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Activating management by competencies in local communities Through the Foundation's project as one of the mechanisms for New public management

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Abstract:

The growing complexity of public governance requires local governments to adopt strategic management approaches that enhance institutional performance and respond effectively to citizens' needs. This article examines the establishment project as a strategic instrument for strengthening competency-based management within local governments, particularly in the field of community-based social protection. Drawing on the principles of New Public Management and integrating more recent perspectives—including the Resource-Based View, Dynamic Capabilities, Public Value Management, New Public Governance, the Neo-Weberian State, and Digital-Era Governance—the article argues that competencies constitute strategic resources for improving local governance. It demonstrates that the establishment project should be viewed not merely as an administrative planning tool but as a governance framework that aligns organizational competencies, stakeholder participation, territorial priorities, and public value creation. By embedding competency-based management into local governance, municipalities can strengthen institutional capacity, improve service quality, support digital transformation, and contribute to sustainable territorial development and more effective social protection.

Keywords: New Public Management, Local Communities, Competencies, Competency Management Social Protection Project.
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1. Introduction

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Over the past three decades, public administration has undergone profound transformations driven by the need to improve efficiency, accountability, and the quality of public services. Initially inspired by the principles of New Public Management (NPM), these reforms promoted decentralization, managerial autonomy, performance measurement, and results-oriented management. While NPM has significantly contributed to the modernization of public organizations, contemporary public challenges—including digital transformation, demographic change, climate risks, fiscal constraints, and increasing citizen expectations—have revealed the limitations of relying solely on this paradigm. Recent approaches such as Public Value Management, New Public Governance, the Neo-Weberian State, and Digital-Era Governance advocate more collaborative, citizen-centered, and adaptive models of public management.

Within this evolving context, local governments play a pivotal role in promoting territorial development and delivering effective social protection. Their growing responsibilities require not only appropriate financial and institutional resources but also the development and effective management of strategic competencies. Competency-based management has therefore emerged as a key approach for strengthening institutional capacity, fostering organizational learning, improving service quality, and enhancing public value creation.

Among the strategic instruments available to local authorities, the establishment project offers a comprehensive framework for translating public policies into coordinated territorial actions. Beyond its traditional role as a planning document, it can serve as a governance mechanism that aligns organizational competencies, stakeholder participation, local development priorities, and performance objectives. When combined with competency-based management, the establishment project can enhance institutional resilience, support collaborative governance, facilitate digital transformation, and improve the effectiveness of community-based social protection initiatives.

This article examines the role of the establishment project in strengthening competency-based management within local governments. It draws on an integrated theoretical framework combining New Public Management, the Resource-Based View, Dynamic Capabilities, Public Value Management, New Public Governance, the Neo-Weberian State, and Digital-Era Governance. The article argues that the integration of these complementary perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of how local governments can mobilize competencies to improve institutional performance, create public value, and support sustainable territorial development.

2. From New Public Management to Post-NPM Theories : An Updated Theoretical Framework

2.1. New Public Management : Contributions and Limitations

New Public Management (NPM) emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s as a response to growing dissatisfaction with traditional Weberian public administration, which was frequently criticized for excessive bureaucracy, centralized decision-making, procedural rigidity, and limited responsiveness to citizens' needs (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Influenced by neoliberal economic thinking, public choice theory, principal-agent theory, and managerialism, NPM advocated the adoption of private-sector management principles to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of public organizations (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

The central assumption underlying NPM is that public organizations should be managed similarly to private firms by emphasizing measurable results rather than procedural compliance. Consequently, reforms inspired by NPM promoted decentralization of managerial authority, strategic planning, performance measurement systems, contractualization, competition between service providers, outsourcing of public services, customer orientation, and greater managerial autonomy (Hood, 1991). Performance indicators, benchmarking, quality management, and results-based budgeting became central instruments for evaluating organizational performance.

These reforms profoundly transformed public administration worldwide. In many OECD countries, they contributed to improving financial discipline, strengthening managerial accountability, increasing transparency, and introducing performance-oriented cultures within public institutions (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Similar reforms gradually spread to developing countries through structural adjustment programs, international donor recommendations, and administrative modernization initiatives promoted by international organizations such as the World Bank and the OECD (World Bank, 1997; OECD, 2015).

In Algeria, although public administration has traditionally remained strongly centralized and characterized by a legal-bureaucratic administrative culture, several reforms inspired by managerial principles have progressively been introduced. These reforms sought to improve institutional performance through decentralization, modernization of public services, strategic planning, performance evaluation, and greater autonomy for public institutions, particularly within the health, higher education, and local government sectors. Nevertheless,

the implementation of NPM principles has remained partial because of institutional, legal, and organizational constraints inherent to the Algerian administrative system.

Despite its considerable influence, New Public Management has been increasingly criticized since the late 1990s. One major criticism concerns the fragmentation of public services resulting from extensive outsourcing, agency creation, and the multiplication of autonomous public organizations. While specialization sometimes improved efficiency, it frequently weakened coordination among institutions and reduced policy coherence (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011).

A second criticism relates to the transformation of citizens into customers. By emphasizing service delivery and customer satisfaction, NPM tended to overlook the broader democratic role of citizens as rights holders, participants in public decision-making, and co-producers of public value. Public services differ fundamentally from private goods because they pursue collective interests that cannot be fully evaluated through market mechanisms alone (Moore, 1995).

Furthermore, the exclusive focus on measurable outputs often encouraged short-term performance optimization while neglecting broader societal outcomes, social equity, institutional legitimacy, and long-term sustainability. Contemporary public problems—including climate change, territorial development, digital transformation, social inclusion, and public health crises—are characterized by high complexity and interdependence. Such "wicked problems" cannot be effectively addressed through isolated organizational performance but require extensive collaboration among multiple public and private actors (Osborne, 2010).

These limitations have gradually led scholars to advocate a transition toward post-New Public Management paradigms that preserve the managerial achievements of NPM while incorporating broader concerns related to governance, collaboration, public value creation, and digital transformation.

2.2. Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives Beyond New Public Management

2.2.1. Public Value Management

Public Value Management (PVM), originally conceptualized by Moore (1995), has emerged as one of the most influential post-New Public Management paradigms in contemporary public administration. Unlike New Public Management (NPM), which primarily evaluates organizational success through economic efficiency, cost reduction, and performance indicators, the Public Value approach argues that the fundamental mission of public

organizations is to create public value, understood as the set of collective social, economic, and institutional benefits that improve citizens' well-being while reinforcing democratic legitimacy. Public value therefore extends beyond the simple delivery of public services to encompass social justice, equity, trust in public institutions, community resilience, and sustainable development (Moore, 1995; Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014).

Within this perspective, public managers are not merely administrators responsible for implementing governmental decisions efficiently. Rather, they become strategic leaders whose responsibility is to reconcile citizens' expectations, political priorities, and organizational capabilities in order to maximize long-term societal outcomes. Public organizations are consequently evaluated not only according to their operational performance but also according to their capacity to generate tangible improvements in quality of life, reduce social inequalities, strengthen institutional trust, and foster inclusive development (Stoker, 2006).

Moore (1995) proposes that effective public management depends upon the simultaneous interaction of three fundamental dimensions, commonly known as the Strategic Triangle. First, public organizations must create services and policies that generate genuine public value by responding effectively to the real needs and priorities of citizens. Second, these actions must enjoy sufficient political legitimacy and receive the support of key stakeholders—including elected officials, civil society organizations, local communities, and public employees—to ensure both democratic accountability and institutional sustainability. Third, public institutions must possess the operational capacity, managerial competencies, financial resources, and organizational capabilities required to successfully implement public policies and achieve their intended objectives.

The Public Value perspective is particularly relevant for public service delivery, where the objective extends far beyond improving administrative efficiency. Public services such as healthcare, education, social security, employment support, housing assistance, and local infrastructure are not commodities exchanged in competitive markets; rather, they constitute essential instruments for promoting social cohesion, protecting vulnerable populations, and guaranteeing equal opportunities. Consequently, evaluating these services solely through traditional efficiency indicators provides only a partial assessment of their overall contribution to society. Public Value Management instead emphasizes broader outcomes, including citizens' well-being, accessibility of services, equity of access, user satisfaction, institutional legitimacy, and the long-term sustainability of public interventions (Moore, 1995; Benington & Moore, 2011).

This approach has become particularly significant in the field of social protection, where governments are increasingly expected to balance economic efficiency with social solidarity. Social protection systems—including social insurance, pensions, unemployment benefits,

health insurance, family allowances, and social assistance programs—play a central role in reducing poverty, mitigating socioeconomic inequalities, protecting households against life-cycle risks, and strengthening social resilience. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024), comprehensive social protection constitutes one of the most effective public investments for promoting inclusive economic growth and reducing long-term vulnerability.

From a Public Value perspective, social protection should not be regarded merely as a financial transfer mechanism or a fiscal expenditure. Rather, it represents a strategic public investment capable of generating substantial social returns through improved population health, enhanced human capital, increased labour productivity, greater economic stability, and stronger social cohesion. Well-designed social protection policies contribute to building public confidence in government institutions while reinforcing citizens' sense of inclusion and social citizenship (World Bank, 2022; OECD, 2023).

This theoretical framework is equally applicable to healthcare systems, particularly within the context of Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Public Value Management argues that healthcare institutions should be evaluated not only according to financial performance or hospital productivity but also according to their capacity to improve population health outcomes, guarantee equitable access to healthcare services, reduce catastrophic out-of-pocket expenditures, and strengthen community resilience against public health crises. Consequently, investments in health insurance systems, primary healthcare infrastructure, preventive medicine, and community health programs become strategic instruments for creating long-term public value rather than simply controlling healthcare costs (WHO, 2023).

At the level of local governments and territorial communities, Public Value Management considerably expands the traditional concept of competency-based management. Local authorities are no longer viewed exclusively as administrative units responsible for delivering standardized services. Instead, they become facilitators of local development, coordinators of public action, and catalysts for community engagement. Their role increasingly involves identifying local needs, mobilizing public and private stakeholders, encouraging citizen participation, promoting territorial innovation, and strengthening social cohesion.

Accordingly, competency-based management within local authorities must extend beyond technical and administrative expertise. Public officials are expected to develop a broad portfolio of strategic competencies, including participatory leadership, collaborative governance, stakeholder engagement, ethical decision-making, conflict resolution, strategic planning, evidence-based policymaking, and digital service management. These competencies enable public managers to design and implement integrated policies capable of addressing complex territorial challenges such as unemployment, poverty, social exclusion,

healthcare accessibility, environmental sustainability, and regional inequalities (Bryson et al., 2014; OECD, 2023).

Furthermore, Public Value Management strongly emphasizes citizen participation and co-production in public service delivery. Rather than treating citizens as passive recipients—or merely as customers, as suggested by New Public Management—PVM recognizes them as active partners in identifying community needs, designing public policies, monitoring service quality, and evaluating policy outcomes. Participatory governance mechanisms, including public consultations, local development committees, participatory budgeting, and digital citizen engagement platforms, enhance both the legitimacy and effectiveness of public action while fostering greater public trust (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012).

For countries undertaking administrative modernization, such as Algeria and Mauritania, the Public Value approach provides a particularly appropriate conceptual framework for reforming public administration. Both countries continue to face significant challenges related to expanding social protection, improving healthcare accessibility, strengthening local governance, and reducing territorial disparities. In these contexts, measuring public sector performance exclusively through financial efficiency would underestimate the broader developmental role of public institutions. Public Value Management instead advocates evaluating public organizations according to their contribution to inclusive development, social protection, territorial equity, institutional trust, community empowerment, and sustainable human development.

Ultimately, Public Value Management offers a comprehensive framework that redefines the mission of public administration. Rather than simply seeking to "do more with less," public organizations are encouraged to generate lasting social value through equitable public services, effective social protection systems, responsive healthcare provision, participatory governance, and sustainable community development. For local authorities, this perspective transforms competency-based management into a strategic instrument for strengthening institutional capacity, improving public service quality, enhancing citizens' well-being, and supporting resilient and inclusive territorial development.

2.2.2. New Public Governance

New Public Governance (NPG), developed principally by Osborne (2010), represents one of the most significant theoretical developments in contemporary public administration. Emerging as a response to the limitations of New Public Management (NPM), NPG recognizes that the growing complexity of modern societies requires a shift from hierarchical government and market-oriented management toward collaborative governance involving multiple public and private actors. Unlike NPM, which relies heavily on competition, contractual relationships, and managerial autonomy, New Public Governance emphasizes

cooperation, partnership, trust, interdependence, and collective action as the fundamental principles guiding public service delivery (Osborne, 2010; Osborne, Radnor, & Nasi, 2013).

The emergence of NPG reflects profound changes in the environment within which public organizations operate. Contemporary public challenges—including poverty reduction, social protection, healthcare accessibility, demographic ageing, unemployment, environmental sustainability, territorial inequalities, and digital transformation—are increasingly recognized as "wicked problems", characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and the involvement of numerous stakeholders whose interests frequently overlap (Head & Alford, 2015). Such multidimensional challenges cannot be effectively addressed by a single public institution acting independently. Instead, they require coordinated interventions involving national governments, local authorities, public agencies, civil society organizations, community associations, private-sector actors, international organizations, and citizens themselves.

Within this perspective, the role of public administration undergoes a fundamental transformation. Public organizations are no longer viewed merely as service providers responsible for producing standardized public services. Instead, they become facilitators, coordinators, and network managers responsible for mobilizing diverse stakeholders around common societal objectives. Government therefore shifts from direct control toward collaborative governance, where policy design, implementation, and evaluation become shared responsibilities among multiple institutional actors (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

One of the principal contributions of New Public Governance lies in its reconceptualization of public service delivery. Public services are increasingly understood as outcomes generated through continuous interactions between governments and society rather than products delivered unilaterally by administrative institutions. This perspective is particularly relevant for sectors such as healthcare, education, social protection, housing, employment services, and local development, where service quality depends heavily upon collaboration among numerous organizations operating at different administrative levels.

In the field of social protection, New Public Governance provides an especially appropriate conceptual framework. Social protection systems have become increasingly complex, integrating contributory social insurance, non-contributory social assistance, health insurance schemes, pension systems, labour market policies, child protection programmes, disability benefits, and emergency social support mechanisms. Managing these interconnected programmes requires extensive coordination among ministries, social security institutions, local governments, healthcare providers, civil society organizations, employers' associations, and international development partners (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2024).

Rather than assigning exclusive responsibility for social protection to central government institutions, NPG promotes a network-based approach in which responsibilities are shared

across multiple actors. National governments establish regulatory frameworks and financing mechanisms; local authorities identify vulnerable populations and coordinate service delivery at the community level; non-governmental organizations provide complementary social services; community organizations facilitate outreach to marginalized groups; while citizens actively participate in identifying needs and evaluating programme effectiveness. Such collaborative arrangements contribute to improving policy responsiveness, increasing service accessibility, and enhancing social inclusion (OECD, 2023).

This governance model is particularly relevant for extending social security coverage in developing countries characterized by high levels of informal employment. In countries such as Algeria and Mauritania, where large segments of the labour force remain outside traditional contributory insurance schemes, achieving Universal Social Protection requires coordinated action involving social security institutions, municipalities, community organizations, employers, cooperatives, and international agencies. Collaborative governance therefore becomes an essential mechanism for identifying uninsured populations, simplifying administrative procedures, promoting awareness campaigns, and improving access to social protection programmes.

Similarly, public healthcare systems increasingly illustrate the principles of New Public Governance. Achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) depends upon effective collaboration among ministries of health, national health insurance funds, hospitals, primary healthcare centres, municipalities, international donors, community health workers, and civil society organizations. Rather than operating independently, these actors must coordinate planning, financing, resource allocation, disease prevention, health promotion, and service delivery to ensure equitable access to healthcare for all population groups (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

Community participation constitutes another cornerstone of New Public Governance. Citizens are no longer regarded merely as passive beneficiaries or consumers of public services. Instead, they are recognized as active partners capable of contributing valuable local knowledge, identifying emerging social needs, participating in policy design, monitoring programme implementation, and evaluating service quality. This process of co-production significantly enhances the effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability of public policies by ensuring that services correspond more closely to community priorities (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012).

Within local governments, co-production has become particularly important in areas such as public health campaigns, poverty reduction initiatives, environmental protection, social assistance programmes, local infrastructure development, youth employment, and community safety. Participatory governance mechanisms—including public consultations, neighbourhood committees, participatory budgeting, citizen advisory councils, and digital

engagement platforms—strengthen democratic accountability while improving policy outcomes.

Consequently, New Public Governance substantially redefines the competencies required of public servants. Traditional administrative skills remain necessary, but they are no longer sufficient for managing increasingly interconnected governance systems. Public managers must now possess a broad range of collaborative competencies, including strategic communication, negotiation, mediation, partnership development, stakeholder engagement, conflict resolution, inter-organizational coordination, participatory leadership, network management, intercultural communication, project management, and collective learning (Osborne, 2010).

These competencies are particularly critical for local authorities, which occupy a central position in territorial governance. Municipalities and regional administrations serve as the interface between national public policies and local communities. They coordinate interactions among governmental agencies, healthcare institutions, schools, social protection organizations, businesses, community associations, and citizens. Effective competency-based management therefore enables local governments to mobilize diverse territorial resources, improve service integration, and respond more effectively to local socioeconomic challenges.

For countries undertaking administrative modernization, including Algeria, New Public Governance offers an especially relevant framework for strengthening local public administration. Contemporary reforms increasingly require municipalities to assume responsibilities extending beyond routine administrative functions toward integrated territorial development, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and local economic development. These objectives cannot be achieved solely through hierarchical administrative structures but instead require extensive collaboration among multiple institutional partners.

Furthermore, recent experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated the importance of collaborative governance for maintaining essential public services and protecting vulnerable populations. Effective responses depended not only upon governmental capacity but also upon close cooperation among healthcare providers, municipalities, social protection institutions, community organizations, humanitarian agencies, and citizens. These experiences have reinforced the relevance of New Public Governance as a framework capable of improving the resilience of public institutions and strengthening community preparedness for future crises (OECD, 2023; WHO, 2023).

Ultimately, New Public Governance extends the traditional objectives of public administration beyond organizational efficiency toward collective problem-solving, social cohesion, community empowerment, and sustainable territorial development. In the context of competency-based management, this perspective emphasizes that public employees must increasingly function as facilitators of collaboration rather than merely administrators of

public programmes. Their competencies should therefore enable them to build partnerships, mobilize stakeholders, coordinate networks, promote citizen participation, and support integrated public services capable of generating lasting social value for local communities.

2.2.3. The Neo-Weberian State (NWS)

The Neo-Weberian State (NWS) has emerged as one of the principal post-New Public Management paradigms seeking to reconcile the legal and institutional foundations of traditional public administration with contemporary managerial reforms (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Rather than replacing Weberian bureaucracy, the Neo-Weberian approach advocates its modernization by combining the principles of legality, impartiality, professionalism, accountability, and continuity of public service with greater organizational flexibility, strategic management, performance orientation, and citizen responsiveness (Drechsler, 2005; Lynn, 2008).

Unlike New Public Management, which emphasizes competition, privatization, and market mechanisms, the Neo-Weberian State argues that the State remains the primary guarantor of collective welfare and social cohesion. Consequently, administrative modernization should strengthen—not weaken—the State's capacity to regulate markets, reduce social inequalities, coordinate public policies, and ensure universal access to essential public services (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Drechsler, 2005).

This perspective is particularly relevant for social protection systems, where public institutions remain responsible for guaranteeing social rights through pension schemes, health insurance, unemployment protection, family benefits, and social assistance. According to Greve (2015), welfare institutions cannot be managed exclusively according to market principles because their objectives extend beyond efficiency toward social justice, equity, redistribution, and risk sharing. Similarly, Béland and Petersen (2014) argue that contemporary welfare states increasingly combine managerial reforms with strong institutional regulation to preserve universal access while improving service quality and financial sustainability.

Within healthcare systems, the Neo-Weberian approach supports the central role of government in coordinating Universal Health Coverage (UHC), ensuring equitable financing, regulating healthcare providers, and protecting vulnerable populations. Public authorities therefore remain responsible for balancing efficiency objectives with the constitutional principles of solidarity, equity, and equal access to healthcare services (Saltman, Rico, & Boerma, 2006; WHO, 2023).

For local governments, the Neo-Weberian State provides a particularly appropriate analytical framework. Municipalities and regional authorities increasingly enjoy managerial autonomy while remaining accountable to national legal frameworks. Their mission extends beyond

administrative service delivery to include territorial development, community well-being, local economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion. Consequently, public managers must simultaneously ensure legal compliance, democratic accountability, financial responsibility, and high-quality public service delivery (Bouckaert & Jann, 2020).

From the perspective of competency-based management, the Neo-Weberian model considerably broadens the competencies expected from public servants. Besides technical expertise, civil servants require legal competencies, ethical leadership, strategic planning skills, financial management capabilities, public policy analysis, citizen engagement, and collaborative governance abilities. Competency development therefore becomes a strategic instrument for improving administrative performance while preserving the fundamental values of public service, including impartiality, transparency, accountability, and equal treatment (Hondeghem, Horton, & Scheepers, 2006).

This theoretical perspective appears particularly suitable for countries such as Algeria, whose administrative institutions continue to operate within a highly centralized legal framework strongly influenced by the French administrative tradition. Although recent reforms have introduced performance management, decentralization, and competency-based human resource management, administrative modernization remains closely linked to constitutional principles, public law, and State responsibility for ensuring social cohesion. Competency-based management should therefore complement rather than replace the legal and institutional foundations of public administration, enabling local authorities to improve organizational effectiveness while preserving democratic legitimacy and citizens' trust.

2.2.4. Digital-Era Governance (DEG)

Digital-Era Governance (DEG), introduced by Dunleavy et al. (2006), constitutes one of the most influential contemporary paradigms explaining the digital transformation of public administration. Emerging as a response to the fragmentation generated by New Public Management reforms, Digital-Era Governance argues that information and communication technologies should be used to reintegrate public organizations, simplify administrative procedures, improve inter-agency coordination, and deliver integrated citizen-centred public services (Dunleavy et al., 2006).

Unlike New Public Management, which promoted organizational specialization and autonomous agencies, Digital-Era Governance emphasizes administrative integration through digital technologies. Public organizations are encouraged to share information, coordinate decision-making processes, and provide seamless services through interoperable digital platforms, thereby reducing administrative fragmentation and improving service accessibility (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013).

The literature generally identifies three core dimensions of Digital-Era Governance: administrative reintegration, citizen-centred service delivery, and extensive digitalization of public services (Dunleavy et al., 2006). These principles have become increasingly important as governments worldwide adopt digital government strategies based on cloud computing, artificial intelligence, blockchain technologies, interoperable databases, electronic identification systems, and integrated digital platforms (OECD, 2023).

Within social protection systems, digital transformation represents a major driver of institutional modernization. Integrated information systems facilitate beneficiary identification, eligibility verification, electronic payment of social benefits, fraud detection, programme monitoring, and coordination among multiple social security institutions. According to the World Bank (2022), digital social protection systems significantly improve administrative efficiency while reducing exclusion errors, transaction costs, and delays in benefit delivery.

Digital technologies also play an increasingly strategic role in achieving Universal Health Coverage. Electronic medical records, digital health insurance systems, telemedicine, hospital information systems, mobile health applications, and artificial intelligence improve healthcare accessibility, service continuity, epidemiological surveillance, and health system resilience (WHO, 2023). These innovations contribute to better resource allocation, evidence-based policymaking, and improved quality of healthcare services.

For local authorities, Digital-Era Governance supports the development of smart public administration capable of delivering integrated territorial services. Municipal governments increasingly rely on digital platforms for civil registration, urban planning, tax administration, participatory governance, environmental monitoring, and social service delivery. Digital government therefore strengthens transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and administrative responsiveness while improving coordination among different public organizations (OECD, 2023).

The digital transformation of public administration also profoundly modifies competency-based management. Public officials must increasingly master digital literacy, data governance, cybersecurity, digital leadership, information systems management, artificial intelligence applications, project management, and organizational change management. Furthermore, ethical competencies relating to data protection, algorithmic accountability, privacy, transparency, and responsible artificial intelligence have become essential for maintaining citizens' trust in digital public services (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013).

For developing countries seeking to modernize public administration, including Algeria, Digital-Era Governance provides a comprehensive framework for improving service delivery, strengthening social protection, expanding healthcare accessibility, and promoting evidence-based public management. Nevertheless, successful implementation depends not only on

technological investment but also on continuous capacity building, institutional coordination, organizational learning, and competency development among public employees (OECD, 2023 ; World Bank, 2022).

3. A Revisited Conceptual Framework for Competency Management

3.1 Competencies, Competency Management, and Management by Competencies

Competency has become one of the central concepts in modern organizational and public management. Although the notion has been interpreted from different theoretical perspectives, there is broad consensus that competency refers to an individual's ability to effectively mobilize knowledge, technical expertise, practical skills, personal attributes, attitudes, and behaviours in order to successfully accomplish professional tasks within a specific organizational context (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Competencies therefore extend beyond formal qualifications or academic knowledge by emphasizing the practical application of learning to solve complex organizational problems and generate sustainable organizational performance.

Within public administration, competencies are increasingly viewed as strategic assets that determine the quality of public service delivery, institutional effectiveness, organizational adaptability, and citizens' trust in government. As public organizations face growing environmental uncertainty, demographic changes, digital transformation, fiscal constraints, and increasing citizen expectations, the development of appropriate competencies among public employees has become an essential condition for improving administrative performance (Hondeghem, Horton, & Scheepers, 2006).

The literature generally distinguishes three complementary concepts that are frequently confused but correspond to different managerial levels.

The first level concerns competency identification, which consists of defining and describing the knowledge, technical skills, behavioural abilities, managerial capacities, and professional attitudes required for each position or organizational function. This stage establishes competency frameworks that serve as reference tools for recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and career development (Le Boterf, 2018).

The second level refers to competency management, which encompasses the set of human resource management practices designed to acquire, develop, evaluate, retain, and allocate competencies according to organizational needs. Recruitment policies, performance appraisal systems, continuous professional training, succession planning, career management, mobility programmes, and talent development constitute the principal instruments through which organizations manage their human capital (Cohen & Soulier, 2002).

The third and most advanced level is management by competencies. Unlike competency management, which primarily concerns the Human Resource function, management by competencies represents a comprehensive strategic management philosophy whereby the organization's overall strategy is formulated according to the competencies it currently possesses and those it intends to develop in the future. Competencies become strategic resources that shape organizational priorities, innovation capacity, institutional learning, and long-term competitive advantage (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).

Within public organizations, this perspective considerably transforms the role of human resources. Employees are no longer viewed merely as administrative personnel executing standardized procedures, but rather as strategic contributors capable of creating public value, improving institutional performance, and supporting organizational transformation. Competency-based management therefore links individual development with institutional objectives, allowing public organizations to respond more effectively to changing economic, technological, demographic, and social conditions.

This strategic approach is particularly relevant for local authorities, whose responsibilities have expanded considerably over recent decades through decentralization reforms. Municipalities and regional governments increasingly manage complex public policies relating to local economic development, social protection, environmental sustainability, public health, urban planning, education, and digital government. Consequently, competency-based management has become a fundamental instrument for strengthening local institutional capacity, improving service quality, and enhancing territorial competitiveness.

3.2. An Updated Theoretical Foundation: Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities

The competency-based perspective finds its strongest theoretical foundation in the Resource-Based View (RBV) developed by Barney (1991), Wernerfelt (1984), and Prahalad and Hamel (1990). The RBV argues that sustainable organizational performance depends primarily on the internal resources and capabilities possessed by an organization rather than exclusively on external market conditions.

According to Barney (1991), organizational resources generate sustainable competitive advantage when they satisfy four conditions commonly known as the VRIN framework: they must be valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable. Human competencies represent one of the most important strategic resources because they are embedded in individuals, accumulated through organizational learning, and difficult for competitors to replicate.

Although originally developed for private firms, the Resource-Based View has increasingly been applied to public administration. In public organizations, competitive advantage should not be understood in commercial terms but rather as superior institutional performance,

higher-quality public services, stronger citizen satisfaction, greater administrative effectiveness, and enhanced public value creation (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014).

However, the RBV has also been criticized for adopting a relatively static conception of organizational resources. Possessing valuable competencies does not automatically guarantee long-term success because organizational environments evolve continuously. Rapid technological change, digital transformation, demographic transitions, environmental challenges, and changing citizen expectations require organizations to adapt their competencies continuously.

To address this limitation, Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) introduced the concept of Dynamic Capabilities, subsequently refined by Teece (2007; 2018). Dynamic capabilities refer to an organization's capacity to deliberately create, integrate, reconfigure, and renew its resources and competencies in response to environmental changes.

Teece identifies three interdependent managerial capabilities that determine organizational adaptability.

The first capability is sensing, namely the capacity to identify emerging opportunities, anticipate environmental changes, recognize future societal needs, and detect potential threats before competitors or other organizations.

The second capability is seizing, which involves mobilizing organizational resources to exploit identified opportunities through innovation, investment, institutional learning, and strategic decision-making.

The third capability is transforming or reconfiguring, whereby organizations continuously adapt their structures, competencies, technologies, partnerships, and operational processes to maintain long-term effectiveness under changing conditions.

These dynamic capabilities have become increasingly relevant for public administration because governments operate within highly uncertain environments characterized by technological disruption, climate change, demographic ageing, pandemics, fiscal constraints, decentralization reforms, and rapidly evolving citizen expectations.

Applied to local governments, the Dynamic Capabilities framework suggests that territorial competencies should not be viewed as a fixed stock of human resources but rather as continuously evolving strategic assets.

A municipality, for example, must first identify its comparative territorial advantages, including tourism potential, agricultural production, industrial specialization, cultural heritage, renewable energy resources, or digital innovation ecosystems.

It must subsequently mobilize the appropriate human competencies through recruitment, professional development, partnerships, organizational learning, and institutional cooperation.

Finally, it must continuously reassess and reconfigure these competencies according to changing socioeconomic conditions, technological innovations, environmental challenges, and local development priorities.

Competency-based management therefore becomes an instrument of territorial resilience, enabling local governments to anticipate change rather than merely react to crises.

4. The Establishment Project as a Strategic Instrument for Community-Based Social Protection Governance

4.1. Definition, Objectives and Methodological Framework

The establishment project constitutes one of the most comprehensive strategic management instruments available to public organizations for translating long-term public policies into coherent operational programmes. It can be defined as a participatory planning framework through which an institution formulates a shared strategic vision, identifies territorial priorities, mobilizes stakeholders, allocates financial and human resources, and monitors performance over a medium- or long-term period, generally ranging from three to five years (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2009; Bryson, 2018).

Within the context of local governments, however, the establishment project goes far beyond a conventional administrative planning document. It represents a governance mechanism capable of coordinating multiple public actors around a common territorial development strategy while simultaneously strengthening institutional capacity, improving service delivery, and promoting inclusive social protection. Rather than focusing exclusively on internal organizational objectives, the establishment project seeks to integrate economic development, social inclusion, health protection, environmental sustainability, and citizen participation into a single coherent framework.

The increasing complexity of contemporary public challenges—including population ageing, unemployment, territorial inequalities, climate change, public health crises, rapid urbanization, and expanding informal employment—requires local governments to adopt integrated planning mechanisms capable of coordinating interventions across multiple sectors (OECD, 2023; United Nations, 2024). Consequently, establishment projects have progressively evolved from simple management tools into strategic governance instruments supporting territorial resilience and sustainable development.

Within social protection systems, the establishment project assumes even greater importance. Social protection programmes involve numerous public institutions operating simultaneously in health care, employment, education, social assistance, housing, disaster management, and local economic development. Without an integrated planning framework,

these interventions often become fragmented, generating duplication of services, inefficient resource allocation, administrative complexity, and unequal access to benefits (ILO, 2024).

An establishment project therefore provides local authorities with a structured methodology for coordinating social protection initiatives while ensuring that interventions remain aligned with national development priorities, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the specific socioeconomic needs of local communities. Its implementation generally follows four interconnected phases.

The first phase consists of a comprehensive territorial diagnosis. Rather than limiting analysis to administrative statistics, local governments conduct multidimensional assessments covering demographic dynamics, poverty incidence, unemployment, health indicators, social vulnerabilities, infrastructure availability, environmental risks, local economic potential, institutional capacities, and existing social protection coverage. Such diagnoses allow municipalities to identify priority populations, including informal workers, women, elderly persons, children, persons with disabilities, internally displaced populations, and other vulnerable groups requiring targeted interventions.

The second phase concerns strategic planning and priority setting. Based on the diagnostic findings, local stakeholders collectively define strategic objectives, measurable performance indicators, financing mechanisms, implementation schedules, and institutional responsibilities. In community-based social protection programmes, priorities may include expanding health insurance coverage, strengthening primary healthcare services, improving social assistance targeting, supporting vulnerable households, developing employment programmes, or increasing financial inclusion.

The third phase focuses on operational implementation. Strategic priorities are translated into concrete programmes, projects, and annual action plans supported by clearly identified financial resources, institutional responsibilities, monitoring mechanisms, and implementation calendars. Human resource development, competency enhancement, interdepartmental coordination, and partnership agreements become central components of this operational stage.

Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation ensure that implementation remains consistent with strategic objectives. Performance indicators are periodically reviewed to measure programme effectiveness, service quality, financial sustainability, beneficiary satisfaction, institutional learning, and policy adaptation. This cyclical evaluation process transforms the establishment project into a dynamic management system capable of continuous improvement rather than a static planning document (Bryson, 2018).

4.2 Integrating competency-based management within community-based social protection projects

Recent developments in public management suggest that establishment projects should no longer be viewed merely as administrative planning exercises. Instead, they constitute strategic governance platforms through which local governments mobilize competencies, coordinate institutions, and create sustainable public value for communities.

From the perspective of Public Value Management (Moore, 1995; Bryson et al., 2014), the primary objective of a community-based social protection project is not simply to increase administrative efficiency but to generate measurable improvements in citizens' well-being. Public value is created when social protection policies effectively reduce poverty, improve access to healthcare, strengthen social cohesion, promote equity, and enhance community resilience.

Consequently, competency-based management extends beyond traditional administrative expertise. Local officials involved in social protection projects must possess competencies in social policy analysis, community engagement, participatory planning, ethical decision-making, stakeholder management, programme evaluation, and evidence-based policymaking. These competencies enable local governments to design interventions that genuinely respond to citizens' needs while maintaining democratic legitimacy and public trust.

The perspective of New Public Governance (Osborne, 2010) further broadens this approach by emphasizing collaborative governance. Social protection cannot be delivered effectively by local governments acting alone. Instead, successful community-based programmes require extensive collaboration among municipalities, ministries, health insurance institutions, social security agencies, hospitals, schools, non-governmental organizations, community associations, development partners, universities, private enterprises, and citizens themselves.

Within such collaborative governance networks, competency management increasingly focuses on relational capacities rather than purely technical knowledge. Public managers require advanced negotiation skills, partnership development capabilities, inter-organizational coordination competencies, conflict resolution techniques, participatory leadership, and collaborative problem-solving abilities. These competencies enable municipalities to mobilize diverse institutional resources while reducing fragmentation across social protection programmes.

The Neo-Weberian State perspective (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017) introduces another essential dimension. While managerial innovation remains important, community-based social protection must continue to respect the fundamental principles of legality, transparency, accountability, equity, continuity of public service, and equal treatment before the law. Local authorities therefore face the challenge of combining managerial flexibility with legal certainty.

Competency-based management consequently becomes complementary to administrative law rather than a substitute for it. Public servants responsible for implementing social protection projects must simultaneously master regulatory frameworks, financial management, procurement procedures, public ethics, administrative accountability, and performance management. Such balanced competencies contribute to strengthening citizens' confidence in public institutions while improving service effectiveness.

The emergence of Digital-Era Governance (Dunleavy et al., 2006; OECD, 2023) further transforms establishment projects into digital governance instruments. Community-based social protection increasingly depends upon integrated information systems capable of connecting multiple public institutions involved in beneficiary identification, contribution collection, healthcare financing, payment systems, and programme monitoring.

Accordingly, municipalities require new categories of competencies including digital literacy, health information systems management, cybersecurity, geographic information systems (GIS), big data analytics, artificial intelligence applications, interoperable digital platforms, cloud computing, and electronic public service delivery. These technological competencies substantially improve administrative efficiency while facilitating evidence-based decision-making and reducing exclusion errors within social protection programmes.

5. Application to community-based social protection projects

When establishment projects are specifically designed to strengthen community-based social protection, competency-based management becomes the central mechanism linking local governance with sustainable social development.

For example, a municipality seeking to expand health insurance coverage among informal workers should not restrict its intervention to administrative enrolment campaigns. Instead, the establishment project should coordinate healthcare providers, social security institutions, community organizations, local employers, financial institutions, women's associations, youth organizations, and digital service providers.

Similarly, municipalities implementing poverty reduction programmes should integrate employment services, vocational training centres, microfinance institutions, agricultural cooperatives, education providers, environmental agencies, and local businesses into a unified territorial strategy. Such integrated governance considerably enhances programme effectiveness while generating synergies among different dimensions of local development.

Community participation also becomes an essential competency objective. Beneficiaries should actively contribute to programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation through participatory budgeting, community health committees, citizen consultation platforms, digital feedback mechanisms, and local development councils. Such

participatory governance strengthens programme legitimacy while improving responsiveness to local needs.

Ultimately, the establishment project evolves into a comprehensive governance architecture capable of integrating competency-based management, territorial planning, collaborative governance, digital transformation, and community participation into a unified strategy supporting universal social protection. Rather than representing a simple administrative planning instrument, it becomes a strategic mechanism through which local authorities contribute to poverty reduction, social inclusion, universal health coverage, territorial resilience, and sustainable community development, fully consistent with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

5.1 Success factors of a community-based social protection project

Achieving the goals of a community-based social protection project requires the convergence of several critical factors. It begins with a meticulous territorial diagnosis to map out urgent social issues, target populations, and available institutional capacities. This must be accompanied by the meaningful engagement of all local stakeholders—including municipal leaders, healthcare networks, NGOs, and the beneficiaries themselves—to secure long-term sustainability and grassroots backing.

Additionally, success depends on an efficient resource allocation strategy that matches financial, technological, and human capacities with established local priorities. Progress must be guided by clear, quantifiable performance indicators that allow for real-time monitoring and continuous improvement. Finally, strong political will and institutional leadership are vital to navigate implementation hurdles and keep the multi-actor coalition aligned with the project's long-term vision. As noted by the International Labour Organization (2024), integrated governance, sustainable funding, inter-agency coordination, and civic engagement form the foundational pillars of any enduring social protection system.

5.2 Methodology for designing and implementing a social protection project

The operationalization of a territorial social protection project progresses through four distinct, sequential phases. The first phase, Territorial Diagnosis, entails an exhaustive analysis of the region's socioeconomic landscape, looking deeply into poverty rates, informal labor, infrastructure constraints, and existing social programs, with a particular focus on marginalized groups like women, elderly citizens, and low-income households. This leads directly into the second phase, Strategic Planning, where local authorities utilize diagnostic

insights to define multi-annual strategic objectives, target populations, operational budgets, and key performance metrics over a flexible three-to-five-year horizon.

The third phase, Project Implementation, translates these strategic blueprints into concrete actions, such as broadening primary healthcare access, executing targeted cash transfers, offering vocational training, and digitizing beneficiary registries. This phase demands constant communication and alignment between local government units, civil society, and social security agencies. Finally, the fourth phase, Monitoring and Evaluation, introduces an analytical loop where authorities measure coverage rates, beneficiary satisfaction, and financial sustainability against initial targets. The insights gained from this final phase are fed back into the next planning cycle, fostering a culture of continuous organizational learning and policy refinement.

5.3 The role of the social protection project in strengthening competency-based management within local governments

Viewed through the lens of competency-based management, the social protection project transcends its role as a planning tool to become a strategic engine for identifying, cultivating, and deploying the exact human talents required by a territory. Instead of enforcing rigid, standardized bureaucratic configurations, this approach empowers local governments to tailor their human capital development to their distinct geographical and structural realities. Consequently, the types of expertise required vary greatly depending on the local context. Municipalities burdened by high poverty indices must prioritize skills in social work, targeted welfare management, and community mobilization, whereas regions undergoing rapid demographic shifts require specialists in healthcare infrastructure planning and demographic forecasting. Similarly, territories with vast informal economies must develop capacities in microfinance, social insurance expansion, and financial inclusion, while areas prone to environmental hazards demand expertise in disaster risk mitigation and emergency social assistance.

In this framework, managing competencies becomes an active, continuous effort to upgrade the technical, digital, and collaborative leadership skills of the public workforce. This methodology aligns perfectly with the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) and the Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), which state that sustainable institutional performance depends on an organization's capacity to constantly adapt and reconfigure its internal skills in response to shifting external pressures. Ultimately, specialized human competencies represent vital public assets that allow local governments to optimize service delivery, weather socioeconomic crises, and generate lasting public value for their communities.

6. Conclusion

The emergence of New Public Management (NPM) marked a significant turning point in the evolution of public administration by introducing managerial principles such as decentralization, managerial autonomy, performance measurement, accountability, and results-oriented management. These reforms contributed substantially to improving administrative efficiency and encouraging a more strategic approach to public sector management. However, more than three decades of theoretical and empirical research have demonstrated that the exclusive application of NPM remains insufficient to address the increasing complexity of contemporary public governance. Public organizations now operate in environments characterized by rapid technological change, demographic transitions, environmental challenges, fiscal constraints, growing citizen expectations, and the need for greater collaboration among multiple institutional actors. These evolving conditions require governance models that extend beyond managerial efficiency to embrace broader objectives of public value creation, institutional resilience, collaborative governance, and sustainable territorial development.

Within this evolving context, the establishment project should no longer be regarded merely as an administrative planning instrument designed to organize institutional activities over a multi-year period. Rather, it should be understood as a comprehensive strategic governance framework capable of aligning organizational competencies, territorial priorities, stakeholder collaboration, and public policy objectives. By integrating competency-based management with contemporary theories of public governance—including Public Value Management, New Public Governance, the Neo-Weberian State, Resource-Based View, Dynamic Capabilities, and Digital-Era Governance—the establishment project becomes a strategic mechanism through which local governments can strengthen institutional performance while simultaneously improving the quality, accessibility, equity, and sustainability of community-based social protection.

This integrated perspective highlights that competencies represent far more than individual technical qualifications. They constitute strategic organizational resources that enable local governments to anticipate emerging challenges, mobilize partnerships, foster innovation, improve decision-making, and continuously adapt public services to changing territorial needs. Consequently, competency-based management should be considered a central pillar of local governance, ensuring that human capital development remains closely aligned with long-term institutional objectives and community priorities.

The analysis presented in this article also demonstrates that the effectiveness of community-based social protection depends not only on financial resources or administrative structures

but equally on the capacity of local institutions to coordinate multiple stakeholders, integrate digital technologies, promote citizen participation, and continuously develop the competencies required by evolving socioeconomic contexts. In this respect, the establishment project serves as an enabling platform that connects strategic planning, organizational learning, collaborative governance, and competency development into a coherent territorial development strategy capable of generating sustainable public value.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed for policymakers and local government practitioners :

First, the establishment project should be conceived as a participatory governance framework dedicated to the collective creation of public value rather than as a purely internal administrative planning document. Its preparation should actively involve public institutions, civil society organizations, private-sector actors, universities, healthcare providers, community associations, and citizens to ensure that strategic priorities genuinely reflect local needs and expectations.

Second, local authorities should institutionalize competency-based management throughout the entire project cycle. Competency identification, recruitment, professional development, performance evaluation, and career management should all be systematically aligned with the strategic objectives of territorial development and community-based social protection. Developing both technical and transversal competencies—including leadership, collaboration, digital literacy, participatory governance, and evidence-based policymaking—will substantially strengthen institutional capacity.

Third, municipalities should reinforce collaborative governance by establishing long-term partnerships among local governments, national administrations, social security institutions, healthcare organizations, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private-sector stakeholders. Such inter-organizational cooperation facilitates resource sharing, improves policy coherence, reduces institutional fragmentation, and enhances the effectiveness of social protection programmes.

Fourth, the modernization of local public administration should preserve the fundamental principles of the Neo-Weberian State, particularly legality, transparency, accountability, continuity of public service, and equal treatment of citizens. Managerial innovation should therefore complement, rather than replace, the rule of law and democratic public administration.

Fifth, digital transformation should become an integral component of competency-based management. Local governments should invest in digital infrastructures, interoperable information systems, geographic information systems, artificial intelligence applications, data analytics, cybersecurity, and electronic public services. At the same time, public employees should continuously develop the digital competencies necessary to effectively

manage increasingly technology-driven social protection systems.

Finally, continuous learning should become a permanent institutional objective. Local governments should establish comprehensive training programmes for managers, technical staff, and elected officials focusing not only on competency-based management but also on contemporary public governance approaches, strategic planning, collaborative leadership, innovation management, digital governance, and public value creation. Such investments in human capital will significantly enhance the adaptability, resilience, and long-term sustainability of local institutions.

Future research could extend the conceptual framework proposed in this article by conducting empirical studies across municipalities or regional governments in different national contexts. Comparative analyses could investigate how competency-based management influences the effectiveness of establishment projects, collaborative governance, institutional resilience, and community-based social protection outcomes. Such empirical validation would contribute to strengthening the theoretical foundations of competency-based public management while providing practical guidance for policymakers seeking to modernize local governance systems in support of sustainable territorial development and universal social protection.

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