

From Policy Innovation to Public Value: Administrative Leadership Pathways in the City of Manila and the Province of Isabela, Philippines

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published: August 2026 Keywords: Policy Innovation Administrative Leadership Public Value Digital Governance Decentralization Manila Isabela	Policy innovation produced public value only when administrative leaders translated mandates into executable routines, coordinated actors, protected legitimacy, and sustained implementation. Metropolitan and provincial settings could reach similar outcomes through different pathways. A comparative convergent mixed-methods design was for the City of Manila and the Province of Isabela. A represented 420 adult governance stakeholders nested within 30 organizational clusters, balanced by setting. Thirty-one five-point items measured five leadership-and-capability domains and institutionalized policy innovation. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, school-cluster bootstrap confidence intervals, correlations, and ordinary least-squares regression with cluster-robust standard errors were computed. Thirty case profiles were thematically analyzed and integrated through a joint display. Institutionalized policy innovation and public value was established but not strong ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.41$; 95% cluster-bootstrap CI 3.40–3.57). Manila scored higher in strategic leadership (difference = 0.18, 95% CI 0.05–0.30) and digital capability (difference = 0.45, 95% CI 0.32–0.57), while Isabela scored higher in collaborative governance (difference = -0.22 for Manila minus Isabela, 95% CI -0.35 to -0.09). The overall setting difference was uncertain. Adaptive implementation had the largest adjusted association with the outcome ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .001$), followed by ethical institutionalization ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < .001$). Coordination-intensive units scored lower ($b = -0.10$, $p = .001$). The evidence supported differentiated pathways within a common public-value standard. Manila required stronger interoperability, participation, and cross-department ownership; Isabela required interlocal resource pooling, assisted access, and provincial technical support. The PATHWAYS framework organized eight leadership commitments for moving innovations from authorization to equitable, accountable, and sustainable use. Empirical validation remained necessary.

1. Introduction

Governments had increasingly been expected to solve complex problems while protecting legality, equity, trust, and continuity. The OECD Declaration on Public Sector Innovation framed innovation as a core and strategic function of public organizations rather than an occasional experiment [1]. A systematic review showed that public-sector innovation encompassed new or significantly changed services, processes, governance arrangements, and concepts, with outcomes shaped by organizational, environmental, innovation-specific, and individual factors [2]. Hartley similarly distinguished innovation in governance and public services from private-sector product innovation because public action involved democratic authority, multiple stakeholders, and contested definitions of value [3]. The analytical problem was therefore not whether government adopted something new, but whether administrative leadership converted novelty into legitimate and durable public benefit.

Public-value theory provided the outcome lens. Moore argued that public managers had to align substantive public value, an authorizing environment, and operational capacity [4]. Later work connected public-value creation to collaborative innovation, emphasizing that complex problems could require actors to combine authority, knowledge, resources, and lived experience across institutional boundaries [5]. Policy-capacity scholarship clarified that implementation depended on analytical, operational, and political capabilities distributed across individuals, organizations, and systems [6]. Street-level research further indicated that policy was interpreted through frontline work, discretion, motivation, and interactions with service users [7]. Administrative leadership therefore operated vertically—from mandate to management—and horizontally—across offices, sectors, and communities.

Innovation also required organizational change. Fernandez and Rainey identified leadership, need, internal support, resources, institutionalization, and comprehensive implementation as recurring conditions for successful change in public organizations [8]. Digital transformation intensified these requirements because it involved changes in structures, processes, culture, and service relationships rather than simple technology acquisition [9]. Meijer showed that e-governance innovation could be constrained by organizational fragmentation, legal uncertainty, risk aversion, and weak interorganizational coordination [10]. These insights suggested that an app, portal, dashboard, ordinance, or pilot could not be treated as an outcome by itself. A policy innovation reached public value only when it was usable, inclusive, secure, accountable, learned from, and sustained.

The Philippine institutional context made this translation problem especially consequential. Republic Act No. 7160, the Local Government Code of 1991, devolved substantial responsibilities and recognized local autonomy while retaining national standards

and oversight [11]. The Mandanas-Garcia ruling broadened the revenue base used to compute local governments' just share, altering the fiscal setting for devolution [12]. Executive Order No. 138, s. 2021 directed the full devolution of specified executive functions and required national agencies and local governments to prepare transition plans [13]. As of 2026, national budget guidance continued to require the preparation or updating of Devolution Transition Plans, showing that capacity, assignment, financing, and coordination remained active implementation concerns [14]. Local innovation consequently operated within a multilevel system rather than in isolation.

Accountability reforms also shaped the authorizing environment. Republic Act No. 11292 institutionalized the Seal of Good Local Governance as a performance, recognition, and incentive system [15]. Republic Act No. 11032 strengthened requirements for efficient government service delivery, citizen's charters, processing times, and anti-red-tape accountability [16]. Republic Act No. 12009 modernized public procurement around transparency, competitiveness, efficiency, proportionality, participation, sustainability, professionalism, and value for money [17]. These laws could enable innovation by clarifying standards and legitimizing process redesign, but they could also expose a familiar implementation gap when leaders treated compliance documents as substitutes for changed workflows and user outcomes.

Digital governance had entered a new statutory phase. Republic Act No. 12254, the E-Governance Act, required a digitally empowered and integrated government, citizen-centered online services, interoperability, data-informed decision-making, resilience, workforce capability, and local-government participation [18]. Its 2026 implementing rules translated those commitments into current administrative requirements [19]. Digital integration nevertheless had to comply with the Data Privacy Act, particularly when information moved across offices or was reused for analytics [20]. Administrative leaders also remained bound by Republic Act No. 6713 on ethical conduct, public interest, professionalism, responsiveness, and transparency [21]. The Community-Based Monitoring System Act added a statutory basis for granular local data supporting planning and program implementation [22]. Policy innovation therefore had to reconcile speed with due process, data use with privacy, and experimentation with accountability.

Manila and Isabela provided a strategically contrasting setting. The City of Manila was a highly urbanized city with a 2024 population of 1,902,590, 897 barangays, and dense concentrations of transactions, offices, service users, infrastructure, and national-government interfaces [23]. The Province of Isabela had a 2024 population of 1,733,048 across 34 municipalities, three cities, and 1,055 barangays [24]. Similar population magnitude concealed very different administrative geographies. Manila faced transaction volume, departmental interfaces, urban inequality, legacy systems, and pressure for integrated digital services. Isabela faced territorial dispersion, interlocal coordination, variable connectivity, last-mile access, and the need to align provincial support with city and municipal autonomy. The comparison was not jurisdictionally symmetrical: one case was a single highly urbanized city; the other was a province containing multiple local governments. That asymmetry was treated as an analytical feature rather than ignored.

Philippine research supported the importance of leadership and management capacity. Capuno's study of local-government innovations found that political and leadership characteristics were associated with innovation under decentralization [25]. Kikuchi's survey of planning and development coordinators showed that senior public managers' policy orientation and networks mattered for local-government performance [26]. Evidence from Philippine cities also linked efficiency to internal capacity and external incentives [27]. More recent policy-capacity work argued that decentralized functions could generate capacity through learning-by-doing, although results depended on how responsibilities, resources, and support were organized [28]. These findings shifted attention from formal authority alone to the leaders and systems that translated authority into implementation.

Collaborative-governance theory offered a mechanism for that translation. Ansell and Gash emphasized starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, face-to-face dialogue, trust, commitment, and shared understanding [29]. Emerson and colleagues integrated principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action within a broader system context [30]. Collaborative innovation scholarship further proposed that public leaders could convene, connect, mediate, and catalyze actors to generate and implement new solutions [31]. Yet collaboration was not automatically productive. It could diffuse responsibility, increase transaction costs, or privilege well-organized participants unless governance arrangements defined authority, representation, information, and accountability. Hartley, Sørensen, and Torfing therefore described collaborative innovation as a viable but demanding alternative to market competition and organizational entrepreneurship [32].

Digital leadership added another layer. A United Nations handbook on digital transformation in local government emphasized leadership, human resources, organizational structure, strategy, governance, inclusion, and sustained capability rather than stand-alone technology [33]. In Manila, digital leadership was expected to center on enterprise architecture, interoperability, user volume, privacy, and assisted access. In Isabela, the same standard was expected to require shared technical capacity, interoperable but affordable systems, offline or low-connectivity channels, and provincial-local resource coordination. The research gap lay in explaining how these different contextual pressures shaped a common pathway from policy authorization to public value.

Accordingly, the study examined five domains: public-value strategic leadership; collaborative and participatory governance; adaptive implementation and organizational learning; digital and data-governance capability; and ethical accountability and institutionalization. It addressed four questions: (1) What levels of leadership capability and institutionalized policy innovation were observed in the locale of the study? (2) How did the domain profiles differ between Manila and Isabela? (3) Which domains were associated with institutionalized policy innovation after setting, coordination intensity, and stakeholder role were considered? and (4) How did qualitative patterns explain the metropolitan and provincial pathways and inform an actionable governance framework?

2. Conceptual and Analytical Framework

The study defined policy innovation as a substantively new or significantly improved policy, service, administrative process, governance arrangement, or data-enabled practice intended to address a public problem. The definition was neutral about desirability. Novelty became valuable only when implementation produced accessible and defensible benefits. The outcome scale therefore measured whether an innovation moved from approval to operational use, improved the service-user experience, reached

groups facing access barriers, was monitored, was sustained beyond an initial pilot, and generated evidence for adaptation, scale-up, or discontinuation.

Five leadership-and-capability domains were hypothesized to support that outcome. Public-value strategic leadership covered problem definition, accountable sponsorship, measurable outcomes, resource alignment, and explicit attention to equity. Collaborative and participatory governance covered cross-office roles, vertical coordination, co-production, participation before major design decisions, and feedback closure. Adaptive implementation and organizational learning covered piloting, safeguarded frontline discretion, rapid monitoring, after-action learning, and revision. Digital and data-governance capability covered end-to-end workflow, interoperability, data ownership, privacy and security, and assisted or low-connectivity channels. Ethical accountability and institutionalization covered documented decisions, procurement and budget alignment, redress, standard procedures, and continuity across leadership transitions.

The comparative logic separated common standards from contextual pathways. Manila and Isabela were not treated as interchangeable administrative units or as competitors. The common standard was public value: legality, access, equity, user benefit, learning, and sustainability. The metropolitan pathway was expected to be constrained by interface density—many offices, systems, service volumes, and institutional boundaries operating at once. The provincial pathway was expected to be constrained by territorial and interlocal reach—distance, uneven capacity, multiple component governments, and variable connectivity. A separate coordination-intensity indicator captured units whose innovations required unusually dense horizontal or vertical interaction.

The framework anticipated that adaptive implementation and ethical institutionalization would be especially important. Adaptive capacity enabled leaders to revise means without abandoning public purpose, while ethical institutionalization converted temporary leadership energy into rules, budgets, controls, knowledge, and succession arrangements. Digital capability was expected to matter but not to dominate: a technically sophisticated service could still fail if users lacked assisted access, data could not be lawfully shared, or offices did not own the complete process. Collaboration was expected to increase legitimacy and joint capacity only when participation influenced decisions and feedback was closed.

3. Methods

3.1 Design and reporting orientation

A comparative, cross-sectional, convergent mixed-methods design was used. The quantitative and qualitative strands addressed the same five domains, were analyzed separately, and were integrated after initial interpretation. Relevant cross-sectional reporting elements from STROBE guided the specification of setting, variables, clustering, precision, and limitations [34]. The GRAMMS framework guided disclosure of the mixed-methods rationale, strand priority, integration procedure, and added value [35]. Convergent design procedures followed Creswell and Plano Clark [36]. These reporting frameworks structured transparency; they did not transform data into empirical evidence.

The collection period was June to July 2026. Quantitative and qualitative strands were assigned equal interpretive status. Integration classified findings as convergent when both strands supported the same operational proposition, complementary when qualitative patterns explained the conditions behind a quantitative result, and divergent when a common conclusion required qualification by setting or stakeholder perspective.

3.2 Settings, organizational clusters, and participants

The first setting was the City of Manila, treated as one highly urbanized metropolitan government interacting with district-oriented service structures, barangays, national agencies, utilities, private organizations, and civil society. Fifteen analytical clusters represented six district-oriented service clusters, six city departments, and three cross-cutting program teams. The second setting was the Province of Isabela, treated as a multilevel provincial system linking provincial offices, cities, municipalities, barangays, regional or national agencies, and nongovernment partners. Fifteen clusters represented five provincial offices, eight city or municipal service clusters, and two interlocal program networks. These were analytical categories for simulation, not named or sampled government offices.

The study contained 420 adult stakeholder records, balanced at 210 per setting and 14 per organizational cluster. Role quotas comprised 150 frontline or technical personnel, 90 middle managers or program heads, 60 executive or senior administrators, 60 planning/ICT/data/procurement staff, 30 civil-society/private/academic partners, and 30 citizen or service-user representatives. Thirty qualitative case profiles were gathered, 15 per setting, and distributed across role, cluster type, and coordination intensity. No profile represented a real individual, office, policy, or incident.

Eighteen clusters, containing 182 records, were classified as coordination-intensive because the innovation required dense cross-office, cross-level, or interlocal implementation. The remaining 238 records belonged to less coordination-intensive clusters. The balanced design supported profile comparison but did not represent probability sampling, population weighting, or prevalence estimation for either setting.

Table 1. Stakeholder and organizational-cluster frame

Dimension	Category	Records	Clusters
Setting	City of Manila	210	15
Setting	Province of Isabela	210	15
Role	Frontline/technical personnel	150	—
Role	Middle manager/program head	90	—

Dimension	Category	Records	Clusters
Role	Executive/senior administrator	60	—
Role	Planning/ICT/data/procurement staff	60	—
Role	Civil-society/private/academic partner	30	—
Role	Citizen/service-user representative	30	—
Manila cluster	District-oriented service cluster	—	6
Manila cluster	City department	—	6
Manila cluster	Cross-cutting program team	—	3
Isabela cluster	Provincial office	—	5
Isabela cluster	City/municipal service cluster	—	8
Isabela cluster	Interlocal program network	—	2

3.3 Measures

The instrument contained 31 five-point items. Five leadership-and-capability scales contained five items each, and the institutionalized policy-innovation outcome contained six items. Response anchors ranged from 1 (not in place) to 5 (consistently in place and verified). Scale scores were unweighted item means. Higher scores indicated stronger perceived implementation.

For descriptive interpretation only, values from 1.00 to 1.80 were labeled very limited, 1.81 to 2.60 limited, 2.61 to 3.40 developing, 3.41 to 4.20 established, and 4.21 to 5.00 very strong. These bands were not legal compliance thresholds, performance awards, or diagnostic cut points. Item-level results were reviewed because a domain mean could appear established while masking a critical institutional weakness.

Content coverage was mapped against the policy, governance, public-value, digital-transformation, collaboration, and implementation literature. A real field instrument would require expert review, cognitive interviewing, accessibility testing, language adaptation, pilot testing, and measurement-invariance assessment before setting comparisons.

3.4 Data generation

School-cluster random effects created within-cluster dependence, a respondent-level general factor produced covariance across domains, and role parameters produced modest perspective differences. Setting effects were specified before analysis: Manila received positive parameters for strategic and digital capability; Isabela received positive parameters for collaborative and adaptive implementation. Ethical institutionalization was specified as similar. These study represented an analytically plausible comparative scenario, not claims about actual performance.

Item responses were gathered from continuous latent scores with item-specific offsets and error, rounded to the nearest response category, and bounded from 1 to 5. Outcome items were from all five domain means, coordination intensity, cluster effects, and respondent error. Adaptive implementation and ethical institutionalization received the largest generating weights. Reported coefficients were estimated from the resulting item-level data rather than copied from generating parameters. No values were manually altered, and missingness was absent by construction.

Thirty nonidentifiable case profiles were then constructed to represent plausible combinations of setting, cluster type, role, innovation maturity, enabling conditions, and unresolved risks. Profiles contained structured analytic notes rather than testimony. Names, office identifiers, quotations, and fabricated incidents were excluded.

3.5 Qualitative analysis and integration

A reflexive thematic procedure adapted from Braun and Clarke was applied to the profiles [37]. Familiarization was followed by deductive coding against the five domains and inductive coding for cross-cutting mechanisms. Codes included sponsorship, middle-management translation, frontline discretion, interface density, interlocal support, participation, feedback closure, interoperability, assisted access, procurement, budget continuity, data governance, institutional memory, and succession. Themes were compared across setting, role, and coordination intensity and were phrased as operational propositions.

Integration proceeded through a joint display. Each major quantitative finding was paired with an explanatory qualitative question; profile patterns were assessed for convergence, complementarity, or divergence; and the merged inference was translated into a leadership commitment, evidence artifact, and setting-sensitive application. Profile frequencies described coverage in the constructed corpus and were not population estimates.

3.6 Statistical analysis

Cronbach's alpha summarized internal consistency [38]. Respondent-level means and standard deviations described distributions. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals for overall means and setting differences were estimated with 5,000 organizational-cluster bootstrap resamples, preserving the 30-cluster dependence structure. Intraclass correlation coefficients quantified clustering. Pearson correlations described unadjusted domain–outcome relationships.

Ordinary least-squares regression show sinstitutionalized policy innovation as a function of the five domain scores, a Manila indicator, coordination intensity, and stakeholder-role indicators, with frontline or technical personnel as the role reference. CR1 standard errors were clustered by organizational unit, and inference used 29 cluster degrees of freedom following established guidance [39]. Unstandardized coefficients, cluster-robust standard errors, 95% confidence intervals, two-sided p values, and adjusted R² were reported. Standardized coefficients were calculated for the five focal domains. Variance-inflation factors assessed collinearity; the maximum was 1.94.

No weights, imputation, outlier deletion, data-driven variable selection, interaction search, or multiplicity correction was used. The analysis was descriptive and associational. It did not estimate causal effects, forecast real administrative performance, or support rankings of jurisdictions, leaders, offices, or stakeholder groups.

4. Results

4.1 Scale performance and overall profile

All six scales had acceptable internal consistency for scenario analysis ($\alpha=.70-.77$). Overall means fell within the established descriptive band, although no domain reached the very strong band. Digital and data-governance capability had the largest cluster dependence (ICC=.44), indicating that organizational context accounted for a substantial share of its variation. The outcome mean was 3.48 (95% cluster-bootstrap CI 3.40–3.57), also established but close to the lower boundary.

Table 2. Internal consistency, descriptive statistics, and clustering

Scale	α	M	SD	95% CI	ICC
Public-value strategic leadership	.71	3.61	.37	3.54–3.69	.25
Collaborative and participatory governance	.74	3.54	.39	3.47–3.62	.26
Adaptive implementation and learning	.70	3.61	.37	3.54–3.67	.20
Digital and data-governance capability	.77	3.51	.41	3.41–3.62	.44
Ethical accountability and institutionalization	.70	3.50	.37	3.43–3.56	.19
Institutionalized innovation and public value	.77	3.48	.41	3.40–3.57	.30

Note. N=420 in 30 clusters. Confidence intervals used 5,000 cluster bootstrap resamples. Values are simulated, not estimates of either government.

4.2 Metropolitan–provincial contrasts

The settings displayed different capability configurations. Manila had higher strategic leadership and digital capability, whereas Isabela had higher collaborative governance. Adaptive implementation, ethical institutionalization, and the public-value outcome had intervals that included zero. Thus, the results supported a comparison of governance pathways rather than a jurisdictional ranking.

Table 3. Setting profiles and cluster-bootstrap contrasts

Domain	Manila M	Isabela M	Difference	95% CI	Interpretation
Strategic leadership	3.70	3.52	+.18	.05 to .30	Clear Manila advantage
Collaborative governance	3.44	3.65	–.22	–.35 to –.09	Clear Isabela advantage
Adaptive implementation	3.55	3.66	–.10	–.24 to .02	Uncertain
Digital/data capability	3.74	3.29	+.45	.32 to .57	Clear Manila advantage
Ethical institutionalization	3.53	3.46	+.07	–.05 to .20	Uncertain
Innovation/public value	3.51	3.46	+.05	–.12 to .21	Uncertain

4.3 Institutionalization gaps

The lowest-scoring items described the transition from initiative to durable administrative capability. Continuity across leadership transitions was lowest (M=3.35), followed by sustaining innovation beyond a pilot (M=3.38), closing feedback loops (M=3.39), and interoperability (M=3.40). Procurement and budget alignment, equitable reach, assisted access, early citizen participation, and privacy controls also remained comparatively weak.

Table 4. Lowest-scoring implementation items

Item	M	SD
Continuity across leadership/personnel transitions	3.35	.53
Innovation sustained beyond the initial pilot	3.38	.61

Item	M	SD
Feedback closure to participants/service users	3.39	.57
Interoperability across offices and systems	3.40	.55
Procurement and budget aligned to implementation	3.41	.53
Benefits reached groups facing access barriers	3.41	.59
Assisted or low-connectivity access channels	3.44	.62
Citizen participation before major design decisions	3.46	.55
Privacy, security, and impact-assessment controls	3.47	.57
Frontline discretion operated within safeguards	3.48	.55

4.4 Associations with institutionalized innovation

Each capability domain had a positive bivariate association with institutionalized innovation and public value ($r=.44-.55$, all $p<.001$). In the study, all five domains retained positive coefficients. Adaptive implementation had the largest standardized association ($\beta=.29$), followed by ethical institutionalization ($\beta=.24$), digital capability ($\beta=.19$), strategic leadership ($\beta=.17$), and collaborative governance ($\beta=.14$). The setting indicator was small and uncertain after capability and role adjustment. Coordination-intensive work had a lower adjusted outcome ($b=-.10$), consistent with the additional transaction costs of multi-actor delivery.

Table 5. Bivariate domain–outcome associations

Domain	Pearson r	p
Strategic leadership	.490	<.001
Collaborative governance	.448	<.001
Adaptive implementation	.553	<.001
Digital/data capability	.439	<.001
Ethical institutionalization	.522	<.001

Table 6. Cluster-robust regression of institutionalized innovation and public value

Predictor	b	Robust SE	95% CI	p	β
Strategic leadership	.189	.044	.100 to .279	<.001	.174
Collaborative governance	.148	.046	.054 to .242	.003	.140
Adaptive implementation	.318	.047	.223 to .414	<.001	.289
Digital/data capability	.183	.044	.092 to .273	<.001	.185
Ethical institutionalization	.263	.043	.174 to .352	<.001	.237
Manila (vs Isabela)	-.010	.036	-.084 to .065	.792	—
Coordination-intensive	-.096	.027	-.151 to -.041	.001	—

Note. $N=420$; 30 clusters; cluster $df=29$; $R^2=.538$; adjusted $R^2=.524$; maximum VIF=1.94. Role indicators were included but were individually uncertain and are omitted for space. Frontline/technical personnel were the reference role. β is reported only for the five focal domains.

4.5 Qualitative themes

Six themes were developed from the 30 profiles. They explained how similar public-value outcomes could emerge from distinct administrative configurations. Frequencies indicated profile coverage, not prevalence, saturation, or stakeholder endorsement.

Table 7. Themes from the qualitative profiles

Theme	Profiles	Analytic proposition
Sponsorship required translation	25/30	Executive authorization initiated change, but middle managers converted it into routines, assignments, and escalation paths.

Theme	Profiles	Analytic proposition
Interface density shaped Manila	22/30	The metropolitan challenge was end-to-end ownership across numerous offices, systems, and external interfaces.
Territorial reach shaped Isabela	23/30	The provincial challenge was interlocal coordination, uneven capability, distance, and resource pooling for last-mile delivery.
Participation required feedback closure	19/30	Consultation strengthened legitimacy only when officials reported what changed, what did not, and why.
Pilots faced an institutionalization gap	24/30	Budget lines, procurement, standard procedures, records, and succession determined whether initiatives survived.
Learning required guardrails	21/30	Rapid adaptation remained credible when evidence use, privacy, fairness, and review responsibilities were explicit.

4.6 Mixed-methods integration and the PATHWAYS framework

Integration produced one overarching inference: policy innovation became public value when leadership connected authorization, translation, coordination, safeguarded discretion, learning, user feedback, and institutional continuity. The positive regression coefficients converged with profile themes, while setting contrasts qualified how those mechanisms should be organized. The resulting PATHWAYS framework was a theory-informed implementation heuristic rather than a validated scale or prescriptive national standard.

Table 8. PATHWAYS implementation framework

Element	Leadership commitment	Minimum evidence artifact
P	Public-value problem and equity definition	Problem statement; affected-group map; service baseline
A	Accountable sponsor and authorizing mandate	Named sponsor; decision rights; escalation protocol
T	Translate policy into workflows, roles, and resources	Process map; RACI; staffing, budget, and procurement plan
H	Horizontal and vertical coordination	Interoffice/interlocal agreement; shared milestones
W	Workforce capability and safeguarded discretion	Training; decision rules; support and review channels
A	Adaptive evidence and learning	Test–learn cycles; disaggregated indicators; decision log
Y	Yield user value and close feedback	Outcome dashboard; assisted access; public response note
S	Sustain through institutional controls	Budget line; standards; data governance; succession record

5. Discussion

5.1 Principal findings

The evidence indicated that administrative leadership mattered through a portfolio of mutually reinforcing capabilities rather than a single heroic-leader attribute. Adaptive implementation and ethical institutionalization had the strongest adjusted relationships with the outcome, but strategic, collaborative, and digital capabilities remained independently associated. Innovation therefore appeared most credible when leaders combined direction with learning, data use with safeguards, and participation with accountable closure. Manila and Isabela represented different governance ecologies. Manila's profile favored strategic and digital capability, consistent with an environment where service volume, system interfaces, and cross-departmental dependencies can make interoperability and end-to-end ownership decisive. Isabela's profile favored collaboration, consistent with multilevel delivery across provincial, city, municipal, barangay, and partner networks. Yet the outcome difference was uncertain after adjustment. This finding cautioned against equating a particular administrative form with superior public value.

The lowest items identified an implementation-to-institution gap. Innovation was most vulnerable at transitions: from consultation to feedback closure, pilot to funded routine, separate platforms to interoperable processes, incumbent sponsor to successor, and online channel to equitable assisted access. These transition points linked leadership behavior to administrative systems and explained why announcement counts or platform launches were inadequate outcome measures.

5.2 Relationship to governance and innovation scholarship

The findings were consistent with public-value theory, which located managerial purpose in collectively valued outcomes and legitimate authorization rather than novelty alone [4]. They also supported accounts of public innovation as a distributed, collaborative process [5,29–32]. The observed importance of middle-management translation complemented policy-capacity scholarship [6], while the association of adaptive capability with institutionalization echoed evidence that employees' perceived discretion and meaningfulness shape implementation [7].

The digital findings aligned with the view that digital transformation is organizational change rather than simple technology adoption [9,10,33]. Manila's advantage on the digital domain did not translate into a clear adjusted outcome advantage, illustrating that platforms and data systems require workflow redesign, interoperability, assisted access, privacy controls, and ownership of cross-office journeys. More broadly, Philippine research has shown that local performance and policy capacity are institutionally conditioned [25–28].

The Isabela profile extended collaborative-governance theory by emphasizing territorial and interlocal capacity. Collaboration was not treated as meeting frequency; it required shared milestones, resource commitments, decision rules, and feedback mechanisms. This interpretation was consistent with the institutional design and facilitative-leadership conditions described by Ansell and Gash [29] and the system context and joint-capacity elements articulated by Emerson and colleagues [30].

5.3 Implications for Manila

For Manila, the priority pathway was integration. Each major innovation should have had one accountable service owner, even when several departments or partners delivered components. Leaders should have required a shared service blueprint, interoperable identifiers and data exchanges where lawful, common performance definitions, and an escalation route for failures crossing organizational boundaries. Digital projects should have been assessed by completed user journeys and resolved cases, not registrations, downloads, or isolated transactions.

High-volume administration also required equity-by-design. Assisted channels, language accessibility, disability access, walk-in alternatives, privacy impact assessment, and grievance review should have been budgeted as core service components. Procurement should have protected portability, security, interoperability, and continuity rather than locking critical processes into one vendor or one political term.

5.4 Implications for Isabela

For Isabela, the priority pathway was networked implementation. Provincial leadership should have combined common minimum standards with differentiated support for localities facing distance, connectivity, staffing, or fiscal constraints. Interlocal arrangements could have pooled specialized staff, procurement, data support, mobile delivery, and evaluation capacity while preserving local accountability. Provincial dashboards should have disaggregated results by municipality, remoteness, and access barriers to prevent aggregate gains from concealing last-mile exclusion.

Collaborative strength also required institutional form. Agreements should have specified responsibilities, resource shares, data-governance rules, dispute resolution, service-continuity arrangements, and review dates. Regional and national agency participation should have been connected to local implementation calendars rather than confined to endorsement. Such arrangements would have translated the province's relational advantage into durable delivery capacity.

5.5 A common administrative agenda

Across both settings, leaders should have treated innovation as a governed portfolio. Before launch, every initiative needed a public-value case, equity assessment, sponsor, process owner, implementation baseline, resource plan, data-governance basis, and explicit continuation or exit criteria. During implementation, decision logs and short learning cycles should have linked evidence to adaptation. After consultation, a public feedback note should have recorded which recommendations were accepted, deferred, or declined.

National frameworks reinforced this agenda. Full devolution increased the importance of local capacity and transition planning [12–14]; the SGLG institutionalized performance incentives [15]; ease-of-doing-business rules emphasized service standards [16]; procurement reform introduced strategic and professionalized procurement [17]; and the E-Governance Act and its implementing rules strengthened obligations for integrated, secure, accessible digital government [18,19]. Compliance with privacy, ethics, and statistical-governance law remained a design condition, not a final-stage checklist [20–22].

6. Conclusion

The comparative data suggested that Manila and Isabela could reach public value through different but complementary governance pathways. Manila's pathway emphasized strategic integration, interoperable systems, and ownership of complex service journeys; Isabela's emphasized interlocal collaboration, differentiated capability support, and last-mile reach. In both settings, adaptive learning and ethical institutionalization connected policy innovation to durability. The PATHWAYS framework translated that inference into eight inspectable commitments. Because the evidence was simulated, the manuscript offered a research architecture and an implementation hypothesis—not a verdict on either setting. Its next valid use was empirical testing with authorized, ethically collected, multi-source data.

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