

Governing Before the Crisis: Strategic Foresight, Anticipatory Governance Capacity, and Public-Sector Resilience in an Era of Polycrisis

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Abstract

Climatic, economic, health, geopolitical, technological, and social disruptions are becoming relevant and intertwining in a Polycrisis environment in which public administrations are operating across institutional and territorial boundaries. While strategic foresight and anticipatory governance are often suggested as solutions, research is still not very well developed to provide an explanation on how knowledge about possible futures can be translated to resilient administrative action. This conceptual paper elaborates on a model linking strategic foresight capacity, interorganizational coordination, anticipatory governance capacity, administrative flexibility, public-sector resilience, public-service continuity, citizen trust and public value. The article proposes that there is no automatic performance effect of foresight, as it is useful only if it is converted within an architecture that makes distributed intelligence coordinated, authorized, experimental and adaptive action. Administrative flexibility also supports the process of building in anticipatory governance capacity and public-service continuity is the visible link between resilience and citizen trust and public value. Eight propositions serve as a model's causal logic and boundary conditions. The article's contribution is to identify how Polycrisis differs from multiple crises, to bring together future-oriented and crisis-oriented public-administration literature, and to shift the focus on continuity as a product of operations and as a democratic statement of the reliability of government.

Keywords: anticipatory governance; Polycrisis; strategic foresight; public-sector resilience; interorganizational coordination; administrative flexibility; public value

1. Introduction

Public administration is in a new era where disruption is no longer an unexpected event, but a more typical phenomenon of governing (Ansell et al., [2021](#), [2023](#)). The current climate of increasing climate hazard, pandemic, economic shocks, geopolitical conflict, technological disruption, demographic change, and misinformation are coming together on shared

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infrastructures, institutions, supply chains and information systems (Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). These interactions are important because multiple crises do not just happen in isolation, but through shared stressors, cascading impacts, and feedback loops that can create cascading effects that are more than the sum of the parts (Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). Polycrisis is not just a catalogue of simultaneous crises, but an environment of governance in which there are causal entanglements between systems (Lawrence et al., [2024](#); Zaki, [2025](#)).

Conventional administrative arrangements tend to be poorly adapted to this context, as they separate accountability, expertise, budgets and authority between fixed sectoral borders (Head & Alford, [2015](#); OECD, [2025](#)). While hierarchical specialization may yield uniformity and legitimate authority in routine circumstances, it can also hinder the flow of weak signals and impede timely action when threats span across departmental or territorial boundaries (Boin & Lodge, [2016](#); Kapucu, [2006](#)). This may be exacerbated by New Public Management reforms where delivery chains are fragmented, narrow performance measures are used and delivery is separated through contracts, leading to a lack of awareness and a lack of collective problem ownership (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Head & Alford, [2015](#)). While networks enhance accessibility to the distributed knowledge and resources, networks also need legitimate coordination, direction, and conflict resolution and accountability mechanisms (Emerson et al., [2012](#); Provan & Kenis, [2008](#)).

Strategic foresight and anticipatory governance have gained momentum as a result of the limits of reactive administration (Habegger, [2010](#); Tönurist & Hanson, [2020](#)). Horizon scanning, scenario exploration, systems analysis, and other techniques are employed in strategic foresight to consider what potential shifts are likely to occur prior to them becoming an intractable policy constraint (Habegger, [2010](#); OECD, [2021a](#)). Anticipatory governance is not just about reporting on the future, but also about introducing future oriented knowledge, participation, experimentation and feedback into policy making and institutional processes (Fuerth, [2009](#); Guston, [2014](#); Tönurist & Hanson, [2020](#)). This orientation is being highlighted in international policy statements such as the United Nations Declaration on Future Generations, which requires governance that is more anticipatory, adaptive and responsive to future opportunities and risks (United Nations [2024](#)).

Yet there is a big difference, however, between envisioning a possible future and governing one. Governments can have advanced foresight institutions and outputs that don't link to budgeting, regulation, service delivery, procurement and political authorisation (OECD, [2025](#); Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#)). Fragmented intelligence can lead to several reports but no common interpretation, and formal plans can exist alongside the lack of movement of staff, resources or authority when things change (OECD [2022](#), [2025](#)). One way foresight can turn technocratic is when predictions by experts take the place of contestations over values, distributional impacts and desired futures by community members who are impacted by the foresight process (Rosa et al., [2021](#); Önnersfors & Schultz, [2022](#)). The central question is not whether disruption can be imagined, but whether it can be translated into legitimate, coordinated and adaptive action, by public organizations.

The shift problem is a related, but partial narrative of resilience research. The resilience of public sector institutions relates to their ability to absorb disturbance, adapt operations, learn and, if needed, transform the institution while maintaining critical public functions (Duit, [2016](#); Capano & Woo, [2017](#)). The relevance of improvisation, collaboration, scalability, learning and institutional design in the context of turbulence (Ansell et al., [2021](#); Boin & Lodge, [2016](#)) has been identified in crisis-governance scholarship. This literature tends to start after an identified crisis has unfolded, but anticipatory-governance research starts at an earlier point and often focuses less on the operational processes by which future knowledge will be realized as service continuity and trusted performance (Boin et al. [2020](#); OECD [2025](#)).

Linking these literatures can help to elucidate the relationship between pre-crisis capacities and performance in interacting disruptions. It is a question that can be posed as follows: How does strategic foresight turn into resilience in the public sector in the face of Polycrisis, and how does this resilience build citizen trust and public value? The article builds a model of the conceptual research, by synthesizing constructs from several literatures to specify what factors matter, how they are related, why the relationships should occur and under which conditions they are likely to strengthen or weaken (Whetten, [1989](#); Jaakkola, [2020](#)). The three proposed elements, interorganizational coordination as a link between strategic foresight and anticipatory governance capacity, administrative flexibility as a boundary condition between anticipation and resilience, and public-service continuity as a connection between resilience and citizen trust and public value, act as a bridge between the three.

The article makes four contributions. First, it does not use Polycrisis as a general term for 'difficulty' but instead understands it as a contextual pattern of causal entanglements, which is an answer to concerns about conceptual stretching in emerging public-policy research (Lawrence et al., [2024](#); Zaki, [2025](#)). Second, it offers a concept for an anticipation-to-resilience conversion architecture, elaborated in OECD ([2025](#)) and Tönurist & Orlik ([2025](#)), which is why foresight exercises can be symbolically impressive but operationally inconsequential. Third, it brings together complexity theory, dynamic capabilities, collaborative governance, and public value governance, to link the four dimensions of sensing, coordination, administrative reconfiguration, service continuity and legitimacy at different levels of analysis (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Emerson et al., [2012](#); Kattel & Mazzucato, [2018](#)). Fourth, it regards reliable continuity as a public message that the government is competent, fair and can safeguard collective interests when dealing with uncertainty, not just a technical performance indicator (Christensen & Lægheid, [2020](#); OECD, [2024](#)).

2. Conceptual Background

2.1 Polycrisis as a Distinct Administrative Context

Lawrence et al. ([2024](#)) provide a definition of global Polycrisis as causal entanglement within multiple crises systems, and an understanding of interaction as common stresses, cascading effects, and inter-systemic feedback. Common stresses happen when multiple underlying pressures occur simultaneously and drive up vulnerability for more than one system, such as ecological degradation or institutional inequality (Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). The disruption of one system can propagate to the other, for example an energy shock has an impact on the production, prices, public budgets and household security (Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). Inter-systemic feedback occurs when one crisis exacerbates the drivers of another and the resulting feedback loop becomes self-reinforcing (Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). These mechanisms reveal that the management of crisis portfolios cannot be effectively done with independent plans based on separation of causes, fixed jurisdictions, and a stable priority. These mechanisms suggest that the management of crisis portfolios is not possible with independent plans that presume a separation of causes, fixed jurisdictions and stable priorities.

However, caution must be taken with polycrisis as the causal interaction in all periods with multiple problems may not be meaningful (Zaki, [2025](#)). All challenging situations are viewed as "polycrisis" which not only reduces explanatory precision but also makes it difficult to determine when new rules of administration are needed (Zaki, [2025](#)). A useful application should identify crises of constituents, the systems they interact with, the connections between systems, their temporal dynamics, and the administration consequences of the connections between systems (Lawrence et al., [2024](#); Zaki, [2025](#)). In this article, polycrisis, then, is not a capability or a result of organization; rather it is a condition in the context of which interdependence, uncertainty, volatility, and demands for coordination across boundaries are

heightened.

2.2 Strategic Foresight and Anticipatory Governance

Unlike prediction, strategic foresight is not about forecasting social and institutional change in uncertain and complex systems, as these are often not capable of a single, reliable prediction (Habegger, [2010](#); OECD, [2021a](#)). Foresight, on the contrary, systematically considers potential, potential and desirable futures to enable decision makers to find out assumptions, emerging signals, opportunities, vulnerabilities and strategic options (Habegger, [2010](#); OECD, [2021a](#)). Horizon scanning, trend and driver analysis, scenario development, visioning, backcasting, systems mapping and stress testing are common examples of tools and techniques used in the development of a vision (OECD, [2021a](#), [2025](#)). These practices open up the space for imagining other futures, and question the way practices often occur in the present, continuously favouring the demands of the present over long-term implications (Boston, [2017](#); OECD, [2025](#)).

For the purpose of this article, strategic foresight capacity is the institutionalised capacity of a public organisation or administrative system to create, interpret, challenge and refresh knowledge about possible futures for current decision-making (Habegger, [2010](#); OECD [2025](#)). The construct comprises four integral elements: environmental scanning, scenario exploration, participatory sensemaking, and decision oriented evidence integration (Guston, [2014](#); OECD, [2021a](#); Rosa et al., [2021](#)). There are two components to environmental scanning: Trend analysis, which identifies trends, discontinuities, weak signals, and emerging risks; and Scenario exploration, which involves studying the possibilities of combinations of these factors (OECD, [2021a](#); Habegger, [2010](#)). Participatory sensemaking involves involving citizens, professionals, scientists, businesses and civil-society actors in the interpretation of future consequences, while evidence integration links up the resulting knowledge to the strategic and operational decisions (Guston, [2014](#); Rosa et al., [2021](#)). Anticipatory governance is an extension of foresight capacity, as it involves the institutional capacity to take action in the light of future-oriented knowledge when options and opportunities are still present (Fuerth, [2009](#); Guston, [2014](#)). Fuerth ([2009](#)) highlights the importance of a foresight system, interconnectedness with policy, feedback on performance, and an institutional culture that is open to challenge and learning. Guston ([2014](#)) highlights three social capacities: foresight, engagement and integration, which can help in reflecting on before things become entrenched. The OECD anticipatory innovation governance framework enriches the three key elements of experimentation, exploring alternatives, agency, and authorizing contexts and organizational mechanisms that link anticipation to innovation (Tönurist & Hanson, [2020](#)).

Here anticipatory governance capacity is understood as the capacity to act in the present in an authorized, coordinated, experimental, and revisable manner, moving from plural knowledge of plausible futures. (Fuerth, [2009](#); Tönurist & Hanson, [2020](#)). Analytically, the difference between foresight and anticipatory governance is significant, in that foresight can be generated in the absence of decisions, budgets, rules, and services (OECD, [2025](#); Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#)). Foresight is first of all a sensing and interpretive capacity, whereas anticipatory governance is a conversion and action capacity (Tönurist & Hanson, [2020](#); Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#)). This separation provides the theoretical basis for exploring the mechanism of coordination and flexibility instead of taking foresight as a direct causal path to resilience.

Resilience can have several meanings – persistence, recovery, adaptation, and transformation – and they are not synonymous with a positive connotation (Capano & Woo, [2017](#); Duit, [2016](#)). While persistence involves absorbing disruption and maintaining core functions, recovery is restoring acceptable functions after degradation (Duit, [2016](#)). Adaptation involves

adapting routines or the organization of resources to new conditions, whereas transformation involves making changes in the structures, purposes, or institutional relationships if the previous arrangements no longer work. (Capano & Woo, [2017](#); Duit, [2016](#)). Resilience is not therefore merely a matter of resisting change; sustaining an institution can also jeopardize the concept of public value if it perpetuates a sense of vulnerability and/or exclusion (Duit, [2016](#); Bryson et al., [2014](#)).

2.3 Public-Sector Resilience, Continuity, Trust, and Public Value

Public-sector resilience is the ability of public institutions to absorb the disturbance, adapt and reconfigure their operations, learn across events, and transform their arrangements if necessary, maintaining lawful authority and essential public purposes (Boin & Lodge, [2016](#); Duit, [2016](#)). This definition regards resilience as a multidimensional administrative capacity and not as an “after the fact” judgment that an organization survived (Capano & Woo, [2017](#)). It also differentiates resilience from robustness, a focus on holding on to core goals, functions and values while adapting flexibly and innovating proactively in turbulence (Ansell et al, [2021](#) and [2023](#)). Resilience can also be achieved through robust governance strategies, and resilience also involves recovery, learning and transformation over time (Capano & Woo, [2017](#); Duit, [2016](#)).

Public-service continuity refers to the continuous provision, access and quality of essential government services both during and after disruption (OECD, [2021b](#)). The way administrative capability is visible to citizens is through citizens' experience of healthcare, education, safety, social protection, identification and licensing, utilities and emergency support, and not through internal capability labels, as is the case with resilience (OECD, [2021b](#), [2024](#)). The delivery of all of the routines does not have to be the same, as resilient delivery can include temporary delivery routes, altered priorities, mutual aid, digital substitution, or decentralised discretion (Ansell et al., [2021](#); Mergel et al., [2021](#)). The question is: do essential public purposes continue to be accessible and rights-respecting while the administrative system adapts (Bryson et al., [2014](#); OECD, [2021b](#))?

Citizen trust depends on both performance and process, and is a relational judgement that public institutions are competent, reliable, honest, fair and responsive. (Christensen & Lægreid, [2020](#); OECD, [2024](#)). The OECD cross-national trust research observes that the key attributes of institutions that foster trust are reliability, responsiveness, openness, integrity and fairness (OECD, [2024](#)). As such, crisis performance can have an impact on trust when citizens see continuity or lack thereof as an indicator of governmental competence and concern for their welfare (Christensen & Lægreid, [2020](#)). Democracy does not only mean uncritical compliance with the trustee; it also means transparency and contestability, and skepticism can be held with accountability (Bryson et al., [2014](#); OECD, [2024](#)).

Public value adds to the assessment of efficiency by including the benefits, rights, fairness, legitimacy and long-term societal outcomes that are collectively determined through public action (Bryson et al., [2014](#)). Resilient continuity makes public value when it safeguards essential capacities, treats everyone fairly, maintains accountability, and allows communities to manage disruption (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Duit, [2016](#)). Operational persistence, but without public value—aggregate continuity that excludes marginalised groups—represents operational continuity without adequate public value (Bryson et al., [2014](#)). Public value, therefore, is not a subset of citizen trust, but rather a different outcome: public value is a citizen-level relational judgment, whereas public value is a larger scale, normative assessment of collective benefit and legitimacy (Bryson et al., [2014](#); OECD, [2024](#)).

Table 1

Core Constructs and Analytical Roles

Construct	Operational definition	Principal sources
Polycrisis	Context in which crises in multiple systems become causally entangled through common stresses, cascading effects, or reinforcing feedback.	Lawrence et al. (2024); Zaki (2025)
Strategic foresight capacity	Institutionalized ability to generate, contest, interpret, and update knowledge about plausible futures for present decisions.	Habegger (2010); OECD (2021a, 2025)
Interorganizational coordination	Capacity of interdependent actors to share information, align interpretation, allocate roles, and commit resources for joint action.	Emerson et al. (2012); Kapucu (2006)
Anticipatory governance capacity	Systemic ability to translate plural future knowledge into authorized, coordinated, experimental, and revisable present action.	Fuerth (2009); Guston (2014); Tönurist and Hanson (2020)
Administrative flexibility	Accountable capacity to redeploy resources, adapt procedures, revise priorities, and decentralize decisions as conditions change.	Mergel et al. (2021); Piening (2013)
Public-sector resilience	Capacity to absorb disturbance, adapt operations, learn, and transform while preserving lawful authority and essential purposes.	Capano and Woo (2017); Duit (2016)
Equitable public-service continuity	Sustained availability, accessibility, acceptable quality, and fair distribution of essential services during and after disruption.	Bryson et al. (2014); OECD (2021b)
Citizen trust	Relational judgment that public institutions are competent, reliable, honest, fair, and responsive.	Christensen and Læg Reid (2020); OECD (2024)
Public value	Collectively assessed benefits, rights, fairness, legitimacy, and long-term societal outcomes produced through public action.	Bryson et al. (2014)

Note. Definitions are synthesized for the proposed framework rather than presented as validated measurement scales.

3. Conceptual Method

We do not follow a systematic review to estimate the frequency or size of empirical effects (Jaakkola, 2020), but instead take a theory-synthesis and model-building approach. Conceptual model building is suitable when there are explanations relevant to the contribution in the literatures, but the contribution requires identification of constructs, causal mechanisms, theoretical reasons and boundary conditions (Jaakkola, 2020; Whetten, 1989). The analytic goal is thus to combine forward-looking governance and crisis and resilience studies, rather than to be comprehensive about all publications based on the chosen keywords (Jaakkola, 2020).

The source corpus was compiled using the conceptually central words and iterative forward and backward chaining. The terms used in the searches included polycrisis, turbulence, creeping crisis, strategic foresight, anticipatory governance, public-sector resilience, robust governance, interorganizational coordination, administrative flexibility, public-service continuity, citizen trust, and public value. Theoretical statements were drawn primarily from peer-reviewed research publications, and OECD, the United Nations and UNDP documents were employed when they set out the contemporary institutional practice, international commitments or public-governance evidence. Sources were kept if they helped to clarify a focal construct, explain a proposed relationship, indicate a boundary condition, or suggest a plausible basis for future operationalization.

The synthesis was a four-stage process similar to conceptual-model development (Jaakkola, 2020; Whetten, 1989). First, conceptual distinctions were kept in mind in the definition of the focal constructs, in particular between foresight and anticipatory governance and between resilience and robustness. Second, theories were used for specific explanatory tasks and not fused into a variety of labels. Third, causal mechanisms from future sensing to coordination, authorization of action, reconfiguration of a resource, service continuity, and citizen-level outcomes were traced. Fourth, competing explanations and boundary conditions were explored such as symbolic foresight, networks that were segmented, rigid administrative rules, technocratic involvement, and inequality in service continuity.

The resulting model is intentionally meso-to-systemic as Polycrisis links organizational capabilities with interorganizational and societal outcomes (Lawrence et al., 2024; Zaki, 2025). Within the organization, strategic foresight and administrative flexibility can be seen, coordinated and anticipatory governance can be seen between the organizations, and trust and public value can be seen between the organization and citizens and communities (Emerson et al., 2012; OECD, 2024). The structure therefore outlines the cross-level relationships that future empirical research should explicitly model, instead of modelling all constructs as individual employee perceptions (Wu et al., 2015). Table 2 provides a summary of the unique contribution that each theory lends to the field of education.

Table 2

Theoretical Foundations of the Conversion Architecture

Theoretical lens	Primary explanatory task	Role in the integrated framework
Complexity theory	Explains nonlinear interaction, emergence, feedback, and limits of prediction.	Establishes why Polycrisis requires plural sensing, scenario exploration, iterative learning, and preserved options.
Dynamic capabilities theory	Explains how organizations sense change, seize options, and reconfigure resources.	Specifies how anticipatory knowledge becomes operational adaptation and why bounded flexibility changes the effect on resilience.
Collaborative governance	Explains joint action among actors with distributed knowledge, authority, and resources.	Positions interorganizational coordination as the bridge that integrates signals, translates implications, and creates commitment.
Public value governance	Explains the substantive, procedural, and distributional standards of legitimate public action.	Constrains flexibility and evaluates continuity through rights, equity, accountability, trust, and collective benefit.

Note. The lenses are complementary: contextual, operational, relational, and normative explanations are required to specify the full pathway.

4. Theoretical Foundations

4.1 Complexity Theory: Why Prediction and Siloed Control Are Insufficient

A. Prediction and Siloed Control are Inadequate 4.1.1 Prediction and Error 4.1.2 Siloed Control

It is explained by complexity theory that Polycrisis cannot be managed with linear projections and singular interventions (Eppel & Rhodes, 2018; Lawrence et al., 2024). In complex systems, there are multiple actors, nonlinear interactions, feedback loops, path dependence and emergent outcomes that cannot be reliably predicted from the behaviour of individual actors (Eppel & Rhodes, 2018). Small interventions can have large impacts in one setting, and have little impact in another setting, and fixes for one problem can change incentives or vulnerabilities in another (Head & Alford, 2015; Lawrence et al., 2024). These properties undermine administrative models which rely on the stable assumption of causal relations, a

manageable boundary, and a distinct policy problem (Eppel & Rhodes, [2018](#); Head & Alford, [2015](#)).

Avoiding analysis and planning does not mean that public institutions should give up on analysis or planning, as this can still be done while not claiming to predict anything precisely (Habegger, [2010](#); OECD, [2021a](#)). It rather moves the role of foresight from finding the right future to enhancing perception, challenging assumptions, uncovering interdependencies and maintaining response options (Habegger, [2010](#); OECD, [2025](#)). Multiple scenarios are beneficial as they enable institutions to identify strategies that are acceptable under a variety of scenarios and for various warning signals to justify adaptation (OECD, [2021a](#), [2025](#)). Distributed sensing, iterative interpretation, feedback, and flexible response (Eppel & Rhodes, [2018](#); Lawrence et al., [2024](#)) therefore provide the contextual logic for the model: the more complex the entanglement, the more value can be brought by this approach.

4.2 Dynamic Capabilities Theory: How Anticipation Becomes Reconfiguration

According to dynamic capabilities theory, dynamic capabilities involve being able to sense changes in the environment, seize or respond to opportunities or threats, and reconfigure resources and routines in response to changes in conditions (Teece, [2007](#)). Created in strategic-management research, the framework is now gaining traction in public organisations with public missions and accountability demands that need to re-imagine their capabilities in order to renew them (Kattel & Mazzucato, [2018](#); Piening, [2013](#)). Public-sector dynamic capabilities are unlike private competitive dynamic capabilities as they seek to generate public value under political authorization, legal restriction and multi-stakeholder expectations (Kattel & Mazzucato, [2018](#); Piening, [2013](#)).

Strategic foresight relates primarily to the sensing function as it broadens the field of attention to signals that are emerging, to alternative scenarios, to system vulnerabilities. (Habegger, [2010](#); Teece, [2007](#)). When conditions are not yet fully matured, and in order to select among options, build authorization, commit resources, and conduct experiments, the governance required is anticipatory governance (Tönurist & Hanson, [2020](#); Teece, [2007](#)). Administrative flexibility and public-sector resilience go hand-in-hand with reconfiguring as public agencies need to change responsibilities, processes, technologies, partnerships, and resource allocations without breaking the law or compromising their public functions (Kattel & Mazzucato, [2018](#); Mergel et al., [2021](#)). This sequence gives a causal explanation for why there is limited operational benefit when there is no coordination and reconfiguration in sensing (Piening, [2013](#); Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#)).

4.3 Collaborative Governance: How Distributed Intelligence Becomes Collective Capacity

The term “collaborative governance” refers to the work of establishing a distributed intelligence as a collective capacity. “Collaborative governance” is a term that refers to efforts to build a distributed intelligence as a collective capacity.

Collaborative governance refers to how public agencies and nonstate actors can participate in the process of shared decision in circumstances where problems extend beyond the boundaries of any single agency and agencies' resources are interdependent (Ansell & Gash, [2008](#); Emerson et al., [2012](#)). Principled engagement, common motive, capability of cooperative action, leadership, procedural legitimacy and larger institutional environment are all essential ingredients of effective collaboration (Ansell & Gash, [2008](#); Emerson et al., [2012](#)). These elements become particularly critical in a polycrisis context where information used for anticipation is dispersed, and the impact of actions is spread across various sectors and groups (Lawrence et al., [2024](#); Zaki, [2025](#)).

Interorganizational networks don't coordinate themselves. Clearly defined responsibilities, common information, power balance, duplication, weak buy-in, and transaction costs can all be potential issues within networks (Provan & Kenis, [2008](#)). Emergency-Management research indicates that boundary spanners, established relationships, communication channels, and network structure are factors that determine whether information is provided to decision makers in the midst of disaster (Kapucu, [2006](#); Kapucu et al., [2022](#)). The model thus considers 'coordination' as a substantive capacity in which shared interpretations, collective choices, the pooling of resources and conflict resolution processes have to play a role, not just partnerships or committees. (Emerson et al., [2012](#); Provan & Kenis, [2008](#)).

4.4 Public Value Governance: Why Resilience Must Remain Democratic

Public value governance is not just about efficiency; it is also about collective purposes, democratic legitimacy, citizenship, fairness and problem solving across sectors (Bryson et al., [2014](#)). This is particularly crucial when one thinks about how well a scenario can be protected by anticipation as well as by resilience, and how well a lack of state support can be blamed on resilience (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Duit, [2016](#)). For a public institution to be resilient in a normatively sufficient way must be able to maintain aggregate output while foreseeable harms are focused on citizens who have the least political or material capacity (Bryson et al., [2014](#)).

Public value governance thus offers three tests of value for the proposed model. The substantive test is: does anticipatory action safeguard outcomes which citizens collectively value, such as safety, rights, equity and future capability (Bryson et al., [2014](#)). The procedural test requires decisions to be transparent, contestable, participatory and accountable, as well as affording broad administrative discretion in situations of uncertainty (Önnerfors & Schultz, [2022](#); OECD, [2024](#)). The distributional test is based on identifying who is getting continuity, who is absorbing disruption, and whether the adaptation process is decreasing or increasing structural vulnerability (Bryson et al., [2014](#); United Nations Development Programme, [2025](#)). These tests do not allow the framework to assume continuity, trust and innovation are in and of themselves good, no matter how they are being gained.

5. An Integrated Conceptual Framework

The proposed model is a model of anticipation-to-resilience conversion architecture. The capacity for strategic foresight brings about intelligence for the future, interorganizational coordination brings about the integration of distributed knowledge, anticipatory governance capacity brings about present action that is authorized and revisable, administrative flexibility brings about the ability of institutions to reconfigure their operations, public-sector resilience brings about the preservation and adaptation of essential functions, and public-service continuity makes that capacity visible to citizens and communities. Citizen trust and public value follows when continuity is perceived as reliable, fair, accessible and accountable (Bryson et al., [2014](#); OECD, [2024](#)).

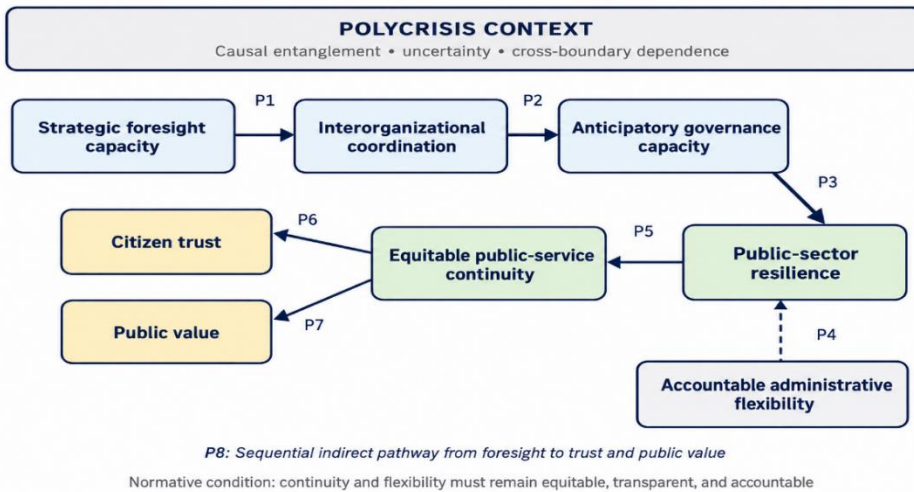


Figure 1: Anticipation-to-Resilience Conversion Architecture

Note. Solid arrows show hypothesized positive relationships; the dashed arrow shows moderation. P8 represents the full sequential indirect pathway.

5.1 Strategic Foresight Capacity and Anticipatory Governance Capacity

The capacity of public decision making in strategic foresight extends time and mind (Habegger, 2010; OECD, 2021a). Weak signals can be identified early in advance of becoming visible in more traditional performance indicators through horizon scanning and scenarios can illustrate how trends can unfold and fit together under alternative assumptions (OECD, 2021a, 2025). Participative foresight can also incorporate experiential and local knowledge that can reveal vulnerabilities that would not be apparent in national aggregates or technical models (Rosa et al., 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 2025). These practices expand the field of alternatives that are considered prior to reaching a tipping point of irreversible administrative system 'lock-in' or crisis-induced time pressure (Guston, 2014; Tönurist & Hanson, 2020).

There are three mechanisms of foresight and anticipatory governance: Foresight can support anticipatory governance in three ways: First, it enables a better allocation of attention through bringing decision makers to the fore of any new issue which might not have been covered in routine reporting (Habegger, 2010; OECD, 2021a). Second, it facilitates the process of assumption testing by making the causal beliefs and expectations explicit for several scenarios (OECD, 2025). Third, it fosters option awareness by making it possible to take action now, conditionally, do experiments or yet not take any action except when a specific trigger point is reached (Tönurist & Hanson, 2020; Tönurist & Orlik, 2025). These processes should make the link between future possibilities and current decisions more robust.

It is not a one-way street, as foresight products can be ignored, politicised, or not linked to decision-making (OECD, 2025; Tönurist & Orlik, 2025). A scenario report has minimal administrative impact if it doesn't fit into budget cycles, if it is not supported at a high level, or if it does not include program implications and resource decisions (OECD, 2022, 2025). Foresight can also introduce ambiguity when agencies read the signals differently or the agencies represent conflicting institutional interests (Emerson et al., 2012). The model then predicts a positive average correlation and identifies a key mechanism as the interorganizational coordination.

Proposition 1. There is a positive relationship between strategic foresight capacity and anticipatory governance capacity in public administrative systems.

5.2 The Mediating Role of Interorganizational Coordination

Polycrisis shares relevant knowledge between organisations and government levels due to the overlapping nature of interacting disruptions across traditional administrative boundaries (Boin & Lodge, [2016](#); Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). Epidemiological signals can be observed by a health agency, fiscal exposure can be identified by a finance ministry, household vulnerability can be identified by local governments, system stress can be monitored by infrastructure operators, and access failures can be detected by civil society (Emerson et al., [2012](#) and Kapucu, [2006](#)). What is observed by individual actors will only be shared and useful when they are able to communicate, to make sense of what they have seen, and to reach a consensus on priority actions and the mobilisation of complementary resources (Kapucu et al., [2022](#); Provan & Kenis, [2008](#)).

Coordination is the middleman between foresight and anticipatory governance, as it facilitates integration, translation and commitment. On the one hand, integration brings together the observations made at the level of separate observations to make a system-wide account of interaction, while, on the other hand, translation transforms a general scenario into implications for particular mandates and operational contexts (OECD, [2025](#)). Shared ownership, responsibility specification, and the diminishing of the chance that each organization waits for the other to do something (Emerson et al., [2012](#); Provan & Kenis, [2008](#)) are all hallmarks of commitment. These processes translate foresight from a product of information to a coordinated decision resource.

Prior relationships are significant since the coordination cannot be built after the disruption becomes urgent (Kapucu, [2006](#); Kapucu et al., [2022](#)); and boundary spanning roles are significant because the disruption cannot always be anticipated (Larkey, 2016). Successful interaction may build trust, common language, data formats, escalation plans and understanding of partner strengths and capabilities prior to a crisis (Ansell & Gash, [2008](#); Emerson et al., [2012](#)). Network governance should however be commensurate with the structure of the problem: If membership is large, trust is varied, and a quick direction is needed, there may be a need for a lead organisation or for a dedicated administrative body (Provan & Kenis, [2008](#)). Coordination capability is thus at both a relational and institutional level.

The mediating argument also helps explain why a single, central hub of foresight can be inadequate. The high quality analysis can be produced by a central unit, but agencies may fail to integrate this when they don't engage in interpretation or see implications as conflicting with mandates and incentives (OECD [2022](#), [2025](#)). On the other hand, coordination that does not anticipate unforeseen interactions and risks in the future can mobilize actors effectively around familiar risks, while missing new risks and interactions (Habegger, [2010](#); Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). Future-oriented intelligence and cross-boundary coordination should be developed in tandem for the most powerful anticipatory capacity to emerge.

Proposition 2. Interorganizational coordination mediates the positive relationship between strategic foresight capacity and anticipatory governance capacity.

5.3 Anticipatory Governance Capacity and Public-Sector Resilience

Anticipatory governance capacity should strengthen resilience because it allows institutions to prepare options, relationships, resources, and decision triggers before disruption eliminates time and choice (Fuerth, [2009](#); Tönurist & Hanson, [2020](#)). Scenario-based stress testing can reveal single points of failure, incompatible procedures, and dependencies across

infrastructures or service chains (OECD, [2025](#)). Experimentation can test alternative delivery methods at limited scale, while preauthorized contingency arrangements can accelerate expansion when specified indicators are reached (Mergel et al., [2021](#); Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#)). These actions create slack, redundancy, modularity, and learning that support absorption and adaptation.

Anticipatory governance also improves resilience by shifting learning earlier in the crisis cycle. Crisis reviews often produce lessons after harm has occurred, but foresight and simulation can create prospective learning through imagined or rehearsed disruptions (Boin et al., [2020](#); OECD, [2025](#)). Prospective learning cannot reproduce the political and behavioral realities of an actual emergency, yet it can reveal assumptions, coordination gaps, and resource constraints before they become operational failures (Leonard & Howitt, [2010](#); OECD, [2025](#)). Repeated exercises also develop shared mental models and relationships that support improvisation when events depart from plans (Kapucu, [2006](#); Leonard & Howitt, [2010](#)).

The effect is expected across resilience dimensions. Anticipatory governance can improve absorptive capacity through buffers and continuity arrangements, adaptive capacity through modular procedures and feedback, learning capacity through monitoring and experimentation, and transformative capacity by identifying when existing institutional arrangements are no longer adequate (Capano & Woo, [2017](#); Duit, [2016](#)). The framework does not claim that every anticipated threat can be prevented, because polycrisis is partly defined by uncertainty and nonlinear interaction (Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). It claims that institutions with a developed ability to convert future knowledge into present preparation will preserve more options and respond more coherently than institutions relying solely on reactive mobilization (Ansell et al., [2021](#); Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#)).

Proposition 3. Anticipatory governance capacity is positively associated with public-sector resilience.

5.4 Administrative Flexibility as a Boundary Condition

Andrews et al. ([2016](#)); Kattel & Mazzucato ([2018](#)) have pointed out that anticipatory governance does not need to ensure that the public organizations have the capacity to take the appropriate action. Administrative flexibility relates to the proper capacity to modify routines, roles, resource sharing, partnerships, delivery channels and so on if the existing procedures are not suited to new conditions (Mergel et al., [2021](#); Micacchi et al., [2025](#)). Flexibility is thus the implementation boundary between anticipatory decisions and operational resilience.

High flexibility allows institutions to transfer its workforce, mobilize contingent procurement, share information, expand partnerships, distribute limited discretion, and adapt service channels within established legal and accountability protection (Micacchi et al., [2025](#); Mergel et al., [2021](#)). Low flexibility is characterized by a knowing-doing gap: agencies are aware of new threats but are limited by appropriation timelines, system incompatibility, mandates that are too short and to the point, and authorization workflows that are too lengthy, or punitive for agencies that try new things without adequate resources (Kattel & Mazzucato, [2018](#); Piening, [2013](#)). In such a climate, it might be possible to enhance documentation without enhancing resilience.

However, flexibility needs to be constrained as discretion in emergencies can create inconsistency, capture, discrimination, and a reduced oversight (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Christensen & Lægreid, [2020](#)). The following useful arrangements include exception criteria, sunset clauses, decision logs, real-time audit, modular contracts, cross-trained personnel, and interoperable data standards, and ex post review (Mergel et al., [2021](#); OECD, [2025](#)). These

mechanisms enable accountability in a lawful manner, while minimizing timeliness gaps from recognition to action. The model thus predicts that while unrestricted managerial discretion may have a negative effect, accountable administrative flexibility has a positive effect.

Proposition 4. The relationship between anticipatory governance capacity and public-sector resilience is positively moderated by administrative flexibility; that is, a positive moderation effect occurs when the level of administrative flexibility is high.

5.5 Public-Sector Resilience and Public-Service Continuity

Resilience is made "administratively consequential" when it allows essential services to keep functioning and recover in the face of disruption (Duit, [2016](#); OECD, [2021b](#)). Absorptive capacity enables continuity through the protection of critical infrastructure, backup systems, critical staffing and emergency reserves (Boin & Lodge, [2016](#)). Adaptive capacity can facilitate delivery continuity by adjusting delivery channels, eligibility criteria, staffing arrangements, and intergovernmental arrangements as circumstances evolve (Ansell et al., [2021](#); Mergel et al., [2021](#)). Learning and transformative capacity foster continuity in times of disaster by fixing vulnerabilities instead of reverting to previous arrangements that failed (Duit, [2016](#); Capano & Woo, [2017](#)).

The idea of continuity should be assessed in terms of availability, accessibility, quality, timeliness and equity, not simply as a yes/no proposition about an agency staying open (Bryson et al., [2014](#); OECD, [2021b](#)). A digital service may maintain service nominally available, but exclude citizens who lack connectivity, skills and/or accessible interfaces or identification (OECD, [2021b](#)). Decentralized response may lead to improvements in the speed of response, but also create inequalities of place and/or inequalities of access (Bryson et al., [2014](#)). These include multiple channels, disaggregated monitoring, and ways of identifying groups whose access is affected during adaptation (OECD, [2021b](#); United Nations Development Programme, [2025](#)).

PRIORITIZATION is also a factor of the resilience-continuity relationship. To ensure that all services are available at "normal levels," administrators must determine what public purposes are essential and the minimum levels of services to be maintained prior to disruption (Boin & Lodge, [2016](#); OECD, [2021b](#)). Good prioritization makes it easier for agencies to allocate limited resources, while maintaining legitimacy, and minimising arbitrary differences (Christensen & Lægreid, [2020](#)). The model is a continuum, reflecting the level of continuity of essential services to be rights respecting and fit for purpose.

Proposition 5. Equitable public-service continuity before and after interacting disruptions is positively related to public-sector resilience.

5.6 Public-Service Continuity, Citizen Trust, and Public Value

When services are disrupted, citizens' experiences of the service leads them to infer the ability of the government to provide services, and increased dependence on public institutions in such situations (Christensen & Lægreid, [2020](#); OECD, [2024](#)). Continuity shows readiness and trustworthiness when citizens can receive vital assistance without unnecessary obstacles, conflicting information or unnecessary delay (OECD, [2021b](#), [2024](#)). This is a positive signal as it lowers uncertainty regarding institutions' commitment in times of stress (Christensen & Lægreid, [2020](#)). Failure can also have a counterproductive impact when the opposite is the case – that official promises and formal plans are not matched by administrative capacity (Boin et al., [2020](#); OECD, [2024](#)).

Perceived process moderates the effect on trust. Technically successful continuity may be discounted by citizens when decisions are perceived as being unfair, opaque, unresponsive,

or being driven by powerful interests (Bryson et al., [2014](#); OECD, [2024](#)). Communication needs to communicate changing priorities, evidence, uncertainty, trade-offs and opportunities for appeal – not just decisions (Christensen & Lægread, [2020](#)). Continuity is associated with the highest level of trust when it is linked to competence, fairness, openness, integrity and responsiveness (OECD, [2024](#)).

Proposition 6. Continuity of public services, which is consistent and fair, is positively correlated with citizens' trust in public institutions.

Systemic disruption presents a challenge to public value by making it difficult for markets, households or communities alone to protect the capabilities and social functions necessary for continuity (Bryson et al., [2014](#)). Reliable health, education, social protection, identification and infrastructure services provide buffering against cascading harms and promote adaptation of other social systems (Lawrence et al., [2024](#); OECD, [2021b](#)). Continuity can also help to ensure democratic inclusion through access to information, participation, legal action and administrative recognition (Bryson et al., [2014](#)). These benefits go beyond satisfaction with a single transaction, as these are meant to enrich the life of the community as a whole and ensure the future recovery.

However, public value relies on distribution and legitimacy. A change that preserves overall service metrics, but that results in inequitable value to periphery communities can be an adaptation that does not provide protection to central districts (Bryson et al., [2014](#)). Likewise, shifting public responsibility to unpaid community workers can be a mask for a withdrawal of public responsibility (Duit, [2016](#)). For the public-value effect to be maximized, service continuity should be inclusive, rights-respecting, transparent and intergenerational (Bryson et al., [2014](#), United Nations, [2024](#)).

Proposition 7. Public value creation is positively related to equitable public-service continuity.

5.7 The Sequential Conversion Pathway

The full model predicts a sequence of effects (and not a set of direct effects). Foresight increases awareness, coordination brings together signals to create commitments, anticipatory governance empowers action in the present, flexibility allows for reconfiguration, resilience maintains essential capability, and continuity generates citizen level and societal outcomes (Emerson et al., [2012](#); Kattel & Mazzucato, [2018](#); OECD, [2025](#)). Even if other components of the pathway are effective, a failure at any point can disrupt it. For instance, a complex foresight without coordination might never be coordinated; a plan with coordinated measures might never be implemented; a resilient operation without equity might not pass the public-value test (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#)).

This particular type of logic is also temporal ordering. In addition, strategic foresight and coordination should be evaluated prior to making anticipatory decisions, administrative reconfiguration should be looked at before resilience outcomes, and continuity and trust should be assessed during or after the disruption of interest (Jaakkola, [2020](#); Whetten, [1989](#)). Cross-sectional perceptions can at best be used as a preliminary test but they cannot determine if the proposed conversion process was the correct one for the development. Longitudinal and event-based designs are thus especially relevant for future studies.

Proposition 8. Citizen trust and public value are positively indirectly related to strategic foresight capacity via the interorganizational coordination, anticipatory governance capacity, public-sector resilience, and equitable public-service continuity processes.

Table 3: Summary of Propositions

Prop.	Specified relationship	Central mechanism or boundary condition
P1	Strategic foresight capacity → anticipatory governance capacity (+)	Attention allocation, assumption testing, and awareness of present options.
P2	Foresight → coordination → anticipatory governance	Coordination mediates through integration, translation, and commitment.
P3	Anticipatory governance capacity → public-sector resilience (+)	Earlier preparation, experimentation, trigger design, and prospective learning.
P4	Administrative flexibility strengthens anticipatory governance → resilience	Accountable redeployment, procedural adaptation, and timely reconfiguration.
P5	Public-sector resilience → equitable service continuity (+)	Absorption, adaptation, learning, and transformation preserve essential purposes.
P6	Equitable service continuity → citizen trust (+)	Experienced reliability, competence, fairness, openness, and responsiveness.
P7	Equitable service continuity → public value (+)	Protection of collective capabilities, rights, inclusion, and recovery potential.
P8	Foresight → trust and public value through the sequential pathway	A chain of conversion mechanisms; breakdown at any link can interrupt the effect.

Note. The plus sign indicates an expected positive association; P2 is a mediation proposition, P4 a moderation proposition, and P8 a sequential indirect-effect proposition.

6. Theoretical Contributions

The article's first contribution is to shift attention from producing foresight to the architecture that converts it into action. Existing guidance emphasizes scanning, scenarios, participation, and alternatives, but these practices do not prove that foresight changes authoritative choices or operations (OECD, [2025](#); Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#)). The framework distinguishes attention failures, integration failures, authorization failures, implementation failures, and legitimacy failures as separate reasons why foresight may not improve resilience (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Fuerth, [2009](#)). This vocabulary reframes failed anticipation as an institutional-conversion problem rather than an information deficit.

The second contribution is to bridge anticipatory governance and crisis resilience across time. Anticipatory governance examines uncertain futures while options remain open, whereas crisis research typically examines action after threat and urgency intensify (Boin et al., [2020](#); Guston, [2014](#)). Foresight cannot remove surprise, and resilience without anticipation risks recurring reactive mobilization around familiar hazards (Eppel & Rhodes, [2018](#); Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). The model explains their complementarity by linking prospective sensing with absorption, adaptation, learning, and transformation (Duit, [2016](#); OECD, [2025](#)).

The third contribution is to integrate analytical, relational, operational, and political capacity. Effective future readiness depends on expertise, coordination, authorization, flexibility, and legitimate public evaluation rather than a forecasting unit alone (Emerson et al., [2012](#); Wu et al., [2015](#)). Participatory foresight makes future choices subject to representation and contestation, while public value governance tests their fairness and distributional effects (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Rosa et al., [2021](#)). This integration prevents anticipation from becoming technocratic and flexibility from becoming unaccountable discretion.

The fourth contribution is to position equitable continuity as the link between latent administrative capability and experienced legitimacy. Citizens rarely observe resilience plans directly; they observe whether services remain accessible, reliable, fair, and responsive under pressure (OECD, [2021b](#), [2024](#)). Continuity consequently signals both competence and the distribution of governmental protection (Christensen & Læg Reid, [2020](#)). The distinction

between aggregate and equitable continuity prevents apparently strong performance from concealing unequal access and burden (Bryson et al., [2014](#)).

7. Implications for Public Administration Practice

The first contribution that this article makes is the focus on the act of foresight rather than the act of architecture, which is turning foresight into action. The first contribution that this article makes is to focus on the act of foresight rather than the act of architecture, which is to turn foresight into action. While these practices are being promoted, existing guidance focuses on scanning, scenarios, participation and alternatives, but none of these demonstrate that foresight would influence authoritative decisions or operations (Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#); OECD, [2025](#)). The framework distinguishes between attention failures, integration failures, authorization failures, implementation failures and legitimacy failures as separate reasons for why foresight may not improve resilience (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Fuerth, [2009](#)). This vocabulary shifts the focus from a failure to anticipate to an institutional-conversion issue, and not an information deficit.

The second contribution is to connect anticipatory governance and crisis resilience in time. The difference between anticipatory governance and crisis research lies in the time horizon – while the first tries to look at uncertain futures when options are still open, the latter usually sees the focus shift to action once threat and urgency increase (Boin et al. [2020](#); Guston [2014](#)). The absence of foresight does not eliminate the possibility of surprise, nor does the absence of a hazard risk the possibility of reactive mobilization around familiar hazards (Eppel & Rhodes, [2018](#); Lawrence et al., [2024](#)). The model brings together their complementarity by connecting the prospective sensing with their absorption, adaptation, learning and transformation (Duit, [2016](#); OECD, [2025](#)).

The third is to combine analytical, relational, operational and political capacity. In addition to a forecasting unit, expertise, coordination, authorization, flexibility, and legitimate public evaluation are necessary for effective future readiness (Emerson et al., [2012](#); Wu et al., [2015](#)). Participatory foresight puts future choices under representation and contestation, public value governance assesses the fairness and effects on distribution (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Rosa et al., [2021](#)). This integration will avoid the technocratic anticipation and the discretionary flexibility that is unaccountable.

The fourth contribution is to make the continuity of equity the bridge between latent administrative capability and experienced legitimacy. The fourth contribution is to situate equitable continuity on the bridge between latent administrative capability and experienced legitimacy. Citizens do not see resilience plans as such, but rather whether services are accessible, reliable, fair and responsive during a crisis (OECD, [2021b](#), [2024](#)). Continuity is therefore an indicator of competence and of the spread of state protection (Christensen & Lægveid, [2020](#)). It is important to note that this is aggregate continuity, and not equitable continuity; that is, a strong performance cannot mask the inequities of access and burden if there is not equitable continuity (Bryson et al., [2014](#)).

8. Research Agenda

The constructs in the framework are multi-level, multi-source, and longitudinal, as the framework is applicable across organizational, network, service and citizens levels and time periods (Emerson et al., [2012](#); Wu et al., [2015](#)). The number of workshops is not a measure of strategic foresight. Measures of strategic foresight should include scanning, methodological diversity, participation, challenging assumptions, updating, and decision use (OECD, [2025](#)). Alternatives exploration, experimentation, authorization, feedback and revisable commitments (Tönurist & Hanson, [2020](#)) should be included in anticipatory

governance measures. Coordination can be done as a combination of surveys and network indicators, and administrative flexibility can be measured by adaptive range and transparency, oversight and review (Kapucu, [2006](#); Provan & Kenis, [2008](#)).

Continuity should be defined as availability, timeliness, accessibility, quality, and distribution within groups, and resilience should be differentiated into absorption, adaptation, and learning, and transformation (Capano & Woo, [2017](#); Duit, [2016](#)). Competence, reliability, fairness, openness, and responsiveness are components of trust that should be differentiated; public value could be assessed in a deliberative or multi-criteria manner (Bryson et al., [2014](#); OECD, [2024](#)). In order to justify the potential need to distinguish foresight, anticipatory governance, resilience and continuity as separate capacities, confirmatory analyses should be conducted to test this.

Longitudinal event studies can measure foresight and coordination prior to disruption, administrative decisions during the process of escalation, continuity during the event, and citizen trust in the aftermath. Process tracing can help to recreate the way that signals entered government, transgressed boundaries, gained authorization, interacted with rules, and influenced service consequences (Boin et al., [2020](#); Kapucu, [2006](#)). Comparative studies could take as their focus the question of whether or not it is possible to perform a functionally equivalent conversion, using different institutional designs in a centralized and decentralized system. Multiple combinations of foresight, coordination, flexibility, leadership, and resources can be tested against resilience using QCA, or specific bottlenecks can be identified as blocking resilience (Andrews et al., [2016](#)).

Scenario experiments can be delivered individually, as a set of scenarios, as a set of causal maps across sectors, with witness testimony from citizens, with trigger-based options, and can measure attention, coordination, resource commitment, and legitimacy. Citizen vignette experiments can unravel the impact of continuity, transparency, equity and appeal mechanisms on trust. These designs should be used alongside field evidence as hypothetical decisions cannot recreate the stakes and inequalities of actual disruption. It is also important for researchers to explore who is defining plausible futures, if temporary flexibility becomes permanent, and if digital continuity means more surveillance or exclusion (Rosa et al. [2021](#); Önerfors & Schultz, [2022](#)).

Table 4: Priority Research Agenda

Research stream	Illustrative question	Suitable designs and evidence
Construct validation	Are foresight, anticipatory governance, resilience, flexibility, and continuity empirically distinct?	Expert sorting, cognitive interviews, pilot surveys, confirmatory factor analysis, measurement invariance.
Conversion process	How do weak signals acquire interpretation, authorization, resources, and operational consequences?	Longitudinal event studies, process tracing, decision records, observation, administrative data.
Coordination mechanism	Which network structures best translate foresight under different levels of trust, scale, and urgency?	Whole-network surveys, social-network analysis, comparative case studies, simulation exercises.
Configurations and context	Which combinations of foresight, coordination, flexibility, leadership, and resources are sufficient for resilience?	Qualitative comparative analysis, multilevel comparison, institutional typologies.
Continuity and legitimacy	When does service continuity build trust, and how do fairness, openness, and prior trust alter the relationship?	Citizen panels, vignette experiments, service-level administrative data, multilevel models.
Polycrisis intensity	Does causal entanglement strengthen foresight benefits or create coordination	Cross-sector dependency maps, event databases, temporal network models,

overload?

comparative panels.

Note. Research designs should combine perceptual measures with observable decisions, network relations, service outcomes, and citizen evaluations.

Polycrisis itself should be modeled as a boundary condition rather than assumed. Its degree can be operationalized through the number of affected systems, causal-link strength, feedback intensity, temporal overlap, and jurisdictional spread (Lawrence et al., [2024](#); Zaki, [2025](#)). Foresight and coordination may become more valuable as entanglement rises, but coordination overload and ambiguous authority may also increase. Comparative panels can further examine whether prior trust, crisis exposure, perceived fairness, and repeated service disruption alter the continuity-trust relationship (Christensen & Læg Reid, [2020](#); OECD, [2024](#)).

9. Conclusion

Public administrations cannot forecast their way out of polycrisis, but they can govern more intelligently before interacting disruptions eliminate options. Strategic foresight expands awareness of plausible futures, yet its administrative value depends on coordination, authorization, experimentation, and the legitimate flexibility to reconfigure action (OECD, [2025](#); Tönurist & Orlik, [2025](#)). The central theoretical argument of this article is that foresight becomes resilience through a conversion architecture rather than a direct effect.

The proposed model connects strategic foresight capacity with interorganizational coordination, anticipatory governance capacity, administrative flexibility, public-sector resilience, equitable public-service continuity, citizen trust, and public value. This sequence integrates complexity theory's account of interdependence, dynamic capabilities theory's sensing-seizing-reconfiguring logic, collaborative governance's account of joint action, and public value governance's normative standards (Bryson et al., [2014](#); Emerson et al., [2012](#); Kattel & Mazzucato, [2018](#)). It also explains why technically sophisticated anticipation may fail when institutional relationships, decision authority, or adaptive implementation are weak.

The framework ultimately places citizens at the endpoint of future-oriented administration. Resilience is publicly meaningful when essential services remain accessible, fair, accountable, and capable of adaptation under stress (OECD, [2021b](#), [2024](#)). By treating continuity as both an operational outcome and a democratic signal, the model links preparedness with legitimacy rather than presenting them as separate agendas. Governing before the crisis therefore requires not only imagining alternative futures, but building institutions able to coordinate, act, learn, and protect public value across them.

Author Contributions

Shahrukh Khan, Sehresh Hena, and Baoyu Cui contributed to the conceptualization, research design, methodology, investigation, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the manuscript. All authors contributed to writing—original draft and writing—review and editing. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial, professional, institutional, commercial, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research, analysis, interpretation, or conclusions presented in this article.

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Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author

upon reasonable request, subject to applicable ethical, confidentiality, and data-protection requirements.

Ethical Approval

The study was conducted in accordance with applicable ethical principles and institutional guidelines. Where required, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee or review board. The authors should provide the name of the approving institution and approval/reference number, where applicable.

sUse of Generative AI

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used to generate the scholarly content, conduct the analysis, interpret the findings, or formulate the conclusions presented in this article.

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