

LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS: NAVIGATING TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL APPROACHES ACROSS DIVERSE CONTEXTS

Rizki Ananda ^{a*)}, Sirda Eldita ^{a)}, Fathimah Qotrunnada Aljannah ^{a)}

^{a)} Universitas Indodnesia, Depok, Indonesia

^{*)}Corresponding Author: rizki.ananda20@gmail.com

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Abstract. Administrative reform in the public sector, a global imperative, relies heavily on the quality of leadership. This study explores the intricate dynamics between leadership styles—specifically transformational and transactional—and their impact on successful administrative reforms across varied national contexts. Through a systematic literature review of academic sources published between 2000 and 2024, sourced from databases including Taylor & Francis Online, Springer Link, and Scopus, this research uncovers key trends and insights. The findings highlight the robust correlation between transformational leadership and favorable reform outcomes, though this link is moderated by contextual factors. These include entrenched organizational structures, deep-rooted cultural norms, political control over bureaucratic processes, and a nation's capacity for institutional change. Such variables can either enhance or inhibit the effectiveness of leadership, even in the most capable hands. This study underscores the need for further research to elucidate the complex interplay of leadership and reform within specific national and cultural contexts. A deeper understanding of these dynamics will equip public sector leaders to navigate the often-unpredictable landscape of administrative reforms more effectively.

Keywords: public sector reform; leadership models; contextual factors; administrative reforms

I. INTRODUCTION

Global demands for improved governance have made public administration reform a priority for many nations. These reforms aim to address challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiency, lack of transparency, and inadequate service delivery, as discussed by Tjiptoherijanto [1]. Although reform models like New Public Management (NPM) and New Public Governance (NPG) vary, as noted by Rhodes [2], obstacles such as internal resistance, resource limitations, and political instability remain prevalent, according to Lan & Hung [3] and Radu [4]. Reform efforts are often hindered by deeply ingrained bureaucratic cultures and uncertainty among public employees, as highlighted by Nemtoi [5], underlining the importance of understanding the dynamics of successful reform and the pivotal role of leadership, emphasized by Brusati & Capurso [6].

Leadership is recognized as crucial for driving successful reforms. Effective leaders inspire collective action, secure necessary resources, and overcome bureaucratic challenges, as illustrated by Horie [7]. They create a unified organizational vision to facilitate reform implementation, supported by bibliometric research highlighting leadership's importance in public administration reform, as shown in Kamaruddin & Prasjo's work [8]. A bibliometric analysis of

relevant research confirms this centrality of leadership, revealing its strong connection to key themes such as public administration, sector reform, management, and service motivation. However, the influence of leadership styles and national contexts on reform success is underexplored, as indicated by Tuan [9], necessitating further investigation to identify leadership strategies that work across different national settings.

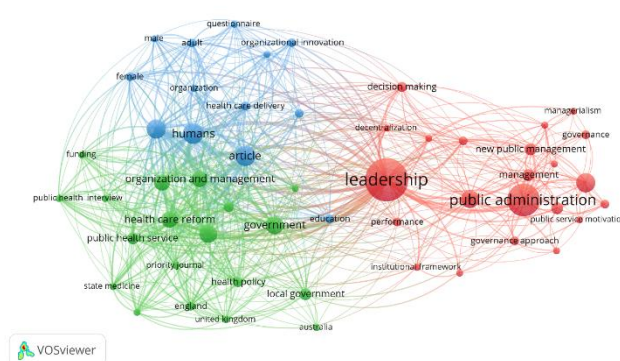


Figure. 1: Bibliometric analysis on leadership and public administration reform

Administrative reform, described as the continuous effort to enhance public sector structures, as noted by Eymeri-Douzans & Pierre [10], is essential for achieving effective, transparent, and accountable governance, according to Amane et al. [11]. Different nations have adapted reform models to fit local contexts, such as Malaysia's "Malayanising" of colonial structures [12], Australia's embrace of digital transformation [13], and Germany's shift toward a digital government [13]. These examples illustrate the diverse approaches to administrative reform globally.

Public sector leadership is distinguished from management in its focus on vision, inspiration, and change, as Harvey mentioned in Goethals & Sorenson's work [14], requiring leaders to navigate political dynamics and public accountability, as emphasized by Van Wart & Dicke [15]. Several leadership theories, such as transformational and transactional leadership (Bass; Bums, both cited in Van Wart [15]), are relevant in public sector reform, where leaders must inspire and guide their teams towards shared objectives while navigating complex reforms, as highlighted by Bennis & Nanus, cited in Van Wart [15].

This study seeks to bridge gaps in existing research by exploring how different leadership styles, shaped by national contexts, impact the success of public administration reform. By examining the interaction between leadership models and local conditions, this research aims to provide both theoretical insights and practical guidance for public sector leaders tasked with implementing reforms across diverse governance landscapes.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

We employed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to guide the systematic literature review in this study. The review focused on leadership models and the contextual factors that impact public sector administrative reforms. Initially, we conducted a comprehensive search across academic databases, including Scopus, Taylor and Francis, and Springer Link. This systematic search used key terms such as "administration," "reform," "leadership," and "public sector" to identify relevant studies. The search was limited to English-language publications between 2000 and 2024, yielding a total of 115 articles from Scopus, 134,135 articles from Taylor and Francis, and 70 articles from Springer Link. After removing duplicates, 119 unique articles remained, which were then screened based on their titles and abstracts to assess their relevance. In total, 134,320 articles were excluded for reasons such as irrelevance, lack of access to full texts, or failure to meet empirical criteria.

In the next phase, the full texts of 119 articles were reviewed to evaluate their methodological rigor and relevance to the research objectives. This resulted in the exclusion of 77 articles, primarily due to poor methodological quality or lack of focus on leadership in public sector reforms. Ultimately, 40 articles were included in the qualitative synthesis, offering significant insights into the role of leadership in driving public sector reforms across various national contexts. These articles

contributed to a qualitative synthesis rather than a quantitative or meta-analysis.

The inclusion criteria for the studies focused on empirical research that examined leadership models (transformational, transactional, servant, or entrepreneurial) within the scope of public sector reforms, covering both developed and developing countries. The review also set specific parameters for time frame (2000-2024), language (English), and research focus, emphasizing leadership's role in promoting organizational change and managing innovation. Exclusion criteria removed non-peer-reviewed articles, theoretical discussions without empirical support, and studies focusing exclusively on the private sector or NGOs.

The study process and results are detailed in the PRISMA flow diagram (Fig. 2), which outlines the stages from article identification to inclusion in the qualitative synthesis.

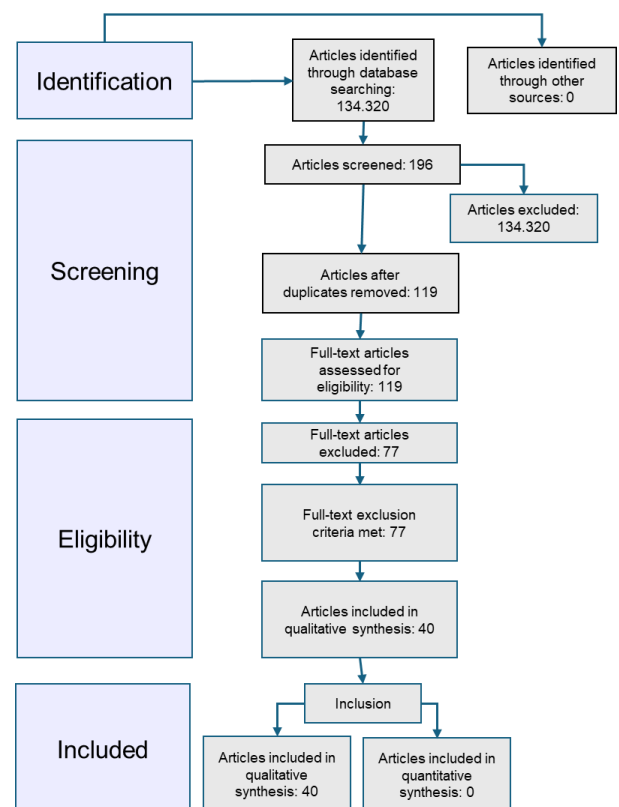


Figure. 2 PRISMA Diagram

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Analyzing the Substance of Leadership's Role in Global Administrative Reform:

Identifying Dominant Leadership Models in Global Research

Transformational leadership frequently emerges as a dominant model for driving administrative reform. This approach, pioneered by Bums as cited in Van Wart [15]), centers on inspiring and empowering followers to achieve

collective goals. Transformational leaders excel at articulating a shared vision, nurturing trust, and fostering both creativity and innovation, as mentioned by Harvey [14], Weiherl & Masal [16], Matjie [17], and Marques [18]. While less impactful in driving large-scale change, transactional leadership, which emphasizes the exchange of rewards, can maintain organizational stability and efficiency, as also discussed by Harvey [14] and Asencio & Sun [19].

However, other leadership models also warrant attention. Servant leadership, with its focus on public service and integrity, has proven effective in overcoming cultural barriers and driving innovation, especially in contexts where corruption is a challenge, as highlighted by Anh Vu et al. [20] and Vuong [21]. Entrepreneurial leadership encourages calculated risk-taking and creative problem-solving to navigate bureaucratic obstacles, according to Anh Vu et al. [20] and Melissanidou [22].

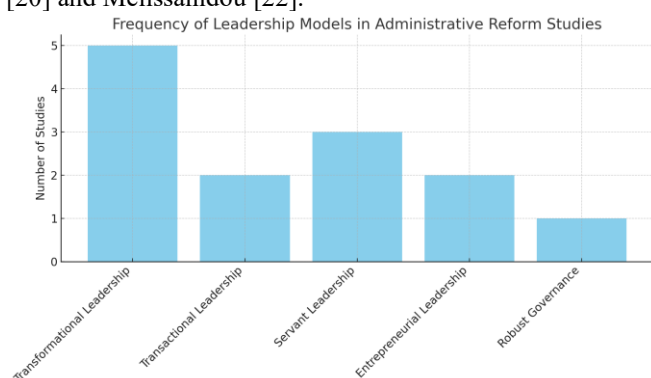


Figure. 3 Leadership Models

Lastly, robust governance underscores the need for adaptability and collaboration when confronting turbulent challenges, demanding leaders who can navigate uncertainty while building public trust, as discussed by Ansell et al. [23]. The bar chart (Fig. 3) illustrates the frequency of various leadership models mentioned in the literature on global administrative reform. Transformational leadership emerges as the most frequently cited model, supported by five studies. Servant leadership follows with three studies, while transactional and entrepreneurial leadership are each cited in two studies. Robust governance, while significant in specific contexts like navigating global crises, is mentioned in only one study. This distribution highlights the prominence of transformational leadership in driving administrative reforms, while also acknowledging the roles of other models in specific circumstances.

Analyzing the Role of Leadership in Driving Change Across Diverse Contexts

A global examination of leadership within administrative reform reveals the crucial influence of context. Bangladesh, for example, struggles to implement public interest-oriented reforms amidst bureaucratic dominance and weak political control, as noted by Huque & Ferdous [24]. Australia's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores this point. While adaptive, collaborative leadership proved

beneficial, excessive managerial support hampered productivity, according to Ha et al [25]. Interestingly, Vietnam demonstrates how servant and entrepreneurial leadership can foster innovation despite deeply ingrained cultural norms that prioritize relationships over performance, as discussed by Anh Vu et al. [20]. The Cook Islands offers another compelling case, where leadership facilitated a shift towards a private sector-led economy while promoting efficiency and accountability within public administration, as mentioned by Glassie [26]. Such variations highlight the unique hurdles faced by developing nations, often grappling with limited bureaucratic capacity, political instability, and the enduring influence of traditional norms, as highlighted by Barsoum [27], Huque & Ferdous [24], Kougiass [28], and Oszlak [29]. Developed countries, with their greater stability and more robust institutions, tend to find implementing and sustaining comprehensive reforms less challenging, as Knott [30] and Oszlak [29] have pointed out.

The Interplay Between Leadership and Contextual Factors

Leadership in administrative reform extends beyond simply selecting the right leadership model; it necessitates understanding and navigating complex interactions with various factors. Strong political will and stakeholder support, including from government, parliament, and civil society, are crucial. Effective leaders must build consensus, mobilize support, and overcome resistance to change, as discussed by Ikeanyibe [31], Jreisat [32], and Brito & Jorge [33].

Additional factors demanding attention include:

- *Organizational Structure and Culture*: Rigid bureaucratic structures and change-resistant cultures can hinder innovation and adaptation, necessitating adaptive and transformative leadership (Park et al. [34], Reginato et al. [35], Van Der Hoek & Kuipers [36]).
- *Cynicism and Resistance to Change*: Leaders must address cynicism and resistance by building trust, effectively communicating the benefits of reform, and involving employees in decision-making processes (Rho et al. [37], Hung [38]).
- *The Role of Information Technology*: Leadership in the digital age requires a firm grasp of information technology. Public leaders need IT competency to lead digital transformation and leverage technology to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability (Shark [39], Danaeefard et al. [40]).

Leadership Competencies and Measuring Effectiveness

Successful administrative reform hinges on public administrators possessing a robust set of leadership competencies. These include effective stakeholder analysis, strategic decision-making, adept change and innovation management, strong team-building skills, and demonstrably positive personality traits coupled with unwavering integrity, as Gupta et al. [41] emphasized. Equally critical is developing

robust tools and methodologies to measure leadership effectiveness within reform contexts. The measurement scales developed by Tummers & Knies [42] offer a valuable framework for such evaluations, assessing various public leadership roles, including accountability and network governance leadership, to provide a nuanced understanding of leadership's impact on reform initiatives.

The Emergence of Hybrid Professional Roles and Hybrid Strategies

Public sector reforms, spurred by New Public Management and New Public Governance, have led to hybrid professional roles, demanding public sector professionals navigate the complex intersection of specialized expertise, managerial demands, and collaborative network engagement, as mentioned by Hendrikx & Van Gestel [43]. This shift necessitates leadership that champions professional development opportunities and cultivates organizational cultures prioritizing both collaboration and innovation. Further underscoring this evolution, Koffijberg et al. [44] advocate for hybrid administrative reform strategies that balance hierarchical structures with the flexibility of network governance. This demands leaders capable of navigating network complexities while retaining the capacity for decisive hierarchical intervention when necessary.

B. Variations in Leadership Roles within Administrative Reform Across Nations

Comparative Analysis of Leadership Roles in Developed and Developing Countries

A comparative examination of administrative reform reveals the fluid role of leadership, shaped by a complex interplay of political, economic, cultural, and institutional factors, particularly when comparing developed and developing nations. In developing countries like Bangladesh, bureaucratic influence often overshadows political leadership, resulting in reforms driven by internal interests rather than long-term visions, as discussed by Huque & Ferdous [24]. This contrasts starkly with developed countries where transparency and robust control mechanisms empower political leaders to steer reforms more effectively.

This interplay is further highlighted in responses to fiscal crises. Randma-Liiv & Kickert's [45] 14-country European study shows that strong leadership proved essential in nations hardest hit by fiscal crises, like Ireland and the UK, necessitating visionary leadership to implement comprehensive structural reforms. Conversely, less affected countries, like Norway, implemented more incremental reforms, demonstrating less reliance on assertive leadership. Barsoum's [27] Egypt case study underscores these complexities, highlighting how internal resistance and resource constraints hinder reform efforts in developing countries. This contrasts with the more stable systems and professionalized bureaucracies in developed nations, as noted by Oszlak [29], which enable more comprehensive and sustainable reforms.

The diagram (Fig. 4) visually represents the variations in leadership roles in administrative reforms across developed and developing nations. It highlights key countries from each category and showcases the contrasting dynamics of leadership. Developed nations like Ireland, the UK, and the USA exhibit visionary and proactive leadership in responding to crises, whereas countries like Norway adopt more incremental reforms with less emphasis on leadership.

In developing countries, such as Bangladesh and Egypt, the bureaucratic influence and internal resistance present greater challenges for political leadership, while Malaysia and China demonstrate the importance of strong leadership in overcoming these hurdles. The diagram underscores how contextual factors like political stability and bureaucratic autonomy shape the effectiveness of leadership in administrative reforms across different nations.

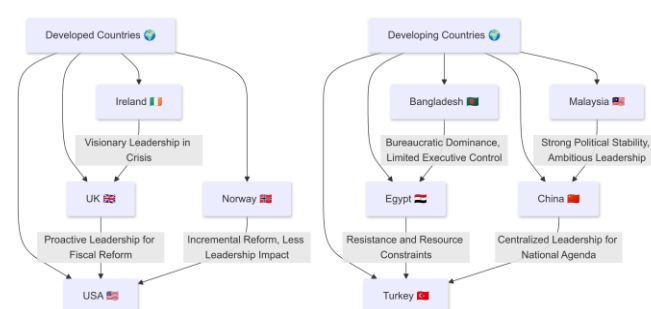


Figure. 4 Leadership roles

Identifying Country-Specific Contextual Factors Contributing to Variations in Leadership Roles

Political and cultural structures are powerful forces shaping leadership's role in administrative reform, particularly evident when comparing authoritarian regimes, like Xi Jinping's China, with more democratic contexts, as discussed by Chan [46]. In centralized leadership systems, such as in China, national agendas are often prioritized with bureaucracy as an instrument of control. In contrast, democratic contexts, with greater bureaucratic autonomy, often foster more participatory, locally responsive leadership.

Vietnam exemplifies how cultural norms influence reform. Deeply ingrained values emphasizing interpersonal relationships and collectivism, as noted by Anh Vu et al. [20], can hinder merit-based performance management reforms, demanding leadership capable of navigating these complexities while fostering a more performance-oriented organizational culture. Comparative case studies further illuminate these dynamics. Latin American examples, highlighted by Oszlak [29], reveal how political instability and patronage can cripple reform efforts. Conversely, Kazakhstan according to Vakulchuk [47] and Bhutan, by Ugyel [48] show that strong leadership can overcome constraints when reform goals align with the institutional and cultural context.

This interplay is further underscored by comparing Türkiye, where constraints hinder reforms, as discussed by Bektaş &

Ateş [49], with Malaysia's politically stable environment that has enabled successful ambitious reforms, according to Siddiquee et al. [50]. Indonesia's tax administration reforms, as noted by Nuryanah et al. [51], highlight the need for contextually aware leadership when navigating a significant informal sector that requires tailored policy solutions.

The Interaction of Leadership with Other Contextual Factors

The interplay between leadership and administrative reform is further complicated by a myriad of contextual factors. For instance, larger organizations, often characterized by intricate hierarchical structures, demand leaders who can adeptly navigate internal politics while maintaining focus on reform objectives, as discussed by Walker et al. [52]. Conversely, in collectivist cultures, leaders must emphasize inclusivity and participatory decision-making to cultivate broad support for reform initiatives. Ultimately, reform success hinges on leadership's ability to recognize and adapt to these diverse contextual factors.



Figure. 5 Leadership interaction with contextual factors

The Figure 5 visualizes the complex interplay between leadership and various contextual factors such as bureaucratic structure, organizational culture, political support, and national context. The central node of leadership connects with these factors, illustrating how leadership influences bureaucratic structure, shapes organizational culture, relies on political support, and adapts to the national context. Each of these contextual factors further interacts with the process of administrative reform. Bureaucratic structure supports reforms, organizational culture impacts reform outcomes, political support strengthens reform efforts, and the national context frames the scope and nature of reforms. Additionally, administrative reforms lead to improvements in transparency, accountability, and efficiency while facing challenges such as resistance to change. The diagram emphasizes the dynamic and interconnected nature of these factors, highlighting the importance of a holistic understanding of leadership's role in administrative reform processes.

Identifying Factors that Strengthen or Weaken Leadership Roles Across Different Countries

The effectiveness of leadership in driving administrative reform hinges on a complex interplay of factors. Studies show that bureaucratic structures, incentive systems, organizational cultures, and employee expectations all play a significant role, as noted by Weiherl & Masal [16] and Ancarani et al. [56]. In contexts plagued by weak governance, leadership that is autonomous from political influence, responsive to public needs, and capable of mobilizing support proves more effective, as Leonard [57] observed. Conversely, pervasive patron-client networks, ambiguous organizational goals, and a lack of professional support can cripple even the most well-intentioned leadership.

Case Studies of the Interplay Between Leadership and Contextual Factors

Administrative reforms reveal a fascinating complexity when viewed through the lens of leadership and context. The Cook Islands case study, discussed by Glassie [26], reveals how limited human resources and infrastructure, while posing significant challenges, simultaneously fostered leadership adaptation and innovation. In contrast, Jordan's experience, as highlighted by Jreisat [32], demonstrates the critical role of competent and ethical leadership in navigating systemic obstacles such as excessive centralization, weak institutional development, and a culture of political patronage. Meanwhile,

C. The Interaction of Leadership Factors with Other Factors

Analyzing How Leadership Interacts with Organizational, Political, Cultural, and Country-Specific Contextual Factors in Administrative Reform

Public sector administrative reform is inextricably linked to its context, with leadership success hinging on navigating a complex interplay of organizational, political, cultural, and country-specific factors. Political structures, for instance, play a significant role in shaping leadership. In Bangladesh, bureaucratic leadership, bolstered by weak political control, often prioritizes self-interest over public needs, as noted by Huque & Ferdous [24], contrasting with developed nations where transparency fosters a more balanced power dynamic, as discussed by Chan [46]. Authoritarian regimes, where bureaucracy reinforces political control, further underscore this point, according to Chan [46].

Organizational and societal cultures add another layer of complexity. Vietnam requires leadership capable of navigating cultural norms like nepotism and ingrained corruption to champion meritocratic reforms, as highlighted by Anh Vu et al. [20] and Nguyen & Truong [53]. The US demonstrates how deeply rooted cultural assumptions, often tied to racial bias, can hinder progress towards social justice, as discussed by Love & Stout [54]. Latin American examples, such as Sanabria-Pulido & Pliscoff's [55], illustrate the need to balance modern managerial values with Weberian principles, integrating both efficiency and accountability.

The COVID-19 pandemic offers a powerful example of these dynamics in action, highlighting the need for adaptive leadership that balances control with innovation while embracing collaboration and flexibility, as Ansell et al. [23] have pointed out. Australia's experience demonstrates that while supportive leadership can enhance productivity during crises, excessive support can have the opposite effect, according to Ha et al. [25], emphasizing the importance of contextually aware leadership.

the Cape Verde case study by Brito & Jorge [33] offers another perspective: international pressure, a supportive legal framework, active stakeholder engagement, and a dedicated reform unit bolstered the influence of leadership in driving administrative reforms.

Challenges of Administrative Reform and the Role of Leadership

Administrative reforms demand leadership capable of navigating both human resistance and institutional complexities. Italy's experience, as Reginato et al. [35] noted, shows how open communication, training, and participatory approaches are critical to overcoming resistance. Russia presents a different challenge, where leaders must reconcile competing logics, such as New Public Management versus the "vertical of power," as highlighted by Khodachek & Timoshenko [58]. Taipei's case, described by Hung [38], underscores the importance of perception, where bureaucratic support for reform depends on a clear understanding of benefits and risks, demanding leadership that communicates effectively and ensures bureaucratic involvement.

Leadership in Diverse Political and Governance Contexts

Political and institutional contexts shape administrative reform leadership in profound ways. In Georgia, high-level political support facilitated reform success, as discussed by Rinnert [59]. In contrast, the UK case, according to Pyper [60], reveals how coalition dynamics can challenge bureaucratic leadership tasked with balancing political agendas and maintaining neutrality. Beyond reform, effective leadership drives public service delivery. In Ethiopian universities, ethical leadership fosters positive student perceptions of governance, as Gollagari et al. [61] have noted, while Thailand's experience, discussed by Lorsuwanarat [62], demonstrates leadership's role in promoting public participation in budgeting. Finally, in the digital age, equipping public leaders with robust IT competence becomes paramount, as Shark [39] emphasizes, necessitating integrated IT training in public administration education.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Effective leadership is paramount to successful public sector administrative reform. Leaders play a crucial role in building consensus and trust, both within organizations and among external stakeholders. Transformational leadership, with its emphasis on inspiration and motivation, has demonstrably fostered creativity, innovation, and organizational culture change, making it particularly impactful in driving reform. While transactional leadership, focused on efficiency and stability, may be less suited to the complexities of large-scale reform, it remains essential for maintaining operational effectiveness.

Furthermore, this research underscores the importance of leadership across all reform stages, from strategic planning and implementation to resource allocation, overcoming resistance, and fostering inter-organizational synergy. Importantly, the specific leadership approaches employed should be sensitive to the unique political, cultural, and

organizational contexts of each country. Effective leadership, therefore, requires adaptability and a nuanced understanding of different leadership models to navigate these diverse settings successfully.

Effective administrative reform hinges on developing leadership capable of driving large-scale change. This requires cultivating transformational leadership skills while simultaneously fostering organizational cultures that are both innovative and adaptable in the face of evolving challenges.

A more nuanced understanding of administrative reform necessitates exploring the interplay between leadership, culture, and political contexts. Comparative studies of leadership effectiveness in developed versus developing countries would be particularly valuable. Additionally, examining the role of leadership in driving reform across diverse sectors like healthcare, education, and infrastructure could yield valuable insights.

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