Abstract

This paper develops a theory expansion in the field of public sector experimentation by questioning the assumptions that underpin current approaches to innovation in government. Much of the existing literature treats experimentation as a process of optimisation, where policies are iteratively improved to achieve more efficient or effective outcomes. This paper argues that such an approach is limited in public sector contexts, where experimentation is shaped not only by technical considerations but also by legitimacy, institutional constraints, and the need for public justification.

To address this gap, the paper introduces the concept of adjacent opportunities. These are institutionally proximate innovations that extend existing administrative practices while remaining acceptable within democratic and organisational norms. Drawing on pragmatist institutionalism and theories of democratic anchorage, the paper argues that public sector experimentation tends to occur through such proximate and incremental changes rather than through disruptive reform.

The framework is further informed by insights from behavioural economics, anthropology, and decision science, which challenge linear and optimisation-based models of development. Together, these perspectives suggest that innovation in the public sector is better understood as a process of bounded exploration, where actors navigate a limited space of feasible and legitimate options.

Illustrative examples, including experimental governance practices in Estonia, are used to demonstrate how adjacent opportunities may operate in practice. The paper does not aim to provide empirical validation, but rather to develop a conceptual framework and identify potential avenues for future research. It concludes by outlining how adjacent opportunities could be tested through case studies and comparative analysis, and discusses their implications for policymakers seeking to design experiments that are both innovative and publicly legitimate.

Keywords: adjacencies, democratic anchorage, legitimacy, theory expansion.

1. Introduction

Public sector institutions are increasingly expected to innovate under conditions of uncertainty. Governments face complex challenges such as digital transformation, climate transition, and demographic change, all of which require adaptive and experimental approaches to policymaking. In response, experimental governance has emerged as a dominant paradigm, emphasising iteration, learning, and feedback (Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Huitema et al., 2014).

However, experimentation in the public sector differs fundamentally from experimentation in private organisations. While firms may pursue innovation through competitive trial-and-error and tolerate failure as a cost of discovery, public institutions operate within conditions of political scrutiny, accountability, and legitimacy, which significantly constrain the scope and form of experimentation (Hood, 2011; McFadgen and Huitema, 2018). Public decision-making is therefore not only a matter of identifying effective solutions, but also of ensuring that such solutions are normatively acceptable and procedurally defensible. In addition, public institutions often face pressures that favour short-term responsiveness over long-term

experimentation, reinforcing tensions between sustainability and institutional behaviour (Costanza et al., 2014; Spangenberg, 2022).

This creates a structural tension between innovation and stability. Experimentation requires deviation from established practices, while legitimacy depends on continuity and predictability. The challenge of balancing these demands has been widely discussed in the literature, particularly in relation to the role of bureaucracy in enabling innovation. Rather than viewing bureaucracy as an obstacle, recent scholarship argues that stable administrative structures are a precondition for sustainable innovation, allowing for what has been described as “agile stability” or “mission mystique” (Kattel, Drechsler and Karo, 2022). This perspective suggests that experimentation is not opposed to institutional continuity, but mediated through it.

While a substantial body of research addresses these issues, the underlying assumptions of this literature remain insufficiently examined. In particular, much of the work on experimental governance implicitly adopts a model of innovation derived from economic theory, in which actors are expected to move toward more efficient and effective outcomes through iterative improvement. This model assumes that innovation is a process of optimisation, guided by rational design and oriented toward better performance. Such assumptions deserve critical scrutiny.

Behavioural research has already challenged the notion that decision-making follows rational optimisation logic. Instead, individuals and organisations rely on heuristics, framing effects, and bounded rationality, meaning that outcomes are shaped as much by context as by design (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008; Tummers et al., 2019). From this perspective, experimentation is not a process of discovering optimal solutions, but of navigating uncertainty under cognitive constraints.

From a complexity perspective, the conditions under which public sector experimentation occurs can be further understood through the CYNEFIN framework, which distinguishes between simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic domains of decision-making (Snowden and Boone, 2007). Public governance, particularly in areas such as climate policy or digital transformation, increasingly operates within the **complex domain**, where cause-and-effect relationships are not fully knowable in advance and must be discovered through iterative probing rather than predictive modelling. This has important implications for experimentation: rather than optimising toward predefined solutions, decision-makers must navigate evolving conditions through adaptive and context-sensitive approaches.

These constraints are intensified by cognitive and temporal limitations in decision-making. Research in behavioural and cognitive science suggests that attention spans in high-pressure decision environments are significantly reduced, often limiting sustained analytical engagement to very short time frames, sometimes measured in minutes rather than hours (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2019). This compression of attention affects the ability of decision-makers to process information, evaluate alternatives, and engage in fully rational deliberation. As a result, the expectation that public actors can optimise policy choices through extended analysis becomes increasingly unrealistic.

Klein’s work on naturalistic decision-making provides further insight into how decisions are actually made under such conditions. In *Streetlights and Shadows*, Klein (2009) argues that in complex and uncertain environments, decision-makers rely on experience, pattern

recognition, and mental simulation rather than formal analytical models. He emphasises that "the most important decisions are rarely made by comparing options," but instead by recognising plausible courses of action based on prior experience. This suggests that experimentation in the public sector is less about testing optimal solutions and more about identifying actions that are **intelligible, defensible, and actionable** within given constraints.

At the same time, the role of questioning becomes central. Gregersen (2018) argues that innovation is driven not by answers, but by the ability to ask better questions. In complex environments, where solutions are not immediately apparent, reframing problems can be more valuable than refining existing answers. This aligns with the logic of adjacency, as new opportunities emerge from shifting perspectives rather than from linear problem-solving. In public governance, this implies that experimentation should not only focus on testing policies, but also on exploring alternative ways of understanding policy problems.

Taken together, these perspectives reinforce the argument that public sector experimentation operates under conditions that fundamentally limit optimisation-based approaches. Instead, decision-making is shaped by complexity, reduced attention, experiential judgement, and iterative questioning. This provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding innovation as a process of **bounded, adjacency-driven exploration**, rather than rational optimisation.

At a deeper level, the assumption that systems evolve toward optimal states reflects what Midgley (1985) describes as the ideological extension of evolutionary theory. In *Evolution as a Religion*, she argues that ideas such as competition and adaptation have been transformed into normative claims about how societies ought to function. Evolutionary thinking, in her view, is often treated "as a complete worldview" rather than as a limited explanatory framework. Applied to governance, this suggests that the belief in continuous improvement through optimisation may reflect a cultural narrative rather than an empirical necessity. But it is rarely asked – improvement toward which goal? Who and when makes that choice? Who can question it?

Anthropological research reinforces this critique. Graeber and Wengrow (2021) demonstrate that human societies have historically engaged in diverse and deliberate forms of institutional experimentation, often rejecting linear narratives of development. Rather than progressing toward a single model of governance, societies have alternated between different arrangements, combining hierarchy and egalitarianism, stability and change. This suggests that institutional evolution is not driven by optimisation, but by plural and context-dependent processes.

Insights from decision science further complicate the optimisation paradigm. Klein (2009) shows that in complex environments, decision-making is often guided by experience, intuition, and pattern recognition rather than formal analysis. He argues that organisations frequently rely on simplified models not because they are accurate, but because they are workable and defensible under real-world conditions. This observation is particularly relevant for public governance, where decisions must be justified within institutional and political constraints.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the dominant model of public sector innovation - rooted in rational optimisation and linear development - is inadequate. Public sector experimentation cannot be understood solely as a technical process of improvement. It

must be analysed as a process shaped by legitimacy, institutional structures, and cognitive limitations.

For these reasons, this paper introduces the concept of **adjacent opportunities**. The central argument is that public sector innovation is not simply constrained by legitimacy, but actively shaped by it. Adjacent opportunities are institutionally proximate innovations that extend existing practices while remaining within acceptable boundaries. These innovations are more likely to be adopted because they align with established norms, narratives, and expectations, making them both feasible and legitimate.

The paper is explicitly a theory expansion exercise. It does not aim to provide empirical validation, but to develop a conceptual framework and propose a set of adjacencies that can be tested through future research. Estonia is used as an illustrative case due to its advanced digital governance infrastructure and emerging experimentation practices, but the argument is not limited to this context. Instead, the aim is to open up a new perspective on public sector experimentation - one that moves beyond optimisation and toward a more nuanced understanding of how innovation becomes possible.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1 Experimental Governance and Its Limits

Experimental governance has been widely conceptualised as a response to policy complexity, particularly in contexts where uncertainty, interdependence, and contested values limit the effectiveness of linear policy design. Within this literature, experimentation is typically understood as a process of iterative learning, where policies are tested, evaluated, and adapted over time (Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Huitema et al., 2014). This approach reflects a broader epistemological shift away from prediction toward adaptation, where policymakers "learn by doing" rather than by anticipating outcomes ex ante (Ansell and Bartenberger, 2016). It has proven particularly influential in areas such as digital governance, behavioural policy, and regulatory innovation, where rapid change renders static policy instruments inadequate (Tõnurist, Kattel and Lember, 2017; Dunleavy et al., 2006).

At a theoretical level, this perspective aligns closely with **pragmatist institutionalism**, which conceptualises institutions as evolving through problem-solving, interaction, and feedback rather than through fixed rule structures (Ansell and Torfing, 2014). From this viewpoint, experimentation is not an exception but a core mechanism of institutional change. However, as critics have noted, pragmatist institutionalism tends to emphasise *how* institutions adapt while remaining comparatively silent on *why certain adaptations are accepted* and others are rejected (Salet, 2020). In other words, it privileges learning over legitimacy.

This limitation becomes particularly visible in the experimental governance literature itself. Much of this work implicitly assumes that experimentation is normatively desirable as long as it produces learning or improved outcomes. Experimentation is often framed as a neutral or even inherently progressive activity, associated with flexibility, responsiveness, and innovation (Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Huitema et al., 2014). Yet this assumption is rarely interrogated. As Sørensen and Torfing (2005, p. 197) argue, governance innovation must remain "democratically anchored" if it is to be legitimate. Without such anchorage, experimental practices risk being perceived as technocratic, exclusionary, or unaccountable.

Empirical research reinforces this point. Edelenbos, Steijn and Klijn (2010) demonstrate that the legitimacy of governance arrangements depends not only on outcomes but on their embedding in democratic processes, including participation, representation, and accountability. Their findings suggest that innovation cannot be evaluated independently of its institutional context. Similarly, studies of public sector reform indicate that policies perceived as lacking transparency or inclusiveness may be contested even when they achieve their intended objectives (Van de Walle, 2016; Christensen and Lægreid, 2007). These observations point to a crucial but underdeveloped insight: legitimacy is not an external constraint on experimentation, but a **constitutive condition of its possibility**.

Despite this, the literature lacks a systematic framework for analysing how experimentation becomes anchored in democratic structures. Legitimacy is frequently invoked as an evaluative criterion, often through the tripartite distinction between input, throughput, and output legitimacy (Scharpf, 1999; Schmidt, 2013), but it is rarely integrated into explanations of how experimental practices emerge and stabilise. As Schmidt (2013, p. 3) notes, legitimacy depends not only on outcomes but on "the quality of the governance processes themselves," yet experimental governance research tends to treat these processes as secondary.

This gap becomes particularly visible when considering how experimental practices are implemented in practice. Studies show that public sector experimentation is rarely conducted as open-ended exploration. Instead, it is typically embedded within existing administrative routines and justified through narratives emphasising transparency, risk management, and accountability (McFadgen and Huitema, 2018). These practices are often deliberately bounded, reversible, and incremental, reflecting what Hood (2011) describes as a broader culture of risk aversion in public organisations. Experimentation is thus shaped by what is institutionally and politically acceptable, rather than by what is theoretically optimal.

This observation aligns with research on administrative reform, which emphasises that policy change is not purely technical but inherently political. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) argue that reforms must be understood in terms of their institutional embedding, while Bauer et al. (2021) highlight the role of democratic norms in shaping administrative change, particularly under conditions of political contestation. In this context, reforms are more likely to succeed when they are perceived as procedurally fair and normatively aligned, rather than simply effective.

Policy design literature further complicates the assumption that experimentation can be systematically engineered. Howlett and Mukherjee (2018) argue that policymaking operates along a continuum from deliberate design to non-design, where many interventions emerge through incremental adjustments rather than coherent planning. This perspective challenges the notion that experimentation is always intentional or strategically planned. Instead, it suggests that innovation often arises through **adaptive processes embedded in existing institutional logics**.

At the same time, research on policy advisory systems highlights the interaction between expertise and political legitimacy in shaping decision-making. Craft and Howlett (2013) describe this as a "dual dynamic," where technical knowledge and political considerations jointly influence policy outcomes. This implies that experimental practices must not only be analytically sound but also politically and institutionally viable. As a result, experimentation

is less about identifying optimal solutions and more about identifying solutions that are both *credible and acceptable*.

Importantly, these institutional and political constraints intersect with cognitive limitations. Behavioural research demonstrates that decision-making is shaped by bounded rationality, framing effects, and heuristic reasoning (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008; Tummers et al., 2019). Klein (2009, p. 23) further argues that in complex environments, "people rarely compare options in any formal sense," instead relying on recognition and experience. This suggests that experimentation is not only institutionally bounded but also cognitively constrained. Decisions must be not only effective but understandable and defensible within limited attention and time.

These insights collectively challenge the implicit optimisation paradigm underlying much of the experimental governance literature. Rather than viewing innovation as a process of converging on better solutions, they suggest that it is a process of navigating constraints - institutional, normative, and cognitive. This aligns with broader critiques of linear development models, which question the assumption that systems evolve toward optimal states (Midgley, 1985; Graeber and Wengrow, 2021).

Taken together, the literature points to a fundamental conclusion: experimental governance is best understood as a **bounded, context-dependent process**, shaped by the interaction of learning, legitimacy, and institutional structure. However, the absence of a clear conceptual mechanism linking these elements remains a significant limitation. Existing approaches either emphasise learning (pragmatist institutionalism) or legitimacy (anchorage theory), but rarely integrate the two.

This is where the concept of adjacent opportunities becomes analytically useful. By focusing on institutional proximity and normative alignment, it provides a mechanism for connecting the adaptive logic of experimentation with the legitimacy requirements of democratic governance. Rather than treating constraints as barriers, it conceptualises them as **structuring conditions** that shape the form of innovation. In doing so, it addresses a key gap in the literature: the lack of a systematic account of how experimentation becomes both possible and acceptable within public sector contexts.

2.2 Institutional Theory, Pragmatism, and the Limits of Change

Institutional theory provides a foundational framework for understanding the constraints under which public sector experimentation unfolds. Historical institutionalism emphasises path dependence and the persistence of established practices, suggesting that institutional trajectories are shaped by past decisions and are therefore resistant to abrupt change (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). Sociological institutionalism further highlights the role of norms and legitimacy, arguing that institutions endure not only because they are efficient, but because they are perceived as appropriate within a given social context (Suchman, 1995). From this perspective, change is not simply a matter of technical improvement, but of alignment with existing expectations and values.

Pragmatist institutionalism extends these insights by shifting the analytical focus from stability to adaptation. It conceptualises institutions as evolving through iterative problem-solving processes, in which actors respond to emerging challenges through experimentation and learning (Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Ansell and Bartenberger, 2016). This perspective has

been particularly influential in the study of experimental governance, where it provides a theoretical justification for adaptive policymaking under uncertainty.

However, this approach has important limitations. While pragmatist institutionalism explains how institutions adapt, it provides only a partial account of how such adaptation becomes stabilised or rejected. In particular, it tends to assume that successful problem-solving will lead to institutional uptake, without fully accounting for the normative and political conditions under which innovations are accepted. As Salet (2020) argues, the pragmatist emphasis on learning risks underestimating the role of legitimacy in shaping institutional change.

This limitation is central to the present argument. If institutional change depends not only on learning but on legitimacy, then innovation must be analysed in relation to its proximity to existing norms and expectations. Change is not simply adopted because it works, but because it can be justified, communicated, and embedded within institutional frameworks. This insight provides a critical bridge toward the concept of adjacent opportunities, which captures how innovation occurs within these constraints.

2.3 Legitimacy as a Dynamic and Constructed Process

Legitimacy theory provides the evaluative dimension that is largely absent from institutional accounts of experimentation. Classical formulations distinguish between input, throughput, and output legitimacy, highlighting that governance is assessed not only in terms of results, but also in terms of participation and procedural quality (Scharpf, 1999; Schmidt, 2013). Importantly, these dimensions are not static attributes, but are actively constructed through governance practices.

Recent research emphasises that legitimacy is shaped by how policies are designed and communicated, rather than by outcomes alone. For example, Pan, Tan and Zuo (2022) demonstrate that procedural visibility-how decisions are explained and made transparent-has a significant effect on trust in governance systems. Similarly, Tummers et al. (2019) show that citizens evaluate policies not only on their effectiveness, but on whether they are perceived as fair, respectful, and consistent with democratic values. These findings suggest that legitimacy is not an external judgement applied after the fact, but an integral component of policy design.

From this perspective, experimentation must be understood as a legitimacy-sensitive process. Practices that are incremental, transparent, and familiar are more likely to be accepted, partly because they reduce perceived risk and align with existing expectations (Hood, 2011; Van de Walle, 2016). Conversely, innovations that are perceived as opaque or disruptive may encounter resistance, regardless of their technical merits.

This insight resonates with democratic anchorage theory, which emphasises that governance practices must be embedded in democratic norms and structures in order to sustain legitimacy (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005; Edelenbos et al., 2010). While this literature does not provide a fully operational model of experimentation, it highlights the importance of linking innovation to processes of participation, accountability, and representation. In doing so, it points to the need for a more integrated understanding of how experimentation and legitimacy interact.

2.4 Experimental Governance as a Legitimacy-Bounded Practice

A critical limitation in the existing literature on experimental governance is the implicit assumption that experimentation is normatively acceptable as long as it produces learning or improves outcomes. This assumption is particularly visible in approaches that frame experimentation as inherently beneficial in contexts of uncertainty and complexity (Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Huitema et al., 2014). However, this perspective risks overlooking the fact that public sector innovation is not evaluated solely on effectiveness, but also on its alignment with institutional norms and democratic expectations.

Empirical research increasingly suggests that experimentation is not a neutral process but a **legitimacy-bounded practice**. Studies of behavioural public policy demonstrate that even highly effective interventions must be framed in ways that are perceived as fair and transparent in order to be accepted (Tummers et al., 2019). Similarly, research on regulatory sandboxes shows that experimentation is often constrained by legal, reputational, and political considerations, which limit the scope of permissible innovation (Zetzsche et al., 2017; see also Juuse and Raudla, 2021 for public sector experimentation constraints).

This body of work indicates that legitimacy is not an external constraint imposed after experimentation, but a **structuring condition that shapes experimentation itself**. Experimental governance must therefore be understood not only as a technical process of learning, but as a political and institutional process in which certain forms of innovation are privileged because they are more easily justified. As Hood (2011) argues, public organisations operate in environments characterised by blame avoidance, which encourages cautious and incremental approaches to change.

The implication is that public sector innovation tends to follow patterns of **bounded expansion**. Rather than introducing radical transformations, institutions adopt innovations that remain close to existing practices, thereby reducing risk and increasing acceptability. This observation aligns with broader critiques of optimisation-based models of innovation, which assume that systems move toward ideal solutions. In practice, innovation is shaped by what is feasible within existing institutional and normative constraints.

This provides the conceptual foundation for the notion of adjacent opportunities. By focusing on institutional proximity and legitimacy alignment, adjacency captures how experimentation unfolds in practice. It shifts the analytical focus from optimisation to **navigability**, from ideal solutions to actionable possibilities. In doing so, it also suggests a methodological implication: if innovation is bounded by context, legitimacy, and institutional structure, then it must be studied through approaches that capture these dynamics, such as case-based analysis, process tracing, and experimental designs that account for perception and acceptance.

This argument also invites a more fundamental reflection on the notion of development itself. Much of the experimental governance literature implicitly assumes that institutional change unfolds along a progressive trajectory, where experimentation serves as a mechanism for approaching better or more efficient outcomes. However, this assumption is increasingly contested. Graeber and Wengrow (2021) argue that historical evidence does not support a linear model of societal development, showing instead that human societies have repeatedly shifted between different institutional arrangements without converging on a single endpoint. Similarly, Midgley (1985) cautions against the tendency to treat evolutionary thinking as a

normative framework, noting that ideas of progress and optimisation are often "imported" into social theory without sufficient empirical grounding.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the directionality of institutional development may be overstated in economic and policy theory. Rather than moving toward a clearly defined optimal state, public governance may evolve through contingent, reversible, and context-dependent processes. In this light, experimentation is not necessarily a pathway toward better solutions in a linear sense, but a mechanism for navigating uncertainty within a shifting landscape of possibilities. This does not negate the value of experimentation, but it reframes its purpose. Instead of seeking to optimise, experimentation may serve to **explore, stabilise, and legitimise** incremental changes within existing institutional contexts.

This perspective reinforces the argument developed in this paper. If development does not follow a single trajectory, then innovation cannot be understood as convergence toward an ideal model. Instead, it must be analysed in terms of what is institutionally, cognitively, and normatively accessible at any given moment. This provides a conceptual foundation for adjacent opportunities, which capture how experimentation unfolds within a bounded and evolving space of possibilities rather than along a predetermined path.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design oriented toward theory development rather than hypothesis testing. The objective is not to establish causal relationships empirically, but to extend conceptual understanding of public sector experimentation by identifying and structuring a previously under-theorised mechanism-adjacent opportunities. This approach aligns with established traditions in social science research where theoretical innovation precedes systematic empirical validation, particularly in complex and evolving fields such as public administration (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

The methodology combines four complementary approaches: reflective literature review, discourse analysis, case-informed conceptualisation, and comparative framing. Reflective literature review is used to identify conceptual gaps and underexplored connections across bodies of research that are typically treated in isolation, including experimental governance, institutional theory, legitimacy theory, and behavioural decision-making (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). This allows the paper to move beyond cumulative review toward synthesis, identifying the absence of a mechanism linking institutional adaptation and legitimacy as a central gap.

Discourse analysis is employed to examine how innovation and experimentation are framed within policy and academic contexts. As Hajer (2005) and Schmidt (2008) demonstrate, policy change is not only driven by material conditions but also by the ways in which problems and solutions are constructed and communicated. This is particularly relevant for the present argument, as adjacent opportunities are understood not only as institutional phenomena but also as discursive constructs that must be rendered intelligible and acceptable within governance systems.

The analysis further draws on what may be described as **ethnographic sensitivity**, rather than formal ethnography, to incorporate insights from practitioner-oriented literature and observed administrative practices. This reflects the pragmatist institutionalist emphasis on learning through practice (Ansell and Torfing, 2014) and allows the paper to remain

grounded in the realities of public sector decision-making, where informal experimentation and iterative adjustment are common but often under-documented.

Comparative framing is used to situate the Estonian case within a broader governance context. Estonia is not treated as a representative case, but as a **strategically selected case** that provides analytical leverage for theory development. Following Flyvbjerg (2006), such cases are valuable because they allow the researcher to explore mechanisms in depth rather than to generalise statistically. Estonia's high level of digitalisation and experimentation capacity makes it particularly suitable for illustrating how adjacent opportunities might operate under favourable conditions.

The analytical strategy follows a **process-oriented logic**, focusing on how adjacent opportunities emerge, are framed, and become potentially institutionalised. Rather than treating experimentation as a discrete event, it is conceptualised as a sequence of interactions shaped by institutional constraints, legitimacy considerations, and cognitive limitations. This process-oriented perspective is consistent with experimental governance research, which emphasises the importance of iteration and feedback (Huitema et al., 2014).

Importantly, the methodology is explicitly limited in scope. As a theory expansion exercise, the paper does not claim empirical validation. Instead, it develops a conceptual framework that is intended to guide future empirical research. This limitation is not a weakness but a necessary condition for theoretical development, particularly in areas where existing frameworks are insufficient.

3.1 From Concept to Testable Propositions

The purpose of this section is to translate the concept of adjacent opportunities into empirically testable propositions. While the paper itself does not conduct empirical analysis, it outlines a research agenda that connects theoretical claims to specific methodological approaches.

First, it is proposed that experiments that remain proximate to existing institutional practices are more likely to be adopted than those that are structurally disruptive. This proposition can be tested through **comparative case study analysis**, examining variation in adoption rates across different types of innovation. Such studies would benefit from a process-tracing approach, allowing researchers to identify the mechanisms through which proximity influences acceptance (Flyvbjerg, 2006; McFadgen and Huitema, 2018).

Second, it is proposed that discursive framing significantly affects the legitimacy of experimental practices. This can be tested through **experimental and quasi-experimental designs**, such as survey experiments or vignette studies, in which stakeholders are exposed to different framings of the same policy intervention. This approach aligns with recent work in behavioural public administration, which examines how perceptions of fairness, transparency, and legitimacy influence policy acceptance (Tummers et al., 2019).

Third, it is proposed that incremental and reversible interventions generate higher levels of trust than large-scale reforms, particularly in high-capacity administrative systems. This proposition lends itself to **longitudinal and mixed-methods research**, combining survey data with case studies of reform trajectories. Such studies could examine how trust evolves over time in response to different forms of experimentation.

Fourth, it is proposed that digital governance environments amplify the effectiveness of adjacency-based innovation, due to lower implementation costs and greater transparency potential. Estonia provides a particularly relevant context for testing this proposition, given its advanced digital infrastructure. Empirical research in this area could combine **comparative analysis across jurisdictions** with **platform-based behavioural data**, examining how digital systems enable or constrain experimentation.

Taken together, these propositions establish a structured pathway from theory to empirical research. They also highlight the need for methodological pluralism, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture the complexity of public sector experimentation.

At the same time, the proposed framework has inherent limitations. By focusing on adjacency, it risks privileging incremental change over more radical forms of transformation. This reflects the broader tension identified in the literature between stability and innovation. While adjacency provides a plausible mechanism for legitimate experimentation, it may also constrain the scope of change. Future research must therefore examine not only whether adjacency-based innovations are adopted, but also whether they enable or limit broader institutional transformation

4. Adjacency Case I: Accelerate Estonia

4.1 Accelerate Estonia: Adjacency as Controlled Institutional Stretching

Accelerate Estonia provides a particularly clear illustration of adjacency as a mechanism of institutional change. The initiative is designed to enable high-risk experimentation while maintaining administrative coherence, not by removing institutional constraints, but by selectively relaxing them within controlled environments. This reflects a form of what may be termed **controlled institutional stretching**, where the boundaries of existing systems are extended without being fundamentally reconfigured.

This approach is consistent with broader findings in the literature on policy experimentation. Studies show that governments are more likely to adopt experimental practices when they are framed as extensions of existing mandates rather than as challenges to institutional authority (Kivimaa et al., 2017). In the case of Accelerate Estonia, innovation is positioned as a continuation of economic development and digital governance strategies, rather than as a departure from them. This positioning is crucial, as it allows experimentation to be interpreted not as disruption, but as evolution within an existing framework.

The adjacency lies in the coexistence of radical ambition and conservative implementation. Projects may aim to create entirely new markets or regulatory frameworks, but they are tested through familiar mechanisms such as pilot programmes, regulatory adjustments, and public–private partnerships. This reduces perceived risk and aligns experimentation with existing expectations of governance. From a legitimacy perspective, this approach is highly effective, as it avoids the perception of institutional overreach.

At the same time, this case also reflects the broader critique of linear development models. Rather than pursuing a clearly defined trajectory of improvement, experimentation unfolds through iterative adjustments that respond to emerging conditions. This aligns with the argument advanced by Graeber and Wengrow (2021), that institutional change is not necessarily directional, but often contingent and reversible.

Methodologically, this case suggests several avenues for empirical research. Comparative studies could examine whether similar initiatives in other contexts achieve comparable outcomes, while process-tracing approaches could identify the mechanisms through which proximity facilitates adoption. In this sense, Accelerate Estonia functions not only as an illustration, but as a **testable instance of adjacency**.

4.2 Biomimicry and Ecological Framing

Biomimicry-inspired policymaking illustrates adjacency at the level of discourse. Rather than being introduced as a radical innovation, biomimicry is framed through familiar concepts such as sustainability, green infrastructure, and ecosystem services. This framing reflects the importance of narrative alignment in policy acceptance, as highlighted by discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008).

The adjacency here is symbolic rather than structural. The underlying concept may represent a significant shift in how policy problems are understood, but its presentation is designed to minimise cognitive and political resistance. This aligns with behavioural research showing that individuals are more likely to accept policies that resonate with existing values and expectations (Tummers et al., 2019).

From a theoretical perspective, this case also reinforces the critique of optimisation-based thinking. By reframing policy problems in ecological terms, biomimicry challenges the assumption that economic efficiency is the primary metric of success. Instead, it introduces alternative criteria, such as resilience and sustainability, which are less easily reduced to optimisation logic.

Methodologically, this adjacency can be tested through experimental designs that compare public responses to different framings of the same policy idea. Such studies would provide insight into how narratives shape legitimacy and acceptance, thereby linking discursive processes to institutional outcomes.

4.3 Innovation Labs: Adjacency as Organisational Hybridisation

Innovation labs represent adjacency at the organisational level, providing structured environments in which experimentation can occur without destabilising core administrative functions. Rather than operating as fully independent entities, such labs typically occupy a hybrid position within public organisations, combining elements of autonomy with institutional embeddedness (Tõnurist, Kattel and Lember, 2017). This hybrid positioning is crucial, as it allows experimentation to be conducted in a controlled manner while maintaining alignment with organisational norms and priorities.

From the perspective of pragmatist institutionalism, innovation labs can be understood as sites of **institutional learning**, where new practices are developed through iterative interaction rather than top-down design (Ansell and Torfing, 2014). However, as discussed earlier, such learning processes do not automatically translate into institutional change. The legitimacy of experimental practices depends on their ability to be integrated into existing structures and justified within prevailing frameworks.

The adjacency lies in the creation of **micro-environments of controlled deviation**. Innovation labs do not seek to replace institutional structures, but to extend them by introducing bounded spaces in which alternative practices can be tested. This reflects a recognition that experimentation must remain anchored in organisational routines in order to be accepted. As Brown and Osborne (2013) argue, public sector innovation is often constrained by risk aversion, leading organisations to favour incremental approaches over disruptive change.

At the same time, the organisational separation of innovation labs introduces a potential limitation. By isolating experimentation from core processes, labs may limit the diffusion of innovation, resulting in pilot projects that fail to scale. This reflects the broader tension between stability and transformation identified in the literature. While adjacency enables experimentation, it may also constrain its impact.

This tension can be interpreted through the lens of non-linear development. Rather than assuming that successful experiments will naturally lead to systemic change, this perspective suggests that institutional transformation is contingent and uneven. Innovations may remain localised or be adapted in unexpected ways, rather than being scaled in a linear fashion (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021).

Methodologically, innovation labs provide a rich context for empirical analysis. Future research could examine the pathways through which ideas developed in such environments are adopted-or fail to be adopted-within broader organisational structures. Comparative case studies could identify conditions under which adjacency facilitates institutionalisation, while network analysis could trace how experimental practices circulate within administrative systems.

4.4 Citizen Patch Notes: Adjacency Through Radical Transparency

Citizen patch notes represent a novel form of adjacency that operates through transparency and communication rather than structural change. Borrowed from software development practices, patch notes involve the regular publication of incremental updates, documenting changes to systems in a clear and accessible manner. Applied to public governance, this approach would involve making policy changes visible as an ongoing process rather than presenting them as discrete interventions.

The theoretical basis for this adjacency lies in research on transparency and legitimacy. Studies show that procedural visibility-how decisions are made and communicated-plays a critical role in shaping trust in governance systems (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Pan, Tan and Zuo, 2022). By making incremental changes visible, patch notes can enhance throughput legitimacy, allowing citizens to understand and evaluate policy processes.

The adjacency lies in **cross-domain translation**. The practice is already well established in digital environments, making it cognitively familiar and easily interpretable. This reduces barriers to adoption and aligns with Klein's (2009) argument that decision-making relies on recognisable patterns rather than abstract reasoning. By presenting policy changes in a format that is already understood, patch notes make experimentation more accessible and less threatening.

At the same time, this approach reflects the broader shift from optimisation to navigation. Rather than presenting policies as final solutions, patch notes emphasise their provisional and evolving nature. This aligns with the critique of linear development models, suggesting that governance is an ongoing process rather than a movement toward a fixed endpoint.

However, this adjacency also introduces new challenges. Increased transparency may expose uncertainty, inconsistency, or failure, potentially undermining trust if not managed carefully. This highlights the importance of framing and communication, reinforcing the idea that legitimacy is actively constructed rather than given.

From a methodological perspective, this case lends itself to experimental and behavioural research designs. Pilot implementations of patch notes could be used to measure their impact on trust, engagement, and policy understanding. Survey experiments could test how different levels of transparency affect public perceptions, while longitudinal studies could examine how repeated exposure to incremental updates influences legitimacy over time.

4.5 Behavioural Governance: Adjacency as Micro-Level Intervention

Behavioural governance represents a well-established form of adjacency, operating through small-scale interventions that influence decision-making without altering institutional structures. By adjusting how choices are presented - through defaults, framing, or information design - policymakers can produce significant behavioural effects (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008; Tummers et al., 2019).

The key feature of this approach is its **minimal institutional distance**. Behavioural interventions are implemented within existing systems, requiring no structural reform. This makes them highly compatible with legitimacy constraints, as they do not challenge established arrangements or require extensive justification. In this sense, they represent the purest form of adjacency, where innovation occurs entirely within existing boundaries.

From a pragmatist institutionalist perspective, behavioural governance can be seen as a form of incremental learning, where policies are continuously adjusted based on observed responses. However, unlike more structural forms of experimentation, these adjustments operate at the micro-level, focusing on interactions between individuals and institutional interfaces.

This approach also reflects the cognitive limitations discussed earlier. By simplifying decision environments, behavioural interventions align with how individuals actually make choices, rather than assuming rational optimisation. This reinforces the argument that experimentation must be grounded in realistic models of behaviour.

At the same time, behavioural governance raises normative concerns. Critics argue that such interventions may undermine autonomy or obscure the role of policy design, particularly when they operate invisibly (Tummers et al., 2019). This highlights the importance of democratic anchorage, suggesting that even micro-level interventions must be evaluated in terms of transparency and accountability.

From a broader theoretical perspective, behavioural adjacency supports the critique of economic models of innovation. It demonstrates that meaningful change can occur without large-scale reform, challenging the assumption that progress requires systemic

transformation. Instead, it suggests that innovation may emerge through cumulative micro-adjustments that reshape behaviour over time.

Methodologically, behavioural governance offers significant opportunities for empirical testing. Randomised controlled trials, field experiments, and digital data analysis can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and their impact on legitimacy. Comparative studies could examine how behavioural approaches perform in different institutional contexts, providing insight into the conditions under which adjacency-based innovation is most effective.

5. Discussion

The analysis developed in this paper suggests that public sector experimentation cannot be adequately understood through the dominant optimisation paradigm that underpins much of the existing literature. While experimental governance is frequently framed as a process of iterative improvement, guided by evidence and learning, this perspective rests on assumptions that are only partially supported by empirical and theoretical work. In particular, it assumes that policy actors operate within a space of rational design, where better solutions can be discovered through systematic testing. The preceding sections have shown that this assumption is insufficient.

Instead, experimentation in the public sector is shaped by a combination of institutional constraints, legitimacy requirements, and cognitive limitations. These factors do not merely restrict experimentation; they actively structure it. From the perspective of pragmatist institutionalism, institutions evolve through problem-solving and adaptation. However, as demonstrated, such adaptation does not occur in a neutral environment. It is conditioned by the need to maintain alignment with established norms and expectations, which determines whether experimental practices are accepted or rejected.

This insight becomes particularly significant when considered alongside the literature on democratic anchorage. Governance innovations must remain connected to democratic principles such as participation, accountability, and transparency in order to sustain legitimacy (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005; Edelenbos, Steijn and Klijn, 2010). This implies that experimentation is not simply a matter of identifying effective interventions, but of ensuring that those interventions can be justified within a democratic framework. In this sense, legitimacy is not an external evaluation criterion, but a constitutive condition of experimental governance.

The concept of adjacent opportunities provides a way of integrating these insights. Rather than treating experimentation as a process of optimisation, adjacency conceptualises innovation as **bounded exploration within a constrained space of possibilities**. This space is defined not only by technical feasibility, but by institutional proximity and normative acceptability. Innovations that remain close to existing practices are more likely to be adopted, not because they are inherently superior, but because they are easier to justify and integrate.

This perspective aligns with broader critiques of linear development models. As Graeber and Wengrow (2021) demonstrate, institutional change does not follow a single trajectory toward improvement, but unfolds through diverse and often reversible processes. Similarly, Midgley (1985) cautions against the tendency to treat evolutionary concepts as normative frameworks,

suggesting that ideas of progress and optimisation are often overstated. These critiques challenge the assumption that public sector experimentation should be oriented toward a predefined goal of efficiency or performance.

From a cognitive standpoint, Klein's (2009) work reinforces this argument by showing that decision-making in complex environments is not driven by formal optimisation, but by experience, pattern recognition, and the need for defensible action. This suggests that experimentation is shaped not only by institutional constraints, but by the ways in which actors interpret and respond to uncertainty. Adjacent opportunities, in this sense, are not simply institutional phenomena, but also cognitive ones, reflecting the need to operate within what is intelligible and actionable.

At the same time, the concept of adjacency raises important questions about the limits of incrementalism. If innovation is always shaped by proximity, does it risk reinforcing existing institutional logics rather than transforming them? This tension reflects a broader debate in the literature between stability and change. While adjacency provides a mechanism for legitimate experimentation, it may also constrain the scope of transformation by favouring incremental adjustments over more radical interventions.

However, this limitation should be considered in light of the alternative. Disruptive reforms that fail to align with institutional and normative expectations are often resisted or rejected, regardless of their potential benefits. From this perspective, adjacency may not be a limitation, but a necessary condition for sustainable change. Transformation, where it occurs, may emerge not through abrupt shifts, but through the accumulation and recombination of smaller, proximate changes.

The implications of this perspective are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it suggests that public sector innovation should be analysed not as a process of optimisation, but as a process of navigating constraints. Practically, it implies that policymakers should focus less on identifying ideal solutions and more on designing interventions that are feasible, acceptable, and adaptable within existing systems.

6. Conclusion

This paper has developed a theory expansion in the study of public sector experimentation by introducing the concept of adjacent opportunities. It has argued that the dominant optimisation-based model of innovation is insufficient for understanding how experimentation unfolds in public governance, where legitimacy, institutional constraints, and cognitive limitations play a central role.

By integrating insights from pragmatist institutionalism, democratic anchorage, behavioural economics, and critiques of linear development, the paper has proposed an alternative conceptual framework. Adjacent opportunities capture how innovation occurs through institutional proximity and normative alignment, rather than through disruptive transformation or abstract optimisation. In doing so, the concept provides a mechanism for linking the adaptive logic of experimentation with the legitimacy requirements of democratic governance.

Importantly, the contribution of this paper is conceptual rather than empirical. It does not seek to validate the adjacency framework, but to establish it as a theoretically grounded

perspective that can guide future research. The propositions outlined in the methodology section provide a starting point for such work, suggesting avenues for comparative case studies, experimental research, and longitudinal analysis.

At a broader level, the paper contributes to ongoing debates about the nature of development and innovation. By questioning the assumption that institutional change follows a linear trajectory toward improvement, it aligns with perspectives that emphasise contingency, plurality, and context-dependence (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). It also echoes Midgley's (1985) critique of evolutionary thinking as ideology, suggesting that the language of optimisation may obscure as much as it reveals.

This does not imply that experimentation should be abandoned or that innovation is undesirable. Rather, it suggests that the goals and assumptions of experimentation should be reconsidered. Instead of seeking optimal solutions, public sector experimentation may be better understood as a process of exploring adjacent possibilities—identifying what can be made to work within existing constraints, and gradually expanding the space of feasible and legitimate action.

Future research will be essential in assessing the validity and usefulness of this perspective. In particular, empirical studies are needed to examine whether adjacency-based innovations are more likely to be adopted, whether they generate higher levels of legitimacy, and whether they enable or constrain broader institutional transformation. Such research will determine whether adjacent opportunities represent a robust framework for understanding public sector experimentation, or simply a useful heuristic for navigating complexity.

In either case, the paper aims to shift the terms of the debate. Rather than asking how to optimise policy design, it invites scholars and practitioners to consider how experimentation becomes possible in the first place—and what this implies for the future of public governance.

References

Allison, G.T. (1980) *Public and Private Management: Are They Fundamentally Alike in All Unimportant Respects?* In: Perry, J.L. and Kraemer, K.L. (eds.) *Public Management: Public and Private Perspectives*. Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing, pp. 27–38.

Ansell, C. and Bartenberger, M. (2016) 'Varieties of experimentalism', *Ecological Economics*, 130, pp. 64–73. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2016.05.016

Ansell, C. and Torfing, J. (2014) *Public Innovation through Collaboration and Design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199644640.001.0001

Bauer, M.W., Peters, B.G., Pierre, J. and Yesilkagit, K. (2021) 'Administrative responses to democratic backsliding: When is bureaucratic resistance justified?', *Governance*, 34(4), pp. 1007–1023. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12617

Brown, L. and Osborne, S.P. (2013) 'Risk and innovation: Towards a framework for risk governance in public services', *Public Management Review*, 15(2), pp. 186–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2012.707681

Christensen, T. and Lægreid, P. (2007) *Transcending New Public Management: The Transformation of Public Sector Reforms*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Chong, D. and Druckman, J.N. (2007) 'Framing theory', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10, pp. 103–126. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054

Costanza, R. et al. (2014) 'Time to leave GDP behind', *Nature*, 505(7483), pp. 283–285. https://doi.org/10.1038/505283a

Craft, J. and Howlett, M. (2013) 'Policy advisory systems and governance: The politics of policy advice', *Policy and Society*, 32(2), pp. 79–87. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polsoc.2013.07.002

Dixon-Woods, M. et al. (2006) 'How can systematic reviews incorporate qualitative research?', *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 6(35). https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-6-35

Dunleavy, P., Margetts, H., Bastow, S. and Tinkler, J. (2006) 'New public management is dead—Long live digital-era governance', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 16(3), pp. 467–494. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui057

Edelenbos, J., Steijn, B. and Klijn, E.-H. (2010) 'Does democratic anchorage matter?', *The American Review of Public Administration*, 40(1), pp. 46–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074009332064

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006) 'Five misunderstandings about case-study research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), pp. 219–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363

Fuglsang, L., Hansen, A.V. and Sørensen, F. (2018) 'Living labs for public sector innovation', in Fuglsang, L., Rønning, R. and Enquist, B. (eds.) *Framing Innovation in Public Service Sectors*. London: Routledge, pp. 181–202.

Geobey, S. (2021) *Reckoning with Reality*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Graeber, D. and Wengrow, D. (2021) *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. London: Allen Lane.

Gregersen, H. (2018) *Questions Are the Answer: A Breakthrough Approach to Your Most Vexing Problems at Work and in Life*. New York: Harper Business.

Grimmelikhuijsen, S., Porumbescu, G., Hong, B. and Im, T. (2013) 'The effect of transparency on trust in government', *Public Administration Review*, 73(4), pp. 575–586. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12047

Hajer, M. (2005) 'Setting the stage: A dramaturgy of policy deliberation', *Administration & Society*, 36(6), pp. 624–647. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399704270586

Head, B.W. and Alford, J. (2015) 'Wicked problems: Implications for public policy and management', *Administration & Society*, 47(6), pp. 711–739. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399713481601

Henderson, S. (2025) *Defining Negative Cases of Policy Transfer*. London: Routledge.

Hood, C. (2011) *The Blame Game: Spin, Bureaucracy, and Self-Preservation in Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Howlett, M. and Mukherjee, I. (2018) 'Policy design and non-design: Towards a spectrum of policy formulation types', *Politics and Governance*, 6(2), pp. 1–11. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i2.1349

Huitema, D., Jordan, A., Munaretto, S. and Hildén, M. (2014) 'Policy experimentation: Core concepts, political considerations and governance implications', *Policy Sciences*, 47(2), pp. 143–159. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-013-9194-x

Juuse, M. and Raudla, R. (2021) *Experimental Governance Constraints in Public Administration*. Working paper. Available at: https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36379.64800/1

Kattel, R., Drechsler, W. and Karo, E. (2022) *How Innovation Needs Bureaucracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kauffman, S.A. (2000) *Investigations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kauffman, S.A. (2023) 'Adjacent possible', in *Complexity and Evolutionary Theory*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367416541_Adjacent_Possible

Kivimaa, P. et al. (2017) 'Experiments in climate governance', *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 27(3), pp. 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1775

Klein, G. (2009) *Streetlights and Shadows: Searching for the Keys to Adaptive Decision Making*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Lorenz-Spreen, P. et al. (2019) 'Accelerating dynamics of collective attention', *Nature Communications*, 10(1759). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-019-09311-w

McFadgen, B. and Huitema, D. (2018) 'Experimentation at the interface of science and policy', *Policy Sciences*, 51(2), pp. 161–187. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-017-9305-6

Midgley, M. (1985) *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears*. London: Methuen.

Pan, S.L., Tan, C.H. and Zuo, M. (2022) 'Legitimacy in content moderation', *Information Systems Journal*, 32(3), pp. 372–395. https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12368

Pollitt, C. and Bouckaert, G. (2017) *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis – Into the Age of Austerity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Salet, W. (2020) *Public Norms and Aspirations*. London: Routledge.

Scharpf, F.W. (1999) *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/0198295454.001.0001

Schmidt, V.A. (2008) 'Discursive institutionalism: The explanatory power of ideas and discourse', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, pp. 303–326. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060606.135342

Schmidt, V.A. (2013) 'Democracy and legitimacy in the European Union revisited', *Political Studies*, 61(1), pp. 2–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00962.x

Snowden, D.J. and Boone, M.E. (2007) 'A leader's framework for decision making', *Harvard Business Review*, 85(11), pp. 68–76.

Sørensen, E. and Torfing, J. (2005) 'The democratic anchorage of governance networks', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 28(3), pp. 195–218. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2005.00144.x

Spangenberg, J.H. (2022) 'The limits of short-termism in governance', *Ecological Economics*, 197. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2022.107489

Streeck, W. and Thelen, K. (2005) *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Suchman, M.C. (1995) 'Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches', *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), pp. 571–610. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331

Thaler, R.H. and Sunstein, C.R. (2008) *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Tõnurist, P., Kattel, R. and Lember, V. (2017) 'Innovation labs in the public sector: What they are and what they do', *Public Management Review*, 19(10), pp. 1495–1519. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2017.1287939

Tummers, L., Bekkers, V., Vink, E. and Musheno, M. (2015) 'Coping during public service delivery', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25(4), pp. 1099–1126. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muu056

Van de Walle, S. (2016) 'When public services fail', *Journal of Service Management*, 27(5), pp. 831–846. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-04-2016-0107

Zetzsche, D.A., Buckley, R.P., Arner, D.W. and Barberis, J.N. (2017) ‘Regulating a revolution: From regulatory sandboxes to smart regulation’, *Fordham Journal of Corporate & Financial Law*, 23(1), pp. 31–103.