

## **CONTRADICTIONS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

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**Abstract.** This article explores the evolution of contradictions in public administration from antiquity to the digital era, arguing that these tensions are not malfunctions but structural forces driving institutional change. It identifies key categories of administrative contradictions – structural, functional, politico-administrative, cultural, ethical, and technological and examines how they manifest historically and theoretically. The analysis integrates classical frameworks (Weber's rational bureaucracy, Simon's bounded rationality) with contemporary paradigms such as *New Public Management*, *Public Value*, and *New Public Governance*. Particular attention is devoted to the Bulgarian context, where Europeanization interacts with post-socialist legacies, revealing tensions between legal reform and cultural inertia, professionalism and politicization, and digitalization and bureaucratic culture.

**Keywords:** Public administration; governance contradictions; institutional change; New Public Governance; Bulgarian public sector

### **Introduction**

In public administration, as in every institutional system, tensions and conflicts inevitably emerge between the ideal model of governance and its empirical manifestations, between formal principles and practical implementation, and between normative goals and human behavior. Understanding these contradictions is not merely a theoretical exercise, but a critical analytical tool for explaining how and why public administration often diverges from its intended objectives – and how such deviations can be addressed. The historical perspective is particularly valuable because it reveals how structures, values, and contextual conditions have shaped these tensions over time and how they have frequently led both to crises and to administrative reform and transformation.

There are several reasons why such an inquiry deserves special attention. First, looking back through time allows us to trace how the very forms of public administration – centralized hierarchies, local authorities, expert bureaucracies, and network governance models – have evolved in interaction with political systems,

technological progress, societal pressures, and cultural values. Thus, contradictions are not random deviations but integral components of governance dynamics. Second, the historical perspective helps us avoid anachronistic judgments by preventing the imposition of contemporary standards on past administrative systems, encouraging instead interpretation within the logic of each epoch. Third, historical analysis enables us to identify recurring patterns of tension, such as centralization versus decentralization, professionalism versus politicization, and stability versus innovation and to use these insights to formulate informed scenarios for today's public administration.

The introductory section must also emphasize the methodological framework. The historical-comparative method is particularly applicable here, as it enables comparisons of administrative systems across different periods, countries, and cultural contexts. Equally important is the institutional approach, which examines how formal rules, organizations, and procedures both constrain and channel the behavior of administrative agents. Moreover, cultural and network perspectives cannot be ignored: values, symbols, roles, and informal interactions all shape administrative reality. By combining these analytical lenses, the study bridges the macro-level (structures, institutions) and the micro-level (individual actors, motivations) – a necessary condition for analytical comprehensiveness.

The central thesis of this article is that contradictions in public administration are not merely deficiencies or deviations from a normative ideal, but rather essential drivers of its evolution and adaptation. In other words, tensions between competing demands – political, ethical, technological, and efficiency-related, necessitate changes that, while often painful, lead to a rethinking of the roles, forms, and purposes of governance. In this sense, the history of public administration can be understood as a continuous series of conflicts and resolutions, cycles of resilience and transformation.

Transitioning from the introduction to the subsequent sections, the paper proceeds to examine:

1. The theoretical foundations of administrative contradictions,
2. Their historical evolution across different periods,
3. Typologies of contradictions,
4. Their role as drivers of change, and
5. Their specific manifestations within the Bulgarian administrative context.

Each section seeks to highlight both the universal patterns of administrative tension and the unique contextual features shaped by time, culture, and institutional tradition.

## **1. Theoretical Foundations of Contradictions in Public Administration**

Contradictions within public administration arise from the very nature of the system itself – it operates at the boundary between politics and implementation,

between the public ideal and administrative reality, and between individual values and institutional rules. At its core, public administration is not merely a mechanism for implementing laws but a complex *social construct* in which power, legitimacy, interests, and culture interact dynamically. From a theoretical standpoint, this makes it a constantly evolving field where conflict is not an anomaly but a *structural element* of governance (Frederickson et al. 2023).

One of the earliest scholars to conceptualize the internal tensions of administrative systems was Max Weber, who formulated the theory of *rational bureaucracy* – a system based on rules, hierarchy, and professionalism. Weber saw bureaucracy as the most effective instrument for rational-legal authority but simultaneously warned that excessive formalization could result in an “iron cage,” leading to depersonalization and alienation of the administrative apparatus from society (Weber 1978). The resulting tension between *rationality and humanity*, between *efficiency and values*, thus becomes one of the classic dilemmas in public administration theory.

During the twentieth century, several authors further developed this idea. Herbert Simon, for instance, introduced the concept of *bounded rationality*, the notion that administrative decisions are made not under conditions of perfect information, but within cognitive and organizational constraints (Simon 1997). This challenged the assumption of complete administrative objectivity and emphasized the inevitable tensions between the rational and the political dimensions of decision-making.

Later developments in the discipline introduced neo-institutional and functionalist approaches, both of which focused on how rules and norms shape institutional behavior. According to North (1990) and March and Olsen (2010), institutions function as frameworks that both stabilize and constrain action. This produces an inherent contradiction between *structural stability* and the *need for adaptability*. The institutional approach helps explain why administrative reforms often encounter *institutional inertia* – the tendency of bureaucracies to preserve the status quo even under changing external conditions.

In parallel, the Public Value Theory offers another perspective on contradictions – not as weaknesses but as a necessary balance between competing societal expectations. Moore (1995) argues that public managers do not merely enforce regulations; they *create public value* by balancing political legitimacy, institutional capacity, and effective outcomes. This introduces a fundamental tension between *efficiency* and *democratic accountability*, a conflict that remains central to contemporary governance.

Over the last two decades, the theoretical discourse has expanded through postmodern and critical perspectives, which stress that public administration cannot be understood outside its cultural and social context. Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) proposed the concept of *New Public Service (NPS)*, which maintains that public servants should “serve citizens, not customers”. This framework stands in contrast

to the market-oriented logic of *New Public Management (NPM)*, emphasizing instead the ethical and participatory dimensions of governance. Here the key contradiction lies between *market rationalism* and *civic ethics*, between *governing as management* and *governing as service*.

The theoretical foundations of contradictions in public administration thus reveal a persistent and universal pattern: every administrative system embodies opposing forces –*authority and accountability, rationality and ethics, stability and change*. These tensions are not flaws to be eliminated but conditions to be managed. The quality and legitimacy of public administration depend mainly on how societies navigate and balance these contradictions to sustain institutions that genuinely serve the public interest.

## 2. Historical Development of Contradictions in Public Administration

The history of public administration is, in essence, the history of its contradictions. From the ancient empires to the digital state of the twenty-first century, the governance of society has been marked by a continual struggle between *authority and service, centralization and autonomy, tradition and change*. Examining these tensions through a historical lens makes it possible to trace how each era has left its distinctive imprint on the way societies perceive the role and legitimacy of public administration.

### *Antiquity and the Middle Ages*

Even in the earliest civilizations, the first major contradiction can be discerned – between *centralized authority* and *local autonomy*. In the Egyptian and Chinese empires, the civil service functioned as an instrument for maintaining order and collecting taxes, but it also symbolized *moral duty* and *competence*. In China, the Confucian tradition emphasized the ideal of serving the state through virtue, though in practice, corruption and hierarchical dependency often prevailed (Li 2020). In the Roman Empire, the tension between republican principles and imperial power manifested in the transformation of the *cursus honorum*, an administrative career path that shifted from public duty to a means of personal privilege and advancement.

The Middle Ages added another dimension to these tensions: the conflict between *ecclesiastical* and *secular* authority. Public administration became a contested arena in which the Church's moral and spiritual claims clashed with monarchs' political ambitions. This dichotomy foreshadowed later contradictions between *ethics and efficiency* in the modern state.

### *The Modern Era (17th – 19th Century)*

Modern public administration emerged with the rise of *absolutist monarchies* and *centralized states*. The creation of a permanent civil service was motivated by the need for effective control, yet it also generated a key dilemma: how to reconcile professionalism with loyalty. French absolutism maintained a hierarchical system in which administrators were “servants of the king,” while Protestant states such

as Prussia developed the concept of the *servant of the state* (Drechsler 2021). Here originated the notion of bureaucratic neutrality – along with the danger of administrative isolation from the citizenry.

The Enlightenment introduced a new contradiction between *rational governance* and *democratic values*. The American and French Revolutions gave rise to the modern conception of the civil service as an expression of the *social contract*, while simultaneously reinforcing hierarchical control to prevent disorder. Thus emerged the *dual nature* of public administration: rational and democratic, bureaucratic and civic.

### *The Twentieth Century*

In the twentieth century, public administration underwent several key crises. After the First World War, tensions arose between *technical expertise* and *democratic accountability*; after the Second, between *state centralization* and the *welfare state*. Totalitarian regimes instrumentalized administration as a tool of ideology, undermining professionalism and moral authority (Kettunen 2022). Meanwhile, post-war democracies initiated administrative reforms aimed at reconciling *efficiency* with *transparency* and *citizen participation*.

From the 1980s onward, new contradictions emerged with the rise of New Public Management (NPM), particularly the tension between *market mechanisms* and *public values*. The managerial paradigm increased efficiency and performance orientation but often led to the erosion of the *public mission* of administration (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2017).

### *The Twenty-First Century*

In contemporary governance, contradictions have taken on a digital dimension. The advent of *artificial intelligence*, *big data*, and *automation* has deepened the conflict between *technological rationality* and the *human dimension* of public administration (Meijer, Grimmelikhuijsen & Shukla, 2021). At the same time, globalization and supranational regulations such as those of the European Union confront national administrations with dilemmas between *sovereignty* and *coordination*.

Recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate emergencies, and migration flows, have further intensified the tension between *rapid decision-making* and *democratic accountability*. These developments have demonstrated that administrative legitimacy depends not only on efficiency but also on ethical and participatory governance.

From a historical perspective, public administration emerges as an *arena of perpetual tension* (Peters 2022). Its survival and evolution have depended precisely on its ability to *transform contradictions into reform*. History reveals that each epoch adds a new layer of complexity to older dilemmas without ever resolving them completely, because they are inherent to the very nature of public governance.

**Table.** Evolution of the Main Contradictions in Public Administration  
(18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> Century)

Period	Key Characteristics of Administration	Main Contradictions	Examples / Consequences
18 <sup>th</sup> – 19 <sup>th</sup> century	Beginning of modern bureaucracy; centralized states; rational administration following Weberian principles.	Rationality vs. humanity; centralization vs. local autonomy.	Prussia, France – strong bureaucratic states with limited citizen participation.
Early 20th century	Professionalized civil service; rise of expertise and neutrality.	Political dependence vs. administrative autonomy; efficiency vs. accountability.	Administrative reforms in the USA, the United Kingdom, and France.
1945 – 1980	Welfare state; central planning; expansion of the public sector.	Bureaucratic control vs. public responsiveness; stability vs. innovation.	Development of the welfare state, but also growing inefficiency and criticism of bureaucracy.
1980 – 2000	Rise of New Public Management; market principles and privatization.	Market efficiency vs. social justice; competition vs. collective interest.	Reforms in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Canada; new performance indicators introduced.
2000 – 2020	Digital governance, transparency, and e-services; network-based structures of governance.	Technological rationality vs. human factor; transparency vs. security.	Implementation of e-government; cybersecurity risks and digital inequality.
21 <sup>st</sup> century – today	Algorithmic governance, artificial intelligence, and adaptive management.	Data vs. ethics; globalization vs. national sovereignty; innovation vs. accountability.	AI in the public sector, GDPR, and ethical frameworks for automated decision-making.

Source: Created by author

### 3. Typology of Contradictions in Public Administration

Contradictions within public administration are not random but *systemic*; they follow stable patterns that manifest at different stages of governance evolution. Developing a typology of these contradictions allows for a deeper theoretical understanding of dynamics in the public sector while providing a foundation for designing management strategies to balance them effectively. From a theoretical standpoint, contradictions can be grouped into six key categories: *structural*, *functional*, *politico-administrative*, *cultural*, *ethical*, and *technological*.

### *1. Structural Contradictions: Centralization versus Decentralization*

One of the most profound tensions in public administration relates to the *organization of authority*. Centralization ensures coordination, coherence, and control but often leads to *bureaucratic inertia* and a sense of detachment from citizens. Conversely, decentralization enhances *autonomy* and *responsiveness*, yet it can weaken policy coherence and fiscal oversight (Rodríguez-Pose & Ketterer 2020). Striking a balance between these two poles is crucial – particularly in multilevel governance systems such as the European Union, where public administration operates simultaneously at national, regional, and local levels.

### *2. Functional Contradictions: Stability versus Innovation*

By definition, public administration must guarantee *predictability* and *continuity*, yet it is constantly under pressure to adapt and innovate. Stability secures *institutional legitimacy*, whereas innovation is necessary to maintain *efficiency* and *societal relevance* (Bekkers, Edelenbos & Steijn 2021). This tension reflects the struggle between *procedural loyalty* and *entrepreneurial spirit*. Concepts such as *agile administration* and *innovative governance* attempt to reconcile these forces but risk undermining traditional principles of *legality* and *accountability*.

### *3. Politico-Administrative Contradictions: Governance versus Implementation*

The classical divide between *politicians*, who formulate policy, and *administrators*, who implement it, remains a central theme in public administration theory. As Peters (2021) notes, the tension between *political dependence* and *administrative autonomy* lies at the core of democratic control. Excessive *politicization* can erode professionalism within the civil service, while excessive *autonomy* may foster a technocratic elite disconnected from citizens. Consequently, modern models of *public governance* emphasize *collaborative management* and *shared responsibility* between the political and administrative spheres.

### *4. Cultural Contradictions: Bureaucratic versus Entrepreneurial Culture*

Administrative culture comprises the values, norms, and attitudes that shape how public servants perceive their roles. Traditional systems are dominated by a *bureaucratic culture* oriented toward compliance with rules and procedures. However, in the era of *New Public Management (NPM)*, an *entrepreneurial culture* has emerged, emphasizing results, initiative, and client orientation (Osborne 2020). These two cultures often collide: the former safeguards order and legality, while the latter promotes flexibility and efficiency. The true challenge lies in synthesizing both to achieve performance without compromising ethical or legal standards.

### *5. Ethical Contradictions: Loyalty versus the Public Interest*

Public servants frequently face *moral dilemmas*: whether to remain loyal to superiors or to defend the *public interest* in cases of conflict. Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) argue that modern administration should serve *citizens rather than power*. However, this raises questions about *individual responsibility* and the limits of *hierarchical obedience*. The tension between *ethical autonomy* and *institutional*

*discipline* is inevitable but also foundational to the *moral legitimacy* of public service.

#### *6. Technological Contradictions: Automation versus the Human Factor*

With the advent of *artificial intelligence (AI)*, *algorithmic decision-making*, and *e-governance*, public administration faces a new dichotomy: how to harness technological innovation without losing its *human dimension*. Automation promises greater *efficiency*, *transparency*, and reduction of human error but simultaneously introduces new *ethical* and *governance risks*. Algorithmic systems may produce hidden forms of bias, while overreliance on technology can weaken *critical thinking* and *professional accountability* among civil servants (Meijer, Grimmelikhuijsen & Shukla 2021).

This raises an essential question: Can a digital bureaucracy remain democratic? Here, the contradiction is not merely technical but deeply *normative* – a clash between *rationalized automation* and the *humanistic essence* of public service.

In this context, there is a growing need for a new type of *digital ethics* and *institutional intelligence* (Janssen & Kuk 2016), capable of integrating technological innovation with the principles of *justice*, *accountability*, and *participation*. Technological contradictions thus demonstrate that public administration cannot be viewed solely as a system of rules, but as a *social organization* in which technology must serve society – *not the other way around*.

### **4. Contradictions as a Driver of Change in Public Administration**

Public administration is often perceived as a conservative system in which change occurs slowly and with difficulty. However, it is precisely its *internal contradictions* – between *stability and innovation*, *rules and reality*, *authority and accountability* – that serve as the main drivers of institutional evolution. As Osborne (2020) observes, reforms in the public sector rarely emerge from harmony, but from tension between what institutions *do* and what society *expects* them to do. In this sense, conflict should not be seen as a sign of weakness, but as a source of *adaptation and renewal*.

#### *1. Contradictions as a Mechanism of Evolution*

From an evolutionary perspective, every administrative system undergoes cycles of *tension*, *crisis*, and *reform*. Hall's (1993) model of *policy paradigms* explains how the accumulation of inconsistencies between established practices and social expectations leads to *paradigm shifts*. Thus, the tension between bureaucratic order and societal dynamics generates new governance models – for instance, the transition from *classical bureaucracy* to *New Public Management (NPM)* in the 1980s, followed by *Public Value* and *Digital Governance*. Each transformation arises from a *crisis of legitimacy* and the need to respond to changing public realities.

#### *2. Crises as Catalysts for Change*

The history of public governance demonstrates that systemic contradictions tend to intensify during periods of crisis. The global financial crisis of 2008, the

COVID-19 pandemic, and the climate challenges of the last decade illustrate moments when tensions between *efficiency and equity*, or between *rapid decision-making* and *democratic accountability*, become particularly visible (Ansell, Sørensen & Torfing 2021). Such crises not only expose institutional weaknesses but also accelerate reforms, such as *digitalization*, *intersectoral collaboration*, and the adoption of *open data*. In these instances, contradictions become a source of *institutional learning* and innovation.

### **3. From Rule-Based to Results-Based Management**

Classical bureaucracy rests on the principles of *control* and *predictability*. In contemporary governance, however, these principles often conflict with demands for *flexibility* and *performance orientation*. The rise of *performance management* and *evidence-based policymaking* can be understood as a direct response to this tension (Head 2020). When rules collide with reality, public administration is compelled to seek new mechanisms for *effectiveness* such as *monitoring*, *evaluation*, and *cross-sector cooperation*.

### **4. New Governance Paradigms Born from Contradictions**

Since the late twentieth century, a range of theories has treated administrative tension as a source of *innovation*. *New Public Governance (NPG)* (Osborne 2010) emerged as a response to both hierarchical and market-based models, proposing instead *network governance* founded on interaction among *public*, *private*, and *civil actors*. Similarly, *Collaborative Governance* and *Adaptive Governance* aim to transform conflict into *cooperation* and *collective learning* (Emerson & Nabatchi 2015). These approaches do not seek to eliminate contradictions but to institutionalize them as a *resource*, managed through dialogue, feedback, and adaptive mechanisms.

### **5. Managing Contradictions as a Strategic Competence**

Modern public managers must learn not to eliminate tension but to *govern through it*. This strategic competence involves balancing competing administrative values, *autonomy and accountability*, *innovation and stability*, *flexibility and fairness*. Christensen and Lægreid (2020) argue that successful administrative reforms are not based on universal models, but on the capacity to *integrate opposites* contextually. In this light, contradiction becomes a *source of organizational resilience and strategic advantage*.

## **5. The Bulgarian Context of Contradictions in Public Administration**

The Bulgarian public administration mirrors the historical, political, and cultural tensions that have shaped the country's transition from centralized statehood to democratic governance. Since the Liberation in 1878, it has evolved along the lines of the continental (Franco-Prussian) bureaucratic tradition but has been marked by frequent institutional disruptions – political coups, ideological transformations, and systemic reforms. This historical discontinuity has generated deep contradictions

that continue to affect the functioning of the modern administrative system: between *formal modernity and cultural tradition, normative rationality and political reality, and European integration and local specificity*.

#### *1. Historical Legacies and Administrative Inertia*

The post-Liberation period in Bulgaria was characterized by rapid institutional construction but an underdeveloped administrative culture. The modern bureaucracy was imported from Western Europe without sufficient adaptation to local socio-political realities. The resulting contradiction between imported institutional models and traditional practices led to *formalism* and *bureaucratic inertia* (Katsamunska 2019). During the socialist period (1944 – 1989), the administrative system became a direct instrument of political power, subordinating professionalism and neutrality to party control. This legacy created a persistent *trust deficit* between citizens and the state administration, a tension that continues to shape the post-communist era.

#### *2. The Contradiction between European Standardization and Local Reality*

Following Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007, an accelerated process of administrative harmonization began. Principles such as *good governance, e-government, accountability, and transparency* were formally introduced. However, their implementation often remained *procedural* rather than substantive. EU standards exist at the normative level but are not always internalized in administrative culture. Thus, a gap persists between *normative modernity and practical sustainability*. Administrations formally comply with EU requirements but often struggle with insufficient administrative capacity, limited digital skills, and a lack of strategic foresight.

#### *3. Politicization versus Professionalism*

One of the most persistent problems in Bulgarian public administration is the tension between *political influence* and *professional autonomy*. The widespread practice of replacing officials after each change in government weakens *institutional memory* and contributes to cyclical instability. This contradiction reflects the inconsistency between the principle of *depoliticization*, enshrined in the *Civil Servant Act*, and the enduring reality of patronage and political appointments (OECD 2021). Consequently, public trust in administration remains low, and employee motivation is constrained by the lack of job security and limited career development opportunities.

#### *4. Centralization versus Local Autonomy*

The Bulgarian governance model has traditionally been characterized by a high degree of *centralization*. Despite the formal existence of municipal self-government, local authorities continue to operate under significant fiscal and administrative constraints. This creates tension between the *central government*, which controls the resources, and the *municipalities*, which are responsible for delivering services to citizens (Nikolova & Mihaylova 2020). In the European

context, this contradiction undermines the effective application of the *principle of subsidiarity* and limits local innovation capacity.

#### *5. Digital Transformation and Cultural Resistance*

Over the past decade, Bulgaria has undertaken steps toward *digital governance*, yet the process remains hindered by deep-rooted *cultural and organizational barriers*. According to the *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI, 2024)*, Bulgaria ranks among the lowest EU member states in digital skills and online public service provision. This lag is not merely technological but also cultural: the administration remains reliant on paper-based processes, excessive formalism, and risk aversion. The contradiction between *digital potential* and *bureaucratic culture* illustrates that technological innovation cannot succeed without a concurrent transformation of administrative *values and mindsets*.

#### *6. Ethical Dilemmas and Public Expectations*

In the Bulgarian context, a persistent gap exists between *legality* and *morality*, between adherence to rules and genuine *service to the public interest*. This discrepancy generates a perception of a *formally compliant yet substantively ineffective* administration. The challenge lies not in the absence of regulation but in the lack of *ethical culture* and *public responsibility*. Strengthening this ethical dimension is a crucial step toward building a resilient, legitimate public service that enjoys societal trust.

### **Conclusion**

Contradictions within public administration are not a by-product of its functioning but a *foundational characteristic* of its existence. From the earliest forms of organized governance in antiquity to the contemporary digital state, public administration has served as the arena where opposing forces – *authority and service, stability and change, control and trust* – intersect and interact. A historical analysis reveals that it is precisely these tensions that have propelled its evolution, with each era layering new dimensions upon old conflicts without ever fully resolving them. From a theoretical standpoint, contradictions expose the *dual nature* of public administration – both as an *instrument of state power* and as a *mediator of the public interest*. Classical theorists such as *Max Weber* and *Herbert Simon* laid the groundwork for understanding bureaucracy as a *rational yet constrained mechanism*. Later paradigms – from *New Public Management (NPM)* to *Public Value* and *New Public Governance (NPG)* – did not eliminate these tensions but reconfigured them in light of changing governance contexts. Contemporary models of administration do not seek to abolish conflict but to *recognize, balance, and learn from it*. The historical overview highlights enduring lines of tension that continue to shape public administration today:

– Between centralization and decentralization – reflecting the balance between control and autonomy;

- Between efficiency and equity – expressing the conflict between economic rationality and social responsibility;
- Between technological rationalization and the human factor – particularly in the age of digitalization and artificial intelligence;
- Between legality and morality – where formal compliance with rules does not always equate to serving the public interest.

In this sense, contradiction becomes an *inherent mechanism of adaptation*. Public administration endures not because it is stable, but because it is capable of transformation. Each crisis economic, health, or institutional intensifies these tensions, yet simultaneously stimulates new solutions: from *e-governance* to *adaptive governance* and *collaborative innovation*. The Bulgarian public administration represents a particularly illustrative case within this framework. It stands at the intersection of *European modernity* and *post-socialist tradition*. Its contradictions, between *legal reform and cultural inertia, political dependence and professional autonomy, digital transformation and bureaucratic legacy*, reflect broader societal processes of transition and modernization. These tensions should not be viewed as obstacles but as *catalysts of institutional maturity*, provided they are managed through values such as *transparency, ethics, and public accountability*. Ultimately, the history and theory of public administration converge around a central insight: contradictions are not anomalies to be eliminated but *sources of resilience, innovation, and legitimacy*. A public administration capable of recognizing and managing its internal tensions is one that evolves with its society remaining responsive, ethical, and genuinely public in its purpose. The core insight that contradictions are drivers of change has direct practical application for contemporary reforms. Instead of striving for a monolithic, tension-free administrative ideal, reform efforts should focus on the dynamic management and ethical balancing of opposing demands. For instance, the tension between efficiency (NPM) and civic ethics (NPS) is managed through New Public Governance (NPG) and collaborative models. By consciously transforming conflicts into opportunities for adaptation and renewal, public administrations can foster institutional maturity and legitimacy. This requires emphasizing transparency, accountability, and the human dimension to ensure that technological and efficiency-driven reforms do not erode the public mission of governance.

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