

Examining the Challenges and Opportunities of Managing Public Services in a Complex and Interconnected World

Panini Karamchand¹

¹Faculty of Social Sciences, Aligarh Muslim University, India

Abstract. *The paper aims at discussing extensive and diverse problems and opportunities as the phenomena of globalization shape the management of public services. This study uses surveys and interviews with the target public managers to identify research questions such as the following major challenges: political instability, economic limitations, technology change, and social disparities. The conclusions reached prove that there is great potential for digital improvement of administrative productivity and citizens' satisfaction, but equally grand are the issues of cybersecurity, social inclusiveness, and allocation of resources. In the same regard political instability and regulatory restraints hinder strategic planning and advancement, while persistent social disparity demands efficient stakeholder management. Economic conditions, as much as they may restrain, are instrumental in spurring creativity; the case should therefore be made for sustainability analyses that combine financial realism with inventive solutions. This research points out that the development of sound and coherent theories and coherent theories in the teaching and practice of public service management, which inhibits technology adoption, social justice, political stability and fiscal viability. The research presents crucial information for policy makers and public manager interested in enhancing the anti-shock and adaptive mechanisms within the public service delivery systems in the contemporary complex world.*

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INTRODUCTION

The management of public services is a critical component of good governance, directly impacting citizens' quality of life and overall societal well-being (Ortega-Rodríguez et al., 2020). In today's globalized world, public service management has become increasingly complex due to various interconnected challenges, including technological advancements, economic pressures, demographic shifts, and social and environmental changes (Meuleman, 2021). The rapid pace of globalization and technological progress has transformed the operational landscape for public administrators, necessitating more adaptive, inclusive, and innovative approaches to public service delivery (Baheer et al., 2020). This study examines the challenges and opportunities of managing public services in this context, focusing on the role of multilateral cooperation, stakeholder engagement, strategic planning, and digital transformation in fostering sustainable development.

Public services, defined as services provided by the government to its citizens, are fundamental to social, economic, and environmental sustainability (Pascaris et al., 2020). However, managing these services effectively in a globalized and interconnected world presents numerous challenges. As noted by Dunleavy et al. (2006), public managers face a dynamic environment shaped by evolving technological landscapes, shifting economic conditions, and

increasingly diverse and demanding populations. The complexity of this environment requires new governance models that emphasize flexibility, collaboration, and innovation (Klein et al., 2020).

One of the most significant challenges in public service management is the growing demand for digital transformation. Digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of Things (IoT), have the potential to revolutionize public service delivery by enhancing efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement (Calzada, 2021). However, these technologies also pose substantial challenges, including cybersecurity risks, data privacy concerns, and the digital divide, which can exacerbate existing inequalities (Okewu et al., 2019). To effectively harness the benefits of digital transformation, public managers must develop robust data governance frameworks and invest in capacity building to ensure equitable access to digital services (Moshood et al., 2021).

Another critical challenge in managing public services is political instability and regulatory barriers. In many parts of the world, political volatility and conflicting policy priorities undermine the effectiveness of public service delivery (Alamanos et al., 2021). Political instability can lead to frequent changes in leadership, policy reversals, and reduced trust in government institutions, all of which complicate long-term planning and investment in public services (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021). Furthermore, regulatory barriers, such as bureaucratic red tape and inconsistent policies, can hinder innovation and delay the implementation of necessary reforms (Alvarenga et al., 2020).

Social challenges, such as demographic changes, poverty, and inequality, also play a significant role in shaping public service management. As populations age and urbanize, the demand for public services, particularly in healthcare, housing, and social protection, is expected to rise significantly (Ortega-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Addressing these challenges requires inclusive policies that cater to diverse populations and prioritize the needs of marginalized communities. Community engagement and participatory governance are essential for ensuring that public services are responsive to local needs and contexts.

Economic constraints, particularly budget limitations and resource allocation, are perennial challenges in public service management. Public managers must navigate the tension between rising demand for services and shrinking fiscal resources, necessitating innovative approaches to public finance and resource management (Pascaris et al., 2020). Public-private partnerships, innovation, and entrepreneurship are increasingly seen as viable solutions to these economic challenges, offering opportunities to leverage private sector expertise and funding for public service delivery (Meuleman, 2021). However, these partnerships also raise concerns about accountability, transparency, and the potential for private interests to undermine public welfare (Baheer et al., 2020).

Environmental challenges, such as climate change, natural disasters, and environmental degradation, further complicate public service management (Calzada, 2021). Public managers must not only mitigate the impacts of these challenges but also adapt public services to enhance resilience and sustainability. Sustainable land use, disaster risk reduction, and renewable energy adoption are critical strategies for building climate-resilient public services (Zhang et al., 2020). Integrating environmental considerations into public service planning and delivery requires a holistic approach that balances economic, social, and environmental goals (Alamanos et al., 2021).

In this complex landscape, multilateral cooperation, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning emerge as key opportunities for improving public service management. Multilateral cooperation, involving collaboration between governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders, can enhance policy coherence, share best practices, and pool resources to address common challenges (Okewu et al., 2019). Stakeholder engagement, including community involvement and public-private partnerships, fosters transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in public service delivery (Alvarenga et al., 2020). Strategic planning, which involves setting clear objectives, prioritizing actions, and aligning resources, is essential for managing

public services effectively in a rapidly changing environment (Ortega-Rodríguez et al., 2020).

Despite these opportunities, significant gaps remain in the current approaches to public service management. Many existing frameworks lack integration, coordination, and adaptability, limiting their effectiveness in addressing complex and interconnected challenges (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021). Additionally, there is often a disconnect between policy formulation and implementation, leading to inefficiencies and unmet objectives. To bridge these gaps, public managers must adopt a more systemic approach that integrates diverse policy areas, leverages technology, and builds on collaborative networks.

METHODS

This type of investigation employs a qualitative research strategy based on a phenomenology that will allow for identifying and analysing the diverse multifaceted problems and prospects in the context of globalisation of the service industries. Qualitative selection of the design was preferred to allow a better understanding of the “lived experiences” of public managers who encounter these issues on a daily basis. The phenomenological approach is particularly relevant as it enables the researcher to attend to participants’ perceptive world and reveal the phenomena’s core.

Participants were selected purposefully including public managers as they are most knowledgeable as to the content matter. Some of these individuals were given purposive recruitment where they were recruited from health care, education, transportation, and environmental care. Concerning the choice criteria, the criterion that was most popular was experience, namely at least five years of experience in managing public service organizations; this helped the participants gain important and profound insights into their work. Thirty public managers participated in this research. The total number of participants was decided here depending upon the data saturation criterion, where data collection continues until original themes and issues are not coming up anymore and cover all aspects of the experiences and perceptions.

The tool used for data collection was face-to-face semi structured interviews because it captures a broad spectrum of data set in a short span of time. Semi structured interviews enable the participants to speak as they feel while on the other hand enabling the researcher to further ask question in the areas of interest. In line with the research questions, an initial data collection instrument; an interview guide, was prepared from the literature review and consultation with experts in public administration. The questions posed within the guide were constructed in an exploratory manner addressing areas of central interest such as the major concerns experienced in public service management and ways of addressing these concerns together with ways of finding potential to innovate and enhance the given situation. A preview of the guide was conducted with a sample of ten public managers with the purpose of perfecting the questions incorporated in the guide. All the interviews were conducted either in person or through collaboration tools such as video conferencing based on the subject availability and location. The interviews ranged between 60 to 90 minutes so as to ensure that participants had enough space and time to volunteer necessary information. Informed consent to audio-record the interviews was obtained from participants and all the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed word by word.

Based on the experiences from the interviews, thematic analysis was selected as the method to analyse the data, while adopting Braun and Clarke’s six phase approach. The researcher first involved in a coding process by rereading the transcripts and listening the audio tapes in order to get familiar with the Codes, categories and subcategories of the interviews. Data was analyzed manually and computer aided using NVivo which aided in coding, sorting and retrieving the data analyzed. Data analysis began with the development of initial codes which were created from phrases or sentences that seemed to symbolize major elements of participants’ experiences. These finally formed 5 themes which best depicted major patterns in the data collected from these codes. Coding here involved combination of deductive coding as was

informed by some guides from literature and directed coding Inductive coding here entailed the identification of new codes emerging directly from the data.

Subsequently, the analysed themes were examined and categorized in a manner that they provided clear identifications from the data corpus. This step consisted in revering the themes to the original data in order to make sure that you are still relevant and coherent. There was ulterior specification of each theme with a definition that gave an idea of what the theme was all about. To distinguish between the themes, more specific terms were chosen for the names of the themes based on their definition and role in view of the research questions. The last step was to integrate the themes into a single narrative which responds to the research questions. Participants' comments were incorporated in the report to buttress the identified themes and to support argument.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research comprise of the following broad areas which are comprehensible as the main issues concerning the provision of the public services in the context of the globalized and interconnected world.

"While digital tools have streamlined many of our processes, the risk of cyberattacks has increased exponentially. We're constantly on high alert."

This quote points at the aspect of insecurity that results from the use of developed systems. The role of technology cannot be ignored it was useful to increase efficiency, but it puts high demands on the IT infrastructure to secure the data. Thus, public managers are under pressure to consider the usefulness of digital tools in contrast with the necessity of adopting specific hard security measures. While there is readiness demonstrated by certain public sectors to handle these threats, therefore handling potential threats is a big loophole that needs to be filled so as not to affect the trust of the citizens on public services.

"The push for digitalization often overlooks those who are not tech-savvy, creating a gap in service delivery. We see this most with older citizens who struggle with online platforms."

This statement raises the concerns of digital divide especially with the older population who are not very fluent in the use of technology. It can widen existing gaps between different demographics and thus it is imperative for the public service managers to adopt many policies, which will enhance equal access to all the demographic groups. That is not always the case and it becomes an uphill task to organize such a technology attack while at the same time making sure that it is an attack that cuts across the region, involving all the users including the elderly, the disable and the kids.

"There's a growing expectation that everything should be available online, but we don't have the resources to maintain these services at the level people expect."

This citation gives an insight of the constrained resource base that challenge public managers, especially when it comes to enhancing the quality and reliability of digital services. The society expects organizations to deliver satisfactory services online although many firms have small budgets and few staff to accomplish all the tasks. This divergence between system prospects and actual promised service delivery promotes a profound challenge in the digital reform process in public services – avert customer expectation and match it with the reality on the ground in terms of service delivering capability.

"Every time there's a new government, we're expected to pivot and adjust to new policies. It's frustrating and inefficient."

This quote shows the destroyed because of political instabilities that cause policy fluctuations which affect planning and execution. The main problem, in this case, is volatility and instability of governance of which is detrimental to morale of the public managers and also reduces productivity. This instability does not only cost so many resources but also leads to an environment whereby formulation of strategies and planning as near to impossible affecting the

quality of the public service delivering.

"Regulatory barriers are our biggest hurdle. Even when we have a good plan, getting through the red tape can take years."

This statement reveals problems with bureaucracy or lack of reform in the institutions and procedures that hinder the generation and implementation of new ideas or solutions. These regulatory barriers remain a work in progress or perhaps indicate how deeply rooted is the system and how easily it can get locked into a mode which becomes very difficult to alter even with the best of intentions. It is such a significant challenge to propel a critical reconsideration of present and potential improved structures of regulation with a view to supporting public service management in stead of complicating it.

"There's a disconnect between what politicians promise and what's actually feasible on the ground. We're left to manage the fallout."

This quote clearly emphasizes the discrepancy between policy and its action in the political realm and how the public managers are left to address the impacts, mostly negative, of unfulfillable goals on people's lives. This is interpreted critically as meaning policy formulation needs to be linked closest to policy implementation in order that political decisions are made with the realities of public service management firmly in mind. Such a misalignment makes the public become distrustful, thus, further straining the already difficult work of providing proper services.

"We're seeing growing disparities in access to services, especially in marginalized communities. It's a challenge to ensure everyone gets the same level of service."

This quote is a flashback to the problem of equity where minority of people in the society receive inferior services. The problematic aspect in this respect can be seen in the requirement for specific policies that will help reduce these inequalities rather than policies that apply for all populations. Another key factor that public managers have to consider is the fact that it is very important for them to recognize and respond to the implied needs of various stakeholders so as to be able to guarantee fair delivery of services.

"Engaging with the community is essential, but it's often seen as an afterthought. We need to be more proactive in involving people in the decision-making process."

Such statement emphasizes also a component, which is the most often overlooked by people who manage public services and that is community involvement. The critical interpretation is that the community participation is crucial and if not properly conducted then a certain public service may not be effective to deliver on its intended mandate. In the case of community participation, services are delivered efficiently, and people who use the services demand efficiency in management hence promoting accountability in service delivery.

"There's a lot of talk about inclusivity, but when it comes to implementation, we're still falling short. We need to do more than just pay lip service to these ideals."

This quote is basically expressing the reality between the noble and the great slogans of diversity and difference and coming to practice of diversity and difference. The problem lies in the fact that diversity is frequently described as a goal and it cannot be achieved unless certain steps and specific means are employed. Public managers should stop giving lip services and start delivering on what would encourage social equity and inclusion in the fraternity.

"We're constantly being asked to do more with less. It's exhausting, but it forces us to think creatively."

This quote typifies the pressure working under financial limitations while at the same time mentally preparing oneself for creativity since the field now forces one to create new solutions. The critical interpretation here is based on the fact that although lack of funds poses as a serious concern, it can also be viewed as an opportunity to come up with more creativity and come up with new ideas. However, even here it is possible to achieve little but not much if properly

resourced, he or she will lack adequate funds at his or her disposal despite the use of innovative ideas.

"Public-private partnerships are often touted as the solution, but they come with their own set of challenges. We need to ensure that these partnerships don't compromise our public service values."

This statement is an apt summary because it shows that reliance on PPPs as a solution to problems affecting the economy involves a lot of metaphorical 'balancing act'. The critical issue is that while these partnership can deliver important resources this can also foster conflict of interest and can downplay public service values. It remains imperative that public managers exercise keen understanding regarding these partnerships; lest they transform into havens for creating value for the private sector at the expense of the public.

"Innovation is important, but it's not a substitute for adequate funding. We need both to effectively manage public services."

This quote underlines the importance of the innovation strategy, at the same time, it cannot, and should not, ignore the requirement for sufficient financial capital. The critical interpretation is the need to have a balance in the creation of innovations as well as the necessary funding needed for management of public services. Where innovation is used as the only approach to managing costs in providing public services without addressing the funding problems in their totality it becomes unsustainable and may compromise the quality of the services being provided.

Technological Advancements and Challenges

On one hand, there is optimism on technological developments in managing public services and on the other there is pessimism in the same. On the one hand, digital tools and platforms may have the potential to revolutionize the performance of public services with regard to efficiency, transparency and responsiveness (Calzada, 2021; Newel et al., 2020). The efficiency of flow in processes as well as ability to communicate with citizens has been acknowledged as an essential factor of new generation public administration (Moser, 2016). However, the study also reveals that this formulation of a new digital world brought in front of us also entails serious risks, especially in as far as security, privacy, and equal access are concerned.

Another important concern raised in the research is on the digital divide especially among the elderly and other vulnerable groups of people. The central drive towards digitalisation is generally positive in a number of ways, yet, if not well geared, can potentially widen social disparities (Middlemiss & Parrish, 2020; Manzo & Padfield, 2016) The aspects of the participants' worries regarding the impossibility of using a smartphone for a non-technologically advanced person are rooted also in modern controversial tendencies concerning digital divide, which characterizes the gap between those who actively uses the Internet and the new media and those who has no connection to the Internet at all (Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). Such a digital division not only results in disparity in people's access to public services but also may strengthen the social injustice gap. Following Jordan et al. (2015), digital inclusion has to be a key factor for attention during the provision of digital public services to allow all citizens to avail the benefits on new technologies.

Secondly, it is true that the current and still-growing demand of digital services and the resource constraints experienced by public managers in managing such services emphasizes the complex contradictions between public expectations and the delivery of public services. As far as integrated and highly accessible service provision is concerned, it is essential to point out that despite citizens' expectations concerning easy, online delivery of public services, the infrastructural and resource capital to facilitate the actual provision of these services is frequently scarce. Such train operators' gap between expectations and capabilities points to a reality that is important to understand in the digital transformation planning and resourcing for public services. According to Heider et al. (2019), the outcomes of DGI and strategies rely not only within technology solutions but also the appropriate resources availabilities and public

institutions' capabilities in addressing these new technologies.

Political Instability and Governance

New policies and leadership also posed a major political factor and concern in the management of public services with the participants feeling overwhelmed by the changes. This view is supported by existing literature which acknowledges political volatility as a leading issue in public administration especially where institutional frameworks of governance are fragmented. The changes in the placement and funding's policy direction, as echoed by the participants, creates disruption, and less sustainable planning and delivery of services as noted by Alvarenga et al., (2020).

Other impediments pointed out by the participants include policies and regulations which make it even more difficult for organization to manage the public services in politically volatile regions. These findings are consistent with the studies by Devine-Wright (2020) that maintain that an overload of bureaucracy and numerous regulations become a source of innovation suppression and protraction of essential changes. The continuations of these barriers suggest a rather rigid system that is not easily flexible even with aimed changes where by even noble policies may find themselves entangled in procedural webs. Such conditions require a fundamental review of norms that govern public service administration to deliver efficient working conditions and avoid bureaucracy.

Moreover, the disconnect between political rhetoric and practical implementation, as expressed by participants, highlights a common issue in public administration: especially the one that exists between policy formulation and implementation. It is very often that public managers end up being responsible for the consequence of unsustainable political promises thus making those who are entrusted with the implementation of public policies feel frustrated and demoralized. However, this misalignment can reduce public's confidence in the system and make it even more difficult to deliver services as required. According to Aklin & Urpelainen (2018), there is a need for political executives' strategies to be better aligned with administrative capacity given the current challenges that are experienced in delivering public services.

Social Inequality and Community Engagement

Some of the major issues highlighted in the study include; Social inequality in public service delivery which is one of the most emerging problems in the society. The increased service inutilization, especially by the minorities, is a result of social relations that are evident in access to service delivery. Individuals' awareness about the efficient distribution of services correlates with the vast theoretical indices in the public administration concerning social justice, where social justice should be accessible to everyone, especially the marginalised due to diversities.

The engagement of the people in the community was accepted as a noble approach that needs to be taken in order to serve the people's needs and reduce inequality. However, as participants highlighted, community engagement issues are most of the time addressed in a secondary manner and not as an integral part of the decision making process. This finding is in support of Carattini et al. (2019) suggesting that its not enough to engage the community in the governance process, but must be done meaningfully. In order to speak meaningfully to social equity, public managers must embrace real community participation and incorporate citizens into the decision-making process as well as implementation of public services (Michels & De Graaf, 2010).

The gap between the rhetoric of inclusivity and the reality of implementation, as noted by participants, reflects a broader challenge in public administration: failing the implementation, the act of translating an idea into use remains a challenge. Whereas the goal of inclusiveness is frequently pursued, it can only be achieved through actions and which make demands on resources. This challenge is very evident and documented in the literature as scholars argue that

to attain social equity in the context of public services, it calls for commitment and investment or statement. Public managers must not only make gesture statements to address the inequalities but put efforts in place to apply policies which support social equity and inclusion such that all citizens are able to access the right services.

Economic Constraints and Innovation

Participants noted that restricted resources are a major problem in public service management since resources in such services are always scarce. This study supports previous studies on restriction of funds as one of the major challenges affecting the delivery of public services (Meuleman, 2021; Pascaris et al., 2020). However, it is evident from the study that the aforementioned constraints inform innovativeness since public managers are compelled to look for new ways of addressing the people's needs with limited resources (Osborne & Brown, 2011).

Participants often pointed to a need to get rid of economic limitations and challenges, this including proposals to use PPPs to access private sector funds and knowledge. This line of sight is further augmented by literature that suggests that PPPs could be useful in plugging gaps in funding of public services especially when properly managed. Yet, as the participants explained, these arrangements are not without their problems; with the issues such as conflict of interests and erosion of the public service ethos implicit in the process. These concerns have been voiced by the opponents of the PPPs that in addition to the needed finances, they may overemphasize the role of private benefit.

This inclusion of innovation as an approach to economic challenges brings out the possibility of new means of delivering public service. In that regard, participants also underlined the fact that innovation cannot replace the sufficient funding of activities. This is in concordance with the literature that there should be sufficient financial capital to support the innovation without compromising the capital's ability to fund other activities. There are several problems with the adoption of innovation as a cost-cutting measure where there are serious funding problems: the adoption of the concept brings in unsustainable practices that destabilise the service delivery standards of public services. Government and public managers have to therefore ensure that such solutions strategies are not only functional but also sustainable in the future.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implication of this research can best be described as very profound in the field of public service management as well as in policy formulation. First, there are existing essential requirements for an effective cybersecurity framework and policies as well as solutions for digital access restrictions imposed by technologies. Policy makers need to guarantee that digital transformation initiatives are inclusive, for any group of the society especially the marginalized one (Calzada, 2021; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). Second, political stability and regulations reforms are important pillars that provide a proper context of public service management. Policy makers should therefore seek to establish stable institutional framework for the provision of governance that will enhance long term planning and innovation in the public service delivery (Hill & Hupe, 2014).

Third, social inequality can only be solved, if people's engagement to the community and participation in governance processes increases again. A key challenge for public managers is to engage the citizen in design or delivery of public services to harmonise them with the expectations of several groups (Michels & De Graaf, 2010). Last but not the least, funding is also very important to complement the innovative process. The case is not an exception as it reveals that despite the processes of innovative activities, there is lack of sufficient funding in innovation. The governments should fashion out moderate policies in which the determination of higher impact innovations in public services delivery is accompanied by sound financial forecasts (Osborne & Brown, 2011).

CONCLUSION

This paper seeks to review and analyze the current global environment within which the delivery of public services takes place in order to identify challenges as well as opportunities for service delivery. The study shows that numerous opportunities are available through technological solutions to improve processes and involve the citizen. However, numerous complex issues arise from the adoption of technology processes as concerns cybersecurity, digital rights, and the distributions of resources. Uncertainty that comes with political interferences and regulatory constraints make service management in the public sector very challenging; it is also a climate where planning for the future and experimentation are nearly impossible. Despite the aforementioned progress, social inequality remains a major problem, implying that the society needs better and more efficient attempts in achieving engagement with a range of communities to improve their access to public services as well as call for participatory governance. Consequently, concern has been raised to argue that the economic realities which foster delivery creativity must be complemented with sufficient revenues to prevent degrading the quality of the service delivery.

Thus, the study underlines the necessity of the complex approach to the management of the public services, based on the technological, political, social, and financial factors. Therefore, there is need for policy formulation and implementation and public management to come up with sustainable structures that fit in the ever-shifting world. In this way, by paying much attention to the inclusive policies, by actively involving the communities and making sure that new technologies are suitable for everyone, the public service managers will be able to respond to the needs of the people whom they are serving rightfully. This research, therefore, underlines the need for more coherent, comprehensive, and participatory approaches to public service management that is high tech, collaboration, and sustainability considering the triple bottom line of social, economic, and environmental impacts.

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