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FUTURE-PROOFING AFRICA'S PUBLIC SERVICE

Leveraging Artificial Intelligence for Strategic Human Capital Development in Public Institutions

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THE CONTEXT

A wave of national AI strategies

Apr 2023 **Rwanda:** Cabinet approves the National AI Policy

Jul 2024 **African Union:** Continental AI Strategy adopted

Mar 2025 **Kenya:** AI Strategy 2025–2030 launched

Apr 2026 **Ghana:** ten-year National AI Strategy launched

Apr 2026 **South Africa:** draft policy gazetted, then withdrawn within weeks



THE CONTEXT

Ambition is running ahead of capacity

E-Government Development Index, 2024

World average



0.64

Africa average: lowest of five regions



0.42

Bar length to scale, out of 1.0. Source: UN DESA (2024).

39%

of core skills expected to change by 2030, from a survey of mostly large private employers (WEF, 2025)

⚠ **Kenya's HRIS-Ke audit (2025):** staff lost or added in migration, unexplained job-group changes.

AI is only as good as the HR records it draws on.

THE PROBLEM

Those who own the workforce are not writing the AI plans

ICT ministries

Write and lead the national AI strategies

?

The HR function

Owns workforce planning, training, careers and performance

The best-known frameworks for public-sector digital skills (OECD, 2021, 2026; UNESCO, 2023) were built for higher-capacity administrations. Little is known about a sequence HR departments with limited data and budgets could follow.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three questions, two phases

RQ1

How do the national AI policies of Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana and South Africa frame the development of public servants?

RQ2

Where do these policies fall short of established frameworks for public-sector digital talent?

RQ3

What step-by-step framework could lower-capacity institutions use to harness AI for developing their people?

Phase 1, completed: RQ1, RQ2 and the framework

Phase 2, planned: interviews to test it

AI amplifies what an HR function already has

The promise

- **Automation:** screening, scheduling and routine queries, freeing officers for advisory work
- **Analytics:** linked records reveal skills gaps and anticipate retirements
- **Personalisation:** learning matched to each officer's role and gaps

The caution

- **Data Science in HR:** complex outcomes, small data sets, employee reactions to decisions made by algorithms (Tambe et al., 2019)
- **Public values:** tensions with merit, equity and accountability (Johnson et al., 2022)
- **Readiness:** sound data, capable staff and acceptance first (Cho et al., 2023)

Accurate records: AI speeds up planning and training. Weak records: it automates errors and bias at scale.

LITERATURE: AFRICAN EVIDENCE

Interest in AI is high; the foundations are weak



Tanzania

Of 217 HR practitioners, about three-quarters had moderate AI awareness; recruitment, training and appraisal were rated high-risk (Mwita & Kitole, 2025).

Zanzibar

Readiness scores did not predict adoption; stalled digitalisation, vendor dependence and skills flight did. Start with training (Jecha et al., 2026).

Kenya

Seventeen public-sector experts linked readiness to data quality, leadership, competencies and regulation (Jonathan et al., 2025).

South Africa

AI use did not reduce unethical recruitment; AI competencies are missing from public administration curricula.

LITERATURE: AI AND SKILLS

Can AI speed up learning? Promising, but narrow evidence

+34%

productivity for novice support agents (+14% on average); 5,179 workers

Brynjolfsson et al., 2025

–19 pts

correct answers when consultants used AI on tasks beyond its capability

Dell'Acqua et al., 2023

0.3 SD

learning gain from six weeks of GPT-4 tutoring for students in Nigeria

De Simone et al., 2025

26 min

a day, self-reported, in the UK government Copilot trial; no control group

GDS, 2025

No published study of AI-based competency mapping in a public service was found. Faster skills development is a proposition to test.

LITERATURE: THE GAP

Frameworks say what matters, not in what order

Framework	What it offers	Limit for lower-capacity settings
OECD (2021) digital talent	Right environment, right skills, right workforce	Predates generative AI; no implementation rubric
OECD (2026) AI-ready workforce	Targeted training, specialist recruitment, continuous learning	Drawn from administrations with mature HR data
UNESCO (2023) competencies	Three domains at four proficiency levels	A catalogue, not a sequence
Cho et al. (2023) HR analytics	Five steps for HR analytics in government	Assumes reliable HR data; not AI-specific
African Union (2024) AI Strategy	Calls for AI capacity in public administrations	Direction, but no operational HR method

Missing for a service with weak HR data and tight budgets: what to build first, what role HR plays, and how to check that AI helps people learn.

METHODOLOGY

Two phases, four countries, three regions

Phase 1, completed
Documentary and cross-case analysis of four national AI policies, with the AU strategy as reference. Coded against the OECD (2021) pillars and inductively.

Phase 2, planned
Interviews with 5–10 officials in HR, digital transformation, AI governance and training institutions, to test the framework.



South Africa is a contrasting case: its gazetted draft is analysed, and its withdrawal treated as evidence. Documents retrieved October 2026.

PHASE 1 FINDINGS

Seven components, four policies

COMPONENT	Kenya	Rwanda	Ghana	South Africa
Workforce diagnosis	**Absent**	Partial	Partial	**Absent**
Role-based AI capability	Partial	**Explicit**	**Explicit**	Partial
AI-enabled learning	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Absent**
Workforce planning, job structures	Partial	Partial	**Explicit**	Partial
Governance and safeguards	Partial	**Explicit**	**Explicit**	**Explicit**
Monitoring and evaluation	Partial	Partial	Partial	Partial
Lead institution for public-service HR	**Not named**	**Not assigned**	Grades only	**Not named**

Navy: explicit | Sage: partial | Dashed gold: absent | Coded against OECD (2021)

THE HEADLINE FINDING

In national AI policy, HR is a recipient, not an architect.

All four documents name public servants as a training target. Every strategy is led by the ICT ministry or a new responsible-AI body; public service ministries and commissions are largely absent.

Eight themes from the cross-case analysis

1

HR not at the table

Public servants are trained; workforce institutions don't lead.

2

Diagnosis is economy-wide

No audit of the public service's own roles and skills.

3

AI taught, not used to teach

The most consistent gap across all four cases.

4

New specialist posts only

Chief AI Officers arrive; generalist jobs are untouched.

5

Governance silent on staff

No rules on AI in recruitment, appraisal or promotion.

6

Inputs, not competence

Targets count people trained, not time to competence.

7

Delivery leans on partners

A risk if donor funding or vendor support ends.

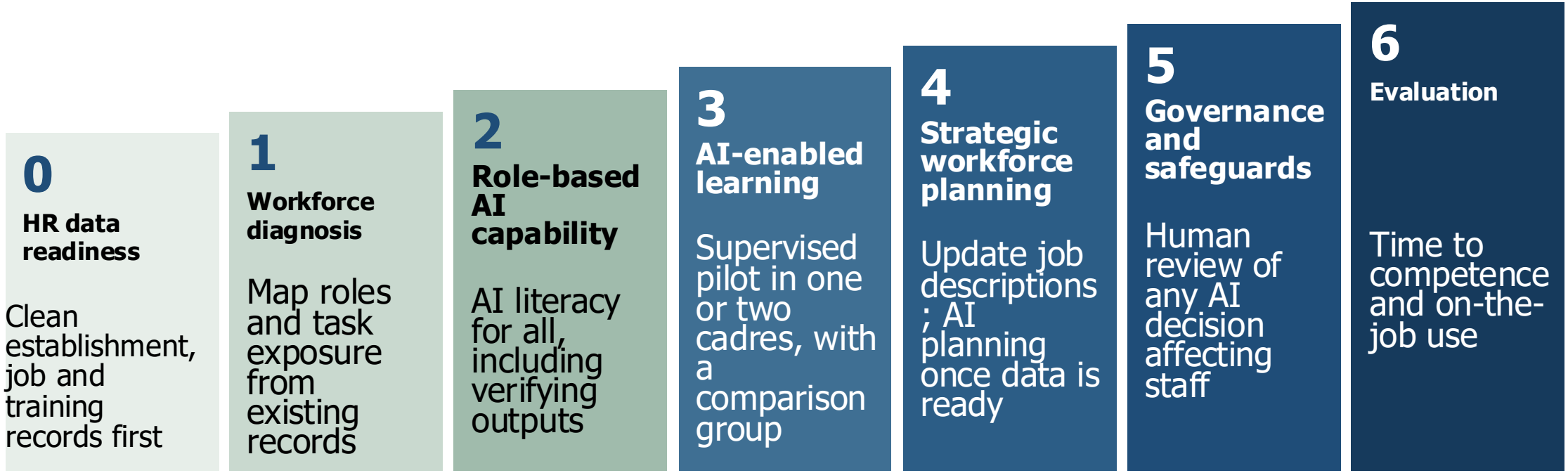
8

Verification is a skill

South Africa's draft fell over fake, AI-made references.

THE STRATEGIC AI-HUMAN CAPITAL TRANSFORMATION FRAMEWORK

Seven components, built step by step



Cross-cutting, HR leadership: the public service ministry or commission co-leads the AI workforce agenda with the ICT ministry.

Built from OECD (2021, 2026) and UNESCO (2023), plus components added to close the Phase 1 gaps

ENTERING THE FRAMEWORK

A modular path for lower-capacity institutions

FIRST 12 MONTHS

Foundation

Clean HR records; AI literacy for HR and training staff; guidance on AI in HR decisions

12–24 MONTHS

Pilot

AI-supported learning in one or two cadres, with a comparison group; training before recruitment

AFTER 24 MONTHS

Scale

Extend what works; AI-assisted workforce planning once data quality thresholds are met

P1 to test: AI-enabled learning shortens time to competence, most for less experienced staff.

P2 to test: data readiness and governance before AI analytics means fewer erroneous or contested outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

What each actor can do now

Public service ministries

Seek co-leadership of AI strategies; prioritise workforce diagnosis and HR data quality.

Schools of government

Pilot AI-enabled learning, and measure outcomes from the start, not only numbers trained.

HR directors

Set rules on AI in recruitment, appraisal and promotion, with human review.

ICT ministries, AI offices

Include public-service HR institutions in plans and indicators.

Development partners

Fund evaluation and local ownership, so capability outlasts programmes.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

AI-ready workforce will not be built by training numbers alone, but by getting the data, roles, safeguards and measures right, in that order.

Next: Phase 2 interviews with 5–10 HR, digital transformation, AI governance and training officials will test whether the sequence is realistic.

Thank you. Questions?

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