

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS AND TRANSPARENT INSTITUTIONS: A BUSINESS-DRIVEN APPROACH TO ACCOUNTABLE INSTITUTION DEVELOPMENT IN SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of digital governance frameworks with **transparent institutions** and **accountable institution** mechanisms to enhance sustainable public administration outcomes. Through a comprehensive analysis of 47 countries implementing digital governance initiatives, we investigate how business-oriented approaches in public sector management contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 targets. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of governance indicators with qualitative case studies of successful digital transformation projects. Findings reveal that countries with higher digital governance maturity demonstrate significantly better institutional performance and citizen satisfaction rates compared to traditional administrative systems. The study contributes to the literature by proposing a conceptual framework that bridges business management principles with public administration theory, emphasizing the critical role of **accountable institution** design in sustainable development. Results indicate that countries adopting integrated digital governance models show significant improvements in **transparent institution** performance, **responsive institution** capacity, and overall **governance** quality, particularly in achieving SDG 16 targets related to institutional effectiveness, rule of law, and corruption control. The research provides practical implications for policymakers seeking to enhance institutional effectiveness while maintaining democratic accountability and **transparency**.

Keywords: Digital governance, **transparent institutions**, **accountable institution**, **governance**, sustainable public administration, business management, institutional effectiveness, digital transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

More than ever before, the landscape of public Relations has changed as government seeks to integrate institutional effectiveness with the democratic principles of public accountability and transparency. Digitalization of public administration offers opportunities as well as challenges for developing institutions that aim to serve the citizens and achieve sustainable development goals (Nchuchuwe & Adejuwon, 2023; Utomo et al, 2024). Focus of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 includes the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, SDG16 targets promoting and strengthening inclusive and equitable quality education accessible to all, institutions of all levels and effective, accountable governance for all. The SDG16 High Level Conference emphasized this agenda to serve as a framework for monitoring and SDG16 has been reaffirmed as a central pillar for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN DESA, 2024). The most recent advancements in digital governance demonstrates the capacity of technology driven institutions to enhance accountability, citizen engagement, and service delivery (Nchuchuwe & Adejuwon, 2023; Okechukwu, 2023). For instance, digitalization of public service in East Africa and Indonesia offers good evidence of transformation in public service. These findings suggest the

need to establish innovative approaches that align effectiveness of the business management practices to the population-driven democratic needs of the service. However, the literature lacks such frameworks to merge the tenets of business with the governance digital strategies that help create responsible and inclusive institutional frameworks with a systematic unity (Utomo et al., 2024). The knowledge gap that should be addressed by this research would involve creation of a conceptual framework between the efficiency of the private sector and responsibility of the public sector. Consequentiality of the study is brought about by the increasing dawn, that the traditional methods of the discipline of public administration is insufficient because it cannot be applied to addressing complex issues that have complicated the society in 21st century.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do digital governance frameworks contribute to the development of **transparent institutions** in public administration?
2. What business management principles can be effectively adapted to enhance **accountable institution** mechanisms in the public sector?
3. What are the critical success factors for implementing integrated digital governance models that promote both efficiency and **transparency**?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Digital Governance

Digital governance is the move towards the past regime of bureaucratic governance to the present regime of systems of public management that systems functionalise use of technology. It consists of the strategic application of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) to change the operations, service delivery and citizen engagement (Engvall & Flak, 2022). First conceptualizations about e-government included the description as the Congress act of 2002 about e-government in the U.S. as a use of Internet applications and digital tools to enhance the efficiency of the governments (NCES, n.d.). The field of scholarship has since broadened the formulation to larger dimensions of governance such as the aspects of accountability, transparency, and inclusion of citizens (Lukings & Lashkari, 2022). Digital governance is based on theoretical foundations of tradition in public administration and management present in business. New Public Management (NPM) brought efficiency, performance measurement performance and customer-oriented services to the government sector (Gantar and Sabri, 2025). However, critics highlight that NPM usually undermines participatory democracy (Saida and Said, 2024). Contrarily, Digital Era Governance (DEG) is a theory that emphasizes reintegration, user-centric design, and technological potential to make it effective and participatory. Randive (2024) define digital governance as the new model of power, decision-making, and stakeholder interactions in the digital era considered as the concept of mechanisms that influence the digital world through processes and traditions. This base illustrates the importance of digital governance in enhancing sustainable and responsible organizations.

2.2 Transparent Institutions and Accountability Mechanisms

The idea of transparent institution is the one that lays the groundwork of the modern handlings of the subject of governance quality and institutional effectiveness. As per Sustainable Development Goal 16 calling upon building peaceful and inclusive states, access to justice to every citizen, and accountable and efficient institutions, ASU released a few research articles in the 2023/2024 academic year (ASU, 2024). Transparency is the idea that to benefit accountability and provide

the chance to scrutinize institutions, the institutions are open and transparent regarding the performance of their functions and foster the accessibility to the information. According to recent empirical studies, among the main dimensions that lead to effective institutional accountability, it is possible to note such dimensions as procedural transparency (transparency in decision-making), informational transparency (accessibility of information, data, reports, and participatory transparency (citizen involvement and response) (Shabnam & Chowdhury, 2025; **Khalufi et al., 2025**). E-governance is of paramount benefits to the effectiveness and efficiency of governance. As an example, the use of technology in the public procurement within Kenya was discovered to improve on the speed of service delivery, cost reductions, and improvement on the procurement process transparency (Mandala et al., 2024). Likewise, it was observed in a case study in Indonesia that e-government helped to decrease the number of delays and repeating bureaucratic activities, as well as increase the efficiency and transparency (Anto et al., 2025). The business literature offers a good deal of information on transparency and accountability practices that can be applied to the contexts of the public sector: institutional transparency appears to be promoted through frameworks focusing on stakeholder engagement, measurement of the performances, and improvement process (Macharia, Munga, and Kithinji, 2025). These values are compatible and can be incorporated well with the needs of the *laissez faire* in providing transparent institutions to provide efficiency as well as democratic goals.

2.3 Business Management Principles in Public Administration

Additional psychology One question that has gained some scholarship attention is the application of business management to implementing government. Suggesting the idea of the efficiency, lower costs, and better service quality, advocates consider that business-type approaches may improve the result, and the criticism claims that state institutions work according to completely different priorities, when compared to a private enterprise (Osborne, 2020). Recent research points at how the selective adjustment of practices adapted to management could reinforce effectiveness without diminishing the democratic values. Kalimullah and Ashraf (2021) note in particular that the tools of performance management and focus on process optimization have been effective when adapted to the conditions in the public sector. On the same note, Greiling and Schoute (2022) observe that performance management systems based on practices of the private sector have the ability to increase accountability and responsiveness in government. The idea of the public value creation has surfaced as a means of seeing the reconciliation of efficiency being adjusted with results oriented towards citizens (Vasudevan et al., 2025). What makes this article meaningful is that Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg (2021) set results, stakeholder interactions, and clear communication as a tool to create trust in the community. Cepiku (2020) continues to demonstrate that the strategic planning practices that are based on business practice can also be modified to ensure the preservation of efficiency and accountability. Additionally, Lindgren and van Veenstra (2021) recognize the importance of the digital government's platform as facilitator of these principles to present data-driven instrumentalities of monitoring performance and design services rather than relying on opinionated tools.

2.4 Digital Transformation in the Public Sector

The digital revolution in the government can go beyond the mere use of technology and involve radical organizational culture, operations, and delivery. Mergel et al. (2021) believe that the digital transformation is not a technological endeavor, but rather a reform process that transforms governance institutions. Digital government is a more recent development than transitioning to e-

government and currently places greater focus on efficiency, access, and quality of government services (Lindgren and van Veenstra, 2021). Studies indicate that effective initiatives are based on leadership strategies, stakeholder approach and a system of change management process modified based on the business sector (Wirtz, Müller, and Schmidt, 2021). The digital governance trend shows the transition of the networked, transparent, and citizen-focused forms of delivering services, influenced by the capabilities of the internet era and the increasing citizen expectations (Criado & Gil-Garcia, 2021). The vital success factors have been recognized as leadership dedication, proper resource allocation, and strong change management procedures (Weerakkody et al., 2021). However, existing problems like the digital divide, privacy concerns, and institutional resistance continue to hinder the provision of services and remain inclusive amidst the obstacles (Alruwaie et al., 2021).

2.5 Sustainable Development Goals and Institutional Effectiveness

The connection between digital governance and sustainable development has gained greater relevance as governments aim to meet the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development. Serving as the Official SDG 16 Review Conference in preparation for the 2024 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, the Conference assessed progress and challenges related to SDG 16 (UN DESA, 2024). Digital governance efforts may also make a difference in realizing several SDGs, especially SDG 16, which aims to establish effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. The digital technologies and their integration with the legislation practices provide the possibility to increase the transparency of the processes, as well as improve the service delivery and the citizens' involvement in the political activities. The articles are devoted to the progressive field of knowledge and innovation that will support the inclusive and sustainable economic growth and tackle the major concerns connected to employment, productivity, and economic development (ASU, 2024). This comes in the form of presenting the interdependence relationship between institutional efficacy and the outcomes of sustainable development.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Conceptual Model Development

The suggested research has provided an integrated theoretical view of how the management approaches in businesses may be overwhelmed by concepts of digital governance to come up with irresponsible measures in institutions. The model is grounded on four core foundations comprising of technological infrastructure, organizational capacity, stakeholder engagement, and performance measurement. Digital platforms, systems as well as tools required to deliver clear and transparent institutions are forms of technological infrastructure pillar. These include online government sites, e-data retrieval hardware, online identifying system as well as a cyber security policy. This organizational capacity pillar is centered around the human resource, the capability, or cultural changes which are necessary to establish digital governance in an effective manner. The stakeholder engagement pillar focuses on the involvement of citizens and that, the agencies collaborate and establish partnerships with the private sector in order to introduce responsiveness in the institutions. Lastly, there is the influence of the performance measurement pillar whereby the consideration of business-based indicators and strategies towards the review of performances are restructured on the type of business conducted within the public sector context.

3.2 Hypothesis Development

Based on the theoretical background, as well as on the literature review, the present research hypothesizes the following:

H1: More complex digital governance models in clear institutions have significantly higher levels of satisfaction among the citizens in comparison to traditional administration buildings.

H2: Application of business management concepts to digital governance efforts significantly improves accountable institution performance and does not interfere with the democratic values.

H3: The performance of countries according to SDG 16 indicators concerned with institutional effectiveness is significantly better in those countries with greater digital governance maturity scores.

H4: The level of digital transformation in the field of public administration is significantly positively related to responsive institution capacity.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study is a mixed-method research, a converse of quantitative studies of the indicators of the Governance and qualitative cases of the digital transformation programs. The research design will enable in-depth research on how the infrastructures of digital governance may be utilized in construction of transparent institutions, putting into consideration the principles of business management. The quantitative segment explores the 47-country secondary data on what efforts of major initiatives of digital governance have been implemented during the years of 2020-2024. The countries were identified by the level of maturity in the area of digital governments, accessibility of the data, and the geographical diversity to address the geographical coverage. The qualitative aspect will include the in-depth cases of the five countries (Estonia, Singapore, Denmark, South Korea, and Canada) that were identified as the leaders in their implementation of digital governance. These cases offer descriptive information regarding the real-world challenges and success factors that relate to the development of accountable institution mechanisms due to the digital transformation.

4.2 Data Collection

To gather quantitative data, several sources of information at international level were used, examples of them are United Nations E-Government Survey, World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, OECD Government at a Glance reports and government national statistics. The data consist of data on the digital government maturity related variables, citizen satisfaction, institutional effectiveness, and business process efficiency. Data in the form of qualitative information were collected via semi-structured interviews conducted with 45 high-level officials, experts on digital transformations, and civil society workers of the five countries of interest involved in this case study. Other qualitative data were drawn as a result of the document analysis of the implementation reports and policy frameworks, as well as academic articles.

4.3 Variables and Measures

The dependent variables, in turn, are the citizen satisfaction regarding the government services, the score of institutional effectiveness, the score of the transit levels, and the score of SDG 16 performance. Digital governance levels of maturity, business process integration scales, stakeholder degree of engagement, and the level of technological infrastructure are the independent variables. The control variables would most likely be their levels of economic development (GDP

per capita), their features of political systems (degrees of democracy), population size, and geography. Such controls assist in defining the effects of digital governance efforts on other issues that may affect change in institutions.

4.4 Data Analysis

The hypotheses of the study were tested through the use of descriptive statistics and regression models on quantitative data available in other countries. The important variables were digital governance maturity of the UN E-Government Development Index, institutional performance of the World Bank Governance Indicators, and citizen satisfaction using Gallup and OECD data. The aspects that were presented as the control variables and enhanced accuracy were GDP per capita and internet penetration. The qualitative section of the thematic analysis of the such discussions and policy papers will have covered the case studies of Estonia, Singapore, Denmark, South Korea, and Canada. Some of the prevailing themes brought into the fore with such strategy included leadership, stake holder involvement and inclusiveness. The integration of the two strategies was adopted, and that is why it was achievable to have a comprehensive understanding of the role of digital governance in transparent and accountable institutions.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interconnection Research on the digital governance maturity and institutional performance 47 countries 2020-2024 revealed that there was a significant relationship between digital transformation, accountability, and transparency. According to the findings, as it has been established through the obtained quantitative data, those countries with a high E-Government Development Index (EGDI) had higher chances of reporting better institutional performance and are more satisfied with the citizen. According to it, the United Nations E-Government Survey presents the EGDI and the E-Participation Index of all the UN members in this period, and Northern Europe and East Asia were leading in providing more digital governance than during this period (United Nations, 2022). As an example, Denmark, Singapore, and South Korea were listed 10th in 2022 EGDI, which implies the outcomes of intensive investment in the digital infrastructure as well as mobile service provision (United Nations, 2022).

Hypothesis 1 stated that clearer institutions were expected to have a greater satisfaction of their citizens as compared to others when they have fully deployed digital governance systems. This expectation could be validated by the results of the regression analysis, which presented a positive relationship that is statistically significant between EGDI scores and citizen satisfaction based on the Gallup World Poll (Gallup, 2023). Only 62 percent of countries were reported to experience average levels of citizen satisfaction in the category of EGDI scores higher than 0.80, while only 38 percent shared the same view in the category of EGDI scores lower than 0.50. This observation can be subsumed under the suggestion that frames of digital governance, as well as their technical efficiency, increase legitimacy and responsiveness perceptions (Lindgren and van Veenstra, 2021). The second hypothesis stated that applying business management principles to the digital governance initiatives improved the accountability of the institution without violating democracy. The results indicated that the countries that put in place such performance measurement, e-procurement processes, and customer service accounting in their measurements of digital strategy scored better in the accountability measure in the labour market under the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank, 2023). The Smart Nation strategy serves as a good specimen of such integration that is rendered to see to not only the high standards of performance indicators

but also transparent reporting systems that strengthen the trust of citizens (Weerakkody et al., 2021). Similarly, the business-style performance coupled with democratic inclusiveness may also be connected to the strengths of co-creations and participatory design, which is central to Denmark. According to these findings, managerial logics are needed to integrate digital governance in order to attain accountability (Greiling & Schoute, 2022).

The third hypothesis tested the connection between digital governance maturity and SDG 16 indicators. Statistical models showed results that tended to produce stronger results regarding institutional effectiveness, rule of law, and control of corruption performance even at relative terms of its GDP per capita and internet penetration, asserting that higher EGDI scores stood in mutually exclusive results. It is consistent with the information about Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, which cover the importance of effective, transparent, and accountable institutions in the realization of Goal 16 (United Nations, 2023). The case of South Korea is a clear example: the Digital Platform Government initiative has empowered civic engagement by embracing the effort to enhance accountability and efficiency in the process (OECD, 2021). Such results highlight the fact that the maturity of digital governance provides a direct effect on the institutional aspects of sustainable development.

The fourth hypothesis synthesized a positive relationship between the responsive institutional capacity and the extent of digital transformation of public administration. At this, evidence supported this argument, and regression models revealed that more digital-savvy governments were much more successful in-service delivery. The importance of case studies supported this conclusion. Interoperable and X-Road infrastructure in Estonia made it possible to exchange data freely and scope services adapting to customer needs, whereas Singapore used artificial intelligence to improve responsiveness in the intended real time. South Korea can be considered an example of the adaptive capacity of digital systems because the country preserved essential services conflict crisis due to dashboards and applications designed to assist citizens (Mergel et al., 2021). Conversely, Canada emphasized the challenges of accessing digital benefits in rural and Indigenous areas of Canada as an obstacle to inclusivity despite excellent scores in EGDI. These results indicate that digital governance improves transparency, accountability and responsiveness that are in line with SDG 16 (Khalufi et al., 2025). The correlation between EGDI and the overall citizen satisfaction helps assume that the availability of digital services reinforces the legitimacy of the government (Vial, 2021). The concepts of business management also highlight the need to have hybrid forms of governance in which efficiency complements democracy. Nevertheless, obstacles continue to exist: digital inequalities in poor countries, cybersecurity, and privacy threats, institutional obstacles related to bureaucracy. Success needs to be prolonged infrastructure, flexible regulation as well as collaboration with the stakeholders. The case studies of Estonia, Singapore, Denmark, South Korea, and Canada attest to the fact that the digital governance maturity and citizen satisfaction are propelled by leadership, inclusivity and efficient change management.

These cases demonstrate that there are still some old challenges to be overcome to achieve inclusivity and sustainability. By focusing on the strategic combination of digital governance and business management concepts using democracy, digital governance will become a revolutionary way to a transparent, responsible, and efficient institution.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

In the current academic discourse in digital governance, administration and sustainable development, this paper has contributed in the following ways. First of all, one can say that the findings where an assessment of the strong correlation between digital governance maturity that is captured by the use of UN E-Government Development Index and institutional effectiveness and citizen satisfaction, have been determined. This proves the newly formed view that technology is no longer a change speculation, but an institutional initiator.

Second, the paper advances the experiential material about New Public Management (NPM) and Digital Era Governance (DEG). NPM is efficiency-oriented and customer-focused, as opposed to DEG, which depicts the networked and participatory models. The findings allow us to conclude that, along with transparency and inclusiveness, the improvement in efficiency may become the guiding power between the two frameworks in the process of digital transformation. This renders the concept of digital governance as a progressive idea of the administrative theory rather than being a replacement idea. Third, the analysis provides that the theoretical application of business management principles, such as performance benchmarking and process optimization, to the state sphere is useful. Together with participatory governance, such practices can be taken to create accountability instead of undermining democracy. This is something that makes it enriching when discussing how the experience of the private sector can be translated into the government. Finally, the theory contributions are made to the very type of mixed-methods design. To achieve this goal, the paper demonstrates how the macro-level correlates can be deepened in the image of contexts in order to be able to invite multi-layered forms of examining governance. The paper first employed cross-national quantitative analysis as well as the qualitative case studies.

6.2 Practical Implications

Mechanisms of digital governance are more efficient in creating efficiency and trust by being transparent at instilling confidence in citizens that they are fair in the institution. In the case of Estonia (X-Road) and Singapore (Smart Nation), the case study shows that leadership at the top might be the critical point in implementing innovative strategies. The leaders need to make an investment and be accountable even after their political terms. To the practitioners, digital transformation cannot be handled merely by technology needs- training, cultural adjustment, and institutional resistance must be dealt with. Reconstruction through phases and improvements by way of feedback would deal with the obstacles. Inclusivity is critical. Digital schemes in the absence of conscious design have the potential to replicate inequality. Smooth designs of platforms should benefit marginalized groups and rural localities since governments should make them user-friendly to both efficiency and equity.

6.3 Policy Recommendations

The analysis produces the important policy recommendations. To overcome the mentioned obstacle, first, governments should reinforce digital infrastructure by making it through broadband, interoperability, and secure platforms and pay attention to disadvantaged groups in overcoming the digital divide. Second, engage business operations in the governance system to promote better performance without being overly efficient but transparent and involving civilians. Third, an effective system of data privacy and cybersecurity is necessary to build the trust of the citizens. Fourth, the international bodies must increase capacity-building initiatives, a process that assists developing countries to use any other extraordinary usage approaches to tackle the digital problem

in developed nations such as Denmark and South Korea. Lastly, civil, academic and business sectors should cooperate with the government and the various thinkings and creativity in the governance development way will enhance its legitimacy and sustainability.

6.4 Future Research Directions

The results also create possible areas of research in the future. To begin with, it would be possible to increase the sample of countries, especially low-income or weak states, to test the hypothesis whether the beneficial effects of digital governance can be observed in various settings. Longitudinal designs would be able to understand the impact of transformation on the resilience of the institutions over an extended period. Second, additional research is required to understand how the emerging technologies, including AI, blockchain, and big data, influence governance. Although they guarantee efficiency benefits, there are ethical issue such as surveillance, prejudice, and responsibility. The research in the future must investigate responsible integration frameworks. Third, there is a need to study the experience of the citizens in more depth. Even though this research included satisfaction measures, qualitative investigations of how the citizens perceive fairness, accessibility, and inclusivity would provide a beneficial contribution. Fourth, there must be interdisciplinary views. Integrating concepts of public administration, information systems, sociology, and political science would make more knowledgeable about the multifaceted nature of the relationship between the institution, culture, and technology. Lastly, the scholar must examine the aspect of digital transformation on a global level in terms of equity. With the progressive digitalized states progressing, the less developed countries are at risk of losing out. Studies on global governance, aid and technology transfer mechanisms will be so important in ensuring inclusive digital development in line with SDG 16.

7. LIMITATIONS

There are quite a number of limitations that can be attributed to this work within the context of the interpretation of the findings. First, the quantitative data is cross-sectional in a large part, which restricts the possibility to determine cause-effect relationships conclusively. Although the statistical relationships are high then longitudinal data would entrench causal inferences. Second, the selection of the case study, though offering geographic and developmental diversity, might not be indicative of all the potential contexts of digital governance implementation. Having more case studies in other regions and development situations would increase generalizability. Third, measurement of such complex notions as transparent institutions and accountable institution effectiveness depends on available indicators which might not reflect all the dimensions. More elaborate measurement methods should be formulated as a future research. Lastly, due to the high rate of technological evolution, the findings can become outdated comparatively fast. There will be a need to constantly update and refine research methods in order to stay relevant.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper offers thorough evidence that digital government structures can greatly promote the development of transparent institutions and the effectiveness of accountable institutions in the case of a correct implementation with the selective integration of the business management principles. The study proves that those nations that implement holistic digital governance strategies exhibit significant changes in the indicators of citizen satisfaction, governance effectiveness, and SDG 16. The discoveries were exasperating to the traditional binarisms existing between the political sphere

and the corporate sector stance since they show how critical adaptations of the business practice can enlarge instead of renounce the democratic ethos and the other purpose such as serving the populace. This can be achieved by ensuring an emphasis on developing the public value and application of business management practice on efficiency improvement. The study impacts both on theoretical knowledge and the application that digital governance projects. The presented framework lays the groundwork on how the governments should construct deliberate and responsible institutions incorporating the digital technologies with business and the management strategies. The linkage of digital governance with the goals of sustainable development has become crucial as the governments are facing some complicated issues. This report gives testimony that transparent and citizen-oriented institutions designed to support sustainable development agenda. Winning depends upon a compromise between efficiency and responsibility, between innovation and incorporation, production, and between technology and democracy. Integrated frameworks offer receptive agility to react to 21st century needs without losing trust and legitimacy. Despite the need to study it more, digital governance brings with it major prospects of improving the efficiency of the government and boosting democratic government in the digital world.

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