



From Bureaucratic Compliance to Organizational Agility: Rethinking Public Sector Reform in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

Bureaucratic reform has long been recognized as a strategic agenda for improving public governance. However, conventional reform approaches that primarily emphasize structural restructuring, procedural simplification, and administrative accountability are increasingly insufficient to address the growing complexity, uncertainty, and digital transformation facing the public sector. This article aims to re-examine the paradigm of bureaucratic reform from the perspective of the Agile Public Organization and to propose a conceptual model of next-generation bureaucratic reform. The study employs a conceptual paper approach using an integrative literature review that synthesizes theories and empirical findings on bureaucratic reform, agile governance, digital government, organizational resilience, dynamic capabilities, and public value. The synthesis reveals that bureaucratic reform should shift from an administrative compliance orientation toward the development of adaptive organizational capabilities. An agile public organization is built upon five core capabilities: adaptive leadership, digital capability, cross-sector collaboration, organizational learning and innovation, and public value orientation. These capabilities are operationalized through agile governance mechanisms that enhance organizational agility, organizational resilience, innovation, and public service performance. The primary contribution of this article is the development of a conceptual model of next-generation bureaucratic reform that integrates multiple perspectives in public administration into a comprehensive framework. The proposed model provides both a theoretical foundation and practical guidance for strengthening bureaucratic reform and advancing the transformation of public sector organizations in the digital era.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For more than two decades, bureaucratic reform has remained a strategic agenda in many countries seeking to establish more effective, accountable, transparent, and responsive systems of government. Bureaucratic reform is no longer understood merely as an effort to streamline organizational structures or simplify administrative procedures, but rather as a process of institutional transformation aimed at strengthening the capacity of public organizations to create public value through high-quality services, good governance, and efficient resource management (Osborne, 2021; Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023; Jilani et al., 2026). Across countries, bureaucratic reform has gradually evolved from the New Public Management paradigm toward New Public Governance, which places greater emphasis on collaboration, innovation, and organizational capacity to adapt to increasingly dynamic environmental changes (Osborne, 2021; Turner et al., 2019).

In Indonesia, bureaucratic reform gained a more systematic direction during the democratization era and was further strengthened through the 2010–2025 Grand Design of Bureaucratic Reform. The agenda encompassed transformation across eight areas of change: organizational structure, business processes, regulations, human resources, supervision, accountability, public services, and organizational culture. These policies were designed to improve organizational effectiveness, administrative efficiency, the integrity of civil servants, the quality of public services, and governmental accountability (Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023; Turner et al., 2019; Pribadi, 2021). Despite considerable progress, however, the implementation of bureaucratic reform at both central and local levels continues to vary substantially due to differences in institutional capacity, leadership, organizational culture, and political commitment (Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023).

Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that bureaucratic reform has not yet fully addressed the complexity of contemporary governance challenges. Most reform evaluations continue to emphasize administrative indicators, such as regulatory compliance, improvements in the Government Agency Performance Accountability System (SAKIP), procedural simplification, and the achievement of organizational performance targets. Although these dimensions are important for strengthening governance, they provide limited insight into how public organizations develop adaptive capacity to respond to rapidly changing environments, policy uncertainty, and technological disruption (Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023; Turner et al., 2019). In other words, the success of bureaucratic reform has largely been assessed through administrative compliance rather than organizational adaptability. Consequently, the organizational capacity to learn, innovate, and respond rapidly to change has received relatively limited attention in the public administration literature.

Empirical findings from Indonesia further support this argument. Salomo and Rahmayanti (2023) demonstrate that although local government performance accountability systems have improved, their implementation remains largely characterized by administrative formalism and constrained by institutional barriers, including overlapping regulations, limited organizational capacity, and a bureaucratic culture that does not fully support change. Pribadi (2021) similarly found that not all dimensions of bureaucratic reform contribute significantly to improvements in public service quality. Organizational structure, work culture, and accountability exert relatively stronger effects, whereas regulatory improvement, business processes, supervision, and human resource management do not consistently translate into better service performance. These findings indicate that bureaucratic reform should not be understood merely as an agenda for improving administrative procedures but should instead be directed toward developing organizational capacities that enable bureaucracies to adapt continuously to changes in their environments.

The limitations of the conventional bureaucratic reform paradigm have become increasingly apparent as public organizations operate in environments characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and rapid change a condition often referred to as a turbulent governance environment. The COVID-19 pandemic, accelerated digital transformation, climate change, cybersecurity threats, and the growing complexity of social problems demonstrate that bureaucracies no longer operate within stable and predictable environments (Ansell et al.,

2020; Nolte & Lindenmeier, 2023). Under such conditions, public organizations require not only institutional stability but also the capacity to adapt rapidly, facilitate organizational learning, strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration, and develop more flexible decision-making mechanisms. Janssen and van der Voort (2020) demonstrate that agile government responses during crises are built upon a combination of strong formal procedures, reliable data infrastructure, and organizational capacity for rapid adjustment. Accordingly, future bureaucratic reform agendas need to move beyond administrative reform toward the development of organizational resilience and adaptive governance (Li et al., 2026; Cosens et al., 2021).

At the same time, digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped citizens' expectations of public services. Citizens increasingly expect services to be fast, accessible, integrated, personalized, and oriented toward user experience (Mergel et al., 2018; Lungu et al., 2025). Various studies have shown that digitalization in the public sector is positively associated with greater service efficiency, transparency, citizen engagement, decision-making quality, and the government's ability to respond to public needs in a timely manner (Latupeirissa et al., 2024; Yukhno, 2022). Digital capabilities including data analytics, information-system interoperability, artificial intelligence, and process automation have also been shown to contribute to organizational agility, defined as the ability of organizations to detect changes, make timely decisions, and pursue continuous innovation (Atobishi et al., 2024). However, digital transformation is not an automatic solution. Its effectiveness remains contingent upon institutional readiness, leadership quality, organizational culture, cybersecurity, data interoperability, and the organization's capacity to manage change (Amirova, 2025; Lungu et al., 2025).

These developments have given rise to emerging paradigms in public administration, particularly agile governance and the agile public organization. Unlike traditional bureaucracies, which emphasize structural stability, functional specialization, and hierarchical control, agile public organizations place learning capacity, cross-organizational collaboration, policy experimentation, data-driven decision-making, and continuous innovation at the core of organizational capacity (Mergel et al., 2020; Mergel, 2023). The literature suggests that agile approaches enable public organizations to operate iteratively and adaptively while remaining centered on citizens' needs and maintaining the principles of public accountability (Mergel et al., 2018). These principles have been implemented through various mechanisms, including government innovation laboratories, digital service development, adaptive procurement, and cross-organizational collaboration to address complex public problems (Ylinen, 2021; Mergel, 2023).

Despite these developments, the conceptual relationship between bureaucratic reform and the formation of agile public organizations remains insufficiently examined, particularly in developing-country contexts. Much of the literature on bureaucratic reform continues to treat institutional change as an end in itself, while research on organizational agility has developed largely in parallel within studies of digital transformation, public management, and adaptive governance (Turner et al., 2019; Mergel et al., 2020). Yet bureaucratic reform should be understood as a process of transformation, whereas the agile public organization represents an organizational capability that this process seeks to cultivate. This conceptual gap has resulted in the absence of a comprehensive theoretical framework explaining how bureaucratic reform can produce public organizations that are adaptive, innovative, collaborative, and capable of creating sustainable public value.

Recent research further indicates that the ability of public organizations to navigate complexity depends not only on the quality of regulations or the adoption of digital technologies but also on their capacity to develop dynamic capabilities the ability to sense changes, seize emerging opportunities, and transform organizational resources and processes continuously (Teece, 2018; Li et al., 2026). In the public sector, these capabilities are reflected in adaptive leadership, robust merit-based systems, public ethics, organizational learning, cross-sectoral collaboration, the effective use of digital technologies, and an innovation-oriented culture (Jilani et al., 2026; Andarwati et al., 2026). Accordingly, future bureaucratic reform needs to shift from a compliance-oriented paradigm toward organizational agility, in which bureaucracies are capable of learning faster than the pace of change they encounter.

Against this backdrop, this article reexamines the bureaucratic reform paradigm through the perspective of agile public organizations. Unlike conventional studies of bureaucratic reform that primarily focus on institutional and administrative dimensions, this article integrates the perspectives of bureaucratic reform, agile governance, digital government, organizational resilience, dynamic capabilities, and public value to develop a conceptual framework for a new generation of bureaucratic reform. The main contribution of this article lies in formulating a conceptual model that explains how adaptive capabilities, leadership, digital technologies, organizational learning, and cross-sectoral collaboration constitute the foundations for transforming bureaucracies into agile, responsive, and public-value-oriented organizations.

2. METHODS

This article adopts a conceptual paper approach aimed at developing a theoretical synthesis of the emerging direction of bureaucratic reform through the perspective of the *agile public organization*. Unlike a narrative literature review, which primarily describes the development of existing research, a conceptual paper focuses on developing scholarly arguments by integrating multiple theoretical perspectives to generate a new conceptual framework capable of explaining a phenomenon more comprehensively (Jaakkola, 2020).

The article was developed using an integrative literature review, an approach that enables the integration of theories, concepts, and empirical findings from multiple disciplines to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a particular issue (Torraco, 2016; Snyder, 2019). This approach was selected because bureaucratic reform in the era of digital transformation can no longer be adequately explained through conventional public administration perspectives alone. It requires the integration of concepts from *adaptive governance*, *organizational agility*, *digital government*, *organizational resilience*, *dynamic capabilities*, and *public value creation*.

The literature search was conducted systematically across several reputable international academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, Taylor & Francis Online, and Emerald Insight, with Google Scholar used as a supplementary source to identify relevant articles not indexed in the primary databases. The search strategy employed combinations of the following keywords: *bureaucratic reform*, *public sector reform*, *agile governance*, *organizational agility*, *agile public organization*, *adaptive governance*, *digital government*, *public sector digital transformation*, *organizational resilience*, *public value*, and *dynamic capabilities*. These keywords were combined using Boolean operators (AND and OR) to identify literature relevant to the focus of the study.

The literature selection process consisted of several stages. The first stage involved identifying articles based on the relevance of their titles, keywords, and abstracts. The second stage involved full-text screening to determine their substantive relevance to the objectives of the study. The third stage involved evaluating the quality of the references based on the reputation of the publication outlet, conceptual contribution, and relevance to the themes of bureaucratic reform and agile public organizations. The review prioritized publications in reputable international journals published between 2018 and 2026 to capture recent developments in public sector transformation. Nevertheless, several foundational works were retained because of their substantial theoretical influence on the development of key concepts, including public value (Moore, 2013), dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2018), and public service logic (Osborne, 2021).

The literature was analyzed using thematic conceptual analysis. All literature meeting the selection criteria was examined through a coding process focused on recurring themes, which were subsequently organized into several conceptual categories: (1) bureaucratic reform paradigms; (2)

limitations of conventional bureaucratic reform; (3) characteristics of agile public organizations; (4) digital transformation and adaptive governance; (5) public sector organizational resilience; (6) organizational dynamic capabilities; and (7) public value creation. Relationships among these categories were then analyzed comparatively to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and conceptual interconnectedness, which served as the basis for developing the theoretical synthesis.

The synthesis process was conducted iteratively by comparing different perspectives emerging from the literature on public administration, public management, and digital governance. This process was intended to identify the conceptual gap, examine patterns of relationships among the concepts, and develop propositions explaining the transformation of bureaucratic reform from an administrative approach toward the development of agile public organizations. The synthesis resulted in a conceptual model that positions bureaucratic reform as a process of institutional transformation, while agile public organizations are conceptualized as a strategic organizational capability that enables greater adaptability, innovation, collaboration, and public value creation in increasingly complex and dynamic governance environments.

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the interpretation of each concept was not based on a single source but was examined through theoretical triangulation, comparing perspectives from multiple strands of literature. This strategy was intended to minimize interpretive bias while producing a more comprehensive, coherent, and academically robust conceptual synthesis (Jaakkola, 2020; Snyder, 2019). The resulting framework presents a new-generation approach to bureaucratic reform that integrates adaptive leadership, digital transformation, cross-sectoral collaboration, organizational learning, dynamic capabilities, and public value orientation as foundational dimensions of agile public organizations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Evolution of the Bureaucratic Reform Paradigm: From Administrative Reform to Agile Public Organization

Bureaucratic reform is fundamentally a process of institutional transformation that continuously evolves in response to changes in the political, social, economic, and technological environment. Since emerging as an agenda for public sector modernization in the 1980s, bureaucratic reform has undergone significant paradigm shifts. Whereas early reform initiatives primarily emphasized administrative efficiency and organizational control, changes in the strategic environment have increasingly required bureaucracies to develop substantially greater adaptive capacity (Osborne, 2021; Mergel et al., 2020).

The initial paradigm of bureaucratic reform was strongly influenced by the principles of New Public Management (NPM), which emphasized efficiency, performance measurement, competition, decentralization, and results-oriented management. This approach contributed to the professionalization of public organizations, strengthened performance accountability, and introduced various modern management instruments into the public sector (Turner et al., 2019). In Indonesia, the influence of this paradigm is reflected in the strengthening of the Government Agency Performance Accountability System (SAKIP), the implementation of merit-based systems, bureaucratic simplification, institutional reform, and improvements in public service quality (Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023).

Although NPM made important contributions to the modernization of public administration, various studies have identified its limitations when public organizations operate in increasingly

complex, dynamic, and uncertain environments. An excessive emphasis on efficiency and administrative compliance can produce bureaucracies that are capable of meeting formal indicators but less responsive to changing societal needs and technological developments (Osborne, 2021; Ansell et al., 2020). In this context, reform success is often assessed through improvements in institutional evaluation scores, performance indicators, or regulatory compliance, while organizational capacities for learning, adaptation, and innovation receive comparatively less attention (Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023).

These conditions contributed to the emergence of the New Public Governance (NPG) paradigm, which views governance as a collaborative process involving multiple actors, including government, the private sector, civil society, communities, and citizens. Unlike NPM, which primarily emphasizes internal organizational efficiency, NPG places collaboration, networks, public participation, and public value creation at the center of modern governance (Osborne, 2021; Bryson et al., 2014). This shift suggests that the effectiveness of public organizations is no longer determined solely by the quality of bureaucratic structures but also by their ability to establish cross-organizational relationships, share knowledge, and integrate diverse resources to address increasingly complex public problems.

Changes in the strategic environment over the past decade have further accelerated this paradigm evolution. The COVID-19 pandemic, accelerated digital transformation, growing cybersecurity threats, climate change, and the emergence of various *creeping crises* have demonstrated that public organizations increasingly face cross-sectoral, interconnected, and rapidly evolving challenges that exceed the capacities of traditional bureaucratic arrangements (Ansell et al., 2020; Nolte & Lindenmeier, 2023). These conditions require bureaucracies not only to implement administrative procedures consistently but also to make rapid, data-informed decisions, experiment with policy solutions, and continuously adjust organizational strategies.

These developments have given rise to the paradigm of agile governance, an approach that emphasizes organizational flexibility, continuous learning, cross-sectoral collaboration, and the capacity of governments to respond rapidly to change without compromising the principles of public accountability (Mergel et al., 2020; Mergel, 2023). Under this paradigm, bureaucracy is no longer viewed merely as an organization responsible for maintaining stability through rigid procedures but as a learning organization that continuously adapts to changes in its environment. Consequently, the success of bureaucratic reform is no longer determined solely by regulatory compliance but also by an organization's capacity to generate innovation, foster collaboration, accelerate policy responses, and create sustainable public value.

The concept of the agile public organization has subsequently emerged as an institutional manifestation of this paradigm. Agile public organizations are characterized by more adaptive structures, empowering leadership, evidence-based decision-making, strategic use of digital technologies, and an organizational culture that supports learning and innovation (Mergel et al., 2018; Ylinen, 2021). Unlike traditional bureaucratic organizations that emphasize specialization and hierarchy, agile organizations prioritize cross-functional collaboration, multidisciplinary teams, open communication, and iterative work processes, enabling them to address complex public problems more rapidly.

The transformation toward agile public organizations is further supported by the theory of dynamic capabilities. Teece (2018) argues that organizations capable of surviving in rapidly changing environments possess the ability to sense changes, seize emerging opportunities, and transform

organizational resources continuously. In the public sector, these capabilities are reflected in bureaucratic capacity to identify changing societal needs, leverage digital technologies to improve service processes, and transform organizations through policy innovation and institutional learning. Accordingly, bureaucratic reform can no longer be understood merely as a process of improving organizational structures and procedures; it must also focus on developing organizational capabilities that enable bureaucracies to adapt continuously to environmental change.

Consistent with this perspective, recent studies indicate that the ability of public organizations to cope with complexity depends increasingly on the combination of adaptive leadership, a learning-oriented culture, cross-organizational collaboration, digital technology utilization, and knowledge-management capacity rather than solely on changes to organizational structures (Li et al., 2026; Atobishi et al., 2024; Jilani et al., 2026). Moreover, the meta-narrative review conducted by Li et al. (2026) indicates that cross-organizational collaboration, adaptive leadership, and digital technology are among the most consistent determinants contributing to organizational resilience in the public sector when responding to environmental change.

These findings indicate that bureaucratic reform is undergoing a fundamental transformation. The focus of reform is no longer limited to improving administrative governance but is increasingly shifting toward developing public organizations with adaptive capability, digital capability, collaborative capability, and learning capability as key sources of organizational capacity. In other words, the success of bureaucratic reform in the era of digital transformation is no longer determined simply by how effectively organizations comply with established procedures but by how quickly they can learn, adapt, and develop solutions to continuously evolving public problems.

Table 1. Paradigm Shift in Bureaucratic Reform

Dimension	Conventional Bureaucratic Reform	New-Generation Bureaucratic Reform
Orientation	Administrative compliance	Organizational adaptability
Focus	Internal efficiency	Public value creation
Structure	Hierarchical	Flexible and collaborative
Decision-making	Procedure-based	Data- and learning-based
Innovation	Incremental	Continuous and experimental
Role of technology	Administrative support	Organizational transformation enabler
Measures of success	Regulatory compliance and administrative performance	Agility, resilience, innovation, and public value

Table 1 illustrates that bureaucratic reform has shifted from a paradigm emphasizing procedural compliance toward one oriented toward the development of organizational capabilities. This shift does not imply abandoning the principles of classical bureaucracy but rather complementing them with adaptive capacities that enable public organizations to remain accountable while responding effectively to environmental change. Therefore, future bureaucratic reform agendas should extend beyond improving institutional structures and administrative procedures and focus on building agile public organizations as a foundation for effective, innovative, and sustainable governance.

3.2. Why Conventional Bureaucratic Reform Is No Longer Sufficient

Developments in the strategic environment over the past two decades have fundamentally transformed the context in which public administration operates. Whereas public sector organizations previously functioned within relatively stable, predictable environments characterized by procedural compliance, contemporary bureaucracies increasingly face rapid, complex, interconnected, and uncertain changes. Phenomena such as digital transformation, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, cybersecurity threats, the disruption caused by artificial intelligence, and rising public expectations regarding the quality of public services demonstrate that bureaucracies can no longer address emerging challenges through conventional administrative approaches alone (Ansell et al., 2020; Nolte & Lindenmeier, 2023; OECD, 2023).

In this context, several assumptions underlying conventional bureaucratic reform have become increasingly limited. Conventional bureaucratic reform is based on the premise that improving organizational structures, standardizing procedures, strengthening control systems, and reinforcing accountability mechanisms will automatically enhance the performance of public organizations. Although this approach has contributed to stronger administrative governance, it has paid insufficient attention to organizational capacity to adapt when environmental changes occur rapidly (Turner et al., 2019; Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023).

Various studies demonstrate that public organizations with high levels of administrative compliance do not necessarily possess adequate adaptive capacity. Salomo and Rahmayanti (2023), for example, found that the implementation of bureaucratic reform in Indonesian local governments remains largely oriented toward meeting institutional evaluation indicators and accountability requirements, while organizational learning and institutional innovation have developed more slowly. Similar findings were reported by Pribadi (2021), who demonstrated that not all dimensions of bureaucratic reform significantly contribute to improvements in public service quality or citizen satisfaction. These findings suggest that the success of bureaucratic reform can no longer be assessed solely through indicators of *procedural compliance* but must also be evaluated in terms of the organization's ability to generate tangible *organizational outcomes*.

These limitations become even more evident when public organizations confront wicked problems and creeping crises, which are multidimensional, gradually evolving, involve multiple actors, and lack single or definitive solutions (Ansell et al., 2020; Nolte & Lindenmeier, 2023). Challenges such as climate change, food security, cybersecurity, urbanization, poverty, and digital economic transformation cannot be effectively addressed through the authority of a single organization or level of government. Instead, they require cross-sectoral coordination, inter-organizational collaboration, real-time data utilization, and the capacity to continuously adjust policies in response to changing circumstances (Cosens et al., 2021).

Under such conditions, highly hierarchical bureaucratic structures can constrain decision-making processes. Long chains of command, rigid functional specialization, and the dominance of administrative procedures can make organizational responses slower than the pace of environmental change. This condition creates what Mergel et al. (2020) describe as bureaucratic inertia, namely the tendency of public organizations to maintain established patterns of work even when the external environment has changed substantially. As a result, organizations may become more focused on maintaining internal stability than on developing the adaptive capacity required to address emerging challenges.

Digital transformation further exposes the limitations of this paradigm. Digitalization does not simply shift service delivery from manual to electronic formats; it fundamentally changes how organizations operate, interact, and make decisions. Digital government requires bureaucracies to integrate diverse data sources, establish interoperability across systems, accelerate cross-organizational coordination, and utilize data analytics and artificial intelligence in decision-making processes (Yukhno, 2022; Latupeirissa et al., 2024). Consequently, the success of digital transformation is no longer determined solely by technological availability but also by an organization's ability to transform its work culture, leadership patterns, and institutional coordination mechanisms (Lungu et al., 2025; Amirova, 2025).

These developments demonstrate that public organizations require a set of new capabilities that are not sufficiently addressed within the conventional bureaucratic reform paradigm. Recent studies identify at least five strategic capabilities that increasingly determine the effectiveness of public sector organizations: adaptive capability, digital capability, collaborative capability, learning capability, and innovation capability (Atobishi et al., 2024; Li et al., 2026; Mergel, 2023). Together, these capabilities enable organizations to detect environmental changes more rapidly, develop solutions iteratively, and adjust organizational strategies without compromising public accountability.

The dynamic capabilities perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of these requirements. According to Teece (2018), organizations capable of surviving in dynamic environments are not necessarily those possessing the greatest resources, but those capable of continuously engaging in sensing, seizing, and transforming. In the public sector, sensing is manifested through the use of data, citizen participation, and feedback mechanisms to identify changes in public needs. *Seizing* is reflected in the organization's ability to formulate policies rapidly, allocate resources effectively, and capitalize on opportunities for innovation. Meanwhile, transforming concerns the capacity of bureaucracies to continuously modify organizational structures, work processes, organizational culture, and the competencies of public employees. Together, these three dimensions constitute a fundamental foundation for agile public organizations.

The literature on organizational resilience further demonstrates that the resilience of public organizations is not determined solely by their ability to withstand crises but also by their capacity to learn from experience, build collaborative networks, and develop sustainable mechanisms for adaptation (Li et al., 2026). Through a meta-narrative review of public administration research, Li et al. (2026) found that adaptive leadership, cross-organizational collaboration, digital technologies, a learning-oriented culture, and institutional flexibility are among the most consistent determinants of resilient public organizations. These findings reinforce the argument that future bureaucratic reform should focus on developing organizational capabilities, rather than merely improving administrative structures and procedures.

Accordingly, the central challenge of bureaucratic reform today is no longer simply to improve administrative efficiency but to transform bureaucracy into organizations capable of learning faster than the changes they encounter. Bureaucratic reform should therefore be understood as a process of developing adaptive capabilities that enable organizations to anticipate change, respond rapidly to uncertainty, strategically leverage digital technologies, and establish cross-sectoral collaboration to generate sustainable public value. This shift in orientation provides the conceptual foundation

for the emergence of the Agile Public Organization paradigm as a new direction for bureaucratic reform in the era of digital transformation.

Table 2. The Paradigm Gap between Conventional Bureaucratic Reform and the Needs of Contemporary Public Organizations

Dimension	Conventional Reform	Bureaucratic Needs of Contemporary Public Organizations
Environment	Relatively stable	Turbulent, dynamic, and uncertain
Primary focus	Efficiency and compliance	Adaptability and public value creation
Structure	Hierarchical	Flexible and cross-functional
Coordination	Vertical	Horizontal and collaborative
Decision-making	Procedure-based	Data- and learning-based
Innovation	Limited and incremental	Continuous, experimental, and iterative
Technology	Administrative support	Enabler of organizational transformation
Role of civil servants	Rule implementers	Agents of learning and innovation
Measures of success	Compliance and organizational outputs	Agility, resilience, innovation, and public value

Table 2 demonstrates that the central gap in contemporary bureaucratic reform does not lie in the weakness of administrative instruments but in the mismatch between a reform paradigm that continues to emphasize organizational stability and the increasingly dynamic nature of the governance environment. Therefore, bureaucratic reform requires a paradigm redefinition that no longer views bureaucracy merely as an administrative system but as an adaptive organization capable of learning, collaborating, innovating, and continuously transforming itself to create public value.

3.3. Agile Public Organizations: Concept, Dimensions, and Theoretical Foundations

The emergence of the Agile Public Organization concept represents a response to an increasingly dynamic, complex, and uncertain governance environment. Unlike traditional bureaucratic organizations, which emphasize structural stability, procedural compliance, and functional specialization, agile public organizations place adaptability, continuous learning, collaboration, and innovation at the center of organizational effectiveness (Mergel et al., 2018; Mergel et al., 2020). From this perspective, organizational agility is not merely the ability to make decisions quickly but also the capacity to anticipate change, respond rapidly to emerging challenges, and continuously transform organizational resources and work processes without compromising the principles of public accountability.

The public administration literature indicates that the concept of agile organizations has evolved from the intersection of strategic management theory, digital transformation, and adaptive governance. Mergel et al. (2020) explain that *agile governance* emphasizes iterative, collaborative, and user-centered work processes, enabling organizations to develop more responsive public policies and services. This approach differs from conventional bureaucratic models, which tend to

rely on linear processes and lengthy hierarchical structures. In agile organizations, decision-making is more decentralized and data-driven and is supported by *feedback loops* that enable continuous organizational adjustment (Mergel, 2023).

This perspective is consistent with dynamic capabilities theory, which identifies an organization's ability to sense, seize, and transform as a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness in changing environments (Teece, 2018). In the public sector, sensing reflects the ability of bureaucracies to identify changing societal needs through the use of data, policy evaluation, and public participation. Seizing concerns the organization's ability to make timely decisions, allocate resources adaptively, and capitalize on opportunities for innovation. Meanwhile, transforming refers to the organization's capacity to modify its structures, work culture, employee competencies, and governance arrangements to remain relevant to changing strategic environments. These three dimensions demonstrate that agile public organizations do not merely manage change but actively develop the capacity to continuously transform themselves.

In addition to dynamic capabilities, the concept of organizational agility is closely connected to organizational resilience. Li et al. (2026) explain that resilient public sector organizations are not only capable of surviving crises but are also able to learn from experience, improve organizational processes, and strengthen their adaptive capacity after a crisis has passed. Organizational resilience should therefore not be understood simply as the ability to preserve existing conditions but as the capacity to undergo continuous transformation. This perspective broadens the meaning of bureaucratic reform from administrative change toward strengthening organizational capacity to cope with uncertainty over the long term.

Digital transformation further reinforces the need for agile public organizations. Various studies demonstrate that the use of digital technologies, data analytics, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and information-system interoperability not only improves public service efficiency but also accelerates decision-making, strengthens cross-organizational coordination, and enhances organizational capacity to manage change (Yukhno, 2022; Latupeirissa et al., 2024; Atobishi et al., 2024). However, digital technologies can deliver their full potential only when supported by an organizational culture that embraces learning, adaptive leadership, and collaborative governance (Amirova, 2025; Lungu et al., 2025). Digitalization should therefore be understood as an enabler of transformation rather than the ultimate objective of bureaucratic reform.

At the same time, the public value paradigm provides a normative orientation for agile public organizations. Moore (2013) argues that the success of public organizations should ultimately be assessed by their ability to create value for society rather than solely by their internal efficiency. This perspective is further developed by Bryson et al. (2014) and Osborne (2021), who position cross-actor collaboration, citizen engagement, and the creation of social benefits at the core of modern public governance. Accordingly, agile public organizations must not only be responsive to change but also ensure that institutional innovations and transformations contribute to improved service quality, public trust, and societal well-being.

Based on a synthesis of these perspectives, this article proposes that agile public organizations are built upon five interconnected strategic dimensions: (1) adaptive leadership; (2) digital capability; (3) cross-sectoral collaboration (collaborative governance); (4) organizational learning and innovation; and (5) public value orientation. These dimensions do not operate independently but constitute an integrated organizational system that enables bureaucracies to respond rapidly to

change, make evidence-based decisions, strengthen collaboration, and deliver higher-quality public services.

Table 3. Dimensions of Agile Public Organizations

Dimension	Key Characteristics	Contribution to Bureaucratic Reform
Adaptive leadership	Visionary, responsive, and empowering	Accelerates organizational change
Digital capability	Data utilization, interoperability, and digital technologies	Improves decision-making and service quality
Cross-sectoral collaboration	Networks, partnerships, and co-creation	Strengthens the resolution of complex public problems
Organizational learning and innovation	Experimentation, evaluation, and continuous improvement	Enhances organizational adaptive capacity
Public value orientation	Citizen-centered, accountable, and inclusive	Produces valuable and sustainable public services

This synthesis demonstrates that agile public organizations do not replace the fundamental principles of bureaucratic reform but represent an evolution of the reform paradigm itself. Accountability, transparency, and compliance with the law remain essential foundations of modern bureaucracy, but they need to be complemented by adaptive capabilities that enable organizations to respond to increasingly rapid environmental change. Therefore, next-generation bureaucratic reform should focus not only on improving organizational structures and procedures but also on building organizations capable of learning, innovating, collaborating, and strategically leveraging digital technologies to create sustainable public value. This conceptual framework provides the foundation for developing the bureaucratic reform model discussed in the following section.

3.4. Conceptual Model of Next-Generation Bureaucratic Reform: Toward Agile Public Organizations

The literature synthesis indicates that bureaucratic reform is undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift. For several decades, bureaucratic reform has largely been understood as a process of institutional improvement through changes in organizational structures, procedural simplification, strengthened accountability systems, regulatory reform, and improvements in the quality of public sector human resources (Turner et al., 2019; Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023). This approach has contributed significantly to strengthening administrative governance and improving the efficiency of public organizations. However, changes in the strategic environment demonstrate that the effectiveness of public organizations is no longer determined solely by administrative capacity but also by their ability to learn, adapt, collaborate, and innovate continuously (Ansell et al., 2020; Mergel et al., 2020).

These findings suggest that bureaucratic reform should be repositioned as a process of organizational capability building, rather than merely institutional restructuring. From this perspective, organizational structures, regulations, and procedures should be viewed as enabling mechanisms that support the development of adaptive public organizations rather than as the ultimate objectives of reform. Accordingly, the orientation of reform shifts from administrative

compliance toward organizational capability, referring to the capacity of organizations to anticipate change, seize opportunities, and transform resources to generate sustainable public value (Teece, 2018; Osborne, 2021).

Drawing on the integration of bureaucratic reform, agile governance, dynamic capabilities, organizational resilience, digital government, and public value perspectives, this article proposes a Conceptual Model of Next-Generation Bureaucratic Reform, as illustrated in Figure 1. The model explains bureaucratic transformation as a reinforcing relationship among external drivers of change, organizational capabilities, governance mechanisms, and strategic outcomes.

At the first stage, bureaucratic reform is influenced by various external drivers, including digital transformation, changing public expectations, increasing policy complexity, technological developments, and the growing frequency of global crises. These factors create pressure for public organizations to move beyond bureaucratic patterns of work toward more adaptive and responsive organizational arrangements (Nolte & Lindenmeier, 2023; OECD, 2023).

In response to these pressures, public organizations need to develop five core organizational capabilities. First, adaptive leadership refers to the ability of leaders to establish a vision for change, empower employees, manage uncertainty, and foster an organizational culture that supports innovation (Ansell et al., 2020). Second, digital capability, encompassing the use of data, information-system interoperability, artificial intelligence, and process automation to improve the quality and timeliness of decision-making (Atobishi et al., 2024; Yukhno, 2022). Third, collaborative capability refers to the ability to establish cross-organizational networks and partnerships with the private sector, academia, and civil society to address complex public problems (Bryson et al., 2014). Fourth, learning and innovation capability, which enables organizations to conduct evaluation, experimentation, and continuous policy improvement (Li et al., 2026). Fifth, public value orientation refers to the capacity to ensure that bureaucratic transformation generates tangible benefits for society through improved service quality, public trust, and social well-being (Moore, 2013; Osborne, 2021).

These five capabilities are subsequently translated into agile organizational governance mechanisms, including evidence-based decision-making, cross-sectoral coordination, multidisciplinary teams, iterative work processes, and learning-oriented evaluation systems. Unlike traditional bureaucracies, which place procedures at the center of organizational control, agile governance places learning and adaptation at the core of organizational responses to environmental change (Mergel, 2023).

The implementation of these mechanisms is expected to generate three strategic outcomes. First, greater organizational agility is reflected in the bureaucracy's ability to respond rapidly and appropriately to environmental changes. Second, greater organizational resilience enables organizations to maintain essential public functions despite crises or external disruptions. Third, greater public value creation, reflected in public services that are more responsive, inclusive, transparent, and oriented toward citizens' needs. Thus, bureaucratic reform should not merely produce more efficient organizations but also organizations that are more adaptive, innovative, resilient, and sustainable.

Conceptually, the proposed model makes several contributions to public administration theory. First, it extends the bureaucratic reform paradigm by integrating organizational adaptability, a dimension that has received comparatively limited attention in the conventional bureaucratic

reform literature. Second, the model establishes a systematic relationship among digital transformation, adaptive leadership, collaboration, organizational learning, and public value creation as interconnected components of bureaucratic transformation. Third, the model positions the Agile Public Organization as a strategic outcome of bureaucratic reform. Consequently, reform success should no longer be assessed solely through procedural compliance or administrative performance indicators but also through the organization's ability to develop sustainable adaptive capacity.

Table 4. Conceptual Framework for Next-Generation Bureaucratic Reform

Component	Dimensions	Expected Outcomes
External Drivers	Digital transformation, policy complexity, global crises, changing public expectations	Pressure for organizational change
Organizational Capabilities	Adaptive leadership, digital capability, collaboration, organizational learning, public value orientation	Adaptive organization
Governance Mechanisms	Data-driven decision-making, cross-sectoral coordination, multidisciplinary teams, iterative innovation	Agile governance
Strategic Outcomes	Organizational agility, organizational resilience, public value	Responsive, innovative, and sustainable bureaucracy

The conceptual model indicates that bureaucratic reform in the era of digital transformation can no longer be understood as a linear administrative change agenda. Instead, reform should be viewed as a dynamic transformation process in which organizations continuously develop adaptive capabilities through learning, innovation, digital technology utilization, and cross-sectoral collaboration. Accordingly, the agile public organization is not merely an outcome of bureaucratic reform but a representation of a bureaucracy capable of balancing institutional stability, organizational flexibility, and sustainable public value creation.

Overall, the proposed model integrates the perspectives of *bureaucratic reform*, *agile governance*, *dynamic capabilities*, *organizational resilience*, *digital government*, and *public value* into a coherent framework for understanding next-generation bureaucratic transformation. The model provides a theoretical basis for repositioning bureaucratic reform from an administrative compliance agenda toward a capability-oriented transformation that enables public organizations to remain adaptive, innovative, resilient, and responsive in increasingly complex governance environments.

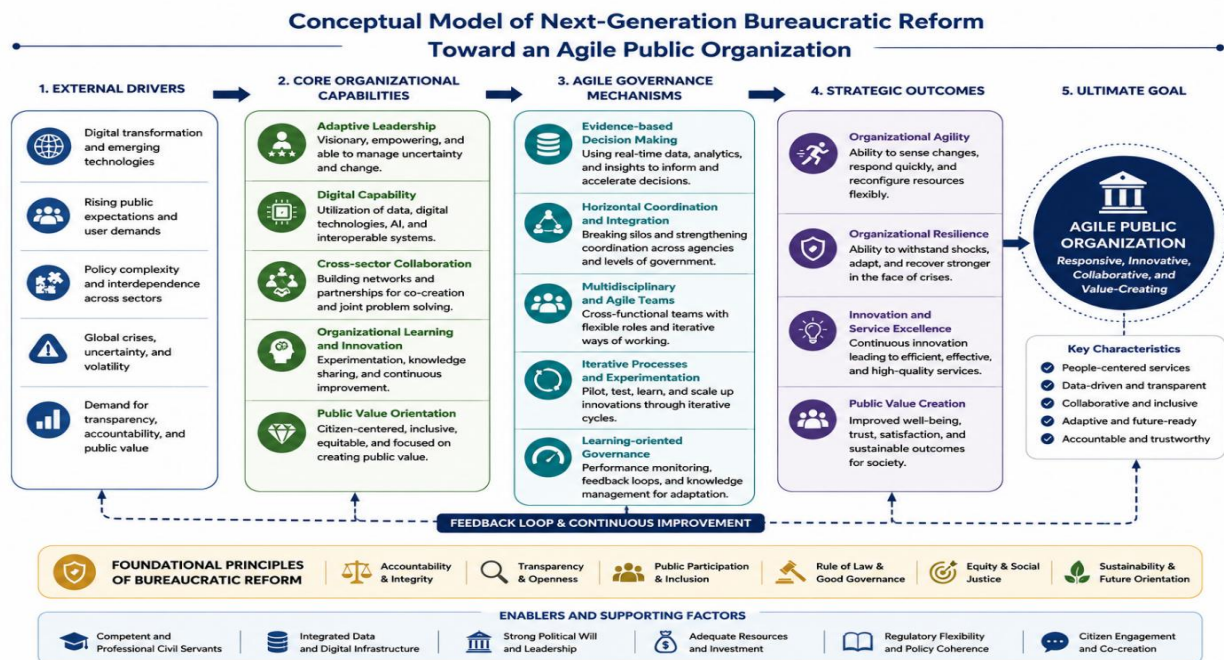


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Next-Generation Bureaucratic Reform toward an Agile Public Organization

Source: Developed by the authors based on a synthesis of the literature published between 2018 and 2026.

Figure 1 illustrates bureaucratic reform as a dynamic transformation process driven by external pressures, including digital transformation, rising public expectations, increasing policy complexity, and global uncertainty. These drivers stimulate the development of five core organizational capabilities: adaptive leadership, digital capability, cross-sectoral collaboration, organizational learning and innovation, and public value orientation. These capabilities are operationalized through agile governance mechanisms that promote evidence-based decision-making, iterative policy processes, multidisciplinary teamwork, and continuous organizational learning. Ultimately, these mechanisms contribute to enhanced organizational agility, organizational resilience, innovation capability, and public value creation, which collectively characterize an Agile Public Organization.

3.5. Implications for Bureaucratic Reform in Indonesia

The conceptual model developed in this article suggests that bureaucratic reform in Indonesia should be directed toward organizational transformation rather than merely administrative system improvement. To date, the success of bureaucratic reform has been assessed largely through institutional performance indicators, the Government Agency Performance Accountability System (SAKIP) score, the Bureaucratic Reform (RB) Index, the maturity level of the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), and compliance with various governance standards. Although these indicators remain important evaluation instruments, they do not fully capture the capacity of public organizations to adapt to rapidly changing environments (Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023; OECD, 2023).

Therefore, the next generation of bureaucratic reform should incorporate organizational capabilities as an integral component of reform performance indicators. Public organizations should not only be required to meet administrative standards but also demonstrate their capacity to foster

innovation, accelerate decision-making, strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration, and develop continuous organizational learning (Mergel et al., 2020; Li et al., 2026). Accordingly, bureaucratic reform should move beyond a focus on rule compliance toward adaptive performance, defined as the organizational capacity to generate timely and appropriate responses to changing societal needs.

Digital transformation represents one of the key instruments supporting this shift. However, digitalization should not be understood merely as the development of applications or the conversion of service procedures into digital formats. Rather, it should involve a comprehensive transformation of business processes, data governance, organizational coordination, and evidence-based decision-making (Yukhno, 2022; Latupeirissa et al., 2024). In other words, digital technology should function as a strategic enabler that strengthens bureaucratic adaptive capacity rather than merely serving as a tool for administrative automation.

Another important implication concerns the development of public sector human resources. Increasingly complex governance environments require civil servants to possess competencies that extend beyond administrative skills. In addition to regulatory knowledge, public officials need to develop digital literacy, data analytics, adaptive leadership, change management, collaborative communication, and innovative problem-solving capabilities. Research indicates that merit-based systems, professionalism, and a learning-oriented culture are important prerequisites for successful organizational transformation in the public sector (Jilani et al., 2026; Andarwati et al., 2026).

Bureaucratic reform should also strengthen collaborative governance. The complexity of contemporary public problems can no longer be effectively addressed by individual government agencies acting in isolation. More open coordination mechanisms are therefore required among government institutions, the private sector, universities, civil society organizations, and communities. Such an approach creates opportunities for policy and public service co-creation that are more innovative, inclusive, and responsive to societal needs (Bryson et al., 2014; Ansell et al., 2020).

Overall, the model proposed in this article suggests that future bureaucratic reform needs to shift from administrative reform toward organizational transformation. Reform success should no longer be assessed solely by the level of procedural compliance but also by the capacity of public organizations to develop organizational agility, organizational resilience, and public value creation capacity. This shift in orientation is expected to foster a bureaucracy that is more responsive, innovative, adaptive, and capable of addressing the evolving challenges of governance in the era of digital transformation.

4. CONCLUSION

Bureaucratic reform in the era of digital transformation can no longer be understood as an administrative change agenda focused merely on streamlining organizational structures, improving regulations, or strengthening procedural compliance. The synthesis of multiple theoretical perspectives demonstrates that the increasing complexity of governance environments, rapid technological development, rising public expectations, and the emergence of multidimensional crises require public sector organizations to develop greater adaptive, collaborative, and innovative capacities. Accordingly, the bureaucratic reform paradigm needs to shift from administrative reform toward organizational transformation, positioning the Agile Public Organization as a central objective. Within this framework, adaptive leadership, digital capability, cross-sectoral

collaboration, organizational learning, and public value orientation constitute complementary strategic foundations for building a bureaucracy that is responsive, resilient, and sustainable.

This article makes a conceptual contribution by integrating the perspectives of bureaucratic reform, agile governance, digital government, dynamic capabilities, organizational resilience, and public value into a conceptual model of Next-Generation Bureaucratic Reform. The model emphasizes that the future success of bureaucratic reform should be assessed not only through administrative performance indicators but also through an organization's capacity to develop organizational agility, organizational resilience, innovation, and public value creation. From a practical perspective, the proposed model can serve as a reference for governments in strengthening the implementation of bureaucratic reform, the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), and more integrated digital transformation across the public sector. Nevertheless, this article remains conceptual in nature. Future research should therefore empirically test the proposed model across different public sector organizations to validate the relationships among its dimensions and develop contextually appropriate indicators for measuring agile public organizations within the Indonesian bureaucratic context.

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Author Contributions

M.M: Literature review and synthesis, analysis and interpretation, writing original draft, and writing review and editing.

Y.S: Conceptualization, methodology, visualization, writing, review and editing, supervision, and project administration.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required because this study is a conceptual research based on systematic literature review and conceptual synthesis and did not involve human participants, animals, or the collection of primary data.

Data Availability

No new primary data were generated or analyzed in this study. The study was based on the analysis and synthesis of published literature and publicly available scholarly sources.

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The authors used AI-assisted tools to support the preparation of Figure 1 and limited language refinement of the manuscript. All AI-assisted outputs were reviewed, edited, and verified by the authors, who remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, interpretation, and final content of the manuscript.

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