OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS

The Challenge of Formulating State Administration as a Discipline in the Perspective of Public Management

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This study examines the epistemological challenges in defining Public Administration as an independent discipline amid the dominance of contemporary Public Management paradigms. Since the rise of New Public Management (NPM) and New Public Governance (NPG), the discipline has faced an identity crisis concerning its academic legitimacy and conceptual boundaries. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this paper analyzes the paradigm shift of Public Administration in Indonesia and its implications for academic orientation and governance practices. The findings reveal that Indonesia's Public Administration faces challenges at three levels: ontological (the shift from state administration to managerial governance), epistemological (disciplinary legitimacy crisis), and axiological (value transition from public ethics to efficiency). To address these issues, it is necessary to recontextualize Public Administration as a value-driven discipline rooted in public interest, social justice, and civic responsibility. Such an approach would restore the normative foundation of Public Administration while maintaining its relevance alongside Public Management in contemporary governance systems.

INTRODUCTION

The debate on the status of State Administration as a discipline has been going on since the beginning of the 20th century and is increasingly finding its urgency in the context of the transformation of modern government. In its early development, State Administration was seen as a discipline that emphasized order, rationality, and bureaucratic efficiency, as formulated in the classical thought of Max Weber and Woodrow Wilson. Weber (1947) emphasized the importance of hierarchy, formal rules, and professionalism in maintaining bureaucratic efficiency and neutrality. While Wilson (1887) through his famous essay, *The Study of Administration*, proposing the separation of politics and administration as the basic principle of professionalism of the state civil apparatus. However, along with the complexity of the role of the modern state and changes in the global economy, this rational-legal bureaucratic approach is no longer considered adequate to address the challenges of dynamic and results-oriented governance (Osborne, 2020).

This paradigm shift has led to a shift in the scientific orientation of State Administration from just bureaucratic governance to a Public Management approach that focuses on efficiency, performance, and results. In various countries, including Indonesia, this new orientation changed the face of public administration from *Rule-Driven Government* become *performance-driven government*. The approach emphasizes the use of private sector management practices in the public sector, such as internal competition, performance evaluation, and results-based accountability. This transformation marked the birth of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm in the late 1980s — a global movement spearheaded by Anglo-Saxon countries such as Britain, New Zealand, and Australia.

In the Indonesian context, the adoption of NPM values has significant epistemological implications. State Administration in Indonesia not only functions as an academic discipline, but also as an ideological foundation for the administration of government, given its historical role in shaping post-independence bureaucratic identity (Dwiyanto, 2018). The Indonesian bureaucracy is built on principles *Bureaucratic State Administration*, where the state becomes the main controller of all social and economic processes. However, with the emergence of the NPM paradigm and the demands of globalization, the concept of the controlling state began to shift towards the facilitator state emphasizing collaboration with the private sector and civil society. It is this shift that creates an epistemological tension between the normative values of State Administration and the pragmatic values of Public Management.

Entering the era of bureaucratic reform, especially after 1998, the Indonesian State Administration faced a crisis of scientific identity marked by the blurring of the boundaries between public administration and public management. The bureaucratic reform program initiated by the government seeks to encourage efficiency, transparency, and accountability of bureaucratic performance through various initiatives such as the performance evaluation system (SAKIP), the preparation of *Key Performance Indicators* (KPI), as well as simplifying the technology-based licensing process. Although administratively this step accelerates the modernization of government, epistemologically it raises a serious question: whether State Administration still has autonomous space as a discipline oriented towards public values, or has it become part of technocratic managerial practices (Frederickson, 2017).

Waldo (2017) calls this phenomenon a shift from *the administrative state* To *The Managerial State*. In the paradigm *Administrative State*, the state plays the role of a guardian of values, justice, and social welfare through an accountable bureaucratic structure. However, in *managerial state*, the government's attention shifts to organizational effectiveness, cost efficiency, and the achievement of performance targets. This change has profound epistemic consequences: public administration, which originally relied on service ethics, is now beginning to be dominated by *Instrumental rationality* which measures success based solely on numbers and indicators.

In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon is increasingly seen through national policies such as the implementation of the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), national bureaucratic reform programs, and the establishment of technocratic institutions such as the Ministry of PAN-RB and LAN (State Administration Institution). SPBE, for example, on the one hand serves to accelerate the digitization of public services and increase efficiency, but on the other hand creates a risk of reducing the substantive values of public administration. The orientation towards procedural efficiency often ignores the aspects of morality and social justice that are the main spirit of the State Administration. Frederickson (2017) warns that when normative values such as service ethics, social justice, and the public interest are ignored, public administration has the potential to lose its moral identity as a public servant and turn into nothing more than an efficient but inhumane organizational machine.

Furthermore, the epistemological challenges of State Administration are also caused by external changes that are global. In the past two decades, the dynamics of globalization, information technology, and the digital economy have prompted governments around the world to adopt performance-based management models that are flexible and responsive to environmental changes. Denhardt & Denhardt (2015) assert that the NPM wave brings the values of individualism, competition, and short-term outcomes that have the potential to erode the collective values and social responsibility that are the basis of the science of public administration. In Indonesia, the pressure is getting stronger as public demands for transparency and technology-based fast service increase. As a result, bureaucracies, which were originally oriented towards legal procedures and stability, began to adopt a managerial culture that judged success from administrative efficiency alone.

However, in the process of adaptation, a deeper epistemological problem arises: how to maintain the normative and scientific character of State Administration so that it is not reduced by instrumental managerial paradigms? This question is very important because State Administration is not just "government management," but also a moral reflection on how the state should be run. This is where the relevance comes in *New Public Service* (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015) becomes important: this paradigm offers a balance between efficiency and public value with the principle of "serve, not control." Through this approach, public administration is again directed to the orientation of ethics and citizen services, not solely on bureaucratic efficiency.

This phenomenon raises a fundamental question: can State Administration still be seen as a discipline in its own right, or has it merged into the framework of Public Management? This question is not only conceptual, but also practical, because it concerns the orientation of the curriculum, the direction of research, and public policy in Indonesia. If the State Administration loses its epistemic autonomy, then the risk that arises is the loss of the reflective dimension and moral values in public policy. On the other hand, if the State Administration closes itself off to managerial and technological developments, it will be lagging behind and irrelevant in modern government practices.

In this situation, a new paradigm known as New Public Governance (NPG) offers a middle ground. Osborne (2020) explains that NPG emphasizes *Collaborative Governance*, where government, the private sector, and civil society work together as a complementary network. In this model, the State Administration no longer plays the role of a sole controller, but as a *Orchestrator* which ensures value integration, policy coordination, and balance of interests between actors. Thus, the State Administration does not lose its academic character, but rather expands its epistemic territory from bureaucracy to network governance (*Network Governance*).

Epistemologically, this shift towards NPG marks a new chapter in the thinking of State Administration. This discipline is challenged to develop theories and methods that are able to explain the dynamics of collaboration between institutions, the distribution of power, and the production of public value in the digital era. In the Indonesian context, this is becoming increasingly important given the increasingly complex challenges of governance: regional decentralization, coordination between central agencies, and the need for integrated national data governance.

Thus, this study seeks to analyze in depth the epistemological challenges of the formulation of State Administration as a discipline in the midst of the dominance of the Public Management paradigm. The main focus of this study is to understand how State Administration in Indonesia can maintain its academic legitimacy as a value-based science without losing its practical relevance in the face of the complexities of modern governance. By examining the interaction between values, knowledge, and practice, it is hoped that this study can make a conceptual contribution in strengthening the position of State Administration as a reflective discipline that combines public morality, managerial rationality, and digital adaptivity in one complete epistemological framework.

THEORETICAL STUDIES

The epistemological study of State Administration cannot be separated from the long history of the development of the theory of world public administration. In the early 20th century, the classical paradigm pioneered by Woodrow Wilson and Max Weber emphasized the separation between politics and administration, as well as placing efficiency as the main value in the administration of bureaucracy. This paradigm is known as *Classical Public Administration*, where administration is considered a neutral technical instrument for implementing political policies.

However, entering the 1970s, the approach began to be criticized for being too mechanistic and ignoring the human dimension and moral values in public service. Figures such as Waldo (2017) and Denhardt & Denhardt (2015) emphasize the importance of understanding administration as a moral and political activity loaded with values. They argue that public administration is not only about managing resources, but also about serving citizens.

The next development was marked by the emergence of a paradigm *New Public Management (NPM)* in the 1980s influenced by neoliberalism and the principles of market efficiency. NPM emphasizes the application of private sector managerial practices to the public sector, such as performance measurement, inter-agency competition, and results-oriented (Hood, 1991). This paradigm brought about a major change in the way government worked, but it also had epistemological consequences: public administration began to lose its normative orientation and shift towards technocraticism.

In reaction to the lack of NPM, a new paradigm emerged, namely *New Public Governance (NPG)* which emphasizes collaboration, community participation, and public value creation (Osborne, 2020). This paradigm affirms that the public sector is not only an engine of service production, but also an arena of social interaction involving many actors. In the Indonesian context, the shift towards NPG is seen in various collaborative initiatives such as *One Data Indonesia*, *GovTech INA Digital*, and community involvement in public policy formulation.

The epistemology of modern State Administration, therefore, can no longer be separated from the dynamics of public management. However, this integration raises an epistemic dilemma: should the State Administration conform to the logic of managerial efficiency or stick to the values of justice and public service? This question is at the heart of the challenge of reformulating this discipline in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a conceptual literature study method. Data was obtained through a literature review of books and scientific journals published between 2015–2025 that discuss the epistemology of State Administration, public management theory, and administrative reform in Indonesia. The analysis is carried out through three stages: (1) identification of paradigm shifts in State Administration; (2) an epistemological analysis of the position of this science in the midst of the dominance of public management; and (3) interpretation of Indonesia's post-bureaucratic reform context.

The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and comparison of global theories with national practices. This approach was chosen because the research is conceptual, focusing on scientific significance and theoretical relevance rather than empirical testing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Identity Crisis: Between Bureaucratic Rationality and Managerial Logic

State Administration in Indonesia is undergoing a fundamental epistemic transformation. The discipline was originally rooted in the Weberian paradigm that emphasized bureaucratic hierarchy, legality, and neutrality. However, since the 2000s, the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) introduced efficiency logic, performance orientation, and pseudo-competition between public institutions. This transformation not only changed the way the bureaucracy worked, but also shifted the epistemological focus of the science of State Administration from *Value-based governance* become *Performance-based governance*.

According to Osborne (2020), the consequence of this shift is the emergence of a dilemma between "administrative rationality" that places public values and social justice as the main orientation, and "managerial rationality" which assesses the success of government based on the size of output and resource efficiency. In the Indonesian context, this dilemma is evident in the implementation of bureaucratic and system reform policies *Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE)*, where the focus on procedural efficiency often dismisses discourses about public values, ethics, and legitimacy (Dwiyanto, 2018; Wibowo & Prasetyo, 2023).

State Administration is finally in a liminal situation — somewhere between normative tradition and managerial reality. Denhardt & Denhardt (2015) argue that the direction that needs to be taken is not to reject NPM, but to integrate it within the framework of the New Public Service (NPS), where efficiency remains important, but always subject to the values of public services. This approach places citizens not as "consumers of services", but as "owners of public sovereignty". The epistemological crisis experienced by the State Administration, thus, can be seen as a reflective opportunity to reaffirm the moral and ideological position of this discipline in the midst of instrumentalistic pressures.

Collaborative Epistemology and the Shift in Knowledge Production

One of the fundamental changes in the last decade has been the way administrative knowledge is produced and validated. If previously the State Administration relied on procedural rationality (drafting rules, SOPs, structures), now public knowledge is moving towards collaborative epistemology, which recognizes the value of user experience, cross-sector data, and collective learning.

Gil-García, Dawes, and Pardo (2018) affirm that the *Digital Governance* Bring up "*Knowledge Interoperability*" — a condition in which data and policies must be integrated across institutions to produce appropriate and accountable decisions. In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon can be seen in the implementation of the One Data Indonesia (SDI) and INA Digital GovTech policies, which encourage data exchange across government agencies. However, data integration does not necessarily mean epistemic integration: institutions still have different definitions, indicators, and knowledge systems, leading to "*Knowledge Fragmentation*" which hinders cross-organizational learning (Nugraha & Hidayat, 2020).

State administrations must play the role of curators of public knowledge—not just data users, but epistemic system designers that enable cross-sector collaboration. In this case, the concept *epistemic governance* (Mergel, Edelmann, & Haug, 2019) becomes relevant: the government is no longer the sole controller of information, but a facilitator of the flow of knowledge that is transparent and verifiable by citizens. Epistemologically, this shift marks that the State Administration no longer relies on a top-down knowledge model, but transforms into a *distributed epistemic community* that is dynamic and reflective.

Adaptive Governance and Public Management Paradigm Reform

The transformation of modern public administration requires adaptive governance (*Adaptive Governance*) that are able to respond to changing social, economic, and technological complexities. Janssen & van der Voort (2016) emphasize that traditional bureaucratic models, which are hierarchical and static, are no longer relevant in the face of the uncertainty of the digital age. In this context, the agile governance approach offers a new paradigm: governance that experiments, learns quickly, and adjusts policies iteratively.

However, adaptivity does not mean losing the direction of values. Main principles *Adaptive Governance* is a balance between flexibility and accountability, between innovation and legitimacy. State Administration should be a discipline that teaches how to manage such ambiguity: when procedures should be strictly followed, and when innovation should be allowed to respond to social change.

In Indonesia, this adaptive practice is starting to be seen in various initiatives, such as *Policy Sandbox* on public digitization policies and government data disclosure. However, most bureaucracies still think strategically *Rule-based* and oriented towards formal compliance. The epistemic challenge that arises is how to build a bureaucratic learning system that not only relies on technical training, but also internalizes reflective learning — understanding the "why" behind every policy innovation (Wibowo & Prasetyo, 2023).

State administration, in this case, becomes the epistemological foundation for the formation of an adaptive bureaucracy—providing principles, ethics, and logic of thought that allow the public apparatus to manage change without losing legitimacy.

Public Values and the Reconstruction of the Axiological Dimension

If the ontological and epistemological dimensions of State Administration continue to change, then the axiological dimension — that is, the values on which this science is based — needs to be strengthened. In the last two decades, a new consensus has emerged in the literature that the main orientation of public administration is not efficiency, but the creation of public value (Moore, 2016; Osborne, 2020).

Public values include the dimensions of social justice, participation, transparency, and sustainability. In practice, the creation of public value demands a balance between three elements: political legitimacy, institutional capacity, and community support (Bannister & Connolly, 2020). State administration in Indonesia often emphasizes only the second dimension — institutional capabilities — while the legitimacy and participation aspects are still weak.

Epistemicly, public values demand a new way of thinking in measuring administrative success. It is not enough to only have performance indicators (output), but must include social outcome indicators such as increasing citizen trust, satisfaction with services, and fairness in access to public resources (Meijer, 2019). Therefore, the axiological reconstruction of State Administration must answer two fundamental questions: (1) how public values are defined contextually in Indonesian society; and (2) how the public policy learning mechanism can ensure that these values are achieved in a sustainable manner.

State Administration as a Collaborative Orchestrator

In the paradigm *New Public Governance*, government no longer acts as a single service provider, but rather as an orchestrator of cross-actor collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2017). This means that the state must manage the complex relationships between government agencies, the private sector, civil society, and local communities in a network of public governance.

Cordella & Paletti (2019) describe this role as *government as a platform* — the government provides infrastructure, standards, and coordination mechanisms, while other actors contribute to creating value. In the context of epistemology, this means that State Administration needs to develop new theories and methods to understand the dynamics of collaboration, including data governance, collaborative risk management, and adaptive leadership.

In the Indonesian context, the most obvious example of this shift is collaboration between institutions in the digital public service system (e.g. NIK integration, Dukcapil services, and OSS portals). Although collaboration has become bureaucratic jargon, research shows that there is still a "sectoral ego" that hinders the orchestration of public values (Dwiyanto, 2018). The epistemic challenge that arises is how to formulate collaborative governance mechanisms that can ensure equitable distribution of benefits, clarity of roles, and collective accountability.

Reorientation of Education and Research in State Administration

The epistemological crisis is also reflected in the academic world. The State Administration curriculum in many universities in Indonesia is still oriented towards a traditional bureaucratic approach. In fact, global developments demand interdisciplinarity: a combination of organizational theory, public policy, behavioral economics, data science, and public ethics.

According to Mergel et al. (2019), the main challenge of modern public administration education is to integrate digital, collaborative, and ethical literacy in a single learning framework. Thus, epistemic reform must also start from the campus—creating an academic ecosystem that not only educates administrators, but also *Public thinkers* reflective and innovative.

State Administration research in Indonesia needs to be directed to answer real problems: digital transformation of bureaucracy, cross-agency collaboration, and public value in service. The methodological approach does not have to be quantitative or qualitative alone, but mixed-method and reflective, with an orientation to produce *usable knowledge* for the government and the community.

Implications: Towards the Recontextualization of Indonesian State Administration

Through this whole discussion, it is clear that the main challenge of the Indonesian State Administration is not just a question of efficiency or institutional structure, but an epistemic crisis — a question of how to think and interpret the government itself. Public Management can be an epistemic partner, not a threat, if State Administration positions itself as a discipline that governs values, ethics, and legitimacy in modern governance.

By adopting a reflective, collaborative, and value-based approach, the State Administration can reaffirm its role as the scientific foundation of government. He not only taught how to manage the country, but also taught why the country should be managed in a certain way. This is where the distinction from

Public Management lies — not in the tools, but in the meaning and moral direction of the administration of government.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

State Administration in Indonesia is at a critical point in its epistemological evolution. The paradigm shift from the classic bureaucratic model to modern public management has given rise to a fundamental crisis of disciplinary identity. On the one hand, the demands of efficiency, accountability, and digitalization encourage governments to adopt a managerial approach. But on the other hand, the dominance of the logic of efficiency risks eroding the normative foundation of State Administration as a values-based discipline oriented towards social justice and citizen service. This crisis shows that the problem of public administration in Indonesia is not merely structural, but epistemic: it concerns how knowledge about governance is generated, justified, and applied in the context of public policy. Therefore, the main challenge faced is not just bureaucratic reform, but also *Thinking Reform* (Reform of Mind) on how to understand and manage state administration in the collaborative and digital era.

In response to this crisis, it is necessary to recontextualize the epistemology of State Administration so that it remains relevant and competitive in the midst of the advancement of the Public Management paradigm. This discipline must integrate the dimensions of **Ontological** (a new understanding of the state as a collaborative network), **epistemological** (reflective and data-driven way of thinking), and **Axiology** (orientation to public values and moral legitimacy). Through the *New Public Service* and *Public Value Governance*, State Administration can position itself as a discipline that not only regulates governance, but also becomes the foundation of public ethics that maintains a balance between bureaucratic rationality and managerial efficiency. In the Indonesian context, this can be realized by strengthening the government's role as an orchestrator of cross-actor collaboration through knowledge-driven policies and national data integration. Thus, State Administration does not sink into managerial pragmatism, but rather stands as a reflective discipline that directs the transformation of government towards fair, transparent, and sustainable governance.

As a strategic advice, three steps need to be a priority. First, at the academic level, the curriculum and research of State Administration need to be updated in order to be able to bridge value theory with modern managerial practices, for example by integrating digital literacy, evidence-based policies, and public service ethics in one learning framework. Second, at the institutional level, the government needs to strengthen *Governance of Knowledge* by encouraging data interoperability, adaptive learning mechanisms, and cross-agency collaboration forums to narrow the gap between policy and implementation. Third, at the value level, state apparatus needs to be fostered as *Public Serving Leaders*—a public leader who is values-oriented, reflective, and collaboratively capacited. By implementing these measures, State Administration will not only survive as an autonomous academic discipline, but will also play a key role as a key pillar of Indonesia's public governance reform towards an innovative, integrity, and citizen-centric government.

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