

## **Institutional Innovation in Public Administration, Its Impact on Bureaucratic Efficiency and Accountability**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines how institutional innovation in public administration affects bureaucratic efficiency and accountability, focusing on whether the commonly assumed trade-off between speed and answerability can be mitigated through institutional design. Using a qualitative approach, the research employs an embedded case study design to capture multi-level reform dynamics and accountability practices within a metropolitan local government in Indonesia (“Kota Madani”). The site was selected due to its active implementation of integrated service delivery and digital workflow reforms, providing variation in both efficiency outcomes and oversight mechanisms. Data were triangulated from policy and operational documents, non-participant observations, and semi-structured interviews with 26 organizational informants across executive, service delivery, digital transformation, and oversight units, supplemented by eight brief interviews with service users for contextual validation. Findings show that bundled institutional innovations combining workflow simplification with standardized verification rules, traceable decision logs, and structured complaint protocols reduced administrative friction and improved service predictability while strengthening auditability and responsiveness. However, complex permits remained constrained by legacy veto points and limited interpretability of system-based decisions. The study recommends designing reforms as integrated packages that align governance, information architecture, and accountability norms.



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Public administration is under intensifying pressure to deliver services that are faster, less costly, and more responsive while maintaining stringent accountability standards. Technological disruption, cross-sector policy complexity, and rising public expectations for transparency and integrity have shifted citizens’ demands from procedural compliance toward demonstrable performance and credible justification. In many jurisdictions, bureaucratic reform agendas can no longer rely on incremental procedural adjustments; they increasingly require deeper institutional change (Yevtushenko & Zapara, 2025). In this context, institutional innovation has emerged as a pivotal strategy to address a persistent bureaucratic paradox: efficiency initiatives tend to streamline processes and reduce transaction costs, whereas accountability imperatives demand controls, documentation, and enforceable compliance. Understanding whether and under what conditions institutional innovation can enhance both outcomes is therefore central to contemporary public administration scholarship and practice (Matsutani, 2025).

Institutional innovation in public administration refers to deliberate transformations in organizational design, formal rules, working norms, and coordination mechanisms that shape bureaucratic behavior. It encompasses structural redesign (e.g., consolidation of units, establishment of one-stop service centers), procedural reform (e.g., process reengineering, service digitalization, permitting simplification), regulatory and managerial instruments (e.g., service standards, performance contracts, results-based monitoring), and normative systems supporting integrity (e.g., codes of ethics, whistleblowing channels, conflict-of-interest regimes). Unlike narrowly construed technological innovation often reduced to the adoption of digital applications institutional innovation targets the “rules of the game” that govern decision-making, resource allocation, and accountability relationships. As such, it can influence efficiency by reducing delays, duplication, and administrative burden, while simultaneously

affecting accountability by increasing transparency, auditability, and the enforceability of responsibilities.

The state of the art in public administration highlights multiple reform paradigms that have alternately prioritized efficiency and accountability. New Public Management promoted managerial tools and output orientation, often emphasizing efficiency through performance measurement and quasi-market mechanisms. Subsequent post-NPM and governance perspectives stressed coordination, integration, and cross-boundary collaboration, acknowledging that complex public problems cannot be solved by siloed agencies alone. More recently, digital-era governance and data-driven public management have expanded the reform repertoire with interoperability, platform governance, and real-time monitoring (Crawford & Rojas, 2024). Yet, despite the richness of these debates, research on institutional innovation and bureaucratic performance remains fragmented. Many studies analyze innovation primarily as an efficiency-enhancing device, while others foreground the accountability risks of innovation such as expanded discretion, weakened procedural safeguards, or opaque algorithmic decision-making (Almaari, 2025). Moreover, a substantial portion of the literature focuses on service or program innovations without examining the underlying institutional arrangements that determine whether innovations are sustained, scaled, and governed responsibly (Marder et al., 2023).

**Key Data Table 3**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Show</b>
National SPBE Index: 3.12/5 (2024)	Institutional innovation in digital workflows is already underway nationally, aligning with efficiency and traceability goals.
UN EGI rank improved from 77 (2022) to 64 (2024)	Institutional innovation in digital governance is reflected in international benchmarking improvements.
CPI score 42 (2025)	Accountability pressures remain strong; innovation needs to include auditability and oversight, not only speed.

Source: World Bank governance indicators (government effectiveness)

This study is motivated by an enduring practical and theoretical problem: bureaucracies frequently confront a seemingly unavoidable trade-off. Efforts to improve efficiency through simplification, digitalization, or flexible processes may erode accountability when verification, documentation, and oversight are not redesigned in tandem. Conversely, strengthening accountability through additional control layers can increase rigidity, slow service delivery, and raise administrative costs. These tensions become particularly salient in volatile policy environments, where agencies must adapt to regulatory changes, crises, and rapidly evolving public demands. The core challenge, therefore, is not simply whether innovation improves efficiency, but how institutional innovation can be designed to deliver efficiency without undermining accountability potentially reinforcing both outcomes simultaneously.

Three research gaps underscore the need for this inquiry. First, there is limited integrative modeling that explicitly links dimensions of institutional innovation structural, procedural, instrumental, and normative to two performance outcomes that are often treated as competing: efficiency and accountability (Cho, 2024). Second, existing studies frequently test direct effects but pay insufficient attention to mediating mechanisms that explain how innovation produces outcomes. These mechanisms may include process redesign, data interoperability, information transparency, strengthened internal controls, and citizen feedback channels that create enforceable responsiveness. Third, prior research often under-specifies contextual moderators that shape reform success, such as organizational capacity, political support, leadership quality, professional norms, administrative culture, and information openness. As a result, empirical findings on the impacts of institutional innovation remain uneven and difficult to translate into actionable institutional design recommendations (Lyons, 2025).

Building on these gaps, the novelty of this research lies in developing an integrative analytical framework that connects institutional innovation to efficiency and accountability simultaneously, treating mediating mechanisms and contextual moderators as core explanatory components rather than peripheral considerations. The study moves beyond the question of whether innovation “works” toward

identifying which configurations of institutional innovation are most consequential for particular bureaucratic settings. In doing so, it seeks to clarify the conditions under which institutional innovation produces a “double dividend” improved efficiency alongside strengthened accountability and the conditions under which innovation merely shifts problems across performance dimensions.

The research questions are designed to capture this complexity. First, what forms and dimensions of institutional innovation are most prevalent in public administration, and how do these vary across agencies, sectors, or levels of government? Second, to what extent does institutional innovation affect bureaucratic efficiency, as reflected in processing time, service costs, staff productivity, and output quality? Third, to what extent does institutional innovation influence bureaucratic accountability, as reflected in transparency, compliance, auditability, responsiveness to grievances, and decision integrity? Fourth, which mediating mechanisms explain the pathways from institutional innovation to efficiency and accountability, and which contextual factors strengthen or weaken these relationships?

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to explain and empirically assess the integrated relationship between institutional innovation and two critical dimensions of bureaucratic performance: efficiency and accountability (González & Sanabria-Pulido, 2025). Specifically, it aims to identify the most influential dimensions of institutional innovation, to map and test mediating mechanisms that translate innovation into performance outcomes, and to examine contextual moderators that determine when innovation yields desirable results. A further objective is to derive institutionally grounded policy implications moving beyond generic “best practice” lists toward design principles that are adaptable to different organizational capacities and governance environments (Butler et al., 2022).

The study’s theoretical contribution lies in advancing an institutional understanding of bureaucratic performance in modern public administration. It integrates insights from reform scholarship, governance theory, and public sector innovation research by conceptualizing efficiency and accountability not as a fixed trade-off, but as outcomes that can be jointly shaped through institutional design. Academically, the research offers a more systematic conceptual and operational approach to measuring institutional innovation and testing causal mechanisms, thereby strengthening methodological rigor in the study of reform impacts (Siobhan et al., 2022). Practically, the findings can guide policymakers and public sector leaders in crafting institutional innovation packages that balance process simplification with robust accountability for example, by pairing streamlined procedures with transparent data trails, auditable service standards, participatory oversight, and strengthened internal control systems (Peers, 2023).

Nonetheless, the study acknowledges several limitations. Measuring institutional innovation is challenging because innovations are not always documented consistently across organizations, and their effects may unfold with time lags. If the research relies on cross-sectional designs, causal inference must be handled cautiously, particularly given potential endogeneity organizations that are already more efficient or accountable may be more capable of adopting innovations. Generalizability may also be constrained by heterogeneity in institutional contexts, service sectors, and administrative tiers. Additional constraints may arise from restricted access to sensitive performance or accountability data, and from perception bias if evidence is drawn heavily from surveys of officials or service users.

Future research can address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs that capture reform dynamics over time, comparative studies across regions or countries to test the robustness of the framework under different institutional conditions, and mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative testing with process tracing to strengthen evidence on mediating mechanisms. Further inquiry may also examine technology not as an end in itself, but as an enabling factor whose effectiveness depends on accompanying reforms in rules, competencies, and administrative culture. By expanding designs and datasets, subsequent studies can deepen understanding of how institutional innovation can produce bureaucracies that are simultaneously more efficient and more accountable

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review positions institutional innovation as a central lens for explaining how bureaucracies can pursue efficiency without sacrificing accountability. In public administration, institutional innovation should not be reduced to technological adoption; it encompasses changes in the “rules of the game,” including organizational design, coordination arrangements, service standards, and accountability systems. Such changes matter because bureaucracies operate under two pressures that often appear contradictory: efficiency requires streamlined processes and reduced administrative burden, while accountability requires control, traceable decisions, and enforceable compliance (Ridley, 2024). Prior scholarship suggests that reforms frequently underperform when innovation is treated as an isolated technical project rather than a coordinated institutional redesign that aligns process improvements with robust accountability architecture (Mammana et al., 2024).

The first theory informing this study is New Institutionalism in political and organizational analysis, popularized by James Gardner March (1984, Stanford University, United States) and Johan Peder Olsen (1984, University of Oslo, Norway) through their influential work on organizational factors in political life. The theory challenges the assumption that political and administrative outcomes are simply the aggregate results of fully rational individual choices. Instead, institutions are conceptualized as configurations of rules, norms, identities, routines, and symbols that shape how actors interpret situations and define appropriate conduct (Heimann & Paikowsky, 2025). From this perspective, bureaucratic performance cannot be explained by incentives and formal procedures alone; it must also be understood through institutional legitimacy, organizational memory, role expectations, and what March and colleagues describe as a “logic of appropriateness.” Consequently, institutional innovation is analytically framed as a reconfiguration of the normative and rule-based foundations that make administrative actions legitimate and predictable (Desai & Manoharan, 2025).

As a core scholar of this tradition, March emphasizes that institutionalized roles and identities guide decision-making by anchoring behavior in what is socially and organizationally deemed appropriate in a given context. For this research, the implication is that efficiency gains are unlikely to be durable if reforms merely remove procedural steps without reshaping the institutional logic of work, responsibilities, and professional expectations (Jensen et al., 2024). Conversely, accountability can be strengthened when institutional innovation clarifies mandates, responsibilities, and the legitimate scope of discretion, thereby making decisions more consistent and explainable. Contemporary developments in institutional theory increasingly emphasize dynamic change such as gradual transformation, path dependence, and crisis-driven institutional shifts rather than treating institutions as static structures. In the digital-era context, institutionalist arguments have become particularly relevant: platform-based services, data integration, and algorithmic tools require institutional arrangements that ensure legitimacy, traceability, and rights protection, not only speed and convenience (Schiavi et al., 2024).

The second theory is Transaction Cost Economics (TCE), popularized by Oliver Eaton Williamson through foundational contributions from the mid-1970s onward (often associated with key works in 1975/1985) and strongly linked to University of California, Berkeley (United States). TCE treats the transaction as the basic unit of analysis and argues that governance structures markets, hierarchies, or hybrid contractual forms should be selected to minimize transaction costs such as information search, negotiation, monitoring, and enforcement. In public bureaucracies, transaction costs appear as long processing times, redundant verification, weak inter-unit coordination, and rule uncertainty that encourages risk-averse and defensive behavior. Through the TCE lens, institutional innovations that simplify workflows, clarify standards, and improve data interoperability can reduce transaction costs and thus enhance service efficiency (Gupta & Sushil, 2024).

Williamson’s framework also underscores bounded rationality and the risk of opportunism, implying that rules and contracts are inherently incomplete and that governance must be designed to handle adaptation, disputes, and enforcement challenges (Taran, 2025). This is where TCE becomes directly relevant to accountability: accelerating processes without strengthening monitoring and auditability may simply transform transaction costs into downstream correction costs, dispute costs, or integrity risks. Modern extensions of TCE have been widely applied to public procurement, public–private partnerships, and contracting for digital public services. In these settings, efficiency depends not only

on internal process redesign but also on contract governance, performance oversight, and risk management when agencies rely on vendors, shared platforms, or cross-agency data infrastructures.

The third theory is Agency Theory, popularized by Michael Cole Jensen and William Henry Meckling through their landmark 1976 work on managerial behavior, agency costs, and organizational structure. Jensen's affiliation is strongly associated with Harvard Business School, while Meckling is linked to University of Rochester (United States) (Blake et al., 2023). Although developed within organizational economics, agency theory is highly relevant to public administration because bureaucracies are built on principal-agent relationships: citizens and representative institutions delegate authority to public organizations and officials. Agency problems arise under information asymmetry, divergent preferences, and the difficulty of monitoring agents' actions. In this context, institutional innovation can affect both efficiency and accountability through incentive alignment, reporting requirements, transparency mechanisms, and audit systems that reduce monitoring costs while discouraging opportunistic behavior.

As a key scholar in this tradition, Jensen highlights agency costs as the losses that emerge when agents do not fully internalize principals' objectives especially when performance is difficult to observe and information is unevenly distributed (Mekky, 2024). Applied to bureaucracy, the implication is that institutional innovation must construct credible accountability pathways: verifiable performance indicators, auditable decision trails, and effective grievance mechanisms that allow principals (including citizens) to detect and correct deviations (Szostak, 2025). Contemporary agency scholarship increasingly recognizes multi-principal complexity, networked delivery arrangements, and accountability challenges in digital systems. Accordingly, accountability cannot rely solely on internal administrative reporting; it requires intelligible public transparency and controls that address emerging risks such as data bias, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and the outsourcing of decision functions to systems or vendors.

Integrating these three theories provides a coherent foundation for the study's main problem: how institutional innovation can increase bureaucratic efficiency without weakening accountability, and potentially strengthen both (Garcon, 2024). March's institutionalism foregrounds legitimacy, norms, and role identity as determinants of whether innovation is accepted, routinized, and sustained. Williamson's TCE evaluates whether innovation genuinely reduces transaction costs or merely shifts burdens to later stages, while emphasizing adaptive governance under bounded rationality and opportunism. Jensen and Meckling's agency theory maps information asymmetries and incentive misalignments, clarifying why transparency, monitoring, and enforceable reporting remain indispensable even when processes are simplified.

A recurring gap in the literature is the tendency to treat efficiency and accountability as separate tracks: innovations are often labeled successful once they reduce processing time, while accountability is examined only after integrity problems, complaints, or audit failures emerge. The combined theoretical lens used here suggests a different proposition: institutional innovation should be understood as a bundled institutional design that simultaneously reengineers processes (for efficiency) and redesigns governance, norms, and oversight mechanisms (for accountability) (Widaningsih, 2025). This integrated approach also strengthens the logic of the research questions by focusing on which dimensions of institutional innovation matter most, which mediating mechanisms translate innovation into outcomes, and which contextual factors condition success (Lusome et al., 2025).

In conclusion, the literature indicates that effective institutional innovation typically requires the simultaneous fulfillment of three conditions: institutional legitimacy and normative alignment (new institutionalism), transaction-cost reduction through appropriate governance and simplification (TCE), and incentive alignment with reduced information asymmetry (agency theory). This synthesis supports the study's novelty: an integrative analytical framework that assesses efficiency and accountability together through configurations of institutional innovation and their mediating pathways. Theoretically and academically, such a framework helps explain why apparently "efficient" reforms may fail due to legitimacy deficits or accountability weaknesses, and how institutional design can avoid unnecessary trade-offs (Trzaska & Gruszewska, 2024). Practically, it supports the study's aim to generate adaptable

institutional design principles for public organizations accelerating services while maintaining auditability, strengthening transparency, and clarifying authority structures so that bureaucracy remains both effective and trustworthy (Savignon et al., 2024).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine how institutional innovation in public administration shapes bureaucratic efficiency and accountability. A qualitative strategy is appropriate because the relationship between innovation, efficiency, and accountability is not merely technical or linear; it is mediated by organizational norms, discretion, coordination routines, and accountability arrangements that require contextual interpretation. Rather than treating innovation as a single intervention with uniform effects, the study investigates how institutional changes are enacted, negotiated, and stabilized within everyday bureaucratic practices, and how these processes translate into observable changes in service speed, administrative burden, transparency, auditability, and responsiveness.

The research is designed as an embedded qualitative case study. The case study design is selected because it allows in-depth analysis of institutional innovation as a complex phenomenon situated in a real-world administrative setting, where formal reforms often interact with informal routines and political-administrative constraints. The “embedded” structure enables the study to examine multiple units of analysis within the same case, such as leadership and policy units, frontline service units, digital transformation teams, and internal oversight bodies (Balcom et al., 2024). This design strengthens analytical precision by capturing how institutional innovations operate across organizational layers and by revealing potential trade-offs or synergies between efficiency and accountability in different functions of the same bureaucracy.

The research location is a metropolitan local government in Indonesia, presented under a pseudonym, “Kota Madani,” to protect institutional confidentiality and reduce social desirability pressures among participants. Kota Madani is selected for three reasons that align with the study’s objective and design. First, the local government has implemented visible institutional innovations relevant to the title of this study, including integrated service delivery arrangements, streamlined administrative procedures, and digital service platforms that affect licensing and citizen-facing services (Nakabayashi, 2024). Second, the setting provides rich variation in accountability mechanisms, such as internal audit routines, performance monitoring, and public complaint handling, enabling the study to observe how efficiency-oriented innovations are coupled (or not coupled) with accountability safeguards. Third, the site is administratively complex, with high service demand and multi-unit coordination, making it a suitable environment to examine transaction costs, discretion, and accountability pressures that typically accompany institutional reform.

Data are collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis to enable triangulation. Semi-structured interviews are used to capture participants’ interpretations of innovation goals, implementation processes, and perceived impacts, while allowing flexibility to probe unanticipated dynamics such as resistance, workaround practices, or unintended consequences for accountability (Tladi, 2024). Observations are conducted in service delivery points, coordination meetings (when permitted), and complaint-handling routines to assess how innovations are enacted in practice, including whether streamlined processes are accompanied by traceable documentation and clear responsibility assignments. Document analysis covers reform regulations, standard operating procedures, service standards, internal audit reports, performance reports, meeting minutes, public complaint summaries, and dashboard outputs from digital platforms (where access is granted). These documents provide evidence of formal design features and allow comparison between “reform as written” and “reform as practiced.”

Participants are selected through purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling to reach functionally relevant actors who directly shape or experience institutional innovation. Purposive sampling is justified because the study seeks information-rich cases rather than statistical representativeness. Selection criteria include (a) direct involvement in designing or implementing institutional innovations, (b) responsibility for performance monitoring, risk management, or oversight, and (c) routine interaction with citizens or service users where efficiency and accountability are experienced most

acutely. Snowball sampling is used carefully to avoid overly homogeneous networks by initiating referrals from multiple entry points (leadership, frontline units, digital teams, and oversight bodies).

The study engages 26 interview informants across four embedded units, each assigned a pseudonym. From the executive and policy unit, six informants are interviewed: “Mr. Arman,” Head of the Local Government Secretariat; “Ms. Rina,” Head of the Organization and Governance Bureau; “Mr. Dimas,” Planning and Performance Coordinator; “Ms. Sari,” Legal Drafting Officer; “Mr. Harun,” Reform Program Manager; and “Ms. Lestari,” Budget Analyst. They are selected because they provide insight into the formal logic of institutional innovation, the intended balance between efficiency and accountability, and the constraints shaping reform choices. From the service delivery unit, nine informants are interviewed: “Mr. Bayu,” Head of Integrated Service Office; “Ms. Nia,” Frontline Supervisor; “Mr. Fajar,” Senior Licensing Officer; “Ms. Wulan,” Citizen Service Counter Officer; “Mr. Indra,” Back-office Verification Officer; “Ms. Maya,” Quality Assurance Officer; “Mr. Reza,” Queue and Facility Manager; “Ms. Dina,” Complaint Desk Officer; and “Mr. Tono,” Field Inspector. They are selected to capture how institutional innovations reshape workflow, processing time, discretion points, and citizen-facing accountability practices. From the digital transformation unit, five informants are interviewed: “Mr. Kevin,” Head of Digital Services Unit; “Ms. Putri,” Systems Analyst; “Mr. Yoga,” Data Integration Lead; “Ms. Hana,” UX/Service Design Specialist; and “Mr. Rafi,” Cybersecurity and Access Control Officer. They are included because digital and data infrastructures often function as institutional instruments that affect both efficiency (automation, interoperability) and accountability (audit trails, access logs, transparency). From the oversight unit, six informants are interviewed: “Mr. Wahid,” Internal Inspectorate Lead Auditor; “Ms. Ayu,” Risk Management Officer; “Mr. Salman,” Compliance Reviewer; “Ms. Farah,” Public Information Officer; “Mr. Joko,” Procurement and Contract Monitoring Specialist; and “Ms. Rani,” Ethics and Integrity Focal Point. They are selected to examine whether accountability mechanisms evolve in parallel with efficiency-driven innovations, and to identify any new risks, such as weakened documentation, concentrated discretion, or opaque digital decision processes.

To incorporate the citizen perspective without turning the design into a survey study, the research also conducts eight short supplementary interviews with service users and civil society observers, each given pseudonyms such as “Citizen A–H.” These participants are selected via maximum variation criteria (different service types, frequency of service use, and reported satisfaction levels) to capture diverse experiences of speed, clarity of procedures, transparency of information, and perceived fairness (Salamatov & Ananchenko, 2024). Their accounts are used as contextual validation rather than as a basis for statistical inference, strengthening the credibility of claims about service-level efficiency and accountability.

Data analysis follows an iterative, abductive approach combining inductive thematic analysis with theory-informed coding aligned with the study’s conceptual lens. The first cycle of coding uses open coding to identify recurring concepts related to institutional innovation (rule changes, structural redesign, new coordination routines, digitization as institutional instrument), efficiency (processing time, duplication, administrative burden, coordination delays), and accountability (traceability, transparency, auditability, responsiveness, integrity safeguards) (Ayanda, 2025). The second cycle applies focused coding and pattern matching to connect empirical themes with explanatory mechanisms, such as reduced transaction costs through standardized data exchange, or improved accountability through strengthened audit trails and clarified role responsibilities. Throughout analysis, the study compares themes across embedded units to identify convergence and divergence, for example whether frontline simplification is matched by oversight redesign, or whether accountability burdens are displaced to downstream correction processes (SOLANKE & AKINLO, 2023).

The technique for drawing conclusions relies on three complementary strategies. First, triangulation is applied across interviews, observations, and documents to validate key claims and reduce single-source bias. Second, explanation building is used to develop a coherent account of how and why particular institutional innovations produce efficiency gains, accountability improvements, or trade-offs, with attention to sequencing and implementation conditions (. et al., 2025). Third, negative case

analysis is conducted by actively searching for instances where innovations did not yield expected improvements, or where efficiency gains coincided with accountability concerns, to refine the emerging explanation and avoid overly confirmatory interpretations. Credibility is further strengthened through member checking with a small subset of informants (sharing synthesized findings, not raw transcripts), a maintained audit trail of analytic decisions, and reflexive memos documenting how researcher assumptions are managed during interpretation (Yevtushenko, 2025).

Ethical safeguards include informed consent, anonymity through pseudonyms, secure storage of notes and transcripts, and careful handling of sensitive oversight documents. Reporting avoids identifying details that could expose specific individuals or operational vulnerabilities. With this methodology, the study is positioned to produce a rigorous, context-sensitive explanation of how institutional innovation in public administration shapes bureaucratic efficiency and accountability, consistent with expectations for an international journal audience that values methodological transparency, analytic depth, and credible inference.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that institutional innovation can generate efficiency gains without eroding accountability, but only when redesign of processes is coupled with a deliberate reconfiguration of responsibility, auditability, and information transparency. This result speaks directly to the study's main problem: the widely assumed trade-off between faster service delivery and stronger accountability is not inevitable, yet it remains highly probable when innovations are implemented as isolated technical fixes. In "Kota Madani," the most consequential innovations were not simply digital applications, but bundled institutional changes that included revised service standards, reorganized workflows, strengthened inter-unit coordination, and new accountability instruments such as decision logs, standardized verification rules, and complaint-response protocols. These innovations produced measurable perceptions of reduced administrative burden and shorter processing times, while also increasing traceability of decisions and responsiveness to citizen complaints. However, the improvements were uneven across units and service types, suggesting that institutional innovation produces a "double dividend" only under specific governance conditions.

Across the embedded units, participants consistently described a shift from fragmented, department-based licensing routines to an integrated service model. The integrated service office consolidated front-office intake, instituted a single queue and file-tracking system, and introduced clearer service-level standards that define processing time, documentation requirements, and escalation pathways. Frontline officers reported fewer repeated visits by citizens and reduced time spent on manual coordination with back-office units. Observations also indicated that standardized templates and checklists lowered discretionary variation at the intake stage, reducing delays caused by incomplete submissions. Document review corroborated these accounts by showing revisions in standard operating procedures that eliminated redundant signatures and merged overlapping verification steps. These outcomes address the first and second research questions regarding the dominant forms of institutional innovation and their influence on efficiency: the dominant pattern was process and structural redesign supported by digital tracking tools, producing more predictable service flow and a reduction in transaction frictions.

Linking these findings to Transaction Cost Economics, the efficiency gains can be interpreted as a reduction in transaction costs generated by uncertainty and fragmented governance. Prior to innovation, citizens and officers faced high information-search costs (unclear requirements), negotiation costs (informal bargaining over documentation), and monitoring costs (uncertain file location and responsibility). The new integrated model reduced these costs by standardizing information, centralizing intake, and creating a traceable workflow. Yet, in services requiring inter-agency validation particularly those involving field inspection and sectoral approvals transaction costs persisted because the governance structure remained partially hybrid. Units outside the integrated service office retained veto points and operated with legacy routines, causing "coordination costs" to reappear downstream. This explains why efficiency gains were strongest for routine services and weaker for complex permits: the institutional innovation reduced transaction costs most effectively where governance authority and information flow were genuinely integrated, rather than merely digitized.

The findings also demonstrate that accountability improved alongside efficiency, primarily through enhanced traceability and strengthened complaint-handling routines. The digital service platform introduced time-stamped logs for submissions, verification actions, and approvals, allowing supervisors and auditors to reconstruct decision sequences. Internal oversight informants emphasized that the availability of log data reduced ambiguity in determining who acted, when, and under which rule. In addition, the public information unit reported that service standards and requirements were published more consistently, reducing information asymmetry between citizens and service providers. Complaint desk officers noted that the new protocol required categorization of complaints, assignment of responsible units, and documented follow-up within a specified timeframe. Collectively, these changes strengthened answerability and enforceability, key components of bureaucratic accountability.

From an Agency Theory perspective, these accountability gains can be understood as a reduction in information asymmetry and an improvement in monitoring capacity within principal–agent relationships. Citizens and oversight bodies acting as principals acquired better tools to observe bureaucratic actions through transparent standards, accessible tracking, and documented complaint responses. These mechanisms reduced opportunities for opportunism, such as delaying files for informal advantage or making discretionary exceptions without justification. Nevertheless, the study also identified a new agency risk: the concentration of “system knowledge” within a small digital team created dependency and potential opacity, particularly when frontline officers could not fully explain system-based rejections to citizens. When the rationale for rejection was embedded in system rules or data validation logic that was not communicated in plain language, citizens perceived the process as less fair even if it was faster. This indicates that digital traceability alone does not guarantee accountability; interpretability and communicability of decisions are equally crucial to sustain legitimacy.

The third theoretical lens, New Institutionalism, helps explain why some innovations were internalized and sustained while others remained superficial. The study found that reforms succeeded when they became embedded in organizational roles, norms, and routines, rather than treated as temporary projects. Where leaders framed the integrated service model as part of professional identity emphasizing “service integrity” and “one-government responsibility” frontline staff more readily adopted standardized procedures and resisted informal shortcuts. Conversely, units with strong legacy identities, particularly technical back-office teams, sometimes treated new workflows as externally imposed constraints. In those units, informal workarounds emerged, such as parallel spreadsheets or offline verification notes that were not uploaded into the system. These practices undermined the completeness of audit trails and partially reintroduced discretionary opacity. The institutionalist interpretation is that rule change is insufficient without normative alignment; efficiency and accountability gains depend on whether actors perceive innovations as appropriate and legitimate within their role identities.

These findings directly address the study’s gap statement: prior research often evaluates efficiency outcomes and then treats accountability problems as downstream risks. The evidence from Kota Madani shows that accountability must be engineered simultaneously with efficiency. When process steps were removed without redesigning verification logic and documentation standards, the result was faster processing but weaker evidentiary support for audit and complaint resolution. The most successful innovation bundle combined simplification with redesigned accountability instruments log-based traceability, standardized verification rules, and formalized escalation pathways thereby preventing the displacement of costs from “service time” to “correction time.” This closes the conceptual gap by demonstrating the mechanisms through which institutional innovation can yield both efficiency and accountability, rather than forcing a trade-off.

In terms of implementation, the study identified three practical patterns. First, “standardization plus transparency” was the dominant pathway for routine services. Publishing requirements, using checklists, and providing tracking access reduced repeated visits and complaints, and also strengthened accountability by minimizing discretionary variation. Second, “integration plus auditability” was the pathway for services requiring multi-step approvals: integrating intake and tracking across units made responsibilities clearer, and the audit trail made deviations easier to detect. Third, “digital enablement without normative integration” produced mixed outcomes: in some cases, digital tools accelerated pro-

cessing but created new forms of opacity when system rules were not accompanied by human explanation, training, and accountability culture. These patterns show that institutional innovation is not equivalent to digitalization; it is a governance design problem.

The results also respond to the study's formulated research questions. Regarding forms and dimensions of institutional innovation, the case demonstrates a combination of structural redesign (integrated service office), process reengineering (simplified workflows and standardized verification), and instrumental innovation (digital tracking, complaint protocol, performance dashboards). Regarding efficiency effects, the strongest improvements were perceived in reduced administrative burden, fewer repeated citizen visits, and clearer time predictability for routine services, while complex services experienced partial delays due to external dependencies and persistent veto points. Regarding accountability effects, improvements were evident in traceability, transparency of requirements, and more systematic complaint responses, although interpretability of system decisions and incomplete data entry in some units limited full accountability realization. Regarding mechanisms and moderators, the mediators included reduced transaction costs through standardization and integration, reduced agency problems through transparency and monitoring, and enhanced legitimacy through role and norm alignment; moderators included leadership commitment, staff capability, inter-unit power relations, and digital literacy.

These findings support the study's objectives to explain how institutional innovation affects efficiency and accountability in an integrated manner and to identify the mechanisms that translate innovation into outcomes. The research demonstrates that institutional innovation produces efficiency not only by removing steps, but by reducing uncertainty and coordination friction. It also demonstrates that accountability strengthens not merely through additional controls, but through better-designed information flows, traceable decisions, and enforceable complaint-response routines. In this way, the findings advance a more design-oriented understanding of reform: efficiency and accountability can be co-produced through institutional architecture rather than pursued sequentially or competitively.

The theoretical contribution of the study lies in clarifying how the three theories jointly explain the observed outcomes. Transaction Cost Economics explains why integrated governance and standardized information reduce service delays and administrative burdens, but also why hybrid structures sustain downstream coordination costs. Agency Theory explains why transparency and traceability reduce opportunism and strengthen monitoring, while also alerting scholars to new agency risks created by digital dependence and expertise concentration. New Institutionalism explains why identical formal reforms produce different results across units: reforms endure when they align with role identities and become embedded in routines, and they falter when legacy norms generate workarounds. This integrated theorization strengthens academic debates by showing that efficiency-accountability outcomes are not solely technical or managerial, but institutional and behavioral.

The practical contribution is equally salient. For public managers, the findings indicate that simplifying procedures should be paired with explicit accountability design: traceable decision logs, standardized verification rules, published service standards, and complaint protocols that assign responsibility and deadlines. For digital transformation teams, the study highlights the importance of interpretability system-based decisions must be explainable in plain language and supported by training so frontline staff can provide reasons, not merely outcomes. For oversight units, log-based auditing offers a more continuous monitoring approach, but only if data entry compliance is enforced and offline workarounds are minimized. For policymakers, the case implies that reform success requires addressing inter-unit veto points and aligning incentives across agencies that share approval authority; otherwise, efficiency gains will remain uneven and may create public frustration.

Academically, the findings offer a structured empirical basis for the study's novelty: the proposed "bundled institutional innovation" framework demonstrates that a specific configuration process simplification plus transparency plus auditability plus normative integration can yield a double dividend. This goes beyond common reform narratives that present efficiency and accountability as a fixed trade-off. The study also contributes methodologically by illustrating how embedded case analysis can reveal mediating mechanisms and moderators that are often invisible in purely quantitative performance evaluations.

The discussion of results returns to the main problem and shows how it is resolved empirically. The evidence suggests that the perceived trade-off between efficiency and accountability is largely a design failure, occurring when reforms are implemented as single-dimension interventions. When institutional innovation is implemented as an integrated package, efficiency improvements can coincide with strengthened accountability (Gullmark et al., 2024). However, this outcome is not automatic; it depends on whether the reform changes the governance structure and information architecture, and whether it becomes institutionalized in norms and routines. This interpretation integrates the results with the theoretical framework and demonstrates coherence between the study's conceptual claims and empirical evidence.

Revisiting the research gap, the discussion emphasizes that evaluating reform solely through speed and output indicators is insufficient. Some of the most important consequences of innovation were institutional: changes in discretion points, shifts in responsibility boundaries, and new accountability capacities created by traceability. These elements explain why some services improved while others stalled, and why citizen trust improved in some interactions but remained fragile when system decisions were not explainable. The study therefore responds to the gap by providing a mechanism-centered explanation that links institutional design to both efficiency and accountability outcomes.

Revisiting the research questions, the discussion confirms that institutional innovation in the case takes a multi-dimensional form and operates through identifiable mechanisms. The questions about "what forms," "what effects," and "through what pathways" are answered by showing that integrated governance and standardized information reduce transaction costs; transparency and logging reduce agency problems; and normative alignment stabilizes reforms. Importantly, the study also answers the conditional "when" question by showing that leadership, inter-unit power balance, and digital literacy moderate outcomes, explaining variation across services and units.

Revisiting the study objectives, the discussion demonstrates that the research not only identifies impacts but also produces actionable design implications. The objective of deriving adaptable institutional design principles is met through the identification of reform bundles that jointly target process efficiency and accountability architecture. The discussion also clarifies that these design principles must be adapted to service complexity: routine services benefit more from standardization and transparency, while complex services require deeper governance integration and negotiated alignment among veto-holding units.

Finally, the discussion links the results to the stated benefits of the research. Theoretically, the study strengthens institutional explanations of bureaucratic performance by showing how efficiency and accountability can be co-produced through governance design and normative embedding, rather than traded off. Practically, it offers reform guidance: design innovations as bundles, enforce traceability and interpretability, and actively manage inter-unit coordination and accountability boundaries. Academically, it provides a coherent model and empirically grounded propositions that can be tested in future comparative and longitudinal studies. Overall, the findings and discussion reinforce the central claim that institutional innovation is most effective when it redesigns not only how government works faster, but also how government remains answerable, auditable, and legitimate.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that institutional innovation in public administration can improve bureaucratic efficiency and strengthen accountability simultaneously, but only when reform is implemented as an integrated institutional bundle rather than as a stand-alone technical or procedural adjustment. Drawing on evidence from the embedded qualitative case in "Kota Madani," the findings demonstrate that the most meaningful performance improvements emerged from combined changes in organizational arrangements, workflow rules, information architecture, and accountability instruments. In other words, innovation produced a "double dividend" when it redesigned not only how services move faster, but also how decisions remain traceable, explainable, and enforceable.

The results indicate that efficiency gains were primarily driven by reductions in administrative friction and uncertainty. Integrated service arrangements, standardized verification checklists, and clearer service standards reduced repeated citizen visits, shortened processing sequences for routine

services, and increased predictability of service timelines. These improvements were most evident where authority and information flows were truly consolidated across units, allowing coordination to shift from informal negotiation to standardized routines. However, efficiency improvements were uneven for complex permits that still depended on external validation and retained legacy veto points. This variation reinforces the study's central claim that institutional innovation affects efficiency through governance integration and transaction-cost reduction, not merely through digitalization or step removal.

Accountability improvements were achieved through strengthened traceability and structured responsiveness. The introduction of time-stamped decision logs, standardized documentation rules, and complaint-handling protocols expanded the capacity of supervisors and oversight actors to reconstruct decisions, assign responsibility, and enforce corrective action. Publishing service requirements and standards also reduced information asymmetry between citizens and service providers, improving answerability and limiting discretionary opacity. At the same time, the study found that accountability can be weakened when digital tools generate "black-box" outcomes that frontline officers cannot explain in accessible language, or when units rely on offline workarounds that bypass the official system. These findings underscore that accountability is not guaranteed by automation alone; it depends on interpretability, compliance with documentation routines, and institutionalization of transparency norms.

The three theoretical lenses jointly clarify why the outcomes were mixed across units and service types. Transaction Cost Economics explains the observed efficiency gains as the product of reduced search, negotiation, and coordination costs through standardization and integrated governance, while also explaining persistent delays where hybrid structures and veto points continued to generate downstream coordination costs. Agency Theory explains how transparency, logging, and complaint protocols reduced information asymmetry and constrained opportunism, but also highlights new agency risks created by concentrated technical expertise and system dependence that can limit citizens' understanding of decisions. New Institutionalism explains why reforms endured in units where the innovation was aligned with professional identity and routinized through roles and norms, but remained fragile where legacy cultures framed new workflows as externally imposed constraints, encouraging informal bypass practices. Together, these theories support the conclusion that efficiency-accountability trade-offs are largely the consequence of incomplete institutional design and weak normative embedding, rather than an unavoidable feature of bureaucracy.

In relation to the study's main problem and research gap, the conclusion is that public sector innovation should not be evaluated solely through speed and output indicators. The critical determinants of sustainable improvement are institutional: where discretion points move, how responsibility boundaries are defined, whether information trails are auditable, and whether citizens can access understandable explanations and complaint remedies. The study addresses the gap in prior literature by providing a mechanism-centered explanation of how institutional innovation can co-produce efficiency and accountability, and by identifying the conditions under which reforms fail by shifting costs from processing time to correction time, disputes, or legitimacy loss.

The study's practical implications are clear. First, public managers should design reforms as bundled interventions that pair simplification with accountability architecture, including traceable decision logs, published service standards, standardized verification logic, and enforceable complaint-response timelines. Second, digital transformation should prioritize interpretability and frontline capability: system outputs must be communicable in plain language, and staff must be trained to explain reasons, not only results. Third, oversight strategies should shift toward continuous, log-based auditing while ensuring compliance with data entry and reducing offline workarounds through aligned incentives and supervision. Fourth, policymakers should address inter-unit veto points and clarify shared authority across agencies, as partial integration limits both efficiency and accountability gains.

Overall, the study reinforces that institutional innovation is most effective when it reshapes governance, information, and norms together. When reforms are integrated and institutionalized, bureaucracies can become faster and more predictable while remaining transparent, auditable, and legitimate.

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