

*Artículos científicos*

## **El cambio al populismo en la administración pública en México**

*The change to populism in public administration in Mexico*

*A mudança para o populismo na administração pública no México*

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### **Resumen**

Para el enfoque teórico del institucionalismo histórico, la relación entre el cambio político y el populismo en la administración pública presentaría particularidades en todos los estados. Los diversos factores históricos, sociales y culturales pueden explicar por qué los cambios políticos en México no ocurren de manera abrupta, sino que se desarrollan gradualmente. Esto puede tener un impacto significativo en la democracia y en la formulación de políticas públicas. En particular, este artículo se centra en el cambio político como transformación institucional durante el periodo del gobierno federal 2012-2018 y lo acontecido en el periodo 2018-2023, lo cual constituye un ejemplo de cómo los gobiernos populistas pueden buscar controlar la administración pública para implementar sus políticas sin restricciones. En este sentido, los gobiernos populistas pueden apuntar a estructuras, recursos, personal, normas y relaciones de rendición de cuentas para debilitar a las instituciones existentes y reemplazarlas con nuevas estructuras más afines a su agenda. Por tal motivo, se concluye que esto puede debilitar la integridad y eficacia de la administración pública y erosionar aún más la confianza en las instituciones democráticas. En otras palabras, el cambio político de los gobiernos

populistas tiene una agenda de reforma antipopulistas, lo que significa que buscan socavar las normas y estructuras democráticas que limitan su poder.

**Palabras clave:** cambio organizacional, gobierno, democracia, liderazgo político, liberalismo.

## Abstract

For the theoretical approach of historical institutionalism, the relationship between political change and populism in public administration would present particularities in all States. The various historical, social, and cultural factors can explain why political changes in Mexico do not occur abruptly but develop gradually over time. This can have a significant impact on democracy and public policy making. In particular, the article focuses on political change as an institutional change during the 2012-2018 federal government period and what happened in the 2018-2023 period, presenting the Mexican case as an example of how populist governments can seek to control the administration. public to implement its policies without restrictions. In this sense, populist governments can target structures, resources, personnel, norms, and accountability relationships to weaken existing institutions and replace them with new structures more in tune with their agenda. It concludes by stating that this can weaken the integrity and effectiveness of public administration and further erode confidence in democratic institutions. The political change of populist governments has an anti-populist reform agenda, which means that they seek to undermine the democratic norms and structures that limit their power.

**Keywords:** organizational change, government, democracy, political leadership, liberalism.

## Resumo

Para a abordagem teórica do institucionalismo histórico, a relação entre mudança política e populismo na administração pública apresentaria particularidades em todos os estados. Vários factores históricos, sociais e culturais podem explicar porque é que as mudanças políticas no México não ocorrem abruptamente, mas antes desenvolvem-se gradualmente. Isto pode ter um impacto significativo na democracia e na formulação de políticas públicas. Em particular, este artigo centra-se na mudança política como uma transformação institucional durante o período do governo federal 2012-2018 e no que aconteceu no período 2018-2023, o que constitui um exemplo de como os governos populistas podem procurar controlar a administração pública para implementar as suas políticas sem restrições. Neste

sentido, os governos populistas podem visar estruturas, recursos, pessoal, normas e relações de responsabilização para enfraquecer as instituições existentes e substituí-las por novas estruturas mais alinhadas com a sua agenda. Por esta razão, conclui-se que isto pode enfraquecer a integridade e a eficácia da administração pública e minar ainda mais a confiança nas instituições democráticas. Por outras palavras, a mudança política dos governos populistas tem uma agenda de reformas anti-populistas, o que significa que procuram minar as normas e estruturas democráticas que limitam o seu poder.

**Palavras-chave:** mudança organizacional, governo, democracia, liderança política, liberalismo.

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## Introduction

The Fourth Transformation (4T) in Mexico refers to the set of policies implemented by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador since December 2018 with the purpose of transforming the country's political and social system and combating corruption and inequality. A key component of the 4T is institutional strengthening, which involves the reform of public institutions to consolidate the political and administrative system to reduce the discretion of power, reevaluate the distribution of resources and promote equitable access to public service (Government of Mexico, 2023).

Discretion in the exercise of power and the distribution of resources has been a historical concern in Mexico from the perspective of the 4T. To counter this, a review and reform of laws and regulations related to the exercise of power and public administration has been proposed.

Political changes, driven by the search for greater plurality and political participation, seek to strengthen democracy and guarantee transparency in electoral processes. In this sense, expanding electoral competition is essential to foster a more plural and diverse political system, since this allows the representation of diverse voices and political options in decision-making (Bermeo, 2003). Furthermore, the importance of strengthening the institutions that guarantee electoral transparency through mechanisms that promote accountability, independent electoral observation, access to information and the prevention of corruption in the electoral field is highlighted (Chantale, 2018). This demands the review

and improvement of government structures and administrative processes to ensure transparency, efficiency and equity in decision-making and access to public resources.

However, to fully evaluate the achievements made, it is necessary to consider the context and concrete results of the reforms implemented. That is, it is not enough to analyze political changes or reforms of public organizations in isolation, an evaluation is required that considers the context, the results and the impacts generated. Furthermore, it is essential to support institutional changes with a solid legal framework and promote a culture of accountability and transparency in all spheres of government.

For these reasons, this document offers a comparative review of the changes in the federal public administration during the periods of government in Mexico from 2012-2018 and 2018-2023, with the aim of understanding whether the political change has influenced all the areas of this system, that is, political community, regime, and authority, and whether it can be considered a systemic change.

A new institutional design, aimed at convening and mobilizing the consensus of diverse renewed political forces, should contemplate a series of significant transformations. Some of them are specified below: 1) definitively overcome political populism through the consolidation and advancement of quality democracy and the rule of law, 2) facilitate the emergence and political participation of all interest and ideological groups, 3) continue and rationalize the process of political-administrative decentralization, 4) eradicate clientelism and political patrimonialism, underlining the importance of combating political practices that undermine equity and transparency, which can be achieved through the development and consolidation of a service career professional in public administration, based on merits and competencies, and 5) guarantee the effective division of powers and the submission of all of them and of citizens to the law.

These transformations are just some of those considered for a new institutional design that seeks to consolidate a more democratic, transparent, and fair political system. Likewise, it should be noted that these measures must be the subject of broad consensus and dialogue between political forces and society to ensure their effective and sustainable implementation (Córdova, 2013; Prud'homme, 2014).

On the other hand, it is essential to recognize that informal practices rooted in a society and institutions can persist even after a change of government. These practices, linked to networks of power and clientelism, can transcend political changes. Therefore, it is imperative to address these practices and replace them with formal rules that are recognized, accepted, and followed by all. Change in the institutional context involves strengthening

institutions and establishing mechanisms that promote transparency, accountability, and the rule of law (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

In this sense, the results suggest that rulers in Mexico can initiate administrative reforms with a transformative will at the national level, but sometimes these reforms are not implemented completely or do not achieve the expected results throughout the national territory. This may be due to various factors, such as the lack of continuity in public policies, the resistance of internal or external actors to change, budgetary limitations or lack of technical capacity.

The establishment of a professional career service exemplifies a profound transformation that can require a complex and sustained process. This type of reform consists of the creation of a system based on merits and competencies for the recruitment, selection, promotion, and evaluation phases of personnel in the public administration. To successfully carry out this reform, institutional adjustments, the implementation of objective evaluation processes and the strengthening of the professionalization of the public service are needed.

In addition to this, it should be emphasized that successful administrative reforms usually require a comprehensive and sustained approach over time to promote regulatory and structural changes, and strengthen institutional capacities, foster a service-oriented organizational culture, and establish effective monitoring mechanisms. and evaluation.

Likewise, it is valid to note that some state and municipal governments may face limitations in implementing deep reforms due to various factors, such as budgetary restrictions, lack of political support or lack of technical skills. However, despite these difficulties, certain state governments have made significant progress in administrative reforms and in establishing a professional career service (Dussauge, 2021).

### **Statement of the problem: the institutional change in the public administration of the 4T**

Changes initiated by the federal government starting in December 2018 have shown limitations at the national level; However, the reform proposal can spark public debate and place the issue on the political agenda, although it can also bring multiple benefits. In the first instance, it could generate hope and confidence in the political leadership by evidencing an intention to address existing problems and improve public administration. In fact, the will to change and transformative rhetoric are appreciated by citizens, which can contribute to the legitimacy and popularity of political leaders.

**Table 1.** Areas of government and political party

Government scope	Political party 2016	Political party 2023
Federal	1 PRI	1 MORENA
State	12 PRI	22 MORENA
Municipal	889 PRI	514 MORENA

Source: Own elaboration with data from the Ministry of the Interior (SG) (2023)  
and the National Electoral Institute (INE) (2023)

Table 1 shows that, of the 2,471 municipalities in the Mexican State, the National Regeneration Party (MORENA) governs only 514 in 2023, compared to the 889 of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 2016. This demonstrates how administrative reform within the framework of local political change can represent a significant challenge for institutional design. That is, public administration plays a fundamental role in the functioning of the political system, and efficiency in administrative processes can be decisive for its success.

Now, the reform process in public administration involves several stages, including routinization, which involves establishing new practices and procedures that become daily activities. Over time, these routines can transform into norms and conventions, shaping organizational culture. This culture, defined by shared values, beliefs and behaviors, influences decision making, resource management and interactions with citizens and other entities.

During the reform process, it is crucial to consider the importance of organizational culture and its impact on the implementation of changes at the national level, because if new approaches conflict with existing norms, they are likely to encounter resistance and difficulties in being implemented. fully adopted. Therefore, achieving successful reform involves addressing both the structural and cultural aspects of public administration to foster a change not only in procedures and practices, but also in the mentality embedded in the organization.

Likewise, it is essential to recognize that administrative reform is not a static process, but rather continuous and adaptable as new challenges arise in the political and social environment. Therefore, evaluation and monitoring of results are essential to guarantee effectiveness and adjust if necessary (Cansino, 1995). In this sense, trust and certainty in the institutional context generate positive effects by allowing faster and more effective decisions, supported by reliable standards. In addition, they provide stability and predictability, which promotes efficiency and productivity (Puga, 2021).



This means that trust in government is intrinsically linked to accountability, and when citizens trust in accountability and decision-making based on the public interest, trust in institutions is strengthened and compliance with the law is encouraged. As an example, in 2017, the federal administration had 25.5 % confidence, while in 2023 the 2018-2024 nation project reached 54.1% (table 2).

**Table 2.** Government satisfaction

Administration by area	Confidence level 2017	Confidence level 2023
Federal	25.5 %	54.1 %
State	29.3 %	45.1 %
Municipal	33.3 %	47.1 %

Source: Own elaboration with data from INEGI (2023a, 2023b)

To achieve comprehensive administrative reform, it is imperative to address both structural and cultural elements within the organization. The reorganization of administrative structures and procedures can give a new profile to the organization, but to achieve effective change, a transformation in operating rules and integration between public servants is also required. This means moving beyond superficial modifications and considering how responsible behavior is encouraged and promoted among individuals within the organization. The operation of public administration is not only based on structures and procedures, but also on the attitudes, values and incentives that influence the behavior of public servants.

Establishing clear and transparent rules that promote responsibility, accountability and ethics in administrative functions is essential. This may involve strengthening control mechanisms, promoting transparency and citizen participation, as well as implementing incentive systems that reward good performance and sanction improper conduct. In addition, an organizational culture that values efficiency, professionalism, and public service must be stimulated, as well as promoting the training and development of skills of public servants, encouraging open and collaborative communication in the organization. Only by considering these aspects can we expect a real change in the operation of public administration and in the provision of services to citizens (Pietschmann, 1996).

For these types of reasons, reforms in public organizations, including those of the State, have become a shared concern in many international organizations. In fact, there is a belief that administrative reforms represent a path to change and transform traditional and inefficient organizations into modern, efficient, and highly specialized entities. These reforms seek to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of public organizations through the restructuring and reorganization of processes, structures and

management systems. Focused on achieving greater efficiency in the provision of services and the use of resources, the administrative reforms cover areas such as strategic planning, performance management, talent management, information technology, citizen participation and transparency. In addition, they promote modern management practices, such as results-based management, impact evaluation and continuous improvement.

However, it must be recognized that the implementation of these reforms is not a simple task, as it requires meticulous planning, adequate allocation of resources and effective change management. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the particularities and specific needs of each organization, since there is no single approach that works for all cases (Elizondo and Nacif, 2006).

Likewise, it is crucial to consider that changes in organizations do not always entail modifications in the underlying institutions, since institutions are defined as the norms, rules and values that direct behavior within an organization. Although administrative reforms may focus on improving organizational processes and structures, they may not address the deeper institutional aspects that influence organizational culture and behavior.

Therefore, it is imperative that administrative reforms consider both the technical and the social and cultural elements of the organizations. This encompasses the promotion of the participation of the actors involved, the generation of commitment and motivation, the establishment of a culture of transparency and accountability, and the resolution of institutional barriers that could hinder the successful implementation of the reforms (Guerrero, 1994; Moreno, 1995).

In Mexico, significant changes have been experienced in the political landscape and in the distribution of power between the different parties over recent years. These transformations have generated expectations regarding the democratic development of the country. Since the victory of the National Action Party (PAN) in the governorship of Baja California in 1989, it was argued that the political transition in Mexico had entered a new stage. Since then, the PAN, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and other political parties have achieved electoral victories in the governorships of various states.

In 2007, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governed in 17 states of the republic, while the PAN governed in 9 states and the PRD in 6, including the Federal District (today Mexico City). However, in 2008, the distribution of power changed, and the PRI began to govern in 18 entities, the PAN in 8, and the PRD remained with 6. In the most recent context, in 2023, the MORENA party (Regeneration Movement National) governs in 22 states, consolidating its presence at the state level. The PRI governs in two states, the PAN



in five states, the Citizen Movement (MC) in two states, and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM) and the Social Encounter Party (PES) in one state each.

These changes in the distribution of political power may reflect a dynamic in the competition between the different parties in the Mexican political system. Furthermore, they have generated a scenario in which the MORENA party has obtained a significant presence at the state level, which has raised expectations about the political and democratic course of the country.

### **Literature review: institutional changes**

Institutional changes include the creation or strengthening of independent electoral bodies, the implementation of more rigorous laws and regulations on the financing of political campaigns, the modernization of voting systems and the promotion of citizen participation in the supervision and monitoring of elections. electoral processes. It is essential to emphasize that institutional changes, in response to demands for greater plurality and spaces for political participation, are vital to strengthening democracy and ensuring more equitable representation of the diverse voices and political options in government. However, the effectiveness of these changes depends on their proper implementation and a continued commitment to transparency, accountability, and citizen participation to ensure the legitimacy of the political system (Dahl, 2002).

The construction and consolidation of solid and reliable institutions are essential to address conflicts, address competing demands and distribute benefits equitably. These institutions play a valuable role in protecting citizens' rights and strengthening democracy. Despite advances in institutions and democracy, significant challenges persist in countries, such as corruption and impunity, underscoring the continued need to strengthen institutions and improve transparency and accountability in all spheres of government (Cansino, 2002; Meyer, 1995).

When behaviors adjust and comply with established norms as part of their regular functioning, a solid institutional framework is established in which trust and consistency prevail. This generates a climate of stability and certainty, essential elements for the proper functioning of democracy and any organization. Citizen trust in institutions and the decision-making process fosters citizen participation and the legitimacy of decisions made, while disruptions in restrictions on the decision-making process can lead to a lack of stability and certainty in political life.

The norms and rules established in an organization are crucial, as they provide a common frame of reference that simplifies reality and facilitates decision-making, which generates trust. However, it is crucial to recognize that institutions and norms are not static and can evolve over time, and as circumstances and societal needs change, they may require adjustments, which must be done in a transparent manner. and participatory to maintain the trust and legitimacy of institutions (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 2021).

However, the lack of tangible transformations in the daily relationship with public power, especially in terms of reducing corruption, equal treatment of citizens and administrative efficiency, is a reality (Fernández, 2023). It is undeniable that changes in institutional design can play a crucial role in achieving effective political change and the continuity of democratic transformations. Notable examples are the creation of the Ministry of Public Administration since 1982 and the implementation of the professional career service. These institutional changes seek to establish mechanisms that promote the professionalization of public servants, based on criteria of merit and competence, and guarantee accountability in the exercise of their functions (Dror, 1999).

Public administration plays the role of executor of government policies by transforming the intentions and objectives of political power into tangible actions. Indeed, through a solid and efficient public administration, the implementation of programs and projects that promote socioeconomic development, social equity, the protection of citizen rights and other goals established by democratically elected political actors is achieved.

To achieve this, institutionalized public administration must be impartial, professional, and transparent, for which public servants must be selected and promoted based on criteria of merit and competence, so that decision-making processes are clear and subject to accountability. In this way, a fair and efficient implementation of political intentions and decisions is ensured.

However, it should be noted that public administration is not the only variable that contributes to the better performance of democracy, since socioeconomic modernity also plays a crucial role in this sense. In this sense, the presence of a solid economy, access to job opportunities, equal conditions and the development of infrastructure are factors that affect the well-being of citizens and reinforce the quality of democracy.

Institutionalized public administration is vital to materialize the intentions and decisions coming from democratically elected spaces of public power. Complementing socioeconomic modernity, it contributes to a better performance of democracy by translating

policies into concrete actions and promoting development and equity in society (March and Simon, 1969).

In this regard, James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (1997), prominent theorists in the field of organizations, have addressed organizational attention as a scarce resource. These authors argue that organizations have limited resources, among which is the attention of their members, which includes time, information, and the ability to process it. Therefore, organizational analysis must focus on understanding how this scarce attention is distributed among the various demands and activities that compete for it within the organization. In the midst of this scenario, attention becomes a critical resource because organizations face multiple demands and tasks but have restrictions on the amount of attention they can devote to each one. In the words of Vergara (1997), organizational attention is “the ability of its intelligent instances in the organization to observe and decide about the processes that take place in the different organizational subunits” (p. 13).

These organizational routines represent modes of action and procedures that are consolidated over time; hence they take root as fundamental habits in the culture and structure of the organization. Its importance lies in allowing organizations to execute tasks and activities efficiently and effectively, eliminating the need to make exhaustive decisions at each step (Morlino and Raniolo, 2021). By automating certain processes and standardizing procedures, these organizational routines contribute to relieving cognitive load and freeing up resources to focus on processes that demand more careful attention and decision-making (Morlino, 1985, 2005).

These routines can cover various aspects within an organization, such as internal communication, task assignment, routine decision making, and coordination between departments, among others. By simplifying and standardizing these activities, organizational routines allow units and members of the organization to operate more efficiently and direct their efforts toward improving results in processes that demand attention and complex decision making. However, it is essential to recognize that these routines can become a barrier to innovation and change, since, on certain occasions, they can become rigid and hinder adaptation to new circumstances or the adoption of new practices. Therefore, it is essential to balance the need for routines to simplify and optimize processes with flexibility and the ability to adapt to changes in the environment. For March and Olsen (1997) routines are “conventional procedures, roles, strategies, organizational forms and technologies around which political activity is built” (p. 68).

Adherence to institutional rules manifests itself more frequently in contexts where trust in institutions prevails. Trust, according to March and Olsen (1997), plays an essential role in the functioning of any institutional system, which is why it is vital for the acceptance and compliance with established norms and rules. This feeling of trust is developed through a socialization process, in which people learn and internalize the norms and rules of the society in which they are inserted. As trust in institutions grows and they are perceived to operate with fairness, predictability and integrity, a natural predisposition to obey established rules develops.

Trust in institutions generates a greater willingness to conform to norms and rules, as they are perceived as beneficial contributions to the well-being and stability of society. This feeling provides a sense of security and certainty, which acts as a stimulus for compliance with the rules. In contrast, lack of trust in institutions can lead to disobedience or failure to comply with established norms. In other words, when people perceive institutions to be corrupt, unfair, or not adequately fulfilling their functions, trust is likely to decline and, with it, the willingness to obey institutional rules. During this situation, the State as an institution is “a political and moral order, as well as a series of long-standing standard operating procedures that reflect values, principles and beliefs shared by most of the population. The primary task of the State is to guarantee political order and the autonomy of the various institutional spheres of society” (March and Olsen, 1997, p. 191).

## Methodology

The purpose of this document is to review whether political change, represented by electoral alternation, can constitute a significant initial step towards an authentic transformation in terms of reducing corruption, discretion, and arbitrariness. This process, of course, involves carrying out institutional reforms, strengthening the separation of powers, promoting transparency and accountability, and fostering a culture rooted in integrity and ethics.

The research, therefore, aims to explore, through the approach of historical institutionalism, the relationship between political change and the emergence of populism in the public administration of the Mexican State during the last two periods of the federal government. This approach, deductive in nature, recognizes that political changes do not manifest abruptly, but rather evolve gradually, influenced by various historical, social, and cultural factors. Therefore, it is assumed that the levels of political change in the Mexican

federal government, during the last two six-year terms, tend towards an intracomponent or factorial change, as well as a dimension of continuity, associated with internal changes in some of the components of the system and responding to the rules and procedures provided by the system or some of its components throughout an extensive historical process. Specifically, the analysis covers the period 2018-2023.

The current circumstances of the public administration encourage us to reflect on the orientation, decision-making and management bodies, as well as inequality in the region. Local governments emerge as fundamental actors to improve the living conditions of citizens, highlighting the need to define new functions for territorial ordering, planning, and administration. The reduction of inequality and the promotion of equitable and participatory development are presented as central objectives in future reflections and actions.

The information was compiled from reliable data sources, including the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Inegi), the National Electoral Institute (INE) and federal government reports.

## **Results: institutional changes in 4T**

Institutional change in Mexico encompasses the modifications, transformations or reforms carried out in the country's institutions, as well as the political, economic, social, and legal spheres. These interventions seek to improve institutional functioning, strengthen democracy, promote transparency, accountability, efficiency in public administration and guarantee respect for citizen rights (Magrini and Santos, 2023; North, 1995).

Within the framework of the 4T, the institutional design seeks to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty in organizations through the Federal Republican Austerity Law. In this sense, the institutionalization of standards generates trust and certainty, which simplifies decision-making and facilitates satisfactory results, although it is necessary to maintain the capacity for adaptation and flexibility to face changing situations.

Trust and certainty in the decision-making process are developed when institutional norms and rules are incorporated into the organizational culture, convincing members that they simplify decision-making and are effective strategies for addressing complexity and achieving results satisfactory.

Since 2003, the Ministry of Public Service, in charge of supervising and promoting integrity in the public service, plays a crucial role in detecting and punishing corrupt acts, as well as in implementing transparency and accountability policies. For its part, the



professional career service seeks to guarantee that access, promotion, and permanence in public service are based on individual merit and capabilities, avoiding political or clientelist considerations. This contributes to a more professional, efficient public administration free of corrupt practices.

However, the effective implementation of these institutional changes demands a continuous commitment of political actors and society, as well as the strengthening of supervision and accountability mechanisms to guarantee effective compliance with established norms and principles.

In summary, changes in institutional design, such as the creation of the Public Service Secretariat and the implementation of the career professional service, can play a crucial role in improving governance and reducing corruption, provided they are sustained with continued commitment and strengthened oversight and accountability mechanisms. In fact, institutionalized public administration often constitutes one of the main correlations between democracy and better performance, which is why it is essential in the implementation of policies and decisions coming from public power spaces elected in an open and plural manner, such as governments and legislative bodies.

Now, in Mexico, the relationship between political change and federal public administration is presented as a complex phenomenon and does not follow a directly proportional correlation (Gómez, 2022). That is, not every change results from a reform, and not every reform necessarily entails a substantial change. An example of this dynamic is the Federal Law on Remuneration of Public Servants, enacted on May 19, 2021, and the National Program to Combat Corruption and Impunity, as well as to Improve Public Management 2019-2024, and the international perception of corruption.

In 2016, Mexico ranked 123 out of 176 countries in the corruption index, and by 2022, it will rank 126 out of 180 countries. Regarding public spending, in 2016, 14.6% of the total (four thousand 763 million 874 thousand pesos) was allocated to public infrastructure, while in 2022 of the total public spending (seven thousand 088 million 250 thousand 300 pesos), the 12.1% (table 3). These annual economic resources are directed to sectors such as environmental protection, health, education, housing, community services and recreational activities, integrating public spending allocated by the federal government to mitigate inequality.

In other words, it is assumed that the left-wing populist government increases social spending to reduce the concentration of income (Bermeo, 2022; Barría and Ramírez, 2023). This means that social programs —according to De la Torre (2022), Bermúdez (2023) and



De la Peña (2023)— become instruments of legitimation of the political party and the political leader. When considering the relationship between the increase in social spending and the decrease in inequality, in the case of the current federal government, this phenomenon is partially fulfilled. According to the World Bank (WB), in Mexico, the margin of inequality in the distribution of income decreased from 47.7% in 2016 to 45.4% in 2020. However, in the WB evaluation of inequality, Mexico went from 118th place from 159 countries in 2016 to 121st place out of the same 158 countries in 2022.

In terms of the Human Development Index (HDI) prepared by the United Nations (UN), in 2016 Mexico registered 0.772 points, decreasing to 0.758 in 2022. This indicates a deterioration in the health, education, and income of Mexicans in less than three tenths (table 3).

**Table 3.** Change in the federal public administration

Political change	Components	Changes in public administration 2012-2018, commitment to Mexico	Changes in public administration 2018-2023, Together we will make history
Political community	Ideology, values, or beliefs; active people or groups; intermediate structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Pact for Mexico.</li> <li>-Commitment to Mexico.</li> <li>-National crusade against hunger.</li> <li>-Prosper.</li> <li>-Life insurance for heads of family.</li> <li>-Community kitchens.</li> <li>-Pension for older adults.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The hope of Mexico.</li> <li>-Together we make history.</li> <li>-Put the presidential plane and the fleet of aircraft up for sale.</li> <li>-Fourth Transformation.</li> <li>-Republican austerity.</li> <li>-Sowing Life Program, Benito Juárez Wellbeing Scholarship, Youth Building the Future Program.</li> <li>-Loss of government support for 5,000 civil society organizations.</li> </ul>
Regime	Ideologies, values, or beliefs; norms or rules of the game; decision structures; enforcement structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-11 structural reforms.</li> <li>-Gendarmerie Division</li> <li>-Creation of agencies: (CENACE), the National Center for Natural Gas Control (CENAGAS), the Mexican Petroleum Fund for Stabilization and Development (FMPED) and the Energy Regulatory Commission (CRE).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-National Guard.</li> <li>-Federal Law on Remuneration of Public Servants.</li> <li>-61 articles reformed to the Political Constitution.</li> <li>-Delegations of Development Programs.</li> <li>-Wellbeing Bank.</li> <li>-Mayan Train.</li> <li>-National Program to Combat Corruption and</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-155 articles reformed to the Political Constitution.</li> <li>-New Mexico City International Airport (NAICM), Texcoco Airport.</li> <li>-Creation of the Secretariat of Agrarian, Territorial, and Urban Development (SEDATU).</li> <li>-9,965,016 militants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impunity, and to Improve Public Management 2019-2024.</li> <li>-Felipe Ángeles International Airport.</li> <li>-Dos Bocas Refinery.</li> <li>- Creation of the Welfare Secretariat.</li> <li>-466,931 militants.</li> </ul>
Authority	Role holders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Presidency of the Republic: 19,158,592 votes.</li> <li>-Deputies: 241.</li> <li>-Senators: 61.</li> <li>-Governorships: 20.</li> <li>-Municipal presidencies: 889.</li> <li>-Place in corruption: 123 out of 176 countries.</li> <li>-Spending on public infrastructure (2016): 14.6% of total public spending.</li> <li>-Gini coefficient (2016): 47.7.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Presidency of the Republic: 30,113,483 votes.</li> <li>-Deputies: 203.</li> <li>-Senators: 60.</li> <li>-Governorships: 22.</li> <li>-Municipal presidencies: 514.</li> <li>-Place in corruption: 126 out of 180 countries.</li> <li>- Spending on public infrastructure (2022): 12.1% of total public spending.</li> <li>-Gini coefficient (2020): 45.4.</li> </ul>

Source: Own elaboration with data from SG (2023), Government of Mexico (2023), Transparency International (2023), SHYCP (2023), WB (2023), UN (2023)

According to March and Olsen (1987), reforms in public administration constitute an adaptive process to changes in an institutional environment. In the specific case of the Mexican public administration, these reforms are materialized and understood through political loyalty between the executive and legislative spheres, which configures an institutional context conducive to change (De la Torre, 2022). This adaptive process is manifested through interactions between the environment and institutions and is influenced by two fundamental levels of interaction. First, there is the inertia of routines and practices embedded in institutions, which tend to maintain stability and resist change. This implies that, unless there is strong pressure or need for change, institutions tend to operate in accordance with already established ways. Secondly, there is the tension generated when the demands of the environment require an adaptation. Institutions look for solutions available in their repertoire to address these demands, a dynamic that resembles the concept of “garbage cans”, where solutions and demands are found randomly.

Initiating changes in institutions can be relatively simple, but the real challenge lies in controlling and managing these changes due to the multiplicity of variables involved. These variables include political interests, budget constraints, external influences, and internal resistance, among other factors. In the words of March and Olsen (1997), “the occasional forays of politics into administrative reform have not led to the development of a general institutional capacity to carry it out” (p. 166).

In this sense, administrative institutions, responsible for implementing and executing public policies, providing citizen services, and guaranteeing compliance with laws and regulations, have a direct impact on the quality of life of people and the government's capacity to meet social demands. For this reason, the reorganization of public administration stands as a crucial element for any political system and form of government, given that administrative institutions play an essential role in the effectiveness and integral functioning of the system.

For March and Olsen, senior officials can find motivation in the need to project a positive image and demonstrate that they address the problems of public administration. Furthermore, there are political pressures and expectations of citizens and other actors that influence the formulation of reform proposals. Regularly, reforms are “systematic and massive efforts aimed at transforming certain characteristics of the organization and functioning of the state to provide them—as it is traditionally said—with greater efficiency and effectiveness. For most of the century they were known as ‘administrative reforms’” (Oszlak, 1999, p. 183).

Administrative or organizational changes often carry with them a significant symbolic and rhetorical value, which represents a transformative will, hence, by conveying the impression that measures are being taken to address existing problems, they can be well accepted by society.

### **Discussion: the populist change in Mexico**

When populist leaders assume power, public administration can undergo various transformations, as they often postulate that only they genuinely represent the interests of the people, so they may try to restrict political participation and limit diversity in public administration (Haggard and Kaufman, 2001). This can result in the appropriation of public institutions by populists and lead them to take absolute control for their own objectives. Furthermore, they could seek to dismantle or sabotage the existing state bureaucracy, especially if they see it as an obstacle to the implementation of their political agenda.

Although they could advocate for reforms in public administration, these would be carried out in accordance with their ideologies and goals, which generates tensions and instability in the institution. Populist leaders tend to question state bureaucracy and distrust its ability to implement policies effectively. Therefore, they may seek to reduce the size of the public administration and reorganize it so that it is more aligned with their political interests (Puga, 2021).

Likewise, populist governments can have a significant impact on public administration and democracy in general. Therefore, it is essential that citizens and political leaders be alert to the risks of political appropriation and control of public institutions, and work to safeguard the diversity and independence of public administration (Morlino and Raniolo, 2022).

In the specific case of Mexico (Puga, 2021), public administration has been influenced by practices that have not always been consistent with democratic principles, such as personal loyalty and the political distribution of benefits. This has hindered the development of an efficient public administration based on political responsibility. However, in recent decades there has been a recognition of the need to modernize and improve government performance in Mexico. In fact, modernization programs have been implemented in public administration to seek changes in the roles of actors and institutions to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness.

In this sense, reforms have been carried out that have involved the divestiture of public companies and the reduction of some agencies of the executive branch. An effort has also been made to simplify procedures, especially those related to trade and customs, with the aim of encouraging the opening of companies and facilitating the passage of goods across borders.

However, it should be noted that the transformations in the Mexican public administration have not been profound in all aspects. Although there has been progress in certain areas, challenges persist in terms of institutional strengthening, accountability, transparency, and professionalization of the public service. Consequently, it can be stated that the transformation of the Mexican public administration requires deeper and sustained changes in organizational practices and culture, as well as the promotion of greater citizen participation and the strengthening of control and supervision mechanisms. This would contribute to consolidating an efficient public administration oriented to the service of citizens, aligned with democratic principles and international standards of good governance.

In Mexico, after the economic crisis of the 1980s, a question arose regarding the role of the State that highlighted the need to modify the development model. For decades, the Mexican State had advocated a model based on the protection of the national industry and import substitution. However, this approach showed limitations, which gave rise to economic, fiscal and poverty problems. Faced with the crisis, international financial organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank supported countries in crisis, although they conditioned their support on structural reforms and changes in the economic model. In the case of Mexico, economic openness and an orientation toward international trade were promoted.

The transformations linked to the new economic model were mainly linked to state power relations and the organization of the public structure. In this context, a reform of the State was carried out with the purpose of reorganizing and resizing the public administration, with emphasis on the reduction of the state apparatus and the disincorporation of the parastatal sector. This forced the privatization and sale of state companies, the elimination of excessive regulations, the simplification of procedures and the search for greater efficiency and competitiveness in the public sector. The objective was to generate a more agile, efficient, and market-oriented State.

However, it is important to note that these transformations were not free of controversy and criticism. For example, debates arose about the effects of economic openness in terms of inequality, economic dependence, and vulnerability to international markets. In addition, concerns were expressed about the privatization of strategic sectors and the impact on public services. In other words, the economic crisis of the 1980s in Mexico led to a reevaluation of the role of the State and the implementation of reforms aimed at economic opening and the reorganization of public administration. These transformations sought to address economic and fiscal challenges, although they also generated debates and questions about their social and political impacts (Cansino and Alarcón, 1994).

For these reasons, the State reform process in Mexico has involved a reconfiguration of power relations, which served to create new forms of interaction between the State and society. One of the central demands of this process has been the search for greater democracy, reflected in the opening of opportunities for political participation and effective respect for suffrage.

Following the trend observed in other Latin American countries, the reform of the State in Mexico has been oriented towards the promotion of economic policies linked to the market economy, the resizing of the state apparatus and the expansion of political freedoms.



Structural changes have been sought in public administrative apparatuses, as well as the rationalization of administration inputs, such as personnel, administrative services, and material resources.

The reforms have also included the administration's internal processes with the aim of making them more efficient and effective. Furthermore, a trend has been observed towards the adoption of economic criteria in the reforms, which mainly seek to reduce public spending and promote more efficient management of resources. Likewise, it should be highlighted that, in some cases, the implementation of reforms has been limited to the formal sphere and has focused on the issuance of laws or decrees or the adoption of novel administrative systems.

Even so, it is imperative to recognize that true transformation implies deeper changes in organizational culture, institutional practices and the relationship between the State and society. In other words, the reform of the State in Mexico has sought to promote democracy, promote market economic policies, resize the state apparatus and expand political freedoms. Emphasis has been placed on structural changes, on the rationalization of administrative inputs, on internal processes and on economic management, although it is necessary to go beyond the formal aspects and achieve profound transformations that strengthen citizen participation, accountability and the development of an efficient public administration oriented to public service (Pardo, 1992).

Furthermore, the decline of the state apparatus has had implications for power relations in Mexico. In fact, the reduction in available public resources has limited the State's ability to distribute benefits in exchange for political loyalty and electoral support, which has caused a reconfiguration of power dynamics, as political actors have had to seek new ways to maintain their influence and ensure the support of society (Zizek, 2002).

Therefore, instead of depending exclusively on the distribution of public resources, political actors have been forced to adapt to a scenario where austerity policies and efficiency in public spending are promoted. This has caused a growing demand from society for transparency, accountability, and greater citizen participation in decision-making. In this new context, political actors have had to explore alternatives to gain citizen support, such as presenting solid political proposals, promoting transparency, fighting corruption, and strengthening citizen participation mechanisms. In other words, society has raised its expectations towards rulers, increasing the importance of legitimacy and good governance as determining factors in the consolidation of political power (Guerrero, 1998; Norris, 2009).

On the other hand, it is crucial to note that, although the reduction of the state apparatus has posed challenges in traditional power relations, it has also provided



opportunities to promote more efficient management oriented to the public interest. For example, the scarcity of resources has motivated the search for innovative solutions, the implementation of information and communication technologies in public administration, and the promotion of alliances with the private sector and civil society (Escalante, 1992).

For this reason, international organizations and development scholars recognize the importance of institutional change to improve economic efficiency and political and social stability, since institutions play a fundamental role by establishing rules, norms and procedures that guide interactions between actors by providing predictability and stability of exchanges. The purpose of these reforms is to foster a solid and reliable institutional environment that encourages investment, entrepreneurship, and economic development, while guaranteeing the protection of citizens' rights and equity in the distribution of the benefits of development (Oszlak, 1979).

In the case of the Mexican government, it has implemented a series of institutional changes in various areas as part of efforts to accompany the country's economic and political transformations, as well as to strengthen the rule of law and improve governance. In the economic sphere, structural reforms have been carried out aimed at modernizing and strengthening financial institutions, such as the new structure of the Central Bank. These reforms aim to improve the stability and efficiency of the financial system, as well as promote greater transparency and accountability (Linz, 1990).

Regarding electoral processes, institutions have been erected and reforms implemented with the purpose of ensuring the plurality and integrity of said processes. Among these reforms, the creation of the National Electoral Institute (INE) stands out as an autonomous body in charge of organizing and supervising elections, as well as the establishment of inspection and control mechanisms for the resources used in political campaigns.

Likewise, reforms have also been undertaken in sensitive areas such as land tenure to provide greater clarity and legal certainty in property rights. Additionally, efforts have been made to transform relations between the State and the church, promoting greater separation between both institutions.

However, it is imperative to recognize that not all reforms have achieved the same degree of success. Some attempts to modify relations with union sectors have faced challenges and resistance that have limited their progress and effectiveness. Broadly speaking, these institutional reforms are part of efforts to strengthen the State, promote transparency and accountability, and improve governance in Mexico. Despite the challenges

and obstacles in their implementation, they represent a significant step towards building a more solid and equitable political and economic system (Roett, 1993).

On the other hand, administrative modernization is a process through which the State seeks to adapt and adjust its management to achieve coherence and organization in relation to the predominant social actions in society. This requires an internal renewal and redefinition of the State based on the social changes that are occurring. In other words, administrative modernization involves constantly negotiating and renegotiating the government's policies and forms of action with the aim of adapting to the new demands and challenges of society.

Administrative modernization can include various actions and measures, such as the simplification of bureaucratic procedures, the implementation of information and communication technologies, the professionalization of public servants, the strengthening of accountability mechanisms and the promotion of participation. citizen in decision making. It is important to note that administrative modernization is not a static process, but rather it adapts and transforms according to the social, economic, and political changes that occur in society, since it is a response of the State to remain updated and efficient in the provision of services and in the management of public policies (Pardo, 1991).

The changes that occur within the government and administrative modernization can contribute to strengthening the capacity of the State in terms of redistribution of power and political control. However, it should be noted that this strengthening does not necessarily imply a counterweight to the market, but rather can be oriented towards the efficiency and response capacity of the State in general.

In Mexico, historically, the exercise of presidential power has been distinguished by the breadth of extraordinary and discretionary powers, which has allowed a concentration of power in the figure of the president. These powers have been materialized through public administration, used as an instrument for the implementation and execution of the policies proposed by the government. Public administration has been subordinated to the needs of political power; hence it has operated to maintain a political regime based on personal loyalty and the political distribution of benefits. In this sense, public administration has been used to reward political allies and maintain control over institutions, to the detriment of the principles of public responsibility and accountability inherent to a democratic system (Molinar, 1993).

However, it is relevant to indicate that in recent years significant progress has been made in Mexico to strengthen transparency, accountability, and the professionalization of public administration. For example, reforms have been implemented aimed at limiting the discretionary powers of the president and promoting the professionalization of public

servants. Likewise, efforts have been made to strengthen control and supervision mechanisms to prevent corruption and ensure more efficient management oriented to the public interest. Although challenges persist in consolidating a responsible and autonomous public administration, it is crucial to recognize the efforts deployed to transform the functioning of public administration in Mexico and promote the democratic values of public responsibility, transparency, and accountability (Ackerman *et al.*, 2021).

In recent years, a political change has been evident in Mexico that has led to the emergence of a post-neoliberal project and the revaluation of the nationalization and governmentalization of politics and the economy. This change has materialized through political movements and parties that have gained popular support, as is the case with the ascension of MORENA to the presidency of the republic in 2018.

The new populist order in Mexico has sought to consolidate itself through electoral means that have allowed it to capitalize on the unification of social demands and popular mobilization. This political approach transcends the traditional dichotomy between right and left, and instead seeks to establish a project that resonates with the needs and aspirations of the majority. In addition to this, there is an urgent need to review and rethink the neoliberal economic policies that have predominated in previous decades, which is why emphasis has been placed on state intervention and achieving a greater balance between the market and the State. The proposal consists of strengthening the function of the latter as a regulator and promoter of economic and social development to ensure greater redistribution of wealth and social inclusion.

However, this process of political and economic change is not without challenges and controversies. Various perspectives and positions regarding the effectiveness and viability of these proposals coexist, along with concerns about possible risks of concentration of power or setbacks in terms of individual rights and freedoms. For this reason, the post-neoliberal project in Mexico continues to be the subject of debate and analysis, with its evolution and results still in the process of development and evaluation.

The widespread acceptance and widespread practice of institutional rules generate an environment of stability, predictability, and confidence in the functioning of institutions. This makes it easier for the proposed changes and implemented policies to have a greater probability of lasting and generating lasting impacts (Cansino and Covarrubias, 2007).

Institutional change plays a crucial role in the continuity and consolidation of political, economic, and social transformations. Thus, institutions act as normative and regulatory frameworks that guide the way in which actions and decisions are carried out in a

society. In the case of the Mexican public administration, this duality has been observed at various times in the country's political history. Some governments may aspire to modify institutional rules and norms according to their interests, which causes tensions and contradictions with the formal institutional structure (Paramio, 1999).

However, it is crucial to highlight that the mere existence of a formal institutional structure does not guarantee per se the effectiveness and compliance with the rules. Sometimes, practices arise that contradict or evade established norms, which causes a duality between institutional normality and actions carried out outside the rules.

In the current context of the government of the fourth transformation in Mexico, the need arises to modify institutional rules and practices to promote a profound change in the way of doing politics and managing the State. This involves breaking with old practices of corruption, clientelism and abuse of power to establish a new public service ethic based on honesty, transparency, and responsibility. The political change in the Mexican public administration is manifested in the different levels that make up the political system and, in the actions, undertaken by the so-called fourth transformation.

However, the implementation of these transformations is not without challenges, so it is imperative that institutional reforms translate into tangible changes in practice, which requires a genuine commitment on the part of political actors and the creation of effective accountability and supervision mechanisms to ensure compliance with established rules. In other words, institutional change is essential to ensure the continuity and sustainability of political and social transformations, although this demands not only the existence of formal rules, but also their recognition and widespread application by the actors involved (Calvin and Velasco, 1997).

Administrative reform in Mexico has faced various challenges and obstacles over the years, linked to both political aspects and the institutional design of the reforms themselves. One of the challenges has been the resistance or influence of actors and interest groups that oppose changes in public administration. Unions and bureaucracies, in some cases, have defended their interests and have hindered efforts to professionalize and modernize the public service. Furthermore, previous governments have had diverse priorities and approaches regarding administrative reforms, which has sometimes resulted in the postponement or partial implementation of said reforms, without achieving an effective transformation of the administrative structure and practices (Metcalf, 1999).

Therefore, we must be aware that the administrative reform process is complex and requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses political, institutional, and training aspects. Furthermore, there must be a real commitment on the part of political leaders and public officials to promote and carry out the necessary changes (Cunill, 2004).

In recent years, with the arrival of the fourth transformation in Mexico to the federal government, administrative reform objectives have been reconsidered. It has sought to promote transparency, efficiency, and accountability in public administration, as well as strengthen the professionalization of public service. However, it is essential to continue facing inconveniences that have historically limited the effective transformation of public administration, which is why it is necessary to overcome resistance, generate consensus and design strategies that allow for the implementation of real changes in the structure and administrative practices with the aim of improving quality of democracy and guarantee an efficient and transparent public service (Puga, 2021).

## Conclusion

Neoinstitutionalism emerges as a theoretical current that seeks to understand how institutions shape and affect the behavior of actors in a society. In the Mexican context, these propositions are useful to analyze the transformations that have occurred in the economic, political, and social systems over the last three decades. According to the data presented, during the last six-year term, significant changes have occurred on the map of Mexico. However, the political change is manifested exclusively in public administration, where it goes from being a decision-making structure to one of execution, from reinforcement to decision. The political community and authority do not undergo reforms that represent systemic change at all levels of the political system. This phenomenon has led to the opening and consolidation of public spaces previously occupied mainly by government and administrative organizations, which indicates greater participation and pluralism in decision-making and in the configuration of the country's institutional life.

Neoinstitutionalism posits that formal and informal institutions, such as rules, norms, and organizational structures, have a profound impact on individual behavior and the development of social systems. In the case of Mexico, this approach can clarify how the opening of public spaces and the reconfiguration of the political map have influenced the economic, political, and social systems. The transition towards greater openness and pluralism implies changes in decision-making and the participation of diverse actors in the



political process. Therefore, the proposals of neoinstitutionalism offer a framework to understand how these transformations have affected the economic, political, and social dynamics of Mexico.

Now, regarding the initial objectives set out in this work, it can be indicated that they are met by verifying that the 4T discourse seeks two reasons for implementation: firstly, the Mexican public administration is immersed in neo-institutionalist reform policies, originated in conceptions contrary to neoliberalism that generate considerable fiscal burdens and political changes. These points outline characteristics and challenges of the public-administrative system in Mexico, as well as the need to modernize and update public management in the country. In summary, the following aspects stand out:

1. Mexico is characterized by constantly changing political dynamism, greater government transparency, divided governments, and growing pluralism, which requires a theoretical and practical review of public-administrative disciplines to address current scenarios.

2. There have been changes in the ways of administering and the emergence of new institutions in Mexico to seek greater effectiveness in the relations between rulers and governed, during a society that demands clear public responses and the need to investigate routes that improve government decision-making and professionalize public service.

3. The relationships between rulers and the governed change and new forms of institutional interaction emerge. The public administration must meet the demands of civil society to try to achieve optimal government performance. Plural life implies democratizing public decisions, promoting transparency, accountability and optimizing resources.

4. Policy design and development are no longer exclusive decisions of the elite. The democratization of public decisions must have greater weight. The groups that sought to monopolize power are losing influence. Now, they have no free space in public life.

5. Mexico finds itself in a new democratic context where the new institutions must be oriented towards the democratization of decisions and provide direction and certainty to political coexistence. Previously, privileged elites had a dominant role in policymaking and managing the government agenda. Today, these perspectives have changed.

6. The process of change in the Mexican political system has advanced mainly in the first decade of the 21st century. The intervening State has been restructured and, as a result, power relations have changed. Political structures and the social environment have evolved to be more responsive and allow for greater participation.



7. The Mexican political system must be increasingly open to interest groups, not as a mediator or to privilege some, but assuming an attitude and capacity for responsible government. The goal is for the State and its administrative apparatus to be characterized by high levels of legitimacy, where public decisions are consistent, professional, plural, and transparent.

8. The power of legitimacy has the original purpose of serving society efficiently and ethically. Legitimacy does not come from political power but is the result of responding to and exercising a public function for society. Sometimes, changing attitudes arises from conflict and the formation of agreements. Mexico must overcome the challenges to achieve institutional certainty and consolidate new relationships between society and the government.

In summary, these points emphasize the need for modernization and updating of the Mexican public administration.

### **Future lines of research**

Research into the political, economic, and social impacts of political change in Mexico must continue to achieve a comprehensive understanding and evaluation of how so-called populist policies have influenced the long-term. This requires analyzing its impact through indicators such as economic growth, inflation, unemployment, and wealth distribution. Furthermore, it is imperative to continue examining how political and social competition and polarization have affected ideological divisions and social cohesion in the country.

The successful implementation of administrative reforms also demands considering the structural possibilities of organizations and adjusting methodologies to their specific needs and contexts. To achieve this, it is essential to adapt the approaches to administrative reforms to the particularities of each organization, considering aspects such as organizational culture, available resources, staff training and management capacity. Simply put, since each organization has its own reality and challenges, not all of them can implement the same administrative practices or models effectively.

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