

Research Article

Bureaucratic Transformation and Public Service Innovation in the Dynamics of Government Administrative Capacity in Dili City, Timor Leste

Roberto Jeronimo Cristovão^{1*}, Emiliana Sri Pudjiarti²

¹ Master of Public Administration, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Semarang, Indonesia, Email: vellycristovao@gmail.com

² Master of Public Administration, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Semarang, Indonesia, Email: emilpudjiarti@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author: Roberto Jeronimo Cristovão, Email: vellycristovao@gmail.com

Abstract: This study aims to analyze bureaucratic transformation and public service innovation in the dynamics of the administrative capacity of the Dili City government, specifically at the Cristo Rei District Office, in realizing responsive, accountable, and quality public services. The research approach employed a mixed methods approach, collecting quantitative data through questionnaires from 12 respondents and qualitative data through in-depth interviews with four key informants: Fernando Araujo (District Head), Marciana de Jesus Soares (Head of Administration and Finance), Jose Sarmento (Head of Program Planning), and Ernesto Mendonça (Head of Public Relations). Statistical analysis showed that institutional capacity had a very strong influence on public accountability ($r = 0.806$; $p = 0.002$), while bureaucratic responsiveness had a very strong influence on the quality of public services ($r = 0.727$; $p = 0.007$). The interviews revealed concrete practices of bureaucratic transformation, such as effective internal coordination, orderly administrative procedures, one-stop service, and responsiveness to citizen needs. This study indicates that institutional capacity and bureaucratic responsiveness are the dominant factors in improving service quality, while formal accountability needs to be made more open and participatory. The findings support the Theory of Administrative Capacity and the New Public Service, and offer recommendations to strengthen participatory mechanisms and make performance evaluation more transparent.

Keywords: Bureaucratic Responsiveness; Institutional Capacity; Public Accountability; Public Service Innovation; Public Service Quality.

1. Introduction

Bureaucratic transformation and public service innovation are national strategic issues that are a primary focus of public administration reform agendas in many countries, particularly in developing and post-conflict contexts. Globally, demands on bureaucracies are no longer limited to procedural compliance but extend to the government's ability to provide quality, responsive, accountable, and citizen-oriented public services (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). In the context of national development, bureaucratic transformation is seen as a crucial instrument for enhancing government administrative capacity to respond to increasingly complex social, economic, and political dynamics (Grindle & Hilderbrand, 1995). Therefore, bureaucratic reform and public service innovation cannot be separated from efforts to strengthen institutional capacity and good governance.

In Timor-Leste, particularly at the local government level, issues of bureaucratic transformation and public service innovation are highly relevant. As a relatively young nation still undergoing institutional consolidation, Timor-Leste faces serious challenges in building its administrative capacity (Soares, 2013). Dili, as the nation's capital and center of government and socio-economic activity, is a key representative of these dynamics. The Dili City Government is required to provide effective and inclusive public services amidst limited resources, limited staff capacity, and increasing public demands. Bureaucratic Transformation and Public Service Innovation in Dili City. Thus, it serves as an important indicator in assessing the extent to which local government administrative capacity develops and adapts to community needs.

Received: January 13, 2026

Revised: January 21, 2026

Accepted: February 11, 2026

Published: February 26, 2026

Curr. Ver.: February 26, 2026



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors.

Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution

(CC BY SA) license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

However, in practice, various problems remain, indicating a gap between normative expectations and empirical reality. This gap in Dili City is evident in the suboptimal performance of the bureaucracy in responding to community needs, weak institutional coordination, and limited innovation in public services at the sub-district level. On the one hand, the government is committed to promoting bureaucratic reform and improving service quality. However, the institutional capacity and responsiveness of the apparatus have not fully met these demands. This situation indicates a mismatch between existing administrative capacity and the complexity of public service tasks faced by the Dili City government, particularly at front-line service units such as sub-district offices.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through the perspective of the Administrative Capacity Theory proposed by Grindle and Hilderbrand (1995). This theory asserts that the government's success in carrying out public functions is largely determined by administrative capacity, which encompasses institutional capacity, human resources, administrative systems, and the political context. Institutional capacity is a key foundation because it relates to the organizational structure, rules of the game, and coordination mechanisms that enable the bureaucracy to function effectively. Without adequate institutional capacity, bureaucratic transformation and public service innovation tend to be partial and unsustainable.

On the other hand, the New Public Service (NPS) Theory proposed by Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) provides a normative framework for how bureaucracy should function in public service delivery. The NPS emphasizes that the primary purpose of public administration is to serve citizens (not customers), strengthen the public interest, and encourage democratic participation and accountability. From this perspective, bureaucratic responsiveness and public accountability are key elements determining the quality of public services. Therefore, the relationship between the concepts in this study can be understood as strong institutional capacity will encourage bureaucratic responsiveness and public accountability, ultimately leading to improved public service quality.

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between administrative capacity and public service performance, but they have shown certain limitations. Grindle (1997) emphasized the importance of institutional capacity in public-sector reform in developing countries but did not sufficiently highlight the value dimension and the service orientation toward citizens. Meanwhile, research by Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) focused more on the normative and democratic aspects of public services. However, it did not examine in depth the limitations of institutional capacity in the context of local governance in post-conflict countries. Another study by Andrews (2013) showed that bureaucratic reform often fails to account for the dynamics of local capacity. Thus, there is a research gap in the limited number of studies that integrate perspectives on administrative capacity and the New Public Service in analyze bureaucratic transformation and public service innovation at the municipal government level in Timor-Leste.

The selection of Dili City as the research location is based on its strategic role as the center of government and public services in Timor-Leste. Dili City reflects the complexity of public administration challenges faced by local governments, including population density, urbanization, and diverse service demands. Specifically, the Cristo Rei Subdistrict Office was chosen as the research object because it is a bureaucratic unit that interacts directly with the community and plays a front-line role in public service delivery. This subdistrict also has unique social and geographical characteristics, making it a relevant context for empirically examining the dynamics of administrative capacity, bureaucratic responsiveness, and public service quality.

Based on this description, the research problem is formulated as a single overarching question: How do bureaucratic transformation and public service innovation affect the dynamics of the administrative capacity of the Dili City government, specifically at the Cristo Rei District Office, in realizing responsive, accountable, and quality public services? This question is expected to comprehensively explore the relationship between institutional capacity, bureaucratic responsiveness, public accountability, and the quality of public services in the context of local government in Timor-Leste.

Therefore, the title of this research is formulated as:

"Bureaucratic Transformation and Public Service Innovation in the Dynamics of the Administrative Capacity of the Dili City Government (A Study at the Cristo Rei District Office, Timor-Leste)"

2. Literature Review

Administrative Capacity Theory

Administrative capacity theory is an important conceptual framework in public administration studies that explains how public organizations can carry out their functions, duties, and responsibilities effectively and sustainably. Administrative capacity refers to the government's institutional ability to formulate policies, implement programs, and provide high-quality public services. This concept has become increasingly relevant in the context of public demands for transparent, accountable, and responsive government performance.

According to Grindle (1996), administrative capacity is part of state capacity, reflecting the bureaucracy's ability to manage resources, coordinate actors, and enforce public rules and policies. Administrative capacity relates not only to the number of resources the government possesses but also to how those resources are optimally managed, developed, and utilized. Thus, administrative capacity encompasses structural dimensions, human resources, managerial systems, and organizational culture.

Conceptually, administrative capacity is often understood through several main components. First is human resource capacity, which encompasses the competence, skills, professionalism, and integrity of civil servants. Civil servants with adequate technical and managerial capabilities are better able to implement public policy effectively. Second is organizational capacity, which encompasses bureaucratic structure, division of authority, work procedures, and coordination mechanisms between work units. Organizations that are too hierarchical and rigid tend to hinder administrative effectiveness.

Third, administrative capacity also encompasses systems and processes, such as planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation. A good administrative system will support data- and evidence-based decision-making (evidence-based policy). In this regard, administrative capacity is closely related to the government's ability to manage information, technology, and administrative innovation. Fourth is leadership and political-administrative capacity, namely the ability of bureaucratic leaders to direct the organization, develop a vision, and maintain the stability and legitimacy of public institutions.

Painter and Pierre (2005) emphasize that administrative capacity is dynamic and shaped by the social, political, and economic context. Bureaucratic reform, decentralization, and globalization have changed the demands of government administrative capacity. In the context of decentralization, for example, local governments must have sufficient administrative capacity to exercise the authority delegated by the central government. Weak administrative capacity is often a major cause of failed public policy implementation.

Furthermore, administrative capacity is also closely related to the concept of good governance. Good governance requires a professional, transparent, and accountable bureaucracy. Without strong administrative capacity, the principles of good governance are difficult to realize. Therefore, strengthening administrative capacity is a crucial agenda item in public sector reform, particularly in developing countries that still face various institutional limitations.

In the context of public services, administrative capacity determines the government's ability to meet the public's needs and expectations. Governments with low administrative capacity tend to deliver slow, inefficient, and less responsive services. Conversely, high administrative capacity enables the government to innovate, adapt to environmental changes, and continuously improve the quality of public services. Thus, the theory of administrative capacity provides a strong foundation for analyzing bureaucratic performance and public policy effectiveness.

New Public Service Theory

The New Public Service (NPS) theory is a paradigm in public administration that emerged as a critique of the dominant New Public Management (NPM) approach. This theory, developed by Denhardt and Denhardt in the early 2000s, emphasizes the role of government as a public servant, not merely a manager or a resource controller. The New Public Service is based on the values of democracy, citizen participation, and the public interest as the primary orientation of government administration.

Denhardt and Denhardt (2003) state that the core of the New Public Service is the principle of "serving citizens, not customers." This means that citizens are viewed not as customers merely receiving services, but as sovereign owners with rights, obligations, and an active role in the governance process. From this perspective, the primary task of public

officials is to facilitate dialogue, build collaboration, and help the community formulate and achieve shared interests (the public interest).

Conceptually, the New Public Service is built on several basic assumptions. First, the public interest is not narrowly defined by elites or market mechanisms but rather is shaped through deliberative and participatory processes. The government acts as a mediator, bridging diverse interests within society. Second, accountability in the NPS extends not only vertically to superiors or politicians, but also horizontally to citizens, communities, and democratic values.

Third, the New Public Service emphasizes ethical values, social justice, and public trust. Unlike the New Public Service (NPM), which focuses on efficiency, performance, and competition, the New Public Service (NPS) places greater emphasis on legitimacy, participation, and the quality of relations between government and society. In this context, the success of public services is measured not only by output and outcome, but also by democratic and inclusive processes.

Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) formulated seven key principles of the New Public Service, including: serving citizens; pursuing the public interest; valuing citizenship; thinking strategically and acting democratically; recognizing the complexity of accountability; serving rather than controlling; and valuing people, not just productivity. These principles emphasize that public administration cannot be separated from normative values and public ethics.

In government practice, the New Public Service promotes a collaborative governance model. The government is no longer the sole actor; it works with the private sector, civil society, and local communities in formulate and implement public policy. This approach is relevant in addressing complex public problems (wicked problems) that cannot be resolved by the government alone.

Furthermore, the New Public Service places significant emphasis on developing the capacity of public officials in participatory leadership, communication, and social facilitation. Civil servants are required to be sensitive to public aspirations and able to build public trust. Therefore, the success of public services depends heavily on the quality of the relationship between the government and citizens.

In developing countries, implementing the New Public Service faces various challenges, including a hierarchical bureaucratic culture, low public participation, and limited administrative capacity. Nevertheless, this paradigm remains relevant as a normative foundation for more democratic and public-interest-oriented public administration reforms. Therefore, the New Public Service theory makes an important contribution to enriching public administration discourse, particularly in efforts to realize a democratic, inclusive, and equitable government.

Developing the Concept of Institutional Capacity

Institutional capacity is a crucial concept in public administration studies, referring to a public institution's or organization's ability to carry out its functions, duties, and authorities effectively, efficiently, and sustainably. Institutional capacity is not only about the availability of resources but also about the organization's ability to manage them to achieve policy and public service objectives.

According to Grindle (1996), institutional capacity is part of state capacity, reflecting the ability of public institutions to design and implement policies, enforce regulations, and provide public services. This capacity is shaped by an institution's organizational structure, formal rules, norms, and practices. Thus, institutional capacity is not static; it can develop or weaken in response to changes in the organization's internal and external environment.

Conceptually, institutional capacity consists of several main dimensions. First, structural capacity, which includes a clear organizational structure, the division of tasks and authorities, and coordination mechanisms between work units. A clear and non-overlapping organizational structure will support the effective implementation of institutional tasks. Second, human resource capacity, which encompasses the competence, skills, professionalism, and integrity of the apparatus. Competent apparatus is a key prerequisite for the success of public institutions.

Third, systems and procedural capacity, such as planning, budgeting, oversight, and management information systems. Good systems enable institutions to operate consistently, transparently, and accountably. Fourth, leadership capacity and organizational culture reflect the leader's ability to direct the organization, develop a vision, and foster an adaptive and innovative work culture. UNDP (2009) emphasizes that institutional capacity also relates to

an institution's ability to adapt to change and societal demands. In the context of modern governance, public institutions must be responsive, open, and able to collaborate with diverse stakeholders. Weak institutional capacity is often the main cause of low public organization performance and policy implementation failure.

In the context of public services, institutional capacity determines how well an organization can provide quality, sustainable services. Institutions with strong institutional capacity can optimally manage resources, implement service innovations, and maintain public trust. Therefore, strengthening institutional capacity is a crucial agenda item in public administration reform, particularly in developing countries that still face institutional limitations.

Bureaucratic Responsiveness

Bureaucratic responsiveness is the ability and willingness of government officials to respond quickly, accurately, and in accordance with public expectations to public needs, aspirations, and complaints. Responsiveness is a key indicator in assessing bureaucratic performance, particularly in community-oriented public services. According to Dwiyanto (2006), bureaucratic responsiveness is the ability of a public organization to recognize community needs, set service agendas and priorities, and develop programs and activities that align with public aspirations. A responsive bureaucracy does not simply wait for orders or follow formal procedures; it proactively recognizes changing community needs and adapts its policies and services accordingly.

The concept of bureaucratic responsiveness is closely related to the modern public service paradigm, which positions the public as the subject, not the object, of service. From this perspective, public officials must possess social sensitivity, communication skills, and an open attitude toward criticism and public input. Responsiveness also reflects the extent to which the bureaucracy can reduce the gap between formulated policies and actual needs on the ground.

Operationally, bureaucratic responsiveness can be measured through several aspects, including the speed of service, the accuracy in complaint handling, the ease of accessing services, and the appropriateness of services to community needs. Denhardt and Denhardt (2003) emphasize that a responsive bureaucracy must be able to build good relationships with citizens through dialogue, participation, and collaboration. Thus, responsiveness is not merely technical but also normative and ethical. Bureaucratic responsiveness is also related to mechanisms for public participation. The more open the space for public participation in policy planning and evaluation, the greater the bureaucracy's opportunity to accurately understand public needs. Conversely, closed and hierarchical bureaucracies tend to be less responsive to public aspirations.

In the context of public services in developing countries, bureaucratic responsiveness often faces various obstacles, such as a rigid bureaucratic culture, limited resources, and low staff capacity. Nevertheless, increasing responsiveness remains a primary public demand for government performance. Therefore, bureaucratic responsiveness is a key concept in efforts to realize a democratic, effective, and public-interest-oriented government.

Public Accountability

Public accountability is a fundamental principle in democratic governance. This concept refers to the obligation of the government and public officials to be accountable to the public, the holder of ultimate sovereignty, for every action, policy, and use of public resources. Public accountability is a crucial instrument for preventing abuse of authority and increasing public trust in government. According to Bovens (2007), public accountability is a social relationship in which a public actor is obliged to explain and be accountable for its actions to a specific forum, which has the right to assess, question, and impose sanctions. In this context, accountability is not only administrative but also political, legal, and social. Public accountability has several main dimensions. First, vertical accountability, namely the government's accountability to higher political institutions or to the people through electoral mechanisms. Second, horizontal accountability involves oversight institutions such as parliament, audit institutions, and the judiciary. Third, social accountability, namely accountability to the public through transparency, public participation, and social control.

Romzek and Dubnick (1987) emphasized that public accountability is also related to clear roles, performance standards, and evaluation mechanisms. Without adequate standards and mechanisms, accountability tends to be formalistic and ineffective. Therefore, public accountability demands a transparent and publicly accessible reporting, monitoring, and

evaluation system. In the context of public services, public accountability is a primary prerequisite for improving service quality. Accountable services enable the public to understand their rights and obligations and assess the performance of service providers. Furthermore, public accountability encourages officials to work professionally and prioritize the public interest. Thus, public accountability serves not only as a control mechanism but also as a means of learning and improving government performance. Effective implementation of public accountability will strengthen government legitimacy and support the realization of good governance.

Public Service Quality

Public service quality is the level of service excellence provided by public organizations in meeting public needs and expectations. Service quality is a key indicator of the success of public service delivery and reflects the extent to which the government fulfills its role as a public servant. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) defined service quality as the gap between service users' expectations and their perceptions of the service performance received. This concept later became known through the SERVQUAL model, which encompasses five main dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Although originally developed for the private sector, this model has been widely adapted in public service studies. In the context of public services, service quality is measured not only in terms of technical aspects but also of processes and public values. DiSanto (2006) stated that public service quality includes ease of access, speed of service, certainty of cost and time, and fair and non-discriminatory treatment. Quality services must satisfy the public while ensuring social justice.

Public service quality is also closely related to the public's perceptions and experiences as service users. Therefore, assessments of service quality are subjective and influenced by the community's social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. The government must understand the diversity of community needs and expectations to design inclusive and responsive services. Zeithaml et al. (1990) emphasize that improving service quality requires organizational commitment, staff competence, and a user-oriented service system. In the public sector, improving service quality also requires adequate policy support, budgeting, and oversight. Without such support, efforts to improve service quality tend to be unsustainable.

Therefore, public service quality is a multidimensional concept that reflects government performance, values, and service orientation. Improving the quality of public services is a primary goal of bureaucratic reform and a prerequisite for building public trust in the government.

3. Research Methodology

This research used a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of bureaucratic transformation and public service innovation at the Cristo Rei District Office in Dili City. The quantitative approach was used to measure respondents' perceptions of institutional capacity, bureaucratic responsiveness, public accountability, and public service quality through a Likert-based questionnaire. Quantitative data were collected from 18 respondents, comprising office staff and service users. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to examine the distribution of responses and correlation analysis to assess relationships between variables (Creswell, 2014).

The qualitative approach was conducted through in-depth interviews with four key informants: the sub-district head, the head of public relations, the head of administration and finance, and the head of program planning. Qualitative analysis used data triangulation to validate findings and thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between concepts (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The Cristo Rei Sub-district Office was chosen as the research location because it is the front-line bureaucratic unit that interacts directly with the public, making it representative for assessing administrative capacity and the quality of public services. This mixed-methods approach is expected to provide a comprehensive picture, both numerical and narrative, of the dynamics of bureaucratic transformation and public service innovation at the sub-district level.

4. Research Results and Discussion

Results

Quantitative Research Results

Based on the descriptive statistics, the data comprised 12 observations ($N = 12$) per variable, indicating that all respondents provided complete data (Valid N listwise = 12). This indicates there was no missing data, allowing for comprehensive analysis. For more details, see the following table:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Red	Std. Deviation
Institutional Capacity	12	17,00	22,00	19,7500	1,81534
Bureaucratic Responsiveness	12	19,00	23,00	21,1667	1,33712
Public Accountability	12	20,00	24,00	21,9167	1,16450
Quality of Public Services	12	18,00	23,00	21,8333	1,52753
Valid N (listwise)	12				

The Institutional Capacity variable ranges from 17 to 22, with an average of 19.75 and a standard deviation of 1.82. This average value indicates that institutional capacity is in the good category. The relatively small standard deviation indicates that respondents' perceptions of institutional capacity tend to be homogeneous or not very varied. Furthermore, Bureaucratic Responsiveness had a minimum score of 19 and a maximum score of 23, with a mean of 21.17 and a standard deviation of 1.34. This higher average score compared to institutional capacity indicates that the bureaucracy is considered quite responsive in responding to public needs and complaints. The smaller standard deviation indicates a relatively high level of consistency among respondents' assessments.

The Public Accountability variable had a minimum score of 20 and a maximum of 24, with the highest average score among the variables at 21.92 and a standard deviation of 1.16. This indicates that respondents perceive public accountability as good and that perceptions are relatively uniform. The low standard deviation reinforces the conclusion that almost all respondents share a similar view of accountability.

Meanwhile, Public Service Quality had a minimum score of 18 and a maximum score of 23, with a mean score of 21.83 and a standard deviation of 1.53. This average score indicates that public service quality is perceived as good, although there is little variation in respondents' assessments compared to the public accountability variable.

Overall, the four variables had relatively high average values with low standard deviations, indicating that institutional performance, bureaucratic responsiveness, public accountability, and public service quality were at a good level and were assessed consistently by respondents.

Subsequent analysis was conducted using a person-to-person correlation statistical analysis based on the questionnaire data. The data processing yielded the following statistical results:

Table 2. Correlation Statistics.

Variabel	Institusional Capacity	Bureaucratic Responsiveness	Public Accountability	Quality of Public Services
Institutional Capacity	1	,356	806**	,607*
Bureaucratic Responsiveness	,356	1	,127	,727**
Public Accountability	806**	,127	1	,503
Quality of Public Services	,607*	,727**	,503	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Based on the Pearson correlation results, this study included 12 respondents ($N = 12$) across all variables, allowing consistent analysis of relationships without missing data. The Pearson correlation test was used to assess the direction, strength, and significance of the

relationships among Institutional Capacity, Bureaucratic Responsiveness, Public Accountability, and Public Service Quality.

The relationship between Institutional Capacity and Bureaucratic Responsiveness showed a correlation coefficient of 0.356 with a significance value of 0.256. This value indicates a positive but weak relationship that is not statistically significant. This means that increased institutional capacity does not directly lead to increased bureaucratic responsiveness, or the relationship is not strong enough to be generalized at the 95% confidence level.

Conversely, Institutional Capacity has a very strong and significant relationship with Public Accountability, with a correlation coefficient of 0.806 and a significance level of 0.002 ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that the better the institutional capacity, the higher the level of public accountability. This strong relationship underscores the importance of institutional structure, resources, and governance in promoting transparency and accountability to the public.

The relationship between Institutional Capacity and Public Service Quality also shows a strong positive correlation, with a correlation coefficient of 0.607 and a significant p -value of 0.037 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that strong institutional capacity significantly improves the quality of public services. In other words, institutions with adequate capacity tend to provide more effective and satisfactory services to the public. For the Bureaucratic Responsiveness variable, the correlation with Public Accountability is very low (0.127), with a significance level of 0.695. This indicates no significant relationship between the two variables. Bureaucratic responsiveness in this context does not necessarily reflect the level of public accountability, possibly due to procedural factors or policies that are not yet fully transparent.

However, Bureaucratic Responsiveness has a strong and significant relationship with Public Service Quality, with a correlation coefficient of 0.727 and a significance level of 0.007 ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that the more responsive the bureaucracy is in serving public needs, the higher the perceived quality of public service. This finding confirms that bureaucratic speed, accuracy, and sensitivity are key factors in improving service quality.

Meanwhile, the relationship between Public Accountability and Public Service Quality shows a moderate positive correlation of 0.503, but it is not statistically significant ($p = 0.096$). Although there is a tendency for improved public accountability to improve service quality, the relationship is not strong enough to be declared significant at the 95% confidence level.

Overall, the analysis shows that Institutional Capacity and Bureaucratic Responsiveness are important factors significantly related to Public Service Quality. Furthermore, institutional capacity plays a significant role in improving Public Accountability. This finding indicates that strengthening institutions and increasing bureaucratic responsiveness should be a primary focus in efforts to improve the quality of public services.

Qualitative Analysis Results

Based on interview transcripts with four key informants: Fernando Araujo, Head of the Sub-district Office; Marciana de Jesus Soares, Head of Administration and Finance; Jose Sarmiento, Head of Program Planning; and Ernesto Mendonça, Head of Public Relations, the research findings describe the state of institutional capacity, bureaucratic responsiveness, public accountability, and the quality of public services at the sub-district office. The analysis was conducted by concluding recurring response patterns and was supported by examples of informants' statements.

The interview results indicate that institutional capacity at the sub-district office is generally considered quite good. All interviewees stated that the existing organizational structure supports the smooth running of daily tasks and that the division of tasks among staff is relatively clear. Fernando Araujo stated that the organizational structure "sufficiently supports the smooth running of daily tasks," while Ernesto Mendonca emphasized that each staff member understands their duties and responsibilities. Coordination between units was also considered quite good, although several interviewees noted limitations. Jose Sarmiento stated that coordination "has responded fairly well," indicating that it is working but not yet fully optimal. In terms of adapting to new policies and regulations, all interviewees confirmed that the sub-district office follows and upholds policies from its superiors, reflecting a hierarchical work system and adherence to the chain of command.

In terms of bureaucratic responsiveness, the research findings indicate that the sub-district office has made efforts to respond to public needs and complaints. All interviewees stated that public complaints or criticism are received and verified. Marciana de Jesus Soares stated that "every complaint received is immediately verified," while Fernando Araujo acknowledged that the office often responds to public complaints to the best of its ability. The

interviewees also assessed that staff adequately understood residents' needs before providing services, particularly in administrative matters such as certificates and population documents. Services were adjusted to changing community needs through performance evaluations and efforts to stay abreast of public service developments, as Jose Sarmiento noted, adding that the office "always follows and responds to changes in public services." Officials' friendly and professional attitude was deemed to have improved, though the change was gradual.

Findings on public accountability indicated that transparency in service procedures was promoted by installing banners and notice boards. Fernando Araujo explained that service procedures were posted in the office area for public access. Budget management was accounted for through the preparation of budget plans and accountability reports, as noted by all interviewees. However, the complaints mechanism was still face-to-face rather than online. Furthermore, office performance reports are confidential and submitted only to superiors, as Marciana de Jesus Soares emphasized, stating that reports are "only to superiors."

Regarding the quality of public services, many interviewees stated that the services were quite good and that they received few complaints from the public. One-stop service is a key strategy for ensuring a fast, hassle-free process. Fernando Araujo provided a concrete example of how to provide land sale and purchase statements to address community needs. However, Jose Sarmiento stated that the ability to provide solutions sometimes depends on the problem's complexity. Overall, the interview results indicate that public service performance at the sub-district office is quite good but still requires improvement, particularly in performance transparency and the development of a more systematic and open complaints mechanism.

Discussion

Institutional Capacity as a Foundation for Public Accountability

Statistical analysis shows that institutional capacity has a very strong and significant relationship with public accountability ($r = 0.806$; $p = 0.002$). These findings indicate that the stronger a public organization's institutional capacity, the higher the level of accountability it generates. This strong relationship was further reinforced by qualitative findings from interviews with four key informants.

Fernando Araujo, the Sub-district Head, stated that the existing organizational structure "sufficiently supports the smooth running of daily tasks" and that all staff understand their respective roles. This statement was reinforced by Ernesto Mendonca, who emphasized that each staff member "understands their duties and responsibilities" according to their assigned functions. This shared perspective indicates that structurally and functionally, the sub-district office has been operating quite stably. Jose Sarmiento added that inter-unit coordination "has been quite satisfactory," indicating the existence of internal working mechanisms that support accountability in task implementation.

In terms of public accountability, interview data revealed that service procedures are publicized through banners and bulletin boards. Fernando Araujo explained that service information is "placed in the office area so that the public can see and follow it." This reflects the practice of procedural transparency, a key indicator of public accountability. Marciana de Jesus Soares added that budget use is accounted for through budget plans and accountability reports (LPJ), demonstrating administrative accountability.

Triangulation of statistical data and interviews demonstrates strong agreement: adequate institutional capacity—characterized by a clear organizational structure, clear division of tasks, and established administrative procedures—significantly promotes public accountability. This finding aligns with the theory that institutional capacity is a primary prerequisite for accountable governance (Grindle, 1996; Bovens, 2007). Thus, this thematic conclusion confirms that strengthening institutional capacity is a key factor in enhancing public accountability at the sub-district level.

Bureaucratic Responsiveness as the Main Determinant of Public Service Quality

Statistical results show that bureaucratic responsiveness is strongly and significantly correlated with the quality of public services ($r = 0.727$; $p = 0.007$). This means that increased responsiveness of bureaucratic officials directly contributes to improved service quality perceived by the public. Interviews with all four informants consistently confirmed this finding. Marciana de Jesus Soares stated that "every complaint received is immediately verified," indicating the bureaucracy's responsiveness in responding to public complaints. Jose Sarmiento echoed this sentiment, stating that all complaints and criticisms are "verified" before being acted upon. Fernando Araujo acknowledged that despite limitations, the sub-district

office "often responds or responds to the best of its ability," reflecting responsive efforts, although not yet fully optimal.

In terms of service quality, all informants emphasized that the one-stop shop system was implemented to avoid cumbersome processes. Ernesto Mendonca stated that the "one-stop shop" system is a way to ensure more controlled and fair services. Fernando Araujo provided a concrete example of the service for preparing land purchase and sale statements as a concrete solution to community needs. This example demonstrates that responsiveness does not stop receiving complaints but also manifests in providing solutions.

Data triangulation indicates that when the bureaucracy can respond quickly to public needs, understand their needs, and adapt services accordingly, the quality of public services improves significantly. This finding aligns with Denhardt and Denhardt's (2015) view that quality public services are rooted in a responsive orientation toward citizens. Therefore, bureaucratic responsiveness can be concluded as a primary determinant of public service quality at sub-district offices.

Public Accountability Has Not Yet Fully Directly Impacted Service Quality

The statistical analysis shows a positive but insignificant relationship between public accountability and public service quality ($r = 0.503$; $p = 0.096$). This indicates that, despite the trend towards a relationship, public accountability has not yet fully impacted service quality improvement. This statistical finding aligns with the interview results. All interviewees stated that sub-district office performance reports are confidential and submitted only to superiors. Marciana de Jesus Soares explicitly stated that performance reports are "only to superiors." Jose Sarmento and Ernesto Mendonca made similar statements. This situation indicates that accountability remains upward, not fully horizontal to the public.

Although service procedures are published and budgets are accounted for through the Public Service Report (LPJ), the public does not yet have access to comprehensive performance reports. Fernando Araujo stated that the complaints mechanism is still conducted in person and not online. This limitation indicates that accountability practices are not fully oriented towards the public as service users. This triangulation explains why public accountability has not statistically significantly influenced service quality. In line with Bovens' (2007) theory, accountability that lacks mechanisms for openness and public participation tends to have limited impact on service performance. Therefore, these findings conclude that improving service quality requires more open and participatory public accountability.

Institutional Capacity and Responsiveness as Dominant Factors Over Formal Accountability

Statistical findings indicate that institutional capacity and bureaucratic responsiveness are significantly related to public service quality, while public accountability is not. This finding is reinforced by interview results, which emphasized operational aspects and apparatus behavior over formal accountability mechanisms. Interviewees emphasized smooth structures, clear duties, and responsiveness to public needs, rather than public performance reporting. Ernesto Mendonca stated that the office's primary focus is "providing solutions to public criticism," rather than publishing performance reports. This suggests that daily work practices better determine service quality.

This triangulation confirms that, in the context of sub-district offices, internal factors such as institutional capacity and bureaucratic responsiveness are the primary determinants in service quality. This finding aligns with Grindle (1996), who stated that institutional capacity and policy implementation often determine service performance more than formal regulations alone.

Thus, this thematic conclusion confirms that strengthening the apparatus's capacity and increasing bureaucratic responsiveness need to be prioritized to improve the quality of public services. In contrast, public accountability needs to be made more open and community-oriented.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, bureaucratic transformation and public service innovation at the Cristo Rei District Office in Dili City indicate that institutional capacity and bureaucratic responsiveness are key to achieving responsive, accountable, and high-quality public services. Statistical analysis indicates that institutional capacity is strongly correlated with public accountability ($r = 0.806$; $p = 0.002$), while bureaucratic responsiveness is strongly correlated with public service quality ($r = 0.727$; $p = 0.007$). The average institutional capacity

score of 19.75 and bureaucratic responsiveness of 21.17 indicate a relatively high level of organizational performance consistency. Interviews supported these findings, with Fernando Araujo, the sub-district head, stating that the organizational structure “sufficiently supports the smooth running of daily tasks” and that staff “adequately understand their duties and responsibilities as public servants.” Marciana de Jesus Soares added that the division of tasks among staff is clear, and administrative procedures support effective public service. At the same time, Jose Sarmiento emphasized that coordination between units is “quite good.” Ernesto Mendonca also emphasized that each staff member understands their respective unit responsibilities, enabling smooth service delivery.

Bureaucratic responsiveness is evident in the office's ability to respond to public needs quickly and accurately. Fernando stated that staff respond to public complaints to the best of their ability, while Marciana noted that each complaint is verified before action is taken. Jose Sarmiento emphasized that the office is always responsive to changing citizen needs, and Ernesto Mendonca added that service information is clear and accessible to all levels of society. The practice of one-stop service is a key strategy to ensure a fast, timely, and fair process, for example, in processing land sales and population documents. This indicates that bureaucratic innovation is citizen-oriented, in accordance with the principles of the New Public Service (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015).

Public accountability, although implemented through administrative procedures and accountability reports, has not yet significantly impacted service quality. Statistical results show a positive but insignificant correlation between public accountability and service quality ($r = 0.503$; $p = 0.096$). This is reflected in interviews, where Fernando mentioned that service procedures are posted on bulletin boards. However, performance reports are confidential and submitted only to superiors, as explained by Marciana, Jose, and Ernesto. This suggests that although administrative procedures are well-executed, public involvement in monitoring and evaluation remains limited.

Overall, bureaucratic transformation at the Cristo Rei District Office has successfully increased operational capacity and responsiveness to public needs, resulting in relatively high public service quality. Practical practices such as effective internal coordination, orderly administrative procedures, one-stop service, and the ability to resolve citizen issues indicate that operational factors are more dominant than formal accountability mechanisms in determining service quality. These findings support the Administrative Capacity Theory (Grindle, 1996), which emphasizes the importance of institutional capacity in bureaucratic success, and the New Public Service theory (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015), which emphasizes citizen-oriented service as the center of public service innovation.

Limitations of this study include the limited number of informants and the focus on a single sub-district office, so the results should be generalized with caution. Recommendations for future research include expanding the sample to all sub-districts in Dili City, developing more participatory accountability mechanisms, and conducting causal and longitudinal analyses to more deeply evaluate the impact of bureaucratic transformation on public service quality.

References

- Andrews, R., & Entwistle, T. (2010). Does cross-sectoral partnership deliver? *Public Administration*, 88(2), 297–314.
- Andrews, R., Boyne, G. A., Law, J., & Walker, R. M. (2009). Centralization, organizational strategy, and public service performance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 19(1), 57–80. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum039>
- Bekkers, V., Edelenbos, J., & Steijn, B. (2011). *Innovation in the public sector: Linking capacity and leadership*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230307520>
- Bouckaert, G., & Van de Walle, S. (2003). Comparing measures of citizen trust and user satisfaction. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67(3), 371–392.
- Bovens, M. (2007). Analyzing and assessing accountability: A conceptual framework. *European Law Journal*, 13(4), 447–468. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0386.2007.00378.x>
- Christensen, T., & Lægreid, P. (2007). *Transcending new public management: The transformation of public sector reforms*. Ashgate.

- Denhardt, J. V., & Denhardt, R. B. (2000). The new public service: Serving rather than steering. *Public Administration Review*, 60(6), 549–559. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-3352.00117>
- Denhardt, J. V., & Denhardt, R. B. (2003). *The new public service: Serving, not steering*. M.E. Sharpe.
- Denhardt, J. V., & Denhardt, R. B. (2015). *The new public service: Serving, not steering* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315699356>
- Denhardt, R. B., Denhardt, J., & Blanc, T. A. (2014). *Public administration: An action orientation* (7th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Dwi Yanto, A. (2006). *Realizing good governance through public services*. Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Grindle, M. S. (1996). *Challenging the state: Crisis and innovation in Latin America and Africa*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511521829>
- Hood, C. (1991). Public management for all seasons? *Public Administration*, 69(1), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.1991.tb00779.x>
- Hood, C., & Dixon, R. (2015). *A government that worked better and cost less?* Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199687022.001.0001>
- Kettunen, P. (2013). Public governance and innovation capacity building. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 26(5), 386–402.
- Kettunen, P., & Kallio, J. (2016). Public sector innovation and organizational performance. *Public Money & Management*, 36(7), 501–508.
- Kettunen, P., & Kallio, J. (2021). Bureaucratic capacity building in public sector reforms. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(10), 784–795.
- Lynn, L. E., Heinrich, C. J., & Hill, C. J. (2001). *Improving governance: A new logic for empirical research*. Georgetown University Press.
- Meier, K. J., & O'Toole, L. J. (2002). Public management and organizational performance. *Public Administration Review*, 62(6), 712–723. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6210.00253>
- Milen, A. (2001). *What do we know about capacity building?* World Health Organization.
- Moynihan, D. P. (2008). *The dynamics of performance management: Constructing information and reform*. Georgetown University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book13015>
- Mulgan, R. (2000). Accountability: An ever-expanding concept? *Public Administration*, 78(3), 555–573. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00218>
- Osborne, D., & Gaebler, T. (1992). *Reinventing government*. Addison Wesley.
- Osborne, S. P. (2010). *The new public governance? Emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203861684>
- Osborne, S. P. (Ed.). (2010). *The new public governance?* Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203861684>
- Osborne, S. P., Radnor, Z., & Nasi, G. (2013). A new theory for public service management? *Public Management Review*, 15(2), 273–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2012.748820>
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 64(1), 12–40.
- Pollitt, C. (2006). Performance information for democracy: The missing link? *Evaluation*, 12(1), 38–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389006064191>
- Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2011). *Public management reform: A comparative analysis* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Rainey, H. G. (2009). *Understanding and managing public organizations* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Romzek, B. S., & Dubnick, M. (1987). Accountability in the public sector. *Public Administration Review*, 47(3), 169–176. <https://doi.org/10.2307/975901>

- Romzek, B. S., & Dubnick, M. J. (1987). Accountability in the public sector: Lessons from the Challenger tragedy. *Public Administration Review*, 47(3), 227–238. <https://doi.org/10.2307/975901>
- Schedler, A., & Proeller, I. (2000). *Governmental accountability in the digital age*. Westview Press.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2009). *Capacity development: UNDP primer*. United Nations Development Programme.
- United Nations. (2008). *UN e-government survey 2008: From e-government to connected governance*. United Nations.
- Van de Walle, S., & Bouckaert, G. (2008). *Public service performance and trust in government*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Walker, R. M., Damanpour, F., & Devece, M. (2011). Management innovation and organizational performance: The mediating effect of performance management. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 21(2), 367–386. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muq043>
- World Bank. (2000). *World development report 2000/2001: Attacking poverty*. Oxford University Press.
- Zeithaml, V. A., Parasuraman, A., & Berry, L. L. (1990). *Delivering quality service: Balancing customer perceptions and expectations*. Free Press.