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Strategic Management in Public Organizations: A Literature Review on Governance, Performance, and Accountability

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Abstract. Strategic management has become increasingly important in public organizations as governments face growing demands for effective service delivery, institutional accountability, transparency, and efficient use of public resources. This study aims to synthesize the literature on the relationship between strategic management, governance mechanisms, and organizational performance in public institutions. A structured literature review was conducted using peer-reviewed studies addressing strategic planning, leadership, performance management, resource allocation, accountability, transparency, institutional coordination, and public-sector performance. The synthesis indicates that strategic management contributes to public organizational performance when strategic planning is integrated with performance measurement, leadership commitment, organizational capacity, and accountability mechanisms. Governance practices such as transparency, stakeholder participation, institutional coordination, and clear accountability structures strengthen the implementation of organizational strategies and improve responsiveness to public needs. However, the effectiveness of strategic management is influenced by political and institutional environments, administrative capacity, leadership quality, regulatory arrangements, and stakeholder pressures. The review concludes that strategic management in public organizations should not be treated solely as a formal planning process but as an integrated managerial system linking strategic priorities, governance mechanisms, resource management, and performance evaluation. Such integration can strengthen organizational effectiveness, accountability, responsiveness, and the creation of public value.

Keywords: strategic management; public organizations; governance; accountability; public sector performance

Abstrak. Manajemen strategis semakin penting dalam organisasi publik seiring meningkatnya tuntutan terhadap efektivitas pelayanan, akuntabilitas kelembagaan, transparansi, dan efisiensi penggunaan sumber daya publik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyintesis literatur mengenai hubungan antara manajemen strategis, mekanisme tata kelola, dan kinerja organisasi pada institusi publik. Kajian dilakukan melalui *structured literature review* terhadap penelitian *peer-reviewed* yang membahas perencanaan strategis, kepemimpinan, manajemen kinerja, alokasi sumber daya, akuntabilitas, transparansi, koordinasi kelembagaan, dan kinerja sektor publik. Hasil sintesis menunjukkan bahwa manajemen strategis berkontribusi terhadap kinerja organisasi publik ketika perencanaan strategis terintegrasi dengan pengukuran kinerja, komitmen kepemimpinan, kapasitas organisasi, dan mekanisme akuntabilitas. Praktik tata kelola seperti transparansi, partisipasi pemangku kepentingan, koordinasi kelembagaan, dan kejelasan struktur pertanggungjawaban turut memperkuat implementasi strategi serta meningkatkan responsivitas terhadap kebutuhan masyarakat. Namun, efektivitas manajemen strategis dipengaruhi oleh lingkungan

politik dan kelembagaan, kapasitas administratif, kualitas kepemimpinan, pengaturan regulasi, dan tekanan pemangku kepentingan. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahwa manajemen strategis dalam organisasi publik tidak seharusnya dipandang hanya sebagai proses perencanaan formal, tetapi sebagai sistem manajerial terintegrasi yang menghubungkan prioritas strategis, tata kelola, pengelolaan sumber daya, dan evaluasi kinerja untuk memperkuat efektivitas, akuntabilitas, responsivitas, dan penciptaan nilai publik.
Kata Kunci: manajemen strategis; organisasi publik; tata kelola; akuntabilitas; kinerja sektor publik

1. Introduction

Public organizations operate in increasingly complex environments characterized by changing public expectations, fiscal constraints, political demands, technological developments, institutional pressures, and growing requirements for transparency and accountability. Unlike private organizations, public institutions are expected not only to use resources efficiently but also to deliver public services, comply with legal and political mandates, respond to multiple stakeholders, and demonstrate that organizational decisions contribute to public objectives. These conditions have increased the relevance of strategic management as an approach for connecting organizational priorities, resource allocation, implementation, and performance evaluation in the public sector (Axelsson & Höglund, 2024).

Strategic management in public organizations extends beyond the preparation of formal strategic plans. It involves identifying organizational priorities, analyzing internal and external conditions, allocating resources, implementing strategic choices, monitoring performance, and adjusting organizational actions when circumstances change. Recent research on public-sector strategic management emphasizes that strategy is not merely a written document but is enacted through organizational practices, interactions, management tools, and ongoing decisions. The case of the Swedish Transport Administration examined by Axelsson and Höglund (2024), for example, demonstrates that public-sector strategy making involves tensions between short- and long-term priorities and between different organizational interests, illustrating the practical complexity of translating strategy into public-sector operations.

A substantial body of research suggests that strategic planning can contribute to organizational performance. George et al. (2019), in a meta-analysis of empirical research, found an overall positive relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance. Their findings indicate that the performance contribution of strategic planning is particularly relevant to organizational effectiveness, while also emphasizing the importance of formal analysis, comprehensive strategy formulation, and stakeholder involvement. More recent evidence shows that strategic planning continues to be considered useful in public organizations even under turbulent conditions. Johnsen (2023), based on evidence from 144 Norwegian public-sector organizations, found that managers generally perceived positive net benefits from strategic planning despite considerable environmental turbulence.

However, the existence of a strategic plan does not by itself guarantee improved public-sector performance. A central challenge is the transition from strategy formulation to strategy implementation. George (2021) argues that successful strategic-plan implementation in public organizations depends on the alignment of people, process, and plan. This perspective highlights the importance of employee involvement, managerial processes, and the usability of the strategic plan rather than treating planning as a purely administrative requirement. Similarly, Andrews et al. (2011) found that implementation styles do not independently generate better public-service performance. Instead, performance depends partly on the fit between an organization's strategic orientation and the way its strategy is implemented. These findings demonstrate that implementation capacity is a critical component of strategic management in public institutions.

The relationship between strategy and performance also depends on the quality of performance management systems. Public organizations require mechanisms that translate broad strategic objectives into indicators, monitoring practices, evaluation procedures, and usable performance information. Johnsen et al. (2024), examining 135 public-sector organizations in Norway, found that performance measurement system design serves as an important link between strategy formulation and purposeful performance-information use. Their results indicate that strategic planning alone does not necessarily lead directly to greater performance-information use; the design of the performance measurement system plays an important connecting role. This suggests that strategic management becomes more operationally meaningful when organizational priorities are connected to measurable outcomes and information that managers can use for evaluation and adjustment.

The public-sector context also requires strategic management to operate within broader governance and accountability mechanisms. Public organizations exercise authority and manage resources on behalf of citizens and other stakeholders, making accountability an essential component of organizational management. Evidence from public institutions in a developing-country setting indicates that leadership practices, integrity systems, and internal controls significantly contribute to public-sector accountability (Brenya Bonsu et al., 2023). This finding illustrates that accountability is not simply an external reporting requirement but is influenced by internal managerial and governance arrangements.

The connection between governance and strategic management is particularly important because public organizations frequently pursue multiple and sometimes competing objectives. Efficiency, service quality, responsiveness, legal compliance, equity, transparency, and public value may all influence strategic choices. Managers must therefore balance organizational performance targets with political mandates, stakeholder expectations, and institutional responsibilities. Strategic decision-making in public organizations cannot be evaluated solely through financial outcomes; it should also consider whether organizational actions improve service effectiveness, responsiveness, accountability, and the achievement of public purposes.

Recent developments in the strategic-planning literature further demonstrate that public-sector strategy is becoming increasingly understood as an ongoing organizational practice. Vandersmissen and George (2024), reviewing 35 years of research on strategic planning in public organizations, synthesized 75 studies and emphasized the importance of understanding the actors, activities, and practices through which strategic planning is actually conducted. This perspective moves the literature beyond asking whether public organizations possess strategic plans toward examining how strategies are developed, implemented, interpreted, and adapted within organizational settings.

This shift is important because public organizations often encounter a gap between formal planning and actual organizational behavior. Strategic objectives may be clearly stated while implementation is constrained by limited resources, fragmented responsibilities, administrative capacity, political intervention, insufficient performance information, or weak coordination. Consequently, strategic management should be understood as an integrated system that connects planning, implementation, performance management, leadership, governance, and accountability rather than as a discrete planning exercise.

Despite growing evidence concerning strategic planning and public-sector performance, the literature remains fragmented across several research streams. Some studies focus primarily on strategic planning and organizational performance, others examine strategy implementation, performance measurement, governance, accountability, or public value separately. The recent review by Vandersmissen and George (2024) also indicates that strategic-planning research in public organizations has developed considerably but continues to contain theoretical and methodological opportunities for further integration. A synthesis connecting these streams is therefore valuable for clarifying how strategic management contributes to public organizational performance and how governance and accountability mechanisms shape that contribution.

Accordingly, this study aims to review the literature on strategic management in public organizations with particular attention to governance, performance, and accountability. Specifically, the study addresses three questions: (1) how do strategic management practices contribute to organizational performance in public institutions; (2) what roles do strategy implementation, performance management, and governance mechanisms play in translating strategic priorities into public-sector outcomes; and (3) what organizational and institutional conditions influence the effectiveness of strategic management? By integrating insights from public management, strategic planning, performance management, and accountability research, this review seeks to develop a clearer understanding of strategic management as an organizational mechanism for improving effectiveness, responsiveness, accountability, and public value creation.

2. Method

2.1 Review Design

This study employed a structured literature review to synthesize existing evidence on strategic management in public organizations, with particular emphasis on governance, organizational performance, and accountability. A structured review was selected because the relevant literature spans several interconnected fields, including public management, strategic planning, performance management, governance, accountability, and public-sector leadership.

The review followed the principle that literature reviews conducted as a research methodology require a transparent process of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing prior studies (Snyder, 2019). The review process was also informed by the evidence-based management approach of Tranfield et al. (2003), which emphasizes systematic and traceable procedures for developing knowledge from existing management research.

2.2 Literature Search and Selection

The literature search focused primarily on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2016 and 2026. Earlier studies were retained when they provided important theoretical or methodological foundations. The search focused on combinations of terms such as "strategic management," "strategic planning," "public organizations," "public sector," "strategy implementation," "performance management," "public organizational performance," "governance," "accountability," "public value," "leadership," and "performance measurement."

Studies were included when they met the following criteria: (1) publication in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal; (2) examination of strategic management, strategic planning, strategy implementation, performance management, governance, or accountability; (3) relevance to public-sector organizations, governmental institutions, or public services; and (4) reporting conceptual or empirical findings relevant to organizational performance, governance, accountability, responsiveness, or public value.

Studies were excluded when they focused exclusively on private-sector organizations without clear implications for public management, addressed political issues without an organizational-management dimension, consisted of non-peer-reviewed commentary, duplicated another publication, or lacked sufficient bibliographic information for verification.

Table 1. Literature Review Protocol

Component	**Review Criteria**
Review approach	Structured literature review
Main focus	Strategic management, governance, performance, and accountability
Main publication period	2016–2026
Earlier literature	Included for essential theoretical or methodological foundations
Source type	Peer-reviewed journal articles

Organizational context	Public organizations, government institutions, and public services
Core concepts	Strategic planning, implementation, leadership, performance management, governance, accountability
Main outcomes	Organizational effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness, accountability, and public value
Main exclusions	Private-sector-only studies, non-peer-reviewed sources, duplicate and unverifiable publications
Synthesis approach	Thematic and comparative synthesis
Source verification	Bibliographic information checked through official journal or publisher records

2.3 Data Extraction and Synthesis

Relevant information from each selected study was organized according to the authors and year, public-sector context, strategic-management practice, governance mechanism, performance dimension, and principal findings. Particular attention was given to the relationship between formal strategic planning and its implementation because the literature indicates that possessing a strategic plan does not necessarily guarantee improved organizational outcomes.

The evidence was subsequently synthesized into four themes: (1) strategic planning and organizational performance, (2) strategy implementation and organizational capacity, (3) performance management and the use of performance information, and (4) governance and accountability mechanisms. Studies presenting positive relationships were compared with findings showing conditional or context-dependent effects.

A meta-analysis was not conducted because the studies employed heterogeneous research designs, organizational settings, strategic-management constructs, and performance measures. The findings were therefore synthesized thematically to identify recurring relationships and differences across public-sector contexts.

2.4 Source Verification

To maintain the reliability and traceability of the review, bibliographic information for each source was checked against the official journal or publisher record.

Author names, article titles, publication years, journal names, volume and issue details, page ranges or article numbers, and DOI information were examined before a study was incorporated into the analysis.

The interpretation of individual studies was limited to findings supported by the original publications. Sample sizes, statistical relationships, and causal interpretations were not introduced unless explicitly reported by the respective studies. This procedure was applied to maintain consistency between the literature discussed in the manuscript and the final reference list.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Strategic Planning and Public Organizational Performance

The reviewed literature generally supports the relevance of strategic planning to organizational performance in the public sector. However, the relationship is more complex than the assumption that the preparation of a strategic plan automatically improves organizational outcomes. George et al. (2019), through a meta-analysis of empirical studies, found a positive and significant relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance. Their findings also indicate that the relationship is particularly meaningful when performance is understood in terms of organizational effectiveness.

More recent research reinforces this conclusion while identifying the mechanisms through which strategic planning can affect performance. Vandersmissen et al. (2024), examining local governments, found that strategic planning was indirectly and positively associated with both managerial and citizen perceptions of performance through improvements in external relations. This finding is important because public-sector performance depends not only on internal administrative processes but also on the capacity of organizations to interact effectively with citizens, stakeholders, partner institutions, and their external environment.

The evidence therefore suggests that strategic planning contributes to performance when it clarifies organizational priorities and improves coordination between organizational objectives and stakeholder expectations. Public organizations should consequently avoid treating strategic planning primarily as a formal administrative obligation. Strategic plans become more valuable when they influence resource decisions, organizational relationships, implementation priorities, and performance evaluation.

3.2 Strategy Implementation and Organizational Capacity

A second major theme concerns the transition from strategic planning to implementation. The literature consistently indicates that the quality of strategy formulation is insufficient when public organizations lack the managerial and organizational capacity required to translate strategic objectives into action.

George (2021) identifies three interconnected dimensions of successful strategic-plan implementation: people, process, and plan. Employee involvement contributes to a more informed planning process, while constructive interaction during planning can support the development of higher-quality strategic plans. The quality of the plan subsequently contributes to implementation success. These findings emphasize that public-sector strategy is simultaneously a technical and organizational process.

Evidence from strategic decision-making research further supports this interpretation. Al-Hashimi et al. (2022), using evidence from strategic decisions in public organizations in Qatar, examined procedural rationality, participation, intuition, and constructive politics within strategic decision-making processes. With the exception of intuition, the examined decision-process dimensions contributed positively to successful implementation and strategic-decision outcomes. Successful implementation also mediated the relationships between procedural rationality, participation, constructive politics, and strategic outcomes.

These findings demonstrate that implementation should be regarded as an integral component of strategic management rather than as a separate administrative stage following planning. Public organizations require appropriate information, participation, organizational coordination, managerial commitment, and implementation capacity to translate strategic intentions into outcomes.

Table 2. Selected Evidence on Strategic Management, Governance, and Public-Sector Performance

Study	**Context/Focus**	**Main Finding Relevant to the Review**
George et al.	Meta-analysis of strategic	Strategic planning has a positive and

(2019)	planning and organizational performance	significant relationship with organizational performance
George (2021)	Strategic-plan implementation in public organizations	Successful implementation depends on the alignment of people, process, and plan
Al-Hashimi et al. (2022)	Strategic decision-making in public organizations	Procedural rationality, participation, and constructive politics support implementation and strategic outcomes
Bonsu et al. (2023)	Public institutions in Ghana	Integrity, internal control systems, and leadership positively influence public-sector accountability
Vandersmissen and George (2024)	Review of strategic planning in public organizations	Strategic planning is shaped by actors, practices, processes, and organizational contexts rather than by formal plans alone
Vandersmissen et al. (2024)	Local-government strategic planning and performance	Strategic planning is indirectly related to managerial and citizen performance perceptions through external relations
Johnsen et al. (2024)	Performance management in Norwegian public organizations	Performance-measurement system design links strategy formulation with purposeful performance-information use
Akbar et al. (2026)	Indonesian government agencies	Performance-information use is supported by measurement-system design, institutionalization, and employee competencies

3.3 Performance Management as a Link Between Strategy and Results

Strategic management also requires mechanisms for determining whether organizational priorities are being achieved. Performance measurement and performance-information use therefore constitute an important link between strategic intentions and organizational outcomes.

Johnsen et al. (2024), using evidence from 135 Norwegian public-sector organizations, found no significant direct relationship between formal strategic planning and purposeful performance-information use. Instead, the design of the performance measurement system emerged as an important link between strategy formulation and the use of performance information. This finding provides an important qualification to the strategic-planning literature. Strategy formulation alone does not ensure that managers will use information for monitoring, evaluation, and organizational improvement.

A public organization may therefore possess clearly articulated objectives but still experience weak strategic management when performance indicators are poorly designed, data are not considered credible, or performance information is not incorporated into managerial decisions. Effective performance systems should connect strategic priorities with meaningful indicators while also allowing managers to identify implementation problems and adjust organizational action.

Recent evidence from Indonesia strengthens the relevance of this issue. Akbar et al. (2026), examining government agencies in Lampung Province, identified the design of performance measurement systems, the institutionalization of performance measurement, and employee competencies as important drivers of performance-information use. The findings indicate that technical performance systems must be supported by organizational routines and competent personnel before they can contribute meaningfully to government performance.

These studies suggest that performance management should not be understood merely as the production of indicators or periodic reports. Its strategic contribution depends on whether information is generated, interpreted, discussed, and used in organizational decision-making. Performance measurement therefore connects the planning and implementation stages by providing feedback about whether strategic actions are producing the intended results.

3.4 Governance and Accountability as Strategic Management Mechanisms

Strategic management in public organizations differs from private-sector strategic management because organizational performance must coexist with public accountability, legal responsibilities, transparency, and multiple stakeholder expectations. Governance mechanisms therefore constitute an essential component of strategic effectiveness.

Bonsu et al. (2023), examining public-sector departments and agencies in Ghana, found that integrity systems, internal control systems, and leadership practices positively and significantly influenced public accountability. These findings demonstrate that accountability depends partly on the internal managerial architecture of public organizations. Strategic objectives cannot be considered successfully achieved when organizational results are obtained without appropriate controls, integrity, and responsible use of public resources.

Accountability is also affected by the organizational environment in which public employees operate. Recent evidence from municipal local governments shows that ethical work climates characterized by attention to caring, laws and codes, and organizational rules are positively associated with public accountability (Makanga et al., 2026). This reinforces the argument that accountability is not generated solely by formal reporting requirements. It is also shaped by organizational values, internal policies, leadership behavior, and employee conduct.

From a strategic-management perspective, these findings indicate that governance and accountability should not be positioned only at the final reporting stage. They need to be incorporated into strategic formulation, implementation, resource allocation, monitoring, and evaluation. Internal controls can constrain inappropriate resource use, integrity systems can guide organizational behavior, and accountability mechanisms can clarify responsibilities for strategic outcomes.

3.5 Integrating Strategy, Governance, and Public Performance

The synthesis indicates that four components of public-sector strategic management are closely interconnected: strategic planning, implementation capacity, performance management, and governance/accountability. Weakness in one component can limit the contribution of the others.

Strategic planning establishes organizational direction but does not ensure implementation. Implementation transforms priorities into organizational action but requires appropriate people, processes, participation, and decision procedures. Performance management provides information regarding the achievement of objectives but becomes useful only when measurement systems are well designed and information is integrated into decision-making. Governance and accountability ensure that strategic actions remain consistent with public responsibilities, institutional rules, and appropriate use of public resources.

The relationship identified in the reviewed literature can therefore be summarized as follows:

Strategic Management Dimension	Principal Function	Expected Public-Sector Contribution
Strategic planning	Establishing priorities and organizational direction	Goal clarity and strategic alignment
Strategy implementation	Translating priorities into organizational action	Program execution and organizational responsiveness
Performance management	Measuring and using information on results	Evaluation, learning, and strategic adjustment
Governance mechanisms	Strengthening transparency, controls, integrity, and accountability	Responsible use of authority and public resources
Stakeholder engagement	Connecting organizational strategy with external expectations	Responsiveness, legitimacy, and public value

The findings also indicate that the relationship between strategic management and performance is conditional rather than automatic. Organizational capacity, leadership quality, employee competence, institutional arrangements, political conditions, stakeholder relationships, and the quality of performance systems influence whether strategic-management practices produce meaningful public outcomes.

For public managers, the principal implication is that strategic management should be implemented as an integrated managerial system rather than as an annual or periodic planning exercise. Public organizations need to connect strategic priorities with resource allocation, implementation responsibilities, performance indicators, stakeholder engagement, internal controls, and accountability arrangements. Such integration can reduce the gap between formal plans and actual organizational practice while strengthening effectiveness, responsiveness, and accountability.

The evidence also suggests that performance should be interpreted broadly. In public organizations, successful strategy cannot be evaluated solely through efficiency indicators. Organizational effectiveness, service responsiveness, accountability, citizen perceptions, stakeholder relationships, and the creation of public value are also relevant outcomes. Strategic management therefore provides its greatest contribution when it combines managerial performance with the governance responsibilities inherent in public institutions.

4. Conclusion

This literature review shows that strategic management plays an important role in strengthening the effectiveness, accountability, and performance of public organizations. The reviewed evidence indicates that strategic planning can contribute positively to organizational performance when it is supported by effective implementation, appropriate performance measurement systems, competent employees, and clear governance mechanisms. Strategic management therefore extends beyond the preparation of formal plans and requires continuous integration between organizational priorities, implementation processes, performance information, and accountability structures.

The synthesis also demonstrates that strategy implementation is a critical stage in public-sector management. Strategic objectives are more likely to produce meaningful outcomes when public organizations align people, processes, organizational capacity, and managerial decision-making with the strategic plan. Performance management further strengthens this relationship by providing information that supports evaluation, learning, and strategic adjustment. However, the usefulness of performance information depends on the quality of the measurement system and the ability of managers and employees to interpret and apply the information in organizational decisions.

Governance and accountability are equally important in ensuring that strategic management remains consistent with public responsibilities. Internal control, leadership, integrity, stakeholder engagement, and transparency can strengthen the responsible use of public resources and improve organizational legitimacy. These mechanisms indicate that public-sector performance should not be evaluated solely through efficiency or financial indicators, but also through effectiveness, responsiveness, accountability, citizen perceptions, and the creation of public value.

Overall, strategic management in public organizations should be implemented as an integrated managerial system that connects strategic planning, implementation, performance management, governance, and accountability. The effectiveness of this system is influenced by organizational capacity, leadership quality, institutional arrangements, employee competence, and the political and administrative environment. Future research should further examine how these factors interact across different types of public institutions and administrative systems, particularly in developing-country contexts where institutional capacity and governance conditions may differ considerably.

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