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**Journal of
Management Science** Vol. 11 No. 2 December, 2025**REVISITING CLASSICAL BUREAUCRACY AND CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION MODELS: A COMPARATIVE THEORETICAL ANALYSIS
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING STATES**Dr. James Adoyi¹, Jessica Larai Osayande², Linda Akwu³, Isah Alikeju Endurance⁴ and Abutu
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Email: James.adoyi@ful.edu.ng**Abstract**

The evolution of public administration has been marked by a sustained debate between classical bureaucratic principles and contemporary reform-oriented models. Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy laid the foundation for modern public administration by emphasizing hierarchy, legality, and merit-based recruitment. However, perceived inefficiencies and rigidity associated with classical bureaucracy led to the emergence of contemporary approaches such as New Public Management, New Public Service, and Digital-Era Governance. This paper undertakes a comparative theoretical review of classical bureaucracy and contemporary public administration models, with particular emphasis on their relevance to developing states. Using a qualitative, literature-based methodology, the study examines the core assumptions, strengths, and limitations of these models and analyzes their implications for governance outcomes in developing countries. The paper argues that no single administrative model is universally applicable and that developing states are more likely to achieve sustainable governance improvements through a hybrid approach that combines Weberian institutional discipline with context-appropriate contemporary innovations. The study contributes to public administration scholarship by reinforcing the importance of contextual adaptation and theoretical pluralism in administrative reform.

Keywords: Bureaucracy, New Public Management, New Public Service, Digital-Era Governance, Developing States, Public Administration

Introduction

Public administration as a field of study and practice has experienced significant transformations over time, shaped by changing political, economic, and social realities. Classical administrative theory, particularly Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy, provided the earliest systematic framework for organizing public institutions. Weber's model emphasized rational-legal authority, hierarchical organization, formal rules and procedures, impersonality, and merit-based recruitment as the most efficient means of administering large-scale organizations (Weber, 1978). Despite its foundational role, classical bureaucracy has been widely criticized for promoting rigidity, excessive proceduralism, and limited responsiveness to citizens' needs. These criticisms intensified in the late twentieth century, giving rise to

contemporary public administration models such as New Public Management (NPM), New Public Service (NPS), and Digital-Era Governance (DEG). These approaches sought to reform traditional bureaucratic systems by emphasizing efficiency, performance measurement, citizen participation, and the strategic use of information and communication technologies (Hood, 1991; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; Dunleavy et al., 2006). For developing states, the choice and application of administrative models present unique challenges. Weak institutional capacity, politicization of the civil service, corruption, and poor service delivery continue to undermine governance outcomes. While some scholars argue that Weberian bureaucracy remains essential for building capable states, others advocate the adoption of contemporary models to enhance efficiency and responsiveness (Andrews, 2013; Fukuyama, 2014). This tension raises critical questions about the relevance and applicability of different administrative models in developing contexts. This paper addresses these questions through a comparative theoretical review of classical bureaucracy and contemporary public administration models, drawing lessons for administrative reform in developing states. The general objective of this study is to comparatively analyze classical bureaucracy and contemporary public administration models and assess their relevance to developing states.

Conceptual Review

The literature on public administration reveals a sustained intellectual debate between classical bureaucratic theory and contemporary reform-oriented models. While Weberian bureaucracy laid the institutional foundations of modern governance, subsequent approaches emerged largely as responses to its perceived limitations. This section critically reviews these perspectives, highlighting their theoretical assumptions, strengths, weaknesses, and applicability to developing states.

Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy

Max Weber, a German sociologist and political economist, developed the theory of bureaucracy in the early 20th century as a model of rational-legal authority in public administration. Weber observed that traditional organizations often suffered from inefficiency, favoritism, and arbitrary decision-making, which hindered effective governance and organizational stability (Weber, 1947). His theory sought to create a professional, rule-bound, and impartial administrative system, capable of delivering predictable and consistent outcomes. Bureaucracy, in Weber's view, was the ideal form of organization for large-scale institutions because it minimized personal bias and emphasized competence, hierarchy, and formal rules (DuBrin, 2016). Weber's concept of bureaucracy has been highly influential in shaping modern administrative practices, particularly in public institutions. It emphasizes rationality, discipline, and clear lines of authority, which are essential for maintaining accountability and operational efficiency. While the model has been criticized for rigidity and excessive formality, its core principles such as merit-based recruitment, specialization, and formalized procedures remain foundational in both classical and contemporary public administration (Riggs, 2017). Understanding Weber's theory provides valuable insights into how structured administrative systems can enhance efficiency and reduce corruption, particularly in complex governmental organizations. The following are the Basic Features / Tenets of Weber's Bureaucracy

Hierarchy of Authority: Weber emphasized a clear and formal hierarchy in which authority flows from the top to the bottom. Each level supervises the one below and is accountable to the one above, creating a well-defined chain of command (Weber, 1947). This hierarchy ensures order, accountability, and efficient communication within organizations. It reduces

confusion about decision-making responsibilities, making it easier to identify where errors occur. In public institutions, a hierarchy allows leaders to delegate authority while maintaining control over outcomes. However, an overly rigid hierarchy may slow decision-making and stifle initiative among lower-level employees (DuBrin, 2016). Despite this limitation, a structured chain of command remains vital for maintaining discipline and consistency in bureaucratic organizations.

Division of Labor and Specialization: Weber argued that tasks should be divided into specialized roles, each handled by individuals with relevant expertise (Riggs, 2017). Specialization increases efficiency and proficiency because employees focus on specific functions rather than performing multiple unrelated tasks. For instance, in government agencies, separate departments handle finance, human resources, and policy implementation, allowing for higher accuracy and expertise. This division reduces errors, improves productivity, and facilitates accountability since responsibilities are clearly defined. However, excessive specialization can lead to compartmentalization and hinder communication across departments. Nonetheless, specialization remains a cornerstone of bureaucratic efficiency and organizational professionalism (DuBrin, 2016).

Formal Rules and Regulations: Weber emphasized that bureaucracies operate according to formal, written rules and procedures to ensure uniformity and predictability (Weber, 1947). These rules standardize processes, guide employee behavior, and prevent arbitrary decision-making. In public administration, formal rules protect against favoritism and corruption by creating a transparent framework for operations. For example, civil service examinations and standardized procurement procedures enforce compliance with established guidelines. While rules enhance fairness and consistency, excessive regulation may create rigidity, “red tape,” and resistance to change. Still, formalization is critical to maintaining integrity and accountability in bureaucratic institutions (Riggs, 2017).

Impersonality: Weber advocated for decision-making based on objective criteria rather than personal preferences or relationships (DuBrin, 2016). Impersonality ensures fairness and equal treatment of all clients and employees. By removing personal biases, bureaucracy fosters professionalism and discourages nepotism or favoritism. In public administration, this principle ensures that services are delivered impartially, such as in law enforcement or licensing agencies. However, extreme impersonality may reduce employee motivation or empathy toward clients. Despite this, it is fundamental in creating equitable and consistent administrative practices.

Merit-Based Recruitment and Promotion: Weber stressed that employment and advancement in bureaucracy should be based on qualifications, education, and performance rather than personal connections or social status (Weber, 1947). Merit-based systems promote competence, professionalism, and ethical behavior. Civil service exams, certifications, and performance evaluations are common mechanisms to implement this principle. In developing countries, meritocracy helps combat corruption and political interference in public institutions. Nonetheless, the system must be complemented by training and capacity-building to ensure that merit reflects actual competence and not just credentials (Riggs, 2017).

Modern Approaches to Public Administration

Modern approaches to public administration emerged in response to the limitations of classical theories, such as Max Weber’s bureaucratic model, which emphasized strict hierarchies, rigid rules, and procedural formalities. While Weberian bureaucracy promoted

efficiency and predictability, it was often criticized for being inflexible, slow to adapt to change, and overly impersonal (DuBrin, 2016). The dynamic socio-economic environment of the 20th and 21st centuries, characterized by globalization, technological advancement, and increasing citizen expectations, necessitated more flexible, responsive, and outcome-oriented administrative systems (Hood, 1991). One of the most influential modern frameworks is New Public Management (NPM), which emphasizes efficiency, decentralization, performance measurement and customer-oriented services (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). NPM and other contemporary approaches focus on results rather than rigid processes, promoting innovation, managerial autonomy, and accountability through performance indicators. Additionally, modern approaches encourage citizen participation, inter-agency collaboration, and the use of digital technologies to enhance transparency and service delivery (Kettl, 2015). Post-bureaucratic models also highlight flexibility, networking, and knowledge-based governance, moving away from hierarchical control toward collaborative and adaptive structures (Osborne, 2010). These approaches recognize that public administration must respond effectively to complex challenges such as social inequality, rapid urbanization, environmental issues, and globalization pressures. In developing countries, adopting modern administrative approaches can improve efficiency, responsiveness, and citizen satisfaction. However, the successful application of these approaches requires balancing flexibility with accountability, avoiding excessive privatization, and ensuring that public institutions maintain integrity and equity (World Bank, 2020). Understanding modern approaches provides public managers with tools to reform administrative structures and practices, combining the stability of classical models with the adaptability needed for contemporary governance challenges.

Classical Bureaucracy

Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy represents one of the most influential contributions to public administration scholarship. Weber conceptualized bureaucracy as an ideal type of rational-legal authority characterized by hierarchical organization, formal rules, specialization, impersonality, and merit-based recruitment (Weber, 1978). The central logic of the model is that rule-bound administration minimizes arbitrariness, promotes predictability, and enhances efficiency in large-scale organizations. Scholars have argued that Weberian bureaucracy is particularly relevant for state-building and institutional consolidation, especially in developing states. Evans and Rauch (1999) empirically demonstrate that meritocratic and professional bureaucracies are positively associated with economic growth. Similarly, Fukuyama (2014) contends that effective governance depends less on regime type and more on the quality of bureaucratic institutions capable of implementing policies impartially. However, classical bureaucracy has attracted sustained criticism. Merton (1940) argues that excessive rule orientation may lead to "goal displacement," where adherence to procedures becomes more important than achieving substantive outcomes. Critics also contend that rigid hierarchies discourage innovation, slow decision-making, and reduce organizational adaptability in dynamic environments (Olsen, 2006). From this perspective, Weberian bureaucracy may be ill-suited to contemporary governance challenges that demand flexibility, responsiveness, and citizen-centered services. Despite these criticisms, several scholars caution against prematurely dismissing Weberian bureaucracy in developing contexts. Grindle (2017) argues that many reform failures in developing countries stem from weak bureaucratic foundations rather than excessive bureaucratization. Thus, the problem is often not "too much bureaucracy" but "too little effective bureaucracy." This suggests that Weberian principles remain indispensable, albeit insufficient on their own.

New Public Management

New Public Management (NPM) emerged in the 1980s as a reform paradigm aimed at addressing perceived inefficiencies of traditional bureaucracy. Drawing heavily from private-sector management practices, NPM emphasizes performance measurement, decentralization, competition, outsourcing, and results-oriented management (Hood, 1991). Its underlying assumption is that market mechanisms and managerial autonomy enhance efficiency and reduce public sector waste. Empirical evidence suggests that NPM has contributed to improved efficiency and service delivery in some developed and developing contexts. Performance contracting and output-based budgeting, for instance, have improved accountability in specific sectors such as health and education (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). These outcomes make NPM attractive to developing states facing fiscal constraints and public pressure for better services. Nevertheless, the literature highlights significant limitations of NPM, particularly in developing countries. Critics argue that NPM's market logic often undermines core public sector values such as equity, transparency, and democratic accountability (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). In weak institutional environments, privatization and contracting-out may increase corruption rather than efficiency. Andrews (2013) further argues that NPM reforms often fail because they are transplanted without regard to local administrative capacity. NPM presupposes the existence of a strong Weberian bureaucratic foundation capable of monitoring contracts, enforcing regulations, and preventing abuse. Where such foundations are absent, NPM reforms may exacerbate governance failures rather than resolve them. This raises critical questions about the sequencing and contextual suitability of NPM in developing states.

New Public Service

The New Public Service (NPS) emerged as a normative response to both traditional bureaucracy and NPM. Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) argue that public administration should prioritize democratic governance, citizen engagement, and public interest, rather than efficiency or market performance alone. The NPS model redefines citizens as active participants rather than passive clients. The strength of NPS lies in its emphasis on legitimacy, inclusiveness, and collaborative governance. In developing states where trust in public institutions is often low, citizen participation can enhance accountability and policy acceptance. Scholars argue that participatory governance mechanisms can improve service delivery by aligning policies with local needs (Fung, 2015). However, critics question the operational feasibility of NPS in contexts characterized by low literacy levels, weak civil society, and limited administrative capacity. Meaningful participation requires institutional support, civic education, and responsive bureaucracies. Without these conditions, participatory processes may be captured by elites, thereby reinforcing inequality rather than promoting democratic governance. From a logical standpoint, NPS complements rather than replaces Weberian bureaucracy. Effective participation presupposes rule-based institutions capable of managing stakeholder engagement impartially. Thus, while normatively appealing, NPS alone cannot address structural weaknesses in public administration.

Digital-Era Governance

Digital-Era Governance (DEG) represents a more recent reform paradigm emphasizing the transformative role of digital technologies in public administration. Dunleavy et al. (2006) argue that DEG seeks to reintegrate fragmented public services, enhance transparency, and improve citizen access through digital platforms. The literature highlights the potential of e-government initiatives to reduce bureaucratic delays, curb corruption, and improve service delivery in developing states. Digitalization can minimize human discretion, thereby reducing

opportunities for rent-seeking (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). These benefits make DEG particularly attractive in governance reform agendas. Nonetheless, DEG faces significant constraints in developing contexts. Poor infrastructure, digital illiteracy, and unequal access to technology limit its effectiveness. Moreover, technology cannot substitute for weak institutions; rather, it often mirrors existing administrative deficiencies. Without strong bureaucratic capacity and legal frameworks, digital reforms may yield limited or uneven results.

Comparative Synthesis and Theoretical Implications for Developing States

A critical synthesis of the literature reveals that each administrative model addresses specific governance challenges while introducing new risks. Weberian bureaucracy provides institutional stability and legality but lacks flexibility. NPM enhances efficiency but risks eroding public values. NPS strengthens democratic legitimacy but faces practical constraints. DEG offers technological solutions but depends heavily on institutional readiness. Theoretically, this suggests that public administration reform should be viewed as evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Andrews (2013) and Grindle (2017) advocate for context-sensitive, incremental reforms that build on existing institutional capacities. From this perspective, developing states benefit most from a hybrid administrative model that combines Weberian foundations with carefully selected contemporary innovations. This study aligns with this strand of literature by arguing that administrative effectiveness in developing states is contingent upon sequencing, institutional capacity, and contextual adaptation, rather than wholesale adoption of any single model.

Empirical Review

Empirical research on public administration reforms provides valuable evidence on the practical implications of classical and contemporary administrative models, particularly in developing states. Existing studies largely converge on the argument that bureaucratic quality and institutional capacity significantly shape governance outcomes. Empirical studies on Weberian bureaucracy consistently demonstrate its positive association with state performance. Evans and Rauch (1999), using cross-national data, found that merit-based recruitment and bureaucratic professionalism significantly enhance economic growth and policy implementation. Rauch and Evans (2000) similarly observed that predictable career structures and administrative autonomy improve bureaucratic effectiveness in developing countries. In the African context, Kelsall (2018) reported that countries with relatively disciplined bureaucracies perform better in service delivery despite broader governance challenges. However, Dia (1996) cautioned that rigid application of bureaucratic rules in African public services can reduce flexibility and responsiveness, indicating the need for adaptive implementation rather than mechanical rule enforcement. Empirical evidence on New Public Management (NPM) reforms in developing countries is mixed. Polidano (2001) found that NPM-inspired reforms such as privatization and performance contracting often failed to deliver expected efficiency gains due to weak regulatory and monitoring capacity. In Nigeria, Adamolekun (2006) observed that NPM reforms produced limited outcomes because of political interference and institutional fragility. Ayee (2008) further noted that performance management systems improved reporting practices but had minimal impact on actual service delivery. These findings suggest that NPM reforms are unlikely to succeed without strong Weberian administrative foundations. Studies on the New Public Service (NPS) model emphasize the role of citizen participation in enhancing accountability and legitimacy. Fung and Wright (2003) found that participatory governance initiatives improved service outcomes when supported by capable administrative institutions. In Nigeria, Ojo (2014) reported that

community participation enhanced project relevance but was constrained by elite capture and weak bureaucratic responsiveness. Bratton (2012) similarly concluded that citizen engagement improves trust in government only when public institutions are responsive, underscoring the interdependence between participation and administrative capacity. Empirical research on Digital-Era Governance (DEG) highlights both its potential and limitations. Bertot et al. (2010) demonstrated that e-government initiatives reduce corruption by limiting discretionary interactions between officials and citizens. In Nigeria, Okot-Uma (2016) found that digital reforms such as the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) improved transparency and reduced payroll fraud. However, Heeks (2006) reported high failure rates of e-government projects in developing countries due to infrastructural deficits, skill shortages, and resistance to change. Overall, the empirical literature supports three key conclusions. First, Weberian bureaucratic characteristics remain central to effective governance in developing states. Second, contemporary reform models yield inconsistent results when introduced in weak institutional environments. Third, hybrid and sequenced reforms, combining bureaucratic professionalism with selective contemporary innovations, are more likely to produce sustainable governance outcomes in countries such as Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theoretical research design, relying on a comprehensive review of secondary sources. Data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and policy reports relevant to public administration and governance. The study employs comparative content analysis to examine similarities and differences between classical bureaucracy and contemporary public administration models. Analytical dimensions include organizational structure, accountability mechanisms, efficiency, flexibility, and citizen engagement. This approach is appropriate for generating conceptual insights and drawing policy-relevant conclusions.

Result and Discussion

The comparative theoretical review underscores that the enduring debate between classical bureaucracy and contemporary public administration models should not be framed as a contest of superiority but as a question of institutional fit, sequencing, and contextual adaptation. The findings reveal that each administrative model emerged in response to specific governance challenges and operates effectively only under certain institutional conditions. First, the analysis confirms the continued relevance of Weberian bureaucracy in developing states such as Nigeria, where administrative systems are often weakened by politicization, patronage, and inconsistent rule enforcement. Weber's emphasis on merit-based recruitment, hierarchical authority, and rule-bound decision-making remains essential for restoring professionalism and predictability in public service. In Nigeria, persistent challenges such as uneven recruitment practices, frequent political interference, and weak enforcement of civil service rules suggest that the problem is not excessive bureaucracy but rather incomplete bureaucratization. This supports Fukuyama's (2014) argument that effective governance depends on bureaucratic quality rather than the adoption of fashionable reform models. Second, while New Public Management offers efficiency-oriented tools such as performance measurement and managerial autonomy, its application in developing states has produced mixed results. In Nigeria, reforms inspired by NPM such as privatization and commercialization of public services have sometimes improved efficiency but have also raised concerns about equity, accountability, and regulatory capacity. NPM presupposes strong oversight institutions capable of monitoring contracts and enforcing performance

standards. Where such institutions are weak, NPM reforms may inadvertently deepen corruption and service inequality. This suggests that efficiency-driven reforms should follow, not precede, the establishment of strong Weberian administrative foundations. Third, the New Public Service model provides a valuable normative framework for addressing legitimacy deficits common in developing states. By emphasizing citizen engagement and public interest, NPS aligns with democratic governance ideals and responds to public dissatisfaction with bureaucratic alienation. In Nigeria, growing civic awareness and social mobilization create opportunities for participatory governance. However, the effectiveness of NPS is constrained by limited civic capacity, elite capture of participatory spaces, and weak administrative responsiveness. Thus, citizen participation must be institutionally supported by professional bureaucracies capable of translating public input into policy action. Fourth, Digital-Era Governance presents both opportunities and risks for developing countries. Nigeria's expanding digital infrastructure and e-government initiatives demonstrate the potential of digital tools to improve transparency and service delivery. Yet, digital reforms cannot compensate for weak institutions or poor administrative culture. Without clear rules, skilled personnel, and accountability mechanisms, digitalization risks reproducing existing governance failures in electronic form. This reinforces the argument that technology should be treated as an enabling tool rather than a substitute for institutional reform. The discussion supports a hybrid and sequenced reform approach, in which Weberian institutional consolidation serves as the foundation upon which selective contemporary innovations are gradually introduced. Such an approach aligns with the realities of developing states, where administrative capacity evolves incrementally rather than through abrupt transformation.

Comparison between Max Webers's Theory of Bureaucracy and Modern Approach to Public Administration

Public administration has evolved significantly over the past century. Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy provided a foundational model emphasizing hierarchy, formal rules and merit-based recruitment, aiming to enhance efficiency and impartiality in organizations (Weber, 1947; DuBrin, 2016). While effective in ensuring order and accountability, Weberian bureaucracy is often criticized for rigidity and inflexibility. Modern approaches, such as New Public Management and post-bureaucratic models, emphasize flexibility, results-orientation, citizen engagement and innovation (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Kettl, 2015). These approaches are responsive to globalization, technological change, and complex societal needs, making them more adaptable to contemporary governance challenges (Osborne, 2010; World Bank, 2020).

Comparative Analysis of Classical Bureaucracy and Contemporary Public Administration Models

Dimension	Classical Bureaucracy (Weberian)	New Public Management (NPM)	New Public Service (NPS)	Digital Era Governance (DEG)
Theoretical foundation	Rational-legal authority (Weber)	Market and managerial theory	Democratic and civic theory	Information and communication technology theory
Primary objective	Order, legality predictability	Efficiency and performance	Public interest and democratic governance	Integrated, technology-enabled service delivery

Organizational structure	Hierarchical and centralized	Decentralized and flexible	Network and collaborative	Digital integrated and platform
Decision Making approach	Rule-Based and Procedural	Managerial discretion and targets	Participatory and deliberative	Data-driven and automated
Accountability mechanism	Legal rules and administrative hierarchy	Performance indicators and contracts	Democratic accountability and citizens engagement	Digital transparency and audit trails
Role of officials	Neutral implementers of rules	Managers and performance drivers	Facilitators and collaborators	Digital service coordinators
Role of citizens	Passive recipients of services	Customers or clients	Active participants and co-producers	Digital users and service consumers
Key strengths	Stability, professionalism, rule of law	Efficiency, flexibility, cost control	Legitimacy, inclusiveness, trust	Speed, transparency, reduced discretion
Major criticisms	Rigidity, red tape, slow responsiveness	Equity concern, market bias	Practical and capacity constraints	Digital divide, infrastructure dependence
Institutional requirement	Strong legal and merit systems	Strong regulatory and oversight capacity	Civic capacity and responsive institutions	ICT infrastructure and technical skills
Relevance to developing states	Foundational for state-building	Conditionally useful	Normatively desirable but capacity dependent	Promoting but uneven
Implications for Nigeria	Essential for civil service reform	Should be selectively applied	Requires institutional support	Must complement bureaucratic reform

Source: Author's synthesis based on Weber (1978), Hood (1991), Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), and Dunleavy et al. (2006).

The table presents a comparative analysis of classical bureaucracy and three contemporary public administration models New Public Management (NPM), New Public Service (NPS), and Digital-Era Governance (DEG) highlighting their theoretical foundations, administrative priorities, and relevance to developing states. Classical bureaucracy, grounded in Weber's rational–legal authority, prioritizes order, legality, and predictability through hierarchical structures and rule-based decision-making. Its emphasis on merit, professionalism, and legal accountability makes it foundational for state-building in developing contexts. However, its rigidity and proceduralism often limit responsiveness. New Public Management represents a shift toward market and managerial principles, emphasizing efficiency, performance

measurement, and decentralization. While NPM can improve service delivery, its reliance on managerial discretion and contractual accountability raises concerns about equity, public interest, and regulatory capacity, particularly in weaker institutional environments. The New Public Service model departs from efficiency-driven approaches by foregrounding democratic values, citizen participation, and public interest. It redefines public officials as facilitators and citizens as co-producers of governance. Despite its normative appeal, NPS is constrained by limited civic capacity and institutional responsiveness in many developing states. Digital-Era Governance introduces ICT as a transformative force in public administration, promoting integrated, data-driven, and transparent service delivery. Although DEG offers significant efficiency and accountability gains, its effectiveness is contingent on digital infrastructure, technical skills, and inclusive access, which remain uneven in developing countries. The table underscores that no single model is universally applicable. For developing states such as Nigeria, effective public administration reform requires a hybrid and sequenced approach: consolidating Weberian bureaucratic foundations while selectively integrating managerial, participatory, and digital innovations in line with institutional capacity.

Conclusion

This study set out to comparatively analyze classical bureaucracy and contemporary public administration models and to draw lessons for developing states, with particular relevance to countries such as Nigeria. The analysis demonstrates that the perceived dichotomy between Weberian bureaucracy and modern reform paradigms is misleading. Rather than representing competing alternatives, these models address different dimensions of governance and are most effective when applied in a complementary and context-sensitive manner. The study concludes that Weberian bureaucracy remains indispensable for developing states seeking to build capable, rule-bound, and professional public institutions. However, classical bureaucracy alone is insufficient to meet contemporary governance demands related to efficiency, citizen participation, and technological change. Contemporary models New Public Management, New Public Service, and Digital-Era Governance offer valuable innovations but require strong institutional foundations to function effectively. For developing countries like Nigeria, the central lesson is that administrative reform should be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Wholesale transplantation of reform models from developed contexts often leads to reform failure. Instead, sustainable governance improvement depends on incremental reforms that strengthen bureaucratic capacity while selectively incorporating modern administrative practices.

Recommendations

Reforms should focus on strengthening civil service commissions, enforcing meritocratic recruitment procedures, and ensuring security of tenure for career officials. NPM should be reframed as a technical complement to strong bureaucratic institutions, rather than as a replacement for them. In Nigeria, performance contracts, outsourcing, and commercialization of public services should be applied selectively and only in sectors with adequate regulatory and monitoring capacity. Regulatory institutions must be strengthened to ensure that efficiency gains do not come at the expense of equity and public interest. For Nigeria, participatory budgeting, service charters, and community monitoring mechanisms should be legally anchored and linked to administrative decision-making structures. Bureaucracies must be empowered and trained to manage citizen engagement constructively. This study also recommended that digitalization should be deployed as an enabler of institutional integrity, not as a shortcut to reform. In Nigeria, e-government initiatives should prioritize areas where

digital tools reduce discretionary power and procedural opacity, such as payroll management, procurement, and licensing. This study further recommends the institutionalization of monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems within public administration. In Nigeria, independent evaluation units within ministries and oversight bodies should be empowered to assess reform outcomes objectively.

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