

FORMULATING POSITIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN INDONESIA: AN ACTOR, STRUCTURE, DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRAK

Perubahan paradigma administrasi publik global, dari pendekatan klasik dan manajerial hingga tata kelola kolaboratif, mengindikasikan bahwa perkembangan disiplin ini tidak berlangsung secara linier, melainkan dibentuk oleh relasi antara aktor, struktur, dan wacana. Dalam konteks Indonesia, adopsi paradigma global sering dilakukan secara normatif tanpa proses kontekstualisasi yang memadai, sehingga kurang selaras dengan karakter sosial-politik dan nilai lokal. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan *interpretative conceptual literature review* terhadap artikel jurnal, buku akademik, dan dokumen kebijakan. Sumber-sumber tersebut diinspeksi melalui kategorisasi tematik dan sintesis konseptual untuk menavigasi bagaimana interaksi aktor, struktur, dan wacana memformulasi modernisasi birokrasi, penguatan institusi perencanaan, dan administrasi pembangunan di Indonesia. Hasil kajian menunjukkan tiga temuan utama. Pertama, modernisasi birokrasi didominasi wacana efisiensi dan kinerja yang memperkuat struktur formal, namun membatasi inovasi aktor lokal. Kedua, institusi perencanaan berkembang dalam kerangka regulatif yang teknokratis sehingga partisipasi substantif masih terbatas. Ketiga, administrasi pembangunan mengadopsi diskursus tata kelola global tanpa integrasi sistematis nilai kolektif seperti gotong royong serta musyawarah. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, kajian ini mengusulkan kerangka “administrasi publik positif” yang menekankan kontekstualitas, inklusivitas, dan sensitivitas budaya sebagai arah pengembangan administrasi publik di Indonesia.

Keywords:

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ABSTRACT

The changing paradigm of global public administration, from classical and managerial approaches to collaborative governance, indicates that the development of this discipline does not occur linearly, but is shaped by the relationships between actors, structures, and discourses. In the Indonesian context, the adoption of global paradigms is often carried out normatively, without adequate contextualization, leading to a lack of alignment with local socio-political characteristics and values. This study employed an interpretive, conceptual literature review of journal articles, academic books, and policy documents. These sources were examined through thematic categorization and conceptual synthesis to navigate how the interaction of actors, structures, and discourses shapes bureaucratic modernization, strengthening planning institutions and development administration in Indonesia. The essay reveals three primary findings. First, bureaucratic modernization is dominated by discourses of efficiency and performance that strengthen formal structures but limit innovation by local actors. Second, planning institutions develop within a technocratic

regulatory scheme, thus limiting substantive participation. Third, development administration adopts global governance discourses without systematically integrating collective values such as cooperation and deliberation. Based on these findings, this essay proposes a “positive public administration” scheme that emphasizes contextuality, inclusiveness, and cultural sensitivity as the direction for developing public administration in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Admittedly, public administration occupies a primary position in contemporary governance and is closely associated with the restructuring of state institutions to perform public functions effectively (Miller, 2024; Overman & Schillemans, 2022; Rosenbloom et al., 2021).

In addition, it provides the institutional framework through which collective decisions are organised, public resources are allocated, and policies are implemented to pursue the public interest (Addink, 2019; Kjaer, 2023). Nonetheless, its significance extends beyond managerial concerns to the normative foundations of democratic governance (e.g., accountability, transparency, and responsiveness).

In Indonesia, ongoing reforms in bureaucracy, planning, and development administration yield the need for a clearer conceptual orientation that not only reflects global developments but also resonates with Indonesia’s socio-political context.

Moreover, the intellectual roots of public administration are often traced to Woodrow Wilson’s conception of the field as a distinct area of study. His politics-administration dichotomy influenced the development of Old Public Administration and later paradigms such as New Public Administration, New Public Management, the New Public Service, and governance-based approaches (Christensen & Lægreid, 2022; Henry, 1995). These paradigms have travelled widely and informed reform agendas in many developing countries, specifically Indonesia. Yet, their diffusion has also generated tension. Ideas developed within specific historical and cultural settings do not always translate smoothly into different institutional and normative environments.

To deep-dive, in Indonesia, administrative reforms have unfolded within a governance system shaped by Pancasila, decentralisation, communal deliberation (*musyawarah-mufakat*),

and bureaucratic legacies formed through colonial and post-independence experiences (Dean, 2024; Santoso, 1995). The adoption of New Public Management instruments, performance-based systems, and reforms of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) demonstrates that external paradigms can produce formal compliance while leaving deeper institutional practices relatively unchanged (Pratiwi, 2021; Santoso, 2025).

Similar observations in law and economics suggest that universal theories must be translated into context-sensitive institutional arrangements (Asshiddiqie, 2016b). It indicates that the barrier is not only a technical concretisation issue but also an epistemological question about how public administration knowledge should be constructed in Indonesia (Keban, 2019).

On the other hand, this essay focuses on that question. It asks: how have global public administration paradigms been interpreted and institutionalised in Indonesia, and how do actors, structures, and discourses shape this process?

The essay uses these three elements as analytical tools to examine three areas: bureaucratic modernisation, planning institutions, and development administration. In more detail, it seeks to clarify the configuration of reform actors, the structural constraints they face, and the dominant policy narratives that legitimise change.

The contribution of this essay is limited but specific. It offers, first, a structured reading of paradigm development in Indonesia; second, a critique of unreflective paradigm transplantation; and third, an initial conceptualization of “positive public administration” as a context-oriented scheme grounded in Indonesia’s normative and socio-cultural foundations.

RESEARCH METHODS

This essay employed an interpretive, conceptual literature review of journal articles, academic monographs, and policy documents, scrutinizing the evolution of public administration paradigms at both global and Indonesian levels. The review was designed to interrogate conceptual trajectories and underlying assumptions rather than to aggregate empirical findings. This confirmation also engages the researcher as the main subject in exploring the research theme's problems and in actively providing inspection grounded in the critical interpretation of that issue, offering valuable insight to readers (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Accordingly, emphasis was placed on identifying how key paradigms have been framed, justified, and translated within different institutional contexts.

In addition, sources were selected critically based on their theoretical significance and relevance to Indonesian administrative reform. These included foundational works on major paradigm shifts, as well as scholarly and policy discussions concerning bureaucratic reform, planning systems, and development administration in Indonesia. The selected materials were classified thematically and analysed through close reading to trace patterns of argumentation, normative commitments, and institutional implications.

On trial, the essay operationalised actors, structures, and discourses as heuristic categories. "Actors" refer to reform coalitions, epistemic communities, and state officials; "structures" denote formal rules, organisational arrangements, and regulatory schemes; and "discourses" encompass dominant narratives and justificatory logics embedded in reform agendas. Through iterative comparison and conceptual synthesis, the review examined how these elements interacted across distinct reform phases. This interpretive strategy was adopted to clarify the epistemological configuration of public administration knowledge in Indonesia and to provide a systematic foundation for articulating an initial formulation of positive public administration.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Development of Public Administration Paradigms

The development of expertise has positioned public administration as a mature applied science, with both epistemological and

normative foundations. Over time, scholars have classified this evolution into successive paradigms, each responding to distinct social, political, and institutional contexts.

At the same time, comprehending the development of public administration requires attention to both diachronic and dialectical sequences. Diachronic sequences trace the emergence of paradigms, focusing on "when" each appeared. In contrast, dialectical sequences examine the logical and normative relationships among paradigms, addressing "why" and "in response to what" a paradigm emerged.

Both perspectives are complementary: the diachronic view clarifies the temporal sequence, whereas the dialectical view reveals the contestations, critiques, and adaptations that drive paradigm change. To reflect that the researcher provides the development of the public administration paradigm as follows:

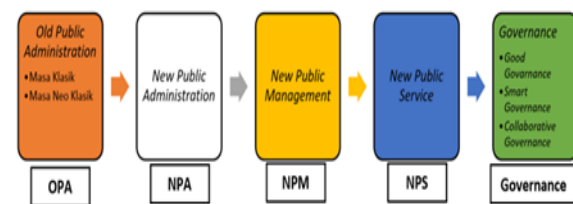


Figure 1. The Development of Public Administration Paradigms

Source: Processed by researchers

The figure illustrates the succession of major paradigms in public administration. Diachronically, it shows the timeline from Old Public Administration (OPA) to New Public Administration (NPA), New Public Management (NPM), and New Public Service (NPS). Dialectically, the figure displays the interrelations among paradigms, indicating how each new paradigm emerges in part in response to the limitations or critiques of its predecessors.

While the figure cannot fully capture all the complexities of socio-political contexts, it provides a useful visual reference for understanding both temporal and logical sequences. Old Public Administration (OPA) is the foundational paradigm of modern public administration, rooted in the work of Woodrow Wilson. Wilson's thesis emphasised the separation of politics and administration and established bureaucratic principles of efficiency, hierarchy, and impartiality. From an actors, structures, and discourses perspective, the dominant actors in OPA were early

bureaucrats, administrative scholars, and reform-oriented policymakers advocating rational, rule-bound governance.

Structures facilitating OPA included hierarchical organisations, codified civil service rules, and formal administrative procedures, which enabled stability and predictability but constrained innovation and responsiveness. The dominant discourse emphasised legality, professional competence, and procedural efficiency. In Indonesia, OPA principles were adopted through colonial bureaucratic legacies and post-independence reforms (Santoso, 1995). While they provided institutional stability, these structures often limited participatory governance and the integration of local socio-cultural norms.

New Public Administration (NPA) emerged as a critique of OPA, focusing on social justice, citizen participation, and responsiveness. NPA sought to expand the goals of public administration beyond efficiency to include normative concerns, such as equity and democratic accountability.

Dominant actors included reformist scholars, civil society advocates, and policymakers promoting participatory approaches. Structures enabling NPA were pilot programs, advisory councils, and professional networks, while entrenched bureaucracies and limited political support constrained its influence. The discourse emphasised social justice and responsiveness to public needs. In the Indonesian context, the NPA paradigm struggled to gain widespread institutional traction.

Nevertheless, it stressed important values that continue to resonate with local governance traditions, such as *gotong royong* and *musyawarah-mufakat*. While OPA emphasised procedural efficiency, NPA introduced normative considerations that challenged existing administrative structures, illustrating that paradigm adoption is not always linear but often shaped by political and institutional conditions. Here is the conceptual scheme:

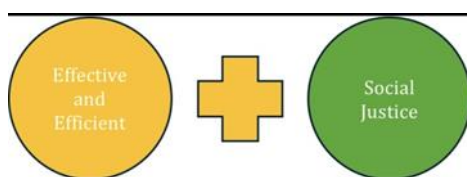


Figure 2. Collaboration of OPA and NPA Values

Source: Processed by researchers

This figure illustrates the coexistence of OPA and NPA values. Even OPA emphasises efficiency and hierarchy, NPA adds social justice and participatory dimensions, showing that paradigms do not necessarily replace one another but can coexist and complement each other in practice. The figure underlines the importance of understanding how different paradigms interact and influence governance outcomes, especially through the lens of actors, structures, and discourses.

New Public Management (NPM) arose in the 1980s and 1990s, introducing managerialism, market-oriented reforms, and performance measurement. Its focus was on efficiency, effectiveness, and customer orientation. Dominant actors included international development agencies, technocratic reformers, and policy entrepreneurs advocating managerial solutions.

Enabling structures included Presidential Regulations, decentralised agencies, performance-based budgeting systems, and contracting frameworks. Constraints included traditional hierarchical bureaucracies and centralised decision-making: the discourse emphasised market mechanisms, accountability for results, and reduced government intervention. In Indonesia, NPM was implemented through civil service reforms, performance-based management, and decentralisation initiatives. While these reforms improved managerial efficiency, they sometimes conflicted with local socio-political expectations and communal governance traditions, demonstrating the limitations of applying global paradigms without adaptation.

Dialectically, NPM both built upon OPA managerial principles and diverged from NPA's emphasis on social equity, creating tensions that necessitated further reform.

New Public Service (NPS) emerged as an explicit critique of NPM, emphasising citizen-centred governance, ethical responsibility, and the balancing of the roles of the state, market, and society.

Dominant actors included reformist policymakers, scholars, and civil society leaders. Structural enablers consisted of collaborative networks, participatory frameworks, and decentralised agencies, while rigid hierarchies and entrenched performance cultures remained constraints. The discourse promoted accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness, emphasising service to citizens

over managerial efficiency. Hence, in Indonesia, NPS aligns with *Pancasila* values and local governance practices, providing a framework for integrating global administrative innovations with indigenous social norms.

Applying the actors, structures, and discourses framework consistently across paradigms allows a systematic analysis of public administration development. For each reform phase, three questions guide the analysis: (1) Who were the dominant actors shaping reform? (2) Which structures enabled or constrained their actions? (3) What discourses legitimised reform choices?

This approach clarifies patterns of adaptation, resistance, and hybridisation, showing that paradigm adoption is neither uniform nor linear. Diachronic analysis clarifies historical emergence, while dialectical analysis explains the normative and political tensions driving paradigm evolution.

The Indonesian case underscores the need for contextual adaptation. While global paradigms offer theoretical and managerial insights, their direct transplantation can produce formal compliance without substantive enhancement in governance outcomes. Historical legacies, normative principles such as *gotong royong*, communal decision-making, and bureaucratic structures all influence how reforms are interpreted and actualized (Asshiddiqe, 2016a).

Positive public administration emerges as a framework integrating global insights with local socio-political and cultural values. It emphasises inclusivity, responsiveness, ethical governance, and the interplay of actors, structures, and discourses.

The evolution from OPA to NPS demonstrates how human actors generate knowledge to meet practical and normative needs. Suriasumantri (1985) notes that humans develop knowledge through language and reasoning, producing frameworks that guide action. Public administration paradigms exemplify this, showing that knowledge production is iterative and shaped by institutional and social realities. Each paradigm reflects technical priorities and the underlying values and discourses that shape administrative practice.

In sum, understanding public administration development requires integrating diachronic and dialectical perspectives with the actors, structures, and discourses lens. Diachronically,

the sequence of paradigms clarifies temporal emergence; dialectically, it illuminates contestations and adaptations shaping each paradigm. The systematic application of ASD across OPA, NPA, NPM, and NPS elucidates the interaction of actors, structures, and discourses in shaping administrative reform in Indonesia.

Additionally, incorporating figure explanations strengthens comprehension of paradigm interaction and value co-existence, particularly between OPA and NPA. Finally, these inspections provide the conceptual foundation for positive public administration, offering a context-sensitive paradigm that reconciles global innovations with local socio-political realities, ethical imperatives, and governance traditions.

Actors, Structure, and Discourse of Public Administration in Indonesia

The study of public administration has long been central to understanding governance systems worldwide. Since it emerged as a distinct discipline in the early twentieth century, public administration has developed a series of paradigms that not only reflect intellectual debates but also shape practical governance models in different national contexts.

In particular, the evolution of public administration in the United States has served as a foundational body of knowledge for other countries, providing conceptual frameworks, methodological approaches, and policy insights that have been selectively adapted to suit local conditions (Immanuel Jaya, 2021).

The effect of these paradigms extends beyond national policy design, affecting local government institutional practices and informing the training of bureaucrats and public managers. Yet, while the global paradigms of public administration offer a useful reference, their direct adoption without critical adaptation risks oversimplification of complex socio-political realities.

In more detail, in Indonesia, the adoption of foreign public administration paradigms has always been mediated by local conditions, including historical legacies, political institutions, cultural norms, and societal expectations. To comprehend this adaptation process, an analytical approach that is both sceptical and speculative is required. Scepticism, in this context, entails more than critical scrutiny: it involves a careful

examination of the relevance, assumptions, and implications of imported paradigms before their application.

This approach acknowledges that a paradigm that is effective in one context may not yield the same results elsewhere. Speculative thinking complements scepticism by recognizing the provisional nature of all paradigms; public administration is inherently tentative, and no single framework can claim universality or finality. By embracing both approaches, scholars and practitioners can assess which elements of a paradigm are transferable and which require modification, thereby ensuring that administrative practices align with local governance needs, societal expectations, and institutional capacities.

The intellectual history of public administration is often simplified into five major paradigms: the Old Public Administration (OPA), New Public Administration (NPA), New Public Management (NPM), New Public Service (NPS), and Governance. This categorization facilitates teaching and research, providing a chronological structure for analyzing the evolution of administrative thought.

Nevertheless, such simplification should not obscure the fact that paradigm transitions are rarely linear or absolute. Each paradigm emerged in response to specific historical and socio-political circumstances and often overlapped with its predecessors. For instance, NPM did not immediately displace NPA; instead, its principles gradually influenced certain bureaucratic reforms, while elements of NPA continued to inform administrative practices in parallel.

Therefore, a nuanced understanding of public administration evolution requires attention not only to the paradigms themselves but also to the broader contexts in which they operate. To capture these dynamics, this essay adopts an actor-structure-discourse framework as a methodological lens for analyzing public administration in Indonesia. This conception emphasizes three interrelated dimensions: first, actors include individuals and groups capable of influencing administrative policy and practice.

In the Indonesian context, these actors encompass bureaucrats, elected officials, academics, civil society organizations, and international development agencies. The roles and interests of these actors vary across

paradigms, and their relative influence shapes the direction and pace of administrative reform.

Second, structures refer to institutional, legal, and organizational arrangements that constrain or enable actor behavior. Structural elements include formal bureaucratic hierarchies, regulatory frameworks, resource allocation mechanisms, and procedural norms. Understanding the structural dimension is critical for assessing which administrative reforms are feasible and sustainable within a given institutional setting.

Third, discourse captures the dominant narratives, ideologies, and modes of reasoning that frame the interpretation and implementation of public administration. In this framework, discourse is not merely rhetorical; it actively shapes what actors perceive as legitimate, possible, or desirable in administrative practice (Bahar & Mardiyanta, 2024).

Applying the actor-structure-discourse framework enables a more systematic mapping of the evolution of public administration in Indonesia. Each paradigm can be analyzed through three questions: who are the dominant actors, which structures enable or constrain their action, and what discourses guide their choices. For example, in the early OPA era, bureaucrats and colonial administrators were the principal actors, hierarchical structures and formal rules defined their capacity to act, and the dominant discourse emphasized efficiency, rationality, and technical competence.

The shift toward NPA introduced new actors, including reform-minded scholars and social activists, challenged hierarchical structures, and foregrounded discourse emphasizing social equity and responsiveness to public needs.

Later, the adoption of NPM principles in Indonesia, beginning in the late 1980s and 1990s, reflected a complex interplay between international financial institutions, technocratic reformers, and domestic policymakers. Structural reforms, such as performance-based budgeting and managerial decentralization, were guided by discourses of efficiency, market orientation, and accountability. Similarly, NPS and Governance paradigms introduced broader participation and networked governance concepts, requiring consideration of multi-level actors and discursive strategies that prioritize collaboration, transparency, and citizen engagement. Chronological and terminological

precision is essential when tracing these paradigms. For instance, the term “Presidential Decree” has often been used interchangeably with “Presidential Regulation”, but in Indonesia’s legal system, these instruments differ in terms of legal authority, scope, and procedural requirements. Mislabeling these instruments in historical or analytical discussion risks undermining the accuracy and credibility of the argument.

Likewise, distinguishing NPM from NPS is crucial, as the former emphasizes efficiency and managerialism, whereas the latter prioritizes democratic responsiveness and service orientation. Ensuring that references to legislation, institutional reforms, and academic sources are chronologically consistent further strengthens the analysis’s coherence, particularly when incorporating contemporary studies alongside foundational literature. The adaptation of public administration paradigms in Indonesia also requires attention to the socio-political context. Historical legacies, such as the centralized bureaucratic system inherited from the colonial and early post-independence period, shaped the possibilities and constraints for reform. Economic crises, waves of democratization, and international pressures similarly influenced administrative evolution.

For example, reforms under the NPM paradigm were often framed as responses to fiscal crises and demands for efficiency. Yet, their implementation was mediated by entrenched bureaucratic norms and political considerations. It underscores the importance of integrating structural analysis with actor and discourse perspectives. Without recognizing the constraints imposed by existing institutions or the influence of prevailing narratives, reforms may produce limited or unintended outcomes.

Moreover, the actor-structure-discourse approach yields the dynamic interplay between domestic and international influences. While Indonesia selectively borrowed principles from global paradigms, local actors interpreted and modified these ideas to suit national priorities. International actors, such as development agencies, provided technical knowledge, funding, and legitimacy for reform agendas.

However, their influence was not deterministic; domestic bureaucrats, policymakers, and civil society actively shaped which elements were adopted, modified, or rejected. Discourse analysis reveals how these negotiations were framed in public and policy

debates, often invoking notions of modernization, democratization, efficiency, or public value. Such a perspective prevents the simplistic assumption that imported paradigms are directly implemented, instead emphasizing the mediated, context-sensitive nature of administrative adaptation.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of treating public administration as both a discipline and a practice shaped by context. While paradigms provide conceptual clarity and comparative insight, their application is contingent upon local institutional arrangements, actor capabilities, and discursive legitimacy. Simplifying complex administrative realities into paradigms is analytically necessary but must always be complemented by attention to the nuanced interactions among actors, structures, and discourses.

In doing so, scholars and practitioners can better appreciate how Indonesia’s governance system has navigated the tension between imported paradigms and domestic imperatives, producing administrative practices that are both informed by global knowledge and responsive to national circumstances.

In conclusion, the evolution of public administration in Indonesia affirms the need to combine historical awareness with methodological rigor. Paradigms such as OPA, NPA, NPM, NPS, and Governance provide a valuable lens for understanding change, but their relevance depends on careful adaptation, critical scrutiny, and contextual interpretation.

The actor-structure-discourse scheme provides a systematic approach to capture this complexity, ensuring that analytical attention is directed simultaneously at the individuals and groups who drive reform, the institutional conditions that shape possibilities, and the discursive formations that guide interpretation and action. By linking these dimensions, the essay contributes to a more nuanced understanding of public administration as a dynamic, context-dependent, and interpretively mediated field, offering insights not only for historical analysis but also for contemporary and future reform initiatives in Indonesia.

Post-Independence Indonesia: The Movements of Soekarno & Soeharto

Since Indonesia gained independence, the government has actively sought to develop a public administration system that is both effective and suited to national conditions. As

Toha (2014) describes, the Sukarno administration prioritized understanding modern administrative practices and adapting them to Indonesia's needs.

In this effort, academic delegations from Cornell University and the University of Pittsburgh were invited to guide administrative reform. Their recommendations led to substantial structural changes, including the reorganisation of ministerial bodies, the establishment of civil service training institutions, and the introduction of public administration curricula in universities, modeled after American institutions. These initiatives reflected the government's recognition that a strong bureaucratic apparatus was crucial for nation-building in the post-independence period.

Several important institutions emerged during this era. Among them were the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) and the National Civil Service Agency (BKN), which evolved from the Civil Service Affairs Office (KUP). These institutions became central in shaping administrative practices and coordinating the state's development agenda.

At the same time, Indonesian scholars began to reinterpret Western administrative theories to suit local conditions. This process led to the rise of Development Administration as the dominant paradigm for public administration in Indonesia (Toha, 2014). Scholars such as Sondang P. Siagian played a key role in this transformation through lectures, writings, and participation in policy discussions.

The development of the book "Introduction to Development Administration" by Bintoro Tjokroamidjojo, then Deputy Chairman of Bappenas, further reinforced this paradigm. The book served as a critical reference for understanding the administrative challenges faced by a developing country like Indonesia, bridging theoretical knowledge and practical application. Examining this period through the lens of actors, structures, and discourse highlights a clear pattern. The government was the dominant actor, initiating reforms, establishing key institutions, and engaging foreign expertise.

The administrative structure was highly centralized, allowing the government to implement reforms efficiently but also limiting broader participation. The discourse, meanwhile, shifted from a direct imitation of Western public administration models toward

development administration, which emphasized local relevance, national development priorities, and the adaptation of foreign knowledge to Indonesia's specific circumstances.

In addition, these three elements created a framework for conceptualizing and implementing administrative reform. The Suharto era continued and expanded these dynamics. Institutional development and bureaucratic capacity building remained central objectives, with the government maintaining a strong top-down approach. During this period, Indonesian academics and policymakers deepened the discourse on development administration, exploring ways to make it more responsive to national priorities. Structural reforms focused on strengthening institutional coherence, while actors included both civil servants and policymakers within the centralized system who shaped administrative practices. The period demonstrated that while the structure constrained some aspects of innovation, it also enabled coordinated, large-scale reform initiatives.

Over time, the roles of the public and private sectors expanded. Discussions of collaborative governance and decentralization emerged within a broader discourse on improving administrative effectiveness and accountability. The central government retained significant authority, but scholars and policymakers increasingly recognized the need for local governments to have greater autonomy in managing public affairs. This gradual shift reflected an evolving understanding of governance that integrated hierarchical structures and participatory mechanisms, emphasizing the interactions among actors, structural constraints, and prevailing discourses. The reform period marked a significant structural shift in public administration. Decentralization granted regional governments greater authority over decision-making and resource allocation.

However, implementation challenges persisted, including varying levels of administrative capacity across regions and difficulties in coordinating national development priorities. At the same time, technological developments began to transform the structure of administration through digitalization, enabling new forms of service delivery, data management, and citizen engagement. Discourse on public

administration also evolved during this period, incorporating ideas from collaborative governance, e-governance, and participatory management. These developments demonstrate that actors, structures, and discourse continue to interact dynamically in shaping Indonesia's administrative system. Across these historical periods, the interaction of actors, structures, and discourse has been central to understanding the development of public administration in Indonesia.

Initially, Western models emphasizing efficiency and bureaucratic organization influenced thinking, but over time, a more contextually appropriate discourse of development administration emerged (Shafritz et al., 2022). The government, academics, and the public all played critical roles in shaping administrative practices, while structural arrangements either enabled or constrained reform efforts. This interplay explains why reforms were both ambitious and uneven: structural centralization facilitated coordinated action but limited innovation, while shifts in discourse encouraged adaptation to local needs (Bauer, 2024).

In conclusion, examining Indonesia's public administration history through the actors-structures-discourse framework illustrates that both the Sukarno and Suharto administrations made deliberate, strategic efforts to strengthen governance. Their reforms were guided by national priorities and informed by international examples, producing tangible improvements in bureaucratic organization, institutional development, and the dissemination of administrative knowledge. Post-reform developments reflect an ongoing negotiation between centralized authority, decentralized responsibilities, and evolving discourses on governance.

In sum, Indonesia's public administration history illustrates the importance of understanding how actors, structures, and discourse interact to shape the design, implementation, and evolution of governance systems, providing lessons for current and future reforms.

Sustainability of Public Administration Reform: Presidential Decree 81/2010 as a Starting Point

Following the reform era and the transition toward a more open democratic system, Indonesia began systematically reorganising its

government structures and institutions. A pivotal milestone was the issuance of Presidential Regulation Number 81 of 2010 on the Grand Design of Bureaucratic Reform 2010-2025. While bureaucratic reform discourse had existed since 1945, this regulation provided the first formal framework to operationalise reform across government institutions (Prasojo, 2020).



Figure 3. Tracing Bureaucratic Reform
Source: Prasojo, 2020

Bureaucratic reform is part of broader public administration reform (Ongaro, 2026; Wegrich, 2023), understood as a deliberate effort to transform resistant bureaucratic systems (Faedlulloh et al., 2020). In developing countries, such reforms are essential for building administrative infrastructures capable of supporting development goals (Seligson, 2019). Reform is not merely change but a structured improvement toward higher quality and effectiveness (Febrina & Syamsir, 2021; Ulil et al., 2020). Presidential Regulation 81/2010 outlines eight areas of change and their expected outcomes, serving as the blueprint for achieving a world-class bureaucracy.

Area	Expected Outcome
Organization	An organization with the right functions and optimal size (rightsizing).
Business Process	Clear, effective, measurable work systems, processes, and procedures aligned with the principles of good governance.
Legislation	More orderly, non-overlapping, and conducive regulations.
Government Apparatus Human Resources	Civil servants who are ethical, neutral, competent, capable, professional, high-performing, and prosperous.
Supervision	Improved governance that is clean and free from corruption and nepotism.
Public Services	Excellent services that meet public needs and expectations.
Mindset and Work Culture of Bureaucrats	A bureaucracy with high integrity and strong performance.

Figure 4. (eight) Areas of Change and Expected Results
Source: Presidential Decree 81/2010

The expected outcomes include (Republic of Indonesia, 2010):

- a. Strengthening laws and regulations to achieve good governance;
- b. Restructuring organisations, human resources, oversight, accountability, service quality, mindset, and culture;
- c. Developing effective control mechanisms;
- d. Managing administrative disputes efficiently.

To operationalise these objectives, the government has extended reform programs regionally, enhanced transparency in civil servant recruitment, and digitised public services (KemenPAN-RB, 2021, 2024).

To maintain analytical clarity, this essay applies an actor-structure-discourse framework across three historical periods of bureaucratic reform in Indonesia:

- a. Pre-reform era (1945-1998)-examining dominant actors, structural constraints, and prevailing discourses under the New Order system.
- b. Post-Reformasi transition (1998-2009)-mapping how democratic opening, decentralisation, and institutional restructuring shaped reform agendas.
- c. Institutionalisation of bureaucratic reform (2010-present), analysing the formalisation of reform through Presidential Regulation 81/2010 and subsequent programs, identifying key actors, enabling or limiting structures, and the discourses guiding policy implementation.

For each period, the study consistently answers three core questions: Who were the dominant actors? What structural conditions enabled or constrained reform? What discourses shaped administrative choices?.

This approach ensures chronological and conceptual coherence, avoids normative digressions, and maintains precision in terminology, such as differentiating Presidential Regulation from Presidential Decree and clarifying references to NPM-related reforms.

Actors, Structures and Discourses that Stop and Depend?

Bureaucratic reform remains central to Indonesia's national development agenda, as reflected in strategic documents such as *Nawacita* and *Asta Cita*. However, the actualization of the Grand Design of

Bureaucratic Reform 2010-2025 has often lacked systematic evaluation, resulting in uneven outcomes at the regional level and weak follow-up on reform achievements (Febrina & Syamsir, 2021). Institutional dynamics have further complicated reform efforts. The disbandment of the *Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara* (KASN) under Law 20/2023 on ASN, with its functions transferred to KemenPAN-RB and BKN, has weakened independent oversight of meritocratic governance.

Similarly, the role of Lembaga Administrasi Negara (LAN) has shifted through Presidential Regulations 57/2013, 79/2018, and 93/2024, emphasising administrative review and procedural functions over transformative capacity in state administration. From an actor-structure-discourse perspective, these changes indicate three trends: leading reform actors (KemenPAN-RB, LAN, BKN, KASN) have experienced role shifts or elimination; institutional structures have not consolidated merit systems or public service culture; and reform discourse has shifted from long-term institutional transformation to short-term efficiency and rhetorical claims of human resource enhancement.

Consequently, Indonesian bureaucratic reform exhibits fragmentation and strategic disorientation, deviating from the sustainable, coherent framework envisioned by Presidential Regulation 81/2010. A critical re-reading and redesign of reform is therefore needed, addressing not only technocratic efficiency but also political, institutional, and socio-cultural constraints. These questions are pressing, given the scale of resources, personnel, and processes involved in implementing reform programs, including paradigm shifts and innovations outlined in the Appendix to Presidential Regulation 81/2010.

Depends (?)

In subsequent developments, the evolution of public administration in Indonesia has been significantly shaped by foreign cooperation, aid, and investment in social, cultural, and economic development, creating a dependency on the countries providing such support. This reliance, while contributing to growth, raises concerns about national sovereignty, as external forces can influence domestic policy and decision-making. Dependency Theory provides a useful lens to understand this situation. Frank (1969) argues that relations with developed

countries (metropolises) tend to disadvantage peripheral countries (satellites), as economic dependence forces these countries to follow the developmental trajectory of the metropolis. Dos Santos (1971), while noting that peripheral countries can develop, stresses that their growth remains conditioned by the economic dynamics of metropolitan nations.

In addition, these perspectives highlight that dependency is a structural challenge for developing states like Indonesia, necessitating careful reassessment of external involvement. Over time, Indonesia's public administration development has often reflected these external influences, with reforms tending to adopt models aligned with foreign paradigms rather than fully grounded in domestic socio-political realities. Post-reform governments, for example, have frequently focused on administrative and technocratic solutions without fully addressing systemic and institutional foundations. It is evident in the Grand Design of Bureaucratic Reform outlined in Presidential Regulation Number 81 of 2010, which prioritises procedural efficiency but falls short in embedding governance values that support participatory, equitable, and citizen-oriented administration.

From that perspective, key actors, including the government, donor agencies, and academics, operate within structural constraints shaped by global dependencies and institutional inertia, while discourses originating in Western paradigms, such as New Public Management (NPM), continue to dominate. These discourses influence policy choices and institutional practices, often without sufficient consideration of local values such as cooperation, deliberation, and kinship. The resulting public administration reform tends to be formalistic and elitist, limiting meaningful public participation. Addressing these barriers requires developing a counter-discourse that re-centers Indonesia's socio-cultural and political context. It involves identifying dominant actors, understanding the structural forces that shape their actions, and analysing the discourses that guide policy choices across different periods and paradigms. No single paradigm can address all public problems simultaneously: the OPA paradigm may suit political and legal sectors, NPM may promote efficiency in the economic sector, and NPS can strengthen democracy and citizen participation (Keban, 2019). Yet the effectiveness of these paradigms depends on

alignment with institutional needs and national socio-political conditions.

Ultimately, the goal of public administration reform in Indonesia should be the development of a system rooted in local values, experiences, and ideas, rather than mere replication of foreign models. Positive public administration emphasizes learning and adapting knowledge to strengthen governance in ways that reflect Indonesian realities. As Suriasumantri (1985) observes, human progress is inseparable from reflection, meaning-making, and cultural creation.

Likewise, the development of Indonesia's public administration must be guided by the nation's own values and experiences, while critically engaging with global knowledge to design reforms that are adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of public administration in Indonesia illustrates selective adaptation of global paradigms, producing hybrid practices that reflect both external influences and local socio-political realities.

Using the actors-structures-discourse (ASD) framework, this essay highlights how administrative reforms are shaped by the interplay between dominant actors, enabling or constraining structures, and guiding discourses. Three propositions emerge from this analysis.

First, actor mediation is essential. Key actors, including government institutions, technocrats, academics, and international development agencies, drive reform agendas, yet institutional structures and prevailing narratives condition their influence. Domestic priorities are negotiated alongside external pressures, resulting in partial adoption rather than wholesale replication of global paradigms.

Second, structural factors both enable and constrain reform. Centralized bureaucracies historically facilitated coordinated policy implementation but limited innovation and participatory engagement. Decentralization, digitization, and collaborative governance create opportunities for inclusive administration, yet uneven capacity and incomplete reforms limit their effectiveness.

Third, discursive frameworks shape reform outcomes. Western paradigms such as New Public Management dominate policy discourse, emphasizing efficiency and managerialism. Local values, such as gotong royong,

deliberation, and kinship, remain underutilized, underscoring the need for counter-discourses that integrate ethical and participatory principles into practice.

From these propositions, Positive Public Administration (PPA) emerges as a context-sensitive framework that reconciles global insights with Indonesian realities. Its core elements include: inclusivity in citizen engagement, responsiveness to societal needs, ethical grounding in governance values, integration of actors, structures, and discourses, and iterative learning through reflection and adaptation. PPA offers both normative and practical guidance for designing reforms that are culturally resonant, socially legitimate, and institutionally feasible.

Limitations of this essay include reliance on secondary literature and policy documents, which may not capture the full diversity of administrative practices across sectors or regions. Furthermore, the PPA framework has not yet been empirically tested, limiting operational validation. Future research should focus on comparative sectoral studies, examining how ASD dynamics and PPA principles manifest in health, education, and local governance. Empirical studies on the interaction between local values, institutional structures, and reform outcomes will strengthen both theoretical and practical applications.

In sum, Indonesia's public administration demonstrates the tension between imported paradigms and domestic imperatives. While reforms have enhanced managerial efficiency and structural coordination, sustainable governance requires deeper integration of local values, inclusive participation, and ethical orientation.

Positive Public Administration provides a roadmap to bridge these dimensions, emphasizing that meaningful reform is not only procedural but also normative and socially embedded. By systematically considering actors, structures, and discourses, Indonesian public administration can evolve toward a model that is both contextually grounded and responsive to the nation's developmental and democratic aspirations.

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