

New Public Management and Performance Management in Rivers State Civil Service

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Abstract

This paper has analyzed how New Public Management (NPM) principles and performance management systems have been applied in the Rivers State civil service and their implications on efficiency, accountability and delivery of the services to the people. This research was inspired by the ongoing gap between the official implementation of public sector reforms and their real-life results in the developing administrative settings. The study, based on the NPM theory, which focuses on results-based governance, decentralization, and performance measurement, questioned the implementation and experience of this reform mechanisms at the subnational level. The qualitative research design was used, and thematic content analysis was the main method of analysis. Secondary sources of data were used, such as Rivers State government reports, civil service circulars, policy documents, and reliable media reports, and publications of labour unions, which reflect the experiences of workers. This methodology allowed a triangulated evaluation of institutional structures as well as realities of reform implementation. The results show that NPM-driven reforms have brought significant changes, especially in the digitalization of the administration, performance appraisal systems, and restructuring of procedures. Nevertheless, their influence is rather formalistic. Although performance management systems have enhanced accountability systems, they have failed to work due to poor enforcement mechanisms, low integration with incentive systems, and endemic political and bureaucratic limitations. This has led to incremental and uneven improvements in efficiency and service delivery. The paper finds that the Rivers State civil service is characterized by a hybrid system in which contemporary reform tools are mixed with established administrative practices. It suggests the enhancement of institutional capacity, performance-based accountability, and results-focused administrative culture to improve the results of the reforms.

Keywords: New Public Management, Performance Management, Civil Service Reform, Accountability, Service Delivery, Rivers State.

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1. Introduction

The issue of public sector reform has been a key focus in the sphere of Public Administration, especially in developing states where bureaucratic inefficiency, ineffective accountability systems, and inadequate service delivery capabilities still persist in compromising the results of governance [1], [2]. New Public Management (NPM) is one of the most powerful reform paradigms that appeared in the late twentieth century in response to the perceived stagnation and ineffectiveness of the traditional Weberian bureaucratic systems [3], [4], [5]. NPM is based on market-oriented values, promoting managerial independence, decentralization, competition, performance measurement, and accountability based on results in the context of a state institution [6], [7]. Its essence is to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of delivering public services by changing the emphasis on process compliance to quantifiable outcomes [8], [9]. Nevertheless, even though the theoretical attractiveness of NPM is not in doubt, there is a growing literature that challenges its applicability in general, especially in developing economies, where institutional capacity, culture of governance, and political structures are vastly different than those of the developed economies [10], [11], [12]. These criticisms imply that NPM reforms that are not adequately adjusted can have unintended effects, such as administrative fragmentation, undermined accountability, and the loss of the ethos of the public service [9], [13].

Intimately connected to NPM is the notion of Performance Management, which focuses on the systematic monitoring, assessment and enhancement of organizational outputs and outcomes in the public sector [14], [15], [16]. The performance management systems usually involve the use of key performance indicators (KPIs), benchmarking, setting of targets, and appraisal systems that aim at aligning the activities of the institutions with the policy goals [17], [18]. Theoretically, these mechanisms would result in transparency, improve accountability, and create a culture of continuous improvement [19], [20]. Nevertheless, the empirical studies show that the success of such systems strongly depends on the contextual factors, such as administrative capacity, data reliability, and organizational culture [21], [22]. The performance management reforms in most developing countries have been accused of degenerating into ritualistic practices that are marked by formal compliance and not performance enhancement [23], [24]. This is commonly known as isomorphic mimicry and is indicative of a scenario whereby institutions mimic the look of reform without realizing its intended functional effects [25], thus contributing to a critical disconnect between policy design and implementation.

The application of NPM principles in the context of public sector reforms has been growing in the Nigerian context, especially since the beginning of the 2000s when the measures to enhance efficiency, accountability, and fiscal discipline in the civil service were introduced by successive administrations [1], [2], [3]. Such reforms involve the implementation of performance-based management systems, reforms in the public financial management, and the restructuring of institutions aimed at improving service delivery [4], [5]. The results of these endeavors have been mixed. According to scholars, the effectiveness of the reforms is still hampered by the deep-rooted bureaucratic culture, political patronage, poor institutional structures, and ineffective monitoring and evaluation systems [6], [7], [8]. More to the point, there is also a significant amount of evidence to indicate that a lot of reforms are introduced at a surface level, having little to no effect on the real performance of the administration [2], [1]. This lack of correspondence between the rhetoric of reform and the reality of its functioning identifies a major issue with the governance environment in Nigeria: the importation of administrative models that are not adapted to the context [9], [10].

These issues are more acute at the subnational level, as they represent differences in institutional capacity, political leadership, and administrative culture among states. Being one of the economically important states of Nigeria because of its strategic location in the Niger Delta region, Rivers State offers a prime example to study the practical implications of NPM and performance management reforms. The state civil service is the core of policy implementation, revenue collection, and service delivery, but it has traditionally been associated with inefficiency, poor accountability systems, and administrative practices that are based on patronage [11], [1]. Despite the reform efforts put in place to bring about performance-based management systems, there are concerns on their effectiveness and sustainability. The challenges of low technical capacity, poor data systems, uneven implementation of performance standards, and political interference remain to limit the achievement of the desired reform results [8], [2]. These limitations indicate that the implementation of NPM and performance management systems in the Rivers State civil service can be more of a symbolic than a transformative change, which is indicative of the larger systemic problems of the Nigerian civil service.

Moreover, the increasing need to be more accountable and enhance service delivery further complicates the issue of reform in the public sector. In Nigeria, the growing awareness of the population, civil society, and financial demands have enhanced demands on transparency, efficiency, and quantifiable performance results [12], [4]. This changing governance landscape requires the implementation of performance management systems, as well as their successful institutionalization. Nonetheless, such systems can be easily compromised into political legitimization tools instead of actual performance improvement tools unless there is a strong political will, administrative capacity, and meritocratic culture [15], [13]. This highlights a larger structural predicament: the conflict between institutional reforms on paper and their practical execution in complicated political-administrative structures.

It is against this background that this paper critically analyzes how the New Public Management principles and performance management practices can be applied in the Rivers State civil service. It questions how far these structures have led to enhanced efficiency, accountability and service delivery and also examines the institutional, political, and structural dynamics that influence their application. The study places the analysis in both theoretical and empirical settings and therefore, it adds to the current academic discussions concerning the issue of public sector reform, state capacity and governance in developing nations. Finally, it aims to offer subtle reflections on the issues and opportunities of coordinating global administrative reform paradigms with local realities, thus contributing to the understanding of the dynamics of reform of public administration in modern systems of governance.

Research Questions

Drawing from the foregoing analysis on New Public Management reforms and Performance Management practices within the Rivers State civil service, this study is guided by a central overarching question that captures the core analytical concern of the research: To what extent have New Public Management reforms and performance management practices enhanced efficiency, accountability, and service delivery in the Rivers State civil service?

Flowing from this central inquiry, the study addresses the following specific research questions:

1. How have New Public Management principles influenced administrative structures and processes within the Rivers State civil service?

2. To what extent have performance management systems improved accountability and efficiency in public service delivery in Rivers State?

Theoretical Framework

The paper is based on the theory of New Public Management (NPM) that appeared in the late 20th century as a reform-based paradigm that promoted the use of the methods of the private sector management in the public administration. NPM, pioneered by scholars like Hood [1] and Osborne and Gaebler [2], focuses on efficiency, output orientation, decentralization, performance measurement, and accountability as the main pillars of restructuring bureaucratic systems. In this context, governmental agencies are supposed to transform their rule-oriented administrative systems into result-oriented systems of governance whereby the focus is on the achievement of quantifiable results rather than adherence to rules. In this regard, NPM offers the conceptual framework through which the administrative reforms in the Rivers State civil service have restructured the bureaucratic procedures towards efficiency, performance measurement, and optimization of service delivery.

One of the key assumptions of NPM is that bureaucratic inefficiency is caused by too much centralization, ineffective performance incentives, and absence of accountability mechanisms [1], [5]. It, therefore, encourages managerial independence, performance contracts, and output-based evaluation systems as mechanisms of enhancing institutional effectiveness. When applied to the Rivers State civil service, this theory allows an analytical interrogation of whether reforms like performance appraisal systems, digital record management, and results-based budgeting have had a significant impact on administrative culture and operational efficiency. It can also be used to critically assess whether such reforms have actually led to increased accountability or simply a formal compliance framework without any behavioral change among public servants [6].

Conceptual ReviewNew Public Management (NPM)

New Public Management (NPM) is a reform paradigm of public administration that promotes the reorganization of government agencies by adopting the principles of management of the private sector. It is conceptually characterized by its focus on efficiency, decentralization of power, output-based governance, and performance-based accountability [1], [2]. Instead of bureaucratic processes and hierarchical control, NPM reinvents the concept of public administration as a results-based system in which value is measured in terms of quantifiable performance outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and effectiveness of service delivery. It is thus a transition of the classical Weberian bureaucracy to a managerial approach whereby the officials of the government are given the freedom to manage resources in exchange for the responsibility of delivering outcomes [5].

As a result, NPM offers a conceptual framework where administrative reforms in developing bureaucracies, including sub-national civil services in Nigeria, can be questioned in terms of their ability to reorganize institutional behavior and enhance the performance of service delivery.

Performance management

Performance management can be defined as the organized approach to establishing organizational or individual goals, tracking the process, and assessing results in accordance with the established standards to enhance accountability and effectiveness. It is operationally defined by the use of such tools as key performance indicators (KPIs), performance appraisal systems, and results-based evaluation frameworks [1], [2]. Simply put, it is a control mechanism that is aimed at making sure that the activities of the public sector are in line with

organizational goals and provide measurable outcomes. In the context of public administration, performance management is a feedback mechanism that connects planning, implementation, and evaluation to increase productivity and accountability.

The Nigerian civil service setting has formal institutionalisation of performance management, namely civil service rules and reform policies, yet the practice is frequently influenced by the administrative capacity, institutional enforcement, and political considerations [3], [4]. As in other sub-national governments, it serves as both an administrative mandate and a governance instrument in Rivers State aimed at enhancing the delivery of services, although its effectiveness is determined by how much performance standards are effectively implemented and embedded in bureaucratic practice.

2. Research Method

This research will take a qualitative research design based on an interpretivist tradition of inquiry. The design is deemed suitable as it helps in the subtle analysis of the conceptualisation, implementation, and experience of New Public Management (NPM) reforms and performance management systems in the Rivers State civil service. The study gives preference to contextual knowledge of institutional practices, administrative behaviour, and governance outcomes, as embedded in reform narratives and bureaucratic realities, instead of statistical generalisation [1]. This method is especially applicable in the studies of reform in the public sector whereby formal policy intentions do not always coincide with real dynamics of implementation.

Data Collection Method.

Secondary data were used to generate data. These are Rivers State government policy documents, civil service reform reports, budget implementation reports, and official publications of the concerned administrative institutions. Additional information was also obtained based on reliable newspaper articles, televised interviews and investigative journalism that reflect administrative experiences and realities of performance in the public sector. Theoretical background and comparative information were also provided by using peer-reviewed academic literature, books, and policy analyses. These materials were chosen based on credibility, relevance, and direct interaction with the discourse of public sector reform in Nigeria.

Sample Selection

The research uses a purposive sampling method that is in line with qualitative research. The selection of documents and media materials was done on the basis of relevance to NPM reforms, performance management systems, and civil service performance in Rivers State. The official government records, reputable national media sources, and peer-reviewed scholarly publications containing empirically or analytically important information on administrative reform processes were prioritized. This will make sure that the analysis is informed by only substantively relevant and authoritative sources.

3. Results and Discussion

Data Analysis Method.

The thematic and content analysis was used to analyse data, as it is the only analytical method in this research. This entailed the systematic identification, coding and interpretation of recurring patterns in documentary and media sources. The research questions of the study were used to guide the analysis, especially those related to the themes of administrative

restructuring, efficiency improvement, accountability mechanisms, and service delivery outcomes. Patterns were identified by reading and conceptual grouping of evidence iteratively and then synthesizing interpretively to determine relationships between reform policies and administrative outcomes. The multiple documentary sources were triangulated to increase the credibility of the analysis and minimize interpretive bias. **Influence of New Public Management Principles on Administrative Structures and Processes in the Rivers State Civil Service**

Administrative structures and processes of the Rivers State civil service being influenced by the New Public Management principles are reflected in a seeming shift towards digitisation, performance monitoring systems, and restructuring of the administrative coordination systems. This reform is connected to the broader reform agenda in the Nigerian public sector in terms of its issues of fiscal efficiency and accountability both at federal and subnational tiers, along with the reforms enabled by the World Bank frameworks of governance and the policies of the country in the frame of restructuring the civil service [1], [2]. The usage of electronic personnel records, personnel verification, and performance appraisal reforms have been mentioned multiple times as the most efficient tools to increase bureaucracy efficiency and eliminate payroll distortions in Rivers State by the Office of the Head of Service (Rivers State Government Press Briefings, 2022, Rivers State Government Press Briefings, 2022).

The most evident restructuring changes are the replacement of manual administrative systems with ICT-based governance facilities, particularly the payroll and staff validation processes. The state government has publicly said its verification drills have brought with them reforms such as staff checks and digital payroll incorporation to reduce ghost workers and improve financial responsibility [3], [4]. These interventions have altered the internal administrative process by centralising the information on personnel and the executives have become more engaged in workforce management. However, as the reports of the labour unions and worker testimonies that are documented by the Nigeria Labour Congress and reflected in the national newspapers indicate, these systems remain un-uniform in their practice, and there are regular complaints regarding the delay in receiving salaries, flaws in information, and multiple rechecks that disrupt working stability [5], [6].

With regard to the administrative procedures, performance management reforms have introduced formal appraisal systems, which are geared towards harmonizing the output of employees to institutional targets that can be quantified. The government circulars about the Rivers State civil services report that ministries and departments have begun to embrace annual performance assessment templates and key performance indicators [7]. However, investigative reporting and interviews with civil servants in *The Guardian Nigeria* and *Premium Times* show that in practice, these appraisal systems are rather a process, and there is no direct correlation between performance ratings and promotion or disciplinary measures [8], [9]. In such reports, employees tend to complain that the appraisal process is purely documentation and not an imposition mechanism of performance, implying that there is an ineffective institutional relationship between appraisal and administrative sanction.

Partially, decentralisation reforms of NPM concepts have also been applied by delegating the operational tasks to ministries, departments, and agencies. However, the executive level control is very centralized, especially on budgetary control, approvals of recruitments, and promotions of senior staff. State administrative observers and civil society monitors of the public sector governance indicate that departments are supposed to achieve performance goals, but decision-making control over key resources is still centralized in the

senior administrative and political offices [10], [11]. This gives a structural anomaly where the decentralisation of responsibility is not accompanied by the same authority, which limits the usefulness of managerial reforms.

The other part of the NPM effect is the digital transformation and, in particular, the introduction of payroll automation systems and personnel databases. The governmental reports show that after the digitisation work, the salary checks and staff records are better organised [12]. However, media reports and employee responses indicate that they still experience ongoing operations problems, including system malfunctions, regular biometric scanner issues, and inaccurate employee data, which need human interventions [4], [6]. These overlapping operations mean that digital reforms, as institutionally significant as they are, have not fully replaced the old administrative modes of operation, and there are parallel systems of both manual and electronic governance.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that there is evidence that the New Public Management principles have significantly impacted the formal structure of the Rivers State civil service through digitisation, the introduction of performance management structure, and the partial decentralisation of the civil service. Nonetheless, executive messages, media inquiries, and employee testifications all indicate that these reforms have not completely changed deep-rooted bureaucracies. They have instead developed an institutional hybrid system of administration, in which modern-day managerial tools have coexisted with and contributed to traditional systems of hierarchical control, resulting in half-institutional change rather than complete reform consolidation [1], [6], [9].

Effectiveness of Performance Management Systems on Accountability and Efficiency in Rivers State Civil Service

The level of performance management systems has enhanced accountability and efficiency in the delivery of public services in Rivers State is best characterized as incremental and uneven with formal institutional reforms and continuity of implementation gaps and poor enforcement systems. An introduction of annual performance appraisals, result-based reporting frameworks, and key performance indicators was supposed to enhance output orientation and institutional accountability by tying administrative performance to quantifiable service delivery outcomes, in line with global New Public Management reforms [1], [5]. The administrative orders of the Office of the Head of Service confirm the fact that ministries, departments, and agencies have to perform regular staff assessments and coordinate the work of the departments with the set performance goals [6], [7].

In spite of this formal architecture, the results of accountability are still poor in practice because of poor enforcement of the appraisal outcomes and poor alignment between performance evaluation and administrative consequences. Civil service witness reports in national newspapers show that performance appraisal exercises are widely held to be standard bureaucratic processes, which have little influence on promotion, sanctioning, or reward systems. *Vanguard Nigeria* and *The Guardian Nigeria* report and interviews show that civil servants are worried that appraisal grades do not easily lead to career advancement or termination, undermining the effectiveness of the system as a tool of accountability [8], [9]. This view is supported by the commentary of labour unions, such as the Nigeria Labour Congress, which recognises that there is an ongoing lack of connection between formal evaluation systems and how they are actually implemented by administrative decision-making in subnational bureaucracies [10].

The efficiency benefits that come with the use of performance management systems are also not evenly distributed in the sectors. Performance frameworks in revenue-oriented agencies, specifically with more powerful digitisation and monitoring processes, have helped to improve reporting discipline and operational outputs tracking [7], [11]. Such gains help to conclude that performance management is more efficient in the case of technological infrastructure and a well-defined enforcement mechanism. But in major service delivery ministries like health, education, and public works, there are still inefficiencies that manifest through slow project implementations, lack of coordination between departments, and failure to monitor performance goals [9], [12].

Performance management systems that have accountability structures are further constrained by poor institutional capacity and poor enforcement of oversight. The internal audit controls and supervisory monitoring units do not usually have the independence and technical ability to consistently impose compliance. Cases of project delays, budget implementation failures are infrequently formally sanctioned, despite findings of legislative oversight and reports on civil society monitoring, which mitigates the deterrent impact of performance systems [13], [12]. Such lax enforcement culture compromises the credibility of accountability measures and reduces their powers to transform bureaucratic behaviour.

This means that efficiency in the delivery of public services, which is manifested in citizen experience and media coverage, is highly limited even with formal reforms. The media opinion polls taken during the televised governance debate and news coverage always point to the time lag in accessing administrative services such as licensing, healthcare administration, and infrastructure approvals. According to *Channels Television* and *Arise News* reports, there were frequent reports of problems with the bureaucratic bottleneck and the inability of ministries to respond promptly to complaints [14], [15]. These longstanding service delivery issues indicate that the performance management systems have not delivered significant gains in efficiency outcomes to citizens yet.

On the whole, the findings suggest that the performance management systems have enhanced the formal accountability structure and have also brought in administrative instruments that focus on results in the Rivers State civil service. Nevertheless, their effect on real accountability implementation and effectiveness in service delivery is minimal because their sanctioning systems are weak, with some partial incorporation into incentive systems and bureaucratic inflexibility. As a result, the reforms have produced procedural accountability as opposed to substantive institutional change in terms of performance in the delivery of public services [1], [5], [6].

Discussion of Findings

The results suggest that the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) principles in the Rivers State civil service has resulted in partial administrative change, where formal reforms (digitization, restructuring, and performance appraisal systems) can be observed in policy and practice. Nevertheless, they are accompanied by deeply rooted bureaucratic culture, such as centralization and the inflexibility of procedure, which restrict the extent to which efficiency will be achieved [1], [2].

The research also indicates that performance management systems have enhanced formal accountability systems but only made minimal realistic gains in efficiency. Although there are mechanisms like performance appraisal and target-setting, their effectiveness is undermined because of inconsistency in application and weak connection to incentives or penalties, making them less effective as a productivity-enhancing tool [3], [5].

Also, there is a big influence of politics and institutions on the outcomes of reforms, and executive-led initiatives are usually limited by administrative culture and informalities like patronage. This forms a disjuncture between the intentions of reform and actual reform. In general, the results indicate that despite the introduction of efficiency and accountability by reforms, their effects are gradual and disproportionate, which is indicative of the overall obstacles to institutional capacity and governance within sub-national public administration.

4. Conclusion

The researchers conclude that the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) reforms and performance management systems in the Rivers State civil service has had a partial and uneven institutional change. Although formal systems like performance appraisal systems, administrative restructuring, and aspects of digital governance have been implemented, their effects are more of a procedural one. Deep-rooted bureaucratic behaviors such as centralization and bureaucratic administrative culture still deprive the full efficiency and effectiveness as envisioned by NPM.

The results also indicate that performance management structures have reinforced formal accountability structures, but have not always been translated to substantive changes in service delivery. Lack of proper incorporation of performance results into incentives and sanctions has lowered the effectiveness of the two as behavior change tools in the civil service. Accountability is thus often a mere formality and the gains in efficiency are incremental, as opposed to systemic.

Further, the research points at the importance of political and institutional factors in determining the results of reform. Although there is a strong executive commitment to reform, there are capacity constraints, poor enforcement systems, and informal processes like patronage that limit the effectiveness of the reform efforts. This highlights how the achievement of administrative reforms in Rivers State does not entirely rely on policy design but on the institutional environment as a whole and how the shift towards a fully performance-based civil service is a long-term and unfinished process.

Recommendations

This was as a result of the major findings of the study, hence the following recommendations were made:

- I. Institutionalization of Performance-Based Accountability Systems: It is necessary to further integrate performance management systems by making sure that results of appraisals are systematically connected to well-defined rewards and penalties.

- a. Institutionalization of Performance-Based Accountability Systems: There is a need to deepen the integration of performance management frameworks by ensuring that appraisal outcomes are systematically linked to clearly defined incentives and sanctions. This would take performance evaluation further than compliance with procedures to an effective process capable of influencing administrative conduct, enhancing efficiency and reinforcing accountability in the civil service.
- b. Enhancing Institutional and Technical Capacity: Sustainable reform will necessitate huge investments in human capital growth, digital infrastructure, and data management systems. Ongoing professional training, in combination with the introduction of powerful monitoring and evaluation tools, will help the civil service become effective in implementing and maintaining the reforms promoted by NPM.

- c. Depoliticization and Meritocratic Governance Promotion: In order to make reform initiatives more credible and effective, there is an urgent need to ensure that the civil service is not interfered with politically. This may be attained by closely following merit based recruitment, promotion and performance evaluation procedures, thus resulting in professionalism, neutrality and administrative integrity.
- d. Enriching the Internalization of Reform Culture: In addition to the formal adoption of policy, there is an urgent necessity to introduce the principles of NPM, i.e., efficiency, results-orientation and accountability into the civil service organizational culture. This demands a long-term leadership investment, institutionalization and behavioral restructuring in such a way that reforms are not only adopted but also internalized as a norm of administration.

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