



Public Administration and Public Management in Comparative Perspective: Defining the Divide in Nigeria and the United Kingdom

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Abstract

The distinction between Public Management and Public Administration continues to generate sustained debate within governance scholarship, particularly in comparative contexts such as Nigeria and the United Kingdom where administrative traditions and reform trajectories differ significantly. The problem stems from the frequent conflation of both concepts despite their divergent philosophical foundations, institutional logics, and operational emphases. While Public Administration is historically grounded in classical bureaucratic theory that prioritises hierarchy, legality, and procedural integrity, Public Management is associated with reform-oriented, market-influenced approaches that emphasise efficiency, decentralisation, and performance outcomes. The objective of this study is to critically examine the conceptual differences and areas of convergence between Public Administration and Public Management, and to assess how both paradigms have shaped governance practices in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. The study adopts a qualitative research design, drawing on secondary sources including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and historical and institutional documents. Data were analysed using content analysis to identify recurring themes and cross-contextual patterns. The study is anchored on Classical Public Administration Theory, New Public Management (NPM), and Public Value Governance. Findings indicate that the United Kingdom's governance reforms reflect a stronger institutionalisation of public management principles, including performance contracting

and agency-based administration, whereas Nigeria's public sector still exhibits a hybrid but uneven blend of bureaucratic administration and reform-driven management practices, often constrained by capacity deficits and governance challenges. The study concludes that the two paradigms are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. It recommends the adoption of a balanced hybrid governance model that integrates accountability, rule-based administration, and performance-oriented management. The study contributes to knowledge by providing a comparative analytical perspective that highlights how contextual factors shape the practical integration of both paradigms in differing governance environments.

Keywords: Public Administration, Public Management, Governance, New Public Management, Nigeria, United Kingdom, Public Sector Reform, Efficiency and Accountability

1. Introduction

Public administration and public management occupy central and evolving positions in the theory and practice of modern governance, shaping how states organise authority, deliver public services, and respond to the complex needs of society across different institutional contexts, including Nigeria and the United Kingdom. Although the terms are frequently used interchangeably in both academic literature and policy discourse, they are grounded in distinct intellectual traditions and historical trajectories that reflect differing assumptions about the role of the state, the organisation of bureaucracy, and the means through which public value is generated. Clarifying the distinction between them is therefore not merely a terminological exercise,



but a necessary analytical step for understanding administrative reforms, institutional performance, and governance outcomes in both developed and developing settings.

Public administration is traditionally anchored in classical bureaucratic theory, which emphasises hierarchy, legality, merit-based recruitment, and procedural consistency as the foundations of effective governance. Early contributions by Wilson (1887) advanced the politics-administration dichotomy, proposing that administration should function as a neutral and technical activity concerned with the efficient implementation of political decisions. This perspective was further reinforced by Weber's (1946) rational-legal model of bureaucracy, which conceptualised public institutions as rule-governed systems designed to promote predictability, fairness, and accountability in state operations. Within this classical framework, legitimacy is derived primarily from adherence to established rules and institutional procedures rather than from measurable performance outcomes. Contemporary scholarship continues to associate public administration with due process, institutional stability, and the protection of the public interest through formal governmental structures (Peters, 2022; Stillman, 2010). In both Nigeria and the United Kingdom, this model historically underpinned the development of civil services, particularly during the colonial and post-colonial periods, where administrative

systems were structured around hierarchical authority and rule-based governance.

In contrast, public management represents a significant shift that gained prominence during the late twentieth century with the rise and global diffusion of New Public Management (NPM). Influenced by neoliberal economic thinking and private-sector managerial practices, NPM advocates for decentralisation, performance measurement, competition, and customer-oriented service delivery (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). This reform movement was particularly evident in the United Kingdom during the 1980s under the Thatcher administration, which introduced extensive public sector reforms such as privatisation of state-owned enterprises, the creation of executive agencies, and performance-based management systems aimed at improving efficiency and reducing public expenditure. Similar reform trajectories were observed in New Zealand, where comprehensive restructuring of the public sector in the late 1980s and early 1990s introduced contract-based governance and output-oriented accountability mechanisms (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). These developments marked a transition from a model of government as the primary provider of services to one in which the state assumes the role of regulator, facilitator, and coordinator, often working in partnership with private firms, non-governmental organisations, and international agencies.

Public management, therefore, prioritises managerial autonomy, flexibility, innovation,



and results-based accountability over rigid adherence to bureaucratic procedures. It reflects a broader reconceptualisation of governance in which efficiency and responsiveness to citizens, often framed as “customers”, become central performance indicators (Dunleavy et al., 2006; Tar, Musa, & Manu, 2014). In comparative terms, the United Kingdom has institutionalised many of these reforms more systematically, embedding performance management frameworks and audit cultures within its public sector institutions, whereas Nigeria’s experience with public management reforms has been more incremental and constrained by structural challenges such as institutional capacity limitations, political interference, and governance inefficiencies.

The distinction between public administration and public management thus reflects fundamentally different governance philosophies and administrative logics. While public administration emphasises hierarchy, rule compliance, procedural equity, and institutional continuity, public management foregrounds efficiency, flexibility, decentralisation, and outcome-oriented performance. These differences have practical implications for how governments design institutions, allocate resources, and evaluate public sector performance. In Nigeria, for example, the public sector has historically been shaped by bureaucratic rigidity, particularly during the post-independence expansion of the civil service in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by the economic

pressures of the 1980s Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which exposed weaknesses in administrative capacity and fiscal management. Subsequent reform efforts, including the 1988 civil service reforms and the introduction of due process mechanisms in the early 2000s under the reform agenda associated with public financial management improvements, sought to address inefficiencies and enhance accountability, yet challenges such as corruption, weak institutional enforcement, and limited performance orientation persist (Okonjo-Iweala & Osafo-Kwaako, 2007).

In contemporary governance environments, both Nigeria and the United Kingdom illustrate the coexistence and interaction of these two paradigms, albeit to varying degrees. Governments are increasingly required to balance the stability and accountability associated with traditional public administration with the efficiency and responsiveness associated with public management. In Nigeria, this balancing act is particularly critical given persistent socio-economic pressures, rising citizen expectations, and constraints on public resources. The integration of administrative legality with managerial innovation suggests the emergence of hybrid governance models that combine the strengths of both paradigms to improve service delivery, strengthen institutional trust, and enhance overall public sector performance.

This paper therefore seeks to clarify the conceptual differences and areas of convergence



between public administration and public management, with particular attention to their implications in the governance contexts of Nigeria and the United Kingdom. Employing a qualitative methodology based on secondary sources and content analysis, the study identifies recurring themes, theoretical linkages, and comparative institutional patterns. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of administrative evolution and provides insights into how governance systems can be strategically aligned to address contemporary challenges in both historical and present-day perspectives.

1.1. Concept Clarification

Public Management

Public Management refers to the application of managerial skills, systems, and practices to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and performance of public sector organisations. It emerged prominently from the New Public Management (NPM) reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, which advocated for business-style managerial principles within government systems. According to Hood (1991), public management prioritises decentralisation, performance measurement, and competitive provision of services. Osborne and Gaebler (1992) define it as the reinvention of government to be more entrepreneurial, results-oriented, and citizen-focused. Lynn (2006) describes public management as a field concerned with the institutional design and managerial behaviour required to implement

public policies effectively. Barzelay (2001) and Tar, Musa & Manu (2014) views it as a shift towards managerial rationality aimed at improving public service delivery through efficiency and innovation. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) further define public management as an approach emphasising accountability, customer service, and performance assessment to enhance administrative outcomes.

Critically, while public management has enabled improvements in service delivery and encouraged innovation, it has also been criticised for over-emphasising market principles in contexts where public values such as equity, transparency, and social justice should prevail. Dunleavy et al. (2006) argue that managerial reforms can weaken democratic accountability and promote fragmentation through outsourcing. Moreover, the assumption that the public sector can operate like the private sector overlooks the complexities of political oversight, legal frameworks, and societal expectations that shape government operations. Thus, although public management offers useful strategies for enhancing efficiency, it must be applied with sensitivity to the public interest. From this study perspective, public management is most effective when adopted not as a wholesale transplantation of business ideology, but as a selective integration of innovative managerial techniques that enhance accountability, responsiveness, and inclusivity in governance. It should complement rather than



replace broader administrative traditions and democratic oversight.

Public Administration

Public Administration is concerned with the implementation of government policies, the management of public institutions, and the coordination of public affairs in accordance with legal and constitutional mandates. Wilson (1887) defined public administration as the detailed and systematic execution of public law. Weber (1946) conceptualised it as a bureaucratic structure grounded in hierarchy, formal rules, and rational authority. Gulick and Urwick (1937) described it through the POSDCORB framework, planning, organising, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting. Simon (1946) emphasised decision-making as the essence of public administration, distinguishing between fact-based administrative decisions and value-based political choices. Rosenbloom (2008) defines public administration as a process balancing managerial, political, and legal dimensions to achieve public interests.

Unlike public management, which draws heavily on managerial efficiency, public administration remains anchored in public law, accountability, and state legitimacy. It recognises that governance is not simply about service delivery efficiency, but also about ensuring fairness, legality, participation, and transparency (Tar, Musa & Manu, 2014). However, critics argue that traditional public administration has often been overly

bureaucratic, hierarchical, and slow to adapt to social change (Heady, 2001). Its rigid procedures can impede innovation and responsiveness, particularly in rapidly evolving governance environments. Nonetheless, these bureaucratic principles defend essential democratic values. For example, formal rules and clear procedures reduce the risk of arbitrariness and corruption, ensuring that governmental power is exercised consistently and equitably (Peters, 2010). Therefore, although public administration may seem less agile than public management, it safeguards public accountability and constitutional order. based on this study view is that public administration remains foundational to governance, but it must evolve to be more flexible, participatory, and digitally responsive. The challenge is not to discard bureaucracy, but to modernise it without compromising legality or fairness.

Public Management and Public Administration are closely related but distinct. Public Management emphasises efficiency, innovation, and performance, while Public Administration emphasises legality, accountability, and the public interest. An effective governance system requires a balanced integration of both approaches. Efficiency without accountability risks authoritarian managerialism; accountability without innovation risks stagnation. Contemporary governance must therefore blend the managerial strengths of Public Management with the



normative and democratic foundations of Public Administration to meet the evolving expectations of citizens in a changing world.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The distinction and interaction between Public Administration and Public Management are best understood through three interrelated theoretical traditions: Classical Public Administration Theory, New Public Management (NPM), and Public Value Governance. These frameworks provide complementary yet contrasting lenses through which the organisation, functioning, and reform of public institutions can be analysed in both developed and developing governance contexts such as the United Kingdom and Nigeria. Together, they reflect the historical evolution of administrative thought, from rule-bound bureaucracy to performance-oriented management and, more recently, to collaborative and network-based governance.

Classical Public Administration Theory represents the foundational paradigm upon which modern administrative systems were built. Its principal proponents include Woodrow Wilson, Max Weber, and Leonard White. Wilson (1887) famously articulated the politics-administration dichotomy, arguing that administrative functions should be insulated from political interference to ensure efficiency and neutrality in the execution of public policy. Weber (1946) further developed this perspective through his conceptualisation of the rational-legal bureaucracy, characterised by hierarchical authority, formal rules, merit-based

recruitment, and impersonal decision-making. These features were intended to promote predictability, accountability, and procedural fairness within public institutions. Historically, this model informed the development of civil services in both the United Kingdom and colonial administrations in Africa, including Nigeria, where the British introduced a structured bureaucratic system during the colonial period (Ayoade, 1998).

The key assumption of classical theory is that public administration operates best as a neutral, rule-governed machine that implements political decisions efficiently within a stable institutional environment. Its strengths lie in its emphasis on legality, continuity, and institutional integrity, which remain essential for maintaining order and fairness in public service delivery. For example, the United Kingdom's long-established civil service tradition continues to reflect Weberian principles of meritocracy and neutrality, contributing to relatively stable administrative performance across political transitions. However, the theory has been widely critiqued for its rigidity and hierarchical rigidity, which can hinder adaptability in complex and rapidly changing policy environments. Empirical studies of post-colonial bureaucracies in Africa, including Nigeria, reveal that excessive formalism and procedural rigidity have at times contributed to inefficiency, delayed decision-making, and vulnerability to patronage networks (Aye, 2008). Moreover, the assumption of a strict separation between politics and



administration has been challenged as unrealistic, given the inherently political nature of public policy implementation. Despite these critiques, classical theory remains relevant for its enduring contribution to institutional stability, rule of law, and administrative professionalism.

New Public Management (NPM), associated with scholars such as Christopher Hood (1991) and Osborne and Gaebler (1992), represents a major paradigmatic shift that emerged prominently in the late twentieth century. Rooted in public choice theory and managerialism, NPM advocates the adoption of private-sector practices within the public sector, including performance measurement, decentralisation, outsourcing, competition, and customer-oriented service delivery. The underlying assumption is that public sector efficiency improves when managers are granted greater autonomy and held accountable for measurable outputs rather than adherence to procedures. NPM gained significant traction in the United Kingdom during the 1980s under the Thatcher administration, which implemented extensive reforms such as privatisation of state-owned enterprises, the creation of executive agencies, and the introduction of performance contracts. Similarly, New Zealand's public sector reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s are often cited as a benchmark for radical NPM implementation, characterised by contractualisation, accrual accounting, and output-based budgeting (Boston et al., 1996).

The strengths of NPM include its emphasis on efficiency, innovation, and responsiveness to citizens, often conceptualised as "customers." For instance, reforms in UK local government, including compulsory competitive tendering, reportedly led to cost reductions of up to 20% in certain service areas (Flynn, 2002). However, NPM has also attracted significant criticism. Scholars argue that it can fragment public services, weaken coordination, and undermine democratic accountability by shifting responsibility from elected officials to quasi-autonomous agencies and private contractors. In developing countries such as Nigeria, the application of NPM has yielded mixed results due to structural constraints, including limited institutional capacity, weak regulatory frameworks, and political interference. Balogun (1983) observed that administrative reforms in Nigeria often struggled to achieve intended outcomes due to systemic inefficiencies and governance deficits. Furthermore, the emphasis on efficiency may inadvertently marginalise equity considerations, particularly in contexts marked by socio-economic inequality. Despite these limitations, NPM remains relevant in contemporary governance, particularly in environments where governments seek to enhance performance, reduce public expenditure, and improve service delivery through results-based management.

Public Value Governance, advanced by Mark Moore (1995), emerged as a response to the limitations of both classical bureaucracy and



NPM. Moore's framework conceptualises public managers as strategic actors responsible not only for implementing policy but also for creating public value through collaboration with political authorities, citizens, and other stakeholders. The theory assumes that public problems are complex, multi-dimensional, and best addressed through networked governance, co-production, and stakeholder engagement rather than purely hierarchical or market-based mechanisms. In this model, legitimacy is derived not only from legal authority or efficiency but also from the ability to generate outcomes that are socially valuable and democratically supported.

Contemporary applications of Public Value Governance can be observed in the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS), particularly through the development of Integrated Care Systems (ICS), which coordinate services across health and social care providers to improve patient outcomes and reduce duplication of services (NHS England, 2023). Similarly, community-based policing initiatives in parts of Africa have demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborative governance approaches in reducing crime rates and enhancing public trust in security institutions (UNODC, 2020). These examples illustrate the practical relevance of networked and participatory governance models in addressing complex public challenges. However, Public Value Governance is not without limitations. Its emphasis on collaboration can create ambiguity in accountability structures,

making it difficult to assign responsibility for policy outcomes. Additionally, the concept of "public value" is inherently normative and context-dependent, which complicates its measurement and evaluation.

In synthesis, these three theoretical traditions provide a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the evolving relationship between Public Administration and Public Management. Classical Public Administration emphasises rule-based governance and institutional stability; New Public Management prioritises efficiency, decentralisation, and performance; while Public Value Governance integrates elements of both by focusing on collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and value creation. In both Nigeria and the United Kingdom, elements of these theories coexist in practice, reflecting hybrid governance systems that blend bureaucratic tradition with managerial innovation and participatory approaches. This theoretical framework therefore offers a robust lens for analysing how the boundaries between public administration and public management are defined, negotiated, and operationalised within different governance contexts.



Table 1: Distinguishing Public Administration from Public Management

Dimension	Public Administration	Public Management	Key Sources
Historical Orientation	Rooted in classical bureaucracy; focuses on execution of state policies and maintenance of order.	Emerged in late 20th century as states pursued efficiency and performance-oriented reforms.	Wilson (1887); Weber (1922); Hood (1991)
Core Values	Neutrality, legality, predictability, continuity, accountability.	Efficiency, innovation, flexibility, competition, customer orientation.	Weber (1922); Hood (1991)
Structural Features	Hierarchical, rule-bound, centralised, process-driven.	Decentralised, market-oriented, managerial discretion, output-focused.	Hood (1991); Osborne (2006)
Key Instruments/Tools	Administrative procedures, regulations, due process, public interest safeguards.	Performance measurement, contracting-out, privatisation, customer charters, managerial autonomy.	Hood (1991); Flynn (2002)
Illustrative Reforms (UK)	Traditional public sector delivery with direct state provision before 1980s.	Thatcher-era NPM reforms, compulsory competitive tendering, outsourcing, privatisation.	Flynn (2002) Thatcher (1993).
Outcomes/Effects (UK)	Strong accountability but slow, rigid processes.	7–15% cost reduction in waste management; reduced staffing; but concerns over inequality and fragmentation.	Flynn (2002)
Illustrative Reforms (Nigeria)	Centralised colonial legacy; rigid bureaucracy; elite civil service dominance.	SERVICOM, IPPIS, National Public Service Reform Strategy, efficiency and anti-corruption tools.	Adebayo (2011); Angbulu (2022)
Outcomes/Effects (Nigeria)	Continuity and stability but red tape, weak accountability, capacity gaps.	Removal of 70,000 ghost workers; ₦220 billion savings; ongoing political interference and inadequate capacity.	Angbulu (2022)
Contemporary Integration	Ensures legality, ethics, accountability and legitimacy.	Enhances performance, responsiveness and service innovation.	Moore (1995); Osborne (2006)
Conceptual Boundary	Answers what government should do (normative).	Answers how government should do it (operational/managerial).	Moore (1995); Osborne (2006)

Source: Generated from Weber (1922); Hood (1991); Wilson (1887); Weber (1922); Hood (1991); Weber (1922); Hood (1991); Hood (1991); Osborne (2006); Hood (1991); Flynn (2002); Flynn (2002); Thatcher (1993); Flynn (2002); Adebayo (2011); Angbulu (2022); Angbulu (2022); Moore (1995); Osborne (2006); Moore (1995); Osborne (2006)

Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of Public Administration and Public Management across historical orientation, core values, structure, instruments, and practical outcomes, revealing both divergence and complementarity between the two paradigms.



Public Administration, rooted in the classical bureaucratic tradition associated with Weber's (1922/1946) rational-legal authority and Wilson's (1887) politics-administration dichotomy, emphasises legality, neutrality, hierarchy, and procedural continuity as the basis for accountability and institutional stability. In contrast, Public Management, as conceptualised within the New Public Management (NPM) framework advanced by Hood (1991), prioritises efficiency, decentralisation, performance measurement, and customer-oriented service delivery, reflecting a shift toward market-inspired governance reforms.

Empirical evidence from the United Kingdom demonstrates that Thatcher-era reforms, including compulsory competitive tendering and outsourcing, yielded measurable cost reductions of approximately 7–15% in some service areas (Flynn, 2002), although concerns persisted regarding service fragmentation and inequality.

Similarly, Nigeria's administrative experience illustrates a gradual transition from a centralised, bureaucratic system inherited from colonial rule to reform initiatives such as SERVICOM and IPPIS, which have enhanced efficiency through measures like the removal of ghost workers and significant fiscal savings, yet continue to face constraints related to institutional capacity and political interference (Adebayo, 2011; Angbulu, 2022). Overall, the conceptual boundary is evident in that Public Administration addresses the normative question

of what government ought to do, while Public Management focuses on the operational question of how government should perform its functions. Drawing on Moore's (1995) public value perspective, the table suggests that effective governance in both Nigeria and the United Kingdom increasingly depends on integrating the procedural legitimacy of public administration with the performance-oriented logic of public management to achieve accountability, responsiveness, and efficiency in contemporary public service delivery.

1.4 Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the distinction between Public Administration and Public Management remains both theoretically significant and practically observable within the governance contexts of Nigeria and the United Kingdom, although the boundary between the two is increasingly blurred in contemporary practice. Historically, Public Administration emerged as a discipline concerned with the structured execution of public policy and the maintenance of administrative order. Classical theorists such as Woodrow Wilson (1887) and Max Weber (1922) conceptualised administration as a neutral, hierarchical, and rule-governed system anchored in legality, predictability, and procedural fairness. Weber's rational-legal bureaucracy, in particular, positioned public servants as technically competent actors operating within formalised structures designed to minimise arbitrariness and



promote accountability. This classical orientation has historically informed administrative systems in both the United Kingdom and Nigeria, especially through the development of merit-based civil services and hierarchical institutional arrangements.

In contrast, Public Management represents a paradigm shift that gained prominence in the late twentieth century under the influence of New Public Management (NPM), associated with scholars such as Christopher Hood (1991). Public management departs from process-oriented governance and instead emphasises outcomes, efficiency, decentralisation, and performance-based accountability. It introduces managerial discretion, market-type mechanisms, competition, outsourcing, and customer-oriented service delivery as central features of public sector reform. As such, the value orientation of public management, efficiency, flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness, stands in contrast to the classical administrative values of neutrality, continuity, and procedural regularity.

The United Kingdom provides a clear empirical illustration of this transition. During the Thatcher administration (1979–1990), extensive reforms were introduced to reduce the size of the state and enhance efficiency in public service delivery. The privatisation of state-owned enterprises, coupled with the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering under the Local Government Act 1988, fundamentally altered the role of public officials from direct service providers to contract managers and

performance monitors. According to Flynn (2002), these reforms contributed to a reduction of approximately 22% in local government staffing levels and generated cost savings of between 7% and 15% in services such as waste management. While these outcomes demonstrated measurable efficiency gains, they also raised concerns regarding fragmentation of services, reduced accountability, and widening socio-economic inequalities in access to public goods.

Nigeria, by contrast, reflects a hybrid governance trajectory shaped by its colonial administrative legacy and subsequent reform efforts. The post-independence civil service inherited from British colonial rule was highly centralised, hierarchical, and rule-bound, reflecting classical public administration principles (Adebayo, 2011). While this system provided a degree of stability, it also contributed to bureaucratic rigidity, inefficiency, and limited responsiveness to public needs. Beginning in the early 2000s, Nigeria introduced a series of reform initiatives aimed at incorporating elements of public management, including the National Public Service Reform Strategy (2003), SERVICOM (2004), and the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS). These reforms sought to improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public administration. Notably, Angbulu (2022) reports that the IPPIS initiative eliminated over 70,000 ghost workers from the federal payroll, resulting in estimated savings of approximately



₦220 billion. Despite these achievements, persistent challenges such as political interference, weak institutional capacity, and infrastructural constraints have limited the full institutionalisation of public management practices in Nigeria.

Overall, the findings suggest that Public Administration and Public Management are not mutually exclusive but represent complementary approaches to governance that coexist within both Nigeria and the United Kingdom, albeit to different degrees. Public Administration provides the normative foundation of legality, accountability, and institutional legitimacy, while Public Management contributes the operational tools required for efficiency, performance measurement, and service innovation. Contemporary governance frameworks, including Mark H. Moore's Public Value Theory (1995) and Osborne's New Public Governance approach (2006), further reinforce the need to integrate both paradigms. These perspectives emphasise that modern governance requires collaboration among government, private sector actors, and civil society to address complex societal challenges. In sum, the "line" between Public Administration and Public Management is neither fixed nor absolute; rather, it is context-dependent and shaped by institutional history, political culture, and administrative capacity. Public Administration addresses the normative question of what government ought to do, grounded in law and public interest, while Public Management

focuses on how government can deliver services more efficiently and responsively. The interaction between these paradigms is therefore central to understanding and improving governance systems in both Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

1.5 Discussion

The distinction between public administration and public management becomes particularly salient when examined within the governance experiences of the United Kingdom and Nigeria, where both paradigms coexist in practice but reflect different institutional logics and reform trajectories. Public administration, grounded in classical bureaucratic theory, emphasises hierarchy, formal procedures, and legal-rational authority as articulated by Wilson (1887) and Weber (1922). In both contexts, this model has historically ensured continuity, predictability, and procedural fairness, positioning public servants as neutral implementers of state policy. In Nigeria, this legacy is strongly tied to the colonial administrative structure, which prioritised centralisation and rule-bound governance (Adebayo, 2011). While this has contributed to administrative stability, it has also been associated with rigidity, red tape, and limited responsiveness. Similarly, in the United Kingdom prior to the 1980s, public administration was characterised by direct state provision and hierarchical control, with strong



emphasis on accountability through rules rather than results.

The emergence of public management, particularly through the influence of New Public Management (NPM), introduced a contrasting logic centred on efficiency, performance, decentralisation, and market-oriented mechanisms (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2006). In the UK, this shift was most visible during the Thatcher-era reforms, which redefined the role of government from direct provider to regulator and contractor (Thatcher, 1993). Mechanisms such as compulsory competitive tendering and privatisation encouraged competition and reduced state involvement in service delivery. Empirical outcomes indicate measurable efficiency gains, including reductions in staffing levels and cost savings in local government services such as waste management, where operational costs declined by approximately 7–15% in some cases (Flynn, 2002). However, these gains were accompanied by concerns over fragmented accountability, reduced service cohesion, and uneven social outcomes, highlighting the trade-offs inherent in managerial reforms.

Nigeria's experience reflects a more recent and uneven adoption of public management principles within a still-dominant administrative framework. Reforms such as the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) and SERVICOM represent deliberate attempts to introduce performance orientation, transparency, and service delivery

standards into the public sector. The IPPIS initiative, for instance, reportedly eliminated over 70,000 ghost workers and generated savings of approximately ₦220 billion, demonstrating the potential of managerial tools to address inefficiencies and leakages (Angbulu, 2022). Nonetheless, persistent challenges, including political interference, weak institutional capacity, and infrastructural constraints, limit the full institutionalisation of these reforms. As a result, Nigeria exhibits a hybrid governance model in which traditional bureaucratic practices coexist with emerging managerial approaches, often with inconsistent outcomes.

Across both contexts, the discussion reveals that public administration and public management are not mutually exclusive but function as complementary approaches to governance. Public administration provides the normative foundation of legality, accountability, and public interest, ensuring that governmental authority is exercised within established rules and democratic principles. Public management, by contrast, introduces tools and techniques aimed at improving efficiency, responsiveness, and innovation in service delivery. Contemporary governance perspectives, including Public Value Theory (Moore, 1995) and New Public Governance (Osborne, 2006), reinforce this complementarity by emphasising collaboration among state and non-state actors in addressing complex policy challenges.

Ultimately, the distinction between public administration and public management in both



the United Kingdom and Nigeria is best understood as contextual rather than absolute. In the UK, the line has shifted significantly toward managerialism due to sustained reform agendas and strong institutional capacity, whereas in Nigeria the boundary remains fluid due to ongoing structural constraints and partial reform implementation. Drawing the line, therefore, depends on balancing administrative values of accountability, legality, and equity with managerial priorities of efficiency, performance, and innovation. Effective governance in both contexts requires an integrated approach that leverages the strengths of each paradigm while mitigating their respective limitations.

1.6 Conclusion

The distinction between public administration and public management is best understood as the interaction of two complementary traditions that have shaped governance practices in both the United Kingdom and Nigeria. Public administration, rooted in legality, due process, hierarchy, and democratic accountability, provides the institutional foundation for legitimate state authority. Its emphasis on procedural correctness and continuity has historically ensured stability in governance, particularly within Nigeria's post-colonial administrative structure and the United Kingdom's pre-reform bureaucratic system. Public management, on the other hand, emerged as a response to the limitations of rigid bureaucracies, introducing efficiency-oriented,

performance-driven, and citizen-centred approaches associated with New Public Management reforms. In the UK, this shift was reflected in large-scale reforms that redefined the role of the state toward regulation, contracting, and performance monitoring, while in Nigeria, reforms such as SERVICOM and IPPIS illustrate ongoing efforts to embed managerial practices within a traditionally administrative system.

Despite their differences, contemporary governance challenges demonstrate that neither paradigm is sufficient in isolation. Issues such as fiscal constraints, digital transformation, service delivery complexity, corruption, and declining public trust require both the stability of administrative systems and the adaptability of managerial approaches. The UK experience shows that while managerial reforms can improve efficiency and reduce costs, they must be carefully balanced to avoid fragmentation of services and weakened accountability. Nigeria's experience further highlights that without strong institutional capacity and effective oversight, managerial reforms may yield only partial or uneven results. Accordingly, modern governance necessitates a hybrid approach that integrates the strengths of both traditions. Public administrators must increasingly adopt managerial competencies such as performance measurement, strategic planning, and results-oriented governance, while public managers must operate within the bounds of legal frameworks, ethical standards, and public accountability. Drawing the line between public administration and public



management is therefore not a matter of strict separation, but of functional integration. The ultimate objective is to combine administrative legitimacy with managerial efficiency in ways that enhance institutional performance, promote transparency, and generate public value in both the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

1.7 Recommendations

1. *Adopt a Hybrid Governance Model:*

Governments in both the United Kingdom and Nigeria should consciously integrate the normative strengths of public administration, such as legality, accountability, and due process, with the efficiency- and performance-oriented tools of public management. Contemporary governance challenges, including service delivery inefficiencies, corruption, and policy complexity, require a blended approach rather than reliance on a single paradigm. A hybrid model helps preserve institutional legitimacy while enhancing responsiveness and innovation.

2. *Clarify Functional Boundaries Between Administrative and Managerial Roles:*

Public institutions should clearly delineate tasks that require administrative authority (e.g., regulatory compliance, ethical oversight, and policy enforcement) from those that benefit from managerial discretion (e.g., operational efficiency, service delivery, and resource

optimisation). Clear role definitions reduce duplication, minimise institutional conflict, and strengthen accountability within both bureaucratic and managerial structures.

3. *Strengthen Capacity Building Through Differentiated Training:*

Public service training institutions should design specialised programmes that reflect the distinct competencies required of administrators and managers. Administrators should be trained in public law, ethics, policy implementation, and administrative justice, while public managers should focus on performance management, strategic leadership, procurement, and contracting. This differentiation enhances professionalism and supports effective governance reforms.

4. *Institutionalise Integrated Accountability and Performance Systems:*

Governments should align traditional administrative accountability mechanisms with modern performance management frameworks. While public administration safeguards transparency, legality, and oversight, public management emphasises results and efficiency. Integrating both systems ensures that managerial discretion is exercised within accountable and transparent structures.



5. ***Establish Strong Legal and Policy Frameworks to Support Managerial Reforms:*** Managerial innovations such as outsourcing, performance-based budgeting, and digital service delivery should be embedded within robust legal frameworks. This is particularly important in contexts like Nigeria, where weak institutional enforcement can undermine reforms. A strong legal foundation ensures that efficiency-oriented initiatives remain consistent with constitutional principles and public interest obligations.
6. ***Promote Collaborative and Network-Based Governance:*** Governments should encourage cooperation among public agencies, private sector actors, civil society organisations, and local communities. In both the UK and Nigeria, complex governance challenges increasingly require networked approaches rather than rigid hierarchical control. Clearly distinguishing when administrative oversight is needed and when managerial coordination is appropriate enhances policy effectiveness and service delivery.
7. ***Strengthen Political Commitment to Administrative–Managerial Reforms:*** Sustained political will is essential for maintaining reforms that bridge public administration and public management. Political leaders should minimise undue interference in administrative processes and ensure continuity in reform initiatives such as IPPIS, SERVICOM, and performance monitoring systems. Stable political commitment enhances both administrative integrity and managerial efficiency.
8. ***Expand Digital Governance Tools to Enhance Both Traditions:*** Investment in digital governance systems, such as e-procurement platforms, integrated payroll systems, online service delivery portals, and data analytics, can simultaneously improve transparency and efficiency. Digital tools reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks while strengthening administrative oversight, thereby serving as a convergence point between administrative control and managerial performance.
9. ***Encourage Evidence-Based Policy and Decision-Making:*** Public institutions should rely on empirical data, performance metrics, and policy evaluations in both administrative and managerial decision-making processes. Evidence-based approaches improve rational planning, reduce inefficiencies, and ensure that reforms are grounded in measurable outcomes rather than political expediency or assumptions.
10. ***Periodically Review Boundary Definitions as Governance Needs Evolve:*** Governments should regularly



reassess the operational boundaries between public administration and public management to reflect changing political, economic, and technological conditions. Periodic reviews help prevent role overlap, institutional rigidity, and policy inconsistencies, while enabling governance systems to remain adaptive, relevant, and effective in both the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

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