

Research Article

The Dilemma of Public Service Innovation in Enhancing Public Value

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Abstract. Public service innovation across various levels of government represents a positive sign of progress in Indonesia's bureaucratic reform efforts. In practice, however, it is essential to ensure that such innovations genuinely enhance the public value of existing services so that they effectively address the needs of service recipients. Field evidence indicates that the implementation of public service innovations continues to face multiple challenges. The public value generated by an innovation may vary—or even fail—when viewed from the perspectives of different stakeholder groups. This study examines these dilemmas, an area that remains relatively underexplored. Employing a qualitative approach that includes in-depth interviews, observation, and a review of relevant literature, the research finds that failures in public value often arise from inherent dilemmas within public service innovation itself. Accordingly, government administrators are expected to develop a clear understanding of the values that should be embedded in the public service innovations they implement. Furthermore, attention must be paid to variations in social conditions and local cultures, as enhancing public value requires alignment between the values underpinning innovation and the cultural context of the community it serves. Finally, public sector organizations, as the primary agents of practical implementation, must provide legitimate mechanisms to reconcile value conflicts when they arise.

Keywords: Innovation Dilemma, Observation, Public Organization, Public Service Innovation, Public Value.

1. Introduction

The government is obligated to provide public services aimed at meeting public needs. However, ongoing developments in time, circumstances, conditions, and technology have compelled the public sector to pursue innovation in the delivery of public services. For this reason, public service innovation has become a prominent agenda across various levels of government over the past decade. According to Regulation of the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (MENPAN RB) No. 30 of 2014 on Guidelines for Public Service Innovation, public service innovation is implemented as an effort to improve the quality of public services. This policy constitutes one of the key steps in realizing the grand design of bureaucratic reform as stipulated in Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 81 of 2010. Furthermore, the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (Kemenpan RB) organized a series of Public Service Innovation Competitions (Kompetisi Inovasi Pelayanan Publik/KIPP) in 2022 to stimulate the creation of public service innovations within ministries and agencies, local governments, state-owned enterprises (BUMN), and regionally owned enterprises (BUMD).

Received: July 11, 2025

Revised: July 31, 2025

Accepted: September 27, 2025

Published: September 30, 2025

Curr. Ver.: September 30, 2025



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On the other hand, Indonesia is a large country with multiple levels of government, beginning from the smallest administrative unit—the village level—which currently comprises 74,954 villages (Ministry of Villages, 2024) spread across thousands of islands. Social conditions, circumstances, and societal values vary considerably across regions. As the world's largest archipelagic state, each area in Indonesia exhibits distinct social, cultural, and demographic characteristics.

According to Law No. 25 of 2009 on Public Services, public services are intended to fulfill service needs in accordance with prevailing laws and regulations for every citizen and resident. In this regard, the government is required to guarantee the provision of public services based on established service quality standards, thereby ensuring services that are high-quality, fast, accessible, affordable, and measurable. This implies that the delivery of public services grounded in the principles of good governance and good corporate governance, as well as legal certainty for all citizens, is mandatory. Moreover, members of the public must be able to access services in a fair and dignified manner.

The transformation of public services toward digital and information and communication technology (ICT)-based systems has become inevitable, given that society is rapidly entering the era of the Industrial Revolution 5.0. However, not all segments of the population are able to use internet-based service systems with ease. Older adults, for example, who are among the groups most affected by technological illiteracy, are nevertheless required to engage with digital-based public service innovations, including in the health sector. As a result, such innovations may fail to achieve the expected public values, such as efficiency, equity, and ease of access.

This means that public service innovation is confronted with dilemmas arising from differences in needs and values among various social groups. Such dilemmas may also emerge due to differing perspectives between public sector managers and the community as service users. Yet one of the fundamental principles that must be upheld in any state is social justice, which includes social justice in access to public services. Based on this background, this study seeks to address the question of how public value dilemmas manifest in the practice of public service innovation.

2. Literature Review

Public Service Innovation

Over the past two decades, public service innovation has attracted significant attention from scholars and government institutions worldwide (Bloch & Bugge, 2013; Bason, 2010; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011; Chen et al., 2020; Queyroi et al., 2020). Moore (2005) and Osborne et al. (2021), in their discussions of public value, also note that public service innovation remains at a stage of theory building and research development, and that much of its conceptual foundation is still derived from studies dominated by the private sector. Consequently, definitions of public service innovation vary depending on the perspective adopted and the category of innovation involved, such as service, product, policy, process, or governance innovation (Mahpudin, 2022). Nevertheless, scholars generally agree that innovation refers to the realization of new ideas (De Vries et al., 2016).

The demand for such renewal arises not only from the need to address public problems or bureaucratic deadlock, but also from pressures for modernization, the streamlining of bureaucratic processes, and the need to meet public expectations for practicality, service speed, and ease of access. However, in responding to these demands, public sector organizations must ensure that the innovations they implement do not lose sight of their primary purpose—namely, to respond to societal needs and to generate public value. Indeed, public value is a central concept in public administration that underpins thinking about governance itself (Brown et al., 2021).

Public Value

Public value can be simply defined as the “change” generated by public services (Vargo, 2019). The underlying idea is to add value to what the public sector does, a process shaped by public sector managers through public organizations (Moore, 1995). Public value is created by government through services, regulations, and other actions (Kelly et al., 2002). These values function as normative criteria that characterize good governance and a good society (Bozeman, 2002; Bozeman, 2007), and different public service institutions may hold varying definitions of what constitutes public value (Osborne et al., 2022).

Mark Moore argues that the creation of public value is built upon a “strategic triangle,” consisting of three strategic dimensions. These include: (1) the provision of services that are substantively valuable; (2) public organizational activities that are politically legitimate; and (3) organizations that are managed effectively in line with their core missions (organizational effectiveness) (Moore, 1995). Meanwhile, the success of public value creation can be assessed through several indicators: (1) the efficiency, effectiveness, and affordability of services for the public; (2) alignment with societal conditions; (3) the ability of public sector leaders to articulate clear visions and missions; and (4) the reduction of public dependence or, at minimum, the minimization of burdens placed on society (Moore, 1995).

Moore (1995) further argues that, in contrast to the dominance of New Public Management theory—which measures the effectiveness of public services primarily through organizational efficiency and user satisfaction—the public value approach also takes into account the creation of external value, which he describes as being “substantially valuable for society.” From a public sector perspective, productivity is assessed by the extent to which social welfare is generated and by how public services enhance the quality of life, rather than by financial gains alone (cf. Moore, 1995). The creation of public value is indicated when the benefits received by society exceed the costs incurred, thereby achieving the public good, such as equity, justice, fairness, and democratic governance (Moore, 1995; Bryson et al., 2015; Hartley et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the provision of public services entails costs. Funding for public services is derived from taxes and fees, yet state financial resources are limited. As a result, governments also rely on legal instruments and authoritative power to compel service users to comply with statutory regulations (cf. Moore, 1995). Budgetary constraints and pressures to improve efficiency have encouraged the emergence of digital-based public service innovations. Digital technology is widely regarded as a breakthrough for addressing sluggish bureaucratic processes, reducing vulnerability to corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN), and lowering administrative costs.

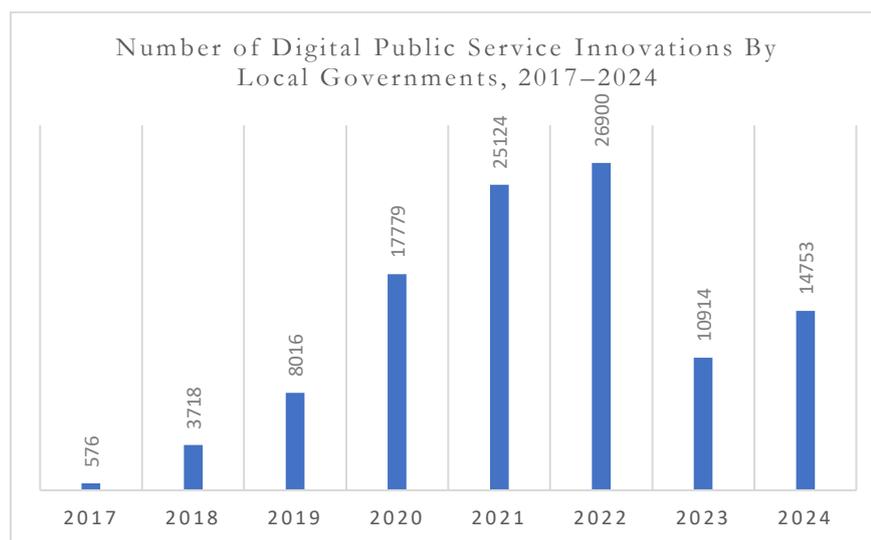
3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach based on interviews, observation, and a literature review. Primary data were obtained from interviews, with informants selected from members of the public as service users. In determining informants, purposive sampling was applied, combined with observation and in-depth interviews. In addition, this study draws on key reference books and academic journals, as well as other relevant sources, to elaborate on public value dilemmas in public service innovation. A total of ten informants were interviewed in order to obtain relevant information. The names of the informants are not disclosed to protect their privacy. All informants were informed about the scope of the research and the use of interview data; they provided informed consent and requested that their identities be kept confidential or anonymized. After the data were collected, an interactive data analysis model was applied (Miles et al., 2014). Furthermore, to develop the discussion and conclusions of this study, relevant literature was reviewed and interpreted, and primary data were selected and processed using data triangulation techniques.

4. Results and Discussion

The Dilemma of Digital-Based Public Service Innovation

A phenomenon currently observed is the rapid proliferation of digital-based public innovations—such as applications and websites—developed without a strong foundation, particularly when viewed from the perspective of public values. The increase in the number of digital-based public service innovations between 2017 and 2024 illustrates this trend.



(Data processed from the Ministry of Home Affairs' Agency for Domestic Policy Strategy/BSKDN, 2017–2024).

The sharp rise in digital public service innovations has also been driven by competitive pressures among government institutions. As a result, a gap has emerged between the innovation values envisioned by public service providers and the realities observed in practice. Although the government later recognized that the excessive number of digital innovations introduced by local governments had become counterproductive—due to high maintenance

and server costs, as well as limited system interoperability—the response ultimately involved the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (PANRB) halting local governments from developing new applications. Meanwhile, the limited creation of public value in these applications is indicated, among other factors, by the persistently high number of public complaints submitted to the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia—amounting to 6,421 public reports in 2021 (Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021).

This also indicates that public service innovations that are sophisticated, modern, and reliant on various digital governance applications may, in fact, be perceived as burdensome by certain groups (Mahpudin, 2022). Members of the public who do not regularly use smartphones, older adults, and individuals with lower levels of education often encounter difficulties when dealing with digital-based services characterized by one-way interactions. Yet, digital and information and communication technology (ICT)–based service innovations are widely implemented in strategic sectors such as population administration and civil registration, as well as health services. Examples include the Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional (JKN) Mobile application, online registration systems for hospitals and clinics, and similar services.

Findings from field observations, interviews, and document review further reveal a persistent gap between the public value that the government seeks to create and what is actually experienced by the public as service users. As illustrated by the JKN Mobile website (jknmobile.com), JKN Mobile is a mobile application developed by BPJS Kesehatan to facilitate participants' access to various health services. Its purpose is to make it easier for the public to access health services, such as online registration for clinic visits, checking membership status, locating nearby hospitals, and other functions. In essence, the application aims to enhance service delivery for JKN-KIS participants.

The JKN Mobile application was developed with the aim of improving services for BPJS Kesehatan participants and enhancing the efficiency of administrative processes through online systems, such as claim submissions, premium payments, and the search for health facilities. Broadly speaking, the key values intended to be achieved through JKN Mobile are ease of access to services and adaptability to societal developments through digital transformation. However, field findings indicate that there are still barriers to realizing these intended innovation values. These include unequal levels of public understanding of digital technology and ICT, as well as differences in the economic capacity of service users. Consequently, the value generated by the JKN Mobile application may vary across different segments of society. Some groups are indeed able to experience its benefits, as reflected in the statement of a 34-year-old woman working as a civil servant: *“I registered using the online registration feature on JKN Mobile. I think it makes things easier, because I don't have to queue early in the morning at the clinic. It's more efficient.”*

However, the researcher also found that a considerable number of BPJS participants do not use the JKN Mobile application to register at primary healthcare facilities (first-level health facilities) because they actually find the online registration process difficult. This is evident from an interview with a 39-year-old JKN-KIS participant who wished to take her child to a JKN-affiliated healthcare facility: *“I’ve been waiting here since 6:30 a.m. The clinic opens at 8:00, sometimes even later. If I come a bit later, the queue here (for conventional registration) is already very long. That’s not even counting the online queue. If I arrive too late, I’m afraid I won’t get a slot for the afternoon schedule. Later on, I’ll definitely lose out to those who register online. Usually, people who register online get their numbers first. I can’t register online, miss. I don’t know how to download the application. I tried installing it before, but then it wouldn’t open. My phone memory is already full, so I can’t install JKN Mobile.”*

Similar responses were also expressed by several other informants. At present, some JKN-affiliated health facilities provide registration services through the JKN Mobile application while still accepting conventional, walk-in registration. This case illustrates that service providers do offer conventional alternatives; however, in practice, conventional registration is consistently disadvantaged compared to online registration. Even when patients arrive at the clinic earlier, they must wait until the clinic opens, whereas online registrants can register from anywhere before opening hours.

It is important to note that many JKN-KIS service users come from lower- to middle-income groups and include older adults. This situation indicates that the values of equity and justice are not fully reflected in the alternatives provided, as certain groups are disadvantaged by the existence of application-based innovations. During an observation at a community health center (*Puskesmas*), the researchers also encountered a 65-year-old JKN-KIS participant who lodged a strong complaint with registration staff and medical personnel because, despite it being only 9:00 a.m., all queue numbers had already been exhausted. The researchers subsequently conducted an interview with a medical staff member at the *Puskesmas* to obtain the implementers’ perspective on this issue: *“At this community health center, there is a daily patient quota. Once the quota is filled, registration is closed, even if it is still 9:00 in the morning. If patients want to be sure to get a queue number, they need to learn how to use JKN Mobile. There’s no need to complain or get angry.”*

In addition to clinics and *Puskesmas*, many hospitals have now undergone transformation by adopting information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, and service quality. One informant, a manager at a public hospital, stated: *“We currently utilize the internet to improve services. We use online registration through our website so patients know when they should come to the hospital and do not have to wait too long in queues. We also maximize digital technology—for example, patients’ X-ray results are no longer provided in printed form; instead, patients can access them by scanning a barcode.”*

The interview excerpt above indicates that the value expected from this service innovation is user orientation (Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). Innovations such as online outpatient registration are designed with the interests of service users in mind, enabling services to be delivered in a timely manner and allowing examination results, such as X-rays, to be accessed more easily by patients and their families. However, several elderly patients encountered by the researchers reported difficulties in using online registration when seeking treatment at the hospital. As expressed by a 63-year-old informant who was an outpatient at the public hospital: *“For me, it’s difficult. I can’t register online by myself. When I need to go to the hospital, I usually ask my child for help. The problem is that my children now live separately, far away. So it becomes quite troublesome for parents like us.”*

This experience is consistent with that of a 50-year-old user of the *“Dukcapil dalam Genggaman”* application, who described her experience in processing population administration documents during the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, all civil registration services in her area were required to be conducted through the *“Dukcapil dalam Genggaman”* application. However, she encountered difficulties and went to the sub-district (*kecamatan*) office to seek direct assistance from staff. Ultimately, she had to return home without success because she had previously sought help and used her nephew’s mobile phone number, which resulted in failure to receive the one-time password (OTP). The problem was that her nephew lived some distance away from her home, and she herself did not own a mobile phone. She reported having gone back and forth to the sub-district office three times without successfully processing her Family Card (*Kartu Keluarga*) through the application. *“I don’t have a smartphone. Honestly, using an application like this makes my head spin. I really can’t do it. I’d rather ask someone for help, but it just ends up being even more complicated.”*

The *“Dukcapil dalam Genggaman”* application is likewise intended to generate public value in the form of accountability, responsiveness, openness, adaptability, innovation, equity, effectiveness, efficiency, and user orientation. From the perspectives of government, public sector managers, and members of society who are accustomed to digital technology, application-based public service innovations that can be accessed anytime and anywhere are generally perceived as more transparent, accountable, and efficient (Castro & Lopes, 2022).

However, as noted by Al-Shboul et al. (2014), social and technological factors remain significant barriers to implementation. Digital divides persist not only among communities but also within government institutions themselves. Among the public, many individuals still lack access to the internet and smartphones. Within public organizations, there are also numerous civil servants who have not yet mastered the use of applications and websites developed as public service innovations. This situation results in frequent challenges related to system maintenance, management, and data security during implementation. More broadly, many regions in Indonesia continue to face difficulties in developing adequate information

and communication technology infrastructure, leading to digital disparities across regions as well.

According to Moore (2005), public value must indeed be created by public sector managers or the government. However, Bozeman, in his research, adds that the success of public value creation must also be assessed from the perspective of society as service users. He finds that societal values and demographic differences—such as education level, digital literacy, age-based user composition, and other factors—significantly influence how public values are ranked and perceived within society (Bozeman, 2018). Therefore, any policy that affects public interests must take into account the values embedded within the community, including value systems, culture, local understandings or perceptions, a sense of justice, and transparency in implementation (Edward III, 1980; Nursalam, 2021; Luthfia, 2021).

Addressing the Dilemma of Public Value Creation

The difficulties experienced by certain segments of society in using public service applications can be understood as a failure in the creation of public value (Bozeman, 2002). The public sector is expected to serve society as a whole and should not cater only to specific classes or groups (Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). In this context, prior to introducing public service innovations, public sector managers must not only understand institutional characteristics and policy processes, but also be capable of addressing the challenges posed by societal heterogeneity in relation to the public values they seek to create (Brown et al., 2021).

As noted earlier, innovation can take various forms, including product innovation, service innovation, process innovation, strategic innovation, governance innovation, and rhetorical innovation (Hartley, 2005). It is therefore necessary to reconsider which types of innovation can generate the greatest and most meaningful public value for communities in specific local contexts. In Indonesia, beginning at the village level, there is an urgent need to equip communities with the capacity for critical and systematic thinking, enhanced knowledge, and civic ethics. This requires a gradual process through which communities can be provided with digital literacy skills, enabling them to better receive and utilize ICT-based innovations. Within this process, the public values necessary to cultivate “smart citizens” must first be established—for example, by fostering public understanding of procedures, queuing practices, democratic norms, and by improving overall digital literacy (Luthfia & Alkhajar, 2018; Luthfia, 2021; Luthfia, 2025).

Furthermore, once public service innovations have been implemented, public sector managers and frontline staff must possess the capacity to understand and manage value conflicts that arise between the innovations introduced and the values embedded within society (Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). Public sector organizations bear the responsibility of reconciling such value conflicts (Spicer, 2009). Responses to value conflicts may take various forms. For example, Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) note that policy actors may attempt to

“balance” competing values, or they may prioritize one value initially before addressing others. Alternatively, responsibility for different values may be assigned to distinct institutional structures, or similar cases involving comparable conflicts may be grouped together in order to identify appropriate solutions. While strategies for responding to value conflicts can vary considerably, it is essential to emphasize that public values must always be treated as equally legitimate. This is crucial to ensure that rational and well-considered policy choices can be made.

5. Conclusion

Public value is critically important in public service innovation across all levels of government—local, provincial, and national. Government authorities need to understand the principles of public service delivery and the urgency of public value in order to provide services that are grounded in public values. At the same time, it must be recognized that interests and values among different social groups may vary and often conflict, particularly across diverse regional contexts.

Therefore, first, public service innovations implemented by service-providing organizations must carefully consider societal conditions so that public value can be created more effectively. Second, the role of public organizations as service providers includes reconciling value conflicts among different and often competing groups. Third, public organizations have a practical implementation function, which involves providing legitimate mechanisms to facilitate the peaceful reconciliation of conflicting interests. Accordingly, an understanding of public value among government officials must be accompanied by a thorough understanding of institutional characteristics, policy processes, and appropriate approaches to managing the heterogeneity of societal conditions.

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