attitudes toward AI adoption are shaped by three interdependent factors: **perceived usefulness and efficiency, ethical and human-centric concerns, and contextual and organisational readiness**. These dimensions

interact in complex ways, influencing trust, willingness to adopt, and perceptions of AI's fit within the policymaking environment.

5.2.3 What are policymakers' views on the intersection between AI usage in policymaking and cultural context?

Policymakers expressed that the successful adoption of AI in public administration must be culturally and contextually grounded as Malta's small size, close-knit governance, and strong interpersonal trust shape perceptions and readiness. **Participants noted that AI tools tend to lack in grasping Malta's specificities and eccentricities.** On a smaller scale, resistance among the **older generation was noted**, while younger employees were deemed to be more open to innovation. Organisational culture, hierarchical decision-making, and **varying digital readiness** levels were also cited as influencing AI adoption. The participants strongly advocated for tailored, human-centric approaches. These concerns align with scholarly work showing that AI systems, typically trained on global datasets, often lack the ability to capture the nuances of local cultural signals, risking misalignment when applied to specific contexts (Ożegalska-Lukasik 2023). As Messner (2022) explains, embedding sociocultural values into AI design, which is referred to as **machine enculturation**, is essential for achieving culturally responsive and accurate systems. Therefore, adoption must go beyond a generic ethical framework and also be in tune with local values, practices, and administrative norms to ensure effective implementation.

5.3 Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged in its conclusion. Firstly, the research was conducted with a relatively small pool of policymakers within Maltese public administration. While this does allow for depth within the findings, it limits the generalisability of the results beyond the local context (Tierney, Clemens 2011). The findings are rooted in Malta's unique cultural and institutional context and cannot be easily transferable, however, this can also be viewed as a strength for policymaking within the local context. The use of elite interviews also introduced additional challenges. Given their positions, the participants may have responded strategically in their own favour or aligned their response with the institutional narrative, limiting the depth and authenticity of the views (Lilleker 2003).

Access limitations and data protection concerns necessitate the use of purposive sampling, which may have excluded more critical voices higher up in the public service. Restrictions on audio recording further reduced data richness and placed greater reliance on researcher notes. Thematic analysis, while conducted rigorously and supported by Braun and Clarke's (2006) criteria, remains subject to researcher interpretation. Although reflexivity was maintained throughout, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2020), the research process and the researcher's professional background as part of public administration may have influenced the interpretation of participants' views, potentially privileging certain insights over others. Furthermore, the document analysis focused on four key texts which, while relevant and fall within the scope of this dissertation, do not fully capture the policy landscape. Finally, AI policy and regulations as well as literature related to AI technologies continue to evolve; some findings may be time-bound and require future reassessment.

5.4 Directions for Practice

Based on the findings, several directions for practice emerge. A notable discrepancy was observed between the policy discourse surrounding AI adoption and the lived experiences of policymakers. While national strategies and frameworks promote innovation and ethical AI use, participants expressed concern about practical gaps in training on AI literacy, implementation, and contextual sensitivity (Pinski, Benlian 2024). This dissertation also revealed a tendency toward growing dependency on AI systems which would lead to a decline in critical thinking and human judgement (Fabio, Plebe et al. 2024). This highlights a pressing need to reframe AI governance in public administration to prioritise the human element rather than the technology itself. Policies should not focus solely on technical capabilities; they must also emphasise human oversight, cognitive engagement, and ethical reflection. AI should be positioned as a supportive tool that enhances, not replaces, human decision-making. Practical efforts should focus on capacity building, AI literacy, and guidelines for responsible use, which shed light on the importance of critical thinking. Therefore, bridging the gap between strategy and practice requires a reorientation. Now more than ever, with the introduction of Microsoft Copilot, policymakers and civil servants are to act as informed critical agents and catalysts in the digital transformation of governance.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

Presently, the focus is primarily on governing AI rather than governing with AI as a tool, thus more research is required. Therefore, future research should explore the adoption of AI models such as Agentic AI and tools such as GovGPT and their applications in public administration. GovGPT, recently launched in the US, is a specialised LLMs created by

OpenAI, designed for government use, allowing agencies to maintain control over security, privacy, and compliance in a secure environment (Mohan 2025). By studying the implementation of AI tools in other jurisdictions, researchers can implement the findings in a local setting to help inform more context-aware AI strategies. Similarly, the rise of Agentic AI, which is an AI system capable of carrying out decisions with minimal human input, also warrants critical research. Agentic AI has improved operational decision-making but has also raised several questions concerning accountability, ethics, and autonomy. However, by embracing such opportunities and navigating the risks, organisations can put themselves at the forefront of an intelligent AI-driven future (Hosseini, Seilani 2025). Additionally, public opinion is also crucial for public administration, thus surveys on AI similar to those conducted by Eom et al. (2024) within the context of governance could also prove to be insightful.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, this study examined the perceptions of policymakers on the use of AI in public administration, revealing several findings related to the importance of ethical governance, cultural and contextual sensitivity, and human-centric approaches. Addressing the gap between policy ambition and live experience is critical to ensure responsible effective integration. Ultimately, AI should be seen not merely as a technological tool but as part of a broader socio-political system. To truly benefit from AI, public administration and policymakers must adopt a more proactive approach, one that does not only keep up with innovation but also anticipates its potential to evolve into a complex and possibly wicked policy challenge.

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Appendix A

Dear Participant,

My name is Christa Caruana, and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Masters degree in Public Policy Leadership. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation titled “*The perceptions of policy makers on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Public Administration*”; this is being supervised by Dr Luke Buhagiar. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Kindly note that permission has been granted by the Data protection officer within the Office of the Prime Minister to collect the data. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to first explore policymakers' attitudes, beliefs, and concerns regarding the integration of AI in the public administration specifically for policymaking. Secondly, to critically evaluate the perceived benefits and challenges of AI implementation, focusing on governance effectiveness and policy making and lastly to assess and analyse the influencing organizational, contextual, and individual factors shaping policy makers attitudes toward AI. Your participation in this study would help contribute to a better understanding of the complexities between AI and the public administration. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of open-ended questions in the form of an interview which can take place both online and on-site depending to the participant's preferences. This will take you approximately between 30 minutes to 45 to complete.

Data collected will be stored in an encrypted, password-protected folder on the researcher's computer to ensure data privacy and accessibility. Identifiable data will be encrypted and stored offline on an external hard drive or flash drive, or a secure UM server (not the UM Google Drive). Any material in hard copy form will be placed in a locked cupboard. Only my supervisor and I (and in exceptional cases, examiners) will have access to this data.

The findings which emerge from this research may be published (e.g., in a dissertation, academic journals) and/or presented (e.g., during conferences, meetings). Your name (or any other identifying information including any references to departmental tasks) will not appear when the findings are reported.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is

anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please also note that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased.

As mentioned, all data collected will be stored in a an encrypted, password-protected folder on the researcher's computer to ensure data privacy and accessibility and will be stored for 5 years following the final submission of the research.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact myself or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Yours Sincerely,

Christa Caruana

Appendix B

Participant's Consent Form

“The perceptions of policy-makers perspective on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Public Administration”

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Christa Caruana. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I am aware that the researcher has been granted approval by the Data protection office within the Office of the Prime Minister prior to contacting the participant.
3. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
4. I understand that I have been invited to participate in an interview in which the researcher will ask a series of questions to explore the perceptions of the participants and their beliefs. I am aware that the interviews will take approximately between 45 minutes to an hour. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
5. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.
6. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others by providing further insight on the topic at hand.
7. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
8. I understand that all data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study and following publication of results within 5 years of completion of the study.
9. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.

10. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
11. I am aware that notes from my interview may be published (e.g., in a dissertation, academic journals) and/or presented (e.g., during conferences, meetings), either in anonymous form, or using a pseudonym (a made-up name or code, e.g., respondent A).
12. I am aware that my data will be pseudonymised, i.e., my identity will not be noted notes from my interview, but instead, a code will be assigned. The codes that link my data to my identity will be stored securely and separately from the data. Raw identifiable data will be encrypted and stored offline on an external hard drive or flash drive, or a secure UM server (not the UM Google Drive). Any material in hard copy form will be placed in a locked cupboard. Only my supervisor and myself (and in exceptional cases, examiners) will have access to this data.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Perception Study on Policymakers' Views on AI Adoption in Malta

1. Could you please describe your role within the organisation and provide a little background on your career thus far?
2. How do you define or understand the concept of AI in the context of public policy and governance?
3. Can you describe your personal experiences or interactions with AI technologies, if any, in your professional role?
 - a. Have you ever encountered instances where you used GPTs specifically?
4. What benefits do you associate with implementing AI in the public administration, more specifically for policymaking?
5. What are your primary concerns about the use of AI for policymaking?
6. Do you believe that the Maltese public administration is adequately prepared to address ethical challenges related to AI? Why or why not?
7. What challenges do you think Malta might face in adopting AI technologies for policymaking?
8. What would you say are the key influencers/factors (such as AI literacy, resources, preparedness, and culture) that effect the adoption of AI within the public administration?
9. In your view, do Maltese cultural values influence the adoption of AI technologies within the public administration?

10. In your opinion, can AI improve decision-making processes in the public administration?
11. Where do you see Malta in terms of AI adoption in the next 5-10 years?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add about your perceptions of AI adoption in Malta's Public Administration within the context of policymaking ?

Appendix D



L-Università
ta' Malta

University Research Ethics
Committee (UREC)

URECA Replica

1G August 2024

University of Malta staff, students, or anyone else planning to carry out research under the auspices of the University, must complete this form. The UM may also consider requests for ethics and data protection review by External Applicants.

Ahead of completing this online form, please read carefully the University of Malta [Research Code of Practice](#) and the University of Malta [Research Ethics Review Procedures](#). Any breach of the *Research Code of Practice* or untruthful replies in this form will be considered a serious disciplinary matter. It is advisable to download a full digital version of the form to familiarise yourself with its contents (<https://www.um.edu.mt/research/ethics/forms>). You are also advised to refer to the FAQs (<https://www.um.edu.mt/research/ethics/faqs>).

* Signifies required field

Part 1: Applicant and Project Details

Applicant details

*Name: Christa

*Surname: Caruana

*Email: christa.caruana.17@um.edu.mt

*Applicant Status: Student

*Please indicate if you form part of a faculty: Economics, Management and Accountancy

***Department:** Department of Public Policy

****If applicable:** Principal Supervisor's Name Dr Luke Buhagiar

****If applicable:** Study Unit Code PPL5019

****If applicable:** Course Title M.A Public Policy Leadership

****If applicable:** Student number 361698M

Project Details

***Title of Research Project:** The perceptions of Policy makers on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Public Administration.

***Project description, including research question/statement and method, in brief:** This dissertation will aim to explore policymakers attitudes, beliefs and concerns regarding AI adoption within the public service and critically evaluate the perceived benefits and challenges associated with AI implementation. Lastly it will also assess and analyse influencing factors shaping the policy makers attitudes. The data will be collected during a number of semi-structured interviews whereby the participants will be asked relevant questions related to the topic. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the (1a) perceived benefits and (1b) perceived challenges associated with the implementation of artificial intelligence in policy making within the public sector?
2. What factors influence policymakers' attitudes towards the adoption of artificial intelligence in public sector?
3. What are policymakers' views on the intersections between AI and cultural context?"

***Will project involve collection of primary data from human participants? Yes**

Explain primary data collection from human participants: A minimum of 10 participants will be interviewed. No specific characteristics are required. All working within the public service or the public sector ideally in a line of work relevant to public policy formulation and design.

Please explain the following aspects with regard to data collection from human participants.

***a. Salient participant characteristics (e.g. min-max participants, age, sex, other);**

All participants will be above 18 years of age of all genders

***b. How they will be recruited (e.g. sampled, selected, contacted etc);**

An invitation will be sent via email to prospective participants which meet the criteria. Ethical consideration will be considered as the interviews will be conducted with the approval of the People C Standards division of OPM.

*c. What they will be required to do and for how long;

The participants will be as to participate in an online recorded interview with will take between 45mins - 1hour

*d. If inducements/rewards/compensation are offered;

No rewards

*e. How participants/society may benefit;

No benefit

*f. Is the participant's identity recorded at any stage of the research (e.g. in consent forms, records, publications)?;

Personal identifiers which might give away anonymity, such as names, professional titles and organisational affiliations will be removed from both the audio and transcription files to ensure anonymity.

*g. The manner in which you will manage and store the data.

Notes will be stored in an encrypted, password-protected folder on the researcher's computer to ensure data privacy and accessibility

*Will project involve collection of primary data from animals? No

Explain primary data collection from animals:

Part 2: Self-Assessment

In what follows, all questions have been answered as "No or Not Applicable" by default. Please mark "Yes or Unsure" to any of the issues that may apply to your research. In such cases, your research proposal presents potential issues in the domain of research ethics and/or data protection. In such cases, you are kindly asked to elaborate upon the specific issue/s you indicate, and you will need to seek FREC permission before data collection.

	Yes/Unsure
Human participants	
Skip questions 1-10 if your project does NOT involve primary data collection from human participants (or their tissue/samples)	
1. Risk of harm to participants: Are your participants at risk of harm? (Physical, psychological, legal, economic, social, etc.) Please explain: i. whether and how participants risk any harm (physical, psychological, legal economic or social) by participating in the research; ii. why such risks are unavoidable; iii. what safeguards you have taken to minimise the risk.	no
2. Physical intervention: Does your research involve non-harmful physical intervention on participants which may raise ethical concerns in your discipline? Please provide a brief risk assessment of each technique used and a brief overall risk assessment.	no
3. Vulnerable participants: Do you include participants who, in your study or discipline, would be considered vulnerable or may be more at risk of being in vulnerability than others (e.g. children, persons who are older, with dementia, patients, subject to discrimination, with disabilities, with mental health conditions, unable to give consent, in prostitution, incarcerated, substance abusers, economically or educationally disadvantaged or minorities)? Please explain: i. the nature of the vulnerability; ii. what safeguards will be taken to protect vulnerable participants (e.g. by not stigmatising participants, not putting undue pressure, implementing safeguards while processing consent, providing contact details for professional help should this be required, safeguarding privacy, providing compensation, etc. If participants are unable to give consent, please explain how you intend to obtain their assent; if this is not possible, - please explain why.	no
4. Identifiable participants: Are there participants in your research whose identity may be revealed in your research data, even though they have not given explicit consent to be so identified/attributed? Please elaborate on: i. the nature of the records, their storage, security, traceability, identifiability of participants and access to research records; ii. how participants will be protected when disseminating results (e.g. pseudonyms, coding, making data attributable with consent); iii. plans for retention and destruction of the records. Please submit a Data Management Plan.	no
5. Special Categories of Personal Data (SCPD): Do you plan to collect SCPD, which, for identifiable participants (in records, data and/or publication), reveals race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, membership in a	no

trade union, genetic or biometric data that may uniquely identify a natural person, health, sex life and/or sexual orientation? Which of the following data categories are collected, if any? i. race and ethnic origin; ii. political opinions; iii. religious and philosophical beliefs; iv. trade union memberships; v. health status; vi. sex life or sexual orientation; vii. genetic information; viii. biometric data that may uniquely identify a natural person. Please describe. Please submit a Data Management Plan.	
6. Human tissue/samples: Will your research involve the collection of human tissue/samples? Please elaborate on: i. the nature of materials and/or biological tissue/samples, their storage, security, traceability, identifiability, and who has access to them; ii. plans for retention and destruction.	no
7. Withheld info assent/consent: Do you plan to withhold information from potential participants regarding the nature of the research when you seek to obtain assent/consent? Please explain: i. the nature of the information withheld; ii. why withholding information is necessary; iii. whether and how participants may be given the information at any point during the research.	no
8. 'opt-out' recruitment: Will you use the 'opt-out' instead of the 'opt-in' method of obtaining consent when recruiting participants (i.e. will any participants be included in your study without providing explicit consent)? Please explain: i. the nature of the consent; ii. why opt-out is necessary; iii. how you will ensure that participants are able to make an informed choice concerning whether to participate or opt out.	no
9. Deception in data generation: Do you plan to actively provide false/misleading information or passively withhold information during the process of data generation (e.g. experiments, use of placebos, scenarios, games)? Please explain: i. the nature of the deception; ii. why this is unavoidable and why you have rejected alternative methods of conducting research; iii. whether the information is likely to be significant to subjects; iv. what explanation for deception and debriefing you give to participants following their participation.	no
10. Incidental findings: Could your research generate incidental findings that may need to be communicated to participants or others? Please elaborate on: i. the nature of potential incidental findings; ii. how such findings will be managed (participant consent to be informed, communication of information, etc.)	no
Unpublished secondary data	

Answer questions 11-13 if your research involves the use of unpublished secondary data. Otherwise skip to question 14.	
11. Human: Was the data collected from human participants? Please indicate the nature of the data collected. In the case of data that has not been anonymised/coded and that could lead to the identification of persons, provide evidence that the research project from which the data has been generated was covered by data protection and ethics review (including participant consent for secondary use), or (if administrative data) evidence that the data controller had permission from subjects for secondary use of data and conformed to the requirements of the Data Protection Act and GDPR.	no
12. Animal: Was the data collected from animals? Please indicate the nature of the data collected. If the source was a research project, provide evidence that the project was covered by ethics review.	no
13. No written permission: Is written permission from the data controller of the original data still to be obtained? Please elaborate.	no
Animals	
Answer questions 14-16 if your project involves primary data collection from animals (non-human vertebrates and cephalopods) or their tissue/samples. Otherwise skip to question 17.	
14. Live animals, lasting harm: Does your research involve taking live animals out of their natural habitat for use in procedures or where such removal may cause the animals lasting harm? Please elaborate.	no
15. Live animals, harm: Is there a risk that your research causes harm to live animals? Please elaborate.	no
16. Source of dead animals, illegal: Does your research involve the use of dead animals (or their tissue/samples) that have not been acquired legally or from a legal source? Please elaborate.	no

General Considerations	
These questions are to be considered for all projects.	
17. Cooperating Institution: If you need permission from a cooperating institution, do you require your FREC's approval prior to approaching the institution? Yes, because an approval from the People and Standards division within the OPM is required to contact the participants.	Yes
18. Risk to researcher/s: Does this research expose any members of the research team to any significant foreseeable risk that would require precautionary measures over and above those typically required in their line of work? Please elaborate on: i. the nature of the risk; ii. why it is unavoidable; iii. the mitigating and/or compensating measures you plan to implement.	no
19. Risk to environment: Is there significant foreseeable risk that your research can cause harm to the environment? Please elaborate on: i. the nature of the risk of harm to the environment; ii. why it is unavoidable; iii. the mitigating and/or compensating measures you plan to implement.	no
20. Commercial sensitivity: Does your research make use of data that may be commercially sensitive? Please elaborate on: i. the nature of the data; ii. how you plan to safeguard sensitive data.	no
Other potential risks	
Other potential risks for research ethics and data protection may arise from conflict of interest; harvesting social media data; the involvement of low income and/or lower middle income countries; the import and/or export of records, data, materials and specimens; the need for special permits/licences to employ specific constructs/tests; the researcher/s having a dual role; and/or the dual use/misuse of research, among other. Applicants are advised to refer to the FAQs in case of doubt (https://www.um.edu.mt/research/ethics/faqs).	no
21. Other potential risks: Does your research run other potential ethical or data protection risks? a. Dual use and/or misuse: Please elaborate on: i. the nature of the risk of dual and/or misuse; ii. why this is unavoidable; iii. the mitigating and/or compensating measures you plan to implement. b. Conflict of Interest: Please elaborate on: i. the nature of the conflict of interest; ii. how you plan to guarantee the impartiality of the research process given such conflict. c. Dual role:	no

Please elaborate on: i. the nature of the dual role; ii. how you plan to address issues that may arise, such as power imbalance, unwarranted surveillance, coercion of participants, exclusion of participants from other services, etc. d. Permission/license to use research tools: Please explain: i. how you satisfy such criteria; ii. how you will obtain permissions/licenses when required. e. Collaboration/data/material collection in low/lower-middle income country: Please elaborate on: i. the countries (of the researcher/s and the institution/s involved) and partners involved; ii. the resources, participants and materials involved; iii. whether and how you plan to implement capacity building measures, and if not, why not; iv. whether and how you plan to implement benefit sharing measures, and if not, why not. f. Import/export of records/data/materials/specimens: Please provide details on: i. the nature of the records, data and/or materials involved; ii. the countries involved; iii. legal and regulatory considerations; iv. licenses, permissions and/or safeguards necessary. g. Harvest of data from social media: Please provide details. h. Criminal issues C incarcerated persons: Does your research involve dealing with personal data about criminal allegations, proceedings or convictions, or incarcerated persons? Please provide details. i. Other considerations: Please provide details.	
22. Official statement: Do you require an official statement from the FREC that this submission has abided by the UM's REDP procedures?* Please note that answering 'Yes / Unsure' here means that you may not start data collection until you receive FREC approval. You may also request a formal letter at a later date if you need it for publication/funding purposes. <i>*This question is automatically checked as "YES / unsure" for external applicants.</i>	no

Part 3: Submission

You are now ready to submit your form to FREC.

*Which FREC are you submitting to?

Faculty applicants will submit automatically to the Faculty FREC. Non-Faculty applicants may refer to the UREC webpages and seek guidance from their Institute, Centre or School to identify which FREC they should apply to.

Arts	Health Sciences	Medicine and Surgery
Built Environment	Information and Communication Technology	Science
Dental Surgery	Institute of Earth Systems	Social Wellbeing
Economics, Management and Accountancy	Laws	Theology
Education	Media and Knowledge Sciences	Centre for Molecular Medicine C Biobanking
Engineering		

***Attachments:**

Please indicate which of the following materials you are attaching. Failure to provide these, where relevant, risks delaying approval to proceed with the research. Materials should be attached below. Students may be required to produce their DRAFT letters of request ahead of sending to cooperating institutions and to obtain their supervisor's signature on consent and assent forms.

Add Files

*Please produce these materials in English and/or Maltese and/or any other relevant language (or equivalent text that may be communicated orally for those who do not read).

- Information and/or recruitment letter*
- Consent forms (adult participants)*
- Consent forms for legally responsible parents/guardians, in case of minors and/or adults unable to give consent*
- Assent forms in case of minors and/or adults unable to give consent*
- Data collection tools (interview questions, questionnaire etc.)
- Data management plan
- Data controller permission in case of use of unpublished secondary data
- Licence/permission to use research tools (e.g. constructs/ tests)
- Any permits required for import or export of materials or data
- Letter granting institutional approval for access to participants
- Institutional approval for access to data
- Letter granting institutional approval from person directly responsible for participants
- Other (please specify in remarks below)

Please feel free to add a cover note or any remarks to FREC:

If this is a re-submission of a Form to FREC, please include previous form reference number. Please indicate if you require written approval for institutional/funding purposes. Please include reference to project grant and/or any previous ethics/data protection approval of related parent project. Please elaborate on any additional attachments you are providing.

Declarations:

- I hereby confirm having read the University of Malta Research Code of Practice and the University of Malta Research Ethics Review Procedures.
- I hereby confirm that the answers to the questions above reflect the contents of the research proposal and that the information provided above is truthful.
- I hereby give consent to the University Research Ethics Committee to process my personal data for the purpose of evaluating my request, audit and other matters related to this application. I understand that I have a right of access to my personal data and to obtain the rectification, erasure or restriction of processing in accordance with data protection law and in particular the General Data Protection Regulation (EU 2016/679, repealing Directive 95/46/EC) and national legislation that implements and further specifies the relevant provisions of said Regulation.

*Applicant Signature:

Christa Caruana

*Date of submission:

08/01/2025

If applicable: Data collection start date

01/02/2025

Save REDP
Application

Or

Save Updated REDP
Application

(saves the application as a draft)

Submit REDP Application

Or

Submit Updated REDP
Application

(submits the application to FREC/REC)

Is this form being submitted for records, or does it require FREC review?

Note: If you marked Yes/Unsure for any of the questions in the self-assessment checklist, you must submit the form for REVIEW. You may NOT start your data collection until you receive FREC/REC approval. If you marked none of the issues, you may proceed with data collection. In such cases, you must still submit the form to FREC/REC for RECORDS.

RECORDS / REVIEW / Cancel

(for students: the application is automatically submitted to the supervisor for endorsement, once the supervisor endorses the application, this is submitted automatically to the FREC for review or for records)

Export REDP
Application

(export to pdf)

Close