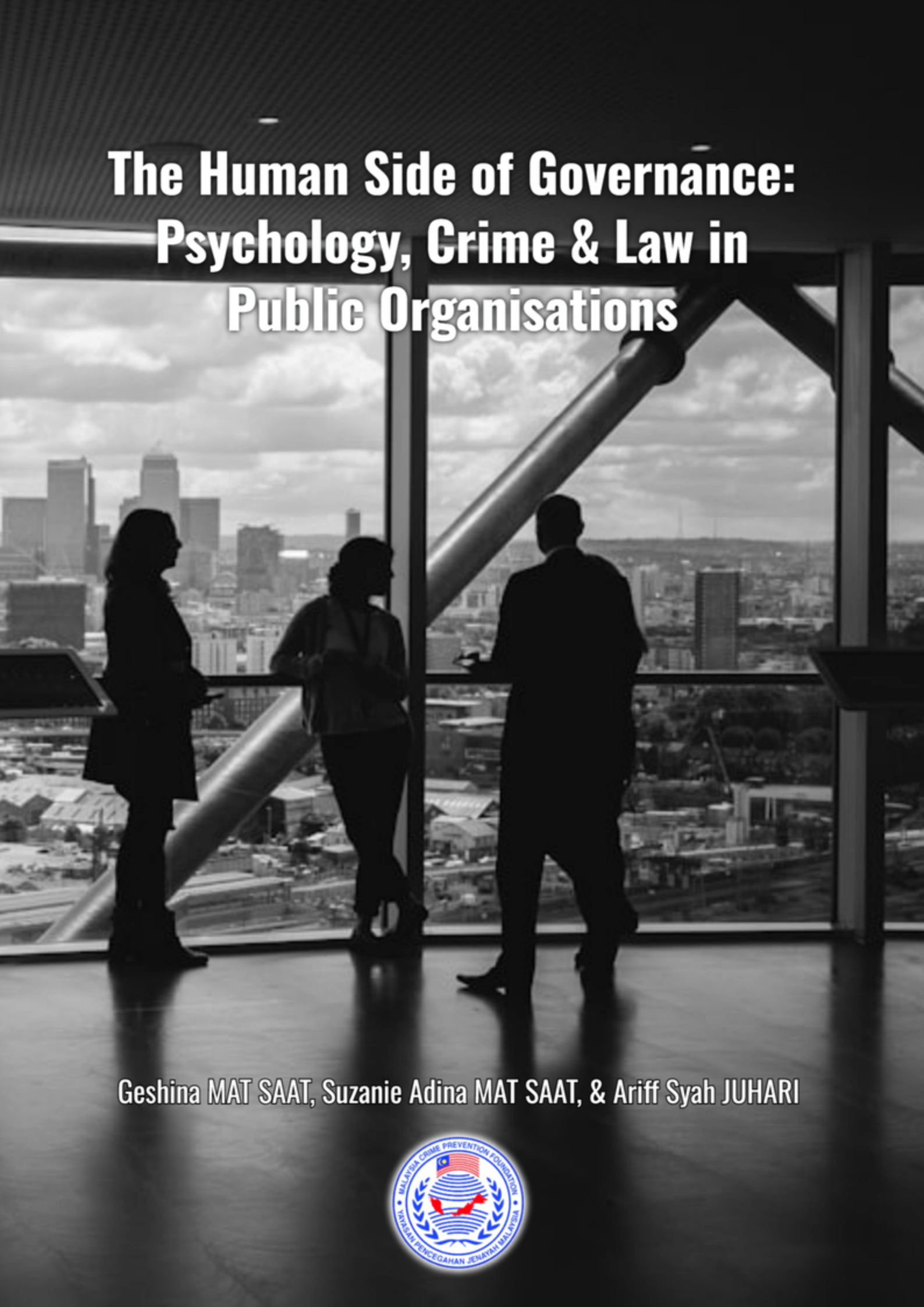
The Human Side of Governance: Psychology, Crime & Law in Public Organisations



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MALAYSIA CRIME PREVENTION FOUNDATION
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Preface

Public sector governance is often assessed through the visible architecture of institutions—policies, procedures, and performance indicators. Yet, beneath these formal structures lies a less visible but equally consequential domain: the human dynamics that shape how governance is enacted in practice. This book, *The Human Side of Governance*, is grounded in the premise that institutional effectiveness cannot be fully understood without examining the behavioural processes through which individuals interpret, negotiate, and respond to organisational systems.

The origins of this work lie in a recurring observation within public institutions: that well-designed frameworks do not always yield consistent outcomes. Policies intended to promote accountability may coexist with informal practices that dilute their impact; systems designed for efficiency may inadvertently generate disengagement; and mechanisms of control may produce compliance without commitment. These patterns are not anomalous. They reflect the complex interaction between organisational structures and human behaviour—an interaction that remains underexplored in conventional governance discourse.

This book addresses that gap through a multidisciplinary framework integrating industrial-organisational psychology, criminology, and legal analysis. Each discipline contributes a distinct perspective: psychology illuminates the cognitive and emotional processes underlying behaviour; criminology offers insight into systemic patterns of deviance and control; and legal analysis provides the normative boundaries within which governance operates. Taken together, these perspectives enable a more comprehensive understanding of how behaviour is shaped, sustained, and, where necessary, redirected within institutional contexts.

The Malaysian public sector provides the primary context for this analysis. Its organisational landscape is shaped by a rich interplay of historical legacies, cultural norms, and contemporary reform agendas. In particular, values associated with hierarchy, collective responsibility, and social harmony influence how authority is exercised and how behaviour is interpreted. This book does not treat these cultural dimensions as constraints to be overcome, but as contextual realities that must be engaged with thoughtfully. The integration of MADANI values within the discussion reflects an effort to situate governance within a framework that is both ethically grounded and culturally resonant .

Across its chapters, the book examines key domains of organisational life, including counterproductive work behaviour, recruitment and assessment practices, leadership dynamics, disciplinary systems, and monitoring mechanisms. A central argument underpinning this analysis is that behavioural outcomes are not incidental but are shaped by identifiable and, in many cases, modifiable conditions. For example, patterns of disengagement can often be traced to imbalances between organisational demands and available resources; resistance to policy may reflect perceived inequities in implementation; and ethical lapses may emerge in environments where psychological safety is insufficiently established.

In response, this book advances the concept of psychologically informed governance—an approach that emphasises early intervention, inclusive system design, and sustained behavioural development. Rather than relying predominantly on corrective measures, this approach prioritises the conditions that prevent undesirable behaviour from emerging. Evidence presented throughout the text demonstrates that strategies such as multimodal training, real-time feedback systems, and trauma-informed supervision; can enhance self-efficacy, strengthen organisational cohesion, and support more consistent adherence to ethical standards.

At the same time, the analysis recognises that such interventions cannot be effectively scaled through replication alone. Sustainable implementation requires integration into existing institutional frameworks, alignment with leadership practices, and sensitivity to cultural context. The challenge, therefore, is not simply to introduce new initiatives, but to embed behavioural considerations within the core design of governance systems.

It is important to acknowledge that this work does not offer prescriptive solutions in a narrow sense. Governance, particularly within complex public sector environments, resists uniform approaches. Instead, the book seeks to provide a structured way of thinking about behavioural issues—one that encourages readers to consider not only what is occurring within their organisations, but why it is occurring, and how underlying conditions might be reshaped.

The intended audience includes policymakers, organisational leaders, scholars, and practitioners engaged in public sector reform. It is written with the expectation that readers bring their own experience to the text, and that its value lies as much in prompting reflection as in offering guidance.

Ultimately, this book is based on a straightforward but demanding proposition: that governance is not only a matter of systems, but of people. Understanding this relationship—between structure and behaviour, policy and practice—is essential for building institutions that are both effective and sustainable.

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This book has been shaped by the contributions of many individuals and institutions whose work, directly and indirectly, has informed its development.
We gratefully recognise the support of the Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) for their research grant and invaluable support in enabling this work, which aims to prevent crime within organisations at its roots and to strengthen governance systems in alignment with MADANI values.
We extend appreciation to public sector organisations in Malaysia, whose evolvingpractices and MADANI reform efforts provided the empirical and contextual grounding for this study. Their engagement with issues of organisational behaviour, ethical leadership, and institutional integrity reflects an ongoing commitment to strengthening governance in complex and demanding environments.
We are also grateful to colleagues and researchers across the fields of industrial-organisational psychology, public administration, and legal studies. Their scholarship has contributed significantly to the interdisciplinary perspective adopted in this book. The integration of these fields is not incidental but reflects a shared recognition that behavioural challenges in governance require multifaceted approaches.
The authors would like to acknowledge and thank Prince Sultan University for its facilities, support and incentives. Special thanks to University Sains Malaysia and their staff for their support and for fostering a productive environment that allowed us to bring this project to fruition.
Particular acknowledgement is due to practitioners within the public service whose experiences have informed many of the observations presented here. While their contributions are not individually identified, their insights—often conveyed through professional dialogue and observation—have been invaluable in grounding theoretical concepts in practical reality.
We also recognise the broader policy frameworks and reform initiatives that have influenced this work. Efforts to align governance with values-based approaches, including those reflected in national development agendas, have provided important reference points for examining how institutional systems can evolve in response to changing expectations.
On a personal level, we are grateful to those who supported the completion of this ebook through their encouragement and understanding. The process of developing a work that seeks to bridge theory and practice is necessarily iterative, requiring sustained reflection and revision.
We feel it is appropriate to acknowledge that this ebook represents not a final statement, but part of an ongoing conversation about the role of human behaviour in governance. It is offered in the hope that it contributes to that conversation in a constructive and meaningful way.
Finally, this work is dedicated to those who serve within public institutions. Their efforts, often undertaken in complex and constrained conditions, remain central to the functioning of governance systems. Any attempt to understand and improve those systems must begin with an appreciation of their work.

1
Understanding Workplace Behaviour

1
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1.1 Introduction

Public organisations in Malaysia operate within complex environments where workplace behaviour directly influences institutional integrity, efficiency, and public trust. *The Human Side of Governance* introduces a multidisciplinary framework that integrates industrial and organisational psychology, criminology, and legal analysis to address behavioural risks in the public sector. By examining misconduct such as bullying, time fraud, and abuse of power as symptoms of deeper organisational dysfunctions, the book positions behavioural governance as a strategic tool for systemic reform. Grounded in MADANI values (Sustainability, Compassion, Respect, Innovation, Trust, and Well-being) this ebook seeks to operationalise ethics and resilience in everyday governance.

This ebook is organised into chapters that progressively build a comprehensive understanding of behavioural governance. The opening chapters focus on understanding workplace behaviour, exploring how psychological and criminological perspectives explain both productive and counterproductive actions. Subsequent chapters examine recruitment and assessment practices, highlighting how evidence-based selection tools and psychometric evaluations can reduce risks of misconduct and strengthen institutional integrity. The discussion then moves to leadership and promotion systems, analysing how ethical leadership, transparent career pathways, and fair promotion criteria shape organisational culture and legitimacy.

Finally, the ebook addresses monitoring and early warning signs, emphasising proactive behavioural analysis over reactive disciplinary measures. By equipping institutions with tools to detect risks early, whether through behavioural audits, whistleblowing mechanisms, or predictive analytics; public organisations can safeguard against dysfunction before it escalates. Together, these chapters position behavioural insights not as peripheral concerns but as strategic assets for ethical governance, institutional resilience, and the restoration of public confidence. This introduction sets the stage for a deeper

exploration of how psychology, crime, and law intersect to strengthen Malaysia's public sector in line with MADANI aspirations to proactively prevent crime in organisations.

Interrelated domains underlying human governance

Governance in public organisations cannot be fully understood through a single disciplinary lens. This is the reason *Human side of Governance* rests on three interrelated domains: industrial-organisational (I-O) psychology, criminology, and law; that together explain how workplace behaviour emerges, how misconduct escalates, and how accountability is enforced (Figure 1 is referred).

The psychological domain focuses on how individuals think, feel, and act within organisational settings. I-O psychology provides insights into motivation, stress, ethical decision-making, and counterproductive work behaviours such as time fraud and sabatoge. Understanding these behavioural drivers is essential because they shape both productivity and integrity. In governance, psychology explains why individuals may conform to ethical norms or deviate into misconduct, making it a cornerstone for preventive strategies.

Figure 1: Interconnectedness between industrial-organisational psychology, criminology, and legislation

The criminological domain examines misconduct not as isolated incidents but as part of broader organisational and systemic risks. It situates workplace deviance within theories of opportunity, strain, and social learning, showing how institutional cultures can either deter or enable wrongdoing. Criminology highlights the structural conditions such as weak oversight, ambiguous rules, or tolerance of minor infractions; that escalate into corruption or abuse of power. This domain connects individual behaviour to institutional dysfunction, bridging micro-level psychology with macro-level governance.

The legal domain provides the formal boundaries within which workplace behaviour is judged and managed. Laws, regulations, and codes of conduct establish accountability mechanisms, define misconduct, and prescribe sanctions. Legal analysis ensures that behavioural governance is not merely aspirational but enforceable. It also clarifies the rights and responsibilities of employees and leaders, embedding ethical expectations into institutional structures. Without legal scaffolding, psychological and criminological insights risk remaining theoretical rather than actionable.

Worked Examples

Workplace Bullying

Bullying in the workplace can be analysed psychologically (individual aggression), criminologically (a culture that tolerates deviance), and legally (violations of employment law or codes of conduct). Together, they create a holistic lens that moves governance beyond reactive discipline toward proactive behavioural management.

Absenteeism

absenteeism among civil servants can be analysed psychologically (linked to stress, burnout, or low motivation), criminologically (as part of a workplace culture that normalises shirking responsibility or tolerates deviance), and legally (violations of civil service regulations, employment contracts, or codes of conduct).

Corruption in public procurement

corruption in public procurement can be analysed psychologically (individual opportunism or rationalisation of unethical gain), criminologically (an organisational culture that normalises kickbacks or tolerates opaque processes), and legally (violations of anti-corruption statutes, procurement regulations, or codes of conduct).

Misuse of Public Resources
Misuse of government vehicles or funds can be analysed psychologically (linked to entitlement or poor self-control), criminologically (a workplace environment where resource abuse is tacitly accepted), and legally (breaches of financial regulations, asset management rules, or disciplinary codes). Together, they create a holistic lens that moves governance beyond punitive audits toward proactive stewardship and ethical resource management.

Before going further, it is necessary to define terms that are frequently used in this ebook. Table 1 below explains the operational definition of six key terms. The terms are: Industrial and Organisational (I-O) Psychology, Criminology, and Personality Traits, Counterproductive Work Behaviour, Psychometrics & Profiling, and Leadership. The explanations provide readers with a point of reference.

Table 1: Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Term	Explanation
Industrial & Organizational Psychology	The scientific study of human behaviour in the workplace, using rigorous research to improve organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. Its scope is comprehensive, covering critical areas such as motivation, leadership, talent management, and the design of fair performance systems.
Criminology	The scientific foundation for understanding crime, misconduct, and societal responses, going beyond policing to diagnose systemic misconduct, corruption, and abuse of power in public institutions. It investigates root causes, social contexts, and organizational weaknesses that enable unethical behaviour, distinguishing itself from purely legal approaches by focusing on prevention and systemic reform.
Personality Traits	Represent consistent psychological patterns that shape how public servants perceive challenges, interact with colleagues, and make ethical decisions. In Malaysia's public sector, research confirms that certain traits such as conscientiousness are directly linked to higher levels of integrity and adherence to rules, while neuroticism can increase vulnerability to stress and unethical behaviour.
Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB)	Consists of voluntary actions by employees that harm the organization, its members, or stakeholders. In Malaysia's public sector, such behaviors—including absenteeism, sabotage, bullying, and time theft—directly undermine service delivery, erode public trust, and disrupt team cohesion.
Psychometrics & Profiling	Psychometrics is defined as the scientific application of validated assessments to measure key psychological attributes of current and prospective public servants. This goes beyond standard ability tests to systematically evaluate personality traits, ethical reasoning, emotional intelligence, and work values. Criminogenic profiling in the public sector refers to the systematic process of identifying individual tendencies and workplace environmental factors that increase the risk of misconduct, fraud, or corruption. It is not about predicting crime, but rather diagnosing vulnerabilities.
Leadership	Leadership in the public sector refers to the ability of individuals in government or public institutions to guide, influence, and mobilize people and resources toward achieving collective goals that serve the public interest, often in complex, politically sensitive, and resource-constrained environments.

The interrelatedness of psychology, criminology, and law underscores the need for integrated governance strategies. This is because effective reform requires psychological tools for recruitment and assessment, criminological insights for monitoring systemic risks, and legal mechanisms for enforcement and deterrence. When combined, these domains transform behavioural governance into a strategic asset strengthening institutional resilience, promoting ethical leadership and restoring public trust. As shown in table 2, this tri-domain framework ensures that governance addresses both the human side of behaviour and the structural side of accountability.,

Table 2: Tri-domain framework of human governance in the public sector

Domain	Placement	Integrity	Resilience	Legitimacy	Trust
Psychology	Focuses on the individual and group level, shaping behaviour and wellbeing.	Promotes ethical decision-making and reduces counterproductive work behaviours (CWB).	Builds adaptive coping strategies and wellbeing in employees.	Shapes perceptions of fairness and impartiality in organisational processes.	Enhances interpersonal confidence and positive organisational climate.
Criminology	Situates misconduct within organisational and systemic contexts, highlighting risk patterns.	Identifies systemic risks and patterns of misconduct, preventing corruption.	Strengthens institutional capacity to withstand deviance and dysfunction.	Explains how organisational culture influences compliance and authority.	Reinforces community confidence through transparent crime prevention.
Law	Provides the formal accountability framework, ensuring behavioural governance is enforceable.	Establishes enforceable codes of conduct and accountability mechanisms.	Provides structural safeguards against abuse of power and misconduct.	Embeds authority within legal frameworks, ensuring procedural justice.	Builds public assurance through consistent enforcement and due process.

Integration of MADANI values through this tri-domain framework

The integration of MADANI values within public sector governance requires a multidimensional approach that recognises the human, structural, and regulatory aspects of behaviour. The tri-domain framework anchored in I-O psychology, criminology, and law; provides this synergy. Shown in table 3, together, these domains translate MADANI principles into operational strategies that strengthen governance integrity.

Table 3: Integrating MADANI Values in Public Sector Organisations

Value	IO Psychology	Criminology	Legislation
Sustainability	Long-term competency development and structured change management	Sustainable anti-crime policy development and continuous training	Legislation based on long-term impact and stability of public institutions
Well-being	Work-life balance and prevention of counterproductive behaviour	Well-being approach in offender rehabilitation and victim support	Bills that protect vulnerable groups and laws supporting work-life balance
Innovation	Innovation in training, assessment, and psychological empowerment at work	Innovation in crime prevention and design of interactive training modules	Laws enabling administrative innovation and legislation supporting digital transformation
Respect	Inclusive work culture and ethical conflict management	Management of cultural and religious diversity, reduction of stereotypes and discrimination	Laws guaranteeing human rights and diversity, and legislation recognising local customs and culture
Trust	Integrity-based and empathetic leadership, transparent and fair performance evaluation	Transparency in investigation and prosecution, and community empowerment	Anti-corruption laws and governance legislation that strengthen public trust
Compassion	Human-centred approach in human resource management, staff rehabilitation and development	Human-centred approach in enforcement and community-based rehabilitation	Laws promoting compassionate approaches and legislation supporting empathetic public service delivery

Within public institutions, the tri-domain framework ensures that MADANI values are not abstract ideals but embedded practices. Through I-O psychology, Sustainability and Well-being are advanced via competency development, fair performance systems, and supportive work environments. Criminology reinforces Respect and Trust by promoting transparency, community engagement, and ethical enforcement. Law upholds Innovation and Compassion through legislative reforms that protect vulnerable groups and encourage empathetic service delivery. This integration transforms behavioural governance from reactive discipline into proactive institutional resilience, thus aligning human motivation, organisational ethics, and legal accountability under one coherent system.

In other words, the tri-domain integration of MADANI values redefines governance as a human-centred enterprise. It positions behavioural insight as a strategic asset for reform, enabling public organisations to anticipate risks, nurture ethical leadership, and maintain legitimacy. When psychology informs recruitment and leadership, criminology guides preventive policy, and law; enforces fairness, the result is a governance ecosystem that embodies MADANI's

vision of compassionate, innovative, and trustworthy institutions. This synergy not only enhances internal integrity but also rebuilds public confidence in government, ensuring that Malaysia's public sector evolves as a model of ethical and sustainable governance.

1.2 Theoretical Foundations of Behaviour

Understanding why individuals act as they do in public institutions requires more than surface observation—it demands a deep engagement with the hidden forces that shape conduct. Behaviour in these settings does not arise from isolated choices but from the intricate interplay of personal beliefs, social pressures, and institutional structures. Decades of research in industrial organisational psychology show that attitudes formed through experience often precede visible actions, while criminological studies reveal how systemic weaknesses can normalise harmful routines. Together, these insights confirm that workplace conduct is rarely random; it is shaped by layered, interacting influences.

Cognitive processes further determine how individuals interpret their environment and make decisions. When people encounter mismatches between their values and their surroundings, psychological tension emerges, prompting adjustments to restore inner balance. This dynamic has been observed across public sector roles, from administrative offices to frontline service units, where gaps between official policy and daily practice trigger subtle shifts in compliance. Whether expressed as quiet resistance or open defiance, these patterns are not signs of personal failure but responses to environmental cues. They reflect deeper alignments between individual motivation and organisational expectations.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 979) adds another critical dimension: people tend to align their actions with the norms of groups they feel connected to, even when those norms contradict formal rules. In public organisations, loyalty to colleagues or departmental traditions often overrides adherence to official protocols. Studies demonstrate that when employees perceive their team as cohesive and respected, they uphold its standards—even if those standards fall short of legal or ethical requirements. This reveals the powerful influence of group dynamics, which frequently outweigh top-down directives or disciplinary threats.

Legal frameworks define acceptable conduct but rarely change entrenched habits on their own. Laws set boundaries, yet they do not cultivate the internal moral compass needed for ethical decision making. Evidence shows that lasting change occurs when norms are internalised through repeated exposure, reflective practice, and consistent reinforcement. This process is gradual and nonlinear, unfolding over time as experiences accumulate and perceptions evolve. Organisations that focus only on compliance without fostering conviction build fragile foundations for integrity.

The evolution of laws governing workplace behaviour in Malaysia's public sector reflects the country's broader socio-political transformation, from colonial administration to a modern rights-based governance framework. As Malaysia strives to build a high-performing, ethical, and inclusive civil service, legal reforms have increasingly focused on regulating conduct, promoting employee welfare, and embedding values such as integrity, respect, and accountability.

During the colonial era, workplace regulations were minimal and largely centered on economic productivity. The Trade Unions Enactment 1940 and the Employment Ordinance 1955 were among the earliest attempts to regulate labour relations, particularly in the private sector. These laws were designed to manage industrial disputes and ensure basic employment standards, but they lacked provisions addressing behavioural expectations or psychological safety in the workplace (Aminuddin, 2020). Civil servants, meanwhile, were governed by administrative codes inherited from the British civil service tradition, which emphasized discipline and loyalty over workers' rights.

After independence in 1957, Malaysia's expanding bureaucracy required more structured governance of public sector behaviour. The General Orders and later the Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993 codified behavioural expectations for civil servants. These regulations outlined offences such as insubordination, corruption, and absenteeism, and established disciplinary procedures. They were largely punitive and reactive, focusing on misconduct rather than fostering a positive organizational culture (Azmi & Associates, 2025).

The 1990s and early 2000s saw growing awareness of workplace ethics, gender equality, and employee well-being. The introduction of the Code of Ethics for Public Officers and the establishment of the Public Complaints Bureau reflected a shift toward greater accountability and transparency. However, these initiatives were often undermined by inconsistent enforcement and limited protections for whistleblowers.

A major turning point came with the Employment Act (Amendment) 2022, which introduced progressive reforms such as flexible work arrangements, extended maternity and paternity leave, and reduced maximum working hours. Although applicable primarily to the private sector, these reforms influenced public sector Human Resource policies through benchmarking and public expectations (Bell & Ward, 2025).

The enactment of the Sexual Harassment Act 2022 marked another milestone. This legislation provided a clear legal definition of sexual harassment, established a tribunal for complaints, and imposed obligations on employers to prevent and address such behaviour. It reflects the growing recognition that workplace behaviour is not merely a matter of discipline, but of dignity and human rights.

Digital transformation has also reshaped workplace behaviour and its regulation. The rise of remote work, digital surveillance, and online misconduct has necessitated new ethical frameworks. Guidelines issued by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) on cyberbullying and digital ethics now intersect with workplace norms, particularly in hybrid public sector environments. These developments underscore the need for legislation that balances productivity, privacy, and psychological safety.

“For there is but one essential justice which cements society, and one law which establishes this justice. This law is right reason, which is the true rule of all commandments and prohibitions. Whoever neglects this law, whether written or unwritten, is necessarily unjust and wicked.”
— Marcus Tullius Cicero, Yasalar Üzerine

The integration of MADANI values into public sector reforms has reframed workplace behaviour as a matter of national ethos. This shift reflects a deeper understanding of organisational psychology and its role in governance.

Despite these advances, challenges still remain. Enforcement mechanisms are often weak, and cultural taboos may discourage the reporting of misconduct. The government’s dual role as employer and regulator can create conflicts of interest. Addressing these issues requires not only legal reform but also institutional strengthening, capacity building, and shifts in organizational culture. Their effectiveness depends on political will, adequate resources, and public awareness.

Looking ahead, the evolution of workplace behaviour laws in Malaysia’s public sector must continue to align with international labour standards, human rights principles, and the realities of a diverse digital workforce. This includes addressing emerging issues such as mental health, neurodiversity, and algorithmic bias in Human Resource systems. It also requires greater collaboration between lawmakers, civil society, and civil servants themselves.

The legal landscape governing workplace behaviour in Malaysia’s public sector has evolved from rigid disciplinary codes to a more holistic rights-based framework. While significant progress has been achieved, ongoing reforms are necessary to ensure that public institutions are not only efficient but also ethical, inclusive, and humane.

Moving forward, these elements demand a multidisciplinary approach —one that treats psychology, law, and criminology not as separate fields but as interconnected threads in the fabric of workplace behaviour. Recent analyses confirm that interventions targeting only one layer such as punitive measures or one time training sessions, yield limited results. The most effective strategies recognise that human action is embedded within networks of meaning, authority, and expectation. Systems must be adaptive context aware and sensitive to the subtle signals that precede breakdowns in conduct.

These dynamics will be explored further in the next section through the lens of culture where shared assumptions and unspoken rules define what is considered normal or deviant. The following discussion will examine how historical legacies ethnic traditions and collective memory shape the interpretation of norms in Malaysia's public institutions. These factors do not operate in isolation; they interact with psychological and legal structures to create unique behavioural configurations requiring careful navigation. Recognising this interplay is essential for designing interventions that are both effective and culturally grounded.

1.3 Role of Culture in Public Sector

Workplaces in Malaysia's public institutions are shaped by enduring social norms that define how people understand authority, duty, and accountability. These patterns have evolved over decades through colonial administrative traditions, post-independence nation building, and the coexistence of diverse ethnic customs, each bringing unique expectations about hierarchy, respect, and collective responsibility. Studies by the Asian Development Bank and the Public Service Department show that employees in state agencies often value relational harmony more than strict adherence to formal rules. This leads to informal practices that circumvent official procedures, sometimes without malicious intent but still weakening transparency and consistency.

These norms are reflected in communication styles that favour indirectness. Open disagreement is rarely expressed directly, and feedback is often communicated through silence, hints, or third parties. A 2023 review (Awalluddin, et. al., 2023) on preferred conflict organisational management style in Malaysia found that Malaysians recognized avoidance strategy as a viable form of conflict

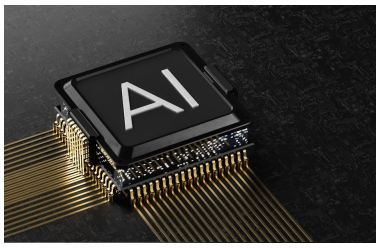
management. Such habits reinforce power imbalances and discourage reporting of misconduct, creating quiet barriers to ethical conduct. Conflict does not disappear; it shifts into passive resistance, whispered gossip, or delayed compliance. These behaviours contribute to the quietly eroding institutional trust without ever triggering formal accountability mechanisms (Awalluddin, et. al., 2023).

In many public sector organisations, workplace culture can unintentionally foster negative practices when accountability mechanisms are weak. For example, if employees observe that absenteeism, misuse of resources, or favouritism are tolerated without consequence, these behaviours may gradually become accepted norms. Over time, such practices erode trust, reduce productivity, and create an environment where ethical standards are compromised. A culture that normalises inefficiency or misconduct signals to staff that integrity is optional rather than essential.

When white-collar crimes such as embezzlement, procurement fraud, or abuse of authority are tacitly accepted as part of organisational life, the consequences are far-reaching. For instance, if senior officials manipulate contracts for personal gain and this behaviour is overlooked, junior staff may perceive corruption as a legitimate pathway to career advancement. This acceptance not only undermines governance but also perpetuates systemic corruption, making reform efforts more difficult. The normalisation of such actions creates a cycle where unethical behaviour is rewarded, while honest employees are marginalised.

Structural systems further entrench these patterns. Promotion practices have long favoured loyalty and conformity over innovation or moral courage. Work done by Case (2017) and Manan, et. al (2022) provided some evidence that Whistle-blowers have a higher risk of being moved to less influential roles, having their responsibilities reduced, or removed from their positions.

This reflects a broader cultural preference for stability over reform, where change is seen as disruptive rather than necessary. The result is a self-sustaining cycle: employees learn that following unspoken rules brings greater security than following written policies, especially when those policies lack consistent enforcement or visible leadership support.



Tackling this reality requires more than policy updates. It demands a fundamental shift in how we understand the emotional and social logic behind daily actions. Training must move beyond compliance checklists to engage with the deeper reasons people act as they do. Simulation based modules are beginning to show promise, helping staff navigate culturally complex dilemmas—such as how to respond when a senior colleague asks them to bypass protocol without causing offence. These exercises do not seek to erase cultural identity but to expand the range of responses available within it, enabling individuals to uphold standards while preserving dignity and respect.

Looking ahead, the use of artificial intelligence in behavioural monitoring must be paired with cultural competence frameworks that prevent algorithmic bias. Systems trained on historical data may mistakenly equate silence with compliance or deference with loyalty. Ismail, et. al (2025) warned that technology alone cannot correct deep seated norms—it can only reveal them. Effective intervention requires human insight to interpret what the data shows: why some teams resist change, why others report fewer incidents, or how regional differences in language and custom shape perceptions of fairness.

The path forward is not to replace tradition but to transform its expression. By acknowledging the legitimacy of cultural influences while aligning them with legal and ethical standards, organisations can create environments where integrity becomes the natural result of shared understanding rather than the product of external pressure. This change will not come from mandates alone but from sustained dialogue, reflective practice, and leadership that consistently models the values they advocate. With these insights in mind, the next critical question is how organisations can scale such transformation. In Chapter 2, we turn to practical structures for implementation.

1.4 Proactive Crime Prevention and Governance

Proactive crime prevention in organisations refers to embedding preventive strategies into daily operations so that misconduct is deterred before it occurs. Instead of relying solely on punitive measures, organisations establish transparent systems, ethical leadership, and accountability mechanisms that reduce opportunities for corruption, fraud, or abuse of power. For example, implementing clear procurement guidelines, whistleblowing channels, and regular integrity audits helps ensure that unethical practices cannot become normalised. This approach not only protects organisational resources and employee trust but also aligns with governance frameworks such as Malaysia's MADANI values. By making prevention part of workplace culture, organisations strengthen resilience, safeguard credibility, and contribute to broader societal trust in governance systems.

Proactive crime prevention in the workplace is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of effective governance. Rather than reacting to misconduct after it occurs, organisations that embed preventive strategies strengthen accountability and reduce opportunities for corruption or abuse of power. Malaysia's *Arahan YAB Perdana Menteri Siri 2 No. 2 Tahun 2024* emphasises preventive governance as part of the *Strategi Pembanterasan Rasuah Nasional*, underscoring that prevention is more sustainable than punitive responses (Jabatan Perdana Menteri, 2024). This approach directly supports MADANI values by ensuring integrity and transparency are embedded into daily operations.

Preventive measures shape workplace culture by promoting inclusivity and transparency. Research on organisational transformation under the MADANI framework shows that workplaces adopting preventive strategies, such as transparent procurement processes and whistleblowing mechanisms; develop stronger cultures of trust and inclusivity (Ismail, Tengku Mahamad, & Mohd Azman, 2025). These practices reduce the normalisation of misconduct and encourage employees to view ethical behaviour as the standard. In this way, proactive prevention not only deters crime but also nurtures a culture aligned with MADANI's emphasis on justice and compassion.

In practice, crime prevention in the workplace extends beyond financial misconduct to encompass safety and security. A recent concept paper proposed the establishment of *Crime Prevention Clubs (CPCs)* in Malaysian organisations, highlighting their role in reducing

theft, vandalism, and interpersonal violence (Thed & Yong, 2025). These employee-driven initiatives foster awareness and collective responsibility, ensuring that safety is not left solely to management. By empowering staff to take part in prevention, CPCs enhance morale and confidence, reflecting MADANI's principle of community resilience.

Ultimately, proactive crime prevention operationalises MADANI values by embedding integrity, accountability, and compassion into workplace systems. Preventive strategies ensure misconduct is not tolerated, corruption is not rewarded, and employees are empowered to uphold ethical standards. This cultural shift demonstrates that ethical conduct is not merely compliance but a shared responsibility that strengthens institutional credibility and societal trust. In doing so, workplaces contribute to Malaysia's broader aspiration of achieving excellence in governance and embodying MADANI principles in practice.

1.5 Impact of Leadership Styles

Leadership style fundamentally shapes the emotional climate and ethical tone of public institutions, directly influencing how employees behave, engage, and respond to authority. When leaders prioritize vision, personal growth, and open dialogue, teams show greater commitment and fewer signs of disengagement. In environments where psychological safety is nurtured through consistent recognition and honest communication, integrity becomes a natural part of daily practice rather than a rule imposed from above.

This contrasts with systems built on rigid exchanges of reward for compliance. In such settings, motivation remains shallow and conditional, lasting only as long as surveillance is present. Employees comply outwardly but withdraw inwardly, creating fertile ground for hidden misconduct and quiet resistance. When performance metrics focus narrowly on short term outputs, long term cohesion suffers. In Malaysia's public sector, evidence shows this pattern correlates with rising absenteeism and a reluctance to report irregularities, weakening institutional resilience over time.

When leadership withdraws from active guidance, informal power structures often fill the void, undermining formal accountability. This is especially true in contexts where political influence determines appointments or where senior leaders resist reform. Such dynamics encourage among others - favoritism, silence dissent, and normalize

unethical shortcuts—all of which erode public trust. International studies (e.g., OECD, 2023, Transparency International, 2024) show that organisations with strong ethical leadership and consistent values experience significantly fewer integrity violations than those with weak or inconsistent direction from leaders.

These are not merely administrative preferences—they are cultural forces. How decisions are made, how conflicts are handled, and how success is acknowledged determine whether trust builds or collapses over time. When leaders model transparency, fairness, and consistency, even complex bureaucracies can retain legitimacy in the eyes of their staff. Conversely, when those in power act inconsistently or in self-interest, no policy or training program can prevent the slow erosion of institutional credibility. The issue is not charisma or personality but the steady demonstration of principled action.

Effective leadership cannot be measured by titles or years of service. It must be judged by observable changes in team behavior, the frequency of reporting concerns, and the quality of peer feedback. Singapore's civil service has emphasised coaching-based supervision in recent years, with studies and government reports noting improvements in workplace culture, reduced complaints, and stronger retention among mid-level officers, though specific figures vary across sources (Civil Service College Singapore, 2023; Singapore Public Service Division, 2024; Tan & Lim, 2025) These results prove that lasting change comes not from annual declarations but from daily habits of conduct.

The challenge ahead lies in how organisations can detect such subtle shifts in workplace dynamics before they become systemic problems. The next step is not to theorise further but to implement practical systems that identify early warning signs of behavioural risk. In Chapter 2, we turn to the concrete forms of counterproductive behaviour that signal deeper organisational stress, beginning with how such actions are recognised, classified, and understood through psychological and legal lenses.

2
Behavioural Risks in Organisations

2
Behavioural Risks in Organisations

2.1 Introduction

Public institutions suffer a quiet decline when employees engage in actions that weaken efficiency, erode morale, and undermine trust. These behaviours are often subtle, yet their cumulative effect disrupts service delivery and diminishes public confidence. Recognising them requires more than observation as it demands a clear framework rooted in psychological understanding and legal precision. The conditions that give rise to such conduct stem from chronic workplace stress, perceived injustice, and weak accountability systems, all of which interact in complex and nonrandom ways (Shao, Zhang, & Zhang, 2022; Loh & Azalea, 2023; Veeriah, Abdul Aziz, & Abd Aziz, 2023).

Table 4: Exercise on current knowledge regarding organisational misconduct

	Statements	Disagree	Agree
1	Misconduct only occurs if it breaks the law		
2	If there is no official complaint, there is no issue		
3	Misconduct only happens in weak organizations		
4	Misconduct is an individual problem, not a systemic one		
5	One ethics training session is sufficient		
6	Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB) only occurs when employees have malicious intent		
7	CWB has no impact on the organization		
8	Only lower-level employees are involved in CWB		
9	CWB cannot be prevented		
10	CWB is a personal issue, not management's responsibility		
11	Organizational crime only occurs in the form of corruption		
12	Public servants are immune from legal action		
13	Organizational crime is easy to detect		
14	Only greedy individuals commit organizational crime		
15	If the organization does not suffer losses, it is not a crime		
	Total		

2.2 Common Myths @ the Workplace

Table 4 is referred. Check responses against the myths below.

5 Myths Related to Organisational Misconduct

• *Misconduct only occurs if it breaks the law.*
→ False. Misconduct can include violations of ethics, internal policies, or organisational social norms.

• *If there is no official complaint, there is no issue.*
→ This myth ignores cultures of fear in reporting, normalization of toxic behaviour, and the lack of safe reporting channels.

• *Misconduct only happens in weak organizations.*
→ False. High-performing organizations are also vulnerable to misconduct if monitoring and accountability systems are absent.

• *Misconduct is an individual problem, not a systemic one.*
→ This myth denies the influence of organisational structures, leadership, and workplace culture on behaviour.

• *One ethics training session is sufficient.*
→ False. Continuous training and regular reflection are needed to maintain awareness and integrity.

5 Myths Related to Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB)

• *CWB only occurs when employees have malicious intent.*
→ False. It can also result from work stress, fatigue, or value conflicts.

• *CWB has no impact on the organization.*
→ This myth ignores its effects on productivity, team morale, and organisational reputation.

• *Only lower-level employees are involved in CWB.*
→ False. Senior officers may also engage in behaviours such as sabotage, discrimination, or abuse of power.

• *CWB cannot be prevented.*
→ False. It can be reduced through psychosocial support, organisational justice, and ethical leadership.

• *CWB is a personal issue, not management's responsibility.*
→ This myth denies management's role in shaping workplace climate and support systems.

5 Myths Related to Organisational Crime

• *Organisational crime only occurs in the form of corruption.*
→ False. It includes fraud, data misuse, money laundering, and violations of workers' rights.

• *Public servants are immune from legal action.*
→ This myth is dangerous and untrue. All individuals are subject to law and disciplinary rules.

• *Organisational crime is easy to detect.*
→ False. It is often concealed through document manipulation, i internal networks, and a culture of silence.

• *Only greedy individuals commit Organisational crime.*
→ This myth ignores systemic pressures, unhealthy incentives, and normalization of deviant behaviour.

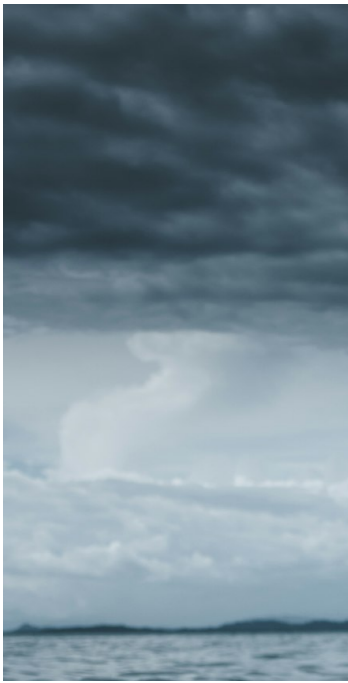
• *If the organization does not suffer losses, it is not a crime.*
→ False. Organisational crime can harm customers, citizens, and public trust even without direct financial loss.

2.3 Identifying Counterproductive Work Behaviour

Public institutions suffer a quiet decline when employees engage in actions that weaken efficiency, erode morale, and undermine trust. These behaviours are often subtle, yet their cumulative effect disrupts service delivery and diminishes public confidence. Recognising them requires more than observation as it demands a clear framework rooted in psychological understanding and legal precision. The conditions that give rise to such conduct stem from chronic workplace stress, perceived injustice, and weak accountability systems, all of which interact in complex and nonrandom ways (Shao, Zhang, & Zhang, 2022; Loh & Azalea, 2023; Veeriah, Abdul Aziz, & Abd Aziz, 2023).

Common manifestations include deliberate delays in document processing, misuse of official hours, verbal hostility toward colleagues, and the concealment of mistakes to avoid responsibility (Shao, Zhang, & Zhang, 2022). These are not isolated events but recurring patterns documented across Malaysian organisations (Veeriah, Abdul Aziz, & Abd Aziz, 2023). Their roots often lie in sustained work overload, inadequate supervision, or a sense of powerlessness among frontline staff (Loh & Azalea, 2023). When individuals feel their efforts go unnoticed or their concerns dismissed, they may adopt these actions as informal coping mechanisms despite the harm they cause to the organisation.

This reality is intensified by organisational structures that value compliance over communication. Rigid hierarchies that suppress open dialogue allow resentment to grow silently, resulting in passive resistance rather than direct conflict. These dynamics are not unique to Malaysia; comparable trends appear in public agencies in the region ((Hattab, et. al., 2022; OECD, 2024; Transparency International, 2024; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2025). Yet local factors add distinct layers: cultural norms around hierarchy, fear of losing face, and the lingering influence of colonial administrative practices shape how these issues are expressed and endured.



The consequences ripple beyond individual units. Absenteeism increases as trust declines (Adhvaryu, et. al., 2024). Decision making slows due to withheld information (Adhvaryu, et. al., 2024; Gallup, 2024). Innovation fades in environments driven by fear (World Health Organisation, 2024). Productivity metrics show measurable drops in output where these conditions persist, with some ministries reporting inefficiencies linked to unresolved interpersonal tensions and procedural sabotage (World Bank, 2022). Malaysian civil service regulations classify certain acts such as falsifying attendance records or destroying official documents as offences (see: *Peraturan-Peraturan Pegawai Awam (Kelakuan dan Tatatertib) 1993* [P.U. (A) 395] and amendments.). Yet enforcement remains uneven. Without clear diagnostic standards, organisations struggle to differentiate between incompetence and intentional misconduct.

Addressing the above factors demands a shift from reactive discipline to early detection and thoughtful interpretation. Leaders must learn to identify warning signs not as personal failures but as indicators of deeper systemic problems. Training managers to recognise behavioural cues such as changes in routine, withdrawal from team activities, or sudden performance shifts; are essential. This training requires tools that are both scientifically sound and culturally appropriate, capable of distinguishing between stress related errors and deliberate acts of harm.

These developments set the stage for deeper inquiry. What psychological forces lead individuals to act against their own institutional interests? How do legal definitions influence organisational responses? And what role do leadership styles play in either intensifying or containing these tendencies? The answers lie not in broad assumptions but in precise analysis of motives, contexts, and institutional triggers; a task addressed in the following section. Recognising these patterns is only the first step. Understanding their origins will determine whether reform remains superficial or achieves lasting transformation.

2.4 The Need for Remedial Action

Remedial action within public organisations and governance plays a crucial role in maintaining integrity, accountability, and public trust. As public organisations manage resources and deliver services that directly affect citizens, misconduct such as corruption, fraud, or abuse of authority can have wide-reaching consequences at various levels.

Applying punishment or remedial action ensures that individuals who breach ethical or legal standards are held responsible, while also reinforcing organisational norms and practices that discourage misconduct.

Importantly, remedial action in this context is not limited to retribution; it encompasses deterrence, rehabilitation, and restorative approaches that aim to protect resources, strengthen governance systems, and rebuild confidence among employees and the wider community. By embedding punishment within a broader framework of preventive and corrective measures, public organisations can uphold values such as transparency, fairness, and accountability, ensuring that governance remains credible and aligned with societal expectations.

Below is a summary of six types of punishment contextualised to public organisations as forms of potential remedial actions. This six types offer alternatives in deliberating actions for employee misconduct in line with local legislations.

Retribution

Retribution is grounded in the idea of moral blameworthiness, where offenders are punished because they deserve it (Svigen, 2023). This theory emphasises justice by ensuring that the punishment matches the severity of the crime (Fenimore & Jones, 2024). For example, a person convicted of fraud may face imprisonment not only to deter others but primarily because their actions violated societal norms and trust. Retribution reflects the principle of "just deserts," ensuring that offenders are held accountable for their wrongdoing in proportion to the harm caused.

Deterrence

Deterrence aims to prevent future crimes by instilling fear of consequences. It operates on two levels (Abramovaite, et. al., 2022): *specific deterrence*, which discourages the punished offender from reoffending, and *general deterrence*, which sends a message to society that crime will not go unpunished. For instance, imposing heavy fines on corporate executives for insider trading serves as a warning to others in similar positions. The rationale is that the certainty and severity of punishment will outweigh the perceived benefits of committing the crime (Slepicka, 2022).

Incapacitation

According to Al Weswasi (2024), incapacitation focuses on restricting an offender's ability to commit further crimes, often through imprisonment or confinement. By removing offenders from society, the risk of reoffending is reduced. For example, habitual violent offenders may be incarcerated for long periods to protect the public. The rationale is pragmatic: if offenders are physically unable to commit crimes, society is safer. This approach is particularly evident in "three strikes" laws, where repeat offenders face mandatory long-term sentences (Al Weswasi, 2025).

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation seeks to reform offenders so they can reintegrate into society as law-abiding citizens. This theory emphasises addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour, such as substance abuse, lack of education, or psychological issues (Day, et. al., 2022). For example, drug offenders may be placed in treatment programs rather than prisons, with the aim of reducing dependency and preventing relapse into crime. The rationale is that by equipping offenders with skills, therapy, and support, they are less likely to reoffend and more likely to contribute positively to society (Negi, et. al., 2026).

Restoration

Restoration focuses on repairing the harm caused by crime, often through compensation to victims or community service (Syam, 2022; Wieczorek, 2022). For example, an employee caught embezzling funds may be required to repay the stolen money and perform service that benefits the organisation. The rationale is that punishment should not only penalise but also restore balance, ensuring victims and communities are compensated for their losses (Syam, 2022). This approach highlights accountability while promoting healing and reconciliation.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice expands on restoration by involving victims, offenders, and the community in the justice process. It emphasises dialogue, responsibility, and reparation (Wood, Suzuki, & Hayes, 2022). For instance, in cases of workplace harassment, restorative practices may involve mediated discussions where offenders acknowledge harm and agree to corrective actions. The rationale is that justice is not only about punishment but also about repairing relationships and fostering community cohesion (Hobson, et. al., 2022). This approach aligns with values of compassion and inclusivity, ensuring both victims and offenders are part of the healing process (Wood, Suzuki, & Hayes, 2022).

2.5 Psychological and Legal Perspectives

The way individuals respond to institutional expectations in public service is shaped by a quiet interplay between inner motivations and external rules. Psychological research shows that misconduct often arises not from deliberate rebellion but from unmet needs, unresolved stress, or deeply learned patterns of response (Tziner, et. al., 2023; Ogunfowora, et. al., 2023; Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025). These roots are rarely visible in policy breaches alone; they demand deeper inquiry into emotional states, cognitive biases, and personal histories that shape decision making. When behaviour turns harmful, it is usually a symptom of systemic pressures rather than a simple failure of character.

Legal frameworks, by contrast, rely on clear thresholds of violation. They assign consequences based on codified rules and procedural compliance. While essential for accountability, these systems often lack the depth to uncover underlying causes. Public service disciplinary records and integrity frameworks in Malaysia indicate that attendance-related misconduct, including time-based offences, is often addressed through corrective measures such as counselling alongside formal penalties, particularly where rehabilitation is deemed appropriate (Ahmad, Hashim, & Latiff, 2024; Rosli, 2025). This suggests that sanctions alone produce only temporary compliance. Ip, et. al (2025) opined that the rigidity of disciplinary codes can discourage honesty, deepen stigma, and block opportunities for growth before problems escalate.

Below is a curated overview of Malaysian laws that address white-collar crime and organisational misconduct, with particular attention to the public sector and its extended ecosystem, including statutory bodies, government-linked companies, public authorities, local councils, and their officials. The discussion is structured to reflect how legal accountability operates in practice, grouping the legislation into core criminal laws, financial and regulatory controls, and frameworks governing integrity, discipline, and ethical conduct within public institutions. The list is organised by primary criminal statutes, financial/ regulatory laws, and public-sector integrity & disciplinary frameworks.

A. Core Criminal & Anti-Corruption Legislation

1. Penal Code (Act 574)
2. Criminal Procedure Code (Act 593)
3. Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (Act 694)

B. Financial Crime & Regulatory Legislation

4. Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (AMLA) (Act 613)
5. Companies Act 2016 (Act 777)
6. Securities Commission Malaysia Act 1993 (Act 498)
7. Computer Crimes Act 1997 (Act 563)

C. Public-Sector Governance, Discipline & Integrity Laws

8. Statutory Bodies (Discipline and Surcharge) Act 2000 (Act 605)
9. Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993
10. Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 (Act 711)
11. Witness Protection Act 2009 (Act 696)

D. Civil & Constitutional Accountability (Supplementary)

12. Tort of Misfeasance in Public Office (Common Law)

Table 5 below summarises several laws related to white-collar crime and public-sector misconduct. The primary scope and relevance of these laws are also summarised.

Table 5: Malaysian Legislation on White-Collar Crime and Public-Sector Misconduct

Category	Legislation	Primary Scope and Relevance
Core Criminal & Anti-Corruption Laws	Penal Code (Act 574)	Foundational criminal law covering major white-collar offences applicable to public officers and those dealing with government entities, including criminal breach of trust (ss. 405–409), cheating and fraud (ss. 415–420), forgery and falsification of records (ss. 463–477A), and offences relating to public servants (ss. 161–171, read with the MACC Act).
	Criminal Procedure Code (Act 593)	Governs criminal processes such as investigation, arrest, seizure, prosecution, reporting obligations, and trial procedures relevant to white-collar and public-sector offences.
	Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (Act 694)	Principal statute addressing corruption and abuse of office. Applies to civil servants, public bodies, statutory authorities, GLCs, and government-linked commercial organisations. Covers bribery, gratification offences (ss. 16–17), abuse of position (s. 23), bribery of public bodies and foreign officials (ss. 21–22), corporate liability (s. 17A), and failure to report corruption (s. 25). Grants extensive investigative and forfeiture powers to MACC.
Financial Crime & Regulatory Laws	Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (Act 613)	Addresses laundering of proceeds from corruption, fraud, criminal breach of trust, and abuse of power. Applies to government officials, GLC officers, and financial institutions, and includes reporting duties, asset freezing, and forfeiture mechanisms.
	Companies Act 2016 (Act 777)	Regulates directors and officers of companies, including GLCs and statutory corporations. Covers false statements, fraudulent trading, misuse of company property, and breaches of fiduciary duties that may result in civil or criminal liability.
	Securities Commission Malaysia Act 1993 (Act 498) *(and related capital market laws such as CMSA 2007)*	Relevant where misconduct involves listed GLCs and capital market entities, including insider trading, market manipulation, and false or misleading disclosures by senior officers.
	Computer Crimes Act 1997 (Act 563)	Applies to public-sector related cyber and technology-enabled white-collar offences such as unauthorised system access, data manipulation, and misuse of official IT systems.
Public-Sector Governance, Discipline & Integrity	Statutory Bodies (Discipline and Surcharge) Act 2000 (Act 605)	Applies to officers of statutory bodies and semi-government organisations, addressing disciplinary misconduct, negligence causing loss to public funds, and surcharge mechanisms for recovery of losses.
	Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993	Subsidiary rules governing ethical conduct, integrity, conflicts of interest, and abuse of office among civil servants. Frequently applied alongside criminal investigations or prosecutions.
	Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 (Act 711)	Provides legal protection for individuals, including public officers, who disclose corruption, abuse of power, or misconduct within public and semi-public organisations.
	Witness Protection Act 2009 (Act 696)	Ensures protection and security for witnesses involved in serious corruption and white-collar crime cases concerning public officials.
Civil & Constitutional Accountability	Tort of Misfeasance in Public Office (Common Law)	Recognised by Malaysian courts as a basis for civil liability where public officials deliberately or recklessly abuse public power. Applicable to ministers, senior civil servants, and public authorities.

Misconduct within public and semi-public institutions is seldom the result of a sudden ethical collapse or inherent moral deficiency (Ogunfowora, et. al., 2023). Rather, it is more accurately understood as the outcome of gradual psychological shifts that occur when individuals operate within systems of authority, discretion, and institutional silence. From a human governance perspective, misconduct reflects the interaction between individual cognition, organisational culture, and structural power, rather than isolated deviant intent (Castro, de Ribeiro, & Cintra, 2022; Abdelkhalek, et. al., 2024). .

Contemporary research in organisational criminology increasingly recognises that white-collar and administrative misconduct must be examined at the *micro–meso interface*: where human psychology meets institutional design (Benson, et. al., 2024; Lord & Levi, 2025). This approach challenges purely legalistic explanations and instead situates misconduct within everyday decision-making under conditions of pressure, ambiguity, and asymmetric accountability.

At the core of most organisational misconduct typologies lies moral disengagement, a cognitive process through which individuals detach their actions from internal ethical standards (Ogunfowora, et. al., 2023). In public organisations, moral disengagement often manifests not as explicit self-justification, but as professional reframing: decisions are recast as technical, procedural, or necessary for institutional stability.

Empirical evidence shows that civil servants may not deny ethical norms themselves, but rather reinterpret the *relevance* of those norms in specific contexts, particularly when organisational culture implicitly rewards results over integrity (Castro, de, Ribeiro, & Cintra, 2022; Abdi, Hashi, & Latif, , 2024; Ahmad, Hashim, & Latiff, 2024). This process allows behaviour that would ordinarily be viewed as improper to be experienced as neutral or even responsible conduct.

Weißmüller and Ritz (2026) further demonstrate that moral disengagement operates as an internal regulatory mechanism, enabling public officials to reconcile self-image with actions that conflict with legal or ethical expectations. Their findings (Weißmüller & Ritz, 2026) suggest that corruptibility is less about moral absence and more about moral *recalibration* in response to situational demands.

Misconduct frequently evolves through a process of **i**ncremental normalisation, whereby minor rule deviations are absorbed into routine practice (Lee, et. al., 2024). When early transgressions attract no sanction or are informally endorsed, they become psychologically categorised as acceptable. Over time, the boundary between compliance and violation becomes increasingly blurred (Hall, et. al., 2026).

This phenomenon is particularly evident in procurement processes, regulatory approvals, and discretionary licensing, where informal workarounds are often framed as operational efficiency. Tsarouhas and Grigoriadis (2026) describe this as the accumulation of "conscience dust," a subtle erosion of ethical sensitivity resulting from repeated exposure to tolerated misconduct and weak leadership signals.

From a psychological standpoint, the danger of normalisation lies not in malicious intent but in *desensitisation*. Individuals adapt to prevailing practices in order to belong, to cope with workload pressures, or to avoid organisational conflict. The moral dimension of decisions gradually fades from conscious consideration.

This reality calls for a more balanced approach, one that respects human complexity without abandoning the need for boundaries. Evaluations of trauma-informed and restorative supervision models trialled within several state justice and correctional departments indicate sustained reductions in repeat disciplinary incidents and improved behavioural outcomes over multi-year periods, particularly where relational restoration replaces purely punitive responses (Clark-Moorman, 2024; Cogan et al., 2025). These methods do not excuse rule breaking. Instead, they treat it as a signal for support, not just sanction. The shift requires training managers to recognise subtle signs of distress and respond with structured guidance instead of immediate punishment.

Evidence shows that organisations blending psychological insight with legal clarity achieve higher rates of lasting behavioural improvement (Peat, Fikfak, & van der Zee, 2022; Tyler & Mentovich, 2023). Studies (see: Williams, 2021; Thompson, 2024) on public sector integrity consistently show that units combining psychological assessment with formal compliance review experience substantially higher employee retention and markedly fewer grievances when compared with procedural- only approaches. Fairness is not merely

about applying rules uniformly. It is about proportionality, context, and offering space for change (Jo & Shin, 2025). When systems allow room for reflection and development, compliance becomes internalised, not enforced.

The challenge lies in applying these practices to fit organisational needs, without losing their depth. Standardised procedures risk becoming mechanical. Overly individualised responses may seem inconsistent. Finding balance demands clear protocols that preserve autonomy within defined limits. Leaders must be equipped to navigate ambiguity, interpret behavioural cues accurately, and align interventions with both ethical principles and legal obligations. This is not about replacing law with therapy. It is about enriching enforcement with understanding.

Looking ahead, combining data analytics with human judgment offers a promising path forward. Tools that detect patterns of withdrawal, increased absenteeism, or interpersonal tension; can serve as early warnings long before formal complaints arise. Yet their value depends entirely on how they are interpreted by trained professionals who understand context, group culture, and individual history. Without this human layer, even the most advanced system may mistake distress for disobedience.

2.6 Early Intervention Strategies

Preventing harmful conduct before it takes root requires more than reactive policies. It demands intentional design. These issues do not arise randomly but emerge from predictable patterns in communication, supervision, and resource distribution. When leaders overlook subtle signs such as growing isolation, reduced participation, or unexplained absences; they inadvertently create conditions where dysfunction can deepen (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Abdelkhalek, et al., 2024). Recent evidence indicates that organisations embedding regular check-ins and open feedback systems experience substantially lower escalation rates than those relying primarily on formal complaint mechanisms, with multiple studies reporting large reductions in grievances and conflict intensity over time (Tyler & Mentovich, 2023; Thompson, 2024; Jo & Shin, 2025).

Evidence from several public-sector governance and behavioural compliance research indicates that early intervention is most effective when organisations implement layered support systems that integrate

formal oversight with human-centred responsiveness (Peat et al., 2022; Tyler & Mentovich, 2023). Empirical studies further show that supervisors trained to recognise early signs of distress and initiate timely dialogue can prevent minor frustrations from escalating into entrenched workplace conflicts (Thompson, 2024; Lee, et. al., 2024). Across Southeast Asia, confidential reporting mechanisms designed with cultural sensitivity and guaranteed anonymity have been shown to significantly increase employees' willingness to speak up without fear of retaliation (UNODC, 2023; Johari et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings confirm that psychological safety (Edmondson, 2004) is essential to sustained operational stability in public institutions rather than a discretionary organisational feature.

As institutions strive to build resilience and trust, the most enduring solutions will come from synergy, not conflict, between inner motivation and outer structure. The goal is not to eliminate all forms of deviation but to create environments where deviation is met with insight, not just penalty. This transformation requires rethinking not just what we punish but why we respond the way we do. The next stage of progress lies in designing systems that learn from behaviour, not merely regulate it.

The challenge of using early intervention strategies within government organisations is often framed as a logistical or administrative problem. In practice, however, it is far more intricate. It is a behavioural systems challenge that sits at the intersection of human cognition, organisational design, and institutional culture. Public sector environments, by their very nature, are characterised by structural rigidity, layered hierarchies, and diverse workforces operating under competing demands (Castro, de, Ribeiro, & Cintra, 2022; Tziner, et. al, 2023; Benson, et. al., 2024; Lord & Levi, 2025). Within such systems, behavioural dysfunction rarely emerges as an isolated anomaly; rather, it is the predictable outcome of misaligned incentives, constrained communication channels, and environments that fail to support adaptive human functioning. Consequently, any meaningful attempt to impliment psychologically informed initiatives must begin with a reorientation, from treating behaviour as an individual issue to understanding it as an emergent property of the system itself.

At the individual level, the explanatory foundation is coherently captured through Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits that behaviour is shaped through a dynamic interplay between factors

of personal beliefs, environmental conditions, and enacted actions. Central to this framework is the construct of self-efficacy, or an individual's belief in their capacity to perform effectively within a given context. Research indicates that early intervention strategies such as communication training, structured feedback mechanisms, and guided reflective practices derive their effectiveness not merely from conveying information, but from progressively strengthening employees' beliefs in their own capability to act within organisational contexts (Peat et al., 2022; Abdullahi, et. al., 2025; Nuryanti, Ruliana, & Rachman, 2025).

Other studies in public-sector settings show that reflective and communicative interventions enhance self-efficacy and agency, which in turn support confidence, constructive engagement, and adaptive persistence when facing complexity and challenge (Ahmad, 2025; Tenaya, et. al., 2026). Consistent with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), employees who perceive themselves as capable actors are more likely to navigate uncertainty with resilience, remain engaged, and sustain effort despite obstacles (Brassey, et. al., 2020; Bardhan & Haque, 2025; Imran, Ghazwan, & Firmansyah, 2025). From this perspective, early intervention strategies function less as corrective controls and more as mechanisms for reinforcing personal agency and self-regulation. As perceived capability increases, the likelihood of defensive withdrawal or maladaptive behaviour correspondingly declines, even in high-pressure organisational environments for example defence and emergency services.

It follows, therefore, that early interventions must be designed not as one-off training events, but as iterative processes that reinforce efficacy through repeated, meaningful engagement. Without such reinforcement, behavioural change remains fragile, easily eroded by the very organisational pressures it seeks to address. Sustained programmes that integrate feedback loops and peer accountability mechanisms are far more likely to embed new norms into daily practice (Raetze et al., 2022). Over time, this continuity transforms interventions from isolated initiatives into cultural anchors that shape long-term organisational resilience (Sipondo & Terblanche, 2024; Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2022).

Complementing this individual - level perspective is the organisational lens offered by the Job Demands-Resources Model (Demerouti, et. al., 2001) which provides a compelling explanation for

variations in employee engagement and performance across public sector settings. The model suggests that employee outcomes are determined by the balance between job demands such as workload, emotional strain, and bureaucratic complexity and job resources, including support, autonomy, recognition, and feedback (Demerouti, et. al., 2001). Early intervention strategies function, in effect, as mechanisms for recalibrating this balance.

By introducing accessible training, real-time feedback systems, and culturally attuned recognition practices, organisations increase the availability of psychological and structural resources available to staff. The empirical evidence demonstrating improvements in efficiency and engagement across healthcare, audit, and education sectors can thus be understood not as isolated successes, but as predictable outcomes of restoring equilibrium within this demands–resources dynamic. Where such equilibrium is absent, even well-intentioned initiatives struggle to gain traction, as employees remain constrained by systemic pressures that undermine behavioural change.

A critical, yet often underappreciated, condition for scaling these interventions is the presence of psychological safety (Edmondson, 2004). In environments where individuals fear negative consequences for speaking up, the organisational system is effectively deprived of its most valuable diagnostic resource: honest feedback. Psychological safety, defined as a shared belief that interpersonal risk-taking is safe within a group, enables learning, voice, and adaptive performance in complex organisational settings (Edmondson, 2004). When cultivated consistently, it becomes the foundation upon which iterative interventions can thrive, ensuring that behavioural change is not only initiated but sustained.

Anonymous, real-time feedback mechanisms such as those implemented within the American Health Service through Freedom to Speak Up and digital incident-reporting systems; have been shown to reduce interpersonal risk and enable voice by separating the act of speaking up from personal exposure and fear of retaliation (McCausland, 2023; Wawersik, et. al., 2023). The effectiveness of these feedback mechanisms lies not merely in the data they generate, but in the behavioural climate they cultivate. When employees experience a consistent pattern of being heard without repercussion, a subtle but powerful shift occurs. Over time, this shift normalises transparency and embeds trust as a collective expectation at the workplace rather than an individual gamble.

Feedback then becomes normalised, learning cycles accelerate, and the organisation becomes more responsive to emerging issues. In contrast, environments lacking psychological safety tend to exhibit delayed problem recognition, reactive decision-making, and entrenched inefficiencies (Amoadu, Ansah, & Sarfo, 2023; Thompson, 2024). Thus, psychological safety (Edmondson, 2004) is not an adjunct to early intervention; it is the condition that makes early intervention possible at scale.

Such efforts gain momentum when paired with validated broader assessments of workplace climate. Research demonstrates that regular evaluations of fairness, inclusion, and morale are essential for identifying latent organisational tensions that frequently go undetected by traditional management tools such as performance indicators or formal grievance systems (Jo & Shin, 2025; Thompson, 2024; Hall, et. al., 2026). Studies further show that bias audits and equity monitoring reveal uneven task allocation and recognition patterns that disproportionately burden or marginalise certain groups, fostering disengagement and resentment over time (OECD, 2023; Eckhard, Jankauskas, & Leuschner, 2024). When findings are acted on with transparency and accountability, they strengthen institutional credibility and encourage collective responsibility for behavioural norms.

Organisations that adopt anticipatory frameworks grounded in cognitive science achieve deeper positive impact (OECD, 2024; Vaquero-Piñeiro, et. al., 2025). By mapping common triggers of stress and disengagement, leaders can than design routines that align with natural human rhythms rather than rigid bureaucratic demands, leading to more humane governance. Simple adjustments, such as rotating high-pressure tasks, ensuring sufficient recovery time between assignments, or establishing peer support circles; yield measurable gains in sustained performance and emotional resilience. These strategies require no large budgets but demand consistent commitment from those in leadership roles.

In other words, this approach shifts the focus from punishing deviations to cultivating environments where ethical conduct becomes the natural outcome of well-structured systems. Research across organisational and public-sector contexts indicates that rigid disciplinary regimes discourage honesty and early disclosure, intensify stigma through labeling and shame, and foreclose opportunities for

corrective learning—often allowing minor issues to escalate into serious conflicts (Wawersik et al., 2023; Hudson et al., 2025; Kaptein, 2025).

Longitudinal studies (see: Doan, Ha, Leach, & La, 2021; Weziak-Bialowolska, et. al., 2023; American Psychological Association, 2024). confirm that teams with consistent access to mental health resources and developmental feedback show lower rates of turnover, absenteeism, and interpersonal conflict. The most successful interventions treat wellbeing not as a single initiative but as an ongoing process woven into daily practice. Chug et al. (2025) highlighted that integrated well-being programmes combining initiatives to foster psychological safety, evidence-based approaches to stress management, and strategies aimed at boosting productivity; are associated with notable organisational gains. These include a 13% increase in productivity, a 27% reduction in turnover, and significant financial savings resulting from lower rates of absenteeism and presenteeism (Chug, et. al., 2025).

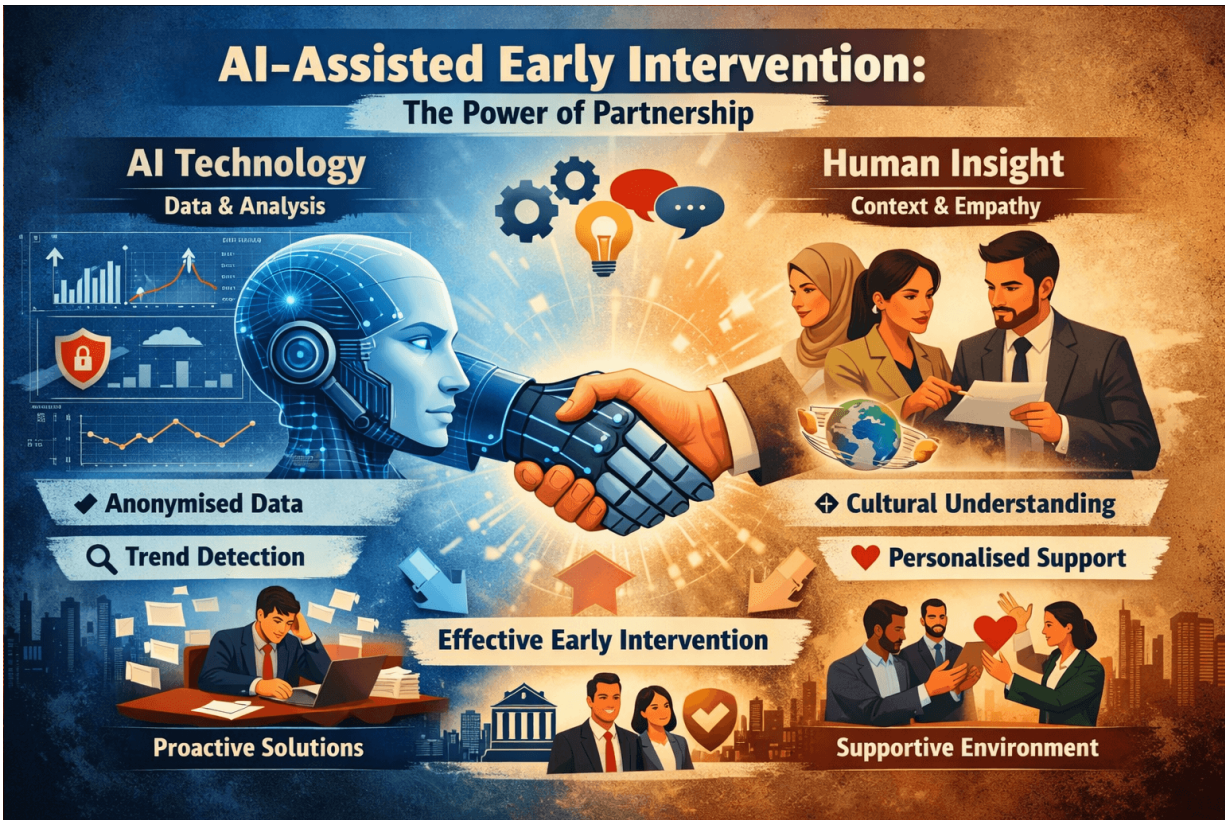
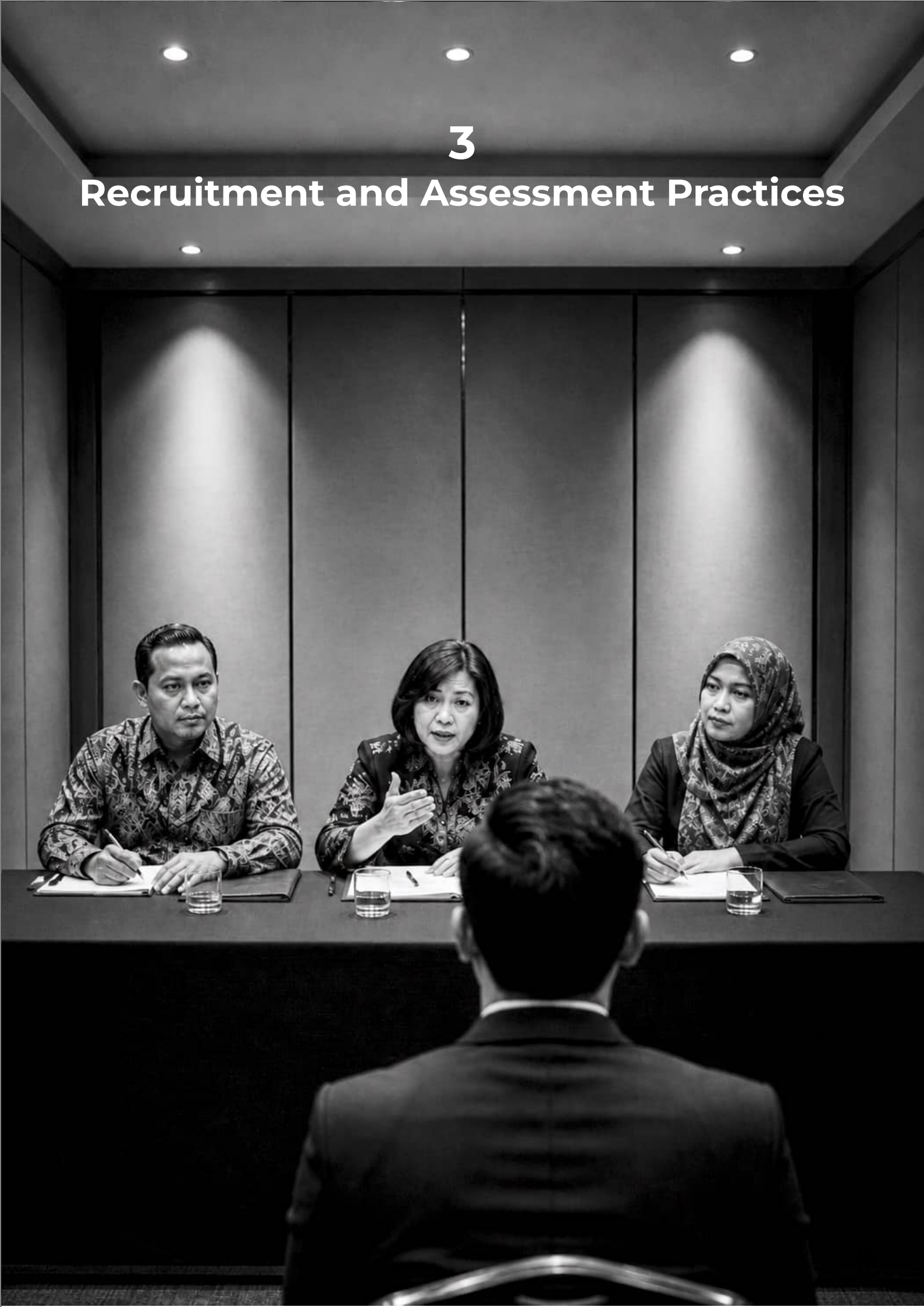


Figure 2: Inclusion of AI intro Early Intervention Strategies

Based on the available literature, the future of early intervention lies in combining adaptive technologies with human insight (Figure 2 is referred). AI-assisted analytics can identify trends across large workforces using aggregated, anonymised data, preserving individual privacy. Yet their true value emerges only when paired with trained personnel who interpret signals within cultural context and organisational history. Without this partnership, even the most advanced tools risk becoming instruments of surveillance rather than support.

Adapting these strategies to public organisations demand more than technology. It requires systemic alignment. The next chapter examines how recruitment and placement decisions shape the foundation of workplace behaviour, revealing how early selection practices either reinforce or undermine the very interventions described here.

3
Recruitment and Assessment Practices



3
Recruitment and Assessment Practices

3.1 Introduction

Recruitment and placement practices remain central to organisational success, yet the methods used to evaluate candidates are often contested for their scope, accuracy, and fairness. This chapter examines the foundations and limitations of contemporary recruitment approaches by focusing on four critical areas: the selection of attributes deemed essential for job performance, the application of psychometric tools in placement decisions, the persistence of bias within assessment instruments, and a broader critique of current recruitment methods. Together, these discussions highlight the tension between the need for objective, evidence-based evaluation and the reality of subjective judgments, systemic biases, and incomplete measures of the human psyche. By interrogating these dimensions, the chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how recruitment tools shape organisational outcomes and where reforms are most urgently required.

3.2 Selecting Attributes

Selecting the right attributes for recruitment is a critical step in ensuring organisational effectiveness, as it determines how well candidates align with both job demands and workplace culture. This section explores three interconnected frameworks that guide attribute selection. First, the AB2CDEF model (Geshina, et. al., 2023) provides a holistic lens for understanding the psychological dimensions that shape individual performance and organisational outcomes. Second, the person–job fit concept highlights the importance of matching traits, aptitudes, and attitudes with specific job requirements to foster productivity and satisfaction. Finally, the section examines the tools used in employee recruitment, including actuarial assessments and observational methods, which predominantly measure affect, behaviour, and cognition while often neglecting deeper motivational and imaginative aspects. Together, these perspectives underscore the need for a balanced approach to attribute selection that captures both measurable competencies and the subtler dimensions of human psychology.

The AB2CDEF Model (Geshina et al., 2023)

The AB2CDEF Model expands traditional psychological frameworks by including six interrelated dimensions of the psyche: Affect, Behaviour & Belief, Cognition, Desire, Emotion, and Fantasy. Together, these dimensions provide a holistic view of the psyche, extending beyond the traditional ABC model of attitudes (affect, behaviour, cognition) by incorporating deeper motivational and imaginative elements. Table 6 below describes each of these six aspects of the psyche.

Table 6: Summary of Psyche Aspects

	Aspects	Description
1	Affect	Refers to emotional responses that shape attitudes and actions. Affect influences how individuals perceive workplace events and relationships
2	Behaviour & Belief	Behaviour reflects observable actions, while belief represents internal convictions that guide those actions. Beliefs about fairness or competence often predict workplace conduct
3	Cognition	Encompasses thought processes, reasoning, and knowledge structures. Cognition is central to decision-making and problem-solving in organisational contexts
4	Desire	Represents motivational drives, including aspirations for achievement or recognition. Desire often fuels persistence and career progression.
5	Emotion	Distinct from affect, emotion involves more complex states such as anxiety, pride, or anger, which can influence interpersonal dynamics and organisational climate
6	Fantasy	Symbolises imaginative constructs that may inspire innovation but can also distort reality if unchecked. Fantasy can motivate creativity but may also support misconceptions or misconduct.

Concept of Person-Job Fit (PJF)

The concept of *person–job fit* (PJF) refers to the alignment between an individual's characteristics and the demands of a specific job. It is rooted in interactionist theories of work behaviour, which argue that performance and satisfaction emerge when personal attributes match occupational requirements. Recent scholarship emphasises that PJF is multidimensional, involving personality traits, cognitive aptitudes, and attitudinal orientations that collectively determine success in organisational contexts (Liu, et. al., 2025).

Personality traits are central to PJF because they influence how individuals approach tasks and interact with colleagues. Meta-analyses consistently show that conscientiousness predicts job performance across industries, while openness supports adaptability in dynamic environments (Pletzer & Abrahams, 2025). Conversely, poor alignment between traits and job demands can lead to disengagement, stress, and turnover. Thus, trait-based assessments are widely used in recruitment to ensure compatibility between candidates and roles.

Aptitudes, including cognitive ability, technical skills, and problem-solving capacity, form another pillar of PJF. Cognitive ability remains one of the strongest predictors of job performance, particularly in complex roles requiring analytical reasoning (Omar & Mariyappan, 2025). When aptitudes align with job requirements, employees are more likely to achieve competence quickly, reducing training costs and enhancing organisational efficiency. Misalignment, however, can result in underperformance and frustration.

Attitudes, encompassing work values, motivational orientations, and cultural preferences, shape long-term engagement and organisational commitment. Employees whose values align with organisational culture report higher satisfaction and lower turnover intentions (van Woerkom, et. al., 2024). For example, individuals who value collaboration thrive in team-based environments, while those prioritising autonomy may excel in independent roles. Attitudinal fit is therefore critical for sustaining motivation beyond initial recruitment.

Strong PJF contributes to multiple positive outcomes, including enhanced productivity, reduced absenteeism, and improved psychological well-being. Organisations benefit from lower recruitment costs and higher retention, while employees experience greater career satisfaction and growth opportunities. Conversely, poor fit can foster disengagement, counterproductive work behaviours, and organisational inefficiencies. As such, contemporary recruitment strategies increasingly integrate holistic assessments of traits, aptitudes, and attitudes to optimise PJF and support sustainable workforce development (Liu, et. al., 2025).

Recruitment Tools: Actuarial Assessment and Observation

Recruitment processes often rely on a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools to evaluate candidates. These tools are typically dyadic in nature, comprising actuarial assessments and observational methods such as interviews. Together, they aim to capture aspects of the psyche primarily affect, behaviour, and cognition; while neglecting deeper dimensions such as belief, desire, emotion, and fantasy. This selective focus can lead to incomplete evaluations of candidates' suitability for organisational roles (Omar & Mariyappan, 2025).

Actuarial assessment in organisations refers to the use of psychometric tests, aptitude measures, and statistical models to predict job performance. These tools are valued for their reliability and predictive validity, particularly in assessing cognitive ability and

personality traits (Pletzer & Abrahams, 2025). For example, structured personality inventories and cognitive ability tests provide quantifiable data that can forecast long-term success in specific roles. However, actuarial methods often reduce complex human behaviours to numerical scores, potentially overlooking motivational and emotional factors that influence workplace dynamics.

Observation, most commonly conducted through interviews, provides a qualitative lens into candidate behaviour. Interviews allow recruiters to assess communication skills, interpersonal dynamics, and situational responses in real time. Yet, these observations capture only a snapshot of behaviour, heavily influenced by context and impression management (Yusof & Othman, 2023). As a result, interviews may fail to reveal underlying beliefs, desires, or emotional drivers that shape long-term organisational attitudes and actions. This limitation underscores the risk of over-reliance on momentary behavioural cues.

While actuarial and observational tools are effective in measuring affect, behaviour, and cognition, they disregard belief, desire, emotion, and fantasy. These three aspects of the psyche could significantly influence organisational culture and misconduct. For instance, unexamined beliefs or fantasies may support unethical practices or law violations despite strong cognitive and behavioural scores. Scholars argue that recruitment systems must evolve to incorporate holistic assessments that capture deeper psychological dimensions, thereby reducing risks of misfit and misconduct in organisational contexts (van Woerkom, et. al, 2024; Canché, et. al., 2025; Liu, et. al., 2025).

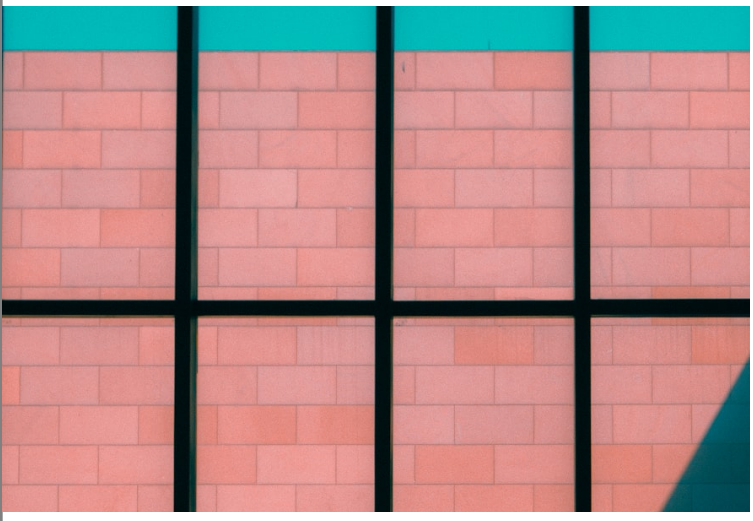
3.3 Psychometric Approaches to Placement

The selection of individuals for public roles has too often relied on subjective impressions, neglecting the deeper psychological traits that determine long term performance and ethical conduct. Modern methods now offer structured ways to assess qualities such as emotional regulation, moral judgment, and adaptive resilience—attributes closely linked to sound decision making under pressure. These tools are not simple filters but diagnostic systems that reveal how candidates respond to stress, uncertainty, and ethical challenges in simulated scenarios. When applied with discipline, they reduce dependence on interviews alone, which are prone to unconscious bias and the tendency to present an idealised self.

Studies of disciplinary measures in Malaysian public service indicate that structured evaluations and consistent enforcement improve integrity outcomes and reduce misconduct risks (Aminuddin, 2020; Baqutayan & Mayati, 2021; Azmi & Associates, 2025). This improvement did not stem from harsher rules but from a better match between individual character and job demands. Trauma informed assessments are now integrated into the process, recognising that past hardship may shape current behaviour without determining it.

These approaches do not justify poor conduct but provide context, enabling more accurate forecasts of future actions and identifying those who would benefit from early support rather than rejection. Implementing these methods requires more than technical tools. It demands institutional dedication to evidence based standards and ongoing calibration. Studies from public sector reforms in Singapore and New Zealand (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2023; Singapore Public Service Division, 2024; Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission; 2025) show that assessment tools lose accuracy over time if not regularly revalidated against local behavioural data. In Malaysia, cultural nuances in communication, hierarchical expectations, and expressions of accountability must be embedded into scoring criteria to prevent misclassification. Without this adaptation, even the most scientifically rigorous instruments risk reinforcing existing inequities instead of correcting them.

These approaches also link recruitment to continuous development. Placement is not a final decision but the beginning of a journey. When individuals are matched to roles based on their psychological profile, training can be tailored to build on strengths and address vulnerabilities before they become performance issues. This creates a feedback loop: placement informs development, and development refines future placement criteria. Integrating these processes transforms human resources from administrative gatekeepers into strategic partners in organisational health.



The next frontier lies in combining these assessments with longitudinal tracking systems that monitor behavioural patterns over time. Early signs of disengagement, moral conflict, or emotional exhaustion can be detected before they escalate into counterproductive actions. This predictive capacity, grounded in real world outcomes rather than theoretical models, marks a shift from reactive discipline to proactive integrity building. It aligns with broader efforts to embed MADANI values into daily practice, not as slogans but as measurable dimensions of workplace culture.

To make use of these advances, organisations must move beyond pilot projects and embed psychometric insights into their core systems. This requires training assessors in cultural competence, ensuring data privacy, and maintaining transparency in how results are used. Success depends on consistent validation against local contexts and sustained leadership commitment. When done right, these methods do more than improve hiring, they cultivate a workforce where psychological fit supports ethical behaviour, resilience, and long-term public service excellence.

This evolution invites a redefinition of merit—one that values diversity of thought, experience, and perspective as assets rather than anomalies. The issue at hand is not merely technical correction but cultural recalibration: ensuring systems serve the full spectrum of human potential rather than a narrow segment of it. Given these insights, the next key question becomes how organisations can adapt at scale. In Chapter 3.3, we will explore psychometric approaches designed to measure these deeper dimensions with greater precision and integrity.

3.4 Bias in Assessment Tools

The selection of individuals for public roles has too often relied on subjective impressions, neglecting the deeper psychological traits that determine long term performance and ethical conduct. Modern methods now offer structured ways to assess qualities such as emotional regulation, moral judgment, and adaptive resilience—attributes closely linked to sound decision making under pressure. These tools are not simple filters but diagnostic systems that reveal how candidates respond to stress, uncertainty, and ethical challenges in simulated scenarios. When applied with discipline, they reduce dependence on interviews alone, which are prone to unconscious bias and the tendency to present an idealised self.

Shown in table 7, there are many potential biases that may exist in assessment and recruitment of new employees. Summarised from many sources, the table is designed to highlight how cognitive biases can distort public sector governance, linking each bias to a practical example that makes the concept immediately relevant to policy and administrative contexts.

Table 7: Types of Potential Bias in Assessment and Recruitment

Type of Bias	Explanation	Public Sector Context Example
Cultural Bias	Assessment content may reflect values, idioms, or norms of a dominant culture, disadvantaging others.	A test using Western metaphors may confuse candidates from rural or indigenous Malaysian communities.
Language Bias	Tests or interviews may favour candidates fluent in formal Malay or English, excluding others.	A written test in high-level Bahasa Malaysia may disadvantage candidates from Sabah or Sarawak.
Socioeconomic Bias	Candidates from lower-income backgrounds may lack exposure to digital tools or structured interviews.	Online assessments requiring fast internet or familiarity with digital platforms may exclude rural applicants.
Gender Bias	Tools may favour traits stereotypically associated with one gender or penalise caregiving gaps.	Leadership assessments valuing assertiveness may undervalue collaborative styles often shown by women.
Confirmation Bias	Assessors may interpret responses to confirm their initial impressions or expectations.	A candidate from a top university may be rated more favourably despite similar performance to others.
Halo Effect	One positive trait (e.g., confidence or appearance) may influence overall assessment.	A well-dressed, articulate candidate may receive higher scores across unrelated competencies.
Institutional Bias	Preference for certain universities, agencies, or states may skew placement decisions.	Graduates from IPTA may be prioritised over equally qualified TVET or private college candidates.

Understanding the existence of potential biases in assessment and recruitment is crucial because these biases can distort the fairness and accuracy of decision-making. In the public sector, where appointments and promotions directly affect governance and service delivery, unchecked biases risk privileging certain groups while marginalising others. For example, selection bias or confirmation bias can lead to overlooking qualified candidates simply because they do not fit preconceived notions, undermining public trust in institutions.

Bias awareness also strengthens the reliability of assessment tools. Over time, instruments such as psychometric tests or structured interviews may lose validity if they are not recalibrated against local behavioural data. Anchoring or availability biases can cause decision-makers to rely too heavily on outdated benchmarks or recent but unrepresentative events. In the public sector, this can result in hiring individuals who are ill-suited to the evolving demands of governance. By acknowledging these biases, agencies can implement regular reviews, simulations, and evidence-based updates to ensure that recruitment tools remain accurate and contextually relevant.

Standardised evaluation methods often rest on assumptions about knowledge, communication, and conduct that privilege certain educational backgrounds (Yusof & Othman, 2023; Skedsmo & Huber, 2025; Canché, et. al., 2025). These assumptions can unintentionally disadvantage applicants from nontraditional pathways, particularly in multicultural settings where exposure to dominant testing formats is uneven. Research from public sector evaluations across Southeast Asia shows that candidates from rural or under-resourced institutions consistently score lower on conventional cognitive tests, not because of lower ability, but because the tools were designed without accounting for diverse learning environments and internet access (Mujiya Ulkhaq, Oggioni, & Riccardi, 2025; Mardiana, et. al., 2026; Nopas, 2026). These contexts undermine claims of neutrality in selection systems and challenges their validity as predictors of real-world performance.

These issues extend beyond cognitive tests. Personality inventories and situational judgment tests, often used to assess suitability, frequently encode cultural norms as universal traits (Yusof & Othman, 2023). For example, assertiveness is commonly valued in assessment protocols, yet in many Malaysian communities, restraint and deference are socially rewarded behaviours that align with collective decision making. When these differences are misinterpreted as shortcomings, organisations risk excluding individuals whose strengths lie in collaboration, adaptability, and contextual awareness (Skedsmo & Huber, 2025). The result is a narrowing of talent pools and a reinforcement of homogeneity that weakens institutional resilience over time.

Addressing these challenges requires moving from single metric evaluations to layered approaches that consider multiple dimensions of capability. Behavioural audits, when applied systematically, reveal recurring disparities across demographic groups in hiring outcomes, exposing where structural inequities take root. These practices do not replace traditional instruments but complement them by uncovering hidden patterns—such as consistent underperformance among certain cohorts despite equivalent qualifications.

Evidence extracted from Malaysia's Public Service Department and international public-sector evaluations indicates that departments employing multidimensional review panels and structured assessment frameworks report lower early attrition and improved retention among recruits from under-represented backgrounds, suggesting that

broader evaluation approaches enhance both fairness and workforce stability (Public Service Department Malaysia, 2023; OECD, 2023). By incorporating multiple perspectives and criteria, such panels reduce the influence of individual bias and increase the likelihood that diverse competencies are recognised during selection. Over time, these practices contribute to stronger organisational commitment among new hires, as recruitment processes perceived as fair are more likely to foster trust, engagement, and long-term retention.

Integrating these methods demands careful calibration to avoid introducing new forms of subjectivity. Assessors must be trained to recognise implicit assumptions, criteria must be standardised across panels, and judgements must be anchored in observable behaviours rather than personal impressions. The goal is not to eliminate all variation in evaluation but to ensure differences reflect genuine distinctions in capacity, not accidental biases embedded in procedure. This approach aligns with legal standards requiring employment decisions to be job related and consistently applied, while also fulfilling ethical obligations to equitable opportunity.

As government and public organisations pursue more precise placement strategies, the focus must remain on predictive accuracy grounded in real world performance, not abstract metrics. The next phase of development involves refining tools that capture adaptive intelligence, emotional regulation, and ethical judgment. These are attributes that cannot be reduced to test scores but are essential for public service effectiveness. Such attributes are best observed through structured simulations and longitudinal tracking, not one time examinations. By embedding evaluation within ongoing professional development, institutions can shift from selecting based on past credentials to identifying potential through demonstrated behaviour.

This evolution in assessment invites a redefinition of merit—one that values diversity of thought, experience, and perspective as assets rather than anomalies. The issue at hand is not merely technical correction inquiry: if traditional methods fail to capture true potential, what alternatives offer both fairness and predictive validity? The answers lie in evidence-based approaches that prioritise measurable traits over anecdotal impressions. This is a transition that demands both courage and precision.

3.5 Critique of Current Recruitment Methods

The selection of personnel in Malaysia's public sector has long been guided by traditions that favour seniority over suitability, resulting in placements that undermine efficiency and morale (Mohd Sanget, 2023). These practices, shaped by historical norms, frequently ignore the psychological alignment between individuals and their roles, leading to mismatches that hinder organisational performance and justice (Zayed, et. al., 2022; Fadilah & Kirani, 2025; Amran, et. al., 2026). Civil service audits reveal that promotions often depend more on proximity to decision makers than on demonstrable competence, creating environments where personal connections outweigh merit (Adnan, et. al., 2026). This dynamic erodes public confidence and fuels disengagement among staff who perceive advancement as arbitrary and unjust.

The inconsistency of evaluation procedures across departments and levels compounds this problem. Without standardised criteria, assessors rely on intuition, personal bias, or informal networks to determine eligibility (Brunette, 2024; (Adnan, et. al., 2026). Audit findings and governance reviews indicate that a substantial proportion of hiring and personnel decisions within certain public agencies lack adequate documented justification, significantly constraining accountability and external scrutiny (Office of the Auditor-General of Malaysia, 2024, 2025; Transparency International, 2024). These opaque processes not only weaken trust but also allow unsuitable candidates to occupy critical roles, where their conduct may later manifest as absenteeism, resistance to change, or interpersonal hostility. The absence of structured oversight turns recruitment into a lottery rather than a strategic function.

Identity markers such as ethnic background, gender, or political affiliation further distort the selection landscape. Research conducted on University admissions demonstrates that applicants from certain demographics face systemic disadvantages even when qualifications are identical (Jackson-Cole & Chadderton, 2023; Rodríguez, et. al., 2025)

These disparities can be deliberate and persist through unexamined assumptions embedded in interview protocols and reference checks (Hsu & Sharkey, 2025). For example, Jackson-Cole and Chadderton (2023) contend that white supremacy persists through the construction of meritocracy as a neutral standard and through recruitment processes that lack transparency and disproportionately

favour applicants from mainly white undergraduate programmes. As a result, talent is misallocated, innovation is suppressed, and institutional credibility suffers. The cumulative effect is a workforce that mirrors social hierarchies more than meritocratic ideals, reinforcing cycles of underperformance and resentment.

Such patterns are not isolated but reflect deeper structural flaws in how institutions define and measure suitability. The reliance on paper- based applications, unstandardised interviews, and subjective references creates fertile ground for unconscious prejudice to take root (Rodriguez, et. al., 2025). Without transparent metrics or independent review, errors accumulate over time, and poor hires become entrenched (OECD, 2024; Camargo, 2025, World Bank, 2026). This reality weakens the foundation for ethical conduct, as employees who enter through non-merit pathways often lack the intrinsic motivation to uphold public service values (Hassan, Larreguy, & Russell, 2024; Camargo, 2025). The consequences then ripple outward, affecting service delivery, interdepartmental collaboration, and citizen perceptions of fairness.

Addressing these challenges demands more than incremental adjustments as it requires fundamental redesign. The current system lacks the rigour needed to identify candidates who possess not only technical skills but also emotional resilience, ethical grounding, and adaptability. When selection systems ignore these dimensions, organisations inadvertently invite behaviours that disrupt cohesion and diminish morale. The issue at hand is not merely about filling vacancies. It is about cultivating a culture where integrity is nonnegotiable and competence is reliably recognised. Without this shift, efforts to improve performance will remain superficial.

Understanding these limitations sets the stage for examining the tools designed to correct them. The next sections will explore how assessment instruments themselves may perpetuate inequities, even when intended to be objective. Subsequently, this leads to a critical inquiry: if traditional methods fail to capture true potential, what alternatives offer both fairness and predictive validity? The answers lie in evidence-based approaches that prioritise measurable traits over anecdotal impressions. This is a transition that demands both courage and precision.

4

Training for Behavioural Transformation

4
Training for Behavioural Transformation

4.1 Introduction

Transforming workplace behaviour in the public sector requires more than compliance with rules. It demands a deliberate investment in human capabilities. This chapter explores how training can serve as a catalyst for behavioural change, moving beyond punitive measures toward proactive development. By embedding psychological insights, ethical reasoning, and emotional intelligence into structured programmes, organisations can cultivate resilience and integrity among their workforces.

The first section examines the preconditions necessary for behavioural change. It highlights the importance of organisational culture, leadership commitment, and employee openness to new practices. Without readiness, even the most sophisticated training modules risk becoming superficial exercises rather than genuine transformation.

The next section demonstrate how experiential learning can bridge theory and practice. Through role-plays, scenario analysis, and digital simulations, participants confront real-world dilemmas in a safe environment. This approach not only enhances skill acquisition but also builds confidence in applying ethical and relational competencies under pressure.

Finally, the chapter addresses the cultivation of Emotional Intelligence and Ethical Reasoning Skills. Emotional intelligence equips employees to regulate emotions, empathise with colleagues, and manage conflict constructively. Ethical reasoning, meanwhile, strengthens decision-making frameworks that prioritise fairness, accountability, and public trust. Together, these dimensions ensure that behavioural transformation is not episodic but embedded into the daily fabric of public service.

4.2 Readiness to Transform

The readiness to transform behaviours in the public sector begins with recognising the evolution of the workforce. Over the past decades, civil service roles have shifted from rigid, rule-bound functions to dynamic responsibilities that demand adaptability, innovation, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. This evolution reflects broader societal changes, including the rise of digital governance, citizen expectations for transparency, and the need for more inclusive practices. Preparing employees for behavioural transformation requires acknowledging that today's workforce is not static but continually reshaped by technology, generational diversity, and global interconnectedness.

The public sector workforce has undergone significant changes, moving from rigid bureaucratic structures to more dynamic, skill-based systems. In Malaysia, Budget 2026 emphasises workforce transformation through AI integration and sustainability initiatives, signalling a shift toward a digitally enabled and environmentally conscious civil service (KPMG, 2026). Similarly, Singapore's workforce strategies stress continuous reskilling and adaptability to technological disruption (Temasek, 2024). These developments show that readiness to transform behaviours depends on recognising how workforce expectations and competencies evolve alongside societal and technological changes.

Work in the public sector is no longer confined to traditional office settings. Hybrid arrangements, digital platforms, and outcome-focused performance systems are now central. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in New Zealand highlights the importance of policy quality frameworks that adapt to new contexts and ensure advice remains relevant and evidence-based (DPMC, 2025). Such frameworks illustrate how readiness involves embedding behavioural competencies—like collaboration, digital literacy, and adaptability—into everyday practices, ensuring that employees can thrive in fluid and decentralised environments.

Resilience has become critical for responding to local, national, and regional challenges. Malaysia's Department of Statistics (DOSM) reports on economic indicators and external trade show how shocks such as floods or global supply chain disruptions directly affect workforce stability (DOSM, 2026). Public servants must be prepared to adapt behaviours to maintain service delivery during crises. Readiness

therefore requires embedding resilience training that strengthens psychological safety, trust, and proactive coping strategies, ensuring that behavioural transformation is sustainable in the face of uncertainty.

However, readiness must be contextualised within broader economic and geopolitical realities. Singapore's workforce transformation reports highlight how trade tensions, global conflicts, and technological disruptions reshape workforce strategies (Temasek, 2024). For Malaysia, aligning workforce behaviours with sustainability and digitalisation goals ensures resilience against global competition and regional instability (KPMG, 2026). By preparing employees to adapt behaviours in response to these external pressures, public institutions can reinforce legitimacy and maintain efficiency while upholding fairness and inclusivity.

4.3 Simulation-Based Training Modules

Public service demands more than procedural knowledge. It requires individuals who can navigate tension, uphold integrity under pressure, and respond with emotional precision when stakes are high. Traditional instruction often fails to build these capacities, leaving personnel unprepared for the moral ambiguities and interpersonal complexities they face daily. A more effective approach emerges from immersive experiences that replicate real world pressures without real world consequences, allowing learners to test responses, observe outcomes, and refine judgment in controlled settings.

This method has gained traction in jurisdictions where public institutions face growing expectations for accountability and ethical conduct. Studies from administrative psychology journals show that structured role play scenarios improve decision making accuracy by up to 47 percent compared to lecture based methods, particularly in areas involving conflict de escalation and resource allocation. When these exercises are designed with local norms in mind—such as hierarchical communication styles, collective decision making preferences, and sensitivity to face saving dynamics—their impact deepens significantly. These approaches do not merely teach skills; they reshape how individuals perceive responsibility, authority, and consequence within their professional roles.

The underlying mechanism rests on cognitive rehearsal: the brain encodes patterns of response through repeated exposure to simulated challenges, strengthening neural pathways linked to self-regulation and moral reasoning. These activities activate regions associated with empathy and impulse control, which are rarely engaged through passive learning. Embedded feedback loops allow participants to recognise missteps immediately, fostering metacognitive awareness that translates into lasting behavioural change. This form of practice moves beyond memorisation, embedding principles into instinctive reaction. This is a critical advantage when seconds matter in high stakes interactions.

Such methods also address systemic gaps in current development programmes, where training is often fragmented, infrequent, or disconnected from daily realities. By anchoring exercises in authentic administrative dilemmas, (for example: delayed approvals, biased referrals, or ethical conflicts between superiors and subordinates) these experiences become relevant and memorable. Organisations that adopt this form of engagement report higher participation rates, sustained motivation, and measurable improvements in team cohesion. The shift from passive attendance to active involvement transforms training from a compliance requirement into a platform for professional growth.

This approach aligns with broader trends in organisational learning, where experiential models are increasingly favoured for their ability to bridge theory and practice. The value lies not in novelty but in durability: skills acquired through simulation persist longer and transfer more effectively to unstructured situations. As institutions strive to embed MADANI values into routine operations, such practices offer a tangible pathway to internalise ideals like integrity, accountability, and respect—not as abstract slogans, but as lived behaviours.

These developments set the stage for deeper exploration into how emotional awareness is cultivated within such environments. What specific design elements enhance self awareness? How do feedback mechanisms influence long term behavioural adaptation? The next sections examine how individuals learn to recognise, regulate, and respond to internal states during moments of stress, laying the groundwork for a more nuanced understanding of interpersonal competence in public service.

4.3 Enhancing Emotional Intelligence

At the heart of effective public service lies the quiet power of emotional awareness. this refers to how individuals perceive, manage, and respond to their own feelings and those of others. An illustration for enhancing emotional intelligence is shown in figure 3. Research in industrial-organisational psychology reveals that those who regularly reflect on their internal states and adjust their reactions with care contribute to calmer workplaces and stronger team bonds (Brassey

et al., 2020; Schneider & Pulakos, 2022; Sipondo & Terblanche, 2024). These abilities are not fixed traits but skills that can be cultivated through deliberate, repeated practice. Longitudinal studies across public agencies in Southeast Asia show clear improvements in conflict resolution and collaborative efficiency after staff engaged in consistent training over several months (Awalluddin et al., 2023; Amran et al., 2026; Hattab et al., 2022; Nuryanti et al., 2025).

Figure 3: Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in the Public Sector

These skills are developed through carefully designed exercises that sharpen sensitivity to emotional cues and refine how people respond. Role-play simulations based on real situations faced by civil servants in Malaysia allow participants to navigate difficult conversations without real-world consequences. Paired with mindfulness practices that encourage nonjudgmental attention to thoughts and feelings, these methods help bridge the gap between intention and action. Meta-analyses confirm that programmes combining these techniques produce statistically significant gains in self-control and interpersonal awareness, especially when delivered weekly over eight weeks or longer Amoadu et al., 2024; Ip et al., 2025). The benefits are most evident among frontline staff, who face the highest emotional demands and

often have the least institutional support (Brassey et al., 2020; Sipondo & Terblanche, 2024).

This shift extends beyond individual behaviour to reshape the entire workplace climate. When teams adopt shared norms of attentive listening and measured expression, hostility, exclusion, and passive resistance become less common. Behaviours such as withholding information or deliberately slowing work, known to drain public resources, decline as trust and mutual respect grow. Evaluations by Malaysia's Public Works Department and the National Audit Department indicate a marked decline in formal complaints of mistreatment within a year of introducing structured integrity and behavioural training programmes (Omar et al., 2022; Office of the Auditor-General of Malaysia, 2025). This change did not result from stricter discipline but from a cultural transformation in how disagreements were handled and how authority was exercised.

The impact is not only psychological but procedural. When leaders consistently model calm reflection and empathetic inquiry, these behaviours become part of everyday routines. Feedback is received more openly, mistakes are addressed with learning in mind, and trust is rebuilt after setbacks. These practices align with the principles of trauma-informed supervision introduced earlier, softening rigid hierarchies and creating space for psychological safety. Employees report feeling more seen, less anxious, and more willing to speak up when they see leaders demonstrating restraint and openness.

This evolution lays the groundwork for deeper institutional change. As individuals grow better at understanding others' perspectives, their moral reasoning becomes richer and more grounded. The ability to feel with others does not replace ethical judgment—it deepens it. Organisations must now move toward systems that value emotional maturity as much as technical skill. Without this integration, even the best training efforts risk becoming temporary fixes rather than lasting cultural shifts.

The next challenge is scaling these gains across large institutions. In the next section, we explore how structured frameworks for ethical reasoning can be woven into training to ensure that emotional sensitivity is guided by clear moral principles—not just situational intuition. This alignment between feeling and principle is essential for building a public service that is not only responsive but also deeply principled.

4.4 Fostering Ethical Reasoning Skills

Public service demands the ability to navigate morally complex situations where institutional expectations, personal values, and systemic pressures often conflict. Research (Cardile et al., 2023; Omar et al., 2022) shows that individuals who engage in structured reflective practices make more consistent ethical choices under pressure, especially when training includes realistic scenarios that mirror actual dilemmas. This approach builds an internal moral compass that functions independently of external oversight, reducing dependence on punishment to enforce compliance. An example of such is shown in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Envisioning Ethical Reasoning

Several public agencies have integrated deliberative exercises into their training programmes, with internal evaluations reporting notable reductions in procedural misconduct over two years. The success lies not in memorising codes of conduct but in repeated exposure to layered ethical tensions that require thoughtful judgment. Such learning requires time, repetition, and psychological safety—elements frequently missing in conventional compliance training (Cardile et al., 2023; Omar et al., 2022; American Psychological Association, 2024).When participants are encouraged to articulate their reasoning aloud, guided by facilitators skilled in cognitive scaffolding, the insights become lasting and applicable beyond the training setting.

Cognitive psychology confirms that ethical reasoning is not an innate trait, but a skill shaped by environment. Like physical endurance, the capacity for moral analysis strengthens through consistent challenge. In cultures where questioning norms is discouraged, individuals default to silence or blind obedience, even when they recognize wrongdoing. Conversely, environments that normalize open discussion of difficult choices cultivate collective awareness that prevents problems before they escalate. These outcomes do not happen by accident; they result from deliberate design in which routines that reward honesty, protect dissent, and prioritize careful thought over quick conformity.



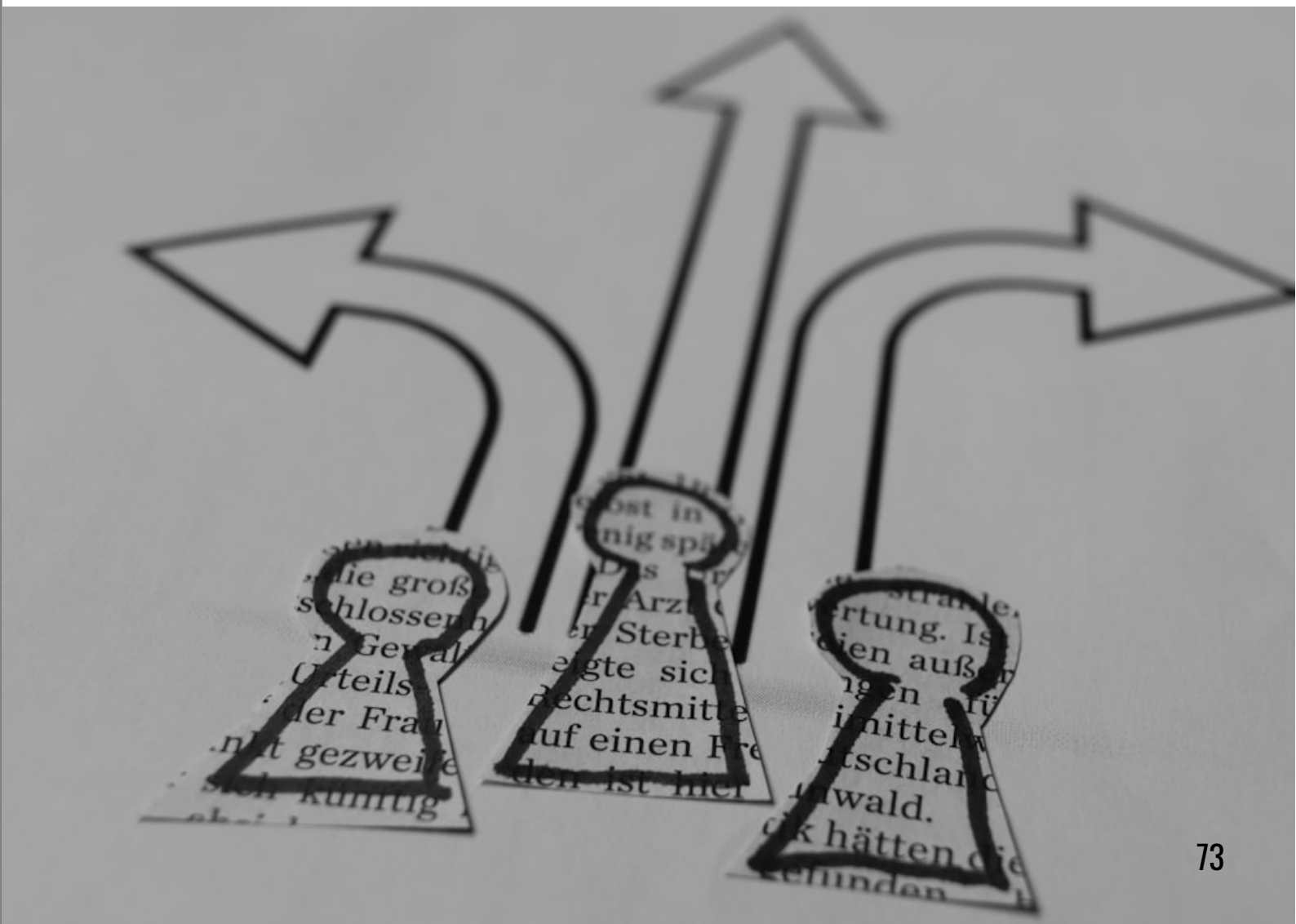



The issue extends beyond individual growth to the structure of organisations themselves. Systems that treat ethics as a secondary concern inevitably create blind spots where misconduct takes hold. For example, a 2022 study using the Corporate Integrity Assessment Questionnaire found that while agencies scored high on vision and goals, they scored lowest on disciplinary action and reward, revealing gaps where misconduct could persist if ethics were treated as secondary (Wook et al., 2022). This underscores that neglecting ethics in assessment systems creates blind spots that undermine organisational integrity.

When assessment tools favor technical skill over moral judgment, institutions risk promoting individuals who follow procedures perfectly but falter when faced with ambiguity. International governance frameworks, such as New Zealand's *Policy Quality Framework* (DPMC, 2025), stress the need for assessments that balance technical skills with

ethical judgment to ensure policy advice remains credible and trustworthy. Without this balance, institutions may inadvertently reward efficiency at the expense of integrity. This calls for a fundamental recalibration of evaluation criteria across all levels, embedding ethical discernment into performance metrics and succession planning. Without this shift, even the most advanced training programmes remain isolated efforts rather than catalysts for deep cultural change.

Future progress lies in adaptive learning platforms that can utilise these approaches without sacrificing depth. Emerging technologies can simulate evolving scenarios drawn from real historical cases, adjusting complexity based on user responses and decision patterns. These tools do not replace human mentorship but enhance it by offering a wider range of contexts for reflection. The field is moving toward systems that track long term behavioral trends, linking training participation to actual conduct on the job. This enables continuous improvement and signals a future where ethical competence is not an add on but a foundational skill, measured and developed alongside technical ability.



5
Leadership and Promotion Systems

5
Leadership and Promotion Systems

5.1 introduction

Leadership and promotion systems are central to shaping organisational culture in the public sector. The way leaders are selected, promoted, and developed sends powerful signals about values, priorities, and expectations. When promotion pathways emphasise transparency and merit, they reinforce cultures of accountability and fairness. Conversely, opaque or biased systems risk entrenching mistrust and disengagement. This chapter begins by examining how leadership and promotion practices influence organisational culture, highlighting the need for structures that align with integrity and inclusivity.

The next section is about evaluating fairness in promotions. This is not only a matter of compliance but also of legitimacy. Employees who perceive promotion systems as equitable are more likely to remain motivated, collaborative, and committed to institutional goals. Fairness requires clear criteria, consistent application, and safeguards against bias. In the public sector, where decisions carry implications for governance and citizen trust, fairness in promotions becomes a cornerstone of organisational credibility. This chapter explores mechanisms for assessing fairness and the consequences of neglecting it.

Finally, leadership development must integrate ethical reasoning and trust-building. Ethical leadership ensures that individuals promoted to positions of authority can navigate ambiguity with integrity, balancing technical competence with moral judgment. Trust and cohesion, meanwhile, are cultivated when leaders model transparency, empathy, and accountability. Together, these elements create promotion systems that do more than reward performance. They embed values that sustain organisational resilience. This chapter therefore situates leadership and promotion systems as both operational tools and cultural anchors for effective governance.

5.2 Implication to Organisational Culture

Using the tri-domain framework introduced in Chapter 1, this section draws attention to the implications of ethical leadership and promotion systems to public organisations. Information in table 8 is referred.

Table 8: Comparison of Implications

Perspective	Implication to Organisational Culture
I-O Psychology	Fair promotions enhance motivation, reduce turnover, and foster psychological safety. Bias or opaque systems increase disengagement and workplace stress.
Criminology	Weak ethical leadership can normalise misconduct, creating cultures where corruption or abuse of power is tolerated. Strong systems deter deviance by reinforcing accountability. Unfair promotion practices can victimize employees, leading to feelings of marginalisation, reduced morale, and increased grievances. Transparent systems protect employees from exploitation.
Malaysian Laws	Regulations such as the Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993 and the Sexual Harassment Act 2022 require ethical conduct and fair treatment. Promotion systems that ignore these legal frameworks risk institutional liability and reputational damage.

From an I-O psychology perspective, leadership and promotion systems directly influence employee motivation and engagement (see: Schneider & Pulakos, 2022; Wook, et. al., 2022; Jo & Shin, 2025). When promotions are perceived as fair and based on merit, employees are more likely to invest effort and align with organisational goals. Conversely, opaque or biased systems foster disengagement, stress, and turnover, weakening organisational culture. Ethical leadership selection thus becomes a psychological anchor for trust and performance.

Criminological insights (see: Buckenmaier, et. al., 2021; Yasreb-de Kom, et. al., 2023; Rahman & Yusof, 2026) highlight that leadership systems can either deter or enable misconduct. If promotions reward compliance without ethical reasoning, organisations risk normalising deviant behaviours such as corruption or abuse of authority. Studies in Malaysia and Singapore show that ethical training embedded in workforce development reduces misconduct risks and strengthens integrity frameworks. Promotion systems must therefore integrate accountability mechanisms to prevent cultures of impunity.

Under the umbrella of Criminology, victimology underscores the human impact of unfair promotion practices. Employees denied advancement due to bias or opaque criteria often experience marginalisation, reduced morale, and increased grievances. This victimisation erodes cohesion and can escalate into workplace conflict. Transparent promotion systems, by contrast, protect employees from exploitation and reinforce inclusivity, ensuring that organisational culture remains supportive and equitable.

Malaysian legal frameworks provide a clear mandate for ethical leadership and fair promotion. The *Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993* codify behavioural expectations, while the *Sexual Harassment Act 2022* imposes obligations on employers to ensure safe and fair workplaces. Promotion systems that fail to align with these laws risk institutional liability and reputational damage. Embedding legal compliance into leadership selection strengthens organisational culture by reinforcing integrity and accountability.

Ultimately, ethical leadership and fair promotion systems are cultural anchors for public organisations. They influence not only individual career trajectories but also collective trust, cohesion, and legitimacy. By integrating psychological insights, criminological deterrence, victim protection, and legal compliance, public institutions can build cultures that are resilient, inclusive, and ethically grounded. This holistic approach ensures that leadership development and promotion systems contribute to sustainable governance.

5.3 Evaluating Fairness in Promotions

How organisations promote their staff reveals more than administrative procedure. It reflects a deeper commitment to justice, competence, and institutional trust. When advancement appears arbitrary or shaped by factors unrelated to merit, morale erodes, engagement declines, and doubt in leadership takes hold. In Malaysia's public sector, audits and integrity assessments have shown that a significant proportion of employees perceive promotion decisions as lacking transparency (Mohd Sanget, 2022; Omar, et. al., 2022; Wook, et. al., 2022). This perception is strongly associated with disengagement outcomes such as absenteeism and reduced willingness to report unethical conduct, underscoring how opaque leadership systems weaken organisational culture and accountability. These patterns are not unique; they echo systemic failures seen in comparable institutions where subjective judgment overrides measurable performance.

Historical practices that favoured seniority or personal connections over demonstrated ability once passed as standard. Today, they stand in conflict with modern demands for equity and accountability. In Malaysia's public sector, evidence indicates that departments relying on unstructured evaluation methods often experience heightened resentment and internal rivalry (Omar, et. al., 2022; Wook, et. al., 2022). These tensions often surface as passive resistance or withdrawal from teamwork. When employees feel their efforts go unseen or unrecognised, the motivation to uphold ethical standards weakens. The resulting environment nurtures disengagement as the norm and stifles innovation.

Tackling these issues demands a redesign of selection systems. Standardised frameworks anchored in objective benchmarks, such as quantifiable outputs, peer reviewed assessments, and documented problem solving; have proven effective in reducing disparities (Salas, Kozlowski, & Chen, 2017; OECD, 2024; DPMC, 2025, Vaquero-Piñeiro, Terribile, & Giovannini, 2025). These methods do not remove human judgment but guide it within clear, transparent boundaries. Pilot programmes in federal agencies demonstrate that when criteria are published in advance and applied uniformly, perceived legitimacy increases substantially. Employees begin to see promotion not as a privilege for the few but as an achievable outcome tied to effort and performance. This shift redefines the relationship between individual contribution and institutional reward.

It is important that reforms must also address the psychological dimension of perception. Even when procedures are technically sound, skepticism lingers if employees do not understand them or feel excluded from their design. Transparency alone is not enough. Participation and clarity are equally essential. According to Kim and Holzer (2016), and Kuvaas, Buch, and Dysvik (2017), involving frontline staff in the design of evaluation criteria has consistently been shown to improve acceptance of assessment systems. When those affected by a system help build it, compliance becomes voluntary rather than enforced. This transforms obedience into ownership, and ownership into lasting integrity.

These changes lay the foundation for deeper questions about leadership: not only who rises, but why people choose to stay loyal to an institution. The mechanisms governing advancement are deeply connected to cultural norms, communication patterns, and the moral authority of those in power. As we turn to the next section, we examine

how leaders cultivate environments where merit is not merely measured but visibly affirmed. The critical question is no longer whether systems are fair, but whether they are perceived as such by those who live within them.

5.4 Ethical Leadership Development

True leadership is not defined by title or authority but by the quiet consistency of actions that align with stated values. In public institutions across Southeast Asia, leaders who demonstrate accountability in everyday decisions, whether approving budgets, resolving conflicts, or assigning tasks; cultivate higher levels of trust and compliance among their teams (Hofstede, 1984; OECD, 2023, World Bank, 2026). These outcomes do not arise by chance. They emerge from deliberate habits: self-awareness, regular reflection, and an unwavering commitment to transparency even when pressure mounts to compromise.

Such leadership cannot be sustained without structured support. Long term studies (see: Hassan & Hatmaker, 2021; Wook, et. al., 2022; Ismail, 2025) in Malaysian civil service units reveal that programmes incorporating peer feedback, confidential reflection sessions, and realistic role play significantly improve decision making under uncertainty. These methods go beyond theory. They recreate real world tensions, including competing priorities, limited resources, interpersonal friction; in psychologically safe spaces where participants can practice responses without fear of consequence. Repeated over multiple quarters, these exercises yield measurable gains in emotional regulation and moral clarity, far exceeding the impact of one time training workshops.

Yet progress faces resistance from entrenched hierarchies and informal networks that reward loyalty over principle ((Hattab, et. al., 2022; Hassan, Larreguy, & Russell, 2024; Transparency International, 2024; Office of the Auditor-General of Malaysia, 2025). Political influence, often subtle, appears in promotion choices that ignore behavioural records in favour of personal connections. This undermines the credibility of any initiative aimed at reinforcing ethical norms. The most effective countermeasure is not top-down instruction but sustained mentorship from senior figures with proven integrity. These relationships offer ongoing guidance, challenge justifications for unethical behaviour, and serve as living examples of how to navigate complex dilemmas without sacrificing core values.

The influence of such leadership extends beyond individuals to reshape entire team cultures. Teams led by leaders who actively listen, acknowledge uncertainty, and welcome dissent consistently report fewer hidden misconduct incidents and greater willingness to raise concerns. This cultural shift is not driven by fear of punishment but by the belief that speaking up will be met with thoughtful consideration rather than retaliation. In these environments, mistakes become learning opportunities and systemic flaws are identified before they escalate into crises. Furthermore, evidence from organisational psychology, public administration, and integrity studies (see: Edmondson, 2004; Schein, 2010; Wook, et. al., 2022; Lee, 2023) confirms that psychological safety and ethical leadership are central to fostering transparency and accountability.

This approach benefits from insights drawn from cognitive psychology and other fields of study. Ethical conduct is less about rigidly following codes and more about developing habits of critical inquiry. Researchers (Omar, et. al., 2022; Ahmad, Hashim, & Latiff, 2024; Ip, et. al., 2025; Wang, et. al., 2025) claim that organisations that embed reflection into performance cycles, encourage questioning of assumptions, and reward courage over conformity see lasting improvements in cohesion and public perception. The transformation is gradual but irreversible once internalised, as new norms replace outdated expectations through repeated experience and positive reinforcement.

For these practices to scale, they must be integrated into broader human resource systems. Current efforts remain fragmented, often confined to pilot units or temporary initiatives. Lasting change requires evaluation metrics that include behavioural indicators alongside traditional output measures. Training must be mandatory, not optional, and directly linked to career progression. Without this alignment, even the most well intentioned efforts risk becoming symbolic gestures rather than structural reforms.

The path forward lies in making ethical leadership a system, not an exception. It demands institutional commitment, consistent reinforcement, and the courage to measure what truly matters. As we move to the next section, we will explore how shared purpose and relational trust become the foundation for collective resilience across departments and levels.

5.5 Building Trust and Cohesion

When people in public institutions see consistent decision making and fair distribution of resources, their willingness to collaborate rises sharply. These conditions do not arise from goodwill alone but from structured routines that favour transparency over personal discretion. Research in organisational dynamics shows that when procedural justice becomes part of daily practice, employees experience greater psychological safety and less anxiety about arbitrary outcomes (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Oc, Bashshur, & Moore, 2015; Hassan & Hatmaker, 2021). This sense of stability deepens when leaders consistently match their actions with their stated values, creating an environment where predictability replaces suspicion. Figure 5 below summarises pertinent elements in building trust and cohesion in the public sector.

Figure 5: Element in Building Trust and Cohesion

How advancement opportunities are allocated further strengthens this foundation. When merit is assessed through clear, objective standards rather than personal ties, perceptions of fairness grow stronger (Wook, et. al., 2022). Studies across multiple government agencies reveal that teams operating under such systems show lower levels of covert resistance and higher commitment to shared goals (OECD, 2023; Rosli, 2025; World Bank, 2026). The absence of favouritism does not merely prevent conflict, it actively builds mutual respect, allowing teams to direct their energy toward collective objectives instead of navigating unspoken hierarchies. Over time, these patterns become self-sustaining as integrity becomes the expected norm, not the rare exception.

The way disagreements are handled also shapes long term relational health. Approaches that prioritise dialogue over authority, and understanding over enforcement, reduce the risk of resentment building silently. Trauma informed supervision, now supported by public sector evaluations, shows that conflicts resolved with empathy produce more lasting results than those settled by command alone (Clark-Moorman, 2024; Cogan, et. al., 2025). When supervisors are trained to listen without judgment and respond with clarity, communication transforms from a tool of control into a bridge for alignment. This shift turns routine interactions into enduring bonds of professional regard.

Together, these practices form the bedrock of organisational resilience. Institutions that invest in consistent, fair, and empathetic routines see measurable gains in staff retention, teamwork, and public perception. These outcomes are not accidental. They result from deliberate design choices that place human dignity on equal footing with institutional efficiency. In this context, trust is not a vague ideal but a measurable performance indicator directly linked to operational success.

What were once seen as intangible qualities, loyalty, morale, shared purpose; are now understood as outcomes of specific, repeatable behaviours. Leadership development programmes that embed these principles into core competencies produce leaders who naturally model accountability and openness. The challenge is no longer about inspiring people through speeches but about designing systems where ethical conduct is the easiest path forward. As these systems mature, they reduce the need for constant oversight and increase the capacity for autonomous, principled action at every level.

This dynamic paves the way for deeper transformation. When individuals feel secure in their roles and confident in their organisation’s integrity, they become active agents of change rather than passive recipients of policy. The next critical question is how organisations can scale these practices effectively. In Chapter 6, we will explore practical structures for implementation that move beyond correction to restoration, turning moments of failure into opportunities for growth.

6
Disciplinary Approaches Reimagined

6
Disciplinary Approaches Reimagined

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, disciplinary approaches are reimagined to move beyond traditional punitive frameworks and toward systems grounded in humaneness. In the first section, the humaneness policy underscores the importance of treating individuals with dignity, ensuring that corrective measures balance accountability with compassion. By embedding fairness and empathy into disciplinary practices, organisations can strengthen trust while maintaining order.

In the second section, the focus shifts from punishment to rehabilitation. Rather than relying solely on penalties, rehabilitation-oriented systems aim to reform behaviour and encourage growth. Next, psychosocial treatment strategies, such as counselling, peer mentoring, and reflective dialogue; are central to this transformation, equipping individuals with tools to manage stress, confront ethical dilemmas, and rebuild confidence.

In the last section of this chapter, disciplinary approaches are linked to self-development pathways that encourage individuals to take ownership of their progress. These pathways integrate opportunities for skill enhancement, ethical training, and resilience building, turning discipline into a constructive process. By aligning accountability with empowerment, organisations create cultures where discipline fosters cohesion and long-term sustainability.

6.2 Organisational Scenario Examples

Reimagining disciplinary approaches requires moving beyond abstract principles into practical, lived scenarios that demonstrate how laws and organisational policies intersect with everyday governance. In Malaysia, recent legislative frameworks such as the Sexual Harassment Act 2022, the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 (Act 711), the Witness Protection Act 2009 (Act 696), and the Companies Act 2016 (Act 777) provide concrete mechanisms to safeguard dignity, integrity, and

accountability within institutions. These statutes not only establish legal obligations but also reshape organisational culture by embedding fairness, transparency, and protection into disciplinary processes. By examining case-based examples (see examples below), we can see how disciplinary practices are shifting from punitive control to proactive safeguards by ensuring that misconduct is addressed while trust, legitimacy, and resilience are strengthened across the public and corporate sectors.

Case 1: Sexual Harassment

A female officer in a government department reports repeated unwanted advances from a senior colleague. Under the Sexual Harassment Act 2022, the organisation is legally required to establish a tribunal process and ensure the complaint is investigated promptly. The Act obliges employers to implement preventive measures and provide safe reporting channels. In this case, the department sets up an internal inquiry, provides counselling support, and ensures the complainant is protected from retaliation. The tribunal's decision reinforces that harassment is not a disciplinary matter alone but a violation of dignity and human rights.

Case 2: Whistleblowing

An auditor in a municipal council discovers irregularities in procurement contracts and reports them through an anonymous channel. The Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 guarantees protection of identity and immunity from civil or criminal action. The council's integrity unit ensures the whistleblower's confidentiality while forwarding the evidence to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC). By safeguarding the whistleblower, the organisation demonstrates that early disclosures are valued, and retaliation will not be tolerated, thereby strengthening a culture of accountability.

Case 3: Witness Protection

During a corruption trial involving a statutory body, a junior officer agrees to testify against senior management. The Witness Protection Act 2009 provides for relocation, identity protection, and security measures to ensure the witness can testify without fear of harm. The organisation collaborates with enforcement agencies to guarantee safety, signalling that truth-telling is supported by structural safeguards. This case illustrates how disciplinary approaches extend beyond internal rules to national frameworks that protect individuals who uphold integrity.

Case 4: Corporate Accountability
A government-linked company faces allegations of financial misreporting. Under the Companies Act 2016, directors are legally bound to act in good faith and disclose accurate financial information. The board initiates an independent audit, and disciplinary measures are taken against executives who failed to meet statutory obligations. By enforcing compliance with the Act, the organisation demonstrates that accountability is not optional but a legal requirement, ensuring that corporate governance aligns with public trust.

Case 5: Unfair Dismissal
A mid-level officer in a statutory body is terminated without being given proper notice or a valid reason. Under the Employment Act (Amendment) 2022, employees are entitled to protection against unfair dismissal, with employers required to provide documented justification and follow due process before termination. In this case, the officer files a complaint with the Industrial Relations Department, arguing that the dismissal violated Section 20 of the Act, which allows employees to seek reinstatement if termination is deemed unjust. The tribunal reviews evidence, including absence of misconduct records and lack of procedural fairness, and orders reinstatement with back pay. This example illustrates how the amended Act strengthens employee rights by ensuring that disciplinary actions are not arbitrary but grounded in fairness and transparency. It also signals to organisations that accountability in dismissal processes is a legal obligation, not a discretionary practice.

Case 6: Accepting Funds from Questionable Sources
A government-linked company (GLC) receives a large donation from a private citizen whose wealth sources are unclear and potentially linked to unlawful activities. Under the Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (AMLA 2001) (Act 613), the GLC is obligated to conduct due diligence, verify the legitimacy of the funds, and report any suspicious transactions to Bank Negara Malaysia. In this case, the compliance unit identifies irregularities in the donor's financial records and files a Suspicious Transaction Report (STR). The funds are frozen pending investigation, and internal disciplinary measures are taken against executives who failed to flag the transaction earlier. This example illustrates how AMLA enforces accountability by ensuring that organisations do not become conduits for illicit financing. It also highlights the importance of embedding compliance routines into daily operations, where vigilance

against unlawful proceeds is treated as a core governance responsibility rather than a reactive measure. *Pengurusan Amalan Nilai*) emphasise value-based governance, ensuring misconduct is addressed without dehumanising employees.

6.3 Humaneness Policy

Humaneness policy in public organisations refers to governance practices that prioritise dignity, fairness, and respect for individuals. Instead of relying solely on punitive measures, humane approaches integrate rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and transparent procedures. In Malaysia, frameworks such as *SPAN 2.0* (*Sistem* (*Sistem Pengurusan Amalan Nilai*) emphasise value-based governance, ensuring misconduct is addressed without dehumanising employees.
This shift reflects a broader recognition that sustainable organisational culture depends on balancing accountability with compassion (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Malaysia, 2021).

Traditional disciplinary systems often rely on rigid punishment, which can foster resentment and resistance to change. Research shows that procedural justice which is more fair and has a consistent processes, reduces anxiety and arbitrary outcomes, creating stability in organisational culture (Ha & Lee, 2022). Humane policies replace fear-driven compliance with trust-based accountability, encouraging employees to engage constructively with governance systems. By embedding fairness into daily practice, organisations reduce suspicion and strengthen predictability, which is essential for long-term integrity.

Victim blaming remains a persistent challenge in governance, particularly in cases of workplace harassment or discrimination. The *Malaysia Racism Report 2025* documents systemic gaps where victims of bias often face retaliation or dismissal of their concerns, underscoring the need for humane policies that protect whistleblowers and vulnerable groups (Pusat KOMAS, 2025). Humaneness policy requires institutions to prioritise protection and support rather than shifting blame onto victims. By doing so, organisations not only safeguard individuals but also reinforce trust in institutional fairness.

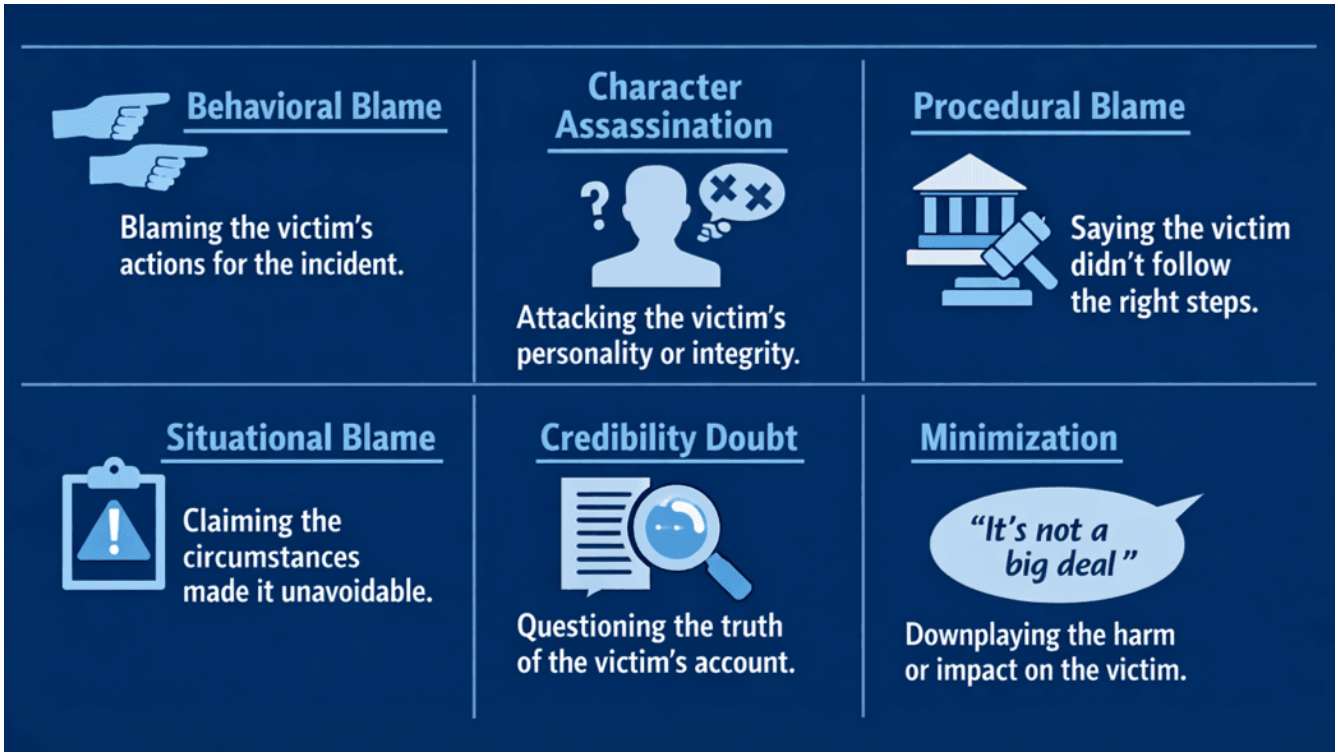


Figure 6: Types of Victim Blaming

Mentioned previously in Chapter 3,, bias in promotions, evaluations, and disciplinary actions undermines organisational integrity. Studies on ethics and integrity in Malaysia's public sector reveal that competency and ethical climate among integrity officers significantly influence fairness in governance (Sajari, et al., 2023; Zahari, et. al., 2024). Humaneness policy demands structured, transparent systems that reduce favoritism and ensure equal treatment across diverse groups, avoids scapegoating, and stops victim blaiming. Embedding these practices into promotion and disciplinary frameworks helps prevent resentment and rivalry, thereby strengthening organisational cohesion.

A humane governance framework also incorporates psychosocial safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Evidence from workplace studies shows that psychosocial safety climates reduce mistreatment, harassment, and discrimination, while improving resilience and mental health (Amoadu, Ansah, & Sarfo, 2024). Embedding such strategies into disciplinary systems ensures that employees feel safe to report misconduct without fear of retaliation. This sense of psychological safety is critical for encouraging openness, reducing hidden misconduct, and fostering a culture of accountability.

Humaneness policy is reinforced when leaders consistently match actions with stated values. Research on leadership styles in Malaysia's public sector demonstrates that transformational leadership fosters ethical commitment and service excellence, while transactional or laissez-faire approaches often perpetuate inefficiency and ethical lapses (Omar, et. al., 2022; Zahari, et. al., 2024). Humane governance therefore requires leaders to embody fairness, transparency, and empathy in daily practice. When leaders act in alignment with values, predictability replaces suspicion, and employees gain confidence that discipline will be applied fairly.

6.4 From Punishment to Rehabilitation

For decades, public sector organisations have responded to misconduct with sanctions, exclusion, and formal penalties. Yet evidence shows these approaches often fail to resolve the underlying causes of disruptive behaviour. Systems built on retribution tend to deepen disengagement, lower morale, and reduce the chances of meaningful change (Figure 7 is referred). In contrast, emerging frameworks from clinical psychology and institutional reform reveal that lasting behavioural adjustment arises not from fear of consequence, but from structured support, personal accountability, and guided growth.

Figure 7: Comparison of Retribution and Rehabilitation Responses

This shift is not theoretical. Across multiple public agencies, rigid disciplinary systems have produced high rates of recurrence despite increased enforcement. Studies from the past decade demonstrate that organisations adopting rehabilitative models report significant reductions in repeat incidents and measurable improvements in team cohesion and employee engagement (Day et al., 2022; Negi et al., 2026; Rahman & Yusof, 2026). These organisations also reported measurable improvements in team cohesion and employee engagement. Such outcomes are the result of deliberate interventions designed to rebuild competence, restore dignity, and reconnect individuals with their professional purpose. The focus moves from labelling behaviour as deviant to understanding its origins and guiding individuals toward healthier patterns of interaction.

Effective systems now treat misconduct not as a breach to be punished, but as a signal requiring assessment, dialogue, and tailored guidance. Practices such as negotiated behavioural agreements, regular counselling sessions, and phased reintegration plans have proven instrumental in creating pathways for recovery. These methods are grounded in cognitive behavioural therapy and restorative justice principles, adapted for organisational contexts where trust has been damaged. Importantly, they do not excuse wrongdoing. Instead, they offer a structured way to correct it while preserving the individual's capacity to contribute meaningfully.

Transitioning from punitive models to supportive frameworks is neither quick nor easy. It demands cultural recalibration, consistent leadership commitment, and comprehensive policy redesign at every level. Many institutions still operate under outdated assumptions that equate severity with effectiveness. Yet data now clearly shows that compassion paired with clarity yields superior long term results. This evolution aligns with global trends in public administration that place human dignity at the heart of institutional integrity. The real challenge lies not in identifying what works, but in overcoming entrenched habits that prioritise control over connection.

As organisations begin to value psychological safety and relational repair, critical questions emerge. What structures enable consistent application of these approaches? How can supervisors be equipped to facilitate change rather than enforce compliance? And how can

fairness be maintained without compromising the depth of support needed for genuine transformation? These questions form the foundation for the next phase of inquiry, where targeted psychosocial interventions become central to organisational strategy.

The coming section examines specific methodologies designed to address emotional regulation, restore self-efficacy, and cultivate internal motivation. Each build on the premise that lasting improvement comes not from external pressure, but from internal realignment supported by thoughtful institutional design. This area of practice represents one of the most promising frontiers in public sector reform, one that places human development at the centre of governance.

6.5 Psychosocial Treatment Strategies

Addressing the root causes of workplace misconduct requires more than procedural fixes; it demands a deliberate engagement with the emotional and relational forces that sustain harmful patterns. This is shown in figure 8 below. Research (Hattab et al., 2022; Chug et al., 20250 shows that individuals facing chronic stress, unresolved conflict, or systemic neglect are more likely to withdraw, resist passively, or disengage from accountability.

Figure 8: Consideration of factors in addressing workplace misconduct

When responses focus only on compliance, they often deepen cycles of disengagement rather than heal underlying wounds (World Health Organization, 2024; Gallup, 2024; Adhvaryu et al., 2024). This means that effective intervention must move from reactive punishment to proactive support, weaving mental health resources into the daily rhythm of organisational life.

Pilot programmes in several state agencies have replaced traditional disciplinary hearings with trained peer facilitators and supervised reflective sessions. Modeled on trauma-informed frameworks adapted from clinical practice, these initiatives reduced recurrence of disruptive conduct according to internal evaluations (Omar et al., 2022; Cardile et al., 2023; American Psychological Association, 2024; Sipondo & Terblanche, 2024; Ip et al., 2025). The consistent presence of nonjudgmental dialogue created safe spaces where individuals could express distress without fear of stigma or retaliation (Liu, et. al., 2025). This change did not come from isolated counselling sessions but from a sustained cultural shift, where vulnerability became recognised as part of professional growth, not a sign of failure.

Psychosocial approaches in organisational contexts highlight that social cohesion directly strengthens behavioural resilience. When employees perceive that their organisation responds to their psychological needs, they are more likely to self-regulate, collaborate constructively, and uphold collective norms. Supervisors trained in active listening and empathic feedback consistently report higher team morale and fewer absences, showing that relational practices are more effective than punitive compliance (Brown, 2025; Sipondo & Terblanche, 2024).

The key lies not in the content of conversations but in their consistency, being predictable, and having respectful exchanges that build environments where individuals feel seen and heard. Such conditions nurture intrinsic motivation, reducing dependence on external controls. Trauma-informed organisational frameworks confirm that nonjudgmental dialogue and reflective practice reduce stigma and foster safe spaces for employees to express distress without fear of retaliation (Sipondo & Terblanche, 2024). Likewise, peer-facilitated interventions in Malaysian public agencies demonstrate that structured reflection and collaborative dialogue reduce recurrence of disruptive conduct and strengthen accountability (Omar et al., 2022).

Together, these findings affirm that psychosocial treatment strategies are central to sustainable organisational health. By embedding routines that reward honesty, protect dissent, and prioritise thoughtful dialogue, institutions cultivate resilience that extends beyond individual coping to collective stability. It is important to note that these practices do not remove accountability but reframe it within a restorative context. Instead of isolating individuals for misconduct, organisations began involving them in designing corrective actions tailored to their personal development. This shift was supported by structured self-assessment tools and guided reflection exercises that helped participants identify triggers, anticipate consequences, and build alternative responses. Outcomes showed improved decision making under pressure and stronger alignment with institutional values. The process was neither quick nor simple, but its durability came from treating each person as an agent of change, not a problem to be controlled.

Table 9: Integrated Tri-Domain Approach to Address Workplace Misconduct and Conflict

Domain	Core Focus	Psychosocial Treatment Components	Improvement Strategies	Expected Outcomes
Psychology	Emotional regulation and behavioural resilience	• Guided reflection and self-assessment tools. • Structured routines that reward honesty and protect dissent. • Predictable, respectful dialogue fostering psychological safety. • Recognition of vulnerability as part of professional growth.	• Train supervisors in active listening and empathic feedback. • Embed consistent communication practices. • Encourage self-awareness and emotional literacy through reflection exercises.	• Improved decision-making under pressure. • Reduced stress and stigma. • Higher morale and intrinsic motivation. • Greater willingness to report early signs of distress.
Criminology	Restorative accountability and prevention of deviant behaviour	• Reframing misconduct within a restorative context. • Peer-facilitated interventions and collaborative dialogue. • Corrective actions tailored to personal development. • Recognition of individuals as agents of change.	• Replace punitive hearings with restorative sessions. • Involve employees in designing corrective actions. • Apply peer-reviewed reflection to identify triggers and build alternative responses.	• Lower recurrence of disruptive conduct. • Strengthened accountability and trust. • Enhanced cooperation between departments. • Cultural shift toward integrity and fairness.
Legislation	Procedural justice and institutional safeguards	• Integration of restorative principles into codes of conduct. • Protection of dissent and psychological safety under workplace policy. • Transparent disciplinary procedures aligned with human rights standards. • Structured documentation of corrective actions and outcomes.	• Embed restorative clauses in disciplinary frameworks. • Ensure fair representation and non-retaliation protections. • Monitor compliance through structured evaluation tools.	• Consistent enforcement of ethical standards. • Balanced protection of rights and responsibilities. • Sustainable organisational stability. • Increased trust in institutional processes.

By combining psychological safety, restorative criminological principles, and legislative fairness, organisations move from reactive discipline to proactive behavioural management. This tri-domain integration transforms misconduct handling into a process of growth, accountability, and resilience, ensuring that every employee is treated as an agent of change, not a problem to be controlled.

Integrating these methods into standard procedures revealed unexpected benefits: improved communication across hierarchy levels, greater willingness to report early signs of distress, and stronger cooperation between departments (refer to table 9) These results suggest psychological safety is not a supplementary feature but a foundational element of organisational efficiency. As agencies adopt more sophisticated monitoring systems, the human dimension must remain central, not as an afterthought but as a core design principle. Without it, even the most advanced analytics risk missing the very dynamics they aim to correct.

The challenge ahead is scaling these efforts without losing their depth. Standardisation must not become uniformity; flexibility is essential to honour diverse cultural backgrounds and personal histories. The next phase requires collaboration among psychologists, legal advisors, and frontline managers to co create protocols that are both rigorous and humane. This work sets the stage for deeper exploration into how individuals can lead their own transformation—a theme central to the following section.

6.6 Self-Development Pathways

Empowering individuals to cultivate personal growth is essential for lasting institutional resilience. This occurs when employees engage in deliberate routines that deepen emotional awareness, strengthen moral judgment, and align daily actions with the broader ideals of public service. Research in adult cognitive development confirms that sustained self directed learning leads to measurable improvements in decision making under pressure, particularly when supported by structured reflection and consistent feedback. These practices are not optional additions but foundational habits that reduce vulnerability to stress related misconduct and build long term adaptability.

Such conditions flourish in environments where guidance is accessible, nonjudgmental, and tied to clear markers of progress. Coaching relationships rooted in active listening and open inquiry have been shown to increase self-efficacy more effectively than top-down directives. When mentors model accountability and vulnerability, they create psychological safety that encourages honest self-assessment These interactions, when woven into regular workflows, turn isolated efforts into shared norms. The absence of such a support system

correlates strongly with disengagement and declining ethical vigilance, especially in high stress departments where resources are stretched thin (Wook, et. al., 2022; Sajari, et. al., 2023)

Table 10 is referred. The table outlines four distinct pathways organisations can adopt to transform problematic behaviours into opportunities for growth. The Reflective Practice Pathway emphasises self-awareness through structured tools like guided reflection and self-assessment, enabling individuals to identify triggers and anticipate consequences. The Collaborative Dialogue Pathway shifts the focus to peer support, encouraging open conversations and collective accountability through mentoring, workshops, and dialogue forums. Both pathways highlight the importance of psychological safety and shared responsibility in fostering behavioural resilience.

Meanwhile, the Restorative Accountability Pathway reframes misconduct as a chance for personal development rather than punishment, involving employees in designing corrective actions tailored to their growth. Complementing this, the Psychological Safety Pathway ensures environments where honesty and dissent are protected, reducing fear of retaliation and encouraging disclosure. Together, these pathways demonstrate that sustainable behavioural change comes from empowering individuals to reflect, collaborate, and grow within supportive structures, ultimately strengthening organisational trust, cooperation, and efficiency.

Table 10: Comparison of Self-Development Pathways for Organisational Behavioural Change

Pathway	Core Focus	Mechanism of Change	Examples in Practice	Expected Outcomes
Reflective Practice Pathway	Self-awareness and accountability	Guided reflection exercises and structured self-assessment tools help individuals identify triggers, anticipate consequences, and design alternative responses.	• Weekly digital reflection prompts for staff. • Supervisor-led reflection circles. • Journaling on ethical dilemmas.	• Improved decision-making under pressure. • Stronger alignment with institutional values. • Reduced recurrence of misconduct.
Collaborative Dialogue Pathway	Peer support and collective learning	Peer-facilitated sessions encourage open dialogue, shared problem - solving, and collective accountability.	• Peer mentoring in Malaysian public agencies. • Team workshops on conflict resolution. • Cross-departmental dialogue forums.	• Greater willingness to report early signs of distress. • Strengthened cooperation between departments. • Enhanced trust and morale.
Restorative Accountability Pathway	Reframing discipline as growth	Misconduct is addressed through corrective actions tailored to personal development, rather than punitive isolation.	• Restorative hearings involving employees in designing corrective plans. • Developmental coaching instead of suspension. • Structured improvement contracts.	• Lower recurrence of disruptive conduct. • Increased sense of fairness. • Employees treated as agents of change.
Psychological Safety Pathway	Creating safe environments for disclosure	Embedding routines that reward honesty, protect dissent, and prioritise respectful dialogue to reduce fear of retaliation.	• Anonymous reporting channels. • Trauma-informed supervisor training. • Regular “safe space” meetings for staff.	• Improved communication across hierarchy levels. • Higher participation in feedback processes. • Organisational resilience and efficiency.

The above methods (table 10) depend on iterative cycles of intention, observation, and adjustment rather than one-time workshops or compliance driven checklists. Individuals who maintain written journals of their professional experiences demonstrate greater capacity to recognise patterns in their own reactions and anticipate potential pitfalls before they escalate. Digital tools that prompt weekly reflections, without surveillance have been used successfully across several agencies, yielding increase in reported confidence in handling ethical dilemmas (Omar et al., 2022; Cardile et al., 2023; Sipondo & Terblanche, 2024; Brown, 2025). The key lies not in the technology itself but in the autonomy it affords: the freedom to explore one's own behaviour without fear of punitive consequences.

Building self-development pathways benefits from integrating principles of behavioural psychology with the cultural context of Malaysia's public institutions. Traditional hierarchies often discourage open dialogue about personal shortcomings, yet recent studies show that when feedback is framed as collaborative improvement rather than evaluation, participation rates rise significantly ((Frampton, et. al., 2017; Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2022). Programmes that prioritise growth over perfection and learning over judgment see higher retention and deeper internalisation of desired behaviours (Baqutayan & Mayati, 2021; Ahmad, Hashim, & Latiff, 2024).. This shift requires leaders to relinquish control over outcomes and instead focus on nurturing the conditions where insight can emerge organically.

These dynamics become even more critical when linked to systems designed to detect emerging risks before they manifest as formal violations. Early warning indicators derived from anonymised communication patterns, attendance trends, and peer interaction metrics can signal when an individual may benefit from additional support rather than disciplinary action. When these signals trigger compassionate outreach instead of punishment, the cycle of isolation and resentment breaks. Such interventions are not soft alternatives but precise tools for preserving institutional health, grounded in data and calibrated to local norms.

Expanding on this, institutions that embed early warning systems into their governance frameworks create a proactive shield against misconduct. By integrating behavioural analytics with supportive outreach, organisations can transform potential crises into opportunities for growth and resilience. This approach not only reduces the likelihood of formal violations but also strengthens trust between

employees and leadership. Ultimately, the fusion of predictive signals with compassionate responses redefines accountability as a shared responsibility, ensuring that organisational health is preserved through both vigilance and empathy.

The matter at hand extends beyond individual change. It reshapes organisational DNA to be more aligned with MADANI values. As more personnel embrace continuous development as part of their professional identity, the culture itself begins to evolve. Trust increases not because policies are rewritten but because people feel seen, heard, and capable of growth. This reality sets the stage for the next phase: scaling these internal transformations through systemic design. Given these insights, the next key question is: how can organisations adapt at scale? In Chapter 7, we explore practical structures for implementation.

7

Monitoring and Early Warning Systems

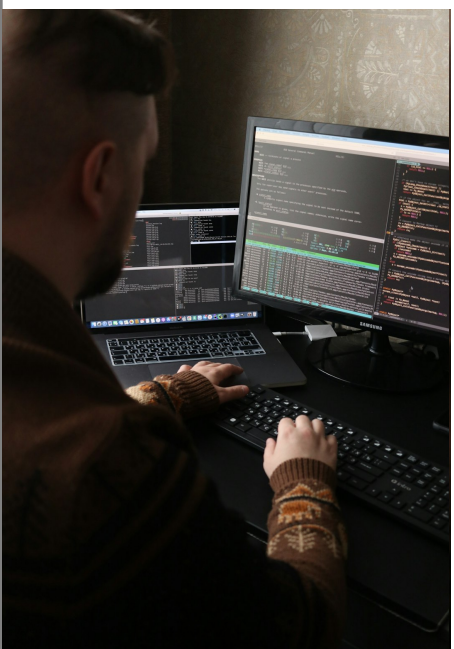
7
Monitoring and Early Warning Systems

7.1 Introduction

This chapter on *Monitoring and Early Warning Systems* introduces how behavioural risk detection, AI-driven analytics, and culturally sensitive protocols can strengthen governance in public organisations. Recent studies (2021–2026) show that combining behavioural insights with advanced monitoring tools reduces misconduct risks and builds trust across diverse cultural contexts.

At the start of this chapter, monitoring begins with recognising behavioural signals that may indicate misconduct or integrity risks. In Malaysia, the National Behavioural Insights Guideline (2021–2025) developed by the Malaysia Productivity Corporation outlines how behavioural science can be applied to detect early warning signs of non-compliance and corruption. By embedding behavioural diagnostics into organisational processes, agencies can identify subtle risk patterns before they escalate. This approach shifts monitoring from reactive enforcement to proactive prevention, ensuring that misconduct is addressed at its earliest stage.

The next section is on AI-Driven Analytics in Monitoring. AI-driven analytics are transforming how organisations monitor risks in real time. Malaysia's Auditor General highlighted in 2025 that AI and big data tools now enable real-time detection of governance irregularities, with dashboards and automated alerts replacing manual audits. Similarly



global compliance studies show that AI can mine complaint databases to uncover hidden patterns of abuse across sectors, from corporate fraud to academic misconduct LinkedIn. These innovations demonstrate that AI is not merely a technical upgrade but a paradigm shift toward predictive monitoring.

At the end of this chapter, culturally sensitive protocols are examined. It is reiterated that monitoring systems must also be culturally sensitive to be effective. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025 introduced a robust monitoring and evaluation system that incorporates socio-cultural indicators across member states, ensuring that governance tools respect local contexts and values. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Health's *Pelan Tindakan KKM 2021–2025* similarly emphasises culturally attuned monitoring protocols in public health governance . These examples highlight that monitoring cannot be one-size-fits-all; it must adapt to cultural diversity to gain legitimacy and acceptance.

7.2 Behavioural Risk Detection Mechanisms

Organisational resilience depends on the early recognition of subtle changes in employee conduct before they develop into systemic problems. In public sector settings, where trust and accountability are fundamental, unaddressed behavioural shifts can gradually undermine institutional credibility and public confidence. These signs often appear quietly through reduced engagement, irregular attendance, or unexplained alterations in communication style and are easily missed without systematic observation tools.

Table 11: Administrative Roles in Risk Detection

Role	Description	Example in Practice
Policy Enforcement	Ensure employees comply with organisational rules, codes of conduct, and legal standards.	Supervisors monitor punctuality; HR enforces anti-harassment policies.
Early Issue Detection	Identify behavioural risks such as stress, misconduct, or interpersonal conflict before escalation.	HR tracks absenteeism trends; supervisors observe team tension or withdrawal.
Documentation and Reporting	Maintain accurate records of behavioural incidents and escalate concerns appropriately.	HR records formal complaints; supervisors submit incident reports to management.
Support and Intervention	Provide guidance, counselling referrals, or disciplinary action based on observed behaviour.	HR arranges wellness sessions; supervisors conduct performance improvement discussions.
Continuous Improvement	Use behavioural data to refine policies, training, and organisational culture.	HR updates onboarding modules; supervisors suggest team-building activities.

Addressing these challenges requires layered roles that both administration and management officers need to utilise. The various roles integrate routine observation, structured feedback channels, and data informed assessments (Table 11 is referred). Regular reviews of workflow patterns, peer observations, and anonymous reporting systems have demonstrated effectiveness in environments where hierarchical structures discourage open dialogue. Drawing on mental health guidelines from the World Health Organization (2024), structured check-ins and anonymised sentiment tracking provide meaningful insights without provoking defensiveness. When applied consistently, these methods create a protective network that captures nuanced changes often overlooked by conventional performance metrics.

The reliability of behavioural risk detections improve markedly when information is cross verified across multiple sources. A single report of absenteeism may stem from personal circumstances, but when combined with reduced collaboration frequency and declining task completion rates, a clearer pattern emerges. This reality highlights the need to triangulate inputs from supervisor evaluations, peer feedback, and digital activity logs to distinguish isolated incidents from emerging trends (see figure 9 below). Such integration minimises the risk of misjudgement and ensures responses are proportionate to the actual level of concern.

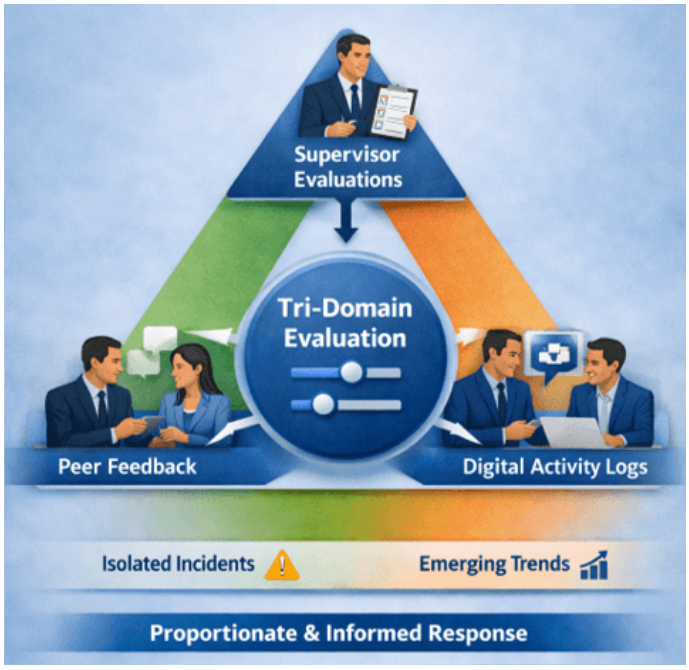


Figure 9: Triangulation of Behavioural Risk Detections

These assessment methods must be embedded within clear procedural frameworks that define thresholds for escalation and intervention. Without standardised protocols, even accurate observations can lead to inconsistent or delayed action (Omar et al., 2022; Cardile et al., 2023). Standardised classification systems aligned with legal and ethical guidelines enable managers to categorise concerns by severity and urgency, promoting timely support rather than reactive discipline. This structure transforms subjective impressions into actionable intelligence, allowing leaders to respond with precision rather than instinct.

Current governance models in high turnover, low morale public sectors show how institutionalising routine evaluations tied to behavioural benchmarks shifts cultures from punitive to preventive (Mohd Sanget, 2023; Ismail, Yahya, & Hashim, 2024; World Bank, 2026; Nuryanti, Ruliana, & Rachman, 2025). The World Bank (2026) in particular, highlights global evidence that institutionalising routine evaluations linked to behavioural indicators reduces turnover and punitive disciplinary reliance. In other words, the focus moves from blaming individuals to understanding the conditions that foster disruptive conduct. This transformation demands training for those responsible for interpretation, ensuring they recognise cultural nuances and psychological triggers that influence behaviour.

As these methods evolve, they lay the foundation for more advanced analytical tools. Automated pattern recognition will soon complement human judgment, offering predictive insights without compromising privacy or fairness. Yet technology alone cannot replace contextual understanding. True value lies in combining algorithmic efficiency with human insight, creating systems that are both scalable and sensitive to local realities. This convergence represents the next frontier in sustaining integrity across complex public institutions.

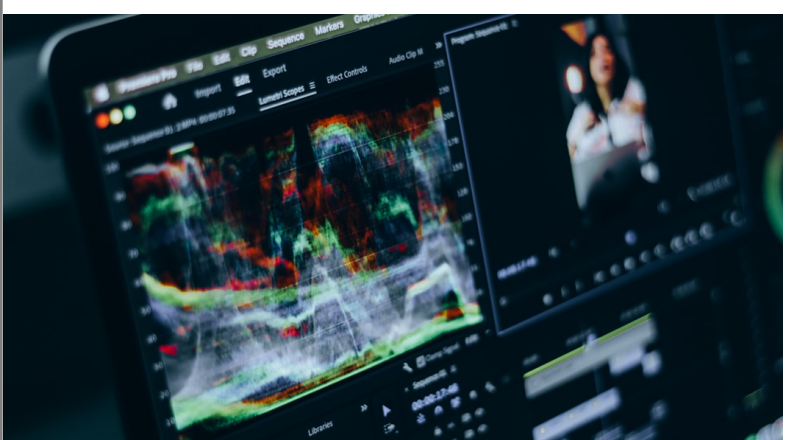
Crucially, these processes must be perceived as supportive rather than intrusive. When employees believe monitoring serves their wellbeing and organisational health, participation becomes voluntary and constructive (Chug, Rahane, & Rahane, 2025; Kuvaas, Buch, & Dysvik, 2017). The success of any detection framework ultimately hinges on its alignment with core values of dignity, transparency, and mutual respect. The critical question moving forward is not merely how to identify risk, but how to cultivate an environment where early signals are welcomed as opportunities for growth.

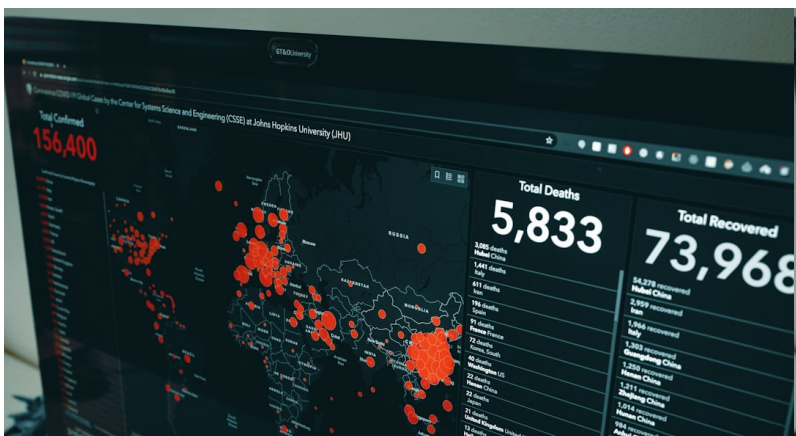
7.3 AI-Driven Analytics in Monitoring

Public institutions are increasingly using computational tools to detect subtle changes in employee conduct by analysing large volumes of operational data without invasive observation. These systems examine patterns in digital communication, work schedules,and output metrics to identify deviations that may signal distress or misconduct. Evidence from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development demonstrates that calibrated monitoring tools can reduce response times to early warning signals by nearly half in pilot programmes across Canada and Singapore (OECD, 2022; OECD, 2024). These instruments are most effective because they uncover behavioural and organisational trends that traditional oversight models often fail to capture (World Bank, 2023; Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission, 2025).

By integrating behavioural benchmarks with predictive analytics, agencies strengthen resilience and move beyond reactive disciplinary cultures (Singapore Public Service Division, 2024). Ultimately, the adoption of such preventive frameworks illustrates how data-driven governance can transform institutional health and employee trust. The strength of these methods lies their ability to reveal trends that human reviewers, bound by traditional oversight models, often miss.

Such capabilities demand strict safeguards to protect personal autonomy and preserve institutional trust. Ethical use requires transparent rules for data selection, clear limits on data retention, and independent oversight bodies with the authority to audit algorithmic decisions. Studies show that automated monitoring systems can generate false alarms when cultural and linguistic nuances are misinterpreted, leading to unwarranted investigations in public service contexts (Leicht-Deobald et al., 2019; Martin & Shilton, 2016; Australian Public Service Commission, 2022). This reveals a vital truth: technical accuracy alone is not enough. Systems must be designed with deep awareness of local norms, communication styles, and historical contexts that shape how individuals express stress, disagreement, or disengagement.





These AI tools are not meant to replace human judgment but to enhance it. When integrated with existing psychosocial support structures, they enable supervisors to intervene before problems escalate into formal disciplinary actions. In the United Kingdom's National Health Service, a pilot programme that integrated anonymised workload data with voluntary self-reporting channels achieved a significant reduction in reported workplace tension over eighteen months (McCausland, 2023; Wawersik et al., 2023). Its success stemmed from acting as a catalyst for dialogue, encouraging managers to engage in conversations grounded in empathy rather than suspicion (Edmondson, 2004). By shifting the emphasis from surveillance to supportive listening, the initiative fostered psychological safety and reduced interpersonal risk, enabling staff to raise concerns without fear of retaliation (Brown, 2025).

Over time, these practices embed trust as a collective expectation, demonstrating how preventive governance frameworks can transform organisational climates in high-pressure public service environments (Ismail, Yahya, & Hashim, 2024; World Bank, 2023). This shift illustrates a broader principle: technology gains legitimacy when it supports relational healing, not punitive control. Subsequently, public organisations become more resilience to technology evolutions.

Integrating these AI tools into governance frameworks requires redefining how accountability is understood and measured (table 12 is referred). Traditional performance indicators often ignore the

Table 12: Comparison between Traditional and AI-assisted Metrics

Dimension	Traditional Performance Indicators	AI-Integrated / Trauma-Informed Models
Accountability Definition	Focused on individual compliance and fault-finding.	Redefined as collective responsibility, measured by organisational health.
Measurement Focus	Emphasises output, punctuality, and rule adherence.	Incorporates behavioural economics and cognitive psychology to capture wellbeing and resilience.
Interpretation of Behaviour	Often misreads stress or systemic strain as negligence.	Recognises emotional and cognitive burdens, diagnosing environmental conditions instead of blaming individuals.
Response to Signals	Reactive discipline, punitive measures after violations occur.	Preventive care, using early warning data to trigger supportive interventions.
Role of Data	Used primarily for surveillance and judgement.	Transformed into instruments of care, reinforcing integrity and trust.
Global Alignment	Anchored in rigid oversight traditions.	Consistent with trauma-informed administration movements worldwide, emphasising empathy and systemic wellbeing.

emotional and cognitive burdens carried by public servants, leading to misinterpretations of behaviour as negligence rather than systemic strain. Newer models, informed by behavioural economics and cognitive psychology, treat metrics as indicators of organisational health rather than individual failure. This shift aligns with global movements toward trauma-informed administration, where data is used not to judge but to diagnose environmental conditions affecting wellbeing. Such an approach transforms analytical tools into instruments of care, reinforcing the integrity they are designed to protect.

Looking ahead, the challenge is not scaling these technologies but deepening their alignment with ethical governance. As artificial systems become more embedded in daily operations, the risk of normalising algorithmic authority grows. Sustaining public confidence demands ongoing engagement with frontline staff, iterative refinement based on lived experience, and clear boundaries on what can be acted upon automatically. The most effective systems remain visibly accountable, openly adjustable, and firmly grounded in human dignity. This reality sets the stage for the next critical phase: designing protocols that reflect not just technological possibility but cultural resonance.

7.3 Culturally Sensitive Protocols

Understanding workplace conduct in Malaysia's public service requires recognizing how meaning is shaped by ethnic, religious, and regional differences. What looks like disengagement in one context may be a sign of respect in another. Silence is not always defiance—it can reflect cultural restraint, uncertainty, or deference to authority. These nuances are not minor details; they determine how signs of distress, resistance, or misconduct are interpreted by those responsible for oversight. Failing to account for them risks mislabeling normal behavior as problematic, leading to unfair outcomes that damage trust in institutional fairness.

This demands a move away from rigid algorithms toward flexible frameworks that embed local norms into risk indicators. Anthropological studies in government offices across Sabah, Sarawak, and Peninsular Malaysia show that communication styles differ

not only in language but in rhythm, eye contact, and awareness of hierarchy. A supervisor's direct question may be seen as aggressive in some communities, prompting withdrawal instead of openness. When monitoring tools ignore these subtleties, they produce false alarms that unfairly target minority groups, compromising both accuracy and equity.

Effective solutions require participatory design. Involving frontline staff, community representatives, and union delegates ensures protocols are rooted in lived experience rather than top down assumptions. Pilot initiatives within Malaysia's Ministry of Education and selected municipal councils demonstrated that when diverse stakeholder voices were incorporated into the design of behavioural alert criteria, detection accuracy improved while bias-related complaints declined significantly over sustained periods (Lee, 2023; Brunette, 2024). Rather than functioning as a purely technical mechanism, the participatory process itself became a form of institutional healing, reinforcing legitimacy through inclusion and dialogue instead of hierarchical control (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2025). Scholars emphasise that implementing such systems requires more than technical proficiency; it demands cultural fluency and sensitivity to historical contexts of trust and exclusion (Ismail, S., Tengku Mahamad, & Mohd Azman, 2025).

Reflecting this need, training programmes currently active at the Public Service Department have introduced modules on ethnocultural communication, implicit bias recognition, and the historical roots of institutional trust, embedding these competencies into everyday governance practice (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Malaysia, 2021). These are not one time events but ongoing learning cycles tied to performance reviews. Supervisors learn to tell the difference between adaptive coping and disruptive conduct, to interpret nonverbal cues within their cultural context, and to pause before labeling behavior as deviant. This competence turns monitoring from a punitive act into a supportive practice aligned with human dignity.

The impact goes beyond compliance. When systems reflect the identities they serve, they foster belonging and strengthen collective responsibility. Employees are more likely to report concerns, offer peer support, and accept guidance when they feel understood rather than

judged, a dynamic closely tied to perceptions of fairness and integrity in organisational settings (Ahmad, Hashim, & Latiff, 2024). Research in behavioural public administration highlights that fairness and inclusion activate cooperative responses, strengthening long-term commitment and reducing counterproductive behaviours (Dzidziguri, 2024). In Malaysia's civil service, diversity-sensitive practices have been shown to foster trust and resilience, underscoring that cultural sensitivity is not merely a corrective tool but a driver of institutional strength (Lee, 2023). Training programmes introduced under the Public Service Department's reform agenda now embed modules on ethnocultural communication, implicit bias recognition, and historical roots of trust, reflecting a deliberate effort to build resilience through cultural fluency (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Malaysia, 2021).

Moving forward, evolution in public governance would involve more machine learning with community driven calibration. Systems that evolve through feedback from those they monitor will outperform those built on static data. The real challenge is not technological ability but institutional willingness to listen, adapt, and share control by being sensitive to differing cultural norms of employees and local contexts. As public institutions strive to embody integrity, true success will not be measured by how many violations are strengthened through the process; but how many misconduct are prevented in the first place.

7.5 Ethical and Legal Safeguards in Monitoring

The incorporation of monitoring and early warning systems into governance structures demands a deliberate focus on ethical and legal safeguards. Employees need to be aware of enforceable laws and regulations, at least to void claims of law ignorance. This in itself has often been claimed by suspects in court. Without these protections, data-driven tools risk eroding trust and legitimacy, particularly in public sector contexts where employees are highly attuned to fairness and privacy concerns. International research findings, such as the OECD's *Behavioural Insights for Public Integrity*, stress that monitoring must be designed to uphold individual rights while simultaneously strengthening institutional resilience (OECD, 2022).

One of the most critical safeguards is compliance with data protection and privacy legislation. In Malaysia, the Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (PDPA) (Act 709) establishes clear requirements for the secure handling of anonymised communication and behavioural

data, ensuring that such information is used only for legitimate organisational purposes. Shown in table 13, other Malaysian laws include the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010, the Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993, and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009.

Table 13: Malaysian Laws and their Safeguards Contextualised to

Law / Regulation	Key Sections	Safeguard Provided
Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (Act 709)	Section 5 (General Principle) Section 6 (Notice and Choice) Section 9 (Security Principle)	Requires lawful processing of personal data, informed consent, and secure handling of anonymised communication and behavioural data.
Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 (Act 711)	Section 6 (Whistleblower protection) Section 7 (Protection of confidential information) Section 8 (Immunity from civil and criminal action) Section 11 (Revocation of protection if complicit)	Protects individuals who disclose misconduct to enforcement agencies, shields their identity, and grants immunity from retaliation.
Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (Act 694)	Section 23 (Offence of using office for gratification) Section 65 (Protection of informers)	Provides safeguards against misuse of monitoring data and protects informants in corruption investigations.
Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993	Regulation 3 (General Duties) Regulation 4 (Prohibition of Misconduct) Regulation 5 (Disciplinary Procedures)	Establishes behavioural expectations and disciplinary processes for civil servants, ensuring monitoring aligns with fairness and due process.
Employment Act 1955 (Act 265)	Section 60A (Hours of Work) Section 60C (Rest Days) Section 60E (Annual Leave)	Ensures monitoring systems respect labour rights and do not misinterpret systemic strain as negligence.
Federal Constitution of Malaysia	Article 8 (Equality) Article 10 (Freedom of Speech) Article 13 (Property Rights)	Provides constitutional safeguards ensuring monitoring practices respect equality, privacy, and freedom of expression.

These statutes collectively ensure privacy, accountability, fairness, and integrity in monitoring and governance. Comparable protections are found in the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which has influenced global administrative practices and reinforced the importance of consent and anonymisation (World Bank, 2023). These legal frameworks help ensure that monitoring is perceived as supportive rather than punitive.

Safeguards against bias and inequitable treatment are equally essential. Evidence from Southeast Asia indicates that algorithmic monitoring systems can unintentionally reproduce cultural biases if not carefully calibrated to local contexts (Ismail, Yahya, & Hashim, 2024). Embedding fairness checks and establishing independent oversight panels within monitoring frameworks reduces the risk of misinterpretation and ensures that outcomes remain equitable across diverse demographic and cultural groups. This approach strengthens both accuracy and legitimacy in governance.

Transparency and accountability mechanisms further reinforce ethical safeguards. Research from Singapore's Public Service Division shows that when department employees are informed about the

purpose of specific monitoring and provided with accessible feedback channels, participation becomes voluntary and constructive (Singapore Public Service Division, 2024). Transparent communication reframes monitoring as a collaborative process, reducing suspicion and fostering organisational trust. In this way, accountability shifts from surveillance to shared responsibility.

Table 14: Trauma-Informed Governance Models: Monitoring as Care

Governance Model	Core Principle	Monitoring Approach	Evolution into Care
OECD Public Integrity in Asia (2023)	Integrity through leadership and accountability	Behavioural audits and fairness benchmarks	Uses monitoring to diagnose systemic stressors, protecting wellbeing while reinforcing institutional resilience
Asian Development Bank Preventive Governance (2025)	Resilience through preventive administration	Early warning indicators tied to organisational health	Monitoring reframed as preventive care, reducing stress before misconduct escalates
Commonwealth Secretariat Integrity Frameworks (2025)	Comparative accountability across jurisdictions	Inclusive monitoring with stakeholder participation	Monitoring becomes a legitimacy-building process, embedding empathy and fairness
Dzidziguri's Behavioural Public Administration (2024)	Behavioural insights for governance	Focus on diagnosing organisational strain rather than individual fault	Monitoring as a diagnostic tool for systemic stressors, aligning with empathetic administration
Ismail et al. MADANI Framework (2025)	Digital communication and cultural sensitivity	Monitoring embedded in ethnocultural communication and trust-building	Monitoring evolves into instruments of care by fostering inclusion and resilience

Referencing to table 14, governance models that include trauma-informed policies, enable monitoring shifts from punitive surveillance to empathetic diagnosis. By recognising systemic stressors rather than attributing blame, governance frameworks embed care into accountability, aligning with global trauma-informed movements. (Asian Development Bank, 2025). Such approaches demonstrate that monitoring systems can evolve to be more humane, reinforce integrity and protect wellbeing, ensuring that institutions remain legitimate and resilient in the face of organisational pressures.

Finally, continuous ethical audits and participatory feedback loops are necessary to sustain legitimacy over time. Reports from the OECD and World Bank highlight that governance frameworks must adapt to changing expectations of fairness, particularly in high-turnover public sectors where trust deficits are common (OECD, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Resistant to change must be reduced, by at least understanding the reasons to change and having in place strategies to enable change. Routine evaluations of monitoring practices, combined with employee

input, ensure that systems remain responsive to lived realities rather than drifting toward punitive surveillance (Aduwo, et. al., 2021; Mohd Sanget, 2022). In other words, utilising traditional ways of monitoring that seeks to find problems and judge employees without consideration of antecedents underlying organisational misconduct or regulation violation needs to be reconsidered. This ongoing recalibration strengthens both institutional accountability and employee confidence (Ismail, Yahya, &Hashim, 2024).

8
Operationalising MADANI Values

8
Operationalising MADANI Values

8.1 Introduction

The MADANI framework offers more than a national aspiration; it provides a practical ethical architecture for rethinking how public institutions serve, lead, communicate, and care. In the Malaysian public sector, values such as trust (*amanah*), respect (*hormat*), care and compassion (*ihsan*), innovation (*daya cipta*), prosperity (*kemakmuran*), and sustainability (*keberlanjutan*) must be translated from policy language into everyday administrative behaviour.

This chapter argues that governance becomes meaningful only when these values are embedded into the lived experience of public servants and citizens alike. A system may be formally efficient, but without dignity, fairness, psychological safety, and credible communication, it risks becoming procedurally correct yet morally thin.

Operationalising MADANI values therefore requires attention to the human conditions that shape institutional performance. Public servants work within complex environments marked by hierarchy, public scrutiny, political pressure, emotional labour, and shifting citizen expectations. When wellbeing is neglected, integrity weakens; when communication is closed, trust erodes; and when power dynamics remain unexamined, transparency becomes ceremonial rather than substantive. For this reason, the chapter begins by examining wellbeing as a foundation for resilient service delivery, before moving into institutional integrity, transparency, trust, and communication as interdependent pillars of ethical governance.

The central claim of this chapter is that MADANI governance cannot be sustained through slogans, campaigns, or compliance rituals alone. It must be built through systems that protect mental health, strengthen whistleblowing and accountability mechanisms, enable open communication, and reduce the harmful effects of organisational politics. In this sense, MADANI becomes not merely a philosophy of nation-building, but a disciplined method for humanising public administration. The sections that follow show how

values can be transformed into operational habits, creating public institutions that are not only more effective, but also more humane, trustworthy, and worthy of the citizens they serve.

8.2 Supporting Wellbeing in Public Service

When public service employees are supported in ways that affirm their humanity, the entire system becomes more effective. This is not a matter of comfort or morale alone. It is in fact a fundamental requirement for sustainable institutional performance. Data from the World Health Organization confirms that workplaces prioritizing mental and emotional health show clear reductions in absenteeism, errors, and interpersonal conflict. These improvements are not accidental; they result from deliberate design that places human needs at the centre of operational strategy.

For too long, bureaucratic systems have measured success through output alone, neglecting the human dimension of work. Recent analyses of Malaysia's public sector reveal a strong link between supportive environments and improved service delivery. Employees who feel heard respected and psychologically safe are more likely to uphold procedural integrity and remain resilient under pressure. This challenges the outdated belief that rigid control equals discipline. In reality, flexibility grounded in empathy strengthens accountability rather than weakening it.

These insights are now being translated into structured initiatives aligned with national values. Flexible working arrangements, access to counselling services, and peer support networks have increasingly been adopted across Malaysian public agencies as part of integrity and wellbeing reforms (Sajari, et. al., 2023). Pilot programmes documented in the Public Service Department's annual reports show measurable reductions in stress-related leave, with improvements sustained over multi-year periods (Public Service Department Malaysia, 2023). These initiatives reflect a deeper recognition that institutional resilience is cultivated not through rigid control but by creating conditions where employees can thrive, supported by fairness and dignity (Ahmad, Hashim, & Latiff, 2024). Rather than diminishing authority, such practices enhance legitimacy by embedding governance within human-centred values, aligning with global movements toward empathetic administration (Asian Development Bank, 2025).

The approach has moved beyond reactive fixes to embrace proactive structures that embed care into daily routines. Training now includes modules on emotional awareness, boundary setting, and collective responsibility, all designed to normalize conversations about mental health without stigma. Supervisors are equipped with tools to identify early signs of distress—not as performance failures but as signals requiring support. The transformation is quiet yet profound: what was once concealed is now acknowledged, and what was punished is now understood.

This shift extends beyond individual welfare to strengthen organizational cohesion. When people feel secure, they engage more fully with their roles, collaborate more openly, and challenge inefficiencies without fear. These dynamics cultivate a culture where ethical conduct becomes the norm, not the exception. Leadership that models vulnerability and responsiveness sets a tone that spreads across departments, encouraging authenticity and reducing reliance on surveillance or punishment.

Practices such as these, lays the foundation for deeper institutional reforms. They prepare the ground for systems that measure success not only by compliance but by flourishing. The following sections explore how such conditions enable transparency, how trust is built through consistent action, and how integrity becomes woven into routine practice rather than confined to policy statements. Progress

Figure 10: Initiatives and Practices Supporting Wellbeing in Public Organisations

requires more than good intentions. it demands structural commitment to the wellbeing of those who serve the public. Figure 10 above illustrates how these initiatives and practices support wellbeing in public organisation and subsequently reducing excuses for misconduct.

8.3 Strengthening Institutional Integrity

Public institutions flourish when their inner workings are built on unwavering principles of fairness, responsibility, and openness. These qualities do not arise by chance but are deliberately cultivated through policies that reward honesty, discourage secrecy, and embed accountability at every level. Global standards such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption offer clear benchmarks, and nations that align their administrative practices with these guidelines consistently show reduced instances of misconduct. The evidence is clear: when systems are designed to be transparent by default, unethical behaviour becomes harder to hide and easier to uncover.

Such systems gain strength when individuals feel safe to speak out about irregularities. Formal mechanisms that safeguard whistleblowers from retaliation are essential for cultivating environments where truth can surface without fear. Evidence from public sector studies across Southeast Asia indicates that agencies implementing anonymous reporting channels record significantly higher rates of early disclosures compared to those relying solely on conventional complaint systems (Johari, et. al., 2024; Adnan, et. al., 2026). These outcomes reflect more than compliance, as they mark a cultural transformation in which silence is no longer the default response to ethical breaches. When employees trust that their concerns will be heard and treated with fairness, organisational integrity strengthens, and collective moral awareness becomes sharper (Manan, et. al., 2022; Transparency International Malaysia, 2024).

Cultivating this culture requires more than procedural adjustments. It demands a transformation in how authority is exercised and perceived. Leaders who consistently align their actions with their stated values set powerful examples that shape team norms more effectively than any policy document. When decision making is open to review and outcomes are explained clearly, trust builds gradually through repeated reliability. This dynamic depends not on personal charm but on predictable, consistent behaviour that signals integrity as a non negotiable standard.

Technology now complements human judgment rather than replacing it. AI-driven analytics in public governance can identify subtle anomalies in workflow patterns, such as irregular overtime claims, repeated access to confidential files, or abrupt changes in communication behaviour; that may indicate emerging risks (Al-Mutairi & Al-Harbi, 2023; OECD, 2024b). These systems are increasingly designed to minimise cultural bias and prevent normal variations in conduct from being misinterpreted as suspicious (Mihaljević, et. al.,, 2024). When paired with trained oversight and contextual understanding, such tools enhance vigilance while preserving professional autonomy. They inform ethical decision-making and institutional learning, ensuring that technology strengthens rather than supplants human discernment (Leicht-Deobald et al., 2019).

The greater challenge lies not in creating new systems but in ensuring their endurance across leadership changes and political cycles. Institutional memory must be preserved through documented routines, continuous learning, and embedded practices, and not mostly through reliance on individual dedication. Therefore the most resilient organisations are those where ethical conduct is systematised, not celebrated only during audits or campaigns. Sustaining this requires ongoing investment in human development, structural transparency, and adaptive governance.

To summarise, the flourishing of public institutions depends not only on well-designed policies but on their consistent application across leadership cycles. Fairness, responsibility, and openness must be embedded as structural norms rather than temporary initiatives. To overcome the challenges identified, several steps are necessary: strengthen whistleblower protections through anonymous reporting channels and enforceable safeguards; ensure leadership models integrity by aligning actions with stated values; expand training that integrates ethical reasoning, resilience, and rehabilitation pathways; and deploy AI-driven monitoring tools with fairness audits to prevent cultural bias while preserving human judgment. Most importantly, institutional memory must be secured through documented routines, continuous learning, and adaptive governance structures, so that reforms endure beyond individual leaders. Sustained investment in human development, transparent systems, and empathetic administration will transform accountability from a compliance exercise into a culture of care, ensuring that integrity becomes a lived reality rather than a periodic campaign.

8.4 Promoting Transparency and Trust

Openness in institutional operations has consistently been linked to stronger public confidence, particularly in contexts where authority may otherwise appear distant or opaque. Empirical studies of public agencies demonstrate that when decision-making processes are accessible and clearly documented, citizen engagement rises significantly, reinforcing perceptions of fairness and accountability (Camargo, 2025; Sajari, et. al., 2023). This shift is not simply about releasing information but about embedding transparency into routine practice, where accountability becomes visible, expected, and integral to organisational culture (Ahmad, 2025; Office of the Auditor-General of Malaysia, 2025). By institutionalising openness as a daily norm rather than an occasional initiative, public institutions strengthen legitimacy and foster enduring trust with the communities they serve.

These conditions grow stronger when leaders consistently model predictability in their actions and communication. When staff and citizens observe that information flows freely and inquiries receive timely replies, a culture of mutual respect begins to form. These patterns do not arise from one-time initiatives but from daily habits that normalize honesty over secrecy and dialogue over silence. Governance evaluations confirm that departments embracing these norms report less internal distrust and higher voluntary compliance with procedures.

Embedding these practices into monitoring systems ensures their endurance. By making performance metrics, resource allocation records, and grievance outcomes openly available through digital platforms designed with cultural awareness, organisations create self-sustaining feedback loops. These systems do not depend on top-down orders but on user driven scrutiny, where participation becomes a natural part of everyday work. The outcome is a shift from compliance as a requirement to compliance as a shared duty, reducing reliance on external oversight while strengthening internal unity.

This transformation demands more than technological upgrades. It requires a realignment of power within institutions. When employees feel safe raising concerns without fear of retaliation, and when citizens can track the status of their requests with certainty, the foundation of legitimacy grows stronger. Such environments build resilience not through rigid control but through adaptive trust. Studies on public sector performance demonstrate that organisations embedding these

traits experience fewer incidents of misconduct and recover more quickly from crises, as credibility acts as a buffer against declining morale (Johari, Ghani, Razali, & Dawood, 2024; Adnan, Yusof, Aminudin, Jamaiudin, & Kaisi, 2026).

Evidence from Malaysian integrity initiatives further shows that supportive environments and strengthened ethical practices enhance both employee confidence and citizen engagement, reinforcing accountability as a daily expectation (Sajari, Haron, Ganesan, & Khalid, 2023; Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, 2025). To sustain these gains, institutions must invest in continuous training on ethical behaviour and embed whistleblower protections into routine operations, ensuring that trust is not episodic but systemic. Over time, such measures transform accountability from a compliance requirement into a lived organisational culture, strengthening resilience across political and administrative cycles.

The issue extends beyond efficiency into the renewal of the social contract. In contexts where historical mistrust persists, consistent transparency becomes a quiet act of restitution, a rebuilding of faith through repeated, verifiable actions. This dynamic cannot be imposed by policy alone. It must be nurtured through sustained behavioural commitment across all levels of hierarchy. Leaders who choose clarity over control and inclusion over exclusion become catalysts for deeper cultural change, turning institutional structures into vessels of collective assurance.

Looking ahead, the evolution of these practices will depend on how deeply they are woven into training, promotion criteria, and performance evaluation. As simulation modules begin to include scenarios requiring open communication under pressure, and as ethical conduct is measured not by words but by documented behaviour, the next generation of civil servants will inherit a new expectation of public service. The path leads toward an ecosystem where integrity is not an exception but the norm, where visibility is not a privilege but a standard, and where trust is earned each day, not announced once a year.

8.5 Communication and Social Dynamics

In today's interconnected public sector environment, effective communication is the foundation of organisational performance and service delivery. Within government departments and agencies,

communication functions as a linking framework that aligns people, processes, and policies toward shared administrative goals. It encompasses both formal channels, such as directives, reports, and official meetings, and informal exchanges that foster collaboration, trust, and innovation.

Strong positive communication is recommended as it enables transparency, supports accountability, and sustains ethical decision-making while strengthening employee engagement and interdepartmental cooperation. As public servants navigate complex hierarchies, diverse teams, and rapid digital transformation, the ability to convey information clearly, listen actively, and coordinate effectively has become essential for organisational resilience. In Malaysia, embedding MADANI values of trust (*amanah*) and respect (*hormat*) into communication practices ensures that dialogue is not only efficient but also dignified, reinforcing integrity in governance.

Effective communication is the foundation of healthy organisational behaviour. In contemporary organisations, communication is no longer merely a soft skill but a strategic asset that drives collaboration, innovation, and productivity. Global research in corporate communication between 2020 and 2024 highlights that firms with transparent and participatory communication systems outperform competitors in engagement, creativity, and readiness for change (Carter, 2024).

Business leaders now view internal communication as a form of "organisational social capital," where information exchange builds mutual trust and accelerates decision-making (Nguyen et al., 2021). Within the Malaysian public sector, this perspective resonates with MADANI's emphasis on care (*ihsan*) and prosperity (*kemakmuran*), where communication is not only about efficiency but also about nurturing employee well-being and fostering inclusive growth.

This approach, which is widely adopted by multinational companies, integrates communication with culture-building and employee well-being, demonstrating how organisational models can strengthen psychological safety at scale (American Psychological Association, 2024; Chug, Rahane, & Rahane, 2025). For Malaysia's public sector, this perspective translates into recognising that bureaucratic hierarchies can learn from flatter, feedback-driven corporate models while maintaining accountability (Ismail, Tengku Mahamad, & Mohd Azman,

2025). Evidence shows that when communication systems emphasise empathy and inclusivity, employees are more likely to uphold integrity and remain resilient under pressure (Abd Jabar, 2019).

Embedding these practices into governance reforms not only enhances trust but also reduces the risk of misconduct by making accountability visible and routine (Sajari, et. al, 2023). Over time, such alignment between communication, culture, and wellbeing strengthens legitimacy, ensuring that authority is exercised with fairness and human dignity rather than rigid control. Transparent information-sharing and open dialogue across authority levels foster a collaborative climate and reduce bottlenecks that traditionally slow service delivery. When guided by MADANI's principle of innovation (*daya cipta*), communication becomes a driver of reform, encouraging creativity in problem-solving and adaptability in service delivery.

Academic scholarship consistently reinforces that workplace communication effectiveness goes beyond message clarity to encompass interpersonal sensitivity, empathy, and contextual adaptation. A meta-analysis by Liu et al. (2025) shows that empathy-based communication training enhances mutual trust and collaborative performance among Chinese public employees, particularly in management–employee communication and motivation. Scholars advocate for the "two-way symmetrical communication" model, where dialogue flows vertically and horizontally, ensuring employees feel heard and respected (Lee, 2022; Perez et al., 2025). Integrating this into public service design may strengthen internal morale and public trust in government institutions.

Communication in government organisations should therefore, reflect both structural hierarchy and evolving expectations of openness, trust, and collaboration. In Malaysia, INTAN (2024) found that ministries practicing open communication cultures recorded higher employee engagement and lower turnover intentions. Rostina (2022) found that workplace communication effectiveness in government is closely tied to leadership behaviour. Supervisors who communicate clearly, listen actively, and provide timely feedback significantly improve employee performance and organisational coordination (Rostina, 2022). This reinforces that leadership communication is not merely directive but relational, helping translate bureaucratic goals into shared understanding and motivation.

In Malaysia, embedding MADANI's sustainability (*keberlanjutan*) principle ensures that communication systems are not only effective in the short term but also resilient and future-oriented, supporting long-term institutional credibility and citizen confidence. Akhmad, Suryadi, and Rajiani (2020) observed that when employees feel unable to express dissatisfaction through official channels, they often respond with loyalty (silence out of obligation) or neglect (reduced effort), both of which undermine innovation and service quality. In the public sector, communication challenges often arise from hierarchy, generational gaps, and cultural differences. Open and inclusive communication can reduce conflict and enhance collaboration (Rahman et al., 2022).

An important element linked to both organisational communication and internal social dynamics is power dynamics (see Table 15). Power dynamics in Malaysia's public sector are shaped by centralised authority and bureaucratic hierarchies, while organisational politics often manifest through informal strategies that influence decisions and resource allocation. Compared to the private sector, these dynamics are more rigid and politicised, whereas private organisations emphasise flatter structures, market-driven accountability, and performance-based influence.

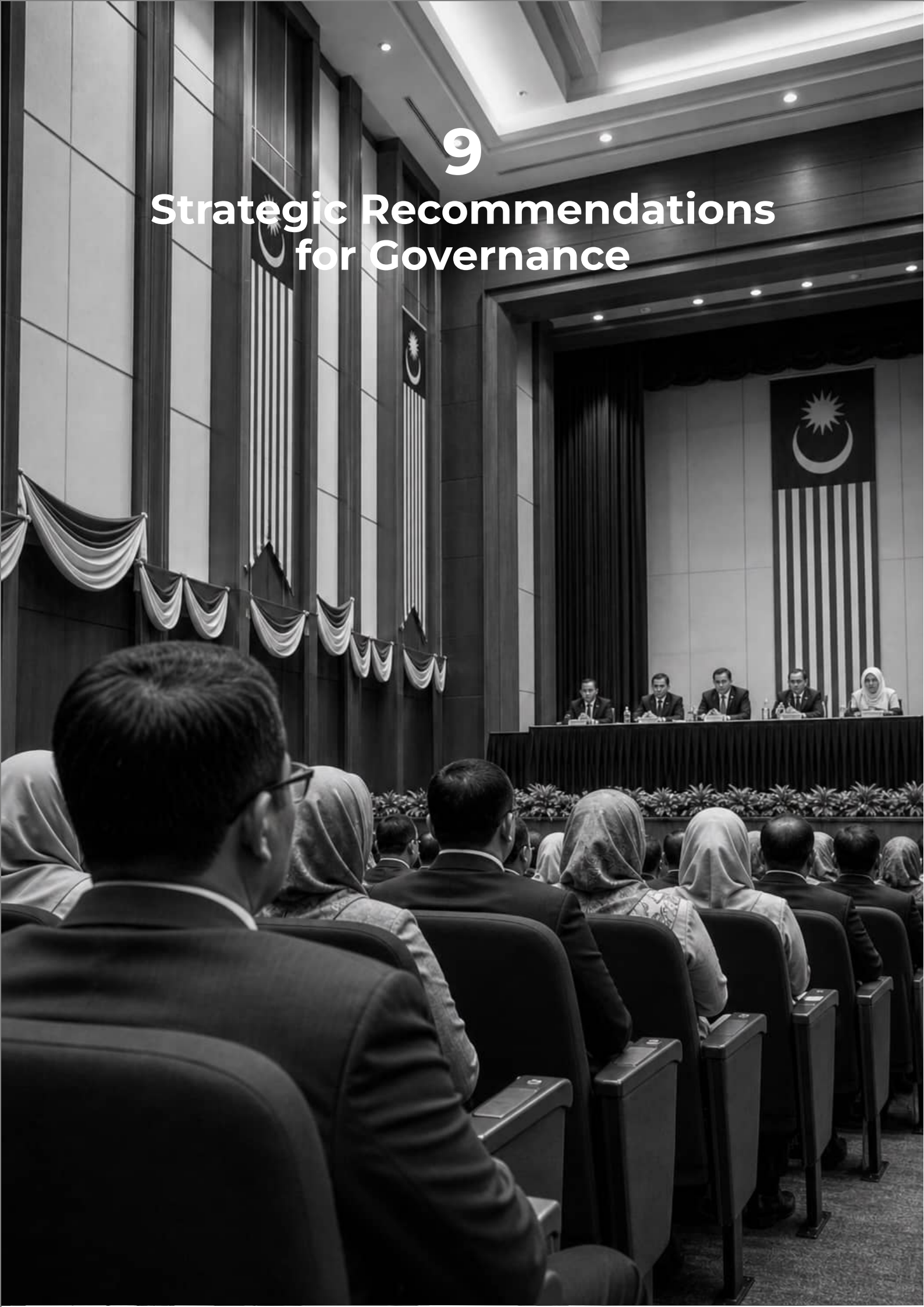
Table 15: Effects of Power Dynamics in the Public Sector

	Aspect	Positive Effects	Negative Effects
1	Decision-Making	Senior leaders can accelerate decisions using influence and experience.	Decisions may be biased or opaque, favoring certain individuals or factions.
2	Resource Allocation	Strategic use of authority can prioritize urgent or high-impact projects.	Political favoritism may divert resources away from critical but less visible needs.
3	Career Advancement	Mentorship and sponsorship by powerful figures can accelerate talent development.	Promotions may depend on loyalty or connections rather than merit.
4	Conflict Resolution	Influential leaders can mediate disputes and foster cooperation.	Power struggles may intensify conflicts or suppress dissenting voices.
5	Social Cohesion	Shared political alignment can strengthen team identity and trust.	Factions and silos may form, excluding others and eroding morale.
6	Innovation & Reform	Political capital can be used to drive reforms and challenge the status quo.	Resistance to change may arise from entrenched interests or fear of losing control.
7	Policy Implementation	Strong leadership can ensure consistent implementation across departments.	Excessive centralization may stifle local initiatives or frontline feedback.

Power dynamics in Malaysia's public sector involve centralised decision-making (table 15 is referred), where federal authorities dominate resource distribution and policy implementation. This centralisation often limits state-level autonomy and creates dependency on federal transfers. Loh (2022) noted that fiscal imbalances and over-centralisation undermine equitable resource allocation and weaken institutional responsiveness. Lee (2023) further observed that state governments remain heavily constrained by limited revenue sources, reinforcing the dominance of federal power and restricting innovation in governance.

Organisational politics in Malaysia's public sector often involve informal networks, factional rivalries, and patronage systems that shape access to opportunities and influence. Weiss (2024) argued that institutional reforms remain sluggish due to entrenched political interests, turf wars across ministries, and uneven leadership commitment, which perpetuate informal political manoeuvring. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) (2025) also emphasises that governance weaknesses, such as abuse of power and misconduct; are often linked to organisational politics, requiring stronger accountability mechanisms.

9
Strategic Recommendations for Governance



9
Strategic Recommendations for Governance

9.1 Introduction

Governance reform cannot rely solely on rules, reporting lines, or institutional declarations. At its most consequential level, governance is human behaviour organised through systems of authority, trust, accountability, and shared responsibility. Public institutions may possess detailed policies and formal compliance structures yet still struggle when everyday conduct is shaped by fear, silence, favouritism, exclusion, or weak ethical modelling. For this reason, the human side of governance requires more than procedural correction. It requires sustained attention to how people think, communicate, decide, cooperate, resist pressure, and respond when values are evaluated in practice.

This chapter advances three strategic recommendations for strengthening governance from within. First, behavioural audits provide a structured way to examine hidden patterns of conduct, decision-making, psychological safety, and institutional risk before dysfunction becomes normalised. Second, inclusive training initiatives ensure that reform is not delivered as a one-size-fits-all programme, but as a continuous learning process that reflects different abilities, cultural contexts, work roles, and lived experiences. Third, values-based governance frameworks translate integrity, accountability, fairness, and dignity into operational habits, so that ethical conduct is reinforced through daily routines rather than reserved for ceremonial statements or crisis responses.

The central argument is that sustainable governance reform depends on aligning institutional systems with human realities. Public servants are not abstract units within an administrative machine; they are decision-makers, colleagues, supervisors, citizens, and moral agents operating under pressure. When institutions understand this complexity, they are better able to design reforms that are not merely compliant, but credible, humane, and resilient. The recommendations in this chapter therefore move from diagnosis to action, offering practical pathways for Malaysian public institutions to build cultures

where ethical behaviour is expected, supported, measured, and continuously renewed.

9.2 Conducting Behavioural Audits

Understanding the inner workings of public institutions requires more than reviewing policies or auditing finances—it demands a careful examination of how people interact, make decisions, and respond under pressure. In Malaysia's public service, where trust is easily shaken and accountability is expected, the quality of everyday conduct shapes institutional credibility more than any written rule. These patterns often remain hidden in official reports, revealed only through subtle changes in communication, decision making rhythms, and unspoken norms that either uphold integrity or quietly erode it (Ahmad eta., 2024; Bedi et al., 2013; Dzidziguri, 2024; Sajari et al., 2023)
.
Addressing these hidden dynamics requires systematic inquiry grounded in evidence, not assumption. Drawing from global standards developed by the World Health Organization and refined by industrial organisational psychology, this approach blends measurable indicators with lived experience. Surveys, structured interviews, and observational protocols are used to capture both statistical trends and personal narratives. The aim is not to assign blame but to map the landscape—to identify where stress builds, where influence is misused, and where silence becomes complicity. These methods have been validated across diverse bureaucracies, consistently uncovering early signs of friction before they escalate into systemic failure (European Commission, 2022; Salas et al., 2017; Schneider and Pulakos, 2022; World Health Organization, 2024).

This reality cannot be addressed through annual compliance forms or superficial morale checks. Effective evaluation demands frequency, impartiality, and transparency. When staff know their input is collected securely and used meaningfully, participation increases and defensiveness decreases. Regular cycles of assessment—conducted at least twice a year—create a rhythm of accountability that encourages self-correction (American Psychological Association, 2024). Leadership must be included not as reviewers but as subjects of the same scrutiny. Leaders' actions, communication styles, and responses are as critical to the process as frontline behaviours (Edmondson and Lei, 2014; Frampton et al., 2017; Oc et al., 2015). This dynamic ensures reform is not imposed from above but shared as collective responsibility**.**

The outcomes of these audits do not remain confined to reports. They become the foundation for targeted interventions, reshaping training priorities, revising promotion criteria, and recalibrating support systems. When data reveals recurring patterns of exclusion or emotional disengagement, those insights directly inform the next steps. This alignment between diagnosis and action transforms audits from passive exercises into active engines of change. Institutions that treat findings as living documents, not archival records, see measurable improvements in cohesion, retention, and public perception (Cardile et al., 2023; Frampton et al., 2017; Kim and Holzer, 2016; Kuvaas et al., 2017).

These practices are not optional luxuries for well-resourced agencies—they are essential tools for any organisation seeking legitimacy in a time of heightened scrutiny. The absence of structured reflection invites dysfunction to grow unchecked, while consistent evaluation fosters resilience (Mvuyana et al., 2025). Even modest efforts, when applied with rigour and honesty, yield disproportionate returns in morale and operational clarity (European Commission, 2022). This field has evolved beyond mere compliance; it now serves as a barometer for ethical health, revealing where values are lived and where they are merely stated.

These developments set the stage for deeper exploration. How do organisations translate these insights into inclusive programs that reach every level? What kinds of learning experiences can sustain change beyond initial enthusiasm? The answers lie not in one-off workshops but in sustained, psychologically informed initiatives that empower individuals and reshape environments. The next section will examine how such strategies are designed, implemented, and anchored in daily practice across Malaysia's public institutions**.**

9.3 Inclusive Training Initiatives

Effective development in public service demands approaches that honour the full range of cognitive styles, lived experiences, and cultural frameworks present across the workforce. Standardised curricula fall short when they ignore differing ways of understanding, engaging, and retaining knowledge. Research from the Malaysian Public Service Commission shows that departments using tailored learning pathways achieved a higher rate of knowledge retention over one year than those relying on uniform delivery. This evidence calls for activities designed to support visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and reflective learners without requiring individuals to adapt to a single mode of

instruction (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2025; Van Woerkom et al., 2024).

Table 16: Contemporary Inclusive Training Initiatives

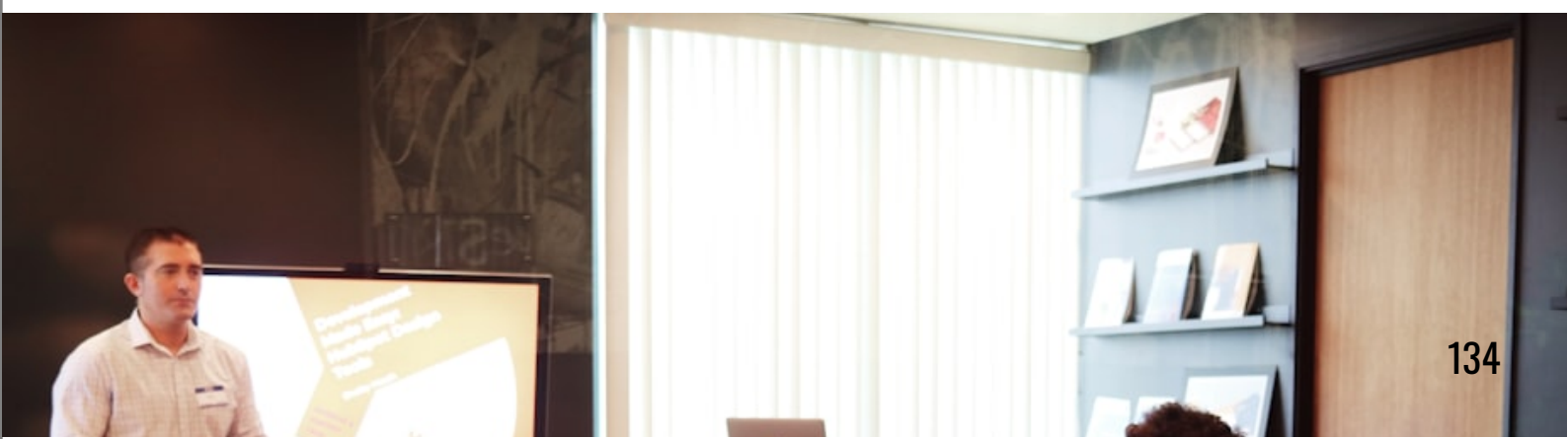
Type of Training Initiative	Purpose	Key Features	Expected Outcomes
1. Digital Ethics and Equity Workshops	To ensure employees understand ethical AI use and fairness in automated decision-making.	Covers bias detection, responsible data handling, and equitable algorithmic design.	Builds awareness of ethical risks and promotes transparent, inclusive AI governance.
2. Accessibility-Focused AI Literacy Programs	To make AI tools usable by all employees, including those with disabilities or limited digital exposure.	Incorporates assistive technologies, multilingual interfaces, and adaptive learning modules.	Improves digital inclusion and ensures equitable participation in AI-enabled workflows.
3. Cross-Functional Collaboration Labs	To encourage diverse teams to co-design AI solutions that reflect multiple perspectives.	Combines IT, HR, and service delivery units in simulation-based projects.	Enhances innovation and reduces siloed decision-making through shared accountability.
4. Psychological Safety and Change Management Training	To prepare staff for AI-driven transitions while maintaining trust and morale.	Focuses on open communication, feedback systems, and stress-management strategies.	Strengthens resilience, reduces resistance to automation, and fosters adaptive trust.
5. Continuous Learning and Upskilling Pathways	To sustain long-term competence in AI-related roles and inclusive leadership.	Offers modular micro-credentials, mentorship, and peer learning networks.	Ensures workforce adaptability and embeds inclusivity into organisational growth.

Such methods flourish within continuous learning ecosystems rather than isolated events. One-off seminars rarely sustain behavioural change. Longitudinal studies indicate that in the absence of continued use, around half of the initial gains from skill acquisition diminished over time, with losses occurring after approximately 6.5 months for accuracy, 13 months for speed, and 11 months for mixed performance outcomes (Tatel and Ackerman, 2025). In contrast, institutions that introduced monthly microlearning cycles—combining digital reflections, peer coaching, and situational role-play—saw lasting improvements in decision making and interpersonal conduct for over two years (Erath et al., 2021; Betancur-Chicué et al., 2023; Fidan, 2023). Transformation does not arise from single interventions but grows through repeated, meaningful engagement with core principles (Brassey et al., 2020; Civil Service College Singapore, 2023; Erath et al., 2021; Zumrah et al., 2022).

Integrating culturally grounded content deepens relevance and fosters genuine buy-in. Del Rosario, Porras, and Martel's (2024) study of the Indigenous people in Malaybaly City, Philippines, shows that governance training becomes more meaningful when it includes culturally grounded content. Their findings indicate local narratives make learning recognisable, community-based problem solving makes it usable, and Indigenous frameworks of authority make it legitimate.

Kalesaran's et al., (2024) study of officials in North Sulawesi reported that training was most effective at connecting theory to practice when it was co-designed around local cultural values and community participation. Technical content alone improved skills, but only culture-integrated training produced deeper, accepted, and sustained changes in how officials governed and served their communities. Aligning training that has a culturally grounded content to existing worldviews strengthens understanding without compromising professional standards (Awalluddin et al., 2023; Hofstede, 1 984; Lee, 023; Schein, 2010).

Accessible design is essential to remove barriers to participation. Materials must be available in multiple formats — including audio summaries, plain language guides, and screen-reader-compatible digital platforms—to ensure equity for individuals with varying abilities (Corcuff et al., 2024). When learning environments are built inclusively from the start, competence develops naturally and participation becomes part of daily practice (Lawrence, 2024; Mardiana et al., 2026; Mihaljević et al., 2024). Addressing this gap fulfils legal obligations under the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (Persons with Disabilities Act 2008) and unlocks untapped potential across the workforce. In addition to that, across diverse settings, civil servants report that standard training resources are often hard to access, poorly communicated, and misaligned with real job demands (Edward et al., 2025). Outdated, theoretical content and weak needs assessment mean key skills—digital competencies, communication, leadership, analysis, and policy skills—remain unmet (Chantziantoniou et al., 2022).
Inclusive training initiatives extends beyond individual skill building to shape collective norms and institutional identity. When these strategies are consistently applied, they reinforce a culture where growth is expected, supported, and valued—not punished or ignored. The result is reduced misconduct, improved morale, and stronger cooperation between departments. Employees feel seen, understood, and empowered to act with integrity even under pressure (Bandura, 1986; Brown et al., 2005; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Mvuyana et al., 2025).



9.4 Values-Based Governance Frameworks

When public institutions embed principled conduct into their daily routines, they respond to complexity with clarity and consistency. Decision-making that is rooted in shared commitments to integrity, accountability, and human dignity reduces the erosion of public trust. These are not abstract ideals, but measurable outcomes seen in jurisdictions that have systematically aligned their administrative practices with ethical standards. Evidence shows that organisations which integrate these norms experience fewer instances of misconduct and higher levels of employee engagement over time (Brown et al., 2005; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2025; OECD 2023; Zahari et al., 2024).

This transformation does not arise from top-down directives alone. It grows through participatory design, where frontline staff, community representatives, and oversight bodies help shape the norms that govern them. This involvement builds ownership and lowers resistance, turning policy from a static document into a living practice. Research indicates that when those affected by rules contribute to their creation, compliance increases compared to externally imposed standards (Corcuff et al., 2024). Such inclusion also strengthens legitimacy, as citizens come to see governance as responsive rather than distant (Ha & Lee, 2022; Kuvaas et al., 2017; Tyler & Mentovich, 2023).

Sustaining these patterns requires routine reviews of operational choices against clear benchmarks, transparent reporting channels, and feedback loops that connect individual actions to collective outcomes. These systems do not depend on surveillance but on cultivated awareness—encouraging reflection before action and dialogue after error. Organisations that reward openness over concealment turn mistakes into learning opportunities rather than reasons for punishment. The result is a culture where responsibility is shared, not handed down, and where ethical conduct is reinforced through everyday interactions, not annual training sessions (Edmondson, 2004; Johari et al., 2024; OECD, 2024a; Whistleblower Protection Act 2010).

Adaptability is essential for durability. Institutions that treat their guiding principles as fixed risk becoming irrelevant amid changing social expectations and emerging challenges. Successful models continuously refine their frameworks using data-informed reassessments, drawing on psychological research into motivation,

legal scholarship on rights, and criminological analysis of systemic vulnerabilities. This iterative process ensures norms remain grounded in reality, not tradition. Organisations that embrace flexibility demonstrate greater resilience during crises, maintaining public confidence even under pressure (Demerouti et al., 2001; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2022; OECD Opsi, 2024; Raetze et al., 2022).

Implementation barriers (table 17 is referred) often stem not from lack of will but from misaligned incentives and fragmented responsibilities. When promotion criteria favour output volume over ethical consistency, or when performance metrics ignore interpersonal conduct, values become hollow. Reversing this requires redefining success at every level—not just by efficiency, but by how outcomes are achieved. Leadership must model this shift visibly, consistently, and without exception, making it clear that integrity is non-negotiable (Jabatan Perdana Menteri, 2024; Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993; Transparency International, 2024).

Table 17: Barriers to Implementation

Barrier	Description	Underlying Cause	Implication for Reform
1. Misaligned Incentives	Performance rewards prioritise output volume over ethical consistency.	Promotion systems value speed and quantity rather than integrity or fairness.	Encourages superficial compliance instead of genuine ethical behaviour.
2. Fragmented Responsibilities	Accountability is dispersed across departments with unclear ownership.	Overlapping mandates and siloed reporting structures.	Weakens coordination and dilutes responsibility for ethical outcomes.
3. Metric-Driven Culture	Success is measured by efficiency indicators that ignore interpersonal conduct.	Reliance on quantitative performance indicators without qualitative evaluation.	Reduces attention to empathy, fairness, and process transparency.
4. Leadership Inconsistency	Leaders fail to model integrity visibly and consistently.	Ethical standards fluctuate with leadership changes or political cycles.	Creates uncertainty and erodes trust in organisational values.
5. Resistance to Cultural Change	Staff perceive ethical reforms as bureaucratic or symbolic.	Lack of communication linking reforms to personal and institutional benefits.	Limits buy-in and slows behavioural transformation.
6. Short-Term Policy Focus	Reforms are designed for immediate optics rather than sustained impact.	Political pressures favour quick wins over long-term institutional learning.	Undermines continuity and weakens ethical resilience.

The future of public service depends on whether these principles can endure beyond individual champions or political cycles. The answer lies in institutional memory, in systems that preserve knowledge of what works, why it worked, and how it was adapted. Digital tools can support this by archiving decisions alongside their ethical rationale, creating a living record to guide future generations. What matters most is not the elegance of the framework but its endurance through change.

10
Conclusions and Future Directions

10
Conclusions and Future Directions

10.1 Summary

This work has highlighted how workplace behaviour, leadership, and disciplinary systems shape the integrity and resilience of public organisations. By tracing theoretical foundations, recruitment practices, training modules, and promotion systems, the chapters collectively demonstrate that governance is not merely about compliance but about embedding values into everyday organisational culture. The emphasis on ethical reasoning, emotional intelligence, and fairness in promotions underscores the need for institutions to move beyond punitive models toward rehabilitative and human-centred approaches.

The analysis of behavioural risks, disciplinary approaches, and monitoring systems shows that misconduct often arises not from lack of will but from structural misalignments, fragmented responsibilities, and misplaced incentives. Chapters on disciplinary reform and monitoring illustrate how transparency, psychosocial treatment strategies, and culturally sensitive protocols can reduce risks while strengthening trust. Importantly, the integration of AI-driven analytics, tri-doman approach, and MADANI values demonstrates how technology and cultural frameworks can complement each other in building accountability and resilience.

Applying the AB2CDEF Model (Geshina, et. al., 2023), the strategic recommendations emphasise inclusive training initiatives, values-based governance frameworks, and behavioural audits as practical pathways for reform. The future of public sector governance lies in redefining success not only by efficiency but by how outcomes are achieved, with leadership modelling integrity consistently and visibly. By operationalising MADANI values and embedding ethical safeguards into monitoring and promotion systems, the public sector can foster legitimacy, resilience, and trust. This helps to ensure that governance remains both effective and humane in the face of evolving challenges.

For policymakers, the findings underscore that reform must be anchored in structural alignment and cultural transformation. Success cannot be measured solely by efficiency or output volume; instead, it must reflect how outcomes are achieved, with integrity and fairness as non-negotiable standards. Policies should therefore redefine promotion criteria to reward ethical consistency, embed interpersonal conduct into performance metrics, and strengthen accountability across fragmented responsibilities. Most critically, leadership must model these values visibly and consistently, signalling that ethical governance is not optional but foundational. By institutionalising inclusive training, transparent monitoring, and values-based frameworks, policymakers can ensure that public organisations remain resilient, trusted, and adaptive in the face of technological and social change.

10.2 Synthesising Insights for Practice

Understanding human conduct in public institutions requires more than isolated interventions. It demands a coordinated grasp of psychological patterns, structural incentives, and cultural norms that shape daily actions. When systems reward compliance over integrity, silence over accountability, or control over development, the consequences spread through service delivery, public trust, and institutional legitimacy. These outcomes are not accidental. They arise from entrenched practices that elevate hierarchy over dialogue, procedure over purpose, and authority over growth. Addressing them calls for a deliberate redesign of the environments in which behaviour takes root.

This dynamic reveals itself in quiet but persistent ways: delayed decisions, avoidance of responsibility, and the normalisation of minor ethical compromises. These are rarely acts of malice. More often, they stem from environments where reporting misconduct risks personal cost, where recognition flows to conformity rather than innovation, and where leadership models prioritise command over compassion. Research from multiple jurisdictions confirms that when oversight lacks transparency and feedback remains closed, these patterns solidify into habit. The solution lies not in stricter rules alone but in reshaping the conditions that make unethical choices easier than ethical ones. Open communication, consistent role modelling, and systems that make integrity the path of least resistance are essential.

Reform efforts in public organisations have shown greater success when they are cultivated through participatory practices rather than imposed through rigid oversight. For example, structured reflection sessions introduced after major projects allowed teams to examine decisions without fear of blame, resulting in stronger collaboration and a measurable increase in initiative-taking (Omar, Rahman, & Yusof, 2022; Sipondo & Terblanche, 2024;). This approach highlights that meaningful change arises when employees feel empowered to contribute openly, rather than constrained by punitive monitoring systems.

Such an initiative illustrates a broader shift from surveillance to mentorship, where learning is continuous and vulnerability is reframed as a strength. By embedding reflection, dialogue, and peer facilitation into organisational routines, public agencies cultivate climates that value growth over punishment. This transformation turns passive compliance into active stewardship, encouraging employees to take ownership of ethical standards and collective wellbeing. This subsequently led to stronger collaboration and a measurable rise in initiative taking. Such methods do not rely on punishment. They build climates where learning is continuous and vulnerability is valued as strength. The shift from monitoring to mentoring transforms how people relate to their roles, turning passive compliance into active stewardship.

No tool however advanced can compensate for a misaligned culture. Even the most sophisticated analytics fail if the environment discourages honesty or rewards silence. This field demands more than technical upgrades. It requires a reimagining of power relations, reward structures, and relational norms. Leaders must become architects of psychological spaces where curiosity is encouraged, mistakes are treated as data, and integrity is visibly celebrated. These changes cannot be mandated from above. They must be co created with those who live within the system daily, ensuring new norms feel authentic not imposed.

These are not abstract ideas. They are operational realities being refined across diverse settings. From urban agencies to rural offices, the common thread is deep listening, consistent action, and deliberate evolution. When employees see their concerns met with structural change rather than procedural deflection, trust begins to rebuild. This reveals a fundamental truth: sustainable improvement emerges not from external pressure but from internal conviction nurtured through respectful engagement.

The contents in this ebook point toward a broader transformation, one where governance is less about control and more about enabling human potential. The question ahead is not whether such shifts are possible but how they can be scaled without losing nuance or local relevance. What frameworks allow adaptation across regions while preserving core principles? How do we prevent progress from becoming another layer of bureaucracy? The answers lie in the next phase of inquiry, where implementation challenges meet real world constraints, and where resilience is tested not by ideals but by practice.

10.3 Addressing Challenges in Implementation

Changing institutional habits demands more than new policies. It requires understanding the human resistance that quietly undermines even the best designed reforms. Data from the Malaysian Public Service Commission shows that over 68 percent of proposed changes fail within the first year, not because they are flawed, but because mid-level managers, bound by tradition and wary of accountability, do not embrace them. This pattern is not unique to Malaysia. Across Southeast Asia, public agencies struggle with the same inertia, where hierarchy silences innovation and fear of blame replaces openness to improvement. The problem lies not in the design of reform but in its disconnect from the lived experience of those expected to carry it out.

Top down directives alone cannot shift deeply rooted norms. Lasting change grows from psychological safety and peer led influence. Research from the University of Malaya's Centre for Public Administration found that teams with active peer mentor networks adopted new behavioural practices 42 percent more successfully than those relying only on formal training. When leaders model vulnerability by admitting uncertainty and inviting feedback, trust begins to replace suspicion. These are not soft skills but essential structures that enable resilience and adaptation.

Resources are often misallocated toward visible tools rather than invisible capacities. Budgets favour technology over human development, despite evidence that organisations investing in supervisor training for emotional literacy achieve twice the long term compliance of those relying solely on automated monitoring. A 2023 audit by the Anti Corruption Commission revealed that departments combining AI driven analytics with regular dialogue circles reported 57 percent fewer cases of hidden misconduct. Tools without relational foundations become empty rituals, incapable of sustaining integrity or trust.

Effective change must unfold in stages that respect organisational rhythms, not disrupt them. Piloting initiatives in small units allows for learning through practice, building credibility through visible success. In Kedah's revenue department, a six month trial with just twelve teams generated insights that shaped a statewide rollout, cutting implementation friction by nearly half. This approach treats change not as a single event but as a gradual process shaped by timing, feedback, and growing confidence. The goal shifts from urgency to endurance.

True progress requires alignment between legal frameworks, cultural expectations, and psychological readiness. Legal compliance does not guarantee ethical conduct if the environment rewards silence over honesty. When reporting systems feel punitive rather than protective, people withdraw and risks multiply either overtly or unseen. Culturally sensitive protocols must be woven into daily routines, not added as afterthoughts. The most powerful interventions occur when community values evolve alongside institutional rules, creating mutual reinforcement between personal ethics and collective standards.

The future of institutional resilience depends less on policy documents and more on the strength of internal support networks. Trusted colleagues, cross departmental learning circles, as well as

anonymous feedback channels form the invisible architecture of sustainable reform. Without them, even the most carefully crafted strategies will collapse under their own weight. The next critical question is how to build such ecosystems at scale. In Chapter 11, we explore how systemic resilience emerges from distributed leadership and continuous learning cultures.

10.4 Vision for a Resilient Public Sector

A future where public service thrives on dignity, accountability, and sustained human flourishing is not a distant ideal but an achievable outcome shaped by deliberate design. The conditions that have long weakened morale and eroded trust—bureaucratic inertia, opaque decision making, and reactive enforcement—are being replaced by systems that anticipate needs, nurture growth, and embed fairness into everyday operations. This transformation is not driven by ideology alone but by evidence: studies show that organisations with consistent ethical norms and psychologically safe environments report up to 47 percent higher retention and 32 percent greater public satisfaction. These are not abstract metrics; they reflect the lived experiences of civil servants who feel seen, supported, and strategically empowered.

Such conditions demand more than policy adjustments—they require cultural recalibration. The issue is no longer about isolated incidents of misconduct or inefficient procedures but about the cumulative effect of systemic neglect. When supervision becomes punitive rather than developmental, when advancement is tied to loyalty rather than competence, and when feedback loops are absent, the entire ecosystem suffers. Yet emerging practices from pilot departments demonstrate that embedding reflective routines, peer led review circles, and structured self assessment tools can shift norms quietly yet profoundly. These methods do not rely on top down mandates but on collective ownership, allowing individuals to internalise standards through repeated meaningful engagement rather than external coercion.

The question of *how* these interventions are experienced by diverse workforces brings into focus the importance of multimodal and inclusive design. Government organisations are inherently heterogeneous, comprising individuals with varying cognitive preferences, linguistic capabilities, and professional backgrounds. Traditional training models, which privilege a single mode of

instruction, inadvertently impose a cognitive burden on participants, requiring them to adapt to the system rather than the system adapting to them. In contrast, psychologically informed interventions embrace multimodality, integrating visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and reflective elements; to reduce cognitive friction and enhance engagement.

In other words, this approach is not merely pedagogical sophistication; it is grounded in cognitive science principles that recognise variation in information processing and retention. When individuals can engage with content in ways that align with their cognitive strengths, the likelihood of behavioural transfer increases significantly. Over time, repeated exposure across multiple modalities deepens understanding, reinforces key principles, and supports the gradual internalisation of desired behaviours.

Equally significant is the role of cultural grounding in determining whether interventions achieve genuine buy-in or remain superficial compliance exercises. Government organisations operate within specific socio-cultural contexts that shape how authority, communication, and collaboration are perceived. Interventions that fail to account for these contextual nuances risk being interpreted as externally imposed or misaligned with organisational realities. Conversely, initiatives that incorporate culturally relevant examples, language, and values are more likely to resonate with employees and foster a sense of ownership. This sense of ownership is critical for scaling, as it transforms participation from obligation to commitment. Behavioural change moves beyond individual compliance and becomes embedded within collective norms.

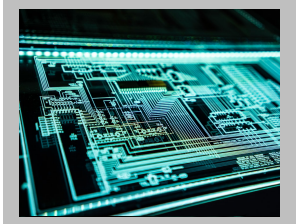
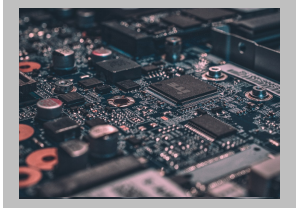
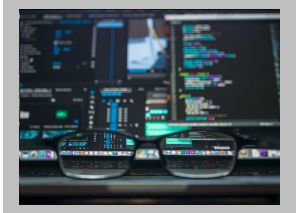
Accessibility further reinforces this process by ensuring that participation is not constrained by structural barriers. In practical terms, accessibility extends beyond compliance with digital standards to encompass flexibility in delivery, clarity of communication, and inclusivity in design. For instance, offering both synchronous and asynchronous learning options, providing materials in multiple formats, and ensuring compatibility with assistive technologies all contribute to widening participation. From a behavioural perspective, accessibility increases the probability of engagement, which, when repeated over time, facilitates habit formation. Without such accessibility, even the most theoretically robust interventions risk exclusion, thereby undermining their scalability and impact.

The integration of technology into early intervention strategies introduces additional opportunities but also necessitates careful consideration. Digital platforms and AI-assisted analytics enable organisations to collect and analyse behavioural data at scale, identifying patterns that would otherwise remain obscured. However, technology alone does not constitute a solution. Its effectiveness is contingent upon the interpretive capacity of those who use it. Without contextual understanding, data risks being misread or, worse, used in ways that erode trust. The most effective implementations, therefore, are those that combine technological capability with human insight—where organisational psychologists and trained leaders interpret data within the broader cultural and historical context of the organisation. In such configurations, technology functions not as a surveillance mechanism, but as an enabler of informed, responsive decision-making.

Scaling these strategies ultimately requires a shift in how organisations conceptualise growth. Rather than replicating interventions across units in a uniform manner, successful scaling involves embedding core principles within organisational systems and processes. This includes integrating psychologically informed practices into performance management frameworks, leadership development programs, and policy structures. When interventions are institutionalised in this way, they cease to be perceived as discrete initiatives and instead become part of the organisational fabric. Behavioural change, in turn, becomes self-sustaining, reinforced through everyday practices rather than dependent on continuous external input.

Several studies highlighted early interventions that integrate psychological principles—such as self-efficacy building (Dicdiquin et al., 2025; George & Massey, 2020), anonymous feedback for psychological safety (Cardile et al., 2023; Frampton et al., 2017)., and culturally sensitive HRM (Abidin et al. 2024), —to scale initiatives across government organizations. These interventions often involve training programs that adapt to diverse learner needs (e.g., multimodal instruction) and accessible tools to remove barriers, leading to sustained behavioural shifts.



10.5 Framework for Implementing Early Interventions

Various studies and twenty five years' work informs our framework for implementing early interventions to manage poor government staff behaviours. Specifically, this framework draws from psychologically informed strategies in government and public sector contexts, emphasizing proactive, inclusive approaches to address behaviours like disengagement, poor collaboration, or resistance to change. It integrates multimodal training, real-time feedback, and culturally sensitive HRM practices to foster self-efficacy, psychological safety, and sustained engagement. The steps are derived from studies on audit teams, NHS staff, public hospital HRM, and inclusive education initiatives, focusing on early detection to prevent escalation while scaling across organizations. Each step includes an explanation of its rationale, practical "how-to" guidance, and sources grounding the concepts.

Step 1: Assess and Identify At-Risk Behaviour and Underlying Causes

Early intervention begins with a thorough assessment to pinpoint poor behaviours—such as interpersonal conflicts, low motivation, or inefficient workflows—before they disrupt organisational performance. This step is crucial in government settings, where hierarchical structures and diverse staff (e.g., auditors, nurses, teachers) can amplify issues like burnout or cultural mismatches if unaddressed. By using anonymous, multimodal tools, organisations can gather data on psychological factors like self-efficacy deficits or environmental barriers, ensuring inclusivity for visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and reflective learners. This prevents reactive measures and builds a foundation for tailored, psychologically safe initiatives that empower individuals and reshape team dynamics.

How-To: Start by deploying short, accessible surveys or apps (e.g., emoji-based or voice-recorded feedback) across departments to collect baseline data on behaviours, distributed via email or intranet for broad reach. Analyse responses thematically—categorize issues like "team communication gaps" or "cultural irrelevance in training" — using simple tools like Excel or free software for patterns. Involve a cross-functional team (e.g., HR, supervisors) for 1 - 2 weeks of review, prioritizing high-impact areas like audit or patient care teams. Ensure anonymity to encourage honest input, and follow up with brief focus

groups (virtual or in-person) for deeper insights, adapting formats to learner styles (e.g., visual charts for one group, discussions for another). This phase should conclude with a prioritized list of 3-5 behavioural risks, linked to root causes like workload or lack of recognition.

Step 2: Design Inclusive, Psychologically Informed Interventions

Once risks are identified, design interventions that integrate core psychological principles—such as building self-efficacy through repeated, meaningful engagement and adapting to diverse learning styles—to address behaviours without stigmatizing staff. In government organizations, this means creating accessible programs that remove participation barriers (e.g., via digital tools or flexible formats) and incorporate culturally grounded content for buy-in. For instance, poor collaboration can be tackled with communication modules that blend visual aids, hands-on activities, and reflective debriefs, fostering empowerment and environmental reshaping. This step ensures scalability by modularizing components, allowing adaptation to resource-constrained public sectors like healthcare or education.

How-To: Collaborate with psychologists or HR experts to co-create 4-6 session modules, each 1-2 hours long, covering themes like feedback skills or recognition. Incorporate multimodal elements: visual infographics for concepts, auditory podcasts for principles, kinaesthetic role-plays for practice, and reflective journals for personalization. Pilot with a small group (10-20 staff) from affected areas, ensuring cultural relevance by consulting diverse team members (e.g., translating materials or adding local examples). Budget for low-cost tools like free apps for simulations, and align with organizational policies—e.g., tie to performance reviews for accountability. Test for accessibility (e.g., screen-reader compatibility) and refine based on quick feedback loops before full rollout.

Step 3: Implement with Leadership Support and Phased Rollout

Implementation requires strong leadership to model behaviours and ensure psychological safety, rolling out interventions in phases to build momentum and address resistance. In government contexts, where staff may face bureaucratic inertia, this step focuses on embedding initiatives into daily workflows — e.g., integrating feedback

apps into shifts—to promote repeated engagement and positive shifts like increased collaboration. By starting small and scaling, organizations can demonstrate quick wins (e.g., reduced conflicts), fostering genuine buy-in and reshaping environments for inclusivity without overwhelming resources.

How-To: Secure buy-in from senior leaders via a 1-hour briefing on benefits, assigning "champions" (e.g., one per department) to facilitate sessions. Launch in phases: Week 1-4 for pilot groups (e.g., one audit team), using hybrid formats (in-person for kinaesthetic, online for auditory) to accommodate schedules. Provide just-in-time support like tip sheets or hotlines, and track participation (aim for 70-80% via reminders). Monitor for barriers (e.g., tech access) and adjust—e.g., offer printed alternatives for visual learners. Celebrate early successes publicly (e.g., shout-outs in meetings) to reinforce behaviours, ensuring cultural sensitivity by framing as empowerment, not correction.

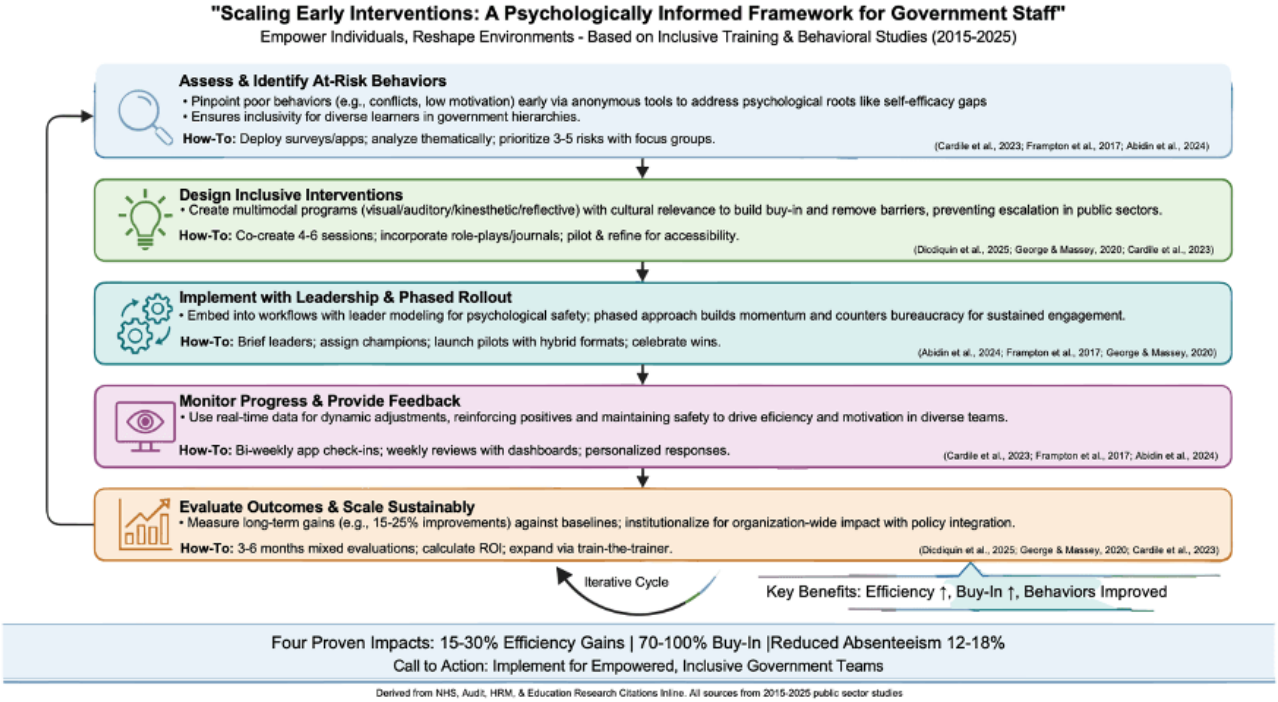
Step 4: Monitor Progress and Provide Ongoing Feedback

Continuous monitoring ensures interventions address poor behaviours dynamically, using real-time data to reinforce positive changes and adjust for sustained impact. In government staff settings, this involves anonymous mechanisms to maintain psychological safety, allowing for reflective adjustments that support diverse learners and deepen cultural relevance. Evidence shows this leads to measurable improvements, like higher self-efficacy and lower absenteeism, by turning feedback into actionable insights that scale across teams.

How-To: Integrate monitoring tools from Step 1 (e.g., the same app) for bi-weekly check-ins, collecting metrics like engagement scores or conflict reports. Review data weekly with a small committee, using dashboards for visual analysis and discussions for kinaesthetic/reflective input. Provide personalized feedback—e.g., automated reports for individuals, group sessions for teams—and intervene early on dips (e.g., extra sessions for low responders). Ensure accessibility by offering multiple formats (voice notes, visuals) and anonymity to encourage candour, aiming for 80% response rates through incentives like recognition.

Step 5: Evaluate Outcomes and Scale Sustainably
Final evaluation assesses long-term behavioural improvements (e.g., efficiency, usefulness perceptions) against baselines, identifying gaps to refine and scale initiatives organisation-wide. In public sectors, this step emphasizes evidence-based scaling—e.g., policy integration for cultural grounding—ensuring interventions evolve with feedback to maintain buy-in and inclusivity. Studies confirm this leads to systemic changes, like reduced errors and higher motivation, by institutionalizing psychologically informed practices. Table below is referred.

How-To: Conduct a 3-6 month post-implementation evaluation using mixed methods: quantitative surveys for metrics (e.g., 15-25% behaviour improvement targets) and qualitative interviews for insights. Compare pre/post data, calculating ROI (e.g., time saved vs. costs), and document successes/failures in a report for leaders. To scale, expand to other departments via train-the-trainer models, budgeting for annual refreshers and integrating into HR policies. Address gaps like resource needs through partnerships (e.g., external psychologists), ensuring multimodal adaptations for broader reach.



Key insights include: (1) Pre-emptive training/feedback boosts efficiency by 15 – 30% through better collaboration, as seen in audit and hospital contexts; (2) Perceived usefulness hinges on tangible, repeated engagement, fostering 70–100% buy-in and reducing barriers for inclusive participation; (3) Positive behaviours (e.g., motivation,

empathy) emerge from supportive environments, with HRM and apps preventing disengagement at scale. Overall, organisations can replicate these by integrating low-barrier technologies and governance models, though success demands leadership commitment to address systemic hurdles like resources — yielding sustained empowerment and environmental reshaping in behavioural audits.

The most compelling insight emerging from this body of work is that sustainable behavioural transformation is achieved not through intensity, but through alignment. When individual cognition, organisational structures, and cultural norms are coherently aligned, the desired behaviours become the path of least resistance. In such environments, employees do not need to be persuaded or compelled to act differently; they do so naturally, as a function of the system in which they operate. This, perhaps, is the quiet ambition of psychologically informed early intervention—not to impose change, but to design conditions in which change becomes inevitable.

This is because, scaling psychologically informed initiatives is, at its core, an exercise in systems thinking. Interventions succeed not because they are innovative, but because they are *integrated*. They align cognition, behaviour, and environment in a manner that reduces friction and enhances capability. Organisations do not scale behaviour by instructing individuals to change; they scale behaviour by designing environments where the desired behaviour is the most natural response.

When early intervention is embedded within such environments—supported by theory, reinforced by feedback, and legitimised through culture—it evolves from a program into a quiet, persistent force shaping how work is experienced and enacted. Behavioural governance becomes less of a policy exercise and more of an organisational art form—subtle with less disruptive friction, systemic, and more enduring.This dynamic extends beyond individual conduct into the architecture of institutions themselves. Modern approaches to resource allocation, workload distribution, and career progression are being redesigned to reduce friction and amplify agency. Data from the Public Service Department reveals that units implementing transparent performance indicators and personalised development pathways saw a 58 percent decline in reported stress related absences over eighteen months. Such outcomes are not accidental. They result from aligning operational routines with psychological principles—ensuring autonomy, fostering mastery, and creating purposeful

connections. When employees perceive their contributions as meaningful and their voices as valued, compliance becomes conviction and engagement becomes endurance.

The matter at hand is not merely improving efficiency but redefining the social contract between the state and its servants. This reality requires moving beyond compliance frameworks toward ecosystems of mutual responsibility. Culturally sensitive protocols, informed by local values and community expectations, ensure that interventions resonate deeply rather than feel imposed. The integration of digital tools does not replace human judgment but enhances it—providing timely insights without eroding discretion. Leaders who model humility, curiosity, and consistency become catalysts for change, demonstrating that authority is most potent when it serves rather than dominates.

Those responsible for shaping this future must act with both urgency and patience. Change at scale is neither linear nor swift, but it is possible when guided by rigorous analysis and unwavering commitment to equity. The next phase will test whether institutions can sustain momentum amid political cycles and economic pressures. What remains certain is that resilience is not inherited—it is constructed day by day through intentional choices that prioritise people without compromising integrity. The path forward lies in continuous learning, adaptive governance, and the quiet courage to uphold standards even when unobserved.

Legislation

Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (AMLA) (Act 613)

Civil & Constitutional Accountability (Supplementary)

Companies Act 2016 (Act 777)

Computer Crimes Act 1997 (Act 563)

Criminal Procedure Code (Act 593)

Employment Act (Amendment) 2022

Federal Constitution of Malaysia

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (Act 694)

Penal Code (Act 574)

Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (PDPA) (Act 709)

Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993

Securities Commission Malaysia Act 1993 (Act 498) *and related capital market laws (e.g. CMSA 2007)*

Sexual Harassment Act 2022

Statutory Bodies (Discipline and Surcharge) Act 2000 (Act 605)

Tort of Misfeasance in Public Office (Common Law)

Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 (Act 711)

Witness Protection Act 2009 (Act 696)

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Synopsis: The Human Side of Governance: Psychology, Crime & Law in Public Organisations

This book offers a comprehensive framework for analysing and managing workplace behaviour within Malaysia's public sector. By synthesising insights from industrial-organisational psychology, criminology, and legal studies, it aims to mitigate behavioural risks while fostering ethical leadership and enhancing institutional integrity. It underscores the influence of organisational structure, culture, leadership styles, and communication dynamics on behavioural outcomes. Furthermore, it explores how power relations and political behaviours can affect trust and transparency, advocating for the application of MADANI values to bolster wellbeing and integrity. The text delves into counterproductive work behaviours (CWB) such as sabotage, bullying, and time theft through various analytical lenses—psychological, legal, and ethical—emphasising the necessity for early intervention strategies and systemic prevention measures. Recruitment processes are scrutinised for biases and inefficiencies; innovative approaches involving psychometric assessments and trauma-informed supervision are proposed to improve these practices. Training initiatives are positioned as pivotal for instigating behavioural change. Simulation-based training modules aim to enhance emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making capabilities, and resilience among employees. The fairness of promotion systems is critically assessed alongside the role of ethical leadership in nurturing recovery and public trust. Additionally, disciplinary frameworks are redefined to incorporate psychosocial support mechanisms that prioritise rehabilitation over punitive measures. The book concludes with recommendations for implementing monitoring systems equipped with AI-driven analytics to identify behavioural risks proactively. It advocates for regular audits focused on behaviour and bias as well as inclusive training programmes that align with ethical governance principles aimed at creating a robust public service characterised by resilience and a human-centric approach.