

Managerial Consequences of Governance Constraints in Bangladesh's Public Institutions: A Qualitative Study

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Article History

Received: 09.12.2025

Accepted: 06.02.2026

Published: 10.02.2026

1. Abstract: The performance of the public sector is based not just on formal governance formations but also on the way in which governance conditions influence the manner in which managers behave, act as leaders, and decisions are made within organizations. Governance weaknesses in developing countries tend to act as limits to managerial discretion, affecting the way public managers manage, distribute resources as well as pursue performance goals. Although there have been far-reaching governance reform efforts, few studies have investigated these dynamics on a managerial approach in Bangladesh. The given study takes the form of a qualitative multiple-case study to identify the influence of the governance conditions on managerial behavior in the context of Bangladesh on the setting of the public institutions. Based on semi-structured interviews with public managers in each of the ministries, regulatory agencies and local government agencies, along with document analysis, the study uses reflexive thematic analysis to determine the predominant trends in managerial reactions to governance constraints. The results indicate that politicization, lax accountability mechanisms, rigidity in the bureaucracy, and limitation of capacity, and informal governance practices systematically reform managerial behaviour. Those situations contaminate risk-averse, compliance-based management, undermine strategic leadership, suppress performance-based management, and narrow innovation and value creation to the populace. Most managers do not serve as organizational leaders but instead as deciphers who go through the political pressure and procedural restrictions. The research also makes a contribution to the body of micro level, situation-specific evidence on the transformation of the governance conditions into managerial practices in a developing-country setting. It concludes that reforms in governance, to increase managerial autonomy, accountability, discretion and capacity, are necessary to address long term sustainable improvements in public sector performance through the ability of managers to be effective leaders, and creators of public value.

Keywords: Public Management, Managerial Behavior, Governance Constraints, Leadership, Bangladesh.

2. INTRODUCTION

Performance, service quality, and value creation to the populace in the public sector organizations are major functions that are motivated by managerial effectiveness. Translating policy goals into operational outputs, inspiring personnel, distributing resources and addressing needs of citizens are the tasks of the public managers. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of their implementation of these functions is influenced by the governance setting organizing managerial discretion, accountability, incentives, and authority. Consequently, governance influences the performance of the public sector mainly through its implications on the managerial conduct but not solely through the institutional design (Bryson *et al.*, 2023; Moynihan *et al.*, 2022).

In most contexts of developing countries, governance restraints do not allow autonomy to managers and deter performance-oriented leadership. Risk-averse and compliance-oriented behaviour tends to be encouraged by personnel systems politicization, ineffective accountability, inflexible bureaucratic rules, unequal managerial capabilities, and the prioritization of innovation and strategic management (Andrews *et al.*, 2023; OECD, 2023). Instead of promoting the idea

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CITATION: Shefat E Rubby (2026). Managerial Consequences of Governance Constraints in Bangladesh's Public Institutions: A Qualitative Study. *South Asian Res J Bus Manag*, 8(1), 27-35. 27

of managing by results, these environments do not allow managers to be leaders and adjust organization practices to evolving needs.

The country of Bangladesh offers a very specific context in which one can study these dynamics. Even with a long-term economic growth and frequent changes in administration, the pockets of political interference, ineffective performance management, a hierarchical decision-making process, and a high level of informality remain the elements under which the activities of the public managers are performed (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024; Transparency International Bangladesh, 2024). Despite introducing reforms, including digitalization, audit systems, and formal frameworks of appraisals, little impact on the day-to-day managerial practice has been reduced.

Available literatures on the Bangladesh public sector are mostly on the indicators of governance, institutional flaws and the outcomes of the reforms in the macro level. Although useful, this body of literature provides little understanding of the experiences of governance constraints and management of such in the context of the public managers in organizations. This is a gap that is very crucial in terms of management. The performance outcomes are not directly generated by governance; it affects the managerial decision-making, leadership approaches, and performance orientation, which subsequently impact the organizational outcomes (Moynihan and Pandey, 2023).

This research addresses the managerial implications of governance constraints in the public institutions in Bangladesh in response to the call of micro-level and context-sensitive research on the subject of public management. It adopts the qualitative multiple-case study methodology to examine how politicization, accountability abuse, bureaucratic inflexibility, capacity, and informality influence managerial performance orientation and behavior. The study advances public management theory in that it places the analytical emphasis on the managerial implications of governance structures rather than the structure itself and provides practical implications in terms of designing the reforms, which would allow effective management of the public sector.

3. OBJECTIVES

The following are some of the objectives of the current research. Such goals are developed to aid in thorough analysis of the issues of governance and their impacts on the managerial practice. They are also used to come up with significant managerial and policymaking implications.

- To identify and explain key governance challenges
- To understand how governance challenges affect managerial practice
- To develop practical managerial and policy implications

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The practice of public management in Bangladesh is one that exists within institutional restraint which has a strong influence on managerial discretion, autonomy and leadership efficacy. According to current studies in the field of public management, political influence, centralized control, and weak accountability systems limit the capacity of managers to make a strategic decision, control staff members and concentrate on performance outcomes (World Bank, 2024; 2025).

Politicization of human resource management especially influences managerial autonomy. The decisions on recruitment, promotion, and posting are also highly likely to be politicized, which restricts the authority of managers over the staff and reduces the effectiveness of performance management based on merit (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024; Zafarullah and Huque, 2025). This environment promotes compliance-based management as opposed to innovation and result-based leadership.

The structures of accountability in the Bangladesh state institutions are still quite procedural and conservative. The main motivation that drives managers is to act in accordance and not to be contentious instead of achieving better service delivery. Despite the increase in transparency caused by digital reforms, e-procurement has had little influence on managerial incentives because of poor monitoring and poor enforcement (TIB, 2024; Khorana, 2024).

Strategic leadership is also limited by frequent changes in leadership, political influence and instability in the institution. They promote short term, transactional forms of management and discourage long term planning, which restricts the emergence of performance oriented public organizations (Asian Development Bank, 2024).

Research Gap

The majority of the literature on the Bangladesh public sector is based on governance indicators, surveys, and policy reports, with no in-depth perspective on the experience and management of governance constraints among the public managers of the organization (World Bank, 2025; TIB, 2024). The qualitative, management oriented research that seeks to explore how managers balance their political pressures, accountability requirements as well as leadership constraints in

their day to day practice is evidently lacking. This paper fills this gap by examining the managerial implications of the governance limitations in the public institutions in Bangladesh.

5. Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on a management-focused theoretical approach to analyze the impact of governance limitations on the managerial behavior and performance in Bangladesh in terms of its involvement in the public institutions.

Agency Theory describes the way in which the lack of accountability and weak oversight distort the incentives of managers to take risks and act in a manner that minimizes risk and rewards compliance as opposed to performance-based management (Jensen and Meckling, 1976; Waterman and Meier, 1998).

The Institutional Theory underlines the influence of formal rules and entrenched norms that compel managers to conformity instead of innovation and restrict managerial discretion even in the context of reforms (North, 1990; Scott, 2014).

New Public Management puts more focus on performance and leadership, yet under restricted conditions managerial discretion, resources, and authority are still limited, where NPM tools can be applied as procedural compliance instead of performance management (Hood, 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017).

Public Value Theory views managers as value-creating actors and thus they have to negotiate between political and institutional restrictions to maintain quality of service, legitimacy and trust (Moore, 1995; Bryson *et al.*, 2017).

Combined, these views indicate how the governance limitations can be converted to the limitations on managers, adaptive strategies, and social value on the ground in the Bangladesh public sector (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024; World Bank, 2025).

Combined, the theories conceptualize governance less as an outcome variable but as a managerial environment that frames behaviour as well as discretion and performance orientation of leadership.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The proposed study will adopt a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore issues associated with governance and their management implications in the Bangladesh public institutions. The qualitative approach that will be utilized in the research entails a case-based method that is suitable when addressing complex organizational processes, managerial decision-making, and contextual impact on governance practices in a real administrative situation (Creswell and Creswell, 2023; Balbastre-Benavent, 2024; Eisenhardt, 1989).

6.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The sample was sampled using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to recruit senior, mid and field level public managers and administrators in ministries, regulatory agencies, and local government agencies (Patton, 2015). The method of collecting data consisted of 25-35 semi-structured interviews and analysis of organizational materials (policy directives, audit reports, and administrative guidelines) to facilitate data triangulation and increase the analytical strength (Bowen, 2009; Balbastre-Benavent, 2024).

6.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted on the basis of the reflexive thematic analysis method, as it focuses on repetitive coding and the formation of topical themes based on active interaction with the data and the analytical tool of the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Ahmed *et al.*, 2025). The method allows discovering trends and knowledge regarding the institutional limitations and management reaction within the context of the cases (Sun, 2025).

6.4 Trustworthiness and Ethics

The triangulation, member checking, and audit trails have helped to improve research rigor in line with qualitative requirements in management research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Levitt *et al.*, 2018). All participants were informed and provided for with an informed consent and the confidentiality and anonymity were ensured during the research.

7. FINDINGS

This section summarizes the key themes identified out of qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interview with senior and mid-level public managers, focus group interview with frontline officials and policy and audit document reviews. The results show that the issues of governance within the public institutions of Bangladesh are so fundamentally embedded within the institutions and directly affect the behavior of the managers, the efficiency of leadership and the

performance of the organization. They identified five thematic categories that are related and they include politicization of administration, lack of accountability, bureaucratic inflexibility, limited capacity as well as informal governance practices.

7.1 Politicization and Loss of Managerial Autonomy

Numerous respondents always stressed the fact that political intervention influences decision-making in a state institution. Political considerations often affect the existence of recruitment, promotion, transfer and procurement decisions as opposed to merit and organizational performance.

As observed by senior managers, appointments that are politically motivated usually subject the leadership to people who have low managerial abilities, thus compromising professionalism. As one director stated:

“Even when a manager is technically competent, he is not able to work on his own when administrative rules do not address political directives.”

This politicization reduces the autonomy of the managers and builds risk aversion behavior where the managers are more concerned about political loyalty as opposed to the organizational objectives. This discourages strategic planning, performance management and innovation thus stagnating service delivery.

7.2 Accountability Deficits and Managerial Incentives

The second overall theme is lack of proper accountability mechanisms. The formal systems are annual performance appraisals, audit procedures and monitoring units, but despite their existence, the respondents stated that those are hardly practiced in reality.

Managers complained that there are minimal penalties imposed to poor performers, and high performers are not well rewarded. This leads to low motivation, low initiative as well as toleration of inefficiency. One of the middle-ranking officers said:

“We do have performance indicators, but nobody is evaluated seriously. You are either working or not, your career goes on.”

The absence of accountability of meaning does not promote management by results, and undermines organization discipline. It also eliminates motivation towards ethical leadership and improvement.

7.3 Procedural Constraints on Managerial Decision-Making

The other important conclusion is that procedural controls that are too numerous seriously limit managerial performance. The methods used in decision-making are long, hierarchical and rule-based, and as such, there is minimal managerial discretion in decision making.

Even small decisions, which managers outlined, demand several approvals, thus, leading to delays in the implementation of projects and provision of services to the people. This also creates a stiff framework that does not allow adaptive leadership as well as constraining the responsiveness of managers towards the needs of the citizens.

The results indicate that the role of managers, as problem-solvers, is minimized as they are rule-followers and leaderships in the public sector are strategic and innovative.

7.4 Managerial Skill Gaps and Leadership Limitations

There were also severe gaps in managerial capacity that were identified in the study. Most managers are not trained in the contemporary management methods, in terms of strategy, financial management, human resource management, and digital management.

Respondents pointed out the fact that promotions have been mostly done on seniority and not on competence. This has led to the emergence of numerous leaders who are trained technically in administration and are lacking managerial and leadership skills. This undermines the organization coordination, motivation of employees and service delivery.

This problem worsens further due to the lack of systematic leadership development programs which restrict professionalization of public management.

7.5 Informal Practices and Managerial Coping Strategies

Personal networks, unofficial decisions and informal networks are important aspects in the functioning of the public institutions. According to the respondents, individual relationships tend to influence decision making as opposed to formal rules.

Even though such informal practices are sometimes useful in assisting managers to overcome bureaucracies, transparency, fairness, and institutional trust are eroded. The informal governance gives unequal access to the public services and also undermines ethical standards in organizations.

Such a two-level structure formal rules and informal practices, generates uncertainty and makes it difficult to make decisions in a managerial position.

7.6 Managerial Implications of Governance Challenges

In all the themes the results show that the governance weaknesses directly influence the managerial behavior. Managers get risk-averse, compliance-oriented, and externally dependent. Innovation, strategic leadership and performance orientation are repressed.

Rather than being leaders of organizations, most of the public managers serve as agents in between the political powers and bureaucracies. This curtails their capacity to enhance efficiency, motivate employees and provide citizen-based services.

The results indicate that the governance issues within the public institutions in Bangladesh are not an administrative issue but a management constraint. Politicization, poor accountability, bureaucratic inflexibility, capacity voids and informal governance converge to diminish the performance of public managers and undermine organizational performance. These problems form an order in which formal change is on paper, but there is little practical managerial discretion and performance-style governance.

8. DISCUSSION

This discussion contextualizes and explains the qualitative results of the governance issues and management implication in the Bangladesh public institutions into the wider academic and empirical literature based on recent studies and governance studies. Each of the finding themes is connected to scholarly and policy evidence to demonstrate the ways in which the experiences of the public managers reflect structural governance problems and limitation of the public sector management.

8.1 Politicization of Public Management

The issue of political interference in the recruitment, transfers, promotions, and day-to-day decision-making is still rife in the public administration of Bangladesh. This kind of politicization undermines a meritocratic HRM approach and undermines the professional neutrality of civil servants (Biswas and Rahman, 2018; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024; Huque and Zafarullah, 2023; Jahan and Shahan, 2008; Woodhouse *et al.*, 2025; Zafarullah and Kaiser, 2025). There is also comparative evidence that politicized personnel systems correlate with various forms of bureaucratic attitudes and behavior- highlighting the role in which politics will distort incentives within administrations and the alignment of organizational interests with external political interests instead of performance outcome (Suzuki & Hur, 2024).

This is in line with factual evidences that the politics-bureaucracy relationship in Bangladesh institutionalizes political pressure which dilute independence and bureaucratic effectiveness, as politicians and civil servants have incompatible goals and interests (Zafarullah and Abdullah Kaiser, 2025). This is also the reflection of principal-agent challenges as the politicians and the civil servants in Bangladesh have incompatible goals and interests that make the policy implementation less effective. Such dynamics undermine administrative professionalism and render managers risk-averse as is the case in this study.

Reform should embrace personnel systems grounded on merit and institutional incentives that isolate managerial decision-making to partisan influences to further increase managerial autonomy and organizational performance.

8.2 Weak Accountability and Performance Management Systems

There is no sacrifice of meaningful accountability-reward systems, which is indicative of large gaps in the governance mechanisms in Bangladesh. The performance appraisals, audit mechanisms, and monitoring units are on paper but not implemented, which does not encourage performance orientation and ethical leadership.

This finding is reflected by more general studies that dictate that the institutions of governance in Bangladesh have restricted functional autonomy and lack of functional accountability mechanisms (Sarker, 2009; Hasan and Hasan, 2025). The inability of the systemic governance structures to prosecute the public managers leads to stagnation of the performance and organizational inertia.

These lacks in accountability are exacerbated by the fact that the country is among the most corrupt nations in the world with the highest levels of corruption in the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (Bangladesh ranked 151/180) with a score of 23, meaning it is lowly accountable and high risk of unethical conduct within the public sector (TIB, 2025).

Enhancing accountability systems such as independent oversight organs and effective performance management systems are important towards making sure that the performance of managers is consistent with the organizational objectives.

8.3 Bureaucratic Rigidity and Procedural Complexity

The effectiveness of managers in Bangladesh state administration is usually limited by the rigidity of bureaucracy and institutions complexity that focuses on procedural control rather than adaptive decision-making (Rahman *et al.*, 2024). Hierarchical procedures, slow decisions, and limited discretion bind managers thus detracting responsiveness and quality of service delivery.

The culture of bureaucracy and its embedded bureaucratic inertia has risen as a major obstacle to the effective public sector reform in Bangladesh, and systemic interests and political factors have reinforced the culture of bureaucratic inflexibility and hindered responsiveness and innovation in service delivery (Zafarullah & Kaiser, 2025).

The reforms in the governance need to include making the administrative processes more lean and delegating power to efficient managers to facilitate quicker and more responsive service provision to the people.

8.4 Capacity and Skill Deficiencies in Public Management

The qualitative evidence on the skills deficiency of managers is reminiscent of research that bureaucratic capacity challenges continue to be a major obstacle to governance in Bangladesh with a lot of managers not being trained on modern skills in public management and recruitment and promotions made on the basis of seniority rather than competencies (Zafarullah and Kaiser, 2025).

According to recent studies, capacity building plays a crucial role in improving the work of an organization by increasing its coordination, management abilities, and overall service delivery in the situation of the public sector (Saputra *et al.*, 2024).

Leadership will be enhanced by investing in long-term professional growth, training based on performance and developing managerial capacity that will enable institutions of the state, to cope with the complex demands of governance.

8.5 Prevalence of Informal and Network-Based Governance

Characterizing the informal forms of governance in Bangladesh, including its personal networking and unwritten rules that co-exist with the formal one, can harm the transparency, accountability, and equal access to services (Emon, 2025).

Informal governance does not only reduce institutional trust but also gives an opportunity to rent-seek and commit corruption, which strengthens the absence of governance (Biswas and Rahman, 2018). The current empirical evidence reveals that organisations with a weak formal governance tend to lean on the systems of informal networks and practices to allocate resources and resolve conflicts, which subsequently influence the formal institutional trust and promote corrupt and rent-seeking behaviours due to the ambiguity they generate among the public managers (Valdiglesias, 2025). The combination of formal and informal practices results in a lack of clarity among the actors in the formal system of influence and complicates the decision-making process.

This should be reinforced by enhancing the formal forms of governance structures as well as reinforcing the mechanisms of anti-corruption in order to make the people dependent on formal structures.

8.6 Managerial Behavior and Organizational Impact

Institutional inefficiencies, administrative incompetence and partial enforcement of reforms within the public sector are governance weaknesses in Bangladesh, which constrain managerial roles, curtail innovation, and reinforce compliance-oriented behavior among public managers and limit their ability to produce performance improvement and service delivery that prioritizes citizens (Shahiduzzaman *et al.*, 2025).

This is in line with other governance studies that show that an ongoing sense of administration implementation gaps, deeply seated procedural barriers, and institutional frailty blocks administrative modernization in Bangladesh, even decades after restructuring efforts (Hasan and Hasan, 2025; Zafarullah and Kaiser, 2025). These systemic limitations not only limit the effectiveness of the administration but also the effects of citizens and the overall administration.

To sum up, the results emphasize that the problem of governance in the BD public institutions is not an administrative problem on a scale but a problem on a managerial level. The politicization of administration, poor accountability mechanisms, the inflexibility of bureaucracy, shortages in capacity and informality in the routine governance undermine managerial independence, performance orientation, and organizational effectiveness. In order to surmount these barriers, the governance reforms should center on the issues of institutional capacity, accountability, depoliticization of the public management, modernization of procedures, and investment in the abilities of managers.

9. MANAGERIAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results reveal that managerial autonomy, performance orientation, and performance define the performance of the public institutions in Bangladesh that is directly limited by governance deficiencies. The policy reforms must thus emphasize on enhancing the governance conditions that would empower the effective management of the people and not just doing it through formal or procedural reforms.

To begin with, it is important to depoliticize the public management. The recruitment, promotion and transfer systems should be implemented using merit-based factors and institutional safeguards to ensure that the managerial decision making process is not interfered with by political factors. This would improve professionalism as well as managerial accountability.

Second, there should be systems of accountability and performance management that are put in place. Rewards, career advancement and sanctions should be well correlated with performance appraisals. Ethical leadership and result-oriented management can be promoted through strengthening mechanisms of independent oversight.

Third, bureaucracy must be made more flexible, through simplification of procedures and delegation of operations to capable managers. More discretion by the managers would enhance responsiveness, innovation and service delivery.

Lastly, the institutionalization of managerial capacity building should take place. The leadership, strategic management, and digital governance should be trained continuously to provide managers with the ability to operate as the organizational leaders and creators of the public value.

Generally, performance of the public sector in Bangladesh needs governance reforms aimed at increasing meritocracy, accountability, discretion by managers and managerial capacity.

10. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

The proposed research is confined by the qualitative and multiple-case nature of the study, limiting the ability to generalize the results to other cases outside the sample of the research. The discussion is mainly based on the managerial views, which do not represent the perspectives of other stakeholders comprehensively. Moreover, the cross-sectional design does not allow the evaluation of the longitudinal change. To expand the findings, future research must adopt a mixed-method or quantitative research, incorporate several groups of stakeholders, and employ longitudinal or comparative designs.

11. CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates that the issue of governance in the public institutions of Bangladesh, especially politicization, poor accountability, bureaucratic inflexibility, inadequate managerial skills and informal governance is highly institutionalized and directly limits the public managers. The conditions promote compliance oriented and risk averse behavior as well as restrict strategic leadership, innovation, and performance-based management.

In management terms, the results show that governance is a significant factor of effective managerial performance and organizational performance. The key to sustainable change in the management of the public sector hence involves structural reforms in governance in order to enhance the meritocracy, accountability, managerial capacity and institution autonomy, as opposed to merely implementing the formal or technical reform.

This paper proves that the issue of governance within the Bangladesh public institutions is not only important as it weakens the institutions but it is a systematic restructuring of the managerial behavior, leadership capacity and performance orientation so that management becomes the focus of the governance reform agenda.

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