Artificial intelligence in Italian municipalities: from perceived affordances to institutional activation

SISP Conference 2026, Trento, 4 September - Panel 6.14

Elisa Filippi, Valeria Andreani, Francesco Monaco, Rosario Marrapodi, Edoardo Fabbri. Marco Scarselli — IFEL

Meet the colleague without a badge

It drafts, summarises, translates and analyses. Quickly.

But it has no formal role, clear supervisor and we do not know where have been trained or which rules it follow.

Generative AI may enter individual work practices before it enters organisational governance.

Three evidences on AI in public administration from literature

1. Transformative potential. Automation, public services, data analysis and decision support.

2. Adoption is socio-organisational. Skills, leadership, data, rules and governance shape implementation.

3. Adoption is accelerating, but uneven. Stronger in internal processes and services than in policymaking and accountability.

Availability does not automatically become organisational capacity.

IFEL
Fondazione ANCI

THE GAP

When does AI become institutional capacity?

Municipal evidence is scarce + use/non-use misses what happens in between.

Three questions connect perception to activation

RQ1 Affordances — What work-related opportunities do employees perceive?

RQ2 Constraints — Which technological, organisational, regulatory and procedural conditions limit adoption?

RQ3 Activation — At what conditions perceived potential become governed use?

TACT → perceived affordances and constraints

TOE → technological, organisational and environmental conditions

An exploratory survey captures the transition to use

AIPACT survey: November 2025–March 2026
664 complete responses: municipal employees

Mainly: Tuscany, Lombardy and Liguria. Non-probability, snowball-based sample

Unit of observation: individual respondent

Closed-ended questionnaire + 1 one open-ended item

Descriptive/interpretive analysis: TOE–TACT lens, not a causal model

NB: exploratory evidence, not representative population estimates

Employees see value, but activation capacity lags

AFFORDANCES perceived: mean 1–5

3.71 Data-driven analysis

3.67 Repetitive-task automation

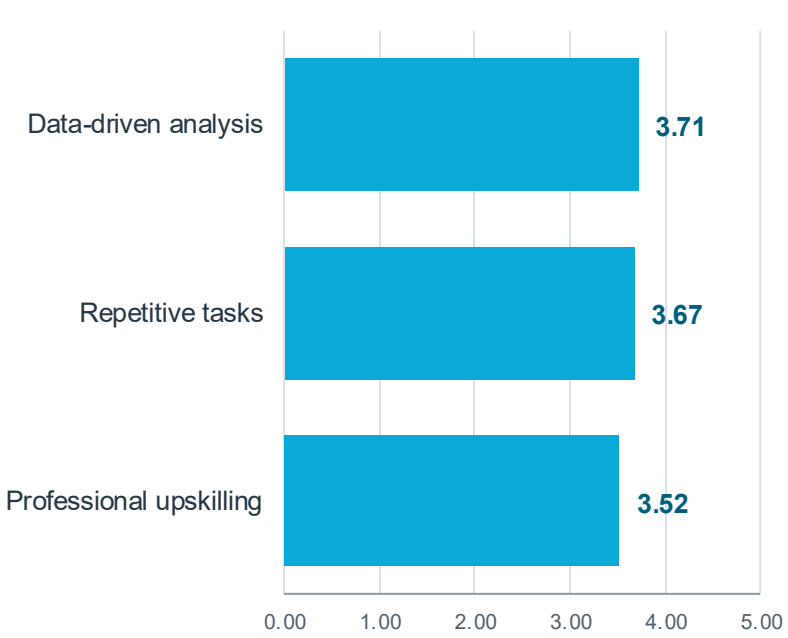
3.52 Professional upskilling

Self-assessed CAPACITY

55.7% no AI training in 12 months

≤ 2.53/5 self-rated competencies

Low adoption ≠ low perceived usefulness



The Paradox: AI enters individual practice faster than institutions

INSTITUTIONAL USE

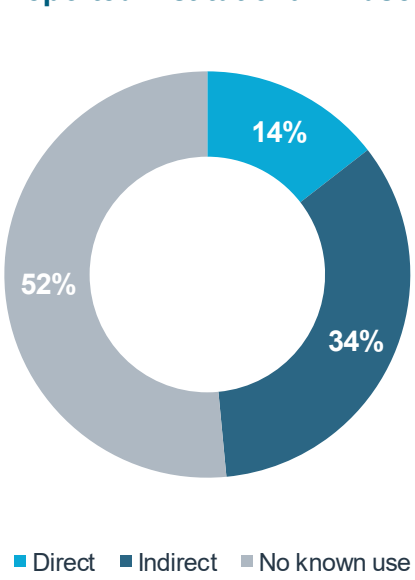
14.5% direct, **34.0%** indirect, **51.5%** no known use

INDIVIDUAL USE

41.9% personally use generative AI for work

86.0% of personal users rely on tools not provided b municipality

Experimentation precedes governed, stable use.



How to enable institutional activation

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

- Affordances are visible;
- Constraints combine skills, legal uncertainty, procedures and leadership.
- Individual experimentation can precede organisational embedding.

INSTITUTIONAL ACTIVATION REQUIRES

- Practical, role-specific training **(3.9/5)**
- Leadership, data governance and accountability
- Authorised tools
- Peer-to-peer learning across municipalities **(3.5/5)** (mimetic pressures)

How to enable institutional activation

Further investigation is required to detecte possible correlations among sub-groups, to extend the sample and to conduct a triangulation.

From a colleague without a badge to an organisational capability:

Institutional activation means both: **governing AI responsibly** and **enabling municipalities to realise its public value**

Thank you for your attention!

Elisa Filippi – IFEL scientific advisor on AIPACT
elisafilippi.tn@gmail.com