



Reassessing Indonesia's Civil Servant Professionalism Index as a Competency Governance Framework in Land Administration Reform

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Abstract

Background Public sector reform increasingly relies on professionalism indicators and competency measurement systems to strengthen bureaucratic capacity and institutional accountability. However, governance scholarship remains limited in explaining how professionalism measurement contributes to organizational learning and adaptive capacity in public institutions. This study aims to develop the Reflective Professionalism Governance Model (RPGM) to explain how professionalism governance operates within Indonesia's land administration reform.

Methods The research employed a conceptual-analytical design through a systematic literature review, policy document analysis, institutional document review, and conceptual synthesis. The data were drawn from Scopus-indexed international literature, Indonesian civil service professionalism regulations, the State Civil Apparatus Professionalism Index (IPASN) policy framework, and institutional reports on land administration. The analysis integrated perspectives from competency governance, public professionalism, organizational learning, and reflective governance.

Results The findings reveal two institutional trajectories. First, administrative professionalism emerges when professionalism indicators function primarily as procedural compliance mechanisms emphasizing reporting, discipline, and numerical performance targets. Second, reflective professionalism governance develops when indicators are used for competency diagnosis, adaptive organizational learning, collaborative professionalism, and institutional capacity transformation.

Conclusion This study concludes that sustainable bureaucratic reform requires professionalism indicators to function as reflective governance infrastructure rather than merely administrative evaluation tools. RPGM contributes to governance literature by reconceptualizing professionalism measurement as an adaptive governance mechanism in public sector reform.

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Keywords

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Introduction

In contemporary public administration, bureaucratic professionalism has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental pillar for strengthening institutional capacity and maintaining state legitimacy amid growing service complexity (Rodríguez Bolívar, 2026). Governments in both developed and developing countries face mounting pressure to build public organizations that are not only procedurally compliant but also adaptive to change, knowledge-based, responsive to digital transformation, and capable of sustaining public trust. This trend has intensified alongside the expansion of digital governance, data-driven administration, and performance-oriented bureaucratic reform, all of which position civil service competence as a strategic state asset (Rabin et al., 2018). Within contemporary governance studies, this shift reflects a broader transition from rule-based bureaucracy toward capability-centered governance, where institutional legitimacy increasingly depends on organizational capacity and the competence of public officials to navigate uncertainty, technological disruption, and rising citizen expectations (Ansell & Torfing, 2021; Christensen & Lægreid, 2025).

This transformation, many governments have introduced competency measurement systems and professionalism indexes as institutional instruments to strengthen organizational performance and bureaucratic accountability. Bureaucratic professionalism is no longer understood solely as compliance with hierarchical rules or formal qualifications. Rather, it has increasingly become a multidimensional concept involving technical competence, adaptive capacity, ethical judgment, collaborative ability, digital literacy, and public service orientation (Homburg, 2017). In this context, professionalism indexes have emerged as governance technologies through which governments translate abstract professional standards into measurable administrative indicators. These instruments are expected not only to function as evaluation tools but also to support organizational learning and long-term bureaucratic capacity development.

However, existing literature indicates that institutionalizing professionalism measurement does not always generate substantive capacity improvement. Mohangi & Nyika (2023), demonstrate that in many public organizations, professionalism indicators gradually become administrative routines focused on reporting and numerical achievement. Under such conditions, professionalism tends to be measured procedurally rather than developed substantively. In contrast, other studies show that competency measurement systems can strengthen meritocracy, improve institutional accountability, and enhance organizational effectiveness when indicators are used to identify competency gaps and guide strategic human resource development (Fierro et al., 2021). These contrasting findings reveal an important debate in public administration literature regarding whether professionalism indicators function as transformative governance instruments or remain limited to procedural compliance.

This debate becomes particularly relevant in Indonesia. As part of ongoing bureaucratic reform, the Indonesian government introduced the State Civil Apparatus Professionalism Index (IPASN) as a national instrument to measure bureaucratic professionalism through four dimensions: qualification, competency, performance, and discipline. Normatively, IPASN was designed to strengthen merit-based civil service management and support continuous bureaucratic capacity development. In practice, however, several studies indicate that IPASN implementation across public institutions remains largely administrative and report-oriented. Turner et al., (2022), show that institutional attention is often directed more toward score achievement than toward using the index as a basis for competency development. This suggests that the relationship between

professionalism measurement and organizational learning remains insufficiently integrated in Indonesia's bureaucratic governance.

These limitations are especially visible in land administration institutions. Compared with many other public service sectors, land administration operates within a highly complex institutional environment because it directly involves legal certainty, sensitive public service interactions, inter-agency coordination, public trust, and simultaneous digital transformation. In Indonesia, this complexity has intensified through strategic national programs such as Complete Systematic Land Registration (PTSL), agrarian reform, electronic land certification, and the digitalization of land information systems. These transformations require civil servants not only to possess strong technical expertise but also managerial coordination skills, social responsiveness, ethical professionalism, and digital adaptability. Yet empirical observations suggest that competency remains one of the weakest dimensions within IPASN assessment, while performance and discipline indicators tend to remain relatively stable. This pattern indicates a deeper institutional issue: professionalism is measured administratively, but organizational mechanisms for competency development remain fragmented.

Although studies on bureaucratic competence, civil service professionalism, and performance management have expanded significantly, an important gap remains. First, competency-based public management research largely focuses on the effectiveness of competency frameworks, training systems, and organizational performance evaluation. Second, bureaucratic professionalism literature often concentrates on ethics, accountability, and service quality. Third, studies on IPASN in Indonesia generally treat the index as an administrative measurement tool rather than as a governance mechanism shaping organizational learning and institutional capacity building. As a result, the literature remains fragmented across administrative measurement, competency development, and governance perspectives. Limited attention has been given to explaining how professionalism indicators become institutionalized within bureaucratic organizations and influence adaptive capability formation.

This gap highlights the urgency of the present study. Theoretically, there is a need for a governance framework capable of explaining the relationship between professionalism measurement, institutional reflexivity, and competency development in complex public organizations. Practically, this issue is highly relevant to Indonesia's bureaucratic reform agenda, particularly within land administration institutions currently undergoing institutional transformation and digitalization. Without a stronger understanding of how IPASN operates in practice, professionalism indicators risk remaining administrative instruments with limited substantive impact on organizational change.

Against this background, this study aims to develop the Reflective Professionalism Governance Model (RPGM) as a conceptual framework to explain how professionalism measurement systems operate along two distinct institutional trajectories: as administrative compliance mechanisms and as reflective governance instruments for organizational competency development. The model integrates reflective governance theory, competency governance, and organizational learning perspectives to explain how bureaucratic institutions interpret, internalize, and operationalize professionalism indicators within complex public service environments. Using IPASN implementation at the Gorontalo Regency Land Office as a critical case study, this research addresses three interrelated questions: how does IPASN represent bureaucratic professionalism in land administration; why does the competency dimension remain institutionally weak despite the implementation of professionalism measurement; and how can professionalism indicators be

transformed into reflective governance mechanisms for competency development in complex public organizations.

Through this approach, the article contributes in three important ways. First, it expands the literature on bureaucratic professionalism by conceptualizing professionalism indexes not merely as evaluative instruments but as institutional governance mechanisms shaping organizational capability formation. Second, it contributes to reflective governance studies by demonstrating how institutional reflexivity influences the relationship between administrative measurement and competency development. Third, it offers practical insight for land administration reform in Indonesia by providing an analytical framework for understanding how civil service professionalism can be strengthened more adaptively and sustainably. Accordingly, this article argues that the central challenge of contemporary bureaucratic reform lies not simply in establishing professionalism indicators, but in the institutional capacity to transform administrative measurement into organizational learning and adaptive capability development.

Methods

This study employed a conceptual-analytical design to develop the Reflective Professionalism Governance Model (RPGM) as a governance framework for explaining the relationship between civil service professionalism measurement, organizational learning, and institutional capability transformation in land administration. Rather than testing statistical relationships between variables, the study aimed to construct a theoretical explanation of how professionalism indicators may shift from administrative evaluation instruments into reflective governance mechanisms for competency development in public organizations. This approach is increasingly relevant in contemporary governance research, particularly in addressing institutional complexity and organizational adaptation, where conceptual synthesis is often needed to bridge fragmented theoretical perspectives and generate more integrated analytical explanations (Osborne et al., 2022).

The study drew on three interrelated sources of data: Scopus-indexed international literature, policy documents, and institutional documents. The literature review focused on recent scholarship related to competency governance, bureaucratic professionalism, organizational learning, and public sector governance, selected based on conceptual relevance and theoretical contribution (Arribas-Aguila et al., 2024). This was complemented by an analysis of Indonesian policy documents concerning the State Civil Apparatus Professionalism Index (IPASN), civil service competency development, and bureaucratic reform, as well as institutional documents related to land administration governance. These sources were used to examine how professionalism is constructed administratively, how competency indicators are operationalized, and how professionalism measurement relates to organizational capacity within the institutional context of land administration.

The analytical process followed a layered conceptual synthesis integrating perspectives from competency-based human resource management, public professionalism, organizational learning, and reflective governance (Masyhuri et al., 2024). The model was developed through four stages: literature diagnosis, institutional contradiction analysis, conceptual synthesis, and model formulation. This process resulted in four operational dimensions of RPGM: reflective competency diagnosis, adaptive organizational learning, collaborative professionalism, and institutional capability transformation. To strengthen analytical credibility, the study applied source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, conceptual auditing, and interpretive consistency

to ensure coherence between theoretical arguments, policy design, and institutional context.

Results and Discussion

Administrative Professionalism: When Professionalism Measurement Becomes Procedural Compliance

The findings show that the implementation of the State Civil Apparatus Professionalism Index (IPASN) in land administration primarily functions as an administrative compliance mechanism rather than as an institutional framework for competency development. Across institutional reports and regulatory documents, professionalism is operationalized mainly through measurable procedural indicators related to reporting obligations, disciplinary stability, and annual performance targets. This orientation was consistently reinforced in interviews, where several informants explained that professionalism assessment is more frequently interpreted as part of routine reporting than as a strategic instrument for diagnosing competency gaps or strengthening organizational learning.

This finding indicates that professionalism measurement increases administrative visibility but does not automatically generate institutional transformation. While the organization can identify competency, discipline, and performance scores, the interpretation of these indicators remains procedural and compliance-oriented. This partially supports competency-governance scholarship which argues that measurement systems strengthen accountability and organizational effectiveness (Knies et al., 2024). At the same time, it confirms critical governance perspectives warning that performance systems may evolve into symbolic administrative routines detached from institutional learning and adaptation.

In this study, this condition is conceptualized as administrative professionalism, referring to a governance condition in which professionalism is formally measured and institutionally recognized through administrative indicators, yet remains disconnected from substantive competency transformation and broader organizational capability development. Under this condition, professionalism tends to function primarily as a procedural and evaluative mechanism focused on reporting compliance and score achievement, rather than as a strategic institutional process capable of strengthening adaptive capacity, supporting organizational learning, and enabling long-term governance transformation.

Fragmented Competency Governance and Weak Reflective Diagnosis

The second finding reveals that professionalism measurement has not sufficiently captured the multidimensional competencies required in land administration. Although institutional regulations formally recognize technical, managerial, and socio-cultural competencies as core dimensions of bureaucratic professionalism, organizational practice remains strongly concentrated on technical performance. Institutional competency reports indicate that technical competencies receive greater attention than collaborative coordination, managerial adaptability, and socio-cultural responsiveness.

This pattern became clearer in interview findings. Frontline officers emphasized that digital land administration, electronic certification systems, and increasingly complex citizen interactions require relational and adaptive capacities beyond technical procedural expertise. Complaint-handling officers also noted that service dissatisfaction often arises from communication gaps, procedural ambiguity, and weak institutional responsiveness rather than purely technical mistakes. These findings reinforce competency governance literature arguing that organizations

frequently prioritize measurable procedural competencies while underestimating adaptive and behavioral capacities (Khatoon et al., 2025).

The findings therefore suggest that professionalism governance becomes more meaningful and institutionally effective only when competency indicators are interpreted reflectively as signals of broader institutional capability gaps rather than as static administrative measurements. When organizations critically engage with these indicators, professionalism measurement can function as a strategic governance mechanism for identifying organizational weaknesses, reassessing institutional priorities, and strengthening adaptive capacity. In this way, competency indicators serve not merely as instruments of evaluation, but as reflective inputs that support organizational learning, institutional responsiveness, and continuous capability development in complex public service settings.

Weak Organizational Learning and Limited Institutional Translation

The third finding demonstrates that professionalism indicators rarely function as organizational learning infrastructure capable of transforming institutional capacity. Although evaluation reports and competency assessments are routinely produced, they are rarely translated into strategic learning mechanisms or targeted competency development. Informants explained that training activities are often implemented to fulfill administrative obligations rather than as adaptive responses to organizational weaknesses identified through professionalism assessment.

This creates a significant governance gap between evaluation and adaptation. Formal assessment systems continue to operate independently from strategic competency development, while institutional redesign remains limited. Several officers further described that organizational adaptation frequently depends on informal coordination and individual initiative, particularly during periods of increased service pressure. This finding aligns with organizational learning scholarship showing that evaluative systems may coexist with weak institutional learning capacity when organizations fail to connect assessment with adaptive restructuring (Atobishi et al., 2024).

Within the RPGM framework, This finding confirms that adaptive organizational learning is an essential institutional mechanism for transforming professionalism measurement from a procedural administrative exercise into effective governance practice. Through adaptive learning processes, organizations are better able to interpret evaluation results, identify competency gaps, strengthen internal coordination, and translate professionalism indicators into continuous institutional improvement. In this sense, professionalism measurement becomes meaningful not only as an evaluative tool, but also as a strategic governance instrument that supports organizational responsiveness, capability development, and long-term institutional adaptation in increasingly complex public service environments.

Collaborative Professionalism and Relational Governance Capacity

The fourth finding highlights that professionalism in land administration increasingly depends on collaborative and relational capacity rather than individual technical competence alone. Interview evidence consistently shows that service effectiveness is strongly influenced by communication quality, inter-unit coordination, responsiveness to citizens, and the ability to manage sensitive interactions involving legal uncertainty and land disputes. Institutional reports and Ombudsman evaluations further reinforce this pattern by documenting recurring complaints related to responsiveness, procedural clarity, and coordination inconsistency.

These findings support Public Service Logic perspectives which argue that governance effectiveness increasingly depends on collaborative and relational capacity rather than hierarchical procedural control alone (Crosby et al., 2017). Professionalism in land administration therefore extends beyond technical competence and increasingly operates through ethical responsiveness, adaptive communication, and effective institutional coordination. This finding reinforces the argument that collaborative professionalism represents a central dimension of adaptive professionalism governance, as organizational effectiveness increasingly depends not only on individual technical expertise but also on the capacity to manage relational complexity, coordinate across units, and respond adaptively to evolving public service demands.

Institutional Capability Transformation and Reflective Governance

The final finding shows that professionalism governance becomes institutionally transformative only when organizations develop reflective capacity to reinterpret evaluation systems as governance adaptation mechanisms. Interview evidence indicates that competency weaknesses are institutionally recognized but rarely integrated into strategic restructuring or long-term competency planning. Organizational adaptation often remains reactive, fragmented, and dependent on informal initiatives rather than systematically embedded in governance arrangements. At the same time, several units demonstrated emerging forms of adaptive governance through collaborative coordination, informal knowledge exchange, and flexible communication during periods of service pressure. These findings indicate that reflective governance capacity already exists in practice but remains weakly institutionalized. This supports reflective governance scholarship emphasizing that institutions become adaptive when they critically interpret information, reassess assumptions, and redesign governance arrangements in response to complexity (Agger & Sørensen, 2018).

Taken together, the findings reveal two competing institutional trajectories shaping professionalism governance in land administration. The first reproduces administrative professionalism, characterized by procedural compliance, fragmented competency governance, weak organizational learning, and limited institutional adaptation. The second enables reflective professionalism governance, where professionalism indicators are interpreted through reflective competency diagnosis, adaptive organizational learning, collaborative professionalism, and institutional capability transformation. These contrasting trajectories demonstrate that professionalism governance is shaped not only by the existence of evaluation systems, but also by the institutional capacity to interpret, internalize, and translate those systems into adaptive governance and sustained organizational capability. These two trajectories form the analytical foundation of the Reflective Professionalism Governance Model (RPGM).

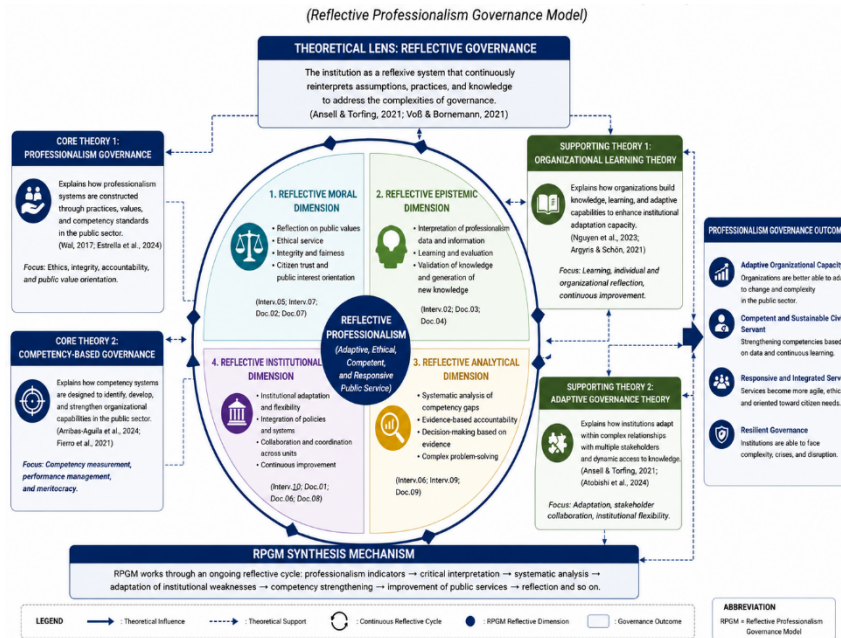


Figure 1. Reflective Professionalism Governance Model (RPGM)
Source: Developed by the authors (2026)

The findings ultimately demonstrate that professionalism measurement becomes transformative only when institutions reinterpret evaluation systems beyond their administrative reporting function and position them as reflective governance infrastructure capable of generating organizational learning, strengthening adaptive capacity, and supporting continuous institutional adjustment in response to governance complexity, public expectations, and the changing demands of service delivery.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the central challenge of professionalism governance in contemporary public organizations lies not merely in the availability of evaluation systems, but in institutional capacity to transform professionalism measurement into adaptive organizational capability. Using the case of land administration in Indonesia, the findings reveal two competing institutional trajectories. The first reproduces administrative professionalism, characterized by procedural compliance, fragmented competency governance, weak organizational learning, and limited institutional adaptation. The second enables reflective professionalism governance, where professionalism indicators are interpreted through reflective competency diagnosis, adaptive organizational learning, collaborative professionalism, and institutional capability transformation. These findings indicate that professionalism governance is shaped not only by administrative measurement, but by the degree of institutional reflexivity embedded in organizational practice.

Based on this analytical synthesis, the study develops the Reflective Professionalism Governance Model (RPGM) as a new governance framework integrating competency governance, public professionalism, organizational learning, and reflective governance theory. The model contributes theoretically by explaining how professionalism indicators can function either as procedural administrative tools or as institutional mechanisms for adaptive governance. In doing so, the study reconceptualizes professionalism measurement

from a static administrative technology into a dynamic governance mechanism that shapes institutional adaptation, expands reflective governance theory into bureaucratic professionalism and competency governance, and addresses an important gap in governance scholarship concerning why organizations often remain institutionally weak despite increasingly sophisticated evaluation systems.

Practically, the study suggests that public organizations should reposition professionalism indicators not merely as annual assessment tools, but as reflective governance infrastructure capable of diagnosing competency limitations, strengthening organizational learning, and supporting institutional adaptation. This implication is particularly relevant for high-pressure public service sectors such as land administration, where professionalism increasingly depends on adaptive capability and relational responsiveness. While this study is conceptual-analytical and focused on a specific governance context, future research is needed to test and operationalize RPGM empirically across different public sector institutions. Comparative and mixed-method studies would be especially valuable for examining how reflective professionalism governance operates under varying institutional settings, digital governance pressures, and organizational complexity.

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