

Learning from Public Administration Reform: A Comparative Study of South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand for Indonesia

Oscar Radian Danar^{1*}, Maulidya Maghfiro²

¹Public Administration, Faculty of Administrative Science, Brawijaya University, Indonesia
Jl. MT. Haryono 163, Malang 65145, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

²Center of Policy and Development Studies, Indonesia
Jl. Tirto Agung No.1 Perum. Latansa Merjosari, Kota Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

*Email Corresponding: oscar@ub.ac.id

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Abstract: The present article attempts to compare the public administration reforms in South Korea, Singapore and New Zealand and draws lessons for Indonesia. This research used a qualitative approach through literature studies with purposive sampling techniques and interactive analysis. This study compares reform orientations, institutional mechanism, enabling conditions, and reform trade-offs across the three countries. The findings reveal distinct reform pathways: South Korea emphasize performance management and digital governance, Singapore relies on meritocracy and institutional integrity, while New Zealand highlights managerial autonomy and result-based accountability. Despite these differences, sustainable reform across the three cases is associated with institutional capacity, political commitment, professional administration, accountability, and the adaptive use of technology. For Indonesia, these experiences suggest adaptation rather than replication, as reform principles and institutional mechanism need to be adjusted to domestic administrative, political, territorial, and institutional conditions. The study contributes to comparative public administration by shifting the emphasis from best practices learning toward contextual institutional learning.

1. Introduction

Public administration reform has become a critical issue in contemporary governance, as governments face increasing demands to strengthen administrative capacity, improve public service delivery, enhance accountability, and adapt public institutions to digital transformation (Amin et al., 2024; Hammerschmid et al., 2024). Different countries have developed different approaches to reform according to each country's political, economic, and social conditions. South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand are examples of countries that have succeeded in improving bureaucratic performance. South Korea is known for its digital transformation of government and the integration of technology in public administration, which drives the efficiency and transformation of public services (Yoon, 2024). The state of Singa-

pore stands out in public sector innovations based on national contexts, including the use of technology, big data, and evidence-based policies in decision-making (Cinar et al., 2024). Meanwhile, New Zealand has managed to be a pioneer in the implementation of the New Public Management paradigm that emphasizes efficiency, accountability, and results-based management in the public sector (Scott et al., 2023). The success of the three countries shows that bureaucratic reform that is systematically designed and supported by strong political commitment can result in a transformation of good governance.

Comparative public administration provides an important framework for understanding variations in governmental and administrative systems across countries (Mozin et al., 2025). The comparative approach identifies key success factors, including institutional design, performance management systems, as well as human resource capacity. Based on the latest literature, public sector reform cannot be separated from global dynamics such as digital governance, public sector innovation, as well as organizational capacity building in the face of complex challenges. This transformation occurs in the context of the emergence of a hybrid world, which is a condition where the physical and digital worlds are increasingly integrated through the use of technology, digital processes, and the abundance of data and information that affects various aspects of life (Ossewaarde, 2019). In this hybrid world, the bureaucracy has built a new system that not only integrates responsibilities but also by learning from best practices and challenges in different countries. Hybrid world Bureaucracy teaches about transformation, which is how the bureaucracy modifies the way they think, work, and interact (Kusumasari et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, public administration reform has become a national priority agenda that continues to be pushed through various policies, such as bureaucratic reform and the development of an electronic-based government system. Despite progress, various indicators show that the effectiveness of Indonesia's bureaucracy is still in the middle category and faces structural challenges, such as the quality of human resources, non-meritocratic practices, and the lack of optimal integration of digital transformation. This shows that the reforms carried out still require a more comprehensive, integrated, and sustainable approach.

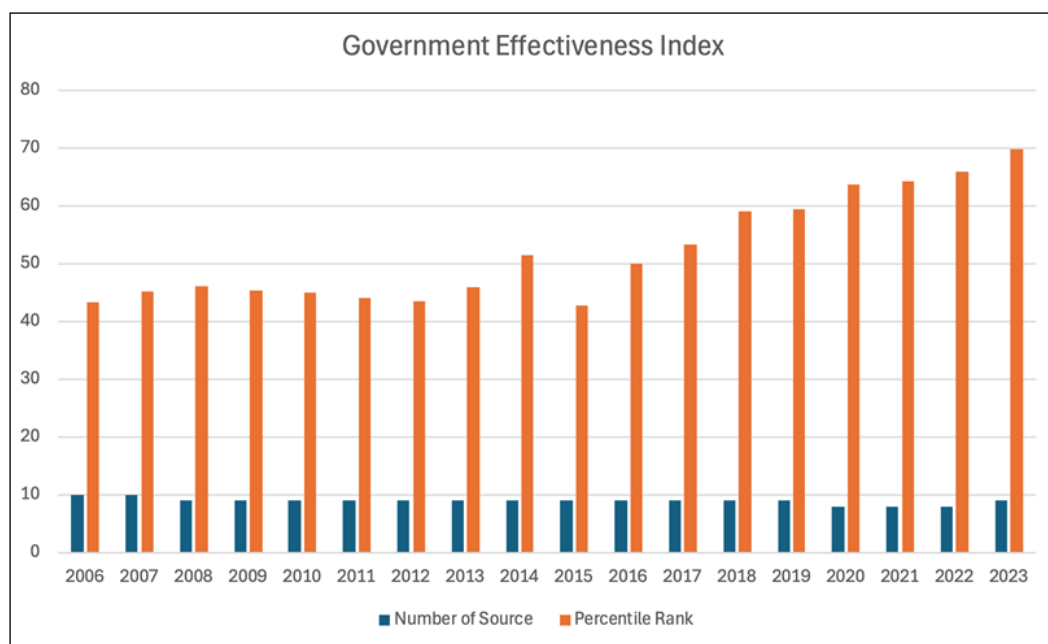


Figure 1. Government Effectiveness Index
Source: World Bank Report (2023)

Based on the World Bank report (2023), the Government Effectiveness Index Indonesia Chart for the 2006–2023 period shows a trend of gradually increasing government effectiveness in the long term. In the early period (2006–2012), the percentile rank value was relatively stagnant in the range of 43–46, which indicates that bureaucratic reform has not had a significant impact on Indonesia’s position globally. During the transition period (2013–2015), the fluctuation with an increase in 2014 and a decrease in 2015 showed the instability of policy implementation. But from 2016 to 2023, there has been a constant tendency to rise to about 70 percent, with a real improvement in the quality of governance, the efficiency of public policies and the services to the community.” Meanwhile the number of sources is generally stable over the whole period. The change in the value is an improvement in the actual performance of the government. However, this achievement still places Indonesia in the middle category in the world so that more comprehensive and sustainable reform efforts are needed. The findings underscore the need to learn from best practices internationally to accelerate the transformation of the bureaucracy toward more effective and competitive governance.

Previous research on public administration reform in Indonesia has highlighted the importance of institutional conditions in shaping reform trajectories. [Danar et al. \(2020\)](#) demonstrate that institutional arrangements play a critical role in Indonesia’s administrative reform, while persistent institutional limitations continue to constrain reform achievements. At the local level, [Muluk and Danar \(2021\)](#) further show that formal institutionalization does not necessarily translate into substantive implementation, as performance accountability reforms may experience policy-practice decoupling. More recent research also demonstrates that governance innovation in Indonesia public-sector organizations can encounter structural resistance, particularly when organizational structures and established routines constrain adaptation to change ([Danar et al., 2024](#)). Taken together, these studies indicate that administrative reform outcomes depend not merely on adopting reform instruments, but also on the institutional capacity and organizational conditions through which those reforms are implemented.

However, existing studies have largely examined administrative reform through specific reform instruments or individual country experiences, providing limited explanation of how different institutional configurations shape reform outcomes and which reform principles can be meaningfully transferred across administrative context. This limitation is particularly relevant to Indonesia, where international reform experiences cannot be assumed to be directly applicable given its distinctive administrative, political, territorial, and institutional conditions. Accordingly, this study compares the reform trajectories of South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand to identify both their common institutional conditions and context-specific mechanism. In doing so, the study advances a contextual institutional learning perspective, shifting the emphasis from replicating international best practices toward selectively adapting transferable reform principles to Indonesia’s institutional context.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundation

Public administration reform refers to institutional changes aimed at improving government performance, accountability, administrative capacity, and public service delivery. Comparative public management suggests that reform does not follow a universal model because outcomes depend on political institutions, administrative traditions, organizational capacity, and governance structures ([Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017](#)). Therefore, similar reform objectives may be achieved through different institutional arrangements. This variation highlights the importance of examining how reform mechanisms interact

with the institutional context in which they are implemented. A comparative perspective can therefore identify not only differences in reform pathways but also the institutional conditions that support their effectiveness.

One major perspective is New Public Management (NPM), which emphasizes managerial autonomy, efficiency, measurable performance, and results-based accountability. New Zealand illustrates this approach through managerial decentralization and performance-oriented management, although subsequent reforms also reveal risks of institutional fragmentation and the need for stronger coordination (Scott et al., 2023). Beyond NPM, contemporary reform increasingly emphasizes professional bureaucracy and digital governance. Merit-based human resource management strengthens administrative competence and limits patronage, as demonstrated in South Korea and Singapore (Lee & Lee, 2014; Quah, 2020). Meanwhile, digital governance extends reform beyond service digitalization toward integrated data, organizational processes, and evidence-based decision-making (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018; Hammerschmid et al., 2024).

These perspectives indicate that administrative reform should be understood as a configuration of mutually reinforcing institutional mechanisms. Performance management requires administrative capacity, managerial autonomy requires accountability, meritocracy requires credible institutional enforcement, and digital transformation requires organizational and data integration. Accordingly, this study examines reform through four dimensions: reform orientation, institutional mechanism, enabling conditions, and contextual trade-offs.

Previous Studies and State of the Art

Previous studies demonstrate distinct pathways of administrative reform. South Korea combines performance management, merit-based administration, and sustained digital transformation supported by policy continuity (Park, 2018; Chung et al., 2022; Yoon, 2024). Singapore emphasizes meritocracy, institutional integrity, professional bureaucracy, and increasingly data-driven public-sector innovation (Quah, 2020; Cinar et al., 2024). New Zealand represents a managerial pathway based on autonomy and result-based accountability, although its experience also demonstrates the coordination challenges associated with extensive decentralization (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Scott et al., 2023).

Despite their differences, these studies reveal a common pattern: successful reform depends less on a single instrument than on the institutional conditions supporting it. Digital government requires administrative and organizational capacity, meritocracy depends on credible institutions, and managerial autonomy must be accompanied by accountability. Therefore, international reform experiences should not be interpreted simply as transferable “best practices”, but as institutional arrangements whose effectiveness depends on their administrative context.

This issue is particularly relevant to Indonesia. Studies have identified gaps between formal reform and substantive implementation, including policy-practices decoupling in performance accountability (Muluk & Danar, 2021), structural resistance to governance innovation (Danar et al., 2024), and institutional challenges in digital transformation (Danar, 2024). These findings suggest that Indonesia’s challenges is not merely adopting reform instruments but ensuring their compatibility with domestic institutional and organizational conditions.

Research Gap

Existing studies provide extensive evidence on individual reform practices and country experiences but offer limited comparative explanation of how different institutional configurations produce reform

outcomes and which principles can be transferred across administrative contexts. This is particularly important for Indonesia because South Korea's coordinated digital reform, Singapore's centralized meritocratic administration, and New Zealand's managerial autonomy operate under substantially different institutional conditions. This study addresses this gap through a contextual institutional learning perspective. Rather than identifying which country offers the "best" model, it compares the three reform trajectories to identify transferable principles, enabling conditions, and contextual limitations. The novelty therefore lies in shifting comparative learning from best-practice replication to context-sensitive adaptation for Indonesia. The analytical framework connects four stages: reform orientation, institutional mechanism, enabling conditions and trade-offs, and contextual adaptation. The study first compares reform experiences from South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand based on their dominant orientations and institutional mechanisms. The study then assesses their enabling conditions and limitations before determining their relevance to Indonesia.

3. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using document analysis to examine public administration reform in South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand for Indonesia. According to [Creswell and Creswell \(2017\)](#), qualitative research explores and interprets the meaning individuals or groups attribute to social or human problems. Data were collected through a literature review of scientific books, journal articles, research reports, and other relevant documents discussing public administration reform in South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand and its lessons for Indonesia. The literature was selected purposively based on its relevance to the research objectives, credibility, substantive contribution, and ability to provide critical insight into the reform experience of the countries under study. Thus, purposive selection was the primary strategy for identifying relevant sources, while the critical value of the source was treated as a selection criterion rather than a separate sampling strategy. This approach enabled the study to identify and synthesize key reform practices, institutional factors, and lessons relevant to the Indonesian context.

The collected documents were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis based on the interactive model of [Miles et al. \(2014\)](#), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The relevant information was extracted and structured by country and the public administration reform issues discussed. The documents were then coded for recurring patterns, institutional practices, and reform mechanisms. Deductive and inductive coding were both used, allowing the analysis to be driven by both the research objectives and themes that emerged from the documentary evidence. The codes were then grouped into themes and matrices for comparison to identify similarities and differences in attributes across South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand. The findings were then interpreted comparatively to identify key reform practices and their relevance to Indonesia.

4. Results and Discussion

Public Administration Reform in South Korea: Reforms based on Performance, Technology, and Integrity

a. The Context of South Korea's Reform

Administrative reforms in South Korea began in earnest in the late 1980s, shifting from traditional bureaucratic models to modern administrative practices that adopted principles from democratic, de-

veloped countries. Administrative reform in South Korea began during the Chun Doo-Hwan government (1980–1988), which dismissed 12% of the state apparatus on October 15, 1981 (Rho & Lee, 2010). This policy was an initial attempt to create a smaller, more efficient government. In 1988, President Roh Tae Woo, through the Presidential Committee on Administrative Reform (PCAR), proposed forming a democratic government, with a small and efficient government as the main goal of reform. In the early 1990s, administrative reform became the main agenda for every president in Korean politics (P. S. Kim, 2010).

During President Kim Young-sam's presidency (1993–1998), administrative reforms were further strengthened through the *seggyehwa* (globalization) program, which aimed to increase national competitiveness through bureaucratic reform, transparency, and the eradication of corruption. This reform also includes simplifying administrative procedures and strengthening the ethics of the state apparatus (P. S. Kim, 2010). Furthermore, during President Kim Dae-jung's presidency (1998–2003), administrative reforms accelerated significantly in response to the 1997 Asian economic crisis. The government implemented policies to restructure the public sector, privatize state-owned enterprises, and reduce the size of the bureaucracy to improve government efficiency and effectiveness (Rho & Lee, 2010). New Public Management (NPM) principles became evident during this period, especially through performance management, decentralization of authority, and performance-based governance.

In the following periods, especially under the leadership of President Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008), administrative reforms focused on strengthening e-government and public participation. The government is developing an integrated digital system to improve transparency and the quality of public services. Thus, administrative reforms in South Korea show a consistent, sustained pattern in which each regime continues and refines previous policies. This approach reflects a long-term political commitment and a shared vision for building a bureaucracy that is professional, efficient, and responsive to community needs (Choi & Choi, 2017; Park, 2018).

According to Park (2018), Korea carried out government reform through two classifications: public management reform and public policy reform (Park, 2018). Administrative reform is an effort to improve government administration through cost-efficient, effective results, as well as better performance and work procedures. Efforts made include performance management, evaluation systems, e-government, bureaucratization, anti-corruption, and others (Seno, 2020). Meanwhile, public policy reform involves changing the government's role in dealing with the private sector and the public through deregulation, privatization, subsidies, and social assistance. However, basic principles such as efficiency, increased competitiveness, and transparency are interrelated guidelines for administrative reform in Korea (S. Kim & Han, 2015).

b. Pillars of Korean Administrative Reform

1) Merit-Based Human Resource Management (HRM)

The Korean government employs a merit-based recruitment system that prioritizes competence, performance, and knowledge through competitive civil service examinations. While the system limits political appointments to uphold meritocracy, it still gives the president limited discretion to appoint officials to strategic positions. Even for politically appointed roles, candidates are generally expected to possess relevant qualifications and professional competence, which helps curb potential nepotism. Furthermore, confirmation hearings in the National Assembly provide an institutional mechanism to scrutinize the qualifications and suitability of senior official nominees. Civil service examinations are also periodically updated to reflect the competencies deemed relevant to the demands of modern public ser-

vice. These institutional arrangements help maintain a merit-based recruitment system and professional standards within the Korean civil service (Lee & Lee, 2014).

In general, South Korea divides the selection process for government employees by job grade. For Grade 5 positions, the selection consists of seven stages, starting with probationary appointment and ending with employee placement. Meanwhile, for Grades 7 and 9, the selection flow is longer, with a total of ten stages. In the Grade 5 position exam stage, there are three tests: multiple-choice exams that include the PSAT (Public Service Aptitude Test), Constitution, English, and History; essay-type exams with four to five topics; and interviews (Firdaus, 2025). In addition to these rigorous selection stages, the South Korean government also emphasizes developing sustainable competencies through its civil service education and training system. Institutions such as the Korea Human Resource Development Institute play an important role in building employee capacity through competency-based training programs, leadership development, and public service innovation. The program is offered not only at the early stages of a career but also periodically throughout an employee's working life. Thus, the merit system in South Korea does not stop at recruitment; it is strengthened through systematic, structured career development to maintain the quality of the bureaucracy over the long term (P. S. Kim, 2010; OECD, 2017).

On the other hand, the employee performance evaluation system is another important pillar of bureaucratic professionalism. The South Korean government implements a performance-based appraisal system that links individual achievements to the organization's overall goals. This evaluation includes quantitative and qualitative indicators and is used as a basis for promotion, rotation, and incentivization. In addition, internal oversight and institutions such as the Ministry of Personnel Management, which manages personnel policies nationally, strengthen transparency and accountability. The combination of merit-based selection, competency development, and objective performance evaluation makes South Korea's personnel system one of the most effective professional bureaucratic models in the world (MPM, 2020; OECD, 2017).

2) Comprehensive Performance Evaluation System

South Korea implements a measurable, comprehensive, and results-oriented performance appraisal system for state civil servants (ASN). This assessment not only serves as an administrative control tool, but also serves as the main basis for promotion, awarding, and career development of employees. Evaluations are conducted using clear and objective indicators and involve a variety of assessment sources to minimize bias. Under this mechanism, civil servants who perform well have a greater chance of receiving promotions and incentives, while employees with low performance receive coaching or corrective action as part of capacity building (Y. Lee & Kim, 2025). In addition, the South Korean government strengthens the performance management system by developing an integrated Performance Management System (PMS) across various levels of the organization. This system combines quantitative and qualitative indicators and links them directly to reward and sanction mechanisms. According to the OECD (2016), this approach encourages a results-based work culture while increasing public sector accountability.

In contrast, the reform also addresses compensation by introducing a performance-based payroll system. Some benefits and bonuses are tied to individual achievements and organizational performance, encouraging motivation while strengthening accountability. With a competitive compensation structure, South Korea can retain high-quality talent in the public sector and reduce unwanted turnover. Overall, South Korea's ASN management system reflects a modern bureaucracy that prioritizes meritocracy, high-quality human resources, and adaptation to change, and it is often used as a reference for public administration reforms in other countries (Dongil et al., 2021).

3) Digital Governance

South Korea is recognized as a world leader in information and communication, informatics, e-government, and digital governance. Significantly, South Korea has achieved one of the biggest leaps in digital governance in the last 50 years (Chung et al., 2022). This achievement is driven by rapid developments in information and communication technology (ICT). As a result, South Korea was ranked first in the world for three consecutive times in the UN e-Government Survey in 2010, 2012, and 2014. This resounding result was made possible by the development of ICT infrastructure, including the deployment of high-speed information and communication networks in a relatively short time (United Nations, 2022).

A significant transformation of digital governance occurred during the days of Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008), when the government aggressively developed e-government. The 1997 Asian economic crisis provided momentum for major reforms, including massive investments in ICT infrastructure and high-speed internet. The government began integrating public services online, increasing transparency, and expanding public access to state services. This phase was a turning point that made South Korea one of the world's pioneers in e-government.

During the time of Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013) and Park Geun-hye (2013–2017), the concept of e-government evolved into a more integrated, user-based digital government. The government began developing mobile-based services, cloud computing, and big data for policymaking. As South Korea moves into the modern era under Moon Jae-in (2017–2022) and continues under Yoon Suk Yeol (2022–present), it is moving toward a smart government based on artificial intelligence (AI), real-time data, and advanced digital innovation. One of the important innovations is KONEPS (Korea On-line E-Procurement System), which is an electronic government procurement system that integrates the entire procurement process, from planning and tendering to payment, in one integrated digital platform. The system has been shown to increase transparency and efficiency and reduce the risk of corruption in public finance management. To summarize, the success of South Korea's e-governance is not only technology-driven but also policy sustainability, visionary leadership, and long-term commitment to digital reform.

4) Measurable and Consistent Institutional Reform

Institutional reform in South Korea shows strong consistency through the continuity of cross-regime policies, as seen in the sustained development of the e-government system. The initial foundation of bureaucratic strengthening was laid during Park Chung-hee's time and continued with the computerized stage of administration in the next era. This transformation reached a pivotal point when Kim Dae-jung's government responded to the 1997 Asian economic crisis by encouraging the massive digitalization of public services. The policy did not stop; subsequent governments, such as Roh Moo-hyun, strengthened it by integrating online public services. A clear example of this continuity is the development of KONEPS, which governments continue to refine into one of the most transparent and efficient electronic procurement systems in the world.

Another example is the gradual, consistent reform of human resource management in the apparatus. The meritocratic system, strengthened since the early development era, continues to be refined through the establishment of special institutions such as the Ministry of Personnel Management, which manages personnel policies nationally. This reform includes a competency-based recruitment system, measurable performance evaluation, and merit-based career development. During the Moon Jae-in and Yoon Suk Yeol administrations, this policy was further strengthened by integrating digital technology

and data into civil servant management. This case shows that the success of institutional reform in South Korea depends not only on policy innovation, but also on consistent implementation and continuous evaluation.

c. Lessons for Indonesia

South Korea's administrative reforms offer several relevant lessons for Indonesia. The first lesson is the need to promote a performance orientation, not just compliance with procedures. New Public Management principles state that the bureaucracy's effectiveness is measured by real results (output and outcome). This approach compels the apparatus to focus more on policy effectiveness and its impact on the community. Lesson two is the need to integrate e-government with data governance. South Korea is not just digitizing services but also integrating cross-sector data to support fast and accurate decision-making. For instance, the national procurement system KONEPS enhances transparency, efficiency, and accountability through one integrated system.

The third is to fortify the merit system, the key to bureaucratic professionalism. ASN recruitment is carried out through competitive selection based on ability and integrity, and promotion to positions is based on objective performance assessment. This system developed since the Park Chung-hee era and continues to this day, minimizing politicization and nepotism in the bureaucracy. Fourth, political consistency plays a major role in the success of long-term reforms. Reform in South Korea continued across governments, from Roh Moo-hyun to Yoon Suk Yeol. This sustainability ensures that reform policies remain aligned with the same overarching vision: to build an effective, transparent, and technology-based government.

2. Singapore: Bureaucratic Professionalism, Integrity and Effective Governance

a. The Context of Singapore's Reforms

Singapore is a country dubbed the "Little Dragon". The nickname reflects that although the country is small and has few natural resources, it can generate economic benefits and exert influence beyond its borders (Seno, 2023). The transformation that has occurred in Singapore, both economically and the improvement of public service standards, is inseparable from how the bureaucracy in Singapore encourages and accelerates the transformation (Jones, 2018). Based on a comparative study of the role of bureaucracy in policy implementation in five ASEAN countries, Singapore's bureaucracy is considered the most effective. This effectiveness is inseparable from a meritocratic system and comprehensive training programs, which produce an apparatus highly competent in carrying out public policies.

According to the United Nations Public Administration Network (2005), Singapore's public services are among the most efficient and have minimal corruption globally. The country's bureaucracy consistently instills the principles of efficiency and integrity, enabling it to adapt quickly to the dynamics of environmental change (Low, 2016). This approach makes Singapore's bureaucracy not only responsive but also proactive in addressing the challenges of modern administration. More broadly, Singapore has demonstrated strong institutional capacity and integrity in its public administration. This is reflected in the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), where Singapore recorded a Control of Corruption score of 86.80 in 2024. The indicator captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including petty and grand forms of corruption and state capture by elites and private interests. Since independence in 1965, Singapore has undertaken administrative reforms systematically and sustainably, focusing on institutional strengthening, merit-based human re-

source development, and the adoption of modern, adaptive governance practices. These institutional reforms have been critical in developing a public administration with a strong administrative capacity and relatively high levels of integrity.

b. Pillars of Administrative Reform in Singapore

1) An Independent and Strong Public Service Commission (PSC)

The principle of meritocracy was introduced to Singapore by the British colonial government in January 1951 when the Public Service Commission (PSC) was established to isolate the process of appointment, promotion and discipline within the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) from political intervention and to accelerate the process of bureaucratic localization (Quah, 2010). Lee Kuan Yew later reinforced this meritocratic principle, stressing the importance of attracting “the best and brightest” to join the bureaucracy. This view was shaped by his experience as a legal counsel for the unions in the 1950s, when he frequently won cases against incompetent and poorly paid colonial government lawyers. Therefore, he supports the role of the PSC in maintaining the quality of the civil apparatus by “screening unqualified individuals” and ensuring that only the best candidates are recruited. In this system, promotion is based on merit, not seniority, regardless of age. In fact, the 1994 White Paper on Competitive Salaries for Competent and Honest Government recommended career acceleration for outstanding employees, where an employee can reach the position of Deputy Secretary at about 32 and Permanent Secretary at about 40 (Quah, 2010).

In line with that, the Public Service Commission (PSC) in Singapore developed into a constitutional institution that has a central role in maintaining professionalism and bureaucratic meritocracy. The PSC has high independence because it is guaranteed in the Constitution, so it is relatively free from political intervention (Siregar & Jannah, 2023). One of its main functions is to manage a merit-based recruitment system through a rigorous and competitive selection process. In addition, PSC also manages the awarding of prestigious scholarships, namely PSC Scholarships, to the best candidates who are prepared to occupy leadership positions in the public sector. The PSC is also authorized in the process of promotion and discipline of the country’s civil servants, thus ensuring that only individuals with high integrity and performance can occupy strategic positions. With this system, the practice of nepotism and political patronage can be significantly minimized (Quah, 2020a).

The advantage of PSC Singapore lies in the integration of ASN management functions in one strong and independent institution. Unlike many other countries, including Indonesia, where the personnel function is spread across several institutions, the PSC can maintain consistent meritocratic standards nationally. This is reinforced by a bureaucratic culture that upholds integrity, as well as support for competitive remuneration policies to attract top talent to the public sector (OECD, 2017).

2) Integrity and Anti-Corruption

In terms of public governance integrity, Singapore is known as one of the countries with the lowest level of corruption in the world. Over the years, the country has consistently ranked among the top in Asia on the Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International (Haque, 2004). In 1995, Singapore ranked third out of 41 countries, and in 2019 it ranked fourth alongside Sweden and Switzerland out of 180 countries, with a score of 85 (Quah, 2020b). This success is inseparable from the long efforts that began even before independence. Singapore’s Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) is the region’s oldest anti-corruption agency, established in 1952 and later strengthened by the

Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) in 1960 (Handayani & Bangun, 2026). This regulation gives the CPIB broad authority to address corruption in both the public and private sectors, reflecting a state approach that treats corruption as a cross-system crime best addressed through comprehensive intervention. Institutionally, the CPIB coordinates with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) but retains independent operational status.

Strong political commitment is shown through the provision of adequate budget and human resource support to CPIB to carry out its functions effectively. The CPIB's success in suppressing corruption is also supported by efforts to build institutional capacity sustainably, including professional training at home and abroad for its officials (Quah, 2020b). Furthermore, Singapore implements a zero-tolerance policy against corruption through a comprehensive approach that combines high salaries for civil servants, strict law enforcement, and strengthened anti-corruption institutions. The synergy between economic incentives and consistent law enforcement has proven to be effective in creating a clean, professional, and accountable bureaucracy (Quah, 2010).

3) Data-Driven Decision Making

The Healthier SG Initiative, launched by the Ministry of Health Singapore in 2023, is an example of data-driven decision-making in the public health sector. The initiative was designed in response to significant demographic changes in Singapore, where the proportion of the population aged 65 years and above is projected to increase from 10% in 2010 to 25% by 2030 (Matsuno et al., 2024). Leveraging population health data and trends in non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, the policy focuses on a paradigm shift from curative care to prevention. One key strategy is to encourage long-term relationships between patients and family physicians to develop personalized health plans based on individual data.

In addition, integrating health information technology systems is an important component of data-driven decision-making. The government intends to facilitate access to health services and more accurately track public health developments by implementing digital health applications and collecting data in real time. However, implementing this policy also faces challenges, including payment system obstacles, limited technology adoption among health workers, and complex coordination among stakeholders. Thus, while data are central to policy formulation, implementation success depends on the system's readiness and institutional capacity.

4) User-Oriented Public Services

Singapore is adopting a customer-centric approach to public services by developing integrated and accessible digital services. For example, SingPass is a national digital identity that enables people to efficiently access various government services. It puts users' needs at the center of the design of public services, thus increasing public satisfaction and the quality of service. Singapore's user-centric model of public services is exemplified by the government's digital transformation that places citizen experience at the heart of service design. The government has created platforms like SingPass to consolidate a broad spectrum of public services into a unified system. This has made access easier, improved efficiency, and strengthened the security of users' data. This transformation is in line with the concept of user-centric governance, where services are no longer designed based on bureaucratic structures, but based on the real needs of the community, including through a life-event-based services approach that simplifies administrative processes at various stages of citizens' lives (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018; Janowski, 2015).

In addition, innovations in the transportation sector such as the use of EZ-Link Cards managed by the Land Transport Authority show how technological integration can significantly improve the convenience and efficiency of public mobility (Phang & Toh, 1997). However, several challenges remain, especially the digital literacy gap and varying technology adoption among vulnerable groups, which can hinder the optimization of digital public services. Therefore, the success of user-oriented public services depends not only on technological innovation but also on the government's ability to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all levels of society (Venkatesh et al., 2016).

c. Lessons for Indonesia

Based on Singapore's administrative reform, several lessons are relevant to Indonesia, particularly for addressing persistent challenges in bureaucratic reform. First, strengthening the meritocratic system through an independent institution such as the Public Service Commission (PSC) offers a relevant lesson for Indonesia, where merit-based recruitment, promotion, and career development remain important challenges amid risks of political intervention, patronage, and uneven implementation across public institutions. Rather than replicating the Singaporean model institutionally, Indonesia could strengthen the autonomy and enforcement capacity of its existing merit-based civil service mechanism by ensuring that personnel decisions are consistently based on competence, performance, and objective career criteria.

Second, Indonesia should learn from Singapore's experience in fighting corruption and improving bureaucratic integrity through the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB). Indonesia has created anti-corruption bodies and regulatory systems, but challenges persist in achieving consistent law enforcement, coordination among institutions, and the implementation of preventative measures against corruption across. This demands not only formal institutions but also consistent political will, credible enforcement, and incentives that limit opportunities and motivations for corruption. For Indonesia, this means the need to enhance the independence, coordination, and enforcement capability of anti-corruption mechanisms while improving integrity-based human resource management and organizational accountability.

Third, Singapore's experience in implementing data-driven initiatives like Healthier SG provides a relevant lesson for Indonesia in addressing challenges related to fragmented data systems, uneven data quality, and limited use of evidence in public-sector decision making. Indonesia has made significant progress in digital government and data integration, including the development of the electronic-based government system (SPBE) and the One Data Indonesia Framework. But the presence of digital infrastructure and data does not necessarily mean that data are systematically used to inform policy decisions. Singapore's experience thus emphasizes the necessity of going beyond digitalization and data availability to institutionalized data use, interoperability, analytical capacity, and organizational practices that incorporate evidence into policy formulation and implementation. In general, the Singaporean experience should not be seen as a model to be replicated directly in Indonesia, because of differences in political systems, administrative structures, institutional capacity and scale. Rather, it is in its capacity to identify principles that are transferable and adaptable to the Indonesian bureaucratic and institutional context.

3. New Zealand: Pioneer New Public Management (NPM)

a. New Zealand's Reform Context

New Zealand has distinctive institutional characteristics that have shaped the nature and trajectory of its public sector reforms. A strong political and institutional commitment to New Public Management

(NPM) motivated the reforms and provided an important framework for administrative change ([Seno, 2022](#)). Public sector reforms in New Zealand began in the 1980s and cannot be separated from the context of the economic crisis and the global shift in governance paradigms. New Zealand faced considerable economic stress, with a large fiscal deficit, ongoing inflation, and low public-sector productivity. The traditional bureaucratic model, with its hierarchy, centralization, and control through procedures, was increasingly seen as unable to meet rising demands for greater efficiency and better government performance.

In this context, the government undertook a massive transformation, driven by a small group of policy elites comprising key ministers, senior officials, and private sector actors. This group has a relatively uniform intellectual background, especially in economics, so the reforms it carried out were strongly influenced by theoretical approaches. Various literatures, such as public choice theory, managerialism, and transaction cost economics, have become the main foundation for designing institutional and managerial changes in the public sector ([Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017](#)). A key characteristic of New Zealand's reforms is their high level of comprehensiveness and their explicit use of theory in policy practice. This is relatively new, given that public bureaucracy was previously not known as an institution based on theoretical approaches. The strong influence of economists, especially from Treasury institutions, is important in encouraging economic analysis in public decision-making.

Institutionally, this reform is implemented by restructuring government organizations around principles such as separating policy and operational functions, decentralizing managerial authority, and implementing market mechanisms in the provision of public services. The government also encourages the formation of smaller, single-goal organizations and strengthens accountability through clear contractual relationships between actors. In addition, competition among service providers and the separation of roles among funding, purchasing, and service provision improve efficiency.

These reforms also reflect a strong top-down approach, especially after the Labor Party's victory in 1984, following a long period of economic stagnation ([Meutia, 2017](#)). The reforms aimed to privatize various government functions, reduce the command-and-control bureaucracy's role, and shift the focus from inputs to outputs and results. The basic principle underlying this approach is that governments should engage only in activities that other sectors cannot perform efficiently, and that public organizations should be managed similarly to private-sector practices. In the context of management, New Zealand adopts a strong contractual system, both between ministers and public managers and between buyers and service providers. Managers are given broad autonomy in managing resources, including in terms of recruitment and employee management, and are responsible for the achievement of agreed performance. The budget system was also reformed to performance-based budgeting, which places more importance on results than on mere procedural compliance.

These reforms were motivated by fundamental problems in the public sector, including inflexible staffing arrangements, seniority-based promotion, and poor efficiency and accountability. The public sector is viewed as a major contributor to many of the nation's problems and therefore a total overhaul is needed with a reduction in central control, delegation of authority and devolution of management to work units. In response, the government issued various strategic policies, most notably through the State Sector Act 1988 and the Public Finance Act 1989. These two regulations are the main foundation in public management reform, with the aim of adopting private sector practices into the public sector. This reform emphasizes transparency, accountability, efficiency, and improved public service quality. In addition, e-government has begun to be introduced to increase access to information and public participation.

In its implementation, the responsibility for human resource management is delegated to each department, while central institutions such as the State Services Commission (SSC) play a role in maintaining integrity standards, ethics, and good employer principles. A performance contract system was introduced to ensure managerial accountability, requiring each manager to meet targets agreed with the relevant ministers. The success of New Zealand's reforms is inseparable from the role of key actors such as politicians, Treasury officials, and central institutions such as the SSC. In addition, there are several important factors that support reform, including (Meutia, 2017):

1. Key people, namely strategic actors who have the capacity and influence in the reform process.
2. Axial principles, in the form of consistent application of theoretical principles in practice.
3. Communicating ideas, through intensive communication across levels, including international.
4. Contextual determinants, such as the economic crisis and political changes of 1984.
5. Political will, which is strong supported by a one-room political system.
6. Ethos, in the form of a collaborative culture between institutions.
7. Knowledge, which includes theoretical knowledge and empirical experience.

The results of this reform include streamlining bureaucracy, increasing efficiency, and strengthening accountability. The government also established the Public Service Code of Conduct (1990) to affirm the principles of professionalism, integrity, and public service (Meutia, 2017). However, these reforms also face challenges, especially limited human resources to adapt to the new system and a competency gap with the private sector.

Since the late 1990s, the reform approach has shifted from a highly fragmented model to a more integrative one. The government began to emphasize cross-sector coordination through a whole-of-government approach, the use of technology through e-government, and the strengthening of ethical values in public services. This shift reflects an effort to address the weaknesses of previous models that tended to create institutional fragmentation. Thus, public sector reform in New Zealand is undergoing a comprehensive, theory-based transformation process and is underpinned by strong political commitment. This experience makes New Zealand a key reference point in the study of public administration reform globally.

b. Pillars of New Zealand Administrative Reform

1) Deregulation and Efficiency

Deregulation is a key pillar of public administration reform in New Zealand and has continued to strengthen in the post-2015 period through a performance-based approach. Deregulation policies focus not only on reducing regulations, but also on simplifying administrative processes and improving the efficiency of public organizations. The government is actively reducing duplication of functions between institutions and strengthening cross-sector coordination to increase public sector productivity. This approach is in line with the principles of New Public Management, which emphasizes organizational efficiency and flexibility. In addition, deregulation encourages a change in bureaucratic culture from a procedural orientation to a results-oriented one. Efficiency is not only interpreted as cost savings, but also continuous improvement of the quality of public services. Thus, deregulation has become a strategic instrument in transforming modern bureaucracy (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

Deregulation in New Zealand is also supported by an evidence-based policymaking approach. Previous studies show that simplifying regulations, paired with systematic policy evaluation, can improve

the effectiveness of public organizations and the quality of services (Dunleavy et al., 2006). Deregulation in New Zealand is not carried out drastically without control, but rather through a mature policy analysis process. Periodic evaluations ensure that regulatory changes positively affect public sector performance. This shows that deregulation is part of the adaptive policy cycle. Thus, the success of deregulation largely depends on integrating flexibility with policy control.

In a comparative perspective, the success of deregulation depends heavily on a balance between autonomy and supervision. An OECD study (2023) shows that New Zealand can maintain this balance through a transparent and accountable governance system. However, challenges still arise in maintaining inter-agency coordination and policy consistency. Therefore, the government still maintains minimum standards in the implementation of public services. This approach ensures that flexibility does not come at the expense of quality of service. As such, deregulation in New Zealand is measurable and governance is balanced.

2) Results-Based Accountability

Accountability within the New Public Management (NPM) framework is positioned as a key instrument for improving public sector performance by setting clear, measurable, results-oriented targets. In New Zealand, accountability implementation shows a positive correlation with improved organizational performance, especially through performance contracts that bind ministers and chief executives (Christensen & Lægreid, 2015). This system includes the setting of specific policy objectives, periodic monitoring, and evaluations based on outputs and outcomes. Accountability is implemented through a clear regulatory framework, so each actor has well-defined responsibilities. In addition, the system integrates individual and organizational performance into one measurable performance management system. This increases productivity, improves budget efficiency, and enhances transparency in public sector management (Mulgan, 2008).

The success of accountability in NPM in New Zealand is inseparable from several institutional prerequisites that support its implementation. First, the state's role in strategic functions is limited, creating space for the private sector to provide certain services and increase efficiency. Second, the chief executive is given full responsibility for the organization's performance, thereby strengthening the principle of managerial accountability. Third, an accountability system requires transparent, relevant, and timely information to support decision-making (Seno, 2022). In addition, clarity on the division of authority and policy objectives is an important factor to avoid conflicts between political and administrative actors. Thus, accountability is not only administrative, but also structural and systemic in supporting effective governance.

A key characteristic of accountability in NPM in New Zealand lies in the emphasis on clear specifications in performance contracts, including who is responsible, to whom, for what purpose, and by what mechanisms. This approach allows performance evaluation to be carried out objectively and measurably. In budgeting practice, the accountability orientation also shifts from inputs to outputs and outcomes, so policy success is measured by the impact produced, not just resource use (Tjiptoherijanto & Manurung, 2010). In addition, the government encourages units to increase fiscal independence, including through the user charges mechanism. Thus, accountability in NPM in New Zealand serves not only as a control tool, but also as a strategic instrument to drive efficiency, performance, and innovation in the public sector.

3) Decentralization of Managerial Authority

Decentralization of managerial authority is an important pillar in the administrative reforms in New Zealand that aim to improve the flexibility of public organizations. The government grants broad autonomy to the heads of the institutions to manage the budget, human resources, and operations of the organization. This is called the principle of freedom of management, which is a feature of the New Public Management model. This autonomy enables public organizations to respond more quickly and in context to community needs. In addition, decentralization encourages innovation in public service delivery. This is important given the complexity of modern government challenges. Thus, decentralization can improve the performance of public organizations (OECD, 2023; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). In practice, New Zealand balances decentralization with a strict accountability system. Coordination between the central government and institutions is maintained through the national policy framework. This ensures that decentralization does not reduce the consistency of public policy. Thus, decentralization strengthens accountability through performance mechanisms.

4) Fiscal Transparency and Budget Reform

Fiscal transparency is a crucial element of New Zealand's administrative reforms and continues to be strengthened through innovation in public financial management. Accrual accounting allows more comprehensive recording of assets and liabilities than cash-based systems. This provides a more accurate picture of the country's financial position and improves decision-making and fiscal transparency, which also strengthens accountability in managing the public budget. Open financial information allows for more effective oversight by the public and legislative institutions. Thus, transparency is a key foundation for building public trust. These reforms show that good fiscal governance is an integral part of public administration reform (OECD, 2023).

New Zealand's budget reform is also supported by performance-based budgeting, which links budget allocation to performance achievements. A study by Ball et al. (2025) shows that accrual-based accounting systems significantly improve the transparency and efficiency of public financial management. In addition, research by Biondi & Lapsley (2014) confirms that integrating accounting systems with performance management can improve the effectiveness of fiscal policies. In this context, New Zealand is one of the countries that has successfully implemented comprehensive fiscal reform. This is reflected in the high quality of financial statements and a strong supervisory system. Thus, budget reform is not only technical, but also strategic. Nonetheless, implementing fiscal transparency also faces challenges, especially given the complexity of accrual-based accounting systems. Therefore, efforts are needed to simplify information presentation without reducing data quality. Consistency of reporting is an important factor in maintaining the credibility of the fiscal system. Strong supervision is also needed to prevent potential irregularities. Thus, fiscal transparency must be balanced with increasing public financial literacy. This is important to ensure the reform's effectiveness in the long term.

c. Lessons for Indonesia

Lessons from public administration reform in New Zealand show that Indonesia needs to strengthen results-based accountability by emphasizing output- and outcome-oriented performance measurement, rather than administrative compliance alone. Simplification of regulations is also a strategic step to reduce policy overlap and improve bureaucratic efficiency through an evidence-based policymaking approach. In addition, decentralization must be balanced with strengthened managerial capacity and an

effective supervisory system to avoid gaps in public service quality. Integrating fiscal reform with performance systems through performance-based budgeting is also important to ensure budget allocation aligns with performance achievements and to increase transparency and accountability in state finances.

On the other hand, reform success depends heavily on policy consistency and strong political will from all stakeholders. Strengthening cross-sector coordination through a whole-of-government approach is crucial to avoid institutional fragmentation and increase the effectiveness of public policies. In addition, developing the apparatus's human resources must be a top priority, especially by building competencies, merit systems, and work cultures oriented toward performance and innovation. Thus, bureaucratic reform in Indonesia must be carried out comprehensively, integrated, and sustainably, while adjusting to the existing institutional and social context.

3. Comparative Synthesis: Administrative Reform Pathways and Lessons for Indonesia

To provide a systematic comparison across three cases, Table 1 synthesizes the key dimensions of public administration reform in South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand. The comparison highlights differences in reform orientation, institutional mechanisms, and governance approaches, while identifying lessons that may be adapted to the Indonesian context.

Table 1. Comparative Synthesis

Dimension	South Korea	Singapore	New Zealand	Lesson for Indonesia
Reform orientation	Performance & digital governance	Meritocracy & integrity	Efficiency & NPM	Integrated reform
Human Resources Management (HRM)	Merit-based HRM	Strong PSC (Public Service Commission)	Managerial autonomy	Strengthen merit system
Performance	Integrated PMS (Performance Management System)	High administrative capacity	Results-based accountability	Outcome orientation
Digital/data	E-government, KONEPS (<i>Korea Online E-Procurement System</i>)	Data-driven government	E-government integration	Electronic-Based Government System and data governance
Accountability	Performance evaluation	Integrity & anti-corruption	Contractual accountability	Results-based accountability
Critical enabling factor	Policy continuity	Institutional capacity	Political commitment	Cross-regime consistency
Main limitation/risk	Centralized reform legacy	Context/scale specificity	Fragmentation under NPM	Contextual adaptation

Source: Authors Processed (2026)

Despite their different reform trajectories, South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand share several institutional characteristics that help explain the sustainability of their public administration reforms. All three cases demonstrate that reform extends beyond changes in administrative structures and depends on the interaction between political commitment, professional public service, performance orientation, and institutional capacity. South Korea combines merit-based human resource management with performance evaluation and digital governance. Singapore places strong emphasis on meritocracy, institutional integrity, and data-driven public service. New Zealand links managerial autonomy with result-

based accountability and fiscal transparency. Across the three cases, reform is therefore sustained not by a single administrative instrument but by mutually reinforcing institutional arrangements that connect human resource capacity, accountability, and organizational performance.

Nevertheless, the three countries differ substantially in their dominant reform orientation and institutional mechanism. South Korea represents a state-led and technologically driven reform trajectory, in which strong executive leadership and policy continuity have supported the gradual integration of performance management and digital government. Singapore relies more strongly on centralized institutional capacity, meritocratic recruitment, integrity mechanism, and a professional civil service to maintain administrative effectiveness. New Zealand, by contrast, represent a managerial reform trajectory influenced by New Public Management, characterized by decentralization of managerial authority, contractual accountability can be pursued through different institutional configurations rather than through a single universal model of public administration reform.

These differences are important because they know that administrative reform is context-dependent. The effectiveness of a particular reform instrument depends on its compatibility with a county's political system, administrative traditions, institutional capacity, and governance structure. South Korea's coordinated digital transformation, for example, has been supported by sustained central leadership and long-term institutional investment. While Singapore's meritocratic model operated within a highly centralized and relatively compact administrative system. New Zealand's managerial decentralizations, meanwhile, depends on strong accountability and transparency mechanism that enable greater organizational autonomy without considering the institutional conditions that support them may produce different outcomes when transferred to another administrative context.

These differences are important because the three cases should not be interpreted as unqualified success stories. South Korea's reform trajectory developed within a strong developmental-state tradition that supported long-term state-led coordination and digital transformation. Singapore's meritocratic and centralized administrative model operates within a distinctive political-administrative configuration and a considerably smaller territorial scale. New Zealand's NPM-oriented reforms, while strengthening managerial autonomy and result-based accountability, also generated coordination challenges that later encouraged a stronger whole-of-government approach. These experiences demonstrate that reform outcomes are shaped not only by particular policy instruments but also by the institutional conditions in which they operate.

Overall, the comparative analysis suggests no single universal model of public administration reform. The experiences of South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand demonstrate that similar reform objectives can be achieved through different institutional arrangements. For Indonesia, the key lesson is therefore adaptation rather than replication. Rather than directly transferring institutional designs from these countries, Indonesia should selectively adapt their underlying reform principles and institutional mechanisms; this adaptation should consider Indonesia's administrative, political, territorial, and institutional context to ensure reform strategies are both relevant and sustainable.

5. Conclusion

The public administration reforms of South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand demonstrate different pathways toward administrative effectiveness. South Korea emphasizes digital governance, performance management, and policy continuity. Singapore highlights meritocracy, integrity, and data-driven governance. New Zealand demonstrates results-based accountability, managerial autonomy, and

fiscal reform. Despite these differences, the three cases show that sustainable reform depends on the interaction of institutional capacity, political commitment, professional administration, and effective accountability mechanisms

The comparative analysis suggests no single universal model of public administration reform. For Indonesia, the central lesson is therefore adaptation rather than replication. Reform principles such as meritocracy, results-based accountability, institutional integrity, and adaptive digital governance should be selectively adapted to Indonesia's administrative, political, territorial, and institutional context. This study contributes to comparative public administration by shifting the emphasis from best-practice learning to contextual institutional learning.

However, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and qualitative comparative analysis, which restricts its ability to assess the implementation and outcomes of reform through primary empirical evidence. Future research should examine the applicability of these reform principles in Indonesia through case studies, surveys, or interviews with public-sector institutions and extend the comparison to countries with different administrative traditions and institutional capacities.

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