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Work Culture and Public Service Ethics in the Modern Era

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Abstract---The development of digital technology and the demands of good governance have fundamentally transformed work culture and public service ethics in the modern era. This article aims to examine the relationship between the transformation of work culture, ethical challenges, and strategies for enhancing professionalism in public service through a systematic literature review. The findings indicate that digitalisation is driving a shift in work culture values from rigid hierarchies towards collaboration, innovation, and a digital mindset, whilst simultaneously presenting new ethical dilemmas such as the protection of personal data, algorithmic bias, the dehumanisation of services, and technological access inequalities. Key findings reveal that professionalism among public servants requires more than just technical competence; it necessitates moral resilience, ethical digital literacy, and a commitment to principles of social justice. Effective strategies for enhancing service ethics include continuous ethics education, exemplary leadership, integrity-based reward and punishment systems, participatory codes of ethics, and internal and external oversight involving the public. This study concludes that an ethical and professional work culture is a crucial foundation for realising fair, inclusive, transparent, and sustainable public services in the dynamic digital age.

Keywords---work culture, public service ethics, modern era, digital transformation, civil service professionalism, integrity, digital literacy, good governance.

Introduction

Public service is at the heart of modern governance. Its primary function is to ensure that the needs of the public are met effectively and fairly. In this context, work culture and civil service ethics are key factors determining the quality and credibility of service delivery. As stated by [Denhardt & Denhardt \(2000\)](#), Public service cannot be separated from principles of morality and the collective interests of the community it serves.

The shift in governance systems towards digital governance is driving a fundamental transformation in how the bureaucracy operates. Public organizations now face demands for greater efficiency and transparency. Osborne (2020) emphasizes that, within the New Public Governance paradigm, government actors must balance traditional bureaucratic values with technological innovation to maintain service integrity.

Digital transformation is also reshaping public-sector values. Values such as hierarchy and administrative compliance are being displaced by new values such as collaboration, innovation, and social responsibility. A study by Yasin et al. (2024), this indicates that public servants in Indonesia are experiencing a shift in their work orientation, from mere policy implementers to public servants who are adaptable to information technology.

Ethics forms the foundation for balancing the speed of service delivery with social justice. In many cases, the implementation of technology often raises ethical dilemmas, particularly regarding privacy and equal access. Lewis & Gilman (2005), emphasize that upholding ethics in digital services requires a robust moral control system to ensure that technology-based decisions do not deviate from human values. Furthermore, globalization adds a new dimension to the shaping of work culture. Civil servants must be able to adapt to universal values such as transparency, accountability, and public participation. Van de Walle (2017), refers to this change as “cultural hybridization” in the public sector, where local values are combined with global standards of good governance.

A study by Verbeeten & Speklé (2015) indicates that a modern, results-oriented work culture (performance-based culture) enhances bureaucratic efficiency but carries the risk of diminishing attention to the moral aspects of public service. Consequently, striking a balance between productivity and integrity has become a key issue in contemporary public management.

In Indonesia, the bureaucratic reforms initiated in the 2000s have driven the establishment of core values for civil servants (ASN), such as integrity, professionalism, and public service. This transformation aims to create a results-oriented work culture whilst upholding service ethics. This demonstrates that work culture is not merely technical but also normative (Rahman, 2022).

Public service ethics are also closely linked to public trust in the government. If public servants demonstrate high ethical behaviour, the government’s legitimacy will increase. Van de Walle (2017) states that public trust is a key indicator of the success of modern bureaucracy, and this depends heavily on the consistency of civil servants’ work ethics.

The interaction between work culture and ethics is no longer linear. In the digital age, these two concepts are integrated through an organization’s internal information systems. Research by Anderson et al. (2014), shows that digital systems supporting performance transparency can strengthen employees’ ethical behaviour by fostering a positive culture of mutual oversight. However, the transformation of work culture also faces significant challenges—including resistance to change and bureaucracy that remains hierarchical. According to Farazmand (2023) The modernization of public management requires transformational leadership capable of instilling the value of integrity at every level of the organization. Public leaders are not only tasked with managing policies but must also serve as moral role models for civil servants.

Previous studies on modern public service have emphasized that improving ethics requires an institutional support system, not merely individual awareness. Cooper (2012) highlights the importance of *an ethical framework* within public organizations so that every decision can be held accountable both morally and administratively. This implies that work culture and ethics must be implemented simultaneously.

Therefore, research into work culture and public service ethics in the modern era is of great importance. The aim is to understand the complex interactions between moral values, technology, and organizational performance. This study forms the basis for designing sustainable and integrity-driven public policy strategies in the digital age (Ali et al., 2015).

Method

The research method employed in this article is a literature review, an approach that focuses on the analysis and synthesis of various academic sources relating to work culture and public service ethics in the modern era (Eliyah & Aslan, 2025). The review process was conducted through a systematic search of books, national journals, international journals, and other documents deemed relevant. The analysis was carried out using a thematic approach to identify patterns, gaps, and conceptual developments regarding the integration of work culture and public service ethics within the modern bureaucratic environment. This method was chosen as it provides a comprehensive understanding based on existing scientific evidence, without the need for direct field data collection, in accordance with the definition of a literature review as outlined by Snyder in ‘Academic Writing and Systematic Literature Review’ (APA) (Snyder, 2019).

Result and Discussion

The Transformation of Work Culture Values in the Digital Age

The digital era has brought profound changes to work culture in the public sector, particularly in how civil servants carry out their duties and interact with the public. Technology has become not merely a tool but also a driver of transformation in the fundamental values of government organizations. As noted by Osborne (2020), digital transformation in public service is shifting the focus of work from administrative routines towards services that are more responsive, participatory, and oriented towards tangible outcomes for the public.

Traditional bureaucratic values such as rigid hierarchies and procedural compliance are beginning to be eroded by demands for flexibility and innovation. Modern work culture requires civil servants to adapt to rapidly evolving digital systems. Research by Wati et al. (2024) confirms that a technology-based work culture has a positive and significant impact on staff performance as it promotes efficiency, transparency, and accountability. One of the most striking shifts in values is the emergence of a *digital mindset* within the civil service's work culture. Staff are not only required to be able to operate digital systems but must also adopt an open attitude towards change and cross-departmental collaboration. Yasin et al. (2024), demonstrate that public organizations with a strong *digital mindset* are proven to be more adaptable in designing innovative services that meet the needs of modern society.

Digital transformation also creates space for the emergence of the values of flexibility in working hours and locations. *Remote* and *hybrid* working systems shift the paradigm from "must be physically present in the office" to "focus on work outcomes". Laelawati (2025), reveals that remote work productivity can be maintained at a high level if a culture of mutual trust and collaboration is consciously built, demonstrating that the value of trust is at the core of digital work culture. Furthermore, cross-sector and cross-regional collaboration has become more accessible thanks to digital platforms. Collaborative networks previously limited by geographical boundaries can now be built virtually. However, the study by Wijaya et al. (2022), highlights that informal interactions fostering team cohesion diminish in remote work, necessitating deliberate workplace culture strategies to maintain online team cohesion.

The values of transparency and accountability are easier to implement through digital systems that record every work process in real-time. Digital performance dashboards enable direct monitoring of both individual and organizational target achievements. Implementation in the City of Semarang demonstrates that the digitalization of work practices can significantly enhance the transparency and responsiveness of public services (Verhoef et al., 2021).

The application of the BerAKHLAK values (Service-Oriented, Accountable, Competent, Harmonious, Loyal, Adaptive, and Collaborative) serves as a crucial foundation for the transformation of the work culture of civil servants in Indonesia. Research findings indicate that the core BerAKHLAK values of civil servants effectively mediate the influence of digital transformation on work culture. The R-Square value indicates that digital transformation explains 59.4% of the variation in the core BerAKHLAK values of civil servants, demonstrating the strong relationship between the two (Shalsabila et al., 2025).

A well-internalized digital work culture is capable of driving employees' active engagement in achieving organizational targets. A dominant characteristic of digital work culture is high performance supported by integrated information systems. The digitalization of business processes and performance management creates a working environment that encourages productive and collaborative behaviour amongst all employees. However, the transformation of work culture does not proceed smoothly without obstacles (Bondarouk et al., 2017). A hierarchical and procedural bureaucratic culture remains a major challenge in the adoption of digital values. Organizational culture innovation in the public sector requires a shift towards more flexible and collaborative work values and practices. Strategic recommendations include strengthening digital leadership and developing a *digital mindset* across all levels of the bureaucracy.

The role of digital leadership is crucial in driving the transformation of work culture. Leaders are not only tasked with managing technology but also with setting an example in internalizing new values such as innovation, transparency, and collaboration. Farazmand (2023), emphasises that the modernisation of public management requires transformational leadership capable of instilling values of integrity and adaptability at every level of the organisation. Furthermore, the development of a *competency-based culture* is a priority in the transformation of digital work culture. Employees need to be equipped with competencies in information technology, data analysis, and digital communication to be able to adapt to the demands of the 4.0 era. Organizational Culture 4.0 emphasizes that digital transformation is not merely about adopting technology, but also about comprehensively changing the way we think and work.

The value of collaboration is becoming increasingly important in modern work culture, particularly with the rise of virtual and cross-disciplinary teamwork. Virtual collaboration demands more structured communication and a

high level of commitment from every team member. Laelawati (2025), found that remote work can enhance productivity and flexibility if supported by a strong culture of collaboration and mutual trust among team members.

The application of integrity values within digital work culture is also a critical issue due to the increasing risk of data and system misuse. Ethical use of technology has become an integral part of modern work culture. Cooper (2012), emphasizes that upholding ethics in digital services requires a robust moral control system to ensure that technology-based decisions do not deviate from human values and social justice.

Overall, the transformation of work culture values in the digital age is a dynamic process involving changes in paradigms, values, and working practices. This transformation requires clear policy support, strong leadership, and the continuous development of civil servants' competencies. Rojabi (2025), concludes that digital transformation in public service is evident in changes to working mechanisms and the dynamic nature of current public needs, thereby underscoring the urgency of a comprehensive adaptation of work culture.

Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas in Public Service

Digital transformation in public service presents significant opportunities to enhance the efficiency and accessibility of services, yet simultaneously introduces complex ethical challenges. Digitalization enables governments to streamline bureaucracy, but it also creates loopholes for ethical breaches such as the misuse of personal data, algorithmic discrimination, and a lack of accountability in technology-driven decisions. These challenges become increasingly complex when regulations fail to keep pace with the rapid pace of technological development (Yuswami et al., 2024).

One of the most pressing ethical dilemmas is the protection of citizens' personal data within digital systems. The public entrusts sensitive data to the government in the hope that it will be secure, yet the risk of data leaks and misuse by unauthorized parties is growing. Digital ethics in the delivery of public services aims to ensure that the use of information technology aligns with moral values, principles of justice, and social interests to protect individual rights (Yuliana & Anita, 2026).

The phenomenon of dehumanization in digital services has become a serious ethical issue. When data-driven technical rationality supplants moral wisdom in decision-making, an epistemological crisis arises in which human values are marginalized. Public officials often focus on the efficiency of digital systems, thereby neglecting the human touch and empathy that are essential in service delivery (Raharjo, 2022). Fundamental values such as justice, empathy, and accountability are eroded by the phenomenon of dehumanization and algorithmic bias. Algorithmic bias presents a new ethical dilemma arising from the use of artificial intelligence in the selection of social assistance recipients or the determination of service eligibility. Algorithms not governed by principles of fairness can result in systemic discrimination against certain groups based on biased historical data (Mariyam, 2007).

Inequalities in access to technology create injustices in public services, exacerbated by digital transformation. The digitalization of public services in various regions, such as Banten, has not yet been fully inclusive, particularly in rural or remote areas with low internet penetration and limited infrastructure. Variations in the public's digital literacy exacerbate these inequalities, leading to disparities in service provision between urban and rural areas that run counter to the principle of social justice. Another ethical challenge arises from the imbalance between the need for service efficiency and the protection of individual rights (Mareta & Fakhri, 2024). Pressure to meet performance targets quickly often leads officials to disregard procedures for privacy protection and transparency. This imbalance highlights the need for policy reform grounded in ethical values within digital transformation to ensure public services remain inclusive, fair, and community-oriented.

Low digital literacy among government officials poses a serious obstacle to the implementation of public administration ethics. Many employees do not fully understand the ethical implications of using digital systems, making them vulnerable to procedural errors or abuse of authority. Key challenges include data privacy, technological access inequality, abuse of authority, the management of personal data that is vulnerable to misuse, and low digital literacy, which requires ethical training interventions (Katharina (Ed.), 2021).

Transparency and fairness in digital services are crucial ethical issues because unclear procedures or unequal access can create the impression of discrimination (Ibrahim et al., 2025). The public is entitled to equal services regardless of social, economic, or geographical background. In addition to data security, digital ethics also encompasses transparency and fairness in service delivery, where slow responses or vague procedures can erode public trust (Cahyarini, 2021).

In the context of Indonesian bureaucratic ethics, a crisis of public trust has arisen due to ethical, moral, and behavioural issues among bureaucrats in the delivery of services. This decline in trust is caused by criminal cases such as corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN) involving many bureaucrats, leading to the decline of the

bureaucracy. Ethics form the foundation for the behaviour of government officials, and public dissatisfaction often sparks discussions regarding the ethical standards applied (Budijaya & Situmeang, 2025).

Ethical violations within the bureaucracy lead to a weakening of public officials' integrity, which in turn results in a decline in the quality of public services and public trust in the government. Many unethical practices are carried out by the bureaucracy in the name of public policy, whilst personal interests are prioritized over the public good. Solutions to address these violations must include strengthening regulations and imposing strict sanctions on offenders to restore the integrity of the bureaucracy (Antika et al., 2025).

The Ferdy Sambo case serves as a reflection of the bureaucracy's low moral resilience in the face of power pressures. From a public administration perspective, ethics should be a pillar of decision-making, particularly in dilemmatic situations; however, bureaucrats' reliance on superiors' directives and the dominance of a culture of loyalty have reduced moral values to mere formalities. The moral resilience of the bureaucracy is tested in crises, and without the reinforcement of ethical values and multi-layered oversight, the bureaucracy will be unable to stand as a bastion of justice (Indrayani, 2022).

Ethical challenges in public service using digital media encompass communication aspects that are often overlooked, such as failing to use capital letters when drafting emails, writing unclear email subjects, and careless use of text. Ethics in digital media usage itself includes issues of awareness, full responsibility for one's actions, integrity, and most importantly, the dissemination of virtuous values. Users must be mindful when using the internet, with clear and responsible intentions (Yasin et al., 2024).

Bureaucratic reform is not merely a matter of structure, but rather a cultural transformation and the consistent internalization of professional values within the training and promotion system. Without the reinforcement of ethical values, multi-layered oversight, and the fostering of integrity, the bureaucracy will be unable to meet modern challenges. Cultural change and the internalization of professional values must be a priority within the training and promotion system to build the moral resilience of civil servants against external pressures (Sedarmayanti, 2012). To address these various ethical challenges, there is a need to strengthen privacy protection regulations, improve civil servants' digital literacy, and develop ethics-based technology. These solutions aim to reduce the risk of injustice, prevent the abuse of power, and ensure the more effective application of public administration ethical principles amidst the ongoing digital transformation. Research recommendations include the importance of humanistic programmes, the strengthening of ethical digital literacy, and continuous policy oversight.

Strategies for Enhancing Professionalism and Ethics in Public Service

Enhancing professionalism and ethics in public service requires a systemic approach encompassing policy, institutional frameworks, and individual capacity building. The key strategy is the internalization of ethical values throughout all stages of civil servant retraining, focusing not only on technical skills but also on character building and ethical awareness. As recommended in the literature review, the systematic internalization of ethical values and the strengthening of an integrity-based organizational culture are fundamental strategies for sustainably improving the quality of public service.

The implementation of an integrity-based *reward and punishment* system is a crucial strategy for motivating ethical behaviour. Civil servants (ASN) who demonstrate high ethical standards should be given incentives, recognition, or promotion, whilst ethical violations must be addressed transparently and firmly, regardless of position. This system creates a working environment that fosters accountability and prevents misconduct that undermines public trust in government institutions (Sedarmayanti, 2012).

The participatory development of an organizational code of ethics is a key strategy for strengthening the moral legitimacy of behavioural norms. A code of ethics formulated jointly by management and staff will have greater binding force than one unilaterally imposed by superiors. Participation in the formulation of the code of ethics fosters a sense of shared ownership of the organization's values and enhances commitment to implementing them in daily work practices (Rahman, 2022).

Regular monitoring and evaluation of service ethics must involve both internal and external oversight, including the active participation of the public and supervisory bodies such as the Ombudsman. Without robust and continuous oversight mechanisms, efforts to improve ethics will amount to nothing more than a mere formality. Regular evaluation enables the early identification of deviations and systemic improvements to weaknesses in the implementation of service ethics (Johannes, 2024).

Effective ethics education and codes of conduct for civil servants are preventive strategies to deter fraud and ethical breaches within government agencies. Research indicates that the implementation of a sound ethics programme, with leaders serving as role models, can regulate civil servants' behaviour and significantly enhance

integrity. Government institutions need to develop ethics programmes and codes of conduct as an integral part of internal controls to safeguard civil servants' integrity (Dwiyanto, 2018).

The role of leadership in upholding ethics cannot be replaced by systems or regulations alone. Agency leaders must serve as *role models* in the implementation of ethical values by demonstrating transparent, accountable behaviour that prioritizes the public interest. Ethical leadership fosters an organizational climate that encourages positive behaviour and builds trust among subordinates and the public in the institutions they lead.

The development of civil servants' (ASN) digital ethics capacity is a serious investment that cannot be postponed in the era of digital transformation. This type of training must not be limited to technical training in the use of technology, but must also prepare civil servants to understand the ethical risks of personal data usage, algorithmic bias, and digital privacy. Building digital ethics capacity is a prerequisite for realizing responsible public service in the digital space (Shalsabila et al., 2025).

Improving digital literacy among government officials can be achieved through regular training and structured continuing education. With good digital literacy, government officials will not only be able to operate technology, but also understand the risks and their impact on the ethical principles of public administration. Strong digital literacy forms the foundation for preventing the misuse of technology and maintaining integrity in data-driven decision-making (Kasnelly & Habibah, 2025).

Ethics-based technology design, such as the application of the *'privacy by design' concept* in administrative systems, is a key strategy for ensuring that ethics are embedded from the outset in the development of digital systems. Technology designed with ethical principles in mind from the start will reduce the likelihood of bias, discrimination, and privacy breaches that frequently occur in systems that do not account for ethical considerations (Johannes, 2024).

Strengthening the professional ethos of civil servants through mental and spiritual development is a fundamental strategy for building a strong professional identity. Sedarmayanti (2012), emphasises three main strategies: strengthening the spirit of the civil service, public and media oversight, and the enforcement of discipline through strict sanctions. A strong spirit of the civil service fosters a sense of pride and shared responsibility to uphold the reputation of the profession and public service institutions (Estiningsih, 2023).

Public and social media oversight serves as an effective external strategy to curb breaches of bureaucratic ethics. Transparency of information and public participation in monitoring civil servants' performance create positive social pressure that encourages ethical behaviour. Social media can serve as a platform for disseminating educational and inspirational information whilst also exposing poor practices that require institutional rectification (Bisara & Suyatna, 2025).

Enforcing discipline with strict sanctions for ethical violations is a deterrent strategy that cannot be compromised. Strict and consistent sanctions for ethical violations demonstrate the institution's genuine commitment to integrity and prevent similar violations in the future. Without strict sanctions, a code of ethics will merely be a dead letter with no binding force in day-to-day practice.

Professionalism must be enhanced through continuous training, skills development and the holistic cultivation of integrity. Fundamental changes in mindset, work culture and service systems—which have hitherto tended to be hierarchical and rigid—require a long-term commitment from all levels of the bureaucracy. The government needs to ensure that the performance appraisal system measures not only administrative output but also ethical behaviour and public satisfaction (Bisara & Suyatna, 2025).

Overall, strategies to enhance professionalism and service ethics require the integration of ethics education, exemplary leadership, a robust oversight system, and an integrity-based organisational culture. These strategies must be implemented synergistically and sustainably to build a clean, professional bureaucracy capable of delivering high-quality public services in the digital age. Without a collective commitment from leaders, civil servants, and the public, efforts to improve ethics will struggle to bring about significant transformation.

Conclusion

Work culture and public service ethics in the modern era are undergoing a fundamental transformation driven by digitalisation, demands for transparency, and shifting social values. A work culture previously based on hierarchy and procedural compliance is now shifting towards collaborative, innovative, adaptive, and results-oriented values, with a *digital mindset* as the primary driver. This transformation not only alters how civil servants work but also demands the internalisation of ethical values such as integrity, accountability, and fairness in every service interaction with the public.

Whilst digital transformation brings greater efficiency and accessibility, it also presents complex ethical challenges and dilemmas, ranging from the protection of personal data, algorithmic bias, the dehumanisation of services, to technological access inequalities. These dilemmas demonstrate that professionalism among public servants is not sufficient with technical competence alone, but must be accompanied by moral resilience, ethical digital literacy, and a commitment to the principles of social justice. Without systemic ethical reinforcement, digital transformation risks eroding human values and public trust in government institutions.

Therefore, enhancing professionalism and ethics in public service requires an integrated strategy encompassing continuous ethics education, exemplary leadership, an integrity-based *reward and punishment* system, participatory codes of ethics, and internal and external oversight involving the public. This combination of strategies will build a clean, responsive, and well-intentioned bureaucracy in serving the public interest. Ultimately, an ethical and professional work culture is the cornerstone for realising fair, inclusive, and sustainable public service in today's dynamic modern era.

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