

Digitalization of Public Services: Evaluation of Bureaucratic Modernization from the Perspective of Weber and Wilson

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Abstract

The digitalization of public services (e-government) is an important part of bureaucratic reform in the technological era. However, this transformation must be evaluated not only from a technological perspective, but also from its administrative structure and effectiveness. This study aims to analyze bureaucratic modernization through the implementation of e-government using Weber's theoretical approach (written rules) and Wilson's (administrative efficiency). This study uses a literature study method with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through an in-depth review of various sources, including books, journals, scientific articles, and related documents that discuss Weber and Wilson's theories. It can be concluded that the digitalization of public services is a concrete form of bureaucratic modernization that seeks to increase the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of government administration. From Max Weber's perspective, digitalization reflects the application of rational-legal bureaucratic principles, especially through written rules, clear hierarchical structures, impersonality in decision-making, and systematic documentation. Meanwhile, in Woodrow Wilson's view, digitalization supports administrative efficiency and strengthens the separation between political and technical functions by making the bureaucratic system a neutral instrument for serving the public.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

In the current era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, the use of digital technology has become a major factor transforming many aspects, including public services. Governments, especially at the regional level, are faced with the expectation of providing faster, more efficient, more transparent, and more accessible services according to public needs.[1] (Purba, 2021). Innovation in public services based on digital technology is a crucial solution to address these challenges, while simultaneously improving the quality and access of services. Digital technologies such as web-based applications, mobile platforms, and public service management information systems can make communication between the government and the public more direct, limit bureaucracy, and reduce the potential for maladministration.[2]

Although digital technology offers many promising opportunities, its implementation is not without challenges. In Indonesia, particularly at the local government level, there are a number of obstacles that can disrupt the digital transformation process. One of these is limited technological infrastructure, particularly in areas with limited internet access. [3] Furthermore, the low level of digital literacy, both among government officials and the

public, is a major obstacle to maximizing the potential use of technology. Local governments are also often faced with limited budgets, gaps in access and utilization of technology, and challenges in formulating policies that support the sustainability of digital transformation. [4]

According to the World Bank Group, e-Government is the use of technology, such as the internet and computer networks, to support relationships between government, citizens, and the business world. This concept encompasses digital transformation aimed at increasing efficiency, transparency, and accountability in various services. In e-Government, government interactions with various parties, such as the public (Government to Citizens or G2C), the business world (Government to Business or G2B), and other government agencies (Government to Government or G2G), are carried out through digital platforms that are more easily accessible and integrated.[5]

In Indonesia, the implementation of e-Government began with the issuance of Presidential Instruction Number 3 of 2003 concerning the National Policy and Strategy for E-Government Development. Since then, various regulations, such as Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) and Law Number 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure, have continued to encourage the development of electronic-based government systems. Supporting programs, such as the Palapa Ring for internet infrastructure development and the Digital Talent Scholarship for human resource training, have also become an integral part of efforts to strengthen e-Government implementation.[5]

However, the implementation of e-government in Indonesia still faces various challenges. Uneven technological infrastructure, particularly in remote areas, is a major obstacle. Furthermore, limited human resources with information technology skills also slow down the digitalization of public services. Another significant issue is data security and privacy, which often raises concerns among the public.

The title "Digitalization of Public Services (E-Government)" is crucial and relevant to discuss because it concerns the very essence of public service delivery in today's modern era. This paper is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the urgency of digital transformation in the public sector, while also highlighting the real challenges still faced on the ground. More than just a technological innovation, the digitalization of public services reflects the government's commitment to realizing more responsive, inclusive governance that adapts to the needs of the community and the changing times. Therefore, this discussion is not only informative but also strategic in encouraging improvements in the quality of public services, both now and in the future.

1. THEORETICAL STUDY

1. Public service

Indonesia, as a democratic country and implementing a decentralized system of government, translated this perspective constitutionally in the second amendment to the 1945 Constitution. The new paradigm of public services is formulated as "the basic rights of the people and the responsibility of the state to guarantee their fulfillment." This rights-based service also brings about a change in the relationship between the state and citizens to a more political level, no longer interpreting public services as merely technical managerial work or as if it were the sole domain of the government.[6]

Further policy translation was carried out at the legislative level: the ratification of several internationally applicable human rights regimes—economic, social and cultural rights [Law Number 11 of 2005], civil and political rights [Law Number 12 of 2005], the elimination of all forms of discrimination [Law Number 29 of 1999], the ratification

of Law Number 37 of 2008 concerning the Indonesian Ombudsman as a state institution authorized to oversee public services, as well as the main book of Law Number 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services. All of these ratifications and regulations clearly bind Indonesia to the obligation to fulfill the basic rights of the people through public service instruments without discrimination. The political mandate and imperative of these regulations form the basis for all nation-state organizations to fulfill their mandatory responsibilities for the rights of citizens to serve.[6]

2. *E-Government*

This is the use of information technology by the government to provide information and services to the public, as well as other government affairs; therefore, innovation is needed in the provision of public services so that the provision of public services becomes more efficient, effective, transparent, and accountable. *E-Government* can also be interpreted as a form or model of government system based on the power of digital technology that manages the monitoring and control of all administrative tasks, public services, organizational resources, finance, taxes, levies, employees, and others in one system.

The World Bank Group[7] submits that *E-Government* is an effort to utilize information and communication technology to increase the efficiency and effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of government processes in providing better public services. Meanwhile, [8] is of the view that, "*E-Government, usually abbreviated with the words 'e-gov,'* refers to the use of information technology to transform or improve relationships with the public, businesses, other government agencies, and employees.

Furthermore, [9] means the E-Government form of application to carry out government functions and administration using telecommunications or information and communication technology. *E-Government* offers opportunities to enhance and optimize relationships between government agencies, between government and business, and between the public. The mechanism for these relationships is through the use of information technology, namely, collaboration or a combination of computers and communication networks.

Another definition of E-Government is given by Heeks, quoted by Nia Karniawati (2018:29), who states that:

"The strategy that determines the success of implementing E-Government in a country/government institution consists of readiness in institutional infrastructure, technology infrastructure, data infrastructure, human resource infrastructure, legal infrastructure, leadership, and commitment."

Kurniasih, D. (2008:2) stated that E-Government is a form of public service implementation based on interactive information and communication technology between the government and other parties, including community groups, businesses, and other government institutions. The implementation of e-Government begins with a simple form of service, namely the provision of computer-based information and data on the implementation of government and development. Then, according to *The Bank World*(Andrianto, 2007:46) as follows:

"E-Government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that can transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government". The use of information technology (such as Network Area, Internet, and Computerization) by government institutions further supports the transformation of relations with citizens, business actors, and other government institutions.

In the book *E-Government in Action* (2005:5) argues that *E-Government* is an effort to create an atmosphere of government service that is consistent with the shared goals of several interested communities, therefore, the vision put forward must also reflect the shared vision of existing stakeholders, for example: Increasing government productivity and performance by serving its people, promoting clean and transparent governance, improving the quality of life of the community through the performance of public services,

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a literature review method with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through an in-depth review of various sources, including books, journals, scientific articles, and related documents discussing Wiber and Wilson's theories. Analysis was conducted by identifying, comparing, and interpreting the key concepts of both theories to gain a comprehensive understanding of their application in the context of this research.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. General Overview *E-Government*

In terms of policy, the government regulates e-government in Indonesia through Presidential Regulation (Perpres) Number 95 of 2018 concerning the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE). The Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE) is a government administration that utilizes information and communication technology to provide services to SPBE users. Article 2 of this Perpres explains the SPBE Principles, which include:

In supporting the implementation of the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), there are several basic principles that must be considered. First, effectiveness, namely optimizing the use of resources so that SPBE can run effectively according to needs. Second, integration, which refers to efforts to integrate all resources to create a well-coordinated SPBE system. Third, continuity, which emphasizes the importance of implementing SPBE in a sustainable, planned, phased, and continuous manner according to technological developments and needs. Fourth, efficiency, namely the optimal and appropriate use of resources to support SPBE operations. Fifth, accountability, which means there is clarity of function and responsibility for each process in SPBE. Next, interoperability, which includes coordination and collaboration between business processes and between electronic systems to enable the effective exchange of data, information, and SPBE services. Finally, the principle of security, which includes protection of the confidentiality, authenticity, and non-repudiation of SPBE resources to ensure the integrity and reliability of the system as a whole.

b. Evaluation with Weber's Perspective (Written Rules)

The legal and theoretical foundations supporting the transformation of digital public services in Indonesia can be seen in several important regulations and conceptual frameworks. Law No. 25 of 2009 concerning public services serves as the primary basis for guaranteeing the public's right to quality, transparent, and accountable services. Presidential Regulation No. 95 of 2018 concerning Electronic-Based Government Systems (SPBE) strengthens the policy direction by encouraging efficient and integrated governance through the use of information technology. This policy is supported by the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform's Regulation concerning service digitalization, which serves as a specific guideline for developing and implementing public services through digitalization for all government agencies.

The establishment of written rules that have been made is a strategic step to ensure the success of bureaucratic transformation towards a more modern and transparent

system, and has the following functions, the first of which is to guarantee uniformity and certainty of procedures in digital-based public services so that all citizens receive fair, equal, and predictable services. In addition to providing fairness to public services, it can also increase the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of services to the public. Thus, the digitalization of public services based on clear regulations not only strengthens governance but also builds public trust in the quality of public services provided.

In the implementation of digital public services, the rational-legal bureaucracy principles proposed by Max Weber serve as an important reference, particularly in ensuring professional and objective governance. One of its key principles is impersonality, where every decision and process is carried out based on established rules, not on individual interests. Furthermore, a modern bureaucratic system also demands a clear hierarchy, so that each implementer has a formally written position, role, and responsibility. To support service quality, technical qualifications are required for employees, including competencies and training relevant to the digital system being used. This entire process is then reinforced through written documentation, where each stage of the service is digitally recorded and auditable, to ensure transparency, accountability, and ongoing evaluation.

c. Evaluation with Wilson's Perspective (Administrative Efficiency)

In the article entitled "*The Study of Administration*" (1987), Woodrow Wilson emphasized the importance of several basic principles that became the foundation for the development of modern public administration. First, he highlighted the importance of efficiency in administration, where the bureaucracy is required to work effectively and not waste resources. Second, Wilson emphasized the use of scientific management principles, namely the use of a rational and systematic approach in managing government organizations. Third, he proposed a clear separation between the political and administrative spheres, with the aim of ensuring that policy implementation can proceed professionally without the intervention of political interests. Finally, he viewed organizations as neutral instruments that function to serve the public objectively, not to serve the interests of certain individuals or groups. Wilson's views later became an important basis in the development of public administration theory, especially in promoting an efficient, neutral, and professional bureaucracy.

Based on the results of the analysis of both Weber's and Wilson's theories, it can be concluded that Weber's theory is very relevant and very clear with the existence of written rules and all processes based on SOPs, and Wilson's theory also supports efficiency and productivity in public administration services.

The digitalization of public services can be understood as a comprehensive transformation effort to increase the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of the bureaucracy through the use of information technology. From Max Weber's perspective, bureaucratic modernization through digitalization is seen as a continuation of administrative rationalization, which emphasizes hierarchical structures, a clear division of labor, and standardized rules and procedures. Weber believed that digital technology can strengthen these principles by creating a service system that is more standardized, transparent, and free from personal subjectivity. Digitalization, within the Weberian framework, functions as an instrument to strengthen the legal-formal rationality that is at the core of modern bureaucracy, thereby reducing the potential for deviation and increasing administrative certainty.

Meanwhile, Woodrow Wilson's perspective views the digitalization of public services primarily from the perspective of separating politics and administration and

focusing on managerial efficiency. Wilson believes that bureaucratic modernization should be directed toward improving institutional performance and the quality of public service. Therefore, digitalization, within the Wilsonian framework, is understood as an innovation that accelerates processes, reduces waste, and increases the responsiveness of public services. While Weber emphasized strengthening structures and rules, Wilson emphasized optimizing managerial functions and professionalizing the apparatus. Thus, comparing the two demonstrates that digitalization can simultaneously strengthen the rational-formal character of bureaucracy (Weber) and enhance a more efficient and responsive service orientation (Wilson).

Comparison of Weber and Wilson's Theories

Indicator	Weber (Written Rules)	Wilson (Administrative Efficiency)
Organizational structure	There is a clear hierarchy and formal positions based on rules.	Rational division of tasks to minimize duplication
Service Procedures	All processes are documented in writing (SOP, regulations)	Procedures are simplified, and automation is implemented
ASN Recruitment	Based on standard competencies and regulations	Emphasize the efficiency and productivity of performance
Digitalization of Services	Digital legal rule-based system (e-governance)	Driving efficiency and operational cost savings
Decision Making	Referring to formal laws and regulations	Prioritize effectiveness and response time
Performance Evaluation	Based on compliance with the rules	Based on the results and speed of service

Source: **Dwiyanto, Agus.** *Bureaucratic Reform and Public Service Management* (2010).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the digitalization of public services is a concrete form of bureaucratic modernization that seeks to improve the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of government administration. From Max Weber's perspective, digitalization reflects the application of rational-legal bureaucratic principles, particularly through written rules, clear hierarchical structures, impersonal decision-making, and systematic documentation. Meanwhile, in Woodrow Wilson's view, digitalization supports administrative efficiency and strengthens the separation between political and technical functions by making the bureaucratic system a neutral instrument for serving the public. Although the implementation of digitalization has shown a positive impact on service quality, this study also found a number of challenges such as apparatus resistance, limited digital infrastructure, and gaps in human resource competency. Therefore, bureaucratic modernization through digitalization needs to be accompanied by strengthening employee capacity, improving technological systems, and consistent political commitment to encourage bureaucratic transformation that is professional, adaptive, and oriented towards the public interest.

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