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MEASURING PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION: FROM INTERNATIONAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS TO AN ADAPTATION STRATEGY FOR VIETNAM

This study presents a comprehensive framework for measuring public sector innovation (PSI) in Vietnam, integrating international theoretical models with evidence from the country's unique governance context. Drawing on the public value tradition, post-New Public Management governance theory, and mission-oriented and anticipatory innovation frameworks, the paper argues that PSI measurement must extend beyond simplistic input-output metrics to encompass organizational capabilities, institutional incentives, citizen-centered outcomes, and long-term adaptive capacity. Employing qualitative comparative institutional analysis and secondary data synthesis, the study critically examines global PSI measurement approaches, including the Oslo Manual adapted for the public sector, the Nordic MEPIN initiative, OECD OPSI's innovation facets, the European public sector innovation scoreboards, and the World Bank's GovTech Maturity Index. These frameworks are triangulated with Vietnam-specific evidence, such as the United Nations E-Government Development Index, the World Bank's GTMI, PAPI citizen-experience surveys, SIPAS, and budget-disclosure assessments. Findings reveal that while Vietnam has achieved notable progress in digital government and service delivery, significant challenges persist in institutional legalism, fragmented data systems, weak transparency practices, and limited citizen adoption of digital services. The paper introduces the PSI-VN framework, a context-sensitive 5x5 measurement architecture that integrates five innovation domains with five performance dimensions. This framework emphasizes strategic adaptation over direct transplantation of international models, advocating for legal sandboxing, interoperable data systems, and incentive-compatible administrative reforms to enhance Vietnam's PSI capabilities. The study concludes that institutionalizing PSI measurement is critical for Vietnam's transition to a more adaptive and resilient developmental state.

Keywords: Public sector innovation; innovation measurement; adaptation strategy; digital government; public value; Vietnam

JEL classification: ***D73, H83, L86, O38, O33***

У дослідженні запропоновано комплексну рамку вимірювання інновацій у публічному секторі В'єтнаму, що поєднує міжнародні теоретичні моделі з емпіричними даними, які відображають специфіку національного врядування. Спираючись на концепцію публічної цінності, теорію врядування New Public Management, а також підходи місійно-орієнтованих і випереджальних інновацій, автори обґрунтовують, що вимірювання інновацій у публічному секторі не повинно обмежуватися спрощеними показниками «входів-виходів», а має охоплювати організаційні спроможності, інституційні стимули, орієнтовані на громадян результати та довгострокову адаптивну спроможність. На основі якісного порівняльно-інституційного аналізу та синтезу вторинних даних у статті критично розглянуто глобальні підходи до вимірювання інновацій у публічному секторі, зокрема адаптований до публічного сектору Oslo Manual, ініціативу Nordic MEPIN, модель вимірювальних аспектів OECD OPSI, європейські табло інновацій у публічному секторі та World Bank GovTech Maturity Index. Ці підходи співвіднесено з даними, релевантними для В'єтнаму, зокрема United Nations E-Government Development Index, World Bank GTMI, опитуваннями громадянського досвіду PAPI, індексом SIPAS та оцінками бюджетної прозорості. Результати показують, що попри помітний прогрес у цифровому врядуванні та наданні послуг, у В'єтнамі зберігаються суттєві проблеми, пов'язані з правовим формалізмом, фрагментованістю систем даних, слабкими практиками прозорості та обмеженим використанням цифрових послуг громадянами. У роботі запропоновано рамку PSI-VN – контекстно чутливу архітектуру вимірювання 5×5, що інтегрує п'ять доменів інновацій із п'ятьма вимірами результативності. Запропонований підхід орієнтований на стратегічну адаптацію, а не на механічне перенесення міжнародних моделей, і передбачає розвиток правових «пісочниць», інтероперабельних систем даних та адміністративних реформ, сумісних із наявною системою стимулів. Зроблено висновок, що інституціоналізація вимірювання інновацій у публічному секторі є критично важливою для переходу В'єтнаму до більш адаптивної та стійкої моделі державного розвитку.

Ключові слова: інновації у публічному секторі; вимірювання інновацій; стратегія адаптації; цифрове урядування; публічна цінність; В'єтнам

JEL classification: ***D73, H83, L86, O38, O33***

1. Introduction

In contemporary public administration, innovation is no longer a peripheral managerial aspiration; it is increasingly treated as a core state capability. Governments are expected not only to maintain order and deliver routine services, but also to respond to accelerating technological change, climate shocks, demographic transitions, public health crises, and rising citizen expectations. In this setting, the problem is not whether the public sector should innovate, but how public innovation can be governed, legitimized, and measured in ways consistent with public value, accountability, and long-term societal resilience.

The economics of innovation initially evolved around firms, markets, and technological change. Yet over the last two decades, a growing body of scholarship has shown that the public sector is not merely a regulator or financier of innovation in the economy; it is itself a site of innovation, experimentation, and capability formation [9, 7]. Public organizations innovate in services, processes, policy design, procurement, organizational forms, digital infrastructures, and collaborative arrangements. These innovations may produce efficiency gains, but they are also

expected to improve equity, trust, transparency, inclusion, and adaptive problem-solving. Consequently, the measurement of public sector innovation (PSI) raises more complex questions than private-sector innovation metrics, which often center on R&D spending, patents, sales of new products, or productivity.

The literature has responded to this complexity in several ways. One stream has adapted innovation-survey logic from the Oslo Manual to public organizations, especially through the Nordic MEPIN effort and subsequent work by Bloch, Bugge, Arundel, and colleagues. A second stream, associated with public management and governance research, has emphasized public value, co-creation, collaboration, risk, leadership, and organizational culture [11, 5, 20]. A third stream, visible in OECD OPSI and related policy work, has reframed innovation in terms of strategic intent: enhancement-oriented, mission-oriented, adaptive, and anticipatory innovation. A fourth stream, strongly shaped by digital government practice, has focused on measurable maturity in data systems, digital identity, interoperability, service portals, and citizen engagement, as seen in the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI) and the World Bank GovTech Maturity Index (GTMI).

Despite this growing international architecture, an important research gap remains. Most available PSI measurement models were developed in or for relatively high-capacity administrative systems with stronger traditions of transparency, mature data ecosystems, and greater room for bureaucratic discretion or experimentation. By contrast, lower-middle-income and institutionally transitional settings face a different problem structure. They may achieve visible progress in digitalization or administrative reform, yet still lack integrated measurement systems that capture the broader institutional conditions under which public innovation can emerge and persist. Vietnam exemplifies this dilemma. The country has made significant advances in digital government, online public services, and administrative modernization. According to the United Nations, Vietnam's EGDI reached 0.7709 in 2024, placing it 71st globally, an improvement from rank 86th in 2022. Yet the country's GovTech maturity remains in the World Bank's "significant" rather than "extensive" tier, and citizen-centered evidence continues to reveal low uptake of many digital public services, uneven transparency, and structural governance bottlenecks.

This mismatch between visible modernization and weak innovation measurement is the core problem addressed in this paper. Existing reforms in Vietnam often generate performance information about administrative procedures, digitalization, or citizen satisfaction, but these data streams are not yet organized into a coherent public-sector innovation measurement architecture. As a result, the state can observe fragments of reform performance without fully measuring innovation as an endogenous capability of public institutions.

The paper pursues three objectives. First, it systematizes the international literature on PSI measurement, with particular attention to its theoretical assumptions and operational indicators. Second, it evaluates the compatibility of these frameworks with Vietnam's administrative and political-institutional context using comparative evidence. Third, it proposes a context-sensitive measurement model - the PSI-VN framework - designed to support strategic adaptation rather than mechanical transplantation.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. From innovation as efficiency to innovation as public value

The earliest influential discussions of innovation in government were often embedded in New Public Management reforms. In that literature, innovation appeared primarily as a means to improve efficiency, reduce costs, or strengthen managerial responsiveness [6, 19]. Although this perspective was important in shifting attention away from static conceptions of bureaucracy, it treated innovation largely as an instrument for administrative modernization. It did not fully resolve the central normative problem of the public sector: innovation is not valuable merely because it introduces novelty, but because it generates legitimate public value under conditions of accountability and democratic constraint.

Mark Moore's concept of public value was a decisive move beyond purely managerial accounts. Moore [11] argued that public managers create value only when three conditions are jointly satisfied: substantive value for society, operational capacity, and political legitimacy. This triadic logic is highly relevant for measurement. A public innovation may appear efficient internally while eroding legitimacy externally; conversely, a popular reform may be normatively attractive but operationally unsustainable. PSI measurement, therefore, must observe not only inputs and outputs, but also institutional legitimacy and value creation.

Hartley [5] further broadened the field by distinguishing innovation in services, processes, positions, strategies, governance, and rhetoric. Her contribution remains central because it shows that the public sector does not innovate along a single axis. A tax administration digital portal, a new procurement protocol, a participatory planning platform, and a mission-based climate program all count as innovation, but they do not operate through the same mechanisms and should not be measured through the same narrow indicators. This insight is one reason why public innovation measurement requires a multidimensional architecture.

2.2. The governance turn: collaboration, co-creation, and institutional capability

As public administration scholarship moved beyond classical NPM, innovation came to be associated more strongly with networks, collaboration, and co-creation. Sorensen and Torfing [20] argued that collaborative innovation can help the public sector mobilize distributed intelligence, break organizational silos, and generate more legitimate and robust solutions to complex problems. Related research has shown that innovation outcomes depend not only on managerial will, but also on interorganizational relations, trust, professional norms, user participation, and political support.

This implies that PSI measurement cannot stop at counting internally generated reforms. It must examine the ecosystem in which innovation occurs: the degree of cross-sector collaboration, citizen participation, intergovernmental coordination, and institutional learning. The challenge is particularly acute in hierarchical administrative systems, where many reforms are formally introduced from above, but their actual innovation content depends on local experimentation, horizontal diffusion, and implementation quality.

Recent work has also focused on the political-administrative conditions under which public organizations become more or less innovative. De Vries, Bekkers, and Tummers [4], in a major systematic review of 181 studies, synthesized

evidence on definitions, antecedents, goals, and outcomes of PSI. Their review is especially important because it highlights a persistent weakness in the literature: public innovation is studied extensively, but measured unevenly. What counts as success differs across contexts, and many studies rely on organizational self-reporting rather than independently triangulated evidence.

Political-administrative institutions also matter. Lapuente and Suzuki [8] show that bureaucratic politicization and legalistic administrative cultures are associated with less innovation-friendly attitudes among senior public managers. This insight is highly relevant for transitional systems, where innovation is often constrained not by lack of reform rhetoric but by fear of sanction, weak protection for prudent risk-taking, and unclear boundaries between compliance and experimentation.

2.3. From theory to measurement: the Oslo lineage, MEPIN, and survey-based PSI metrics

A major step toward operational measurement came from efforts to adapt the Oslo Manual - originally developed for business innovation statistics - to the public sector. Bloch and Bugge [2] remain foundational in this regard. They argued that public innovation is measurable, but only if measurement moves beyond direct transplantation of private-sector indicators. Their work emphasized differences in objectives, incentives, appropriability, and output valuation between firms and public organizations. In the public sector, innovation may produce value without generating market revenue, and success may consist in better access, lower transaction costs for citizens, improved trust, more equitable outcomes, or greater resilience.

The Nordic MEPIN initiative was the first serious multinational attempt to collect comparable survey-based data on PSI. It demonstrated that innovation surveys can be administered to public organizations and that it is possible to distinguish product, process, organizational, and communication innovations in the public sphere. Yet the initiative also revealed conceptual and practical problems. Public organizations often innovate without naming activities as innovation; many reforms are incremental rather than radical; and outcomes are difficult to quantify in monetary terms. Moreover, innovations in policy and governance arrangements may cut across organizational boundaries, making unit-level survey measurement incomplete [10].

Arundel, Bloch, and Ferguson [1] advanced this agenda substantially by arguing that PSI metrics should be aligned with policy goals rather than confined to generic innovation counts. Their contribution is crucial for two reasons. First, they demonstrate that measurement design is never neutral: indicators are shaped by the use case, such as benchmarking, internal learning, strategic steering, or accountability. Second, they propose a broader framework that includes capacities, processes, barriers, outcomes, diffusion, and contextual variables. This helps bridge the economics of innovation with public management and governance research.

2.4. OECD OPSI and the strategic-intent model of public innovation

OECD OPSI has become one of the most influential sources for conceptualizing PSI at the policy level. Its work on innovation portfolios and the four innovation facets - enhancement-oriented, mission-oriented, adaptive, and

anticipatory - represents a major advance over one-dimensional measurement models. The central claim is that innovation serves different strategic purposes in government and that each purpose requires different capacities, leadership styles, and evidentiary standards [13, 14, 15, 16].

Enhancement-oriented innovation refers to improving existing services and processes. Mission-oriented innovation addresses ambitious societal challenges through coordinated strategic action. Adaptive innovation emphasizes rapid responses to changing environments and emerging demands. Anticipatory innovation seeks to detect and prepare for future risks and opportunities. This typology matters because many measurement systems implicitly privilege enhancement-oriented innovation - the most measurable and administratively visible type - while undercounting adaptive and anticipatory forms that are essential for resilience.

The OECD has also stressed that measurement should be distinguished from evaluation. Measurement seeks to assign indicators to inputs, processes, outputs, and impacts; evaluation seeks to establish causal relationships and meaning. The distinction is analytically useful, especially in the public sector, where innovation is often iterative, politically contingent, and embedded in broader institutional change. A mature PSI architecture should therefore combine descriptive measurement, comparative benchmarking, and selective evaluation [13, 17].

2.5. Digital-government metrics as partial proxies for PSI

A parallel measurement tradition has emerged from digital government. The United Nations EGDI captures online services, telecommunications infrastructure, and human capital, while the World Bank GTMI focuses on four dimensions: core government systems, public service delivery, digital citizen engagement, and GovTech enablers. These frameworks are highly valuable because they provide standardized, cross-country evidence and focus on administrative capabilities that often underpin innovation [21, 28].

Yet digital-government indexes are best seen as partial proxies rather than full PSI measures. A country can score relatively well on e-government readiness while still having weak innovation culture, low transparency, limited co-creation, or poor capacity for mission-oriented problem-solving. Conversely, some public innovations occur through organizational redesign, procurement reform, or local experimentation that may not significantly change national digital scores. Therefore, digital indexes should be integrated into, not substituted for, broader PSI measurement [21, 28].

2.6. The unresolved gap: adaptation for transitional states

A broad conclusion emerges from the literature. First, PSI is multidimensional and cannot be measured through a single scalar indicator. Second, public value and legitimacy distinguish PSI measurement from business innovation statistics. Third, ecosystem variables - collaboration, data infrastructure, leadership, legal permissions, and citizen uptake - are as important as internal organizational activity. Fourth, there is still no universally accepted PSI measurement architecture, and perhaps there should not be one.

For developing and transitional states, the central methodological implication is adaptation. Measurement must preserve enough comparability to learn from international experience, but it must also remain institutionally feasible. An indicator system that assumes rich administrative microdata, high-quality interoperable

databases, advanced survey infrastructure, and broad room for bureaucratic experimentation will likely fail in settings where legal caution, fragmented information systems, and compliance-oriented administrative culture remain strong. This is the space in which the Vietnam case becomes analytically significant.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative institutional design supported by secondary quantitative evidence. The objective is not to estimate a causal econometric model of innovation performance, because there is currently no integrated Vietnamese PSI dataset capable of supporting such analysis. Instead, the paper pursues a structured diagnostic exercise: it identifies the dominant measurement logics in the international literature, extracts their operational implications, and assesses how far those logics can travel into Vietnam's administrative context. Therefore, three types of material are used.

First, the paper reviews key scholarly and policy works on PSI theory and measurement, including studies by Bloch and Bugge, Arundel et al., de Vries et al., OECD OPSI reports, and digital-government measurement frameworks. These sources are used to reconstruct the conceptual architecture of PSI measurement, including indicator families such as inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, impacts, collaboration, data capability, and strategic intent [1, 2, 4, 13, 17].

Second, the paper assembles comparative governance evidence from authoritative international databases. This includes the United Nations EGDI and E-Participation measures, and the World Bank's GTMI data. These sources are not interpreted as direct measures of PSI; rather, they are used as externally validated proxies for important enabling conditions of PSI, especially digital-state capability and citizen-facing digital infrastructure [21, 28, 29].

Third, the paper synthesizes Vietnam-specific administrative and citizen-experience evidence from PAPI, SIPAS, and related transparency assessments. These sources are valuable because they shift the evidentiary perspective away from official compliance reporting toward actual use, perception, and interaction. This is especially important in public-sector innovation research, where formal implementation often overstates practical performance [22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 30].

Two methodological cautions are necessary. First, the evidence base is uneven: international frameworks often provide more coherent and standardized metrics than domestic Vietnamese sources. Second, because many PSI outcomes are institutionally embedded and unfold over time, the results should be read as a strategic diagnostic rather than a final empirical verdict. Nonetheless, triangulating international theory with citizen-centered domestic evidence allows a more useful analysis than relying on either source alone.

4. International Measurement Architectures and Comparative Evidence

4.1. What the major frameworks actually measure

A close reading of the major international frameworks reveals that "measuring public sector innovation" is not a uniform exercise but rather reflects distinct intellectual traditions. The Bloch–Bugge–Arundel approach is primarily methodological, emphasizing the construction of surveyable and comparable indicators. Its strength lies in analytical precision and in differentiating public from private innovation, making it particularly effective for organizational-level measurement—for instance, assessing whether an agency introduced new

services, processes, communication methods, or organizational practices, as well as the barriers encountered and objectives pursued [1, 2, 10, 13, 17, 21, 28].

By contrast, the OECD OPSI framework is strategically oriented. It focuses less on enumerating innovations and more on understanding their purpose and portfolio composition. Its distinctive contribution is the classification of innovation into enhancement, mission, adaptive, and anticipatory types, thereby offering governments a lens through which to balance immediate service improvements with long-term capability development [14, 15, 16].

The European public-sector scoreboard tradition places emphasis on benchmarking and comparability. It structures measurement across enablers, activities, and outputs, which facilitates cross-national monitoring but often lacks sensitivity to institutional variation and context-specific dynamics [1].

Meanwhile, the digital-government tradition, exemplified by EGDI and GTMI, concentrates on capabilities that underpin but do not exhaust public sector innovation. EGDI integrates indicators of online service provision, telecommunications infrastructure, and human capital, while GTMI provides more granular administrative detail, covering government systems, service delivery, citizen engagement, and enabling strategies. These frameworks capture digitization and state capacity more directly than they do innovation culture, experimentation norms, or public-value outcomes [21, 28].

Taken together, these comparisons underscore that no single framework is sufficient. Survey-based metrics excel in capturing organizational activity but are weaker in system-level architecture; strategic frameworks illuminate intent but lack standardized quantification; digital-government indexes highlight infrastructure and capability but underrepresent non-digital innovation and public-value outcomes. Consequently, a robust public sector innovation architecture for Vietnam must integrate these logics rather than rely exclusively on one tradition [1, 13, 17, 21, 28].

4.2. Comparative signals from international data

In the World Bank's GTMI dataset, the Republic of Korea scored 0.99 in 2022, Estonia 0.96, Singapore 0.83, and Vietnam 0.68. In the 2025 GTMI update, the World Bank classified Estonia, Singapore, and the Republic of Korea in Group A (extensive GovTech maturity), while Vietnam remained in Group B (significant GovTech maturity). This is not a trivial distinction. It suggests that Vietnam has moved beyond basic digital government but still lacks the breadth, depth, or consistency associated with top-tier public-sector digital transformation [28, 29].

The UN's 2024 EGDI data point in the same direction, though they also highlight Vietnam's progress. Estonia ranked 2nd globally with an EGDI of 0.9727, Singapore 3rd with 0.9691, and the Republic of Korea 4th with 0.9679. Vietnam reached 0.7709 and ranked 71st, improving from rank 86th in 2022. This is a meaningful upward shift, especially for a lower-middle-income country, and it indicates that Vietnam has strengthened the digital infrastructure and service capacity relevant to public innovation. However, its e-Participation score remained much lower than the leading countries. In 2024, Vietnam's e-Participation score was 0.6027, compared with 0.9589 for Singapore, 0.9589 for Estonia, and 0.9726 for the Republic of Korea. This gap is analytically important because public innovation in advanced systems increasingly depends not only on digitized administration but on citizen feedback loops, participatory interfaces, and open engagement channels [21].

In short, Vietnam's international profile is mixed but instructive. It is no longer appropriate to describe the country as institutionally lagging in all relevant dimensions; progress is evident and measurable. Yet it is equally inaccurate to treat digital progress as synonymous with mature PSI. The comparative evidence suggests a middle position: Vietnam has built significant enabling capacities, but these have not yet been fully converted into a deeply institutionalized public innovation system.

4.3. Why top-performing cases matter conceptually

The leading international cases are instructive not because they can be replicated wholesale, but because they demonstrate how distinct measurement logics reinforce one another. Estonia provides the clearest example of data integration, interoperability, and trust-based digital government. Its significance extends beyond technology: by lowering transaction costs, reducing administrative duplication, and creating interoperable data environments, Estonia shows how innovation can be rendered visible and scalable. This is crucial for measurement, since fragmented data systems often obscure public sector innovation even when it occurs [21, 28, 29].

Singapore illustrates the strategic embedding of innovation within national missions, digital capability, and performance management. The value of this case lies less in any single index than in the way innovation is institutionalized through state strategy, talent systems, and disciplined implementation. For measurement, Singapore demonstrates that indicators acquire meaning when they are linked to managerial decision-making rather than produced as symbolic scorecards [28, 29].

The Republic of Korea highlights the role of mature digital citizen engagement and state-wide systems. Its consistently high EGDI and E-Participation scores suggest that innovation is sustained not only by infrastructure but also by long-term institutional investment in the interfaces between citizens and government [21].

Taken together, these cases imply that advanced public sector innovation systems rest on at least four interdependent layers: digital back-end capability, front-end service usability, strategic intent, and a culture of measured experimentation. This layered logic is central to the framework developed later in the article, underscoring that effective measurement requires integration across technological, strategic, institutional, and cultural dimensions [21, 28, 29].

The results of previous studies are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Major international frameworks for measuring public sector innovation*

Framework / source	Core unit of analysis	Main measurement logic	Analytical strength	Key limitation for Vietnam
Oslo Manual adapted to public sector; Bloch & Bugge (2013); MEPIN (2011)	Public organizations	Counts and classifies service, process, organizational, and communication innovations; surveys objectives and barriers	Closest to formal innovation-statistics tradition; useful for comparable organizational measurement	Requires survey capability and shared understanding of what counts as innovation

End of Table 1

Framework / source	Core unit of analysis	Main measurement logic	Analytical strength	Key limitation for Vietnam
Arundel, Bloch, & Ferguson (2019)	Public organizations and policy systems	Aligns innovation measurement with policy goals; includes capacities, barriers, diffusion, and outcomes	Bridges economics of innovation and public management; explicitly policy-relevant	Still demanding in data terms and requires tailored questionnaire design
OECD OPSI Innovation Facets (2021-2024)	Innovation portfolio / strategic intent	Differentiates enhancement, mission, adaptive, and anticipatory innovation	Captures why governments innovate, not only what they do	Less standardized for routine statistical reporting
European public-sector scoreboards	National public sectors	Measures enablers, activities, and outputs for benchmarking	Useful for cross-country comparison	Can understate contextual and institutional variation
UN EGDI	National digital-government systems	Online services, telecom infrastructure, and human capital	Externally validated and globally comparable	Measures digital government, not PSI in the full sense
World Bank GTMI	National GovTech capability	Core systems, service delivery, citizen engagement, enablers	Strong on digital-state capability and administrative architecture	Still a partial proxy for innovation culture, legitimacy, and learning

**Source: compiled by the authors (2026)*

Table 2

Selected comparative indicators for leading digital-government cases and Viet Nam*

Country	GTMI 2022 score	GTMI 2025 group	EGDI 2024	EGDI 2024 rank	E-Participation 2024	Interpretive note
Estonia	0.96	A - Extensive	0.9727	2	0.9589	Benchmark case for interoperability, data integration, and trust-based digital state
Singapore	0.83	A - Extensive	0.9691	3	0.9589	Strong strategic alignment between digital state capacity, missions, and implementation

End of Table 2

Country	GTMI 2022 score	GTMI 2025 group	EGDI 2024	EGDI 2024 rank	E-Participation 2024	Interpretive note
Republic of Korea	0.99	A - Extensive	0.9679	4	0.9726	Mature digital citizen engagement and whole-of-government architecture
Viet Nam	0.68	B - Significant	0.7709	71	0.6027	Strong recent progress, but weaker participation, uptake, and integrated innovation capability

**Source: compiled by the authors (2026)*

5. Vietnam: Evidence-Based Diagnosis of Public-Sector Innovation Capacity

5.1. Measurable progress: digital government and service modernization

Any academically credible diagnosis must begin by recognizing that Vietnam has made real progress. The country's move from rank 86th to rank 71st in the UN EGDI between 2022 and 2024 is substantial. This result indicates improvement across the composite dimensions of digital government and confirms that Vietnam has strengthened parts of the basic capability structure on which PSI depends. The World Bank's 2022 GTMI score of 0.68 and its Group B classification in 2025 similarly show that Vietnam is not at an early stage of GovTech development. It has crossed the threshold into significant maturity [21, 28, 29].

Domestic indicators point in the same direction. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the average SIPAS score in 2024 reached 83.94 percent, up 1.28 percentage points from 2023. This is not a direct innovation metric, but it provides useful evidence that improvements in administrative service quality are being perceived by users. Taken together, EGDI, GTMI, and SIPAS suggest that Vietnam has succeeded in building visible reform momentum in the service-delivery and digital-administration domains [30].

Moreover, PAPI 2023 documented improvement in the e-Governance dimension compared with 2020-2022. UNDP's analysis showed that the score for access to internet rose from 2.04 in 2020 to 2.39 in 2023 on the relevant sub-dimensional scale, while the score for access to e-governance increased from 0.40 to 0.48. Nearly 80 percent of PAPI respondents in 2023 reported internet access at home, compared with 31 percent in 2016. These trends matter because a public innovation strategy increasingly depends on citizens' ability to connect with administrative systems, access information, and use digital channels [22, 23].

5.2. The contradiction: capacity is improving faster than usage, transparency, and responsiveness

The more difficult question is whether these improvements amount to institutionalized public sector innovation. Here the evidence is more sobering.

First, citizen uptake of digital services remains limited relative to policy ambition. UNDP's 2024 review of 63 provincial online service portals found that, as of July 2024, only 17 percent of administrative requests were submitted online. Even more striking, PAPI-based evidence shows that only 7.6 percent of citizens used provincial e-service portals, with just 1,680 out of 18,919 valid respondents reporting such use. These figures indicate that digital-government supply has expanded faster than effective citizen demand, raising the risk of false positives if measurement focuses on system availability rather than actual usage [22, 24].

Second, responsiveness remains weak. UNDP's review of e-governance performance noted that while internet access and online information improved, the sub-dimension measuring authorities' responsiveness stayed persistently low from 2020 to 2023. This matters because genuine innovation should reduce not only transaction time but also feedback frictions. A digitized but non-responsive portal constitutes partial reform rather than mature innovation [23].

Third, transparency routines remain shallow. A 2024 review of district budget disclosure found that fewer than half of districts published budget documents. Only 20.1 percent disclosed the 2023 performance report, and 21.1 percent disclosed the 2024 draft budget estimate. Timeliness was even weaker, with just 8.2 percent publishing the 2023 report on time and 13.6 percent disclosing the 2024 estimate on time. These are not merely transparency deficits; they are measurement deficits, since without reliable disclosure the state cannot generate credible feedback loops linking reform initiatives to observable outcomes [27].

Fourth, citizen concern data show that governance quality is still judged through substantive vulnerabilities rather than administrative modernization alone. In the 2024 PAPI survey, corruption was identified as the top concern (22.58 percent), followed by poverty and hunger (14.2 percent) and employment (12.64 percent). Although the share of households reporting poor economic conditions fell to 10.2 percent—the lowest since 2019—this juxtaposition suggests that macroeconomic improvement has not eliminated insecurity. Administrative innovation must therefore be assessed by its capacity to reduce lived vulnerability, not merely by the introduction of new systems [25, 26].

Fifth, social protection and environmental resilience remain closely tied to governance performance. The 2024 PAPI survey reported that only 29 percent of respondents had social insurance, while nearly 40 percent were directly affected by extreme weather events. UNDP also noted that 65 percent of respondents prioritized environmental protection over economic growth, rising to 75 percent in provinces hit by the super typhoon. These findings broaden the scope of PSI: meaningful innovation in Vietnam must extend beyond administrative digitization to encompass risk management, social protection, and climate adaptation [25].

Together, these observations underscore that institutionalized PSI requires more than technological deployment. It demands integration of usage, responsiveness, transparency, citizen trust, and resilience into the measurement architecture.

5.3. Interpreting the evidence: three structural bottlenecks

The assembled evidence points to three structural bottlenecks that constrain the institutionalization of public sector innovation in Vietnam.

The first is institutional legalism. Public administration remains highly rule-bound and compliance-oriented. While this provides stability, it restricts iterative

experimentation. In such environment, failed experimentation is often perceived as liability rather than organizational learning, reinforcing procedural conformity and discouraging measured risk-taking. Comparative literature suggests that this form of legalism systematically undermines innovation capacity, particularly adaptive and anticipatory forms [8].

The second bottleneck is fragmented data architecture. Vietnam maintains multiple performance and reform indicators—digital capacity relevant to EGDI, service satisfaction through SIPAS, citizen experience via PAPI, and various administrative-reform metrics—but these remain loosely integrated. Policymakers thus observe isolated "islands" of performance without a coherent view of the innovation system. The absence of interoperable and analytically linked data reduces the state's ability to distinguish reforms that improve outcomes from those that remain symbolic, and to identify persistent bottlenecks.

The third bottleneck is weak conversion from administrative effort to citizen adoption. This is perhaps the most critical finding. Innovation capacity is not exhausted by government-side investment. Low rates of provincial e-service portal usage, persistently weak online responsiveness, and shallow disclosure practices indicate that Vietnam's challenge lies increasingly in conversion: translating formal modernization into citizen uptake, trust, and observable value.

In summary, these bottlenecks highlight that institutionalized PSI requires not only technological deployment and administrative effort but also systemic conditions that enable experimentation, data integration, and genuine citizen adoption.

5.4. A diagnostic conclusion

Vietnam should therefore be understood as a state with significant but incomplete PSI capability. It possesses enough digital and administrative momentum to move beyond pilot-stage reform, but it has not yet institutionalized the measurement systems needed to manage innovation as a strategic portfolio. This diagnosis supports the central argument of the article: Vietnam does not need a simple import of foreign metrics. It needs a layered, context-sensitive architecture that measures both innovation efforts and the institutional conditions that determine whether those efforts generate public value (Table 3).

Table 3

Selected diagnostic evidence for public-sector innovation in Viet Nam*

Indicator	Latest evidence used in research papers	Interpretation for PSI measurement
UN EGDI	Viet Nam reached EGDI 0.7709 and rank 71 in 2024, up from rank 86 in 2022	Digital-government capacity is improving materially
World Bank GTMI	GTMI score 0.68 in 2022; Group B in 2025	GovTech maturity is significant but not yet extensive
SIPAS	Average score 83.94% in 2024, up 1.28 percentage points from 2023	Citizen-perceived service quality has improved, but this is not yet a full PSI metric

End of Table 3

Indicator	Latest evidence used in research papers	Interpretation for PSI measurement
PAPI e-governance	Access to internet sub-score rose from 2.04 (2020) to 2.39 (2023); access to e-governance from 0.40 to 0.48	Enabling digital access improved, but responsiveness remains weaker
Portal uptake	Only 17% of full-service provincial administrative requests were submitted online as of July 2024; only 7.6% of citizens used provincial e-service portals in 2023	Supply of digital services is growing faster than citizen adoption
Budget transparency	Only 20.1% of districts published the 2023 annual budget performance report; 21.1% disclosed the 2024 draft budget estimate	Transparency and disclosure routines remain too weak to support mature innovation learning
Citizen concerns	Corruption was cited by 22.58% of respondents in 2024; poverty and hunger by 14.2%; jobs by 12.64%	Innovation must be assessed against substantive governance and welfare challenges
Risk and resilience	Only 29% of respondents had social insurance; nearly 40% reported direct impact from extreme weather in the past year	PSI in Viet Nam must include adaptive capacity, inclusion, and resilience, not only digitization

**Source: compiled by the authors (2026)*

6. The PSI-VN Framework: A Context-Sensitive Architecture for Measuring Public-Sector Innovation

6.1. Design principles

The proposed PSI-VN framework rests on five interlinked principles. It emphasizes multidimensionality, recognizing that innovation in Vietnam's public sector occurs through diverse channels—services, processes, organizations, policies, and technologies—and cannot be reduced to a single index. It is public-value oriented, assessing innovation not only by efficiency gains but also by its contribution to legitimacy, equity, usability, and resilience. It requires institutional feasibility, ensuring that indicators are ambitious enough to guide reform yet realistic within Vietnam's current data environment, so that ministries and provinces can operationalize them rather than treat them symbolically. It balances comparability with adaptation, maintaining conceptual alignment with OECD, UN, and World Bank models while incorporating dimensions salient to Vietnam, such as legal permissibility, transparency routines, and citizen uptake. Finally, it insists on strategic use, positioning the framework as a governance tool to help central and local agencies identify where innovation is emerging, where it is blocked, and what capacities remain absent, rather than as a decorative ranking exercise.

6.2. The 5 x 5 architecture

The PSI-VN framework integrates five innovation domains—service, process, organizational, policy, and technological innovation—with five measurement dimensions—inputs and enablers, processes and implementation quality, outputs

and deliverables, outcomes and public value, and learning, collaboration, and diffusion—yielding a 25-cell matrix. The analytical strength of this design lies in its ability to prevent category errors by situating innovation within a structured grid. For example, a province may demonstrate strong technological inputs but weak service outcomes, or a ministry may initiate numerous process reforms yet show limited diffusion and learning. Rather than asking abstractly whether an organization is innovative, the framework directs attention to where innovation occurs, what supports it, and what it produces, thereby enabling a more precise and actionable assessment of public sector innovation.

6.3. Illustrative indicators

For service innovation, relevant inputs include digital-service budgets, user-experience design capacity, and staff training in service redesign; processes involve integration, one-stop workflow restructuring, and end-to-end digitalization; outputs comprise redesigned services and digitized high-frequency procedures; outcomes are reflected in satisfaction, uptake, reduced processing time, and lower compliance costs; and learning is captured through feedback loops, complaint resolution, and replication across provinces. For process innovation, inputs such as interoperability infrastructure and review teams support simplification, coordination, and back-office integration; outputs include shortened or merged procedures; outcomes reduce administrative burden and corruption opportunities; and learning is advanced through standardization, documentation, and diffusion. Organizational innovation relies on leadership mandates, innovation teams, talent mobility, and skills investment; processes emphasize cross-functional work and autonomy; outputs generate new routines and structures; outcomes improve decision cycles, coordination, and problem-solving; and learning occurs through reviews, repositories, and experimentation incentives. Policy innovation requires analytical capacity, data access, and sandbox structures; processes involve experimentation, consultation, and evidence review; outputs include piloted instruments and revised regulations; outcomes strengthen target achievement and distributive impact; and learning depends on evaluation and adaptation. Finally, technological innovation builds on infrastructure, cybersecurity, cloud readiness, identity systems, and data governance; processes include interoperability, API use, model governance, and agile procurement; outputs deliver platforms and analytic tools; outcomes enhance usage, reliability, and transparency; and learning is sustained through monitoring, upgrades, and cross-agency reuse.

6.4. Why a separate dimension for learning and diffusion is indispensable

Many public-sector measurement systems fail because they observe adoption but not institutional learning. A ministry can implement a pilot, but if the lessons are not documented, compared, and diffused, the innovation remains isolated. Conversely, one failed pilot can still be valuable if it improves institutional knowledge. For this reason, the final PSI-VN dimension focuses explicitly on collaboration, learning, and diffusion [13, 14, 15, 16, 17].

This dimension also helps align the framework with OECD OPSI's strategic emphasis. Enhancement innovations can be measured through service and process improvements; mission innovations require cross-sector collaboration and outcome tracking; adaptive innovations require response and learning speed; anticipatory innovations require scenario capability and strategic experimentation. A learning dimension makes these different forms more visible [14, 15, 16].

6.5. Governance uses of the framework

The PSI-VN framework can be applied coherently across three levels of governance. At the central level, it enables the Government, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Government Office, and digital-transformation agencies to construct a unified national architecture for innovation monitoring, replacing fragmented reform metrics with a layered dashboard built on the 5 × 5 model. At the sectoral level, ministries can tailor the framework to their substantive domains—for instance, health may emphasize service, process, and technological innovation, while environmental agencies may prioritize policy, mission-oriented, and anticipatory innovation. At the provincial level, the framework supports benchmarking that is more nuanced than generic administrative rankings, identifying whether bottlenecks lie in data infrastructure, organizational capability, transparency, uptake, or cross-agency coordination. Importantly, the PSI-VN framework does not replace existing indicators such as SIPAS or PAPI; rather, it organizes them within a broader innovation logic while adding currently unmeasured elements, thereby enhancing both coherence and analytical depth (Table 4).

Table 4

PSI-VN: illustrative 5 x 5 indicator architecture*

Innovation domain	Inputs / enablers	Processes	Outputs	Outcomes / public value	Learning / diffusion
Service innovation	Service-design budget; digital skills; user-research capacity	Workflow redesign; integration of one-stop services	New or redesigned services; end-to-end digital services	Higher take-up; lower waiting time; greater user satisfaction	Feedback loops; complaint resolution; replication
Process innovation	Interoperability tools; procedural review teams	Administrative simplification; cross-agency coordination	Merged procedures; reduced steps; shared databases	Lower burden; lower petty corruption risk; faster handling	Documentation of process lessons; standard setting
Organizational innovation	Leadership mandate; innovation units; staff mobility	Cross-functional teams; delegated decision rights	New routines; collaborative structures; project governance	Better coordination; faster decisions; improved problem-solving	After-action reviews; knowledge repositories; peer learning
Policy innovation	Analytical capacity; access to administrative data; sandbox support	Pilots; consultation; evidence review; adaptive revision	New instruments; missions; revised regulations	Improved target achievement; reduced implementation failure	Evaluation quality; structured policy adaptation
Technological innovation	Cloud, digital ID, cybersecurity, data governance	APIs; interoperability; AI governance; agile procurement	Platforms deployed; analytics tools; reusable components	Reliable services; greater transparency; higher usage	Monitoring actual use; upgrading; cross-agency reuse

**Source: developed by the authors (2026)*

7. Discussion: Why Vietnam Needs Adaptation, Not Transplantation

7.1. Theoretical implications

The core analytical finding of this paper is that Vietnam's challenge is not the absence of reform, but the absence of an integrated measurement grammar for reform as innovation. These finding places the country in an increasingly common position among middle-income states: reform activity is visible, digital investments are significant, and citizen-facing improvements can be observed, yet the state still lacks a sufficiently integrated system for identifying what kinds of innovation are occurring, which of them create value, and what institutional conditions permit their diffusion.

From a theoretical standpoint, the Vietnam case supports three broader propositions in the PSI literature. First, public-sector innovation is deeply context-bound. Survey-based models, strategic-intent models, and digital maturity models all capture valid aspects of PSI, but each rests on institutional assumptions that travel imperfectly. Vietnam's combination of hierarchical coordination, strong political steering, uneven local capability, and still-fragmented data architecture means that the operational meaning of innovation is shaped by institutional fit. This reinforces the argument that PSI metrics must be designed for use cases, not merely copied from existing templates.

Second, digital progress is necessary but not sufficient. Vietnam's EGDI and GTMI progress matters, but the citizen-uptake and transparency evidence shows why digital capacity alone cannot be equated with innovation maturity. This supports a more general claim: digital-government indexes should be treated as innovation enablers embedded within a broader public-value system, not as comprehensive innovation scores [21, 24, 28, 29].

Third, citizen-centered evidence is indispensable for PSI measurement. PAPI-type evidence on usage, vulnerability, and governance experience provides a corrective to official performance narratives. In the public sector, unlike in many private-market settings, successful innovation cannot be inferred from internal roll-out alone. Value must be co-observed through user experience, uptake, trust, and problem resolution [22, 25].

7.2. Why transplantation fails

Mechanical transplantation of international PSI frameworks into Vietnam would likely fail for four structural reasons. The first is legal-institutional asymmetry: advanced systems assume environments where experimentation is protected, whereas in Vietnam legal uncertainty and accountability pressures foster risk aversion, turning innovation metrics into compliance rituals rather than genuine experimentation. The second is data asymmetry: international models presuppose interoperable administrative data and stable statistical routines, yet Vietnam's data integration across administrative, transparency, and citizen-experience systems remains limited, making high-frequency standardized indicators unrealistic. The third is incentive asymmetry: performance management often rewards measurable improvements but not learning from partial failure, so if measurement is perceived as surveillance, officials rationally avoid innovation; PSI metrics must therefore be embedded in incentive-compatible designs. The fourth is demand-side asymmetry: low citizen uptake of digital portals and uneven responsiveness show that supply does not automatically translate into use, meaning measurement must capture

adoption and conversion as well as provision. Taken together, these asymmetries underscore the need for a framework tailored to Vietnam's institutional realities rather than imported wholesale [8].

7.3. A strategic adaptation agenda for Vietnam

The appropriate response to these asymmetries is strategic adaptation, which suggests at least five policy directions. First, Vietnam should establish a formal legal basis for controlled experimentation in selected domains of public administration. Sector-specific sandboxes in areas such as social-service delivery, licensing, digital identity, or integrated local services would create measurable spaces for innovation without requiring broad deregulation. Second, the government should construct an integrated PSI data architecture that links existing indicator streams—EGDI, GTMI, SIPAS, PAPI, and transparency reviews—through shared identifiers, common reporting logic, and periodic synthesis, thereby transforming fragmented evidence into a coherent dashboard. Third, uptake and usability metrics must be elevated to the same status as deployment metrics, since digital availability does not equate to digital success; mature measurement should track completion rates, repeat use, dropout points, complaint resolution, and user segmentation. Fourth, transparency should be treated as a core innovation variable, with disclosure routines embedded into both process quality and public-value outcomes, ensuring that modernization is substantive rather than procedural. Fifth, PSI must be explicitly linked to resilience and inclusion, addressing corruption, social protection, climate adaptation, and service reliability. In short, a serious innovation agenda for Vietnam must align technological and administrative modernization with developmental and distributive priorities, ensuring that innovation is both measurable and meaningful [24, 25, 27, 30].

8. Conclusion and Implications

This paper addressed three central questions: which models dominate international PSI measurement, what comparative evidence reveals about Vietnam's current position, and how a context-sensitive architecture can be designed. The findings suggest that Vietnam has advanced sufficiently in digital government and administrative reform for innovation measurement to be both feasible and urgent. The challenge is no longer the absence of systems but the fragmentation of progress, which produces partial visibility and limits governance capacity.

International literature confirms that no single metric can capture the full reality of public-sector innovation. Survey-based indicators, strategic-intent frameworks, and digital maturity indexes each contribute distinct insights. Vietnam's evidence reflects this pluralist conclusion: progress is visible in EGDI, GTMI, and satisfaction measures, yet weaknesses persist in uptake, responsiveness, transparency, social protection, and climate adaptation. These gaps mark the distance between administrative modernization and institutionalized innovation. The PSI-VN framework contributes theoretically by combining five innovation domains with five measurement dimensions, and practically by showing how existing Vietnamese and international data can be organized into a coherent architecture rather than treated as isolated reform statistics.

Three implications follow. For policy, innovation measurement should be embedded in modernization strategy, with legal protection for pilots, stronger

interoperability, and explicit focus on uptake and public value. For administration, ministries and provinces should move from reporting activities to measuring innovation portfolios—types pursued, capacities supporting them, and outcomes generated. For research, the next step is empirical operationalization through pilot data collection and validation studies. Despite limitations—reliance on secondary data and uneven comparability—the conclusion is clear: Vietnam's future in public-sector innovation depends less on announcing reforms than on measuring innovation as a real capability that links strategy, institutions, data, uptake, learning, and public value. Building such capability is integral to constructing a more adaptive developmental state.

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MEASURING PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION: FROM INTERNATIONAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS TO AN ADAPTATION STRATEGY FOR VIETNAM

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This study presents a comprehensive framework for measuring public sector innovation (PSI) in Vietnam, integrating international theoretical models with evidence from the country's unique governance context. Drawing on the public value tradition, post-New Public Management governance theory, and mission-oriented and anticipatory innovation frameworks,

the paper argues that PSI measurement must extend beyond simplistic input-output metrics to encompass organizational capabilities, institutional incentives, citizen-centered outcomes, and long-term adaptive capacity. Employing qualitative comparative institutional analysis and secondary data synthesis, the study critically examines global PSI measurement approaches, including the Oslo Manual adapted for the public sector, the Nordic MEPIN initiative, OECD OPSI's innovation facets, the European public sector innovation scoreboards, and the World Bank's GovTech Maturity Index. These frameworks are triangulated with Vietnam-specific evidence, such as the United Nations E-Government Development Index, the World Bank's GTMI, PAPI citizen-experience surveys, SIPAS, and budget-disclosure assessments. Findings reveal that while Vietnam has achieved notable progress in digital government and service delivery, significant challenges persist in institutional legalism, fragmented data systems, weak transparency practices, and limited citizen adoption of digital services. The paper introduces the PSI-VN framework, a context-sensitive 5x5 measurement architecture that integrates five innovation domains with five performance dimensions. This framework emphasizes strategic adaptation over direct transplantation of international models, advocating for legal sandboxing, interoperable data systems, and incentive-compatible administrative reforms to enhance Vietnam's PSI capabilities. The study concludes that institutionalizing PSI measurement is critical for Vietnam's transition to a more adaptive and resilient developmental state.

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