

Ethical Transformation in Public Administration in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has fundamentally altered the landscape of public administration, introducing new technologies that impact various aspects of societal life and government governance. This research investigates the ethical implications of digital transformation in public administration in the Indonesian context. Using a qualitative approach involving case studies from several government agencies, this study analyzes the benefits, challenges, and implications of adopting digital technologies on ethical principles in public service. Findings reveal that while digital transformation enhances efficiency and transparency, ethical challenges such as personal data protection, equity of access, and adherence to moral principles remain significant. Recommendations are formulated to develop comprehensive ethical policies, enhance education and training, and involve the community in the digital transformation to ensure ethical and responsible use of technology in public administration.

Keywords: *Digital Transformation, Public Administration Ethics, Digital Technology, Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of public administration has brought about significant changes in the way governments operate and interact with citizens. This transformation has not only impacted the technological aspects of public administration but has also raised important ethical considerations (Denisov & Nemtsova, 2021; Indama, 2022; Bondarenko et al., 2020). One key aspect of this ethical transformation is the integration of Big Data and advanced analytics in public decision-making (Denisov & Nemtsova, 2021). The use of Big Data-driven approaches has the potential to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public services (Denisov & Nemtsova, 2021; Bondarenko et al., 2020). However, it also raises concerns about data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential for misuse of personal information (Borțea, 2021; Pakhnenko & Kuan, 2023). Public administrators must navigate these ethical challenges and ensure that the use of digital technologies aligns with the principles of transparency, accountability, and citizen-centricity (Indama, 2022; Gil-García et al., 2017).

A critical aspect of the ethical transformation in public administration in the digital era is the change in information management. In the past, information was often stored physically with limited access. However, with digital technology, data can be stored electronically and easily accessed online. This opens up enhanced transparency and accountability opportunities, as the public can quickly and easily access relevant information. However, this also presents new challenges regarding protecting personal data and information security. For example, data breaches or unauthorized access can damage public trust in government institutions and have serious consequences for affected individuals. Therefore, decisive measures are needed to strengthen ethical principles and enforce rules relating to unethical behavior (Nashihah et al., 2024; Sukowati et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the digital era also raises ethical issues related to automation and the use of artificial intelligence in decision-making. AI in public administration can improve efficiency by replacing or complementing human roles in various routine tasks. For instance, algorithms can process public service applications or detect fraud patterns in government spending. However, using this technology also raises ethical questions about accountability and fairness. Decisions made by

automated systems must be transparent and accountable and ensure no biases or discrimination occur. Additionally, mechanisms must be in place to ensure that decisions made by machines can be reviewed and corrected by humans if necessary.

The ethical transformation in the digital era also includes changes in organizational culture and individual behavior in public administration. Digital technology has created more flexible and collaborative work environments where all organization members can easily share and access information. This fosters a more transparent and inclusive work culture where all stakeholders can view and understand decisions and work processes. However, this also requires adjustments in the ethical values that underlie interactions between individuals and departments within the organization. For example, government employees' use of social media to share information or communicate with the public must be carefully regulated to avoid the spread of misinformation or unethical behavior.

Additionally, the digital era changes the relationship between the government and the public. Technology has enabled more direct and interactive communication between the government and citizens. Social media platforms, mobile applications, and government websites allow citizens to easily express their opinions, complaints, or questions to the government. This can increase public participation in decision-making processes and help the government become more responsive to the needs and expectations of society. However, this also demands ethical responsibility from the government to listen, respond to, and address public input transparently and accountable.

Furthermore, the ethical transformation in the digital era also includes challenges related to protecting human rights and social justice. Digital technology can expand access to information and public services and improve efficiency and effectiveness in delivering these services. However, this technology could exacerbate inequality and social injustice if not appropriately managed. For example, unequal access to technology and the internet can worsen the gap between different social groups. Therefore, it is essential for the government to ensure that all citizens have equal access to technology and digital services and to protect their rights to use these technologies.

The ethical transformation in public administration in the digital era also demands adequate education and training for government employees. Rapid technological developments require a deep understanding of the moral aspects related to their use. Government employees must have the knowledge and skills to identify and address ethical issues in digital technology. Ongoing education and training in digital ethics are crucial to ensuring that government employees can carry out their duties with integrity and professionalism.

In conclusion, the ethical transformation in public administration in the digital era is a complex and multidimensional process. The development of digital technology brings various opportunities to enhance efficiency, transparency, and public participation in government. However, it also presents significant ethical challenges related to information management, the use of automation technology, organizational culture, government-citizen relationships, and the protection of human rights. Therefore, the government needs to develop and implement comprehensive ethical policies that adapt to the changes occurring in the digital era. By doing so, the government can ensure that digital technologies are used responsibly and ethically, creating a transparent, accountable, and just government for all citizens.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The ethical transformation in public administration in the digital era is an increasingly relevant topic in line with information and communication technology development. Research conducted by Apriadi and Sihotang (2023) in their article titled "The Profound Transformation of Education Through Artificial Intelligence: Positive Impacts for Students in the Digital Era" highlights how artificial intelligence (AI) technology can transform the educational approach, significantly impacting student learning in the digital era. This transformation is relevant to education and provides essential insights into how AI can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery, which in turn requires new ethical adaptations in public administration.

Atmaja (2024), in his article "Utilizing Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Digital Transformation for Public Service," emphasizes the importance of implementing AI to improve the quality of public services. He argues that AI enables the government to improve the quality of public services. He argues that AI empowers the government to optimize bureaucratic processes and provide more responsive and efficient services to the public. However, using AI also raises ethical challenges, such as the need for automated decision-making transparency and personal data protection. These challenges demand the government develop comprehensive ethical policies and practices to ensure this technology does not harm the public interest or create injustice.

Ayu, Zulkarnaen, and Fitriyanto (2022), in their study titled "Digital Culture in Digital Transformation Facing the Society 5.0 Era," highlight the importance of digital culture in facilitating digital transformation. They explain that cultural changes, including understanding and acceptance of digital technology, are key to addressing the challenges of the Society 5.0 era. This is relevant to public administration, where a strong knowledge of digital ethics must support organizational cultural changes toward more advanced technology use. Applying an ethical digital culture can help the government create a transparent and accountable work environment.

Budhirianto (2020), in his article "Transformation of Public Communication Approaches in Government Public Relations in the Digital Era," examines how digital technology has transformed how government public relations carry out public communication. This transformation requires a new approach that is more transparent and responsive to public needs. Ethical communication is crucial to building and maintaining public trust in public administration. Therefore, government public relations officers must understand and apply ethical principles in digital communication to ensure that the information conveyed to the public is accurate, transparent, and trustworthy.

Cahya, Maksum, and Primadana (2024) in their article "Legal Culture Transformation in the Digital Era: The Implications of AI Use in the Development of Law in Indonesia" discuss the implications of AI usage in the legal context and how it affects legal culture. They demonstrate that while the use of AI can expedite legal processes and enhance accessibility, it also raises ethical questions about justice and accountability in legal decision-making. In public administration, these implications are also relevant, as the use of AI in decision-making must be handled carefully to ensure fairness, transparency, and respect for individual rights.

Cahyarini (2021), in her research titled "Implementation of Digital Leadership in the Development of Digital Competence in Public Services," emphasizes the importance of digital leadership in enhancing the digital competence of government employees. Effective digital leadership can help guide the ethical transformation in the digital era by promoting values that align with the use of technology. According to her, leaders who understand the importance of digital ethics can create an environment that fosters technological innovation while maintaining high ethical standards in public service.

In their book *Digital Transformation*, Erwin et al. (2023) comprehensively explain various aspects of digital transformation, including in the public sector. They emphasize that digital transformation in the public sector can improve efficiency and effectiveness in administration, but it also requires special attention to ethical aspects. Digital transformation brings challenges related to data privacy, information security, and transparency, which must be addressed through clear and structured ethical policies.

Haw (2023), in his article "Recent Developments in Educational Systems Technology: The Transformation of Learning and Teaching in the Digital Era," explores how digital technology has transformed educational systems. These findings are relevant to public administration because they indicate that widespread technology adoption requires a deep understanding of digital ethics, especially in protecting personal data and ensuring that technology serves the public good.

Khalida and Ridwan (2023), in their study "Digital Transformation in Public Services: The Role of Electronic Archiving at the General Bureau of the Governor's Office of North Sumatra,"

show how digital transformation can improve public administration efficiency. They also highlight the importance of electronic archiving in maintaining the integrity and security of data. This suggests that ethics in public administration in the digital era also involves protecting data and reliable, accurate information essential for maintaining public trust in government.

Mistortoify, Najicha, and Negara (2023), in their article "Civic Education in the Digital Era: Fostering Critical Thinking, Digital Literacy, and Active Participation through Social Media," emphasize the importance of digital literacy and active community participation in the context of digital citizenship. They show that strong digital literacy can enhance public participation in more transparent and accountable governance. In public administration, digital ethics should improve digital literacy and public involvement in decision-making processes.

Putri and Qurniawati (2024), in their article "Ethical Transformation and Public Relations Strategies in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," discuss how AI is changing public relations practices and strategies. They highlight that AI can improve efficiency in information and communication management, but it also requires special attention to ethics in data usage and public interaction. This shows that in public administration, AI must be guided by strong ethical principles to ensure technology is used responsibly and transparently.

Sepriano et al. (2023), in their book *Public Administration Transformation Facing the Digital Era*, provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities that public administration faces in the digital era. They emphasize that digital transformation must be accompanied by changes in ethical approaches and policies to ensure that public services are delivered efficiently, transparently, and justly.

Siregar (2023), in his article "Digital Transformation of the Central Statistics Agency of Indonesia in the Big Data Era," highlights the importance of big data in supporting digital transformation in the public sector. However, the use of big data also raises ethical challenges related to privacy and data security. In the context of public administration, digital ethics must include policies that ensure the protection of data collected and used by the government, providing it serves the public interest.

Sisilianingsih et al. (2024), in their article "Analysis of the Factors Driving Digital Transformation of Public Services in the Pandemic Era," show how the pandemic has accelerated digital transformation in public services. They highlight the importance of adapting ethics in digital technology to ensure that public services are delivered fairly and transparently during times of crisis.

Taufiqurokhman et al. (2023), in their article "E-Government Transformation: Evaluating the Impact of Digitalization on Public Services," evaluate how digitalization has changed how governments provide public services. They emphasize that e-government can improve efficiency and transparency but also requires special attention to digital ethics to ensure that technology is used responsibly.

Overall, the existing literature indicates that the ethical transformation in public administration in the digital era is a complex process that requires continuous adaptation. Governments need to develop comprehensive ethical policies and practices to manage the challenges that arise from the use of digital technologies and ensure that these technologies are used to enhance public welfare in a fair and transparent manner.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach to examine the transformation of ethics in public administration in the digital era. Hardiyansyah (2024), consider about a qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of this complex phenomenon. In the context of this study, the qualitative approach provides flexibility in exploring various aspects related to ethical transformation, including perspectives from multiple stakeholders such as government employees, technology experts, and the general public.

The research is conducted through in-depth case studies of several government agencies in

Indonesia that have implemented digital technology to carry out their tasks and public services. Case studies were selected because this method allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon in its original context and provide rich insights into the processes, challenges, and ethical implications of applying digital technology in the public sector. The selected agencies cover a range of industries, such as population administration, taxation, and healthcare services, to provide a broad and diverse picture of the impact of digital transformation on ethics in public administration.

Data is collected through several primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews are conducted with each agency's key informants, including senior officials, administrative staff, and information technology experts. These interviews aim to explore their perspectives on the ethical transformation occurring, the challenges faced, and the policies and practices implemented to address emerging ethical issues. Interviews are also conducted with members of the public who receive services from these agencies to understand the impact of digital transformation on their experiences in interacting with public services.

Participatory observation is conducted by directly observing daily activities in the government agencies being studied. The researcher actively participates in some activities, such as meetings and training sessions, to observe how digital technology is used and how ethics are applied in daily practices. This observation allows the researcher to gain direct insight into the internal dynamics of the agencies and how ethical values are realized in actual actions. This technique also provides an opportunity to identify best practices as well as challenges faced in implementing digital ethics.

Document analysis is carried out by reviewing various official documents, such as policies, ethical guidelines, annual reports, and other publications related to implementing digital technology and ethics in government agencies. These documents provide essential information about the moral framework that has been applied, changes made, and the results achieved. Document analysis also includes a review of academic literature and previous research reports to gain a broader perspective on the ethical transformation in public administration in the digital era, both in Indonesia and other countries.

The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying key themes that emerge from the data. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify meaningful patterns and connect findings from various data sources to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ethical transformation (Aditia & Imran, 2024). The analysis begins with transcribing interviews and observational notes, which are then coded to identify relevant themes. Data from documents are also analyzed to determine alignment with findings from interviews and observations.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, data triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from various data sources and collection techniques. This triangulation helps ensure that the research findings are consistent and trustworthy. Additionally, data verification was performed through member checking, in which key informants were asked for feedback on the researcher's interpretations of the collected data. This approach helps ensure that the researcher's interpretations are accurate and aligned with the informants' experiences and perspectives.

By employing such a comprehensive and in-depth research methodology, this study aims to provide valuable and relevant insights into the ethical transformation in public administration during the digital era and offer practical recommendations for addressing the ethical challenges arising from using digital technology in the public sector.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research focuses on the ethical transformation in public administration in the digital era, with case studies of several government agencies in Indonesia that have adopted digital technology in their operations and public services. The findings indicate that digital transformation in the public sector has brought significant changes in governance, efficiency, and service responsiveness. However, it has also introduced new ethical challenges that require serious attention.

One key finding of this study is that the adoption of digital technology has enabled improvements in efficiency and effectiveness in various public administration processes. For instance, at the Population and Civil Registration Office (Disdukcapil), the implementation of digital systems has expedited the registration and processing of population data. This digital system allows citizens to register online, reducing waiting times and minimizing opportunities for corruption and mismanagement due to reduced face-to-face interactions. However, while this technology improves efficiency, concerns have emerged regarding protecting personal data collected and stored in digital systems. Citizens have expressed worries about the potential misuse of their personal data by irresponsible parties, underscoring the need for stringent ethical policies to ensure data security and privacy.

The Directorate General of Taxes has implemented e-filing and e-payment systems to facilitate online tax reporting and payments in the taxation sector. The findings show that these innovations have increased taxpayer compliance and simplified tax administration processes. However, this implementation also presents ethical challenges related to fairness and accessibility. Some informants noted that not all taxpayers, especially those in remote areas or with limited internet access, could fully benefit from these services. This indicates a disparity in access to digital services, necessitating specific ethical policies to ensure equal access to public services for all citizens without exception.

In the healthcare sector, digital transformation has enabled improved healthcare service delivery through the use of telemedicine and electronic medical record management systems. The study found that these technologies have enhanced healthcare accessibility, particularly for residents in remote areas with limited access to healthcare facilities. However, the use of these technologies also raises ethical concerns related to the confidentiality of medical information and patient consent. Some healthcare professionals expressed concerns about the security of patient data stored in digital systems and its potential misuse by third parties. This highlights the importance of robust ethical policies to safeguard medical information and ensure that technology is used to protect patient's rights and welfare.

In terms of governance, digital transformation has driven increased transparency and accountability within government agencies. The study reveals that information technology has facilitated public access to information such as budgets, performance reports, and policy decisions. Some agencies have implemented transparency portals that allow citizens to access and monitor the use of public funds. These findings demonstrate that digital technology can effectively enhance transparency and accountability, essential principles in public administration ethics. However, challenges remain in ensuring that the information provided is accurate and easily accessible to all segments of society.

Furthermore, this study found that digital transformation impacts government institutions' organizational culture and work ethics. The adoption of digital technology demands changes in work culture, emphasizing flexibility, openness, and collaboration. Government employees are required to adapt to new technologies and develop digital skills. These findings suggest that digital transformation can create a more dynamic and innovative work environment but also necessitates attention to ethics in technology usage to ensure these changes do not lead to workplace inequalities or discrimination. Some employees expressed concerns about the pressure to continually enhance their digital skills, which could result in stress and dissatisfaction if not supported by adequate training and resources.

In terms of policy, the study revealed that although many government institutions have adopted digital technology, ethical policies related to its use still need to be completed and unintegrated. Some institutions have developed ethical guidelines for technology use, but their implementation needs to be more consistent and sufficiently monitored. This underscores an urgent need for more comprehensive and integrated ethical policies encompassing all aspects of digital technology usage in public administration. Such policies should include ethical principles like transparency, accountability, privacy, and fairness and establish mechanisms to ensure compliance and enforcement.

The study also highlighted the importance of education and training in supporting ethical transformation in the digital era. Many informants indicated a low understanding and awareness of digital ethics among government employees and the general public. Thus, education and training programs focusing on digital ethics and technological skills need to be enhanced to ensure all stakeholders understand and can apply ethical principles in technology use. These programs should also cover training on policies and best practices in digital technology usage to encourage adherence to high moral standards.

The discussion section of this study demonstrates that while digital technology offers numerous benefits to public administration—such as increased efficiency, transparency, and accessibility—it also introduces significant ethical challenges requiring serious attention. These challenges include personal data protection, equitable access to digital services, decision-making transparency, and digital transformation's impact on organizational culture and employee well-being. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and integrated approach involving the development of robust ethical policies, adequate education and training, and mechanisms to ensure adherence to and enforcement of ethical principles.

The study also found that public participation in the digital transformation process is crucial to ensuring that technology is used in ways that serve the public interest and meet societal needs. Public involvement can help ensure that technology policies and practices reflect community values and requirements and assist in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of ethics in public administration. Therefore, government institutions need to enhance efforts to engage the public in decision-making processes related to digital technology usage and the implementation of ethical policies.

In a global context, the findings of this study align with existing literature that indicates digital transformation in the public sector brings complex ethical challenges. Previous studies by Atmaja (2024) and Budhirianto (2020) similarly highlight that the use of digital technology in public administration requires particular attention to ethical issues such as transparency, accountability, and personal data protection. This study contributes additional insights into how these challenges emerge in the context of public administration in Indonesia and provides practical recommendations to address them.

Overall, the findings of this study underscore that ethical transformation in public administration during the digital era is a complex and ongoing process that demands serious attention from all stakeholders. Digital technology offers significant opportunities to enhance efficiency and transparency in public administration but also brings ethical challenges that require comprehensive policies and practices to ensure technology is used in ways that support the public interest and respect individual rights. As such, this study contributes to understanding ethical transformation in public administration during the digital era and offers practical recommendations for improving the application of ethics in using technology in the public sector.

This study suggests that to address the ethical challenges arising from digital transformation, government institutions must develop and implement comprehensive ethical policies that encompass all aspects of digital technology usage. These policies should be supported by adequate education and training programs to enhance understanding and awareness of digital ethics among government employees and the general public. Additionally, the government must strengthen efforts to involve the public in decision-making processes regarding digital technology and implement ethical policies, ensuring that technology is utilized to serve the public interest and meet societal needs.

Ethical transformation in public administration during the digital era is a complex and ongoing challenge that requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. With appropriate attention to emerging ethical issues and continuous efforts to develop supportive policies and practices, digital technology can be utilized to enhance the quality of public services and meet societal needs ethically and responsibly. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in understanding and addressing the ethical challenges associated with digital transformation in the public sector.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study highlights that ethical transformation in public administration during the digital era is a complex and continuous process requiring serious attention from all stakeholders. While digital technology offers numerous opportunities to improve efficiency and transparency in public administration, the ethical challenges must be addressed through comprehensive policies and practices to ensure that technology serves the public interest and respects individual rights. Thus, this study contributes to understanding ethical transformation in public administration during the digital era and offers practical recommendations for enhancing the application of ethics in using technology in the public sector.

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