
Transforming Public Administration: Digital Governance and Policy Innovation in Decentralized Networks

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ABSTRACT

The quick development of digital technology has drastically changed the public administration scene, requiring creative policy solutions to deal with new governance issues. In particular, traditional notions of power, responsibility, and providing services have been reinterpreted by the emergence of decentralized networks, which are made possible by technologies like blockchain, distributed structures, and peer-to-peer infrastructures. The function of digital governance in promoting policy innovation in decentralized settings is examined in this research. The study investigates how decentralized technology can improve public administration's effectiveness, openness, and citizen participation using a theoretical and analytical framework. It covers important areas like data governance, public service shipment, digital identity administration, and democratic policymaking. The justification is that digital transformation has been shown to facilitate the decentralization of public administration, enhancing overall organizational effectiveness and generating more value for the public. The research explores how digital transformation facilitates the decentralization of public governance, drawing from a systematic review of the literature and fifteen informal interviews with public sector specialists. Because digital transformation increases the effectiveness of local and national governments, citizen participation, citizen autonomy, public trust, and the continuation of public administration, it helps public organizations make the most of decentralized public governance. By providing information on how policymakers might use decentralized networks to spur sustainable policy innovation, it adds to the expanding conversation on electronic governance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Devolution of public governance

For more than fifty years, researchers and practitioners have consistently focused on the concept "Governing without State [1]." The proposal comes after what was formerly thought of as the global silent revolution in response to public demands. Because of social and technical advancements, the context in which democracies function is always changing. Beginning in the early 1980s, a number of events brought about by shifts in the political and commercial environments forced institutions and leaders to re-evaluate their methods of governance. Strong demands for accountable, responsible, and equitable governments were found to have resulted from a number of factors, including the end of colonization in many countries (1), the change in power in Eastern Europe (2), the rise of organizations promoting equality and citizens' rights (3), polarized and divisive political debates (4), and discontent with public service standards (5). With differing degrees of success, these changes have significant ramifications for attempts at decentralizing public government in numerous nations.

Together with these countries, transnational organizations like the European Union (EU) and international organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank have developed concepts and treaties that support the decentralization of public administration. In contrast to a standard centralized administration, the decentralized governance thesis focuses on a kind of governance that allows highly independent entities to "resist governmental steering, create their own policies and mold their surroundings [2]." Decentralized governance is described in academic literature as a system in which municipalities, local leaders, or community groups receive some of the central government's authority and decision-making rights and obligations.

1.2. Digital transformation in the public sector

In the field of strategic databases and related research areas, digital transformation has emerged in the scholarly literature in recent years [3]. It describes "a fundamental change procedure, enabled by the creative application of digital technologies along with the strategic leverage of key abilities and assets, aiming to substantially enhance an entity i.e., an organization, a business system, a sector or a community, and redefine its advantages for its audience." Due to its advantages for businesses in all sectors and industries, the phenomenon of digital change is receiving unprecedented attention. Citizens' expectations regarding the provision of public services have also changed as a result of the accessibility of new digital technologies, such as the Web and cellular phones.

Additionally, these innovations have made it possible to enhance the provision of public services. This typically takes the shape of quick, integrated services at lower manufacturing cost. The accessibility of eGovernment services in practically all developed Western nations is indicative of this. The results of empirical research show that the digital evolution of the public sector has made it possible to decentralize public governance, which has improved accountability and transparency, eliminated redundant resources and procedures, and increased the value generated through citizen engagement. Studies outlining the justification for technology-enabled governance frameworks are, nevertheless, called for. We can better grasp how novel technologies could be developed and managed to provide citizens with added value by drawing connections between decentralization and digital shifts. Furthermore, Jonathan claims that the value gained from the application of emerging technology is impacted by the physical and cultural differences between industrialized and poor nations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It calls for a shift from hierarchical, compartmentalized governance to unified [4], "Whole-of-Government" approaches made possible by agile, iterative policy-making and central online service units. The use of cutting-edge technology like IoT and AI promises greater automation and improved services. However, there are drawbacks to this change, including serious societal difficulties. Due to disparities in access, abilities, and meaningful utilization, the digital divide poses a danger to social fairness. Fairness, confidentiality, and civil liberties are seriously threatened by the growth of mass monitoring and opaque algorithmic choices. Thus, it is critical to establish digital trust through accountability, openness, and ethical norms. In the end, lasting digital future must prioritize people and strike a balance between efficiency improvements and the defense of fundamental rights.

This article examines the critical role that e-Government and e-Governance play in using digital technologies to transform public administration. It looks at how governments throughout the world are using information and communication technology (ICTs) to make public services more accessible, transparent, and efficient [5]. The report tackles important issues like cyber security, the digital gap, and the use of cutting-edge technology in governance like blockchain and artificial intelligence. This study illustrates the wider ramifications for both academia and industry and provides remedies and suggestions for policymakers through an extensive assessment of e-Government efforts and their impact on government efficiency.

This might be demonstrated by enabling direct public involvement in digital politics, encouraging greater civic involvement and collaboration, elevating the function of civic discourse, and even fostering cooperative decision-making in e-government. In this sense, the article critically expands on the possibility of this technology to advance political aspects of public sector reforms in a post-positivist manner [6]. It does this by analyzing specific online participation cases in several public domains where the possibilities has already been realized and by consulting with expert software developers who are currently working on developing different blockchain-driven data management applications in the e-government space.

The purpose of this study is to investigate if big data is appropriate and useful for intelligent public agency governance [7]. Using different scales and indicators, a meta-analysis approach and a systematic review of the literature are used. A review of the literature reveals that multiple models have been created to explain smart governance, but there is still a dearth of rigorous study on the feasibility and application of big data for public agency smart governance. This article makes the case that using big data for effective governance in the public sector will boost public agencies' productivity, expedite the delivery of public services, improve transparency, lessen public inconvenience, and help them become smart agency.

The primary tenets of contemporary public administration concepts—New Public Management and Good Governance—are the foundation of the theoretical framework of public administration excellence presented in this article [8]. The efficacy and productivity of the public administration field are known to determine the quality of public administration. Opportunities brought about by digitalization in the public management sector are evaluated based on global best practices. Tasks related to Ukraine's public administration's electronic transformation are examined.

The various coordination issues that public administration faces during the digital transition are examined in this paper. It especially uses four German case studies to look at issues with federal systems [9]. The results of this empirically motivated study are explained theoretically

using both Neo-Institutional and federation research. The four papers provide a thorough analysis of the German situation and shed light on why Germany is falling behind in the field of digital administration. The investigations' focus is dispersed over the macro, meso, and micro levels of the government, differentiating between the technical and governance aspects of digital management.

In the first section of the discussion, the term "digital change [10]" is defined and its significance in contemporary governance systems is emphasized. With an emphasis on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Institutional Theory, the scholarly review examines theoretical frameworks that have also been used to evaluate and contrast various e-government models while addressing recent technological developments like AI, blockchain technologies, and cloud services. This lists a number of obstacles, including digital divisions, people's reluctance to use technology, and security hazards to data and systems.

3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

3.1 The role of digital transformation in the regionalization of public governance

The manner that people seek to interact with authorities and the public sector has changed as a result of current developments in emerging technologies made possible by quicker internet connections. Governments and the public sector have more than just a chance to cut expenses and offer better [11], quicker services. Through e-governance systems, several nations—especially those in the most developed West—have employed cutting-edge electronic devices to offer solutions. The transition from the so-called "new public management (NPM)" model to "digital-era management" has been made easier by advancements in the field of digital transformations [12].

The current governance model aims to integrate new components, such as innovation and standardization, to provide comprehensive services to people and companies, whereas the previous models concentrated on the decentralization of delivering public services. This paradigm change is consistent with the core of digital transformation, which is the creative application of digital technology along with the strategic use of vital assets and capabilities with the goal of significantly enhancing the proposition of a business for citizens.

Re integration, holism, and digitalization are three crucial requirements for technology in a decentralized governance paradigm, according to a closer examination of scholarly literature and articles in practitioners' outlets. The problems with public sector procedures brought forth by different organizations providing numerous dispersed services are resolved by integration. Repeating procedures resulted from the allocation of resources and responsibility to numerous organizations. Reintegration creates new procedures and central data repositories that may remove redundancy while fostering real partnerships through the use of new technology. Because shared services remove redundant organizational levels that radicalize delivering services and manufacturing, reintegration reduces costs.

For a variety of public organizations, digital technology must also encourage holism and prompt, comprehensive, client-focused solutions. An end-to-end design of amenities from the viewpoint of the citizens is the goal of such an arrangement. This entails putting in place one-stop procedures and developing completely adaptable and robust systems to enable a decentralized governmental structure. In other words, decentralization made possible by digital change need to be a distinct departure from the shortcomings of NPN, which are typified by an inflexible and rigid architecture. The third requirement, "digitalization," relates to the delivery of services to citizens, which must be fully electronic. Proponents of decentralization facilitated by digital transformation argue for e-government solutions that make it easier for public organizations to communicate with

their citizens and enterprises. The use of "zero-touch" innovations in service delivery is becoming more and more common among nations and international organizations.

3.2 The digital transformation-driven decentralisation process

Establishing local units to symbolize the governing body is known as decentralization, which is the initial stage in the decentralization process of public governance. To put it another way, it is intended to shift the responsibilities of a higher-level government agency to its subordinate offices. However, the leadership team of financial obligations and decision-making authority are the primary areas of concern for this change in accountability [13]. As governments start the decentralization process, digital change is seen as a catalyst since it offers the first instruments to make information more accessible.

For example, by decentralizing knowledge assets, digital technologies increase access to knowledge and information, empowering certain individuals in lower administrative divisions. This makes it possible for more people to take part in decision-making processes and lessens knowledge asymmetry. Additionally, automating processes, lowering centralized control, granting autonomy, and enhancing transparency are all made possible by digital change. Accountability and the prevention of power abuses can both benefit from this better openness.

The devolution is the process of giving authority to a legally recognized body of authority as the next stage in decentralization. Unlike deconcentration, the main goal of devolution is to ensure that local elected officials have independent decision-making authority. To put it another way, devolution is the transfer of broad decision-making authority to quasi-autonomous local government entities that have been given company status. Sub-national or sub-regional areas are given the authority and resources to act with some degree for political autonomy through devolution. Devolution, then, is a comparatively larger transfer of decision-making power and accountability to a local government.

As the transmission of power takes shape, technological transformation can facilitate decentralization; the accessibility of digital technology is crucial. Digital platforms, for example, can support cooperative governance models in which many stakeholders, such as government, civil society, and neighborhoods [14], can work together to address local issues. Additionally, by facilitating decentralized decision-making, these systems help local communities feel empowered and in control. The exchange of best practices and knowledge between various levels of government is made possible by digital transformation. Local capacity-building initiatives can also be aided by webinars, online instruction platforms, and digital training materials, which equip community leaders and municipal officials with the abilities and information required for efficient devolved decision-making.

Lastly, delegation is the transfer of authority through contracts that assign tasks to a local organization. Delegation is a more comprehensive type of decentralization than decentralization and devolved. Delegation gives semi-autonomous organizations—which may not be entirely under the jurisdiction of central governments—the authority to make decisions and carry out public responsibilities. Nonetheless, the higher-level governing body holds people assigned these duties accountable. For example, governments may assign duties related to transportation, lodging, education, and specialized services. In order to exempt private organizations from restrictions on normal civil service employees, these organizations are given a fair amount of discretion in making decisions.

Delegation can benefit from digital transformation in a number of ways. Online platforms and project administration solutions, for example, offer a centralized area for work delegation,

deadline setting, and progress monitoring. These technologies make it possible to assign duties effectively and guarantee that the appropriate bodies are informed of their duty. Digital task management systems also make it simple to monitor assigned tasks, collaborate, and make modifications. Large volumes of data are also produced by digital transformation, which can help in decision-making. By using data analysis and reporting tools, federal or local governments can assign decision-making power based on data-driven insights. Local governments are better equipped to make choices within their assigned purview when they have access to real-time data, which lessens the need for continual supervision.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Research context—decentralisation in Kenya

Kenya's decentralization of state administration is acknowledged to have advanced with the adoption of a fresh constitution in 2020 and the election that followed three years later. This resulted in the creation of 47 county governments that shared national administration responsibilities with the federal authorities. Large-scale political, budgetary, and administrative decentralization was acknowledged as the first step in decentralizing public government. The author claims that, in contrast to many nations on the same continents, the decentralization movement aimed at all three sorts of elements simultaneously.

According to our respondents' comments, the country's shift from a reasonably centralized government to a "fully" decentralized approach was risky because of the long-standing bureaucratic culture and political resistance [15]. When it comes to the maturity of digital change, the nation's public sector now lags behind private organizations. However, when asked to consider how digital change has affected decentralization, their answers suggest that it may make it possible for the expected results of decentralized public governance to be realized.

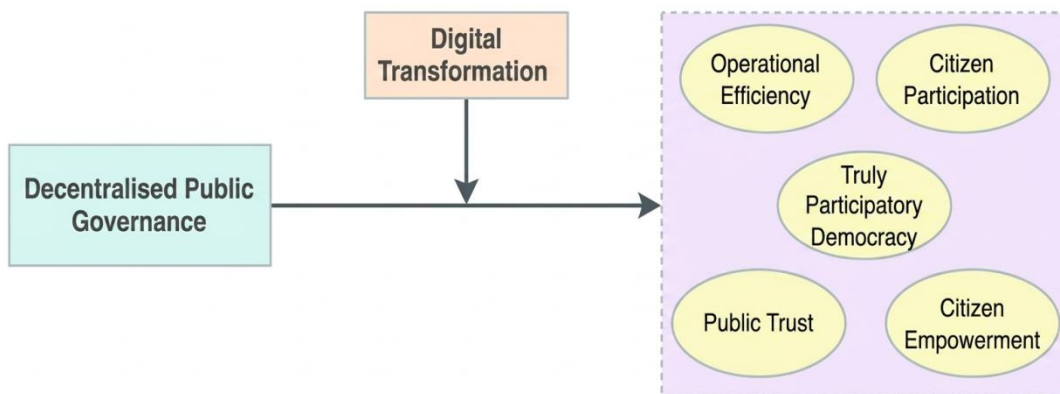


Figure 1. Research conceptual framework

During our interviews, a few digital transformation projects that facilitated the shift to decentralized government were brought up. Five themes emerged from organizing the responses; these will be covered in the ensuing sections (see also Figure 1).

4.2 Efficiency of local and federal governments

The lack of possibilities or incentive for public participation in decision-making is one of the unexpected effects of centralized governance types. Our interview concurs and contends without the use of new technology, the suggested transition to decentralization would not have been possible. But according to three of the CIOs, the use of blockchain technology is still in the

planning stages. However, the widespread rollout of eGovernment systems and open-data programs has been useful. The shared repositories that are currently in use to hold public documents like marriages and other agreements, identifying documents, and land contracts are a few examples. As public organizations provide shared services, the new digital technologies lower the cost of long-term public record archives and increase the efficiency of government operations. Blockchain-based governance structures, for example, might make it easier for citizens to participate in service delivery.

The respondents acknowledge the advantages of technology that enable, for example, the development of smart agreements, which can relieve authorities of their conventional tasks, which is compatible with the findings in the body of existing literature. For instance, the potential for citizens to design and sign contracts has been discussed nationally. Previous research has already suggested such configurations. For example, while digitally changed public agencies enable people to conduct activities like getting wed, passing title to someone else, or notarizing a will without interacting with regional or local governments, governments could concentrate on other service provisions. These services, like Huduma Kenya, may also be provided at several public service stations. Our interviewees contend that if developing technologies enable decentralized governance structures, the efficiency of the federal and local governments (in terms of cost-saving and promptly service supply) could be enhanced.

4.3 Truly participatory democracy

A complex society has been produced by the current political, technological, and commercial environment. The respondents claim that the development technological advances and a wealth of publicly available information have produced knowledgeable citizens who expect greater responsibility and service. These calls for greater openness and involvement opportunities are not new. According to public officials surveyed for this study, the move toward decentralization is a reaction to citizens' growing desire for intimacy with their public service suppliers. Public officials and elected officials are aware that this proximity affects the quality and accessibility of services offered to the public.

Governments are better positioned to increase autonomy, accountability, and efficiency under such systems. The Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) is mentioned by our interviewees as a digital transformation project that encourages accountability and openness. Academics contend that technology could facilitate accountability, genuine citizen participation in public decision-making, and the creation of services and goods. For example, citizens may actively participate in their elected officials in one or more of the following roles: (1) consumers or clients; (2) volunteers; (3) co-producers; (4) advocates for interest groups; (5) electors; or (6) co-learners. In order to do this, it is essential to employ technology to help residents, elected officials, and administrators communicate. For example, digital technologies offer a useful platform for encouraging citizens to participate in the activities of their governments. Consequently, this involvement enhances equality and creativity.

4.4 Citizen Empowerment

The state, administration, and public sector all have the power to govern in the setting of public administration. If the last few years have taught us anything, it is that public officials are finding it more and more challenging to exercise sovereign power. The wealth of data and online platforms that have made it possible for citizens to take part in the decision-making process is the cause. The research now in publication suggests that coercive governance is a thing of the past and contends that the adoption of new technology by public sector organizations has had a significant

impact on the development and provision of public services. These modifications affect not just how organizations function but also how governance structures are set up. According to the findings of our interviews, decentralized governments can establish transparent, inclusive, and collaborative governance systems that engage citizens through well-planned digital transformation. For example, Kenya's numerous eGovernment platforms have led to active citizen participation, collaboration among stakeholders, and co-creation of public policies and choices. Therefore, technologically enabled decentralized governance empowers citizens in contrast to Kenya's previous centralized governance paradigm.

This outcome is in line with research conducted across OECD nations, which indicated that decentralization in health care made possible by technology has given citizens more options. Higher life expectancy is a result of greater healthcare quality. Decentralization has been made easier by a number of new technologies. For example, the use of safe and encrypted information repositories will eliminate the need for centralized governments as decentralized autonomous organizations and smart contracts more effectively assume the function. To put it another way, citizens' connections with their governments will be replaced by these contracts and independent organizations. Although Kenya still has much to go in its efforts to digitize the government sector, our responses show that the National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSC) and eCitizen platforms have decentralized the delivery of public services in the nation. Depending upon the level of technological maturation and citizen engagement, the series of instantaneous atomic interactions may be fully or partially implemented.

4.5. Public trust

In response to a question concerning the use of technology to increase public trust, those polled stated that the national government has pushed for programs to increase technology use. Administrators and CIOs agree that it is crucial to remember that the successful application of blockchain technology in democratic governance necessitates careful thought of legal, governing, and technological concerns. In order to do this, the Kenyan government has started talks to create a blockchain with a foreign platform. Additionally, the interviewers mentioned that a measure to govern the usage of blockchain technology is currently being debated in parliament. The respondents said that this makes it easier for the public sector to use technologies.

The use of technology in public organizations focuses on how citizens can collaborate and discuss the creation, distribution, and consensus-building of services using peer-to-peer, digitally validated processes without the involvement of a centralized government. More precisely, blockchain technology makes large-scale decentralization possible, reducing the need for human agents and centralized government agencies. The importance of trust in individuals of a central organization with power is shifted to an open code in this kind of governance architecture. For example, distributed architecture, like the database-driven distant monitoring system, can be used by those who are given access to keep an eye on the activities of citizen camera networked. This is an illustration of what Farmers meant when he said that "code is law." In a nutshell, the concept is that anyone can review an open-source protocol.

The required redundancy is ensured by the fact that no single entity owns or controls the internet and that information can be stored by all nodes at once. Additionally, distributed architecture has the benefit of greatly reducing the time-consuming and complicated decision-making process of a centralized governing body. Fraud and a lack of openness are discouraged by the code's impartiality and the potential for citizens to monitor and audit transactions. Therefore, without the active supervision of central governments, technology like blockchain can be used to enhance government oversight.

4.6. Extension of public administration

The way governance works has frequently failed for a number of reasons, despite the fact that organizational evolution indicates that centralization makes it easier to coordinate and oversee activities. First, there is limited opportunity for the flexibility required during periods of constant change since governments function with power and coercion. It is also well known that because they have concentrated power, centralized administrations frequently exhibit abuses of authority, lack transparency, and even revert to tyranny. Additionally, computer scientists refer to this type of centralized power as a single point of failure (SPOF).

The idea is linked to the possibility that citizens could be impacted in the event that central government fails. According to the findings of the interviews, decentralization can prevent single-state failures within government by dividing authority, accountability, and decision-making among several organizations. Put differently, a decentralized governance system facilitated by technology eliminates the need for resource and power centralization. Citizens can then benefit from increased equality, openness, and effective politics.

At least three advantages of decentralization made possible by digital transformation were discussed by two of the CIOs. First, decentralized data processing and storage are made possible by technologies like cloud computing. Cloud-based architecture and virtualization technologies enable the deployment that the government programs and services across numerous servers and data centers. Second, technology can offer cooperative platforms that facilitate more effective collaboration across government organizations, companies, and individuals.

Through open data efforts, governments can share information and resources to foster cooperation, sharing information, and group decision-making. This promotes decentralized governance and lessens reliance on a single organization. Third, the development of distributed systems in which several nodes or entities share duties can be made easier by technology. For instance, blockchain computing or peer-to-peer networks can be used to create a decentralized network rather than one centralized server. Because of this redundancy, the system can continue to operate with the help of other nodes or entities even in the event that one fails.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The global adoption of decentralized governance has been greatly aided by the development of digital technologies. In addition to serving as a tool for decentralized governance, digitization has fueled the need to increase citizen participation in public decision-making. As a result, it is now extremely useful for enhancing the production of public value. Our findings, which are consistent with earlier research, indicate that decentralized governance made possible by digital transformation is essential for enhancing citizen participation, accountability, and transparency.

Additionally, public organizations are now able to provide globalized, borderless public services because to the usage of cutting-edge technology like blockchain technology. Our research question, "How can digital change support the decentralization of public governance?" was addressed in part by the findings of our interviews and the examination of earlier studies. Table 1 shows five ways that the three phases of decentralized public governance are made possible by the digital change.

Table 1. Decentralisation of public governance stages and digital transformation

Decentralisation Stage	Characteristics	Digital Transformation Support
De-concentration	Creating local divisions and moving high-level administrative duties	In order to deliver local services, digital platforms facilitate easy information availability from the governing body. Workflow automation and local administrative office management are made possible by technological advances.
Devolution	Transferring legal power, jurisdiction, assets, and decision-making rights to quasi-autonomous governmental units	While digital technologies facilitate managing knowledge and capacity building initiatives, digital platforms make central government information accessible.
Delegation	Creating entities that are not under the federal government's jurisdiction and transferring a large amount of decision-making power	Digital technologies enable seamless communication with the central government. Platforms support project management, task assignment, and process tracking. They also enable data storage, real-time data usage, and enhance transparency and accountability, adding legitimacy to these organizations.

From a strictly technical perspective, the use cases from numerous nations show that in order to maximize the benefits of standard in the public sector, a number of challenges need to be further investigated. In order to enhance the efficient use of digital technologies supporting the decentralization of public governance, our respondents have repeatedly stated that developing nations like Kenya must improve their computer systems, IT oversight and institutional capability, skilled human resources, and citizens' digital literacy. Therefore, we contend that future research must examine the factors that lead to an effective digital change.

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