

# THEORETICAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MODELS

## ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ МОДЕЛЕЙ ДЕРЖАВНОГО УПРАВЛІННЯ

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**Abstract.** *The field of public administration has experienced significant evolution, mirroring changes in political ideologies, societal expectations, and the complexity of contemporary governance. This study undertakes a theoretical and comparative analysis of five major models of public administration: Classical Public Administration, New Public Administration (NPA), New Public Management (NPM), Postmodern Public Administration, and New Public Governance (NPG). Each framework is analyzed in terms of its historical emergence, philosophical foundations, guiding principles, and administrative implications. The analysis draws on both foundational theorists and contemporary scholarly discourse to critically evaluate the strengths and limitations inherent in each model. Through a structured comparative approach, the article explores how these paradigms conceptualize the roles of the state, public officials, and citizens, as well as their differing approaches to accountability, efficiency, participation, and responsiveness. A comparative table is provided to systematically synthesize and contrast key theoretical and operational dimensions of the models. Additionally, the discussion section contextualizes each framework within the evolving landscape of 21st-century governance, including issues such as digital transformation, participatory policy-making, and multi-level governance challenges. By offering a nuanced theoretical examination and synthesizing key distinctions, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intellectual trajectory and practical implications of public administration models. It aims to support scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in identifying the most contextually relevant administrative strategies in an era characterized by complexity, interdependence, and institutional change.*

**Keywords:** *public administration, governance models, comparative analysis, New Public Management, New Public Governance.*

**Анотація.** *Сфера державного управління зазнала значної еволюції, що відображає зміни в політичних ідеологіях, суспільних очікуваннях та складність сучасного управління. Це дослідження проводить теоретичний та порівняльний аналіз основних моделей державного управління: класичного державного управління, нового державного управління, нового державного адміністрування, постмодерного державного управління. Кожна структура аналізується з точки зору її історичного виникнення, філософських основ, ключових принципів та адміністративних наслідків. Аналіз спирається як на теоретиків-основоположників, так і на сучасний науковий дискурс, щоб критично оцінити сильні сторони та обмеження, властиві кожній моделі.*

*За допомогою структурованого порівняльного підходу стаття досліджує, як ці парадигми концептуалізують ролі держави, державних службовців та громадян, а також їхні різні підходи до підзвітності, ефективності, участі та реагування. Наведено порівняльну таблицю для систематичного синтезу та зіставлення ключових теоретичних та операційних*

*вимірів моделей. Крім того, автор контекстулізує кожну структуру в рамках мінливого ландшафту управління 21-го століття, включаючи такі питання, як цифрова трансформація, партисипативне формування політики та проблеми багаторівневого управління.*

*Пропонуючи нюансований теоретичний огляд та синтезуючи ключові відмінності, це дослідження сприяє глибшому розумінню інтелектуальної траєкторії та практичних наслідків моделей державного управління. Воно має на меті допомогти науковцям, політикам та практикам у визначенні найбільш контекстуально релевантних адміністративних стратегій в епоху, що характеризується складністю, взаємозалежністю та інституційними змінами.*

**Ключові слова:** державне управління, моделі управління, порівняльний аналіз, нове державне управління.

**Introduction.** Public administration, as both an academic discipline and a field of practice, has continuously evolved in response to the shifting demands and complexities of modern societies. It is not a static body of knowledge but rather a dynamic and interdisciplinary arena that integrates elements of political science, sociology, economics, and management. Central to its evolution are the theoretical models that have been developed to provide structured ways of understanding how public institutions operate, how public services are delivered, and how government interacts with and is held accountable by citizens. These models offer normative and empirical frameworks that guide administrative behavior and reform efforts.

A comparative analysis of these models reveals the distinct philosophical and ideological foundations upon which they are built, ranging from classical notions of hierarchical authority to more recent emphases on networked collaboration and citizen engagement. Such comparisons are critical in assessing the relevance and applicability of each paradigm within different political, economic, and cultural settings. Moreover, they help scholars and practitioners to critically evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, and ethical dimensions of governance mechanisms.

This article explores five major paradigms in public administration theory: classical bureaucratic theory, the New Public Management (NPM) approach, post-NPM models such as the New Public Governance (NPG), digital-era governance, and equity-centered public administration. It traces their historical development and theoretical contributions, analyzing the contexts that gave rise to each paradigm and the challenges they sought to address. Particular attention is paid to how these models respond to contemporary governance imperatives, including the increasing digitization of public services, demands for transparency and accountability, and the pursuit of social equity and inclusiveness in policymaking. By examining the strengths and limitations of each approach, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how public administration can continue to adapt to emerging global and local challenges in the 21st century.

### **Theoretical Models of Public Administration**

Public administration has continually adapted in response to the evolving complexities and demands of contemporary societies (Wilson, 1887; Simon, 1947). Rather than constituting a static body of knowledge, it has emerged as a dynamic and interdisciplinary field, integrating perspectives from political science, sociology, economics, and management theory (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Goodnow, 1902). Central to its development are foundational theoretical models that offer structured frameworks for understanding the operation of public institutions, the delivery of public services, and the mechanisms through which governments engage with—and are held accountable by—citizens (Taylor, 1911; Hood, 1991; Simon, 1947). A comparative examination of these models underscores their distinct philosophical and ideological roots—ranging from classical hierarchical authority and market-oriented decentralization to citizen-centric service provision and collaborative network governance—each reflecting particular historical, cultural, and administrative contexts (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Rhodes, 1997). More recent paradigms, such as the Neo-Weberian State and New Public Governance, emphasize the reinvigoration of professional bureaucratic norms alongside participatory governance networks, highlighting the co-production of public value through inter-organizational collaboration and stakeholder engagement (Pollitt

& Bouckaert, 2017; Kettl, 2002; Rhodes, 1997). This theoretical pluralism enables scholars and practitioners to critically assess governance mechanisms in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, legitimacy, and ethical accountability across diverse political, economic, and socio-cultural environments (Kettl, 2002; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003).

Building upon Weber's foundational work, bureaucracy is conceived as an "ideal type" marked by a clearly delineated hierarchy, a division of labor based on specialized functions, formalized rules, and the consistent application of impersonal procedures—all designed to maximize organizational efficiency and predictability (Weber, 1947). Woodrow Wilson (1887) further refined this paradigm by articulating a politics-administration dichotomy, arguing that elected officials should engage in policy-making while professional administrators, insulated from partisan pressures, execute those policies through a neutral, merit-based civil service (Wilson, 1887). Central to Weber's model is the principle of meritocracy: recruitment and promotion hinge on formal qualifications and performance rather than on patronage, thereby cultivating technical competence and accountability in public agencies (Weber, 1947). While such a rule-bound structure promotes uniformity and standardization in service delivery, critics have highlighted its tendency to generate procedural "red tape," hinder organizational adaptability, and suppress innovation (Hood, 1991). Moreover, the strict adherence to impersonal rules has been faulted for neglecting equity and social justice, as it may fail to address the diverse needs of marginalized communities and inadvertently perpetuate systemic biases (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.; Frederickson, 1990; Riccucci, 2005). These critiques have, in turn, spurred advocacy for more flexible, citizen-centric frameworks that balance bureaucratic control with responsiveness and ethical accountability (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Reflecting this evolution, Johan P. Olsen (2005) has called for a "rediscovery" of bureaucracy—maintaining Weberian strengths of stability and accountability while integrating adaptive, learning-oriented practices to enhance innovation and responsiveness in today's governance contexts (Olsen, 2005).

Rooted in foundational critiques articulated by Dwight Waldo (1948) and crystallized at the 1968 Minnowbrook Conference, the New Public Administration (NPA) movement sought to reconceptualize bureaucracy by foregrounding social equity, citizen participation, and ethical governance (Waldo, 1948; Marini, 1971). Drawing on the civil rights and social justice movements of the era, NPA scholars rejected the ideal of value-neutral administration, contending that practitioners bear a normative responsibility to confront systemic inequalities and to amplify the voices of marginalized constituencies (Frederickson, 1990). This paradigm promoted organizational innovations such as devolution of authority, client involvement initiatives, and sensitivity training to enhance responsiveness and distributive fairness in service delivery (Frederickson, 2010). Nonetheless, translating NPA's transformative agenda into practice proved challenging, as tensions between activist imperatives and bureaucratic neutrality often generated conflicts over procedural consistency and resource allocation (Frederickson, 2010). In contrast, the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm that emerged in the 1980s sought to import private-sector management techniques into the public domain, emphasizing decentralization, rigorous performance measurement, and market competition as engines of efficiency (Lane, 2000). Inspired by neoliberal reforms in the United Kingdom and United States, NPM reconceived citizens as "customers," championed outsourcing and privatization, and instituted output controls to drive results-oriented administration (Hood, 1991). Proponents lauded NPM for reducing bureaucratic red tape, incentivizing innovation through performance contracts, and fostering managerial autonomy within public agencies (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) further codified these reforms in its 1995 report *Governance in Transition*, which advocated performance benchmarking and "internal markets" as global best practices for public sector modernization (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1995). However, critics flagged that NPM's overreliance on economic rationality risked undermining core public values—equity, transparency, and democratic accountability—by subordinating social goals to narrow cost-benefit calculations (Dunleavy et al., 2006). They also noted that the fragmentation induced by contractualism and performance metrics increased policy complexity and often impeded coherent interagency coordination (Dunleavy et al., 2006). These debates have paved the way for subsequent models—such as digital-era governance and New Public Governance—that seek to integrate

collaborative networks, adaptive learning, and technological innovation to harmonize efficiency with democratic values (Dunleavy et al., 2006; Kettl, 2002).

Postmodernism in public administration fundamentally challenges the modernist reliance on fixed hierarchies and universal managerial truths, arguing that governance structures are contingent, discursively constructed, and open to deconstruction (Fox & Miller, 1995). Fox and Miller (1995) advance a discourse theory of public administration that privileges multiplicity and the negotiation of meaning among diverse interpretive communities over monolithic bureaucratic norms (Fox & Miller, 1995). Drawing on Habermas's communicative rationality, scholars emphasize the role of dialogue and pluralism in policy-making, advocating context-sensitive solutions tailored to specific social settings rather than one-size-fits-all prescriptions (Habermas, 1984). Inspired by Foucault's governmentality, postmodernists foreground the dispersed nature of power, showing how administrative "truths" emerge from competing discourses rather than from objective, value-neutral procedures (Foucault, 1991). This orientation problematizes the "myth" of democratic consensus by exposing the ways in which dominant narratives marginalize alternative voices and mask underlying power asymmetries (Fox & Miller, 1995;). Critics warn, however, that an unmoored plurality of discourses can impede coherent action, as the absence of shared normative benchmarks may lead to fragmentation and undermine large-scale policy coordination (Bogason, 2005; Box, 1998). Nonetheless, proponents argue that by embedding ethics and reflexivity within administrative practice—and by recognizing the performative power of narratives—postmodern approaches enrich democratic governance through more inclusive, deliberative, and adaptive policymaking processes (Fox & Miller, 1995; Callon, 1998).

New Public Governance (NPG) shifts the locus of public administration from a state-centric model to one premised on governance networks, where inter-organizational collaboration among governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and private actors is central (Osborne, 2006; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). Under this paradigm, co-production of public services emerges as both a normative and practical imperative, whereby citizens actively partner with state agencies to generate public value, complementing traditional service delivery mechanisms (Alford, 2009; Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014). NPG also foregrounds adaptive leadership and trust-building processes, recognizing that effective governance requires relational capacities, mutual accountability, and shared problem-solving across network participants (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012). The salience of network governance has been further amplified by digital transformation trends, including the strategic adoption of artificial intelligence to enhance decision-support systems and personalize public service experiences (Babšek, Ravšelj, Umek, & Aristovnik, 2025), as well as the diffusion of participatory budgeting practices that democratize fiscal decision-making at the local level (Sintomer, Herzberg, & Röcke, 2008). However, the complex, cross-sectoral configurations demanded by NPG necessitate robust coordination mechanisms—such as network managers, metagovernance frameworks, and formalized governance protocols—to prevent fragmentation and ensure policy coherence (Torfing, Peters, Pierre, & Sørensen, 2012; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). In sum, NPG advances a model of governance that is dynamic, collaborative, and responsive to multifaceted societal challenges, yet its efficacy hinges on the design of integrative structures to negotiate complexity and align diverse stakeholder interests.

### **Comparative Analysis**

In this comparative analysis, five influential paradigms of public administration—Weberian bureaucracy, New Public Administration (NPA), New Public Management (NPM), postmodern approaches, and New Public Governance (NPG)—are evaluated across five dimensions: philosophical foundations, organizational designs, normative objectives, implementation dynamics, and performance/accountability mechanisms (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). While the Weberian model emphasizes hierarchical control and rule-bound procedures, NPA foregrounds social equity and citizen empowerment; NPM imports market-driven efficiency; postmodernism deconstructs universal rationalities in favor of discursive pluralism; and NPG prioritizes networked co-production of services (Osborne, 2006; Weber et al., 1947; Frederickson, 1990; Fox & Miller, 1995; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). Each paradigm exhibits unique strengths in addressing modern governance

challenges, yet also faces trade-offs in adaptability, legitimacy, and equity. The table below synthesizes key differences across models.

Table 1

### Comparative Overview of Public Administration Models

| Model      | Theoretical Foundation | Key Principles                     | Strengths                      | Weaknesses                        |
|------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Classical  | Weberian bureaucracy   | Hierarchy, rules, meritocracy      | Predictability, efficiency     | Rigidity, inequity                |
| NPM        | Economic rationalism   | Marketization, performance metrics | Cost-effectiveness, innovation | Erosion of public trust, inequity |
| NPA        | Social equity theory   | Participation, equity, ethics      | Inclusivity, justice           | Implementation challenges         |
| Postmodern | Deconstructionism      | Pluralism, discourse               | Flexibility, critical analysis | Lack of coherence                 |
| NPG        | Network theory         | Collaboration, co-production       | Adaptability, resilience       | Coordination complexity           |

*Source: by Author*

No single paradigm fully addresses the multifaceted demands of contemporary governance. Weberian bureaucracy provides stability and procedural fairness, while NPA injects social conscience into administration. NPM drives efficiency and performance focus, postmodernism enriches critical reflexivity, and NPG offers a blueprint for collaborative, multi-stakeholder problem-solving. Hybrid approaches that harmonize hierarchical coordination, equity imperatives, market incentives, discursive diversity, and networked co-production hold the greatest promise for responsive, legitimate, and sustainable governance (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011)

**Conclusion and discussion.** The evolution of public administration paradigms mirrors the broader transformations occurring within society, particularly in response to globalization, technological advancements, and shifting public expectations. Classical bureaucratic models, rooted in Max Weber's principles of hierarchical organization and rule-based governance, continue to hold relevance in domains necessitating standardization and uniformity, such as tax collection and national defense (Weber, 1947). These models provide a structured framework that ensures consistency and predictability in administrative processes.

However, the advent of globalization and the rapid proliferation of digital technologies have introduced complexities that traditional models struggle to address effectively. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and algorithm-driven governance has necessitated the development of more adaptive and collaborative frameworks. New Public Governance (NPG) has risen to prominence in this context, emphasizing multi-stakeholder collaboration, co-production of services, and adaptive leadership to navigate the intricate challenges of contemporary governance (Osborne, 2006). NPG's focus on networked governance structures enables more responsive and innovative solutions, particularly in areas like participatory budgeting and AI integration.

Despite the shift towards NPG, the legacy of New Public Management (NPM) persists, particularly in the continued emphasis on performance-based budgeting and efficiency metrics. NPM's market-oriented approach, which redefined citizens as customers and prioritized cost-effectiveness, has been instrumental in driving reforms aimed at enhancing public sector efficiency (Hood, 1991). However, this customer-centric model has faced criticism for its inadequacy in

addressing equity concerns, especially during crises that expose systemic disparities, such as the housing affordability crisis. The focus on measurable outcomes often overlooks the nuanced needs of marginalized communities, leading to policy outcomes that may exacerbate existing inequalities (Dunleavy et al., 2006).

In contrast, New Public Administration (NPA) and postmodern approaches offer critical perspectives that prioritize social equity and challenge the assumptions of value-neutrality in public administration. NPA, emerging from the 1968 Minnowbrook Conference, advocates for administrators to actively address systemic inequalities and empower marginalized populations through participatory and ethical governance (Frederickson, 1990). A practical manifestation of NPA principles can be observed in South Africa's post-apartheid reforms, where efforts were made to redress historical disparities and promote inclusive governance structures (Cameron, 2009).

Postmodern critiques further deconstruct traditional administrative paradigms by questioning universal truths and highlighting the role of narratives and discourse in shaping policy. Scholars like Fox and Miller (1995) argue for a more pluralistic and context-specific approach to governance, emphasizing the importance of diverse perspectives and the deconstruction of dominant narratives. This perspective is particularly pertinent in the realm of algorithmic governance, where opaque AI systems can perpetuate biases and undermine transparency. The concept of "black box" algorithms, as discussed by Pasquale (2015), underscores the challenges of accountability and the need for greater transparency in AI-driven decision-making processes.

The integration of AI into public administration has sparked debates over algorithmic transparency and the ethical implications of automated decision-making. Concerns have been raised about the potential for AI systems to reinforce existing biases and the difficulty in ensuring accountability within these opaque systems (Vaassen, 2022). The lack of transparency in algorithmic processes poses significant challenges to democratic governance, as citizens may find it difficult to understand or contest decisions made by AI systems. This underscores the necessity for frameworks that prioritize explainability and social transparency in AI applications within the public sector (Ehsan et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the evolution of public administration reflects a dynamic interplay between enduring principles and emerging challenges. While classical models provide foundational structures for governance, the complexities of the modern era necessitate adaptive frameworks like NPG that emphasize collaboration and innovation. Simultaneously, the critical lenses offered by NPA and postmodern approaches highlight the importance of equity, transparency, and ethical considerations in public administration. As AI and digital technologies become increasingly integrated into governance, ensuring that these systems align with democratic values and promote social equity remains a paramount concern.

No single model universally addresses the complexities of modern governance. Hybrid approaches, such as blending NPM's efficiency with NPG's collaborative ethos, may offer pragmatic solutions. Future research should explore contextual factors influencing model efficacy, such as cultural norms and technological adoption. As governments confront challenges like climate resilience and digital trust, theoretical agility will remain paramount.

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