



Digital Human Resources Management and Local Governance Transformation: An Integrative Narrative Review

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Abstract. The digitalization of human resources (HR) has become a key driver of organizational transformation in both public and private sectors. This narrative review, based on 50 academic articles published between 1986 and 2025 in indexed journals (Scopus and Web of Science), examines the relationship between HR digitalization and local governance dynamics. The analysis highlights three main findings. First, human resource information systems (HRIS), e-recruitment, e-learning, and automation are essential tools for modernizing HR practices. However, their effectiveness depends on institutional context, digital skills, and stakeholder acceptance. Second, the impact of HR digitalization on local governance is uneven. While it may improve performance and transparency in some cases, it also faces organizational, trade union, and cultural resistance in others. Third, a central tension emerges between technical process rationalization and the democratic dimension of governance. Some studies focus on internal efficiency gains, whereas others emphasize the potential of digital tools to enhance citizen participation and public value creation. This review proposes an integrative framework linking HR digitalization and local governance through four mediators: digital competencies, local leadership, digital trust, and institutional interoperability. It also identifies future research directions related to digital maturity, artificial intelligence in public HR, digital resilience, and territorial digital justice. Ultimately, HR digitalization represents a potential lever for transformation within inclusive and sustainable local governance strategies.

Keywords: Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS); Local Governance; Digital Government; Public Value; e-HRM

1 Introduction

The digitalization of human resources (HR) is emerging as a major axis of organizational transformation in both the private and public sectors. Since the early work of DeSanctis [1] on Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), researchers have highlighted the potential of digital technologies to automate and optimize HR processes. Since then, the emergence of e-recruitment, e-learning, and performance analytics tools has profoundly altered practices in talent management and organizational steering [2,3].

However, while research in electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM) has seen rapid growth, it remains fragmented. Bondarouk et al. [4] show that research on e-HRM requires a multidisciplinary approach integrating both Information Technology (IT) and Human Resource Management (HRM) fields, recognizing the complexity of the relationships between technology, HRM practices, and organizational outcomes. Strohmeier [5,6] notes that most studies focus on technical or organizational aspects, to the detriment of governance dynamics and political implications. A recent bibliometric review [7] confirms this fragmentation, highlighting compartmentalized research fields between organizational performance, technological tools, and impacts on HR professionals, without genuine connection to public governance.

In the public sector, and particularly at the level of local authorities, the challenges related to HR digitalization hold a specific dimension. Reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM) have introduced logics of performance, transparency, and accountability into local administrations [8,9]. However, these reforms run into structural constraints and organizational resistance that limit their scope [10,11].

The central research question becomes: to what extent does HR digitalization transform local governance dynamics, and under what institutional conditions can it generate public value? Some studies suggest that digital tools can enhance the efficiency and quality of public service [12,13]. Others, however, point out that digitalization tends to further rationalize internal workflows rather than strengthen citizen participation [14,15]. This tension between technical rationalization and democratic governance constitutes one of the central debates in our literature.

This narrative review aims to overcome this fragmentation by proposing an integrative analysis of existing work. It is based on a corpus of 50 academic articles, covering various regions (Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas) and employing both empirical and theoretical approaches. Its objective is to shed light on the convergences, divergences, and tensions running through the research, in order to propose a conceptual framework linking HR digitalization and local governance.

In this sense, this review contributes on three levels: first, it offers an overview of a still-dispersed field; second, it identifies major theoretical and empirical tensions; and finally, it proposes a conceptual framework likely to guide future research on the place of HR digitalization in local governance dynamics. Furthermore, this narrative review should be understood as an exploratory step, as it proposes an initial conceptual mapping that will be extended by a more comprehensive systematic PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) review. This second phase will allow for testing the robustness of the studies and quantifying the

identified trends, while expanding the documentary base and strengthening the validity of the observed conclusions.

2 Theoretical background: from digital HRM to local governance transformation

2.1 Foundations and evolution of digital HRM

e-HRM has gradually established itself as a fundamental field in human resource management research. From the pioneering work of DeSanctis [1], Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) were analyzed as levers for the automation and rationalization of administrative processes. Subsequently, studies showed that HRIS facilitated information processing and improved the productivity of HR professionals [16]. Laura et al. [17] noted in a recent study that the digitalization of HR practices enhances organizational performance by creating synergies, transforming employee experience, reducing costs, improving employer branding, and generating new revenue.

However, recent research shifts the debate towards strategic and organizational dimensions. Parry and Tyson [2] and Marler and Fisher [3] emphasize the role of e-HRM as a strategic management tool, linked to the overall performance of organizations. Bondarouk and Brewster [18], from a forward-looking perspective, call for moving beyond a strictly technicist view to consider e-HRM as a constitutive element of the very evolution of the HR function.

Yet, the literature remains fragmented. Strohmeier [5,6], Contreras et al. [19], and Sakib et al. [7] shows, through systematic reviews and bibliometric analyses, that studies on e-HRM are scattered across multiple themes (effectiveness, performance, adoption, professional impacts, e-HRM and organizational strategy, integration and innovation of digital HRM, etc.) without always engaging in dialogue with each other. This fragmentation justifies the use of an integrative conceptual framework.

2.2 Local Governance and New Public Management

Local governance constitutes the second pillar of our field. Inspired by New Public Management (NPM), reforms of local administrations emphasized performance, accountability, and transparency [8,20]. However, their implementation is far from uniform.

In Africa, for example, Awortwi [9] shows that decentralization is hampered by structural dependencies and limited resources. Kumar and Parumasur [13] confirm this analysis by highlighting that the organizational effectiveness of HRIS in African municipalities depends less on the tools themselves than on managerial perceptions and the trust placed in the technology. Similarly, Lippert and Swiercz [21] remind us that digital trust and security are essential conditions for adoption, often neglected by local authorities.

In Europe, the work of Harris [8,22], Bruns [10], and Burlacu et al. [23] demonstrates that local authorities are caught between performance imperatives and organizational resistance, particularly related to labor relations and unions. In the Asian context, Teo et al. [24] and Rahman et al. [25] emphasize that the diffusion of HRIS depends largely on institutional support and political will. Finally, in the Americas, Resh et al. [26] and David et al. [27] stress the role of public HR data and local digital adoption strategies, confirming the growing importance of data-driven governance.

2.3 A socio-technical perspective on digital HR and local governance

While the literature on e-HRM and that on local governance have developed in parallel, few studies genuinely intersect them. Scarcely any articles identified in our corpus explicitly analyze the linkage between digital HR tools and governance dynamics [2,28,14]. However, these rare integrative contributions highlight major tensions.

Rogiers et al. [14] show that HR digitalization in local authorities primarily aims at internal rationalization, to the detriment of citizen participation. Conversely, Alawneh et al. [15] remind us that user satisfaction with public digital services is an essential condition for legitimizing reforms, as do Bach et al. [29], who emphasize the importance of genuine engagement, noting that partnerships between employers and unions require more than mere rhetoric. The "modernization" of public services has had significant implications for employment relations, with major changes in work practices and skills. Lindström and Vanhala [30] studied HRM performance in the local public sector as a social construct through discourses linking HRM to local residents as external customers. HR managers perceive their work as strategic rather than purely operational. Frucquet et al. [31] broadens this debate by highlighting the creation of public value in smart cities, stressing that digitalization cannot be limited to technical gains but must be conceived as a democratic and territorial transformation. Thus, Pyszka [32] sees that the adoption of e-HRM in public institutions improves efficiency by transforming the role of HR professionals. IT solutions create value in three ways: technological change, transfer of best practices, and delegation of routine tasks. e-HRM enables the delegation of routine HR activities to line managers and employees.

Finally, recent authors call for exploring still understudied dimensions. Piwowar-Sulej et al. [33] emphasize the importance of future skills and digital justice, while Myllymäki [34] proposes an integrated sociotechnical perspective, insisting that technology and organization are inseparable. These contributions pave the way for a conceptual framework where HR digitalization must be analyzed not only as a technical tool but as a structuring factor in local governance dynamics. This review bridges two traditionally separate fields -digital HRM and local governance- by proposing an integrative socio-technical framework that recognizes the inseparability of technology and organization.

3 Proposed Conceptual Model

Our literature review highlights that the digitalization of HR does not automatically produce a transformation in local governance. Instead, its impact depends on institutional mediations, organizational capabilities, and territorial contexts. Based on this finding, we propose the “Socio-technical mediation model of digital HR governance” articulating three main dimensions: digital HR tools, local governance, and key mediating factors.

This review adopts a socio-technical perspective, recognizing that digital HR systems cannot be understood in isolation from their organizational and institutional context. Following Myllymäki [34], we contend that technology and organization are mutually constitutive, requiring an analytical approach that transcends the traditional separation between technical and social dimensions.

3.1 Digital HR Tools as Drivers of Modernization

HRIS, e-recruitment, e-learning, and administrative automation are frequently presented as instruments for modernizing public organizations [1,2]. Their role extends beyond mere operational functions: they contribute to strategic management and the improvement of service quality [3,12].

However, their effectiveness heavily depends on the implementation context. For example, Kumar and Parumasur [13], in an African case, show that the benefits in terms of municipal performance only materialize if managers perceive HRIS as credible and useful. Conversely, Lippert and Swiercz [21] emphasize that a lack of technological trust can constitute a major barrier to their adoption. These findings confirm that digital HR tools are necessary but insufficient for transforming local governance.

3.2 Local Governance: Performance, Participation, and Transparency

Local governance is a field where administrative logic and citizen expectations intersect. Reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM) have emphasized performance and accountability [8,9]. Within this framework, digital HR tools can support more efficient and transparent management of personnel and skills.

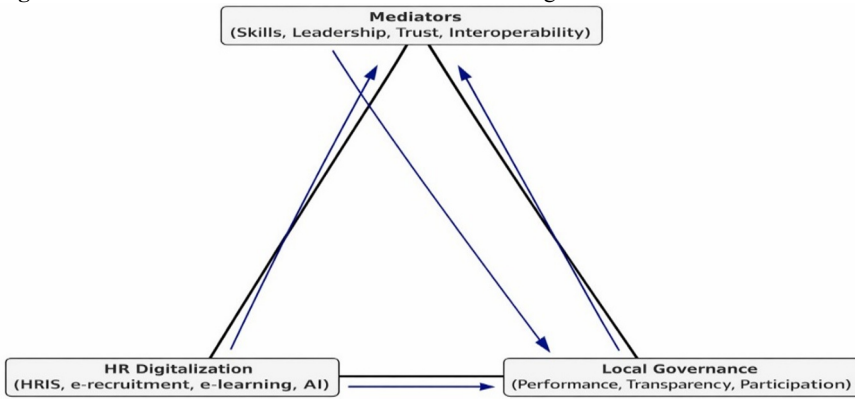
However, several studies point out that the democratic effect remains limited. Rogiers et al. [14] show that the digitalization of internal functions promotes the rationalization of internal workflows rather than citizen inclusion. In contrast, Alawneh et al. [15] emphasize that user satisfaction is an essential determinant of the legitimacy of digital initiatives. Finally, Frucquet et al. [31] proposes a broader vision, where digitalization is part of a logic of public value creation and territorial innovation (smart cities, collaborative governance).

3.3 Key Mediating Factors

Between digital HR tools and local governance, several structuring mediators emerge. First, the digital competencies of public servants condition their capacity for adaptation [33]. Next, local leadership plays a central role, as without political and managerial support, digitalization projects remain isolated [10]. Two other mediators also appear crucial: technological trust and security [21], which determine the adoption and sustainable use of HRIS, and territorial interoperability [27,26], which determines the ability of digital HR systems to communicate across different authorities and to support multi-level governance logics.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

Fig. 1. Socio-Technical Mediation Model of Digital HR and local Governance



The proposed model in figure 1 is based on a triangular framework:

- Digital HR (HRIS, e-recruitment, e-learning, AI applied to public HRM);
 - Local Governance (performance, transparency, citizen participation, public value);
 - Mediating Factors (digital competencies (skills), leadership, trust, interoperability).
- This model suggests that digital HR strategy influences local governance through mediating factors, rather than through a direct effect. In other words, digital HR does not transform governance directly but through institutional and human mediators. This indirect pathway explains why similar technological investments produce divergent governance outcomes across different territorial contexts.

This framework offers practical utility for researchers and practitioners. For researchers, it provides a structured approach to analyze why digital HR initiatives succeed or fail in specific territorial contexts. For practitioners, it serves as a diagnostic tool to identify which mediating factors require attention before implementing digital HR reforms.

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Methodological Justification

Narrative reviews are distinguished from systematic reviews or meta-analyses by their ability to connect fragmented theoretical fields and propose an integrative reading [35]. Unlike strictly quantitative approaches, they allow for the exploration of contradictions, tensions, and complementarities between studies, which is particularly relevant for our research field where studies on e-HRM and those on local governance often evolve in parallel without genuine connection [36]. In this sense, our narrative review stands as a suitable approach for identifying conceptual dynamics, proposing theoretical connections, and developing a provisional research framework. As noted by Strohmeier [5,6] and Sakib et al. [7], the field of e-HRM suffers from disciplinary fragmentation and thematic separation. A narrative approach therefore allows for a transversal and critical overview. This approach is particularly suitable for emerging interdisciplinary fields where theoretical integration is still nascent.

4.2 Research Corpus

Table 1. Summary of research corpus

Au- thor(year)	Region stu- died	Main theme	Type of research	Method	N cases
DeSanctis (1986) [1]	US A	Evaluation of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS)	Empirical research	Questionnaire survey	171 com- panies
Harris (2005) [8]	UK	Impact of public sec- tor reforms on HRM in local gov- ernments	Qualita- tive case study	Participant observation, interviews, document analysis	4 local au- thorities
Kumar & Parumasur (2013) [13]	Sout h Afri- ca	Perceived impact of HRIS on HR func- tions and organiza- tional effec- tiveness	Quantita- tive empi- rical study	Questionnaire, statistical analyses	101 managers

Bruns (2014) [10]	Germany	Role of HR strategy in organizational change	Qualitative research	Multiple case studies, interviews	Six municipalities
Rogiers et al. (2020) [14]	Europe	Transformation of internal staffing via HRIS	Prospective qualitative research	Delphi method	26 experts
Resh et al. (2019) [26]	USA	Use of Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey in public administration research	Systematic review	Content analysis	48 articles
Piwowar-Sulej et al. (2024) [33]	Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic	Impact of digitalization on future employee skills	Quantitative	Structural equation modeling	1209 companies
Sakib et al. (2025) [7]	Global	Mapping the evolution of Digital Human Resource Management	Mixed	Systematic review and Bibliometric	532 articles

The corpus of this study, as resumed in table 1, consists of 50 academic articles published between 1986 and 2025. This corpus ensures conceptual saturation while maintaining analytical depth, allowing for both breadth of coverage and depth of thematic analysis. The articles were selected based on their relevance to the analysis of two central dimensions:

- The digitalization of HR (e-HRM, HRIS, e-recruitment, e-learning, big data, AI applied to public HRM);
- Local governance (NPM reforms, citizen participation, public performance, decentralization, public value).

The selection included foundational work [1], contextualized empirical studies [13,10,24], as well as recent reviews and analyses [7,33]. The objective was to assemble a representative sample of scholarly debates spanning nearly 40 years of research.

The literature search was conducted using Scopus and Web of Science databases. Keywords used included: “HRIS”, “e-HRM”, “digital HRM”, “human resource information system”, “local governance”, “public sector HR”, “municipal HR”, “digital governance”, and “public value”. This search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English. The exclusion criteria were not based on sectoral boundaries but on analytical relevance, privileging studies that contributed to understanding digital HRM as governance and socio-technical phenomenon. The corpus ensures conceptual saturation while maintaining analytical depth.

4.3 Analysis Process

The analysis process consisted of three stages:

Step 1: Data extraction: each article was read and analyzed according to its theoretical, empirical, and contextual contribution. Key elements such as keywords, abstracts, and main contributions were extracted [18].

Step 2: Thematic classification: the articles were grouped into four main categories:

- Theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks [5,12];
- Empirical digital HR studies [13,21,37];
- Local governance and public reforms [8,9,31];
- Work combining digital HR and local governance [2,14].

Step 3: Analysis of tensions and contradictions: emphasis was placed on the divergences between studies. For example, some studies highlight the effectiveness of HRIS in terms of service quality [12], while others emphasize the persistence of organizational resistance [10]. Similarly, Rogiers et al. [14] show a rational use of digital technology, while Alawneh et al. [15] emphasizes the importance of citizen satisfaction.

5 Analysis and Discussion of Results

Table 2. Major tensions and contradictions.

Tension	Optimistic view	Critical view	References	Practical implications
Strategy vs. reality	HRIS modernize HRM	Lack of resources, resistance	[2,9]	Strengthen local capacity and funding
HR transformation and hierarchy	Digital HR = strategic repositioning	Rigid structures, heavy-hierarchies	[12,10]	Encourage organizational agility
Rationalization and citizenship	Digital technology increases internal efficiency	Low impact on citizen participation	[14,15]	Include the participatory dimension

Public value	Creation of public value through digitalization	Risk of digital divides and exclusion	[31,33]	Integrate digital justice and inclusion
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According to table 2, the analysis of the 50 articles reveals three major tensions in the literature on HR digitalization and local governance. These tensions reflect structural-contradictions inherent in digital public sector reforms, where technological imperatives often conflict with democratic and participatory governance ideals: (1) the gap between strategy and reality in the field, (2) HR transformation in the face of organizational resistance, and (3) technical rationalization versus citizen governance. Furthermore, a comparative examination of regional contexts (Africa, Europe, Asia, Americas) shows that the effects of HR digitization are highly contingent.

5.1 Tension 1: Strategy and Ground Reality

A primary tension concerns the gap between the strategic ambitions assigned to digital HR tools and their real-world application in local authorities. Parry and Tyson [2], for example, demonstrate that the objectives assigned to e-HRM (cost reduction, service quality improvement) do not always correspond to observed outcomes. Similarly, Marler and Fisher [3] emphasize the need to anchor e-HRM in organizational strategy to achieve real gains.

However, in low-resource contexts, these ambitions remain limited. Awortwi [9] shows that African digital decentralization reforms are hindered by structural dependencies and weak local autonomy. In a complementary manner, Kumar and Parumasur [13] highlight that HRIS only produce efficiency gains in African municipalities if managers trust them, confirming that perception plays a role as decisive as the tool itself.

5.2 Tension 2: HR Transformation and Organizational Resistance

HR digitalization modifies the role of the HR function, shifting it towards more advisory, analytical, and strategic steering activities [12]. In theory, it would free HR professionals from administrative tasks to entrust them with a more strategic role [38].

Nevertheless, in local authorities, resistance is significant. Bruns [10] shows that local HR strategies struggle to gain traction due to hierarchical and inflexible organizational cultures. Thite [11] notes that digital HR development (digital HRD) remains largely unfinished, due to a lack of appropriation by staff. Finally, Lippert and Swiercz [21] stress the importance of technological trust: without it, digital tools are perceived as constraints rather than opportunities.

5.3 Tension 3: Technical Rationalization and Citizen Governance

The literature converges on the fact that HR digitalization improves internal workflows, but its impact on citizen governance remains limited. Rogiers et al. [14] illustrates that the use of HRIS primarily aims to rationalize internal management, to

the detriment of citizen participation. Strohmeier [6] confirms that the focus is more on conceptual clarification and technical performance than on the democratic dimension.

In contrast, Alawneh et al. [15] demonstrates that user satisfaction is a crucial determinant of the legitimacy of digital initiatives. Frucquet et al. [31] broadens this perspective by introducing the notion of "public value," asserting that digitalization in smart cities must serve not only performance but also inclusion and participatory governance. Piwowar-Sulej et al. [33] adds a forward-looking dimension by emphasizing that digital justice and territorial equity must become criteria for evaluating HR digitalization policies.

5.4 Regional Empirical Comparisons

Beyond general tensions, results differ significantly according to geographical contexts and models of digital governance:

Africa: The work of Awortwi [9] and Kumar and Parumasur [13] identifies persistent structural challenges, where weak financial and technical resources and dependency on donors limit the impact and sustainability of HRIS. The central issue remains the local capacity for appropriation and maintenance of digital tools.

Europe: Research by Harris [8] and Bruns [10] describes technically modernized local administrations facing significant internal resistance, both from unions and hierarchies. Bondarouk et al. [12] observes gains in service quality but emphasize that these benefits remain highly contingent on specific organizational and socio-political contexts.

Asia: Teo et al. [24] and Rahman et al. [25] highlight that HRIS adoption is primarily conditioned by political will and top-down institutional support. South Korea exemplifies this approach with its "digital new deal" and proactive institutional support for digital transformation [39]. The Korean experience demonstrates how targeted state intervention can foster collaborative digital ecosystems, offering a transferable model for administrative modernization.

The Americas: Resh et al. [26] highlights the growing importance of public HR data in federal governance, marking a transition towards more quantitative administration. Concurrently, David et al. [27] identify, via a PRISMA systematic review, the diversification of local digital adoption strategies. This body of work collectively testifies to a transition towards "data-driven" governance, occurring simultaneously at federal and local levels.

5.5 Summary Results

This narrative review, based on the analysis of 50 academic articles, explores the link between the digitization of human resources and local governance dynamics. The study reveals that the digital transformation of HR in local authorities is a complex phenomenon with both promising and paradoxical impacts.

HR digitization is proving to be an essential lever for modernization in local government. HR information systems (HRIS), e-recruitment, and e-learning make it poss-

ible to automate administrative processes, improve service quality, and reposition the HR function toward a more strategic role. These tools are widely recognized for their potential to enhance organizational efficiency and managerial transparency.

However, this modernizing impact remains highly contingent on the institutional and territorial context. The study highlights significant organizational, union, and cultural resistance that often limits the scope of digital reforms. In low-resource contexts, particularly in Africa, structural dependencies and lack of local autonomy are additional barriers to the sustainable adoption of digital tools.

A fundamental tension emerges between technical rationalization and democratic governance. While digital tools effectively optimize internal flows and operational performance, their contribution to citizen participation and democratic deliberation generally remains limited. This contradiction calls into question the ability of digitalization to truly transform local governance beyond simply improving processes.

Considering these findings, the study proposes an integrative conceptual model in which the influence of digital HR on local governance is mediated by four key factors: the digital skills of employees, local leadership, technological trust, and institutional interoperability. This framework emphasizes that the transformative value of digitalization does not lie in the technology itself, but in its ability to fit into favorable organizational and territorial dynamics.

Looking ahead, future research should explore the digital maturity of local authorities, the application of artificial intelligence to public HR, and the challenges of territorial digital justice. Ultimately, this review demonstrates that HR digitalization is less a technical solution than a strategic opportunity whose realization depends on the commitment of local actors and their ability to embed these transformations in an inclusive and sustainable vision of territorial governance

This review demonstrates that digital HR transformation is fundamentally a governance challenge rather than a technological one. The findings support socio-technical approach to digital governance transformation, where success depends less on technological sophistication than on organizational readiness, institutional support, and stakeholder engagement.

6 Conclusion

This literature review reveals a fundamental paradox: while HR digitalization is recognized as essential for modernizing local government, its transformative potential depends on factors extending beyond technology. HRIS promises streamlined processes and strategic repositioning of HR functions, yet this promise confronts organizational resistance, skill gaps, and unfavorable managerial perceptions. Digitalization thus represents a necessary but insufficient condition for governance reform.

At the heart of this complexity lies a fundamental tension between, on the one hand, a logic of technical rationalization focused on internal optimization and, on the other hand, an ambition for citizen governance aimed at creating public value and strengthening participation. Purely technical approaches risk producing efficient but dehumanized systems, while an exclusive focus on participation without a solid foundation leads to inefficiency. The emerging concept of "digital justice" invites us to move beyond this opposition by placing territorial equity and inclusion at the center of our concerns.

To understand this reality, an integrative conceptual model is essential. It posits that the impact of digitalization on governance is not direct, but is mediated by several key factors:

- The digital skills of agents, without which tools are underutilized.
- The leadership of decision-makers, crucial for driving a strategic vision.
- User confidence in new systems.
- Technical and organizational interoperability, enabling integrated management.

This socio-technical framework places technology back in its human and institutional ecosystem, providing practitioners with a compass for diagnosing failures and steering change in a holistic manner.

For public decision-makers, the lesson is clear: investing in software without simultaneously investing in training, changing management, and leadership is a strategy doomed to failure. Digitalization must be a means to broaden ambition of transparency, efficiency, and inclusion.

Finally, this review opens several priority areas for research: comparative studies to understand the differences between regions of the world, longitudinal analyses to assess the sustainability of reforms, and the exploration of innovative fields such as artificial intelligence applied to public HR and digital territorial justice. The findings support a socio-technical approach to digital governance transformation, providing researchers with an integrative framework to analyze the complex interplay between technology, institutions, and human resources in public sector modernization.

Ultimately, the future of renewed local governance does not depend on the sophistication of the tools, but on their appropriation by territorial actors. Success lies in the alliance between technology and the collective intelligence of the territories.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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