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Administrative Efficiency and Public Service Delivery in Nigeria: Assessing the Institutional Determinants of Effective Public Service Performance

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Abstract

Administrative efficiency plays an important role in determining how well public institutions turn government policies, resources and decisions into services that people can access when and where they need them. In Nigeria, however, the performance of public institutions continues to be affected by persistent challenges such as limited institutional capacity, weak coordination, ineffective human resource practices, leadership problems, inadequate accountability mechanisms, financial constraints and gaps in digital infrastructure. Despite several public-sector reforms, these challenges have continued to influence the quality, timeliness and responsiveness of public service delivery. This paper examines the institutional factors that shape administrative efficiency and their implications for public service delivery in Nigeria. The study adopts a systematic narrative literature review approach. Relevant academic and institutional literature was identified through structured searches of academic databases, journal platforms, research repositories and official government sources. The review focused mainly on studies published between 2015 and July 2026, while foundational theoretical works were also considered. The selected literature was assessed for relevance, methodological quality and bibliographic reliability and analysed thematically. The discussion is anchored in New Public Management Theory, Institutional Theory and Public Value Theory. The review shows that administrative efficiency should not be understood simply as reducing costs or completing tasks quickly. It also involves the effective use of public resources, reliable administrative processes, sound decision-making, effective coordination, accountability, responsiveness and the reduction of unnecessary bureaucratic delays. The evidence further suggests that institutional capacity, leadership, human resource management, organisational structures, financial resources, accountability systems, digital capabilities and organisational culture are closely connected and collectively influence public-sector performance. Digital technologies and performance-management practices can improve service delivery, but their success depends largely on adequate infrastructure, staff competence, organisational readiness and effective implementation. A major weakness in the existing literature is the tendency to examine these determinants separately, making it difficult to fully understand how they interact to influence administrative performance. This paper therefore proposes an integrated institutional-performance framework that connects institutional determinants with administrative efficiency, public service delivery, public value and organisational learning. The paper concludes that improving public service delivery in Nigeria requires coordinated and sustained institutional reforms rather than isolated interventions targeted at individual administrative problems.

Keywords: Administrative Efficiency; Public Service Delivery; Institutional Capacity; Public Administration; Public-Sector Performance; Administrative Reform; Digital Governance; Nigeria.

Introduction

Public administration is the machinery through which governments turn policies and public decisions into actions that affect citizens' everyday lives. It is responsible for implementing government programmes, managing public resources, regulating activities and delivering essential services. The effectiveness of this machinery matters because even well-designed policies can produce disappointing results when the institutions responsible for implementation lack the capacity, competent personnel, leadership, appropriate structures, reliable information systems or accountability mechanisms needed to perform effectively. Administrative efficiency is therefore an important part of public-sector performance.

Traditionally, administrative efficiency has been associated with using organisational resources wisely, reducing unnecessary expenditure and avoiding delays. However, the meaning of efficiency in contemporary public administration is broader. Public institutions do not operate like private businesses whose performance can be judged mainly by financial returns or cost reduction. They are also expected to uphold accountability, fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, transparency and public value. The emphasis of New Public Management on performance, measurable results, managerial responsibility and efficient resource utilisation reflects the importance attached to these concerns, although subsequent scholarship has shown that public-sector performance cannot be adequately assessed through managerial efficiency alone (Hood, 1991; Moore, 1995).

Public service delivery is one of the clearest ways in which citizens experience the performance of government institutions. People interact with public agencies when obtaining official documents, accessing healthcare and education, applying for licences and approvals, receiving social services or seeking administrative decisions. When institutional processes are inefficient, citizens may encounter long delays, repeated requests for documentation, unclear procedures, poor communication and inconsistent decisions. Conversely, well-organised administrative processes can reduce unnecessary burdens, improve responsiveness and make public services more accessible and reliable.

Nigeria presents an important context for examining these issues. Over the years, the country has introduced several public-sector reforms aimed at improving professionalism, accountability, financial management, performance, institutional structures and digital service delivery. The revised National Strategy for Public Service Reform reflects the continuing effort to strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of the Nigerian public service. Yet the existence of repeated reforms does not necessarily mean that the underlying problems have been resolved. Recent Nigerian scholarship continues to point to bureaucratic inefficiency, institutional weaknesses, limited administrative capacity, political interference, accountability problems and difficulties in implementing reforms. For instance, Onyekwere's analysis of public-service reforms from 1999 to 2023 suggests that many reform initiatives have fallen short of their intended objectives, particularly because of weaknesses in implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Sukare and Mai-Ulu similarly identify institutional capacity, accountability, administrative autonomy and political commitment as important conditions for successful reform.

The growing use of digital technology presents both opportunities and challenges. Digital systems can simplify administrative procedures, improve information management, strengthen communication and potentially reduce delays. However, technology does not automatically produce better public services. Peter's review of electronic governance in Nigeria identifies potential improvements in administrative efficiency, transparency, accountability and service delivery, while also drawing attention to infrastructure deficits, limited digital skills, interoperability problems, cybersecurity concerns and organisational resistance. Likewise, Omorede and Oribhabor's empirical study covering 2015–2024 found that governance quality and ICT adoption did not have statistically significant effects on their selected measure of public

service delivery. Rather than weakening the case for digitalisation, this finding highlights the need to consider the institutional conditions within which technology is introduced and used.

The institutional environment is consequently central to understanding administrative performance. Institutions consist not only of formal laws, policies and organisational structures but also of norms, routines, expectations and established patterns of behaviour. Institutional Theory helps explain why similar reforms may produce different outcomes across organisations. Scott (2001), for example, identifies regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements through which institutions influence behaviour. This suggests that introducing a new policy, procedure or technology is only the beginning of reform. For sustainable results, the reform must become part of the everyday practices and expectations of the organisation.

Performance management provides another useful example. Nwambuko, Anekwe & Agu (2026), in their study of the Federal Civil Service Commission, report significant relationships between performance-management practices, organisational effectiveness, employee productivity and service-delivery efficiency. These findings reinforce the importance of performance management, although they should be interpreted within the institutional setting examined rather than automatically generalised to the entire Nigerian public service.

Similarly, Nwambuko, Amanze & Akogboin (2026) report a positive relationship between modern human resource management practices and service delivery in selected local government councils in Abia State. Their findings indicate that human resource practices were implemented at a moderate level and were significantly associated with service delivery and administrative effectiveness. The evidence reinforces the broader argument that public-sector performance depends substantially on how institutions recruit, develop, deploy and manage their human resources.

Against this background, administrative efficiency in Nigeria is best understood as an institutional-performance issue rather than simply an individual employee or procedural problem. Administrative capacity, leadership, organisational structure, human resources, accountability, financial resources, digital capability and organisational culture are interconnected. Together, they influence the quality of administrative processes, which in turn affects public service delivery and the value citizens derive from government institutions.

This paper therefore undertakes a systematic narrative review of relevant literature to bring together evidence that has often been examined in separate strands. Its purpose is not to generate new survey or interview data but to provide a structured synthesis and theoretical integration of existing knowledge. By connecting institutional determinants with administrative efficiency, service delivery, public value and organisational learning, the paper seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what is required to improve public-sector performance in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has undertaken numerous public-sector reforms over several decades. These reforms have addressed areas such as administrative restructuring, professionalisation, accountability, financial management, performance improvement and digital transformation. Yet

improvements in administrative performance have not always matched the scale or frequency of these reform efforts. Delays in decision-making, fragmented institutional responsibilities, limited capacity, weak accountability and implementation difficulties remain important concerns.

One of the major problems is the gap between reform design and actual administrative practice. A policy or reform may be formally adopted without becoming fully embedded in the routines and behaviour of the institutions responsible for implementation. New procedures, performance-management systems, organisational arrangements and digital platforms can therefore exist on paper while everyday administrative practices remain largely unchanged. Onyekwere (2025), for example, identifies implementation, monitoring and evaluation as continuing challenges in Nigeria's public-service reform experience.

Administrative capacity is another important concern. Modern public institutions are expected to implement increasingly complex policies and programmes, which requires professional knowledge, managerial competence, organisational experience and dependable information systems. Where these capabilities are inadequate, even well-designed policies may be poorly implemented. Ihemeje & Afegbua (2020) emphasise the importance of training, expertise and staff development in strengthening public-service delivery.

Human resource management is closely connected to this problem. Recruitment, deployment, promotion, training, professional development and performance appraisal determine whether public organisations have the people and competencies required to perform effectively. Evidence from Nigerian local governments suggests that human resource management practices are not uniformly implemented and that weaknesses in areas such as ICT integration and performance appraisal can limit administrative effectiveness.

Leadership and organisational structure also influence institutional performance. Leaders establish priorities, allocate resources, motivate employees and guide organisational change. At the same time, organisational structures determine how authority, responsibilities and information move through an institution. Excessive centralisation can slow decision-making, while poorly coordinated decentralisation can create duplication, confusion and fragmented responsibilities.

Accountability presents another institutional challenge. Effective public administration requires mechanisms through which officials and institutions can explain decisions, demonstrate responsible use of public resources and respond to poor performance. However, accountability mechanisms can themselves become burdensome when organisations focus heavily on producing reports without using the information generated to improve management, decision-making and service outcomes. The challenge is therefore to establish accountability systems that support both responsible governance and effective administration.

Digital transformation has created additional opportunities while exposing existing institutional weaknesses. Electronic platforms can reduce paperwork, improve access to information and support faster communication and coordination. However, technology cannot independently correct inefficient procedures, inadequate infrastructure or weak organisational capacity. Peter (2026) and Omorede & Oribhabor (2026) both demonstrate the importance of

considering institutional and contextual factors when assessing the contribution of ICT to public-sector performance.

The central problem addressed by this paper is therefore the continuing disconnect between public-sector reform initiatives and the institutional conditions required for those reforms to produce lasting improvements in administrative efficiency and public service delivery.

Although existing Nigerian studies provide useful evidence on individual factors such as human resource management, performance management, digital governance and administrative reform, these areas are often examined separately. What remains insufficiently developed is an integrated explanation of how these factors interact, how they jointly influence administrative efficiency and how administrative efficiency ultimately affects public service delivery and public value. This paper addresses that gap by bringing the major institutional determinants together within a unified analytical framework.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to examine the institutional determinants of administrative efficiency and their implications for public service delivery in Nigeria.
Specifically, the paper seeks to:

- Examine the conceptual relationship between administrative efficiency and public service delivery;
- Identify the major institutional factors that influence administrative efficiency in Nigerian public institutions;
- Examine how administrative capacity affects public-sector performance;
- Analyse the roles of leadership, organisational structure and human resource capacity in shaping administrative efficiency;
- Examine the relationship between accountability, transparency, resource management and public service delivery;
- Assess the contribution of digitalisation and ICT capability to administrative efficiency;
- Examine how organisational culture influences administrative reform and institutional performance;
- Synthesise existing empirical evidence on the major institutional determinants of administrative efficiency; and
- Develop an integrated institutional-performance framework for strengthening administrative efficiency and public service delivery in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between administrative efficiency and public service delivery in Nigeria?
- What institutional factors influence administrative efficiency in Nigerian public institutions?
- How does administrative capacity affect public-sector performance?
- How do leadership, organisational structure and human resource capacity influence administrative efficiency?

- How do accountability, transparency and resource management affect public service delivery?
- What role does digitalisation play in improving administrative efficiency and public service delivery?
- How does organisational culture influence reform implementation and institutional performance?
- What does the existing empirical evidence reveal about the interaction among the major institutional determinants of administrative efficiency?
- What integrated institutional measures can strengthen administrative efficiency and public service delivery in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Administrative Efficiency

Administrative efficiency concerns how well an organisation uses its available resources to achieve legitimate objectives while avoiding unnecessary waste, duplication, delays and administrative burdens. In public administration, however, efficiency is more than simply spending less money or completing tasks quickly. A government service may be delivered at a low cost but still fail if citizens cannot access it, if procedures are unfair, or if the service does not respond adequately to public needs.

For this reason, administrative efficiency in the public sector needs to balance effective resource use with accountability, accessibility, responsiveness, equity and the achievement of legitimate public objectives. Public institutions operate within legal and social responsibilities that distinguish them from private organisations. Efficiency must therefore be understood in relation to both internal administrative processes and the quality of outcomes experienced by citizens.

For this study, administrative efficiency is defined as the capacity of public institutions to organise and use human, financial, technological and organisational resources in ways that minimise avoidable costs, delays, duplication and administrative burdens while promoting effective, accountable, responsive and citizen-oriented achievement of public objectives.

Public Service Delivery

Public service delivery refers to the ways in which government institutions translate policies, administrative decisions and public resources into services, regulatory activities and public goods for citizens.

The quality of public service delivery can be considered through several dimensions, including: accessibility; timeliness; reliability; responsiveness; service quality; equity; and accountability.

Administrative efficiency is an important condition for effective service delivery because poorly organised institutions are more likely to experience delays, duplication and unnecessary administrative burdens. Nevertheless, efficiency alone cannot explain service outcomes. Factors

such as policy design, funding, infrastructure, geographical circumstances and the needs of different groups of citizens also influence the quality of public services.

Institutional Determinants of Administrative Efficiency

The literature reviewed for this study shows that administrative efficiency is shaped by several interconnected institutional factors. The major determinants identified are: administrative capacity; leadership and management; organisational structure; human resource capacity; accountability and transparency; financial and material resources; digitalisation and ICT; and organisational culture.

These factors should not be viewed as isolated variables. In practice, they interact continuously. For example, introducing a digital system without adequately trained personnel may produce limited benefits. Similarly, competent employees may perform below their potential when leadership is weak, resources are inadequate or organisational procedures are unnecessarily rigid. Administrative efficiency therefore emerges from the interaction between institutional capacity, organisational processes and the wider environment in which public institutions operate.

Administrative Capacity

Administrative capacity refers to the professional, managerial, organisational and informational capabilities that enable public institutions to implement policies and perform their responsibilities effectively.

It includes: technical expertise; managerial competence; organisational knowledge; reliable information systems; coordination mechanisms; monitoring capacity; and established institutional routines.

Administrative capacity is particularly important because contemporary public-sector reforms often place new demands on government institutions. Digital government requires employees who can use digital systems effectively. Performance management requires the ability to collect, interpret and apply performance information. Accountability requires reliable records and reporting systems, while decentralisation requires sufficient managerial capacity at different levels of government.

Ihemeje & Afegbua (2020) emphasise staff development and professional competence as important considerations in effective public-service delivery. Their contribution reinforces the view that institutional capacity depends substantially on the knowledge and skills available within public organisations.

Capacity should therefore not be understood simply in terms of the number of employees or the existence of formal structures. What matters is whether institutions possess the appropriate skills, systems, knowledge and organisational arrangements required to turn policies and resources into results.

Leadership and Management

Leadership plays an important role in determining how public institutions respond to policy demands and organisational change. Leaders establish priorities, allocate resources, communicate expectations, coordinate activities and create the conditions under which employees work.

Public-sector reform frequently requires employees to change familiar procedures and adopt new ways of working. Such changes can generate uncertainty or resistance, particularly when reforms are introduced without adequate communication or organisational support. Effective leadership can help build ownership, explain the purpose of reform and maintain momentum during implementation.

Recent Nigerian literature also points to political commitment, accountability and professionalisation as important conditions for successful public-sector reform. These factors suggest that leadership should not be viewed simply as the exercise of formal authority. It is also an institutional capability that helps translate policy intentions into practical priorities and sustained organisational action.

Effective leadership is therefore expected to contribute to administrative efficiency by improving coordination, clarifying responsibilities, supporting employees and ensuring that resources are directed towards institutional priorities.

Organisational Structure

Organisational structure determines how authority, responsibility, communication and information are distributed within public institutions. It influences who makes decisions, who is responsible for particular tasks and how different units coordinate their activities.

An excessively hierarchical structure can create unnecessary layers of approval and slow decision-making. At the other extreme, decentralisation without adequate coordination can produce duplication, inconsistent decisions and uncertainty about responsibilities.

The challenge is therefore not simply to restructure public organisations but to establish structures that provide appropriate delegation, functional clarity, coordination and accountability. A well-designed structure should allow decisions to be made at the appropriate level while maintaining sufficient oversight to protect institutional integrity and public accountability.

Organisational structure consequently has a direct bearing on administrative efficiency because unclear responsibilities and unnecessary approval procedures can increase delays and administrative burdens.

Human Resource Capacity

Human resources are at the centre of public administration because policies and institutional systems ultimately depend on people for their implementation. Recruitment, deployment, training, promotion, professional development and performance appraisal all influence the competence and motivation of public employees.

Nwambuko, Amanze & Akogboin (2026) found moderate implementation of modern human resource management practices in selected local government councils and reported a significant positive relationship between HRM practices and service delivery. The finding supports the argument that effective human resource management can strengthen administrative capability.

At the same time, the study was conducted within a specific geographical and institutional setting. Its findings should therefore be treated as context-specific evidence rather than automatically generalised to every public institution in Nigeria.

The broader implication is that public-sector reform cannot be sustained without appropriate attention to the people responsible for implementing it. Training, fair deployment, professional development, meaningful performance appraisal and opportunities for continuous learning are important components of institutional effectiveness.

Performance Management

Performance management provides a link between organisational resources, employee activities and institutional results. It involves setting expectations, monitoring performance, assessing results and using performance information to identify weaknesses and improve organisational effectiveness.

Nwambuko, Anekwe & Agu (2026), in their study of the Federal Civil Service Commission, reported significant relationships between performance-management practices, organisational effectiveness, employee productivity and service-delivery efficiency.

This evidence suggests that well-designed performance-management systems can contribute to better organisational outcomes. However, the finding should not be interpreted to mean that performance management automatically produces better services in every public institution. Its effectiveness depends on how the system is designed, implemented and used.

Performance information is most useful when it supports learning, decision-making, resource allocation and process improvement. If performance management becomes primarily an exercise in completing forms or producing reports, its contribution to administrative efficiency may be limited.

It is also important that performance indicators capture citizen-facing outcomes. Measuring only the speed of internal processes may give an incomplete picture of institutional performance if citizens continue to experience poor accessibility, inequity, unreliable services or weak responsiveness.

Accountability and Transparency

Accountability requires public officials and institutions to explain their decisions, justify their actions and accept responsibility for their performance. Transparency supports accountability by making relevant information available to those responsible for oversight and, where appropriate, to the wider public.

Effective accountability mechanisms should: clearly identify responsibilities; provide useful performance information; support oversight; dentify weaknesses; and facilitate corrective action.

However, accountability can become counterproductive when public organisations are required to produce excessive reports that add administrative work without improving decision-making or institutional performance. The objective should therefore be to develop accountability systems that provide meaningful information while avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens.

When properly designed, accountability and transparency can strengthen administrative efficiency by reducing opportunities for misuse of resources, clarifying responsibilities and encouraging institutions to address performance problems.

Financial and Material Resources

Public institutions require adequate and predictable resources to function effectively. Financial and material resources are needed for: personnel; infrastructure; equipment; training; information systems; maintenance; and day-to-day service operations.

However, simply increasing resources does not guarantee administrative efficiency. Resources can have limited impact when they are poorly allocated, inadequately managed or disconnected from institutional priorities.

The important issue is therefore not only how much government spends but also whether available resources are allocated appropriately, used responsibly and directed towards activities that support institutional objectives. The National Strategy for Public Service Reform places public-service improvement within a broader institutional framework that recognises the importance of organisational and resource-management capacity.

Digitalisation and ICT

Digitalisation has become increasingly important to public-sector reform. When properly implemented, digital systems can improve information processing, records management, communication, coordination, transaction speed, transparency and access to government services.

Peter (2026) identifies digital governance as an important avenue for modernising Nigerian public administration but also highlights challenges involving infrastructure, digital skills, interoperability and cybersecurity.

The evidence, however, does not suggest that technology automatically produces better public services. Omorede & Oribhabor (2026), using annual Nigerian data covering 2015–2024, found that ICT adoption had a negative but statistically insignificant coefficient in their model of public service delivery. Their finding illustrates why technology should not be treated as a stand-alone solution to administrative problems.

Digital systems are most likely to improve administrative performance when they are accompanied by reliable infrastructure, competent personnel, appropriate process redesign,

interoperable systems, effective leadership and organisational readiness. In other words, digital transformation is also an institutional transformation.

Organisational Culture

Organisational culture refers to the shared values, assumptions, norms and behavioural expectations that influence how people within an institution understand and perform their work.

Culture can affect how employees respond to:

- Performance appraisal; accountability; innovation; technology; authority; and organisational change.
- Institutional Theory helps explain why formally introduced reforms sometimes fail to produce the expected changes in behaviour. A new digital platform, for instance, may be installed successfully but remain underused when employees lack the necessary skills, incentives or leadership support. Similarly, a performance-management system may become a routine administrative exercise when an organisation does not value performance information or continuous improvement.
- Organisational culture can therefore either support or undermine reform. Sustainable administrative improvement requires a culture that values professionalism, responsibility, learning, innovation and service to citizens.

Table 1
Selected Empirical and Institutional Literature Relevant to Administrative Efficiency and Public Service Delivery in Nigeria

Author/Source	Year	Method/Approach	Context	Principal Finding/Relevance
Ihemeje & Afegbua	2020	Critical/documentary appraisal	Nigerian public service	Staff development, training and professional competence are important considerations for effective public-service delivery.
Onyekwere	2025	Historical/documentary analysis	Nigerian public-service reforms, 1999–2023	Reform objectives have not been fully realised, with implementation, monitoring and evaluation remaining important concerns.
Nwambuko, Anekwe, & Agu	2026	Descriptive survey with correlation/regression	Federal Civil Service Commission, Abuja	Performance-management implementation was associated with organisational effectiveness, employee productivity and service-delivery efficiency.
Nwambuko, Amanze, & Akogboin	2026	Descriptive-correlational mixed approach	Local governments in Abia Central Senatorial District	HRM practices showed significant relationships with service delivery and administrative effectiveness.
Sukare & Mai-Ulu	2026	Qualitative/documentary analysis	Nigerian public administration	Reform effectiveness is constrained by institutional,

Author/Source	Year	Method/Approach	Context	Principal Finding/Relevance
				political and capacity-related factors.
Nwosu	2026	Descriptive qualitative/documentary analysis	Nigerian public sector	Institutional restructuring, accountability, decentralisation, human capital and technology are relevant to service delivery.
Peter	2026	Qualitative review	Nigerian digital governance	Digital governance can support efficiency, although infrastructure, skills, interoperability and organisational readiness remain important constraints.
Ella et al.	2026	Qualitative documentary analysis	Nigerian public institutions	Bureaucratic bottlenecks, weak accountability, human-resource limitations and institutional weaknesses remain recurring concerns.
Omorede & Oribhabor	2026	Ex-post facto analysis using secondary data and OLS	Nigeria, 2015–2024	Governance and ICT variables explained substantial variation in the dependent variable, but the overall model was not statistically significant at the 5% level.
BPSR	2023	Government policy framework	Federal public service	The NSPSR provides a broad framework for public-service reform and institutional improvement.

Source: Author's synthesis of the reviewed literature.

The studies summarised above demonstrate that there is considerable evidence concerning individual factors associated with administrative efficiency and public service delivery in Nigeria. At the same time, the studies differ in their research designs, institutional settings, geographical coverage and measures of performance.

This variation makes direct statistical comparison difficult and supports the use of a narrative synthesis. More importantly, the literature suggests that administrative performance cannot be adequately explained by any single institutional factor. Human resources, leadership, accountability, digital capacity, organisational structures and financial resources often operate together.

Literature Gap

Three important weaknesses emerge from the review.

- First, individual institutional determinants are often examined without sufficient consideration of how they interact. Digitalisation, for example, may be analysed

independently of employee competence, leadership, organisational culture and institutional readiness, even though these factors can determine whether a digital reform succeeds.

- Second, the studies vary considerably in institutional setting and methodology. Evidence from federal institutions may not necessarily apply in the same way to state or local government institutions. Similarly, findings from qualitative studies cannot be directly compared with results from econometric or survey-based studies.
- Third, administrative efficiency is not always clearly positioned as the mechanism connecting institutional conditions to public service delivery and public value. This leaves an important conceptual question: how do institutional conditions become actual improvements in the services experienced by citizens?

This paper responds to these limitations by proposing an integrated model:

Institutional Determinants → Administrative Efficiency → Public Service Delivery → Public Value → Feedback and Organisational Learning.

The framework is intended as a conceptual synthesis of the literature. It does not claim to establish a new statistical causal relationship.

Theoretical Framework

New Public Management Theory

New Public Management (NPM) became influential in public administration through its emphasis on managerial responsibility, performance measurement, output orientation, efficiency and more deliberate attention to resource use (Hood, 1991).

NPM is relevant to this study because administrative efficiency involves questions of resource utilisation, performance management, managerial responsibility and results.

However, NPM also has limitations when applied to public institutions. Government agencies cannot be judged solely by how cheaply or quickly they operate. They must also comply with legal requirements, protect equity, maintain accountability and contribute to citizens' welfare.

For this reason, NPM provides an important managerial lens for understanding administrative efficiency, but it is insufficient on its own. It needs to be complemented by perspectives that explain institutional behaviour and the public value created through government action.

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory focuses on the ways in which formal rules, organisational structures, norms and cultural expectations shape behaviour.

Scott (2001) identifies three broad institutional elements: regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive. Together, these elements help explain why organisations may respond differently to apparently similar reforms.

For example, the introduction of a performance-management system may produce meaningful changes in one organisation but have limited effects in another. The difference may arise from leadership, professional norms, organisational culture, enforcement mechanisms or the capacity of employees to use performance information effectively.

Institutional Theory is therefore particularly relevant to explaining the gap between formal reform adoption and actual implementation. It suggests that successful reform depends not only on what government formally introduces but also on whether the reform becomes embedded in organisational routines and accepted ways of working.

Public Value Theory

Public Value Theory, associated particularly with Moore (1995), shifts attention beyond internal organisational efficiency to the value that public institutions create for citizens and society.

This perspective is important because administrative efficiency is not an end in itself. A public institution may process applications rapidly and use resources economically but still fail to create meaningful public value if citizens cannot access its services or if the services are inequitable, unreliable or unresponsive.

Public Value Theory therefore provides a citizen-centred basis for assessing whether administrative efficiency ultimately matters. It connects administrative processes with broader outcomes such as public trust, legitimacy, social welfare, equity and citizen satisfaction.

Theoretical Integration

The three theories provide different but complementary explanations of public-sector performance.

Theory	Central Question	Contribution to the Study
New Public Management	How can public organisations improve performance and resource use?	Explains efficiency, performance management and managerial responsibility.
Institutional Theory	Why do reforms produce different outcomes across organisations?	Explains the influence of rules, structures, norms, culture and institutionalisation.
Public Value Theory	What makes public-sector performance valuable to citizens and society?	Connects administrative processes with citizen outcomes and wider societal value.

Taken together, the theories suggest that institutional conditions influence the ability of public organisations to implement managerial reforms; managerial practices shape administrative efficiency; and the ultimate significance of efficiency depends on whether it produces better services and meaningful public value.

This integrated position is more useful than treating the three theories as unrelated explanations because it connects institutional capacity, administrative processes and citizen outcomes within one analytical perspective.

Framework Level	Key Dimensions/Indicators	Role in the Framework
Institutional Determinants	Administrative capacity; Leadership and management; Organisational structure; Human resource capacity; Accountability and transparency; Financial and material resources; Digitalisation and ICT; Organisational culture	Provide the institutional foundation for effective administration. These factors influence the ability of public organisations to mobilise resources, coordinate activities, make decisions and implement policies effectively.
Administrative Efficiency	Effective resource utilisation; Reduced avoidable delays; Improved coordination; Timely decision-making; Reduced duplication; Lower administrative burden; Improved process reliability	Represents the immediate organisational outcome of effective institutional arrangements. It reflects how well public institutions convert available resources and administrative capabilities into efficient processes.
Public Service Delivery	Accessibility; Timeliness; Reliability; Responsiveness; Service quality; Equity; Accountability	Represents the citizen-facing outcome of administrative processes. Effective administrative systems should contribute to services that are accessible, timely, reliable, responsive, equitable and accountable.
Public Value	Citizen satisfaction; Trust and legitimacy; Improved welfare; Equity and inclusion; Sustainable public outcomes	Represents the broader societal value generated when public institutions deliver services effectively and respond to legitimate citizen needs.
Feedback, Monitoring and Organisational Learning	Performance monitoring; Evaluation; Citizen feedback; Performance information; Knowledge management; Organisational learning	Provides information about institutional and service outcomes. The information generated can be used to identify weaknesses, improve processes and inform future decision-making.
Institutional Reform	Policy adjustment; Process improvement; Capacity development; Leadership development; Human resource reform; Digital transformation; Accountability strengthening	Represents the continuous improvement process through which lessons from implementation, monitoring and citizen experience are incorporated into future institutional reforms.

Administrative efficiency is positioned as the immediate organisational mechanism through which institutional conditions influence service delivery. In this sense, efficient institutions are not simply those that reduce expenditure; they are institutions capable of converting available resources and administrative decisions into reliable and responsive processes.

Public service delivery represents the more immediate outcome experienced by citizens, while public value reflects the broader societal purpose of public administration. This distinction is important because efficient internal processes have limited meaning if they do not ultimately contribute to better public outcomes.

The final component of the framework is feedback, monitoring and organisational learning. Public institutions can learn from performance information, citizen experiences and implementation challenges. These lessons can then inform subsequent institutional reforms. The

framework therefore presents reform as a continuous process rather than a one-time intervention.

Empirical Review and Synthesis

Administrative Reform

Onyekwere (2025) identifies continuing implementation challenges within Nigerian public-service reforms, while Sukare & Mai-Ulu (2026) similarly emphasise institutional capacity, accountability and political commitment as important conditions for reform effectiveness.

The convergence of these findings is significant. It suggests that reform outcomes depend not only on the quality of reform policies but also on the institutional environment in which those policies are implemented.

A reform may therefore be well designed but produce limited results when institutions lack the leadership, resources, skills, coordination mechanisms or accountability arrangements required for implementation.

Administrative Capacity and Human Resources

Ihemeje & Afegbua (2020) identify staff development and professional competence as important considerations in public-service delivery. More recent evidence from Nwambuko, Amanze and Akogboin (2026) reports a significant relationship between human resource management practices and service delivery in selected Nigerian local governments.

Together, these studies reinforce the argument that human resource management should be understood as part of institutional capacity rather than simply as a personnel function.
Public institutions require competent employees, appropriate deployment, continuous training and meaningful performance appraisal. Without these elements, reforms may remain largely formal because the people responsible for implementation lack the necessary capacity or support.

Performance Management

Nwambuko, Anekwe & Agu (2026) report significant relationships between performance-management practices, organisational effectiveness, employee productivity and service-delivery efficiency within the Federal Civil Service Commission.

The evidence supports the importance of performance management while also highlighting the need to consider institutional context. Findings from a single federal institution should not automatically be generalised to every public organisation in Nigeria.

Performance management is likely to be most valuable when performance information is used for problem identification, resource allocation, process improvement and organisational learning. Its usefulness is reduced when it becomes primarily a compliance exercise focused on producing reports.

Digital Governance

Peter (2026) identifies several potential benefits of digital governance, including improved efficiency, transparency and administrative coordination, while also highlighting infrastructure, digital-skills, interoperability and cybersecurity challenges.

Omorede & Oribhabor (2026) provide a useful empirical counterpoint. Their analysis of Nigeria between 2015 and 2024 did not find a statistically significant effect of ICT adoption on public service delivery within their regression model.

The difference between these findings is important. It demonstrates that digitalisation should be regarded as an enabling condition rather than an automatic solution to administrative problems.

The effectiveness of digital government depends on several supporting conditions, including infrastructure, employee competence, process redesign, interoperability, data governance, cybersecurity, leadership and organisational readiness.

Institutional Weaknesses

Ella et al. (2026) identify bureaucratic bottlenecks, weak accountability, inadequate human resource capacity and political interference among the recurring challenges affecting Nigerian public institutions.

These findings are consistent with the wider reform literature and reinforce the argument that administrative inefficiency is multidimensional. Problems in one area may also reinforce weaknesses in another. For example, weak accountability may contribute to poor resource management, while weak human resource systems may limit the effective use of digital technologies.

This interconnectedness explains why isolated interventions often produce limited or short-lived improvements.

Current Public-Service Reform Architecture

The revised National Strategy for Public Service Reform provides a broad institutional framework for strengthening Nigeria's public service.

The Federal Government's launch of the Reform Tracker, Knowledge Repository and NSPSR Dashboard in July 2026 also reflects increasing attention to digital monitoring, institutional knowledge management, accountability and performance tracking.

These initiatives are potentially important because they can strengthen the ability of government institutions to monitor reforms and learn from implementation. However, the existence of reform-monitoring instruments should not itself be interpreted as evidence that public service outcomes have improved. Their effectiveness ultimately needs to be

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a **systematic narrative literature review** design. The approach was considered appropriate because the literature on administrative efficiency and public service delivery in Nigeria covers a wide range of research designs, institutional settings, variables and outcome measures. These differences make it difficult to combine the findings statistically in a meaningful meta-analysis.

The review was systematic in the way relevant literature was searched for, selected, screened, verified and analysed. At the same time, it was narrative because the findings were interpreted and brought together through qualitative thematic synthesis rather than statistical pooling.

This approach enabled the study to identify recurring patterns across the literature while also recognising differences in institutional context and methodological approach.

Review Period

The review focused primarily on literature published between **January 2015 and July 2026**. This period was selected to capture recent developments in Nigerian public administration, particularly contemporary public-sector reforms, performance-management initiatives, human resource practices and digital transformation.

Earlier foundational works were retained where they were necessary for explaining the theoretical foundations of the study. These included Hood (1991), Moore (1995) and Scott (2001).

Search Sources

Relevant literature was identified from a range of academic, institutional and official sources, including:

- Google Scholar;
- Crossref-indexed scholarly records;
- journal and publisher websites;
- institutional repositories;
- ResearchGate, particularly where an accessible publisher or journal record was unavailable;
- official Nigerian government websites;
- Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR) materials; and
- Relevant institutional publications.

Where more than one bibliographic record was available, the original journal, publisher or official institutional record was given preference over secondary listings.

Inclusion Criteria

A source was considered eligible for inclusion when it met the following conditions:

- It addressed administrative efficiency, public service delivery or an institutional determinant relevant to public-sector performance;

- It focused on Nigeria or provided theoretical evidence directly relevant to the Nigerian public-sector context;
- It was a peer-reviewed journal article, scholarly book, official government document or credible institutional publication;
- Sufficient bibliographic information was available to permit verification;
- The source contributed directly to at least one of the research questions; and
- It contained identifiable empirical evidence or a clearly articulated theoretical argument.

Screening Procedure

The screening process was conducted in four broad stages:

- **Stage 1: Identification**
  Potentially relevant records were identified through searches of academic databases, journal platforms, institutional repositories and official government sources.
- **Stage 2: Title and Abstract Screening**
  Titles and available abstracts were examined to determine whether each record was sufficiently related to the research questions and central concepts of the study.
- **Stage 3: Full-Text Eligibility Assessment**
  Sources that appeared relevant at the initial stage were examined more closely against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Particular attention was given to the study's context, evidence, research approach and relevance to the institutional determinants under investigation.
- **Stage 4: Verification and Data Extraction**
  Sources that met the eligibility requirements were checked for bibliographic completeness and organised according to the institutional themes developed in the conceptual framework.
  This staged process helped reduce the possibility of including sources that were only superficially related to the study.

Data Extraction

Information extracted from eligible sources included:

- Author and publication year;research design or methodological approach; institutional and geographical context; principal variables or concepts; major findings; relevance to administrative efficiency relevance to public service delivery; and contribution to the conceptual framework.
- The extracted information was then compared across studies to identify recurring findings, areas of agreement and differences in the evidence.

Thematic Synthesis

The literature was initially organised around eight institutional determinants:

- Administrative capacity leadership and management; organisational structure; human resource capacity; accountability and transparency; financial and material resources; digitalisation and ICT; and organisational culture.
- A second level of analysis examined how these determinants influence administrative processes, including resource use, coordination, decision-making, performance management and administrative burden.

- A third level examined how administrative processes relate to public service delivery and public value.
- This three-level approach enabled the review to move beyond simply listing institutional determinants. It provided a basis for considering how institutional conditions may interact, shape administrative efficiency and ultimately influence the quality of services experienced by citizens.

Quality Assurance and Bibliographic Verification

Because the review includes recent literature published in 2026, particular attention was given to bibliographic verification. Where possible, recent sources were checked against:journal websites; publisher records; DOI information; and official institutional repositories.

Where an article was available through more than one source, the journal or publisher record was preferred as the primary bibliographic reference.

For example, the Nwambuko, Anekwe and Agu performance-management study was checked against its journal and DOI information. The Nwambuko, Amanze and Akogboin study was similarly checked against its publication record and DOI information.

This verification process was intended to reduce citation errors and improve the reliability of the literature base.

Discussion

The central finding of the review is that administrative efficiency in Nigeria is best understood as an institutional capability that emerges from the interaction of several organisational conditions. No single factor appears sufficient to explain why some public institutions perform better than others.

Administrative capacity provides the foundation. Public institutions require competent personnel, reliable information, managerial knowledge and established organisational routines to implement policies effectively. Where these capabilities are weak, even well-designed reforms can produce limited results.

Leadership provides direction and coordination. Public-sector reform requires leaders who can translate broad policy objectives into operational priorities, allocate resources appropriately, communicate expectations and manage organisational change. Leadership is therefore not simply a matter of formal authority; it is part of the institutional capacity required to sustain reform.

Organisational structure determines how decisions, authority and information move through an institution. Structures with unnecessary layers of approval can slow administrative processes, while poorly coordinated decentralisation can create duplication and confusion. Effective administrative structures therefore need a balance between appropriate delegation, coordination and oversight.

Human resource management provides the personnel foundation for implementation. Recruitment, training, professional development, deployment, performance appraisal and

employee motivation all influence the ability of institutions to perform their responsibilities. Reform cannot be sustained when the people responsible for implementation lack the skills or institutional support required to perform effectively.

Accountability connects authority with responsibility. Effective accountability mechanisms can improve transparency, responsible resource use and organisational discipline. However, accountability systems should be designed carefully. When reporting requirements become excessive without producing useful information for decision-making or improvement, they can create another source of administrative burden.

Financial and material resources provide the operational foundation for public institutions. Adequate funding is necessary for personnel, infrastructure, equipment, training, information systems and service operations. However, the review also shows that resources alone do not guarantee efficiency. Their contribution depends on how well they are allocated, managed and aligned with institutional priorities.

Digitalisation represents an important opportunity for improving administrative processes. Digital systems can strengthen information management, reduce paperwork, improve coordination and make services more accessible. At the same time, the contrasting evidence from Peter (2026) and Omorede & Oribhabor (2026) demonstrates that technology should not be regarded as an automatic solution. Its contribution depends on infrastructure, employee competence, organisational readiness, process redesign and effective implementation.

Organisational culture provides the behavioural environment within which all these reforms operate. Formal policies and new systems may have limited effects when they conflict with established norms, weak professional values or resistance to change. A culture that supports professionalism, accountability, innovation and learning can strengthen reform, while a culture resistant to change can undermine even well-designed interventions.

The theoretical implications of the review are also significant. The three theoretical perspectives used in the study address different aspects of the same institutional-performance problem. **New Public Management** highlights efficiency, performance and resource use. **Institutional Theory** explains why formal reforms may produce different results depending on organisational rules, norms, structures and culture. **Public Value Theory** provides a citizen-centred basis for determining whether administrative improvements actually matter to society.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that public-sector performance should be understood as a chain rather than as a single outcome. Institutional conditions influence administrative processes; administrative processes influence service delivery; and service outcomes determine the extent to which public institutions create meaningful value for citizens.

The policy implication is therefore clear: government should not assess reform success simply by asking whether a new policy, system or structure has been introduced. The more important questions are whether institutional capacity has improved, whether administrative processes have become more effective and whether citizens are experiencing better services as a result.

Conclusion

This paper examined the institutional determinants of administrative efficiency and their implications for public service delivery in Nigeria through a systematic narrative review of relevant conceptual, theoretical, empirical and institutional literature.

The review shows that administrative efficiency is much broader than reducing government expenditure or completing administrative tasks more quickly. It involves using public resources effectively, maintaining reliable processes, coordinating institutional activities, making timely decisions, reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and ensuring that public institutions remain accountable and responsive to citizens.

Eight interconnected institutional determinants emerged as particularly important: administrative capacity, leadership and management, organisational structure, human resources, accountability and transparency, financial and material resources, digitalisation and ICT, and organisational culture.

The evidence suggests that these determinants rarely operate independently. Digitalisation, for instance, requires competent personnel and organisational readiness. Performance management requires reliable information, leadership and a culture that values learning. Accountability depends on transparency, effective monitoring and clearly defined responsibilities. Similarly, structural reform requires adequate capacity and coordination if it is to improve rather than complicate administrative processes.

The central challenge facing Nigerian public administration is therefore not simply a lack of reform initiatives. Rather, it is the difficulty of converting reform intentions into sustained institutional practice. Policies and systems may be introduced formally, but their effectiveness depends on whether public institutions have the capacity, leadership, resources, skills and organisational culture required to implement them consistently.
The study consequently proposes the following institutional-performance chain:

Institutional Capability → Administrative Efficiency → Public Service Delivery → Public Value → Organisational Learning.

This chain highlights the importance of looking beyond the introduction of reforms to the outcomes they produce. An institution should not be considered efficient merely because it spends less or processes documents more quickly. The more meaningful test is whether citizens experience public services as **accessible, timely, reliable, responsive, equitable and accountable**.

Ultimately, sustainable improvement in Nigeria's public service requires a coordinated approach to institutional reform. Strengthening one component while leaving others weak is unlikely to produce lasting change. Administrative capacity, leadership, human resources, organisational structures, accountability, resources, digital systems and organisational culture need to reinforce one another.

The broader lesson from the literature is therefore that effective public service delivery is not produced by isolated reforms but by capable institutions that can continuously learn, adapt and translate public policies and resources into meaningful outcomes for citizens.

Policy Recommendations

- **Institutionalise Public-Service Reform:** Public-sector reforms should be embedded in durable institutional structures rather than treated as temporary programmes tied to particular administrations or office holders. Each major reform should have clearly defined responsibilities, realistic implementation timelines, measurable indicators and mechanisms for continuity.

  Reform programmes should also be documented and institutionalised so that changes in political leadership or administrative priorities do not automatically interrupt ongoing initiatives. Sustained reform requires institutions that can preserve useful practices, retain organisational knowledge and build progressively on earlier improvements.
- **Strengthen Administrative Capacity:** Government should invest in the technical, managerial, analytical and digital capabilities required by public institutions. Capacity-building programmes should be based on clearly identified institutional needs rather than relying primarily on general training programmes.

  Training should be connected to the actual responsibilities of public servants and to the performance requirements of their institutions. Particular attention should be given to data management, policy analysis, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation, digital administration and evidence-based decision-making.
- **Professionalized Human Resource Management:** Recruitment, promotion, deployment and performance appraisal should increasingly be based on professional competence, transparent criteria and clearly defined responsibilities. Human resource systems should reward competence and continuous improvement while providing public servants with opportunities for professional development.

  Institutions should also strengthen workforce planning so that employees are deployed according to organisational needs and areas of demonstrated competence. Continuous learning should become an integral part of public-service management rather than an occasional training activity.
- **Strengthen Leadership and Change Management:** Leadership-development programmes should place greater emphasis on strategic management, ethical conduct, communication, coordination and organisational change.

  Public-sector leaders need more than technical knowledge of administrative procedures. They must also be capable of communicating reform objectives, building organisational support, managing resistance and maintaining institutional momentum.

  Leadership accountability should similarly be strengthened so that managers are assessed not only on compliance with administrative requirements but also on their ability to improve organisational performance and service outcomes.
- **Simplify Administrative Processes:** Public institutions should regularly review their workflows to identify unnecessary approvals, duplication, repeated documentation and avoidable administrative steps.

Process reviews should focus on making services simpler and faster while preserving essential legal, financial and accountability safeguards. Where possible, institutions should redesign processes from the perspective of the citizen rather than simply reproducing existing internal procedures in digital form.

- **Strengthen Performance-Oriented Accountability:** Accountability systems should bring together financial controls, internal audit, external oversight and meaningful performance reporting. At the same time, government should avoid creating unnecessary reporting requirements that consume staff time without contributing to better decision-making.
  Performance information should be actively used to identify institutional weaknesses, allocate resources, address implementation problems and guide corrective action. Accountability should therefore function not only as a control mechanism but also as a tool for organisational learning and improvement.

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