

(Research Article)

Reducing Administrative Burden in Remote Subdistrict Services: A Theory-to-Practice Review for Citizen-Centred Administration

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Abstract: Citizen-facing public services can require people to discover eligibility and procedures, assemble documents, travel or wait, navigate digital channels, and manage uncertainty or stigma. These demands are particularly consequential in geographically extensive or remote subdistrict settings, where access conditions and administrative capacity may intensify citizen–state interaction costs. This conceptual review reconstructs Administrative Burden Theory and translates it into a practice-oriented framework for citizen-centred administration. A Theory-Focused Narrative Literature Review with a Theory-to-Practice orientation was conducted using Scopus as the sole bibliographic database. Five documented search runs yielded a final analytical corpus of 26 eligible peer-reviewed journal articles, all verified in full text. The synthesis confirms learning, compliance, and psychological costs as the theory’s diagnostic core, while later applications identify frontline interaction, digital task transfer, administrative capacity, cross-agency coordination, burden distribution, and state reflexivity as important conditioning mechanisms. These findings are organized into six domains: navigational clarity and assisted access; procedural simplicity and documentary continuity; respectful frontline interaction and human assistance; inclusive digital and multichannel service design; administrative capacity and cross-agency coordination; and equitable, proportionate, and reflexive burden governance. The review contributes a source-traceable conceptual and translational framework linking theory mechanisms to diagnostic questions, conditional design options, implementation conditions, risks, and monitoring needs. The framework supports structured inquiry for Kecamatan Sebuk in comparable settings but does not establish local burden prevalence, causal effects, or intervention effectiveness without local empirical evidence.

Keywords: Administrative Burden; Citizen-Centred Administration; Public Service Delivery; Remote Subdistrict Services; Theory-To-Practice Review.

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1. Introduction

Public services are experienced not only through their substantive entitlements but also through the work required to obtain them. Citizens may need to discover which service applies, determine eligibility, interpret instructions, assemble evidence, travel or wait, repeat information, navigate digital interfaces, and manage uncertainty or stigma. Administrative Burden Theory gives Public Administration a disciplined vocabulary for these experiences by treating burden as the onerousness individuals encounter in policy implementation and citizen–state interaction. Its original formulation distinguishes learning, compliance, and psychological costs and emphasizes that public organizations and political choices help create, distribute, and reduce those costs (Moynihan et al., 2015). The framework therefore directs attention away from a generic complaint about “bureaucracy” and toward identifiable mechanisms that can be examined without assuming that every rule or verification requirement is unnecessary.

The theory is especially relevant to citizen-facing administration where access conditions magnify the consequences of unclear information, repeated procedures, fragmented records, or limited assistance. In geographically extensive or remote subdistrict settings, distance, channel availability, institutional handoffs, and local administrative capacity can condition how citizens experience an otherwise uniform requirement. These are analytical possibilities, not a factual diagnosis of any particular locality. Kecamatan Sebuk in Nunukan Regency,

North Kalimantan, is used in this review only as a conditional practice anchor: it represents the kind of remote subdistrict service environment for which administrators may ask whether service arrangements impose avoidable learning, compliance, or psychological costs. No claim is made here about the prevalence of burden in Sebuku, the performance of its offices, or the effect of any local intervention.

Administrative burden scholarship has expanded rapidly across welfare, health care, education, immigration and identity administration, digital government, business–government relations, and local service delivery. This growth has clarified that burdens may begin before an application, accumulate across sequential encounters, be anticipated before a compulsory meeting, and be transferred between citizens, frontline workers, organizations, and technologies (Baekgaard & Madsen, 2024; Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2022; Halling & Baekgaard, 2024; Madsen et al., 2022). It has also revealed conceptual and evidentiary cautions. Perceived burden among broad populations is not identical to directly experienced costs among policy clients; worker workload is not itself citizen burden; digitalization is not automatically simplification; and formal process reform does not by itself demonstrate lower experienced costs (Astudillo-Rodas et al., 2024; Kang et al., 2025; Mikkelsen et al., 2024; Zhou & Mast, 2026). These distinctions matter when a theory is translated into managerial guidance.

A practice-oriented review therefore needs to preserve the theory's original cost taxonomy while making later cross-level mechanisms usable for diagnosis and design. Simply relabeling the three costs as recommendations would be too abstract for administrators. Conversely, expanding the framework into a long list of service ideals would obscure causal logic and invite claims that the reviewed literature does not support. The practical problem is to identify a parsimonious architecture that links citizen-experienced costs to information pathways, procedural sequences, frontline interaction, digital channels, organizational capacity, coordination, and distributive governance. Such an architecture must remain source-traceable and conditional, because most eligible evidence comes from sectors and jurisdictions other than remote Indonesian subdistrict administration.

This article addresses three research questions. RQ1 asks: How has Administrative Burden Theory conceptualized and developed learning, compliance, and psychological costs, their mechanisms, and boundary conditions in citizen–state interactions? RQ2 asks: How has Administrative Burden Theory been applied and criticized across public-service and Public Administration contexts, and what conditions shape the distribution and consequences of burden? RQ3 asks: How can theory mechanisms and eligible application evidence be translated into a source-traceable framework for citizen-centred administration in remote subdistrict services, and with what boundaries and cautions? Together, the questions move from theoretical reconstruction, through application and criticism, to disciplined translation.

The review contributes a six-domain, source-traceable translation framework that connects Administrative Burden Theory's original cost taxonomy and later cross-level mechanisms to conditional diagnostic and design options for citizen-centred remote subdistrict services. The contribution is conceptual and translational, with contextual interpretation. It does not modify the theory's constructs, validate the framework in Kecamatan Sebuku, or claim that any option will be effective without local inquiry. The framework is intended to help administrators formulate better questions, distinguish different sources of onerousness, identify design trade-offs, and specify monitoring needs before action.

2. Methods

Research Design and Rationale

This article is a Conceptual Review Article using a Theory-Focused Narrative Literature Review with a Theory-to-Practice orientation. The design is appropriate because the objective is to reconstruct a focal theory, examine its subsequent applications and criticisms, and translate verified mechanisms into a bounded administrative framework. The review is not a field study, systematic review, meta-analysis, or bibliometric study. It does not estimate a pooled effect, assess local prevalence, or infer causal effectiveness in the focal practice setting.

The synthesis proceeded through three analytic movements aligned with the research questions. First, the original Administrative Burden Theory was reconstructed around its definition, cost taxonomy, causal logic, unit of analysis, and political-distributional premises. Second, later studies were read for theoretical development, sectoral application, criticism, boundary conditions, and measurement cautions. Third, findings were translated into domains only when a source-supported mechanism could be stated as a diagnostic question, an interpretation cue, a conditional design option, and a corresponding risk or monitoring requirement. This sequence protected the distinction between evidence reported by reviewed studies and the authors' translational synthesis.

Literature Search and Corpus Construction

Scopus was the sole bibliographic database used to identify peer-reviewed journal literature. Five documented search runs were conducted on 17 August 2026 (Asia/Jakarta). Every run searched TITLE-ABS-KEY, retained source type “journal,” retained document type “article” or “review,” and applied no publication-year or language restriction. The exact queries and exported counts were as follows.

Run 1—Theory origin and development (150 results; 150 exported). TITLE-ABS-KEY(("administrative burden" OR "administrative burdens") AND ("learning cost" OR "learning costs" OR "compliance cost" OR "compliance costs" OR "psychological cost" OR "psychological costs" OR "citizen-state interaction" OR "citizen-state interactions" OR "citizen state interaction" OR "citizen state interactions")) AND (LIMIT-TO(SRCTYPE,"j")) AND (LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"ar") OR LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"re")).

Run 2—Criticism and boundaries (138 results; 138 exported). TITLE-ABS-KEY(("administrative burden" OR "administrative burdens") AND (critic* OR limitation* OR boundar* OR inequalit* OR inequit* OR distribut* OR power OR "policy feedback" OR "state action" OR "state capacity" OR "administrative exclusion") AND (citizen* OR applicant* OR claimant* OR beneficiary* OR recipient* OR "learning cost" OR "learning costs" OR "compliance cost" OR "compliance costs" OR "psychological cost" OR "psychological costs")) AND (LIMIT-TO(SRCTYPE,"j")) AND (LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"ar") OR LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"re")).

Run 3—Applications (915 results; 915 exported). TITLE-ABS-KEY(("administrative burden" OR "administrative burdens") AND ("public service" OR "public services" OR "public benefit" OR "public benefits" OR "social benefit" OR "social benefits" OR "welfare program" OR "welfare programs" OR "social welfare" OR healthcare OR "health care" OR education OR taxation OR migration OR licensing OR permit*) AND (access OR "service access" OR "benefit access" OR "take-up" OR takeup OR enrollment OR enrolment OR application* OR participation OR compliance OR implementation OR exclusion OR eligibility)) AND (LIMIT-TO(SRCTYPE,"j")) AND (LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"ar") OR LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"re")).

Run 4—Public Administration context (26 results; 26 exported). TITLE-ABS-KEY(("administrative burden" OR "administrative burdens") AND ("public administration" OR "public management" OR "public service" OR "public services" OR "local governance" OR "street-level bureaucracy" OR "street-level bureaucrat" OR "street-level bureaucrats") AND ("local government" OR "local governments" OR municipal* OR subnational OR "sub-national" OR district* OR subdistrict* OR "sub-district" OR "sub-districts" OR rural OR remote OR "remote area" OR "remote areas" OR peripheral OR "frontier region" OR "frontier regions" OR isolated)) AND (LIMIT-TO(SRCTYPE,"j")) AND (LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"ar") OR LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"re")).

Run 5—Workplace and practice translation (144 results; 144 exported). TITLE-ABS-KEY(("administrative burden" OR "administrative burdens") AND (frontline OR "front-line" OR "frontline worker" OR "frontline workers" OR "front-line worker" OR "front-line workers" OR "street-level bureaucrat" OR "street-level bureaucrats" OR caseworker* OR "public employee" OR "public employees" OR "civil servant" OR "civil servants" OR "administrative capacity" OR workload OR discretion OR procedure* OR "red tape" OR "digital government" OR "digital public service" OR "digital public services") AND ("public service" OR "public services" OR "local government" OR citizen* OR applicant* OR claimant* OR beneficiary* OR recipient*)) AND (LIMIT-TO(SRCTYPE,"j")) AND (LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"ar") OR LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"re")).

The runs produced 1,373 record occurrences. Deduplication used exact Scopus EID, normalized DOI, and then normalized bibliographic identity. It removed 232 repeated EIDs and three additional bibliographic duplicates, leaving 1,138 distinct records for screening. The raw CSV filenames and run-level metadata were retained in the search repository to permit audit of the final search procedure.

Eligibility and Source Verification

Eligible sources were peer-reviewed journal articles or reviews that directly addressed administrative burden theory, its citizen-experienced costs, public-service applications, criticisms, boundary conditions, measurement, or mechanisms relevant to theory-to-practice translation. Records were excluded when the term referred only to generic regulation, internal paperwork, red tape, organizational workload, or professional administration without a specified pathway to citizen-experienced learning, compliance, or psychological costs. Sources

whose unit was a business, farmer, employee, or broad public perception were retained only when their analytical transfer was explicit and bounded.

Title-and-abstract screening excluded 920 of the 1,138 distinct records and identified 218 discovery-stage full-text candidates: 35 Priority A, 80 Priority B, and 103 Priority C. Priority reflected expected relevance to theory reconstruction and the three research questions, not a quality score. Twenty-six Priority-A full texts were obtained and verified; nine unavailable Priority-A candidates remained discovery-only. All 26 obtained full texts met the substantive criteria and were included. No abstract-only record was cited or synthesized.

The included corpus covered overlapping roles: 24 sources informed theory origin or development, 15 informed criticism or boundaries, 16 informed applications, 17 informed practice translation, and two supplied especially direct Public Administration or local-government context. Overlap was expected because a single study could develop a construct, apply it, and expose a boundary. The small number of directly local-government studies is itself a reason for cautious mechanism transfer rather than contextual equivalence.

Qualitative-Interpretive Synthesis

Full texts were coded into evidence records for constructs, relations, assumptions, developments, applications, criticisms, boundaries, and candidate practice implications. Each interpretive claim was linked to one or more verified sources and assigned a transfer status: retained when it reproduced an original construct, combined when several studies supported a cross-level mechanism, contextualized when evidence was adapted to remote subdistrict administration, or extended when the review proposed a practical governance arrangement without attributing it to the original theory.

Domain formation used explicit competing configurations. A three-domain version merely restated the cost taxonomy and concealed digital, organizational, and governance mechanisms. Five domains merged digital design with procedure and hid channel-specific task transfer. Seven and nine domains separated closely related enablers or repeated equity, access, and dignity across multiple categories. Six domains offered the best balance: the first three remain close to experienced costs and service encounters; the next two represent cross-channel and organizational conditions; the sixth supplies an equity, proportionality, and reflexive governance layer. The domain count is an author synthesis, not a universal empirical classification.

The final interpretive audit required each framework statement to specify its theoretical warrant, practical implication, and caveat. Causal language was limited to the design and findings of the reviewed studies. Recommendations are therefore framed as questions and conditional options. For Kecamatan Sebuk, the framework authorizes local diagnosis and deliberation but not claims about burden prevalence, causal pathways, or intervention effects.

3. Theoretical Foundations And Development Origins and Intellectual Context

Administrative Burden Theory emerged from a Public Administration concern with what policies demand of people during implementation. Moynihan et al. (2015) defined administrative burden as an individual's experience of policy implementation as onerous and organized that experience into learning, compliance, and psychological costs. This move was consequential because it connected apparently mundane administrative requirements to distributive politics. Rules, forms, verification, waiting, and interaction are not merely technical details; their design can allocate costs differently across groups and influence whether rights or services are effectively accessible.

The framework does not imply that every burden is illegitimate. Governments may require information to determine eligibility, prevent fraud, safeguard public resources, or coordinate complex services. The normative issue is whether a cost is necessary, proportionate, equitably distributed, intelligible, and accompanied by feasible routes to comply or correct error. Burden reduction therefore cannot be equated with eliminating all requirements. It requires distinguishing legitimate public purposes from avoidable friction and examining whether the same objective can be achieved with lower or more fairly distributed citizen costs.

The theory's primary unit is the person experiencing a citizen-state interaction. Organizational procedures and political choices are antecedents; service access, take-up, exclusion, health, trust, or other outcomes may be consequences. This distinction prevents conceptual drift. Staff workload, administrative capacity, or institutional fragmentation matters to the theory only when a plausible pathway links those conditions to what citizens must learn, do, pay, wait for, or psychologically endure. Likewise, general attitudes toward bureaucracy can inform measurement development, but they should not be treated as identical to direct experience among applicants or recipients (Kang et al., 2025; Storseth et al., 2025).

Core Constructs, Mechanisms, and Relations

Learning costs arise when people must discover that a service exists, recognize its relevance, determine eligibility, understand rules, locate a responsible office or channel, and interpret what to do next. Information availability is therefore insufficient if information is difficult to find, fragmented, generic, or not converted into personalized understanding. Research on program awareness and benefit claims shows that learning can be an active, relational process: citizens may need clarification, and institutions may fail to elicit the questions required to reveal an entitlement (Daigneault & Macé, 2020; Tarshish & Holler, 2024). Learning costs can occur before an application and can produce non-entry into an administrative process.

Compliance costs are the time, effort, money, and practical tasks required to satisfy administrative demands. They include collecting documents, completing forms, traveling, attending appointments, waiting, monitoring a case, responding to requests, and correcting errors. Costs can accumulate when a process contains sequential dependencies or when separate agencies do not share records or recognize one another's evidence. Chudnovsky and Peeters (2022) show how burdens can cascade so that failure at one administrative step restricts access at subsequent steps. Evidence from safety-net participation similarly connects procedural demands with participation outcomes, while underscoring that program structure and context matter (Fox et al., 2023).

Psychological costs include stress, stigma, frustration, fear, loss of autonomy, powerlessness, and threats to dignity associated with administrative encounters. They may arise from conditionality, uncertainty, intrusive questions, disrespectful treatment, or the anticipation of a demanding encounter. Bielefeld (2021) illustrates how administrative arrangements can implicate time, autonomy, and dignity, while Baekgaard and Madsen (2024) show that burden may be anticipated before an upcoming meeting. Psychological costs are not a residual category: they can shape whether people initiate, continue, or withdraw from a process, yet they are often less consistently measured than learning and compliance tasks (Ilea & Ilea, 2024).

The three costs are analytically distinct but empirically connected. Unclear information can lead to incorrect documentation; repeated correction can increase stress; stigma can deter a person from asking for help; and limited health or cognitive capacity can make the same demand more costly for some citizens than others. Bell et al. (2023) demonstrate that physical and mental health problems shape burden experiences and take-up. Halling and Baekgaard's (2024) review consolidates this relational view by connecting state actions, individual resources and perceptions, experienced costs, burden tolerance, and downstream responses. The implication is not that all costs move together. Evidence on anticipated burden and vulnerability cautions that dimensions can vary independently and that vulnerable citizens do not uniformly report higher costs on every measure (Baekgaard & Madsen, 2024; Vogel et al., 2025).

Assumptions, Boundaries, and Theoretical Evolution

Later scholarship has extended the temporal and institutional reach of the framework. Burden may precede contact through low awareness, anticipated demands, or fear; unfold across a sequence of agencies; and persist through monitoring or correction after an initial decision. Research on immigration administration makes visible how policy change and institutional design can deliberately intensify burdens, whereas studies of welfare rescaling show how national rules and local implementation arrangements can interact to produce or mitigate costs (Moynihan et al., 2022; Soler-Buades & Ferraioli, 2025). The theory thus supports analysis across micro, meso, and macro levels while retaining citizen experience as the outcome to be explained.

Digital government has sharpened the concept of task transfer. A digital channel can remove travel or waiting, but it can also shift interpretation, data entry, device management, troubleshooting, and error correction to the citizen. Madsen et al. (2022) describe the citizen as an "accidental caseworker," and Astudillo-Rodas et al. (2024) show that technology can generate unintended burdens. Digitalization is therefore a mechanism through which costs are removed, created, or redistributed; it is not burden reduction by definition.

The literature has also brought organizational capacity and state reflexivity into the analysis. Administrative capacity can moderate distributional effects by determining whether institutions provide usable information, assistance, and functioning processes (Schneider & Rubenstein, 2026). Daigneault et al. (2025) argue that states must become reflexive actors capable of measuring the burdens they generate rather than relying only on citizen outcomes or

internal efficiency metrics. These developments do not create a fourth citizen cost. They identify enabling conditions through which the original costs are produced, detected, and addressed.

Applications beyond individual policy clients require further boundary discipline. Petersen et al. (2024) examine learning and compliance costs in business–government interaction, and Ritzel et al. (2020) model factors influencing farmers’ administrative burden. These studies demonstrate analytical portability, but organizations and businesses possess resources, routines, and bargaining positions that may differ from individual citizens. Transfer to remote subdistrict services should therefore preserve mechanisms—such as information search or documentation effort—without assuming equivalence of actors, stakes, or capacities.

Applications, Criticisms, And Boundaries

Applications Across Public and Workplace Contexts

Welfare and social-protection research remains a central application domain because eligibility, conditionality, sanctions, and recurring verification expose all three cost types. Low awareness can prevent entry; documentary demands and appointments create compliance work; and sanctions or stigmatizing encounters generate psychological costs. Daigneault and Macé (2020) connect awareness and burden to non-take-up, while Senghaas et al. (2026) show how claimants perceive and cope with the costs associated with potential sanctions. These studies support attention to information and assistance, but they also show that burden is not the sole cause of non-take-up: preferences, perceived value, eligibility uncertainty, and broader circumstances remain relevant.

Health-care research translates the framework to settings where illness itself can reduce the capacity to navigate administrative demands. Bell et al. (2023) link physical and mental health problems to burden experiences and take-up. Ilea and Ilea’s (2024) scoping review identifies patient burdens across health-care settings and highlights uneven attention to psychological costs. Storseth et al. (2025) caution that the term is sometimes used for clinicians’ administrative workload, making actor definition essential. For local service design, the transferable lesson is to examine whether a demand is feasible for the person facing it, not to infer that every professional workload problem is a citizen burden.

Education studies show how capacity and frontline treatment condition access. Schneider and Rubenstein (2026) examine administrative capacity as a moderator of distributional effects in financial-aid completion. St. John et al. (2026) analyze race, criminal records, and street-level bureaucrats in college admissions, demonstrating that burdens can be embedded in classification, discretion, and interaction rather than forms alone. The mechanism transfer to subdistrict services concerns differential ability to obtain clarification, respond to documentation demands, and receive respectful assistance; it does not assume that admissions and local civic services are substantively identical.

Identity and immigration studies make sequential dependency and power especially visible. Chudnovsky and Peeters (2022) show a cascade in which one documentation barrier can exclude people from later rights and services. Moynihan et al. (2022) connect immigration burdens to policy choices and institutional practices. These applications warn against examining a single counter or form in isolation. The citizen’s journey may span institutions, and a local office may inherit burdens created elsewhere while still possessing discretion to clarify requirements, coordinate correction, or prevent unnecessary repetition.

Digital and frontline applications reveal how channels and organizational conditions mediate experience. Digital self-service may increase flexibility for some users while turning others into de facto caseworkers responsible for tasks previously handled by staff (Madsen et al., 2022). Frontline stress is associated with clients’ burden experiences in multilevel analysis, but the direction and mechanism should not be assumed without further evidence (Mikkelsen et al., 2024). These findings justify attention to assisted channels, escalation, staff support, and correction pathways while preserving causal caution.

Local-government and permitting studies are particularly relevant but remain limited in number. Aguado-Riveros et al. (2026) examine simplification and document management in a district-level public organization, and Zhou and Mast (2026) analyze streamlined municipal permitting. Together they suggest that process mapping, document continuity, and administrative capacity can support burden reduction. Yet an institutional reform or shorter formal process is not direct evidence that citizens experience lower learning, compliance, and psychological costs. Experience measures and distributional checks remain necessary.

Criticisms, Contradictory Evidence, and Limitations

The first criticism concerns conceptual expansion. As administrative burden has become influential, the label risks encompassing any disliked rule, organizational inefficiency, employee workload, or public frustration. Such expansion weakens explanatory precision.

This review therefore requires a specified actor and pathway: an organizational or policy condition counts as relevant when it changes what a citizen must learn, do, spend, wait for, or psychologically bear. The distinction is particularly important in remote administration, where staff shortages and coordination difficulties may be real but should not be treated as citizen burden until their transmission is demonstrated.

A second criticism concerns measurement. Direct experience, anticipated burden, perceived general burden, administrative outputs, and downstream outcomes are related but non-equivalent. Kang et al. (2025) broaden measurement beyond direct clients, which is valuable for comparative perception research but requires careful interpretation. Daigneault et al. (2025) show why state measurement systems must include the state as a reflexive actor; internal processing time or number of forms alone cannot reveal stigma, confusion, abandonment, or unequal exposure. Mixed indicators are therefore preferable: journey tasks and processing data should be combined with citizen-reported experience and subgroup access patterns.

A third criticism concerns distributional generalization. Administrative Burden Theory directs attention to unequal capacity and resources, but vulnerability should not become a blanket empirical claim. Vogel et al. (2025) test the expectation that vulnerable citizens perceive higher costs and find a more differentiated pattern. Similarly, distinct costs may respond differently to proximity, rules, assistance, or individual circumstances (Baekgaard & Madsen, 2024). A local diagnostic should therefore disaggregate cost type, procedural stage, channel, and relevant citizen circumstances instead of assigning a uniform “high burden” label to a group.

A fourth boundary concerns causal outcomes. Burden can reduce take-up, participation, or trust, yet those outcomes have multiple causes and the evidentiary chain varies by study. Stronger evidence exists for some immediate access and participation outcomes than for distal democratic effects. Halling and Baekgaard (2024) identify important gaps in the cumulative literature. Practice claims should therefore move in calibrated steps: a requirement may create a cost; the cost may influence behavior; and the behavior may affect access or broader attitudes. Each link needs evidence rather than rhetorical compression.

Finally, normative evaluation cannot be replaced by a simple minimization rule. Some verification and compliance requirements serve legitimate goals. Burden governance must compare necessity, proportionality, alternative designs, distributional effects, and safeguards. An option that reduces effort for most users may increase exclusion for people without devices, documents, literacy, health, or trusted assistance. The practical task is to make these trade-offs explicit and monitor them, not to declare all friction administratively irrational.

Theory-To-Practice Translation Framework

The synthesis yields six domains. Domains 1–3 remain closest to the original cost taxonomy and interpersonal service encounter. Domains 4–5 capture cross-channel and organizational mechanisms through which costs are redistributed. Domain 6 is a governance layer that tests equity, proportionality, and learning across all other domains. Table 1 makes the translation chain explicit. Each design option is conditional: it must be assessed against legal purpose, feasibility, local capacity, distributional risks, and citizen experience.

Table 1. Six-Domain Theory-to-Practice Translation Matrix

Domain	Theoretical mechanism	Diagnostic question	Conditional options	Risks and monitoring
1. Navigational clarity and assisted access	Learning costs: discovery, interpretation, personalization, clarification.	Can citizens identify the relevant service, eligibility, requirements, responsible unit, and next step without avoidable search or guesswork?	Plain-language pathway maps; pre-visit information; named assistance; proactive clarification; feedback on recurring questions.	Generic information may not create understanding. Monitor unanswered queries, failed first

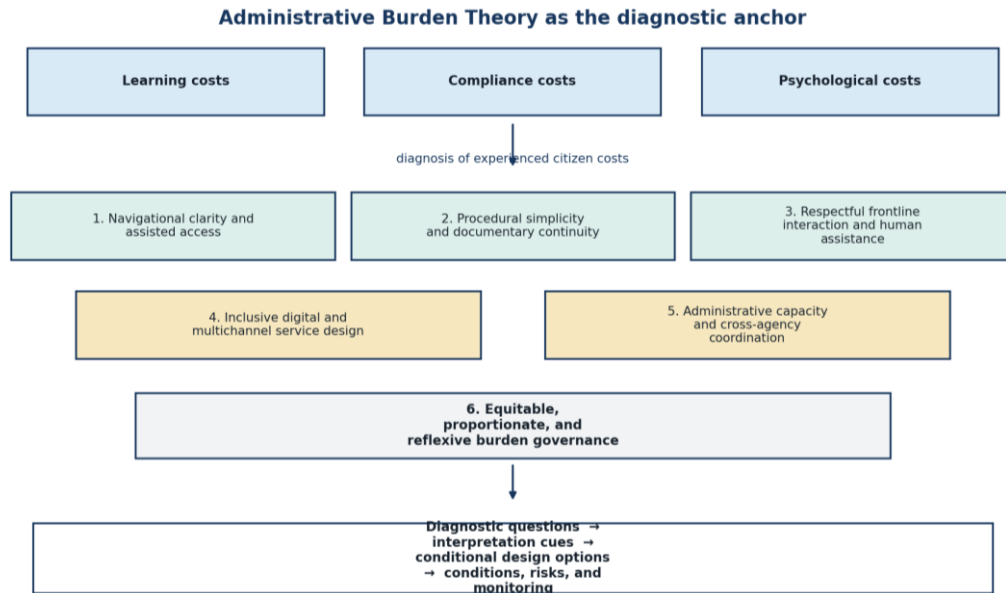
Domain	Theoretical mechanism	Diagnostic question	Conditional options	Risks and monitoring
				contact, repeat visits, and differences by channel or citizen capacity.
2. Procedural simplicity and documentary continuity	Compliance costs and cascading burden across sequential tasks.	Where do citizens repeat evidence, travel, wait, monitor, or correct errors, and which steps depend on other institutions?	Journey mapping; reuse of verified information where lawful; requirement checklists; correction routes; status updates; proportionate evidence rules.	Simplification can weaken necessary controls or shift work elsewhere. Monitor total journey effort, repeat submission, abandonment, and unresolved cases.
3. Respectful frontline interaction and human assistance	Psychological costs plus frontline mediation of learning and compliance.	Do interactions provide explanation, dignity, predictable treatment, and escalation when ordinary procedures fail?	Assistance protocols; respectful communication; discretion guidance; private consultation; escalation and complaint pathways; staff support.	Discretion may become inconsistent; worker stress is not proof of citizen burden. Monitor interaction experience, complaint patterns,

Domain	Theoretical mechanism	Diagnostic question	Conditional options	Risks and monitoring
				and differential treatment.
4. Inclusive digital and multichannel service design	Digital task transfer can remove, create, or redistribute all three costs.	Which tasks move to citizens in each channel, and can users obtain assistance, switch channels, and correct digital error?	Assisted digital service; functional non-digital alternative; save-and-return; accessible interfaces; confirmation; human correction channel.	Digital-first design can exclude or create accidental casework. Monitor failed transactions, channel switching, assisted completion, and correction time.
5. Administrative capacity and cross-agency coordination	Capacity, document management, ownership, and institutional handoffs shape experienced cost.	Who owns each stage, which records are available, where are handoffs, and who resolves conflicting requirements or evidence?	Named process ownership; interoperable or coordinated records; handoff protocols; joint case resolution; capacity review; burden registers.	Capacity is an enabling condition, not a fourth cost. Monitor handoff delay, conflicting instructions, rework, unresolved ownership, and citizen reconciliation work.
6. Equitable, proportionate, and reflexive	Distribution varies by cost, exposure, resources, health, and treatment; legitimate purposes require explicit trade-offs.	Are requirements necessary and proportionate, who bears each cost, and	Burden impact review; subgroup disaggregation; mixed indicators;	Avoid assuming uniform vulnerability

Domain	Theoretical mechanism	Diagnostic question	Conditional options	Risks and monitoring
burden governance		does monitoring capture experience as well as internal performance?	citizen feedback; periodic rule review; documented justification and safeguards.	ty or causal outcomes. Monitor cost types separately, access/take-up, subgroup patterns, dignity, and unintended displacement.

Note. The matrix is an author synthesis based on verified sources. It supports diagnosis and design deliberation; it is not a validated local instrument or evidence of intervention effectiveness.

Figure 1. Layered Architecture of the Six-Domain Translation Framework



Mechanism transfer only: the framework does not diagnose Kecamatan Sebuku or establish intervention effectiveness.

Source: Authors' synthesis from the verified literature corpus

Domain 1: Navigational Clarity and Assisted Access

The first domain translates learning costs into a service-entry diagnostic. Information should be evaluated from the citizen's position: whether a person can identify the relevant service, determine likely eligibility, locate the responsible unit, and understand the next action. Research on awareness, claims, and educational assistance suggests that information is relational as well as textual; a notice or website may exist while still failing to answer the question a person needs to ask (Daigneault & Macé, 2020; Schneider & Rubenstein, 2026; Tarshish & Holler, 2024).

For a remote subdistrict, conditional options include a single plain-language pathway for each common service, consistent pre-visit requirement lists, named assistance, and proactive clarification through feasible channels. The purpose is not simply to publish more

information but to reduce failed search and avoidable first-contact error. Monitoring should examine repeated inquiries, unsuccessful first visits, missing or misunderstood requirements, and who cannot use the dominant information channel.

Domain 2: Procedural Simplicity and Documentary Continuity

The second domain treats compliance as an end-to-end journey. A procedure that appears short within one office may be burdensome when citizens must obtain upstream documents, revisit several units, repeat proof, or resolve inconsistent instructions. Evidence on cascading exclusion, safety-net participation, local simplification, and document management supports analysis of sequential dependencies and correction pathways (Aguado-Riveros et al., 2026; Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2022; Fox et al., 2023).

Conditional options include mapping total citizen tasks, reusing verified information where lawful, clarifying document validity, providing status information, and establishing a correction route that does not restart the entire process. Necessary controls should be retained and justified. Monitoring should follow total journey time and effort rather than only internal processing time, with attention to repeat submissions, abandonment, unresolved cases, and costs displaced to another agency or channel.

Domain 3: Respectful Frontline Interaction and Human Assistance

The third domain recognizes that frontline encounters can create or mitigate all three cost types. A staff member may translate a rule, help sequence documents, explain a decision, or provide an escalation route. The same encounter can also intensify uncertainty, stigma, or unequal treatment. Studies of admissions, welfare conditionality, local implementation, and street-level stress make this relational mechanism visible (Mikkelsen et al., 2024; Senghaas et al., 2026; Soler-Buades & Ferraioli, 2025; St. John et al., 2026).

Conditional options include assistance protocols, respectful and private communication, calibrated discretion guidance, clear escalation, and organizational support for staff performing complex explanation. The framework does not infer that stressed workers cause burden; the association and pathway require contextual evidence. Monitoring should combine citizen experience, complaints, repeat explanation, escalation outcomes, and checks for differential treatment across comparable cases.

Domain 4: Inclusive Digital and Multichannel Service Design

The fourth domain asks which administrative tasks a channel allocates to the citizen. Digital submission can remove travel and waiting, but it may require devices, connectivity, data entry, scanning, password recovery, interpretation, and independent error correction. Technology research therefore supports a cross-cost task-transfer lens rather than a simple digital-equals-efficient assumption (Astudillo-Rodas et al., 2024; Madsen et al., 2022). Bielefeld's (2021) emphasis on autonomy and dignity also warns that channel design can alter control as well as time.

Conditional options include assisted digital completion, a functional alternative channel, save-and-return features, accessible interfaces, clear confirmation, and a human route for correction. In remote contexts, channel design should be evaluated against actual connectivity and assistance capacity rather than an abstract digital-first norm. Monitoring should track failed transactions, incomplete applications, channel switching, assisted completion, correction time, and whether digital requirements redistribute costs to family members or intermediaries.

Domain 5: Administrative Capacity and Cross-Agency Coordination

The fifth domain locates citizen costs in organizational capacity, records, ownership, and handoffs. When institutions cannot retrieve prior information, agree on requirements, or identify who resolves an exception, citizens become coordinators of the state. Capacity can moderate distributional effects, while multilevel institutional misfit can produce burdens that local actors partly inherit and partly mediate (Schneider & Rubenstein, 2026; Soler-Buades & Ferraioli, 2025). District-level document management and municipal permitting studies further show the practical relevance of process ownership and administrative capability (Aguado-Riveros et al., 2026; Zhou & Mast, 2026).

Conditional options include named ownership for each journey, coordinated records where lawful, explicit handoff protocols, joint resolution for conflicting requirements, and a register of recurring burden mechanisms. Capacity is not a fourth original cost and improved capacity is not itself an outcome. Monitoring should examine rework, conflicting instruction, handoff delay, unresolved ownership, and the amount of reconciliation citizens perform between offices.

Domain 6: Equitable, Proportionate, and Reflexive Burden Governance

The sixth domain governs the other five. Because costs vary by exposure, resources, health, treatment, and procedural stage, averages can conceal concentrated burdens. At the

same time, vulnerability cannot be assumed to raise every cost uniformly (Bell et al., 2023; Vogel et al., 2025). Reflexive government therefore needs indicators that distinguish cost types, capture experience, and allow subgroup analysis rather than relying solely on transaction volumes or internal speed (Daigneault et al., 2025).

Conditional options include burden-impact review for new or revised requirements, documented justification, subgroup disaggregation, citizen feedback, periodic rule review, and safeguards when controls are necessary. Proportionality asks whether the public purpose warrants the cost and whether a less burdensome alternative could achieve it. Monitoring should include learning, compliance, and psychological indicators; access or take-up where relevant; differential patterns; and unintended cost displacement.

Using the Framework in a Remote Subdistrict

Use begins with a bounded service journey rather than a broad judgment about an office. Administrators can select one citizen-facing service, define the start and end of the journey, identify the legal and public purposes of each requirement, and map the actors and channels involved. The six domains then organize questions: what must citizens learn; what must they do; what might they experience psychologically; what tasks are transferred by channel; which capacity or coordination conditions shape the journey; and how are costs justified, distributed, and monitored?

Evidence should be collected before choosing an option. Feasible methods include document and communication review, task and journey mapping, observation where authorized, anonymized case-flow analysis, citizen interviews or feedback, staff process workshops, and subgroup comparison. These methods are suggestions for future local diagnosis, not methods used in this review. Findings should distinguish observed facts from staff hypotheses and citizen reports, and they should specify the procedural stage and cost type involved.

Options can then be appraised against five tests: theoretical fit, legal necessity, operational feasibility, distributional consequences, and monitorability. A plain-language requirement list may fit a learning-cost diagnosis, but it will not resolve a conflicting upstream rule. Record reuse may reduce compliance effort, but it must satisfy legal and data-protection requirements. Assisted digital completion may improve access, but only if staff and connectivity are available. Each option therefore needs an owner, an implementation condition, a risk statement, and an indicator that could reveal improvement or unintended displacement.

For Kecamatan Sebuk, the framework can structure a future co-diagnostic process involving subdistrict personnel, relevant district agencies, village interfaces, and citizens. It cannot substitute for that process. The locality is not presented as a case with demonstrated administrative burden; it is the intended context for asking disciplined questions. Any later article or intervention claiming local patterns should provide official contextual evidence and primary empirical data with appropriate ethical and methodological safeguards.

Discussion

The review's main analytical result is that Administrative Burden Theory can guide remote subdistrict service design without either collapsing into a generic efficiency agenda or being inflated into a new theory. The original triad remains the diagnostic anchor. Learning, compliance, and psychological costs identify what citizens experience. Later scholarship shows how those experiences are shaped by information relationships, sequential procedures, frontline encounters, technologies, administrative capacity, institutional coordination, and state measurement. The six-domain framework preserves this hierarchy: costs are not confused with antecedents, and organizational reforms are not confused with citizen outcomes.

The six-domain configuration is more useful than a three-domain restatement because it makes cross-level mechanisms actionable. It is more parsimonious than seven- or nine-domain alternatives because access, dignity, equity, and monitoring operate across several mechanisms rather than functioning as independent silos. Five domains would obscure the distinctive risks of digital task transfer. Six domains therefore balance theoretical fidelity and managerial usability. This is an author synthesis that should remain open to empirical refinement; it is not a universal classification discovered in the literature.

The framework also clarifies what citizen-centred administration means in this context. It does not mean unconditional convenience or the removal of every control. It means designing from the complete citizen journey, explaining public purposes, making compliance feasible, preserving dignity, providing assistance and correction, and examining who bears costs. Citizen-centredness is thus compatible with legality and accountability when proportionality and safeguards are explicit. The approach is especially relevant where distance

or limited channels may magnify the effect of a failed visit, an unclear instruction, or an unresolved handoff.

A further contribution is the integration of digital and frontline administration. Public organizations often treat digital service, counter service, and organizational capacity as separate modernization topics. Administrative burden scholarship shows why they must be connected: a digital design changes staff roles and citizen tasks; staff capacity shapes whether help and correction are available; and coordination determines whether information gathered in one channel follows the case. An apparent efficiency within one unit can therefore create learning, compliance, or psychological costs elsewhere. End-to-end monitoring is necessary to detect this displacement.

The analysis also supports a more cautious distributional approach. Burdens are politically and administratively distributed, but empirical patterns are not reducible to a universal vulnerability gradient. Health, resources, exposure, treatment, and procedural stage interact, and different cost types may move in different directions. Local diagnostics should avoid labeling groups as inherently burdened. They should identify which demand, at which stage, through which channel, under which conditions, imposes what type of cost. This specificity improves both fairness and the plausibility of design responses.

For Public Administration theory, the review demonstrates the value of a source-traceable translation chain. Practice recommendations are often detached from the constructs that justify them. Here, every domain links an experienced cost or later mechanism to a diagnostic question, conditional option, and monitoring caution. That architecture makes disagreement productive: administrators and researchers can challenge the mechanism, the transfer condition, or the evidence without treating the framework as a universal solution. It also makes clear where further evidence is needed—particularly in remote local-government contexts and in the measurement of psychological and cumulative burden.

The contribution should therefore be classified precisely. It is conceptual because it organizes constructs and cross-level mechanisms; translational because it converts them into a diagnostic and design architecture; and contextual because it interprets their relevance to remote subdistrict administration. It is not a theoretical modification, a validated scale, an empirical evaluation, or a demonstration that local services are burdensome. Those stronger claims would require additional theoretical propositions, measurement work, and local data.

4. Conclusions

Administrative burden is a useful lens for remote subdistrict services when it remains centered on the costs citizens experience rather than becoming a synonym for bureaucracy, workload, or inefficiency. The reviewed literature supports three foundational costs—learning, compliance, and psychological—and shows that their production and distribution are shaped by information, procedural sequences, frontline interaction, technology, capacity, coordination, and government reflexivity.

This review translates that evidence into six domains: navigational clarity and assisted access; procedural simplicity and documentary continuity; respectful frontline interaction and human assistance; inclusive digital and multichannel design; administrative capacity and cross-agency coordination; and equitable, proportionate, and reflexive burden governance. The domains offer a structured way to diagnose a bounded journey, interpret possible mechanisms, consider conditional options, and specify risks and indicators.

For Kecamatan Sebuk and comparable settings, the immediate value is disciplined inquiry rather than a predetermined reform package. The framework can help identify what must be investigated and what evidence would be needed before action. Local empirical research should test whether the proposed mechanisms occur, how costs are distributed, which requirements are legitimate, and whether any design change improves citizen experience without weakening public purposes or transferring burden elsewhere.

Limitations

The review used Scopus as the sole database and a theory-focused narrative design. Relevant studies not indexed in Scopus, books, chapters, official reports, and non-English local literature may therefore be absent. The documented searches were broad but depended on the terminology of “administrative burden”; adjacent work using different labels may not have been retrieved. Nine Priority-A candidates could not be verified in full text and were excluded from synthesis.

The included corpus is heterogeneous in sector, jurisdiction, design, actor, and outcome. Mechanisms can inform remote subdistrict analysis, but contextual equivalence cannot be assumed. Direct local-government evidence was limited, and no eligible study empirically ex-

amined Kecamatan Sebuk. The framework has not been validated as a measurement instrument, and the six-domain count reflects analytical judgment. Psychological costs, cumulative pathways, and distal outcomes such as trust remain less consistently measured than some procedural tasks.

Finally, the review did not collect primary data. Statements about Kecamatan Sebuk are deliberately conditional and do not establish local burden prevalence, causality, or intervention effectiveness. Future research should combine official contextual evidence with citizen and staff data, distinguish cost types and procedural stages, examine subgroup patterns, and evaluate whether reforms reduce experienced burden or merely shift it across people, channels, or institutions

Data Availability

No primary dataset was generated or analyzed for this conceptual review. The Scopus search strategy and execution log, full-text-verified analytical corpus, and domain-formation traceability matrix are provided in Supplementary Tables S1–S3 accompanying this article.

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