

# *Innovating In Administration: Managerial Challenges And Socio-Cultural Constraints Of Change Management In The Democratic Republic Of Congo*

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**Résumé :** Cet article analyse les enjeux managériaux et les contraintes socioculturelles de la gestion du changement dans l'administration publique de la République Démocratique du Congo. À partir d'une lecture critique des réformes inspirées de la nouvelle gestion publique et de la gouvernance numérique, l'étude met en évidence l'ambivalence des dynamiques de modernisation. Si l'innovation administrative apparaît comme un levier stratégique d'amélioration de la performance, de la transparence et de la qualité des services publics, sa mise en œuvre demeure freinée par des rigidités structurelles, une forte hiérarchisation, le cloisonnement institutionnel et le poids du formalisme juridique. L'analyse souligne également l'importance de la dimension humaine du changement, notamment la communication, la participation des agents et le leadership administratif, comme facteurs déterminants de l'appropriation des réformes. L'article conclut que l'innovation durable dans l'administration congolaise requiert une transformation systémique articulant adaptation organisationnelle, institutionnalisation progressive des pratiques et valorisation du capital humain public.

**Mots-clés :** Gestion du changement, Innovation administrative, Administration publique ; Réformes publiques, Modernisation de l'État, Fonction publique, RDC.

**Abstract:** This paper examines the managerial challenges and sociocultural constraints of change management within public administration in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Drawing on a critical review of reforms inspired by New Public Management and digital-era governance, the study highlights the ambivalence of modernization dynamics. While administrative innovation represents a strategic lever for improving performance, transparency, and public service quality, its implementation is hindered by structural rigidities, strong hierarchical traditions, institutional fragmentation, and legal formalism. The analysis further emphasizes the central role of the human dimension of change particularly communication, employee participation, and administrative leadership in shaping the appropriation and sustainability of reforms. The paper concludes that durable innovation in the Congolese public sector requires a systemic transformation combining organizational adaptation, progressive institutionalization of best practices, and the recognition and empowerment of public servants as key actors of change.

**Keywords:** Change management; Administrative innovation; State modernization; Public service; DRC.

## Introduction

Public administrations in the Democratic Republic of Congo are currently operating in an environment marked by significant economic, institutional, and technological transformations. Driven by globalization and increasing demands for public performance, states are called upon to modernize their administrative structures and management methods to respond more effectively to citizens' expectations [1]. Within this context, administrative modernization has emerged as a strategic necessity to improve the efficiency of public action and enhance the quality of services provided to users.

In this context, several public administration reforms have been undertaken in the Democratic Republic of Congo, notably with the aim of improving administrative efficiency, transparency, and accountability in public action. These reforms involve streamlining administrative structures, revising management procedures, and progressively introducing new managerial practices [2]. They also aim to promote a more efficient and results-oriented administration, in accordance with the principles of New Public Management [3].

Furthermore, the Congolese civil service continues to face persistent structural challenges. The literature highlights, in particular, bureaucratic inefficiency, excessive centralization of decision-making, weak institutional and managerial capacities, and insufficient human, material, and financial resources [2], [3]. These constraints affect the public administration's ability to effectively implement ongoing reforms and limit the introduction of sustainable organizational and managerial innovations.

Furthermore, several authors demonstrate that the often limited scope of administrative reforms in developing countries is largely due to the absence or inadequacy of structured change management. The introduction of new rules or technologies only produces lasting effects if it is accompanied by mechanisms designed to prepare, mobilize, and involve the relevant stakeholders [4], [5]. Otherwise, reforms tend to remain merely formal and struggle to genuinely transform administrative practices [6].

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, rising expectations among users of public services further reinforce this need for transformation. Citizens demand greater speed, transparency, and accessibility in the delivery of public services, prompting administrations to adopt innovative practices and progressively utilize digital technologies [7], [8]. However, the success of these innovations remains closely linked to the capacity of public organizations to manage organizational and human change.

The current context of public administration transformation in the Democratic Republic of Congo highlights the need to analyze change management as a central lever for innovation in the civil service. Such an analysis allows for a better understanding of how administrative reforms can be translated into effective and sustainable innovations, taking into account the institutional, organizational, and human realities specific to the Congolese context [9], [10].

## 1. Change Management

### 1.1. Definition and scope of change management

Change management is a central concept in organizational theory and management. It is generally defined as the set of structured approaches aimed at supporting an organization and its members through a transformation process [4]. Among the foundational contributions, Lewin conceptualized organizational change as a three-phase process: thawing, change, and refreezing [4]. This model highlights the need to prepare individuals before any transformation, to support the implementation of new practices, and to stabilize the adopted changes.

Other authors, such as Burnes, broaden this perspective by considering change management as a continuous process integrating anticipation, implementation, and organizational adaptation [11]. These approaches highlight that organizational change cannot be reduced to a one-off intervention, but must be understood as a permanent dynamic of adjustment.

### 1.2. The human dimension of organizational change

Change management cannot be understood solely from a technical or structural perspective. It fundamentally relies on a transformation of the behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of organizational actors. Indeed, any modification of structures, procedures, or technologies necessarily implies an adaptation of the individuals called upon to implement them [4].

From this perspective, Lewin emphasizes that organizational change is primarily a social process, within which individuals can exhibit a variety of reactions such as acceptance, indifference, or resistance [4]. Change affects work habits, professional benchmarks, and areas of psychological comfort, which explains the frequency of resistance phenomena.

Kotter reinforces this analysis by highlighting that one of the main obstacles to change lies in human factors, including fear of uncertainty, fear of losing power, and a lack of understanding of the objectives being pursued [5]. According to this author, the success of change depends largely on the ability of leaders to mobilize stakeholders, establish a climate of trust, and effectively communicate the vision for change.

For their part, Fernandez and Rainey emphasize that, in public organizations, the human dimension of change is of particular importance [6]. Public employees play a crucial role in the effective implementation of administrative reforms. Their involvement, motivation, and perception of change directly influence the outcome of transformation processes.

The findings of organizational psychology also confirm that individual reactions to change are influenced by variables such as perceptions of organizational justice, feelings of security, administrative culture, and prior experiences with reform [11]. Thus, a change perceived as imposed or poorly explained can generate defensive attitudes and hinder the adoption of new practices.

Therefore, taking the human dimension into account appears to be an essential condition for the success of organizational change. This notably involves communication, stakeholder participation, continuous training, and the development of leadership capable of supporting individuals through the phases of adaptation and learning.

### **1.1.3. Specifics of change management in the public sector**

In this context, change management cannot be understood as a simple internal managerial process, but rather as a complex institutional phenomenon subject to multiple constraints. Public administrations operate within a highly regulated framework, where managerial flexibility is limited by legislation, formal procedures, and control mechanisms [1]. This organizational reality reinforces the centralization of decision-making and reduces the capacity of public organizations to rapidly adapt their structures and practices to the demands of change [2].

Furthermore, the administrative culture specific to the public sector is often oriented towards compliance and respect for rules rather than towards risk-taking, experimentation and innovation [9]. This cultural orientation, largely inherited from the classic bureaucratic model described by Weber, promotes the continuity of existing practices and can generate resistance to organizational transformation processes [12], [11].

Managing change in the public sector must therefore contend with deeply entrenched institutional routines, organizational norms, and behaviors. Fernandez and Rainey emphasize that the success of change in public organizations largely depends on the ability of leaders to overcome these organizational inertias, particularly through communication, stakeholder engagement, and aligning reforms with the administrative culture [6].

### **1.1.4. Levers for managing change in public administrations**

Managing change in public administrations relies on activating several organizational and managerial levers aimed at facilitating the acceptance, appropriation, and effective implementation of administrative reforms. Given the specific characteristics of the public sector, these levers play a crucial role in transforming policy orientations into sustainable organizational practices [5], [6].

Institutional communication is one of the fundamental levers of change management. It allows for the dissemination of clear, consistent, and structured information on the objectives, methods, and expected benefits of the reforms undertaken. According to Kotter, effective communication helps reduce uncertainty, prevent misunderstandings, and strengthen the buy-in of organizational stakeholders [5].

In the public sector, Fernandez and Rainey emphasize that communication about change plays a crucial role in building trust by fostering a shared understanding of the planned transformations [6]. Conversely, insufficient or poorly structured communication can fuel resistance and hinder the adoption of reforms.

### **1.1.5. Change management in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo**

In developing countries, change management is emerging as a key strategic lever to support institutional reforms and improve the performance of public administrations. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, this issue is of particular importance due to the ongoing administrative modernization efforts and persistent structural constraints [2], [3].

The Congolese civil service operates within a context marked by major organizational challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiency, centralization of administrative decisions, insufficient human, material and financial resources, and the persistence of traditional administrative practices [3]. These characteristics limit the capacity of administrations to effectively implement reforms and integrate sustainable innovations.

According to Polidano, in the public administrations of countries with fragile institutional capacities, organizational changes are often introduced formally without any real transformation of behaviors, routines, and professional practices [2]. This situation frequently leads to a gap between the objectives of reforms and their actual implementation on the ground.

In this context, change management cannot be reduced to a simple adoption of new rules, structures or technologies. It must be understood as a comprehensive support process aimed at transforming organizational behaviors, strengthening the capacities of public agents and promoting the appropriation of administrative reforms [4], [11].

### **1.2. Civil service**

The civil service encompasses all government departments, institutions, and agents entrusted with the mission of implementing public policies, executing government decisions, and providing public services to citizens. It constitutes a fundamental pillar of public action insofar as it ensures the continuity of the state, translates political orientations into concrete actions, and meets collective needs in the economic, social, and administrative spheres [1], [2]. Through its various components, the civil service plays a central role in economic and social development, participating in the regulation of economic activities, the redistribution of public resources, and the promotion of collective well-being [1], [3].

In the literature on public management and administrative sciences, the civil service is generally considered the primary instrument of state action. According to Pollitt and Bouckaert, it represents the central mechanism through which the state carries out its missions, ensures the implementation of public policies, and guarantees administrative continuity [1]. It thus embodies the state's institutional capacity to fulfill its sovereign functions, translate policy orientations into concrete actions, and guarantee citizens' equitable access to public services. As such, it constitutes an essential link in the functioning of the state and a determining factor in the quality of public action [1], [2].

This conception is part of the administrative tradition stemming from the bureaucratic model, in which Weber defines public administration as an organization based on legal rationality, the hierarchy of responsibilities and the formalization of rules [4]. From this perspective, the civil service appears not only as an executive apparatus, but also as a regulatory structure, aiming to ensure legality, neutrality and equal treatment in public action [4], [5].

Several studies highlight that the efficiency of the civil service directly influences the overall performance of the state and the quality of public governance. Effective public administration not only ensures the implementation of laws and public policies, but also strengthens citizens' trust in public institutions [1], [6]. Conversely, dysfunctions within the civil service can undermine the legitimacy of the state and jeopardize the achievement of economic and social development objectives [2], [6].

Thus, the civil service appears as a central actor in the institutional system, simultaneously guaranteeing the continuity of the State, implementing public policies, and promoting the general interest. Its capacity to fulfill these functions depends closely on its organization, the quality of its human resources, and its ability to adapt to changes in the political, economic, and social environment [1], [2], [3].

### **1.2.1. Organizational characteristics of the civil service**

The civil service is characterized by a hierarchical structure, an operation based on strict formal rules and a strong dependence on legal and institutional frameworks. These organizational features, largely inherited from the classic bureaucratic model, are intended to guarantee the legality of administrative decisions, the neutrality of the administration and the equal treatment of citizens, fundamental principles of public service [1].

In the literature on administrative science, this bureaucratic organization is seen as a means of rationalizing public action and ensuring the predictability of administrative decisions. However, several authors emphasize that these same characteristics can generate significant administrative rigidity, potentially limiting the civil service's ability to adapt to changes in the economic, social, and technological environment. The centralization of decisions, the complexity of procedures, and the predominance of rule-taking over performance improvement are often cited as factors hindering reform and innovation processes within public administrations [2], [3].

In this context, the performance of the civil service appears closely linked to the quality of human resource management, administrative coordination mechanisms, and the capacity of institutions to transform themselves. The literature thus highlights that, while bureaucracy constitutes an essential foundation of legality and administrative stability, it can also represent an obstacle to modernization when public organizations struggle to reconcile compliance with the rules with the requirements of efficiency, adaptation, and innovation [2], [4].

### **1.2.2. The civil service in the context of the DRC**

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the civil service is characterized by a highly hierarchical organization and a centralization of administrative decisions, partly inherited from the country's institutional and administrative history. It faces numerous structural challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiency, insufficient managerial capacity, weak performance evaluation systems, and slow administrative procedures. These constraints constitute major obstacles to the modernization of administrative practices and the improvement of the quality of public services [1].

Furthermore, the Congolese civil service is engaged in reform processes aimed at strengthening administrative efficiency, transparency, and public governance. These reforms are part of a broader strategy to modernize the state and enhance the administration's capacity to meet the growing expectations of citizens [2]. However, the literature emphasizes that the success of these reforms largely depends on the institutions' ability to transform organizational practices and the behavior of public officials [3].

In this context, change management appears as an essential lever to support the reforms undertaken and to foster the emergence of innovative practices within the Congolese civil service. It makes it possible to facilitate the appropriation of the transformations by public servants and to create the conditions necessary for a more efficient, more transparent administration that is more oriented towards meeting the needs of citizens and the requirements of national development [2], [3].

## **2. The Ambivalence of Change in the DRC**

### **2.1. Between decreed reforms and realities on the ground**

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, organizational change management takes place within a complex institutional context, historically shaped by an administrative culture inherited from the colonial period. This culture remains largely characterized by a strong hierarchy, centralized decision-making, and persistent procedural inertia, which hinder organizational flexibility and the adaptability of public structures [1], [2]. Despite recurring political discourse focused on the “modernization of public administration,” the operational reality in many ministries and general secretariats remains marked by major structural constraints, including insufficient material, technological, and financial resources, as well as shortages of specialized skills [3].

In this context, administrative innovation and managerial reform initiatives are often perceived by public officials as exogenous forces, driven primarily from Kinshasa or under the influence of international technical and financial partners such as the World Bank or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This perception contributes to a significant gap between formally

adopted reforms and their effective implementation by local institutional actors [4]. This gap is particularly evident in decentralized provinces, where administrative capacities, infrastructure, and change management support mechanisms remain limited, thus reducing the real impact of public modernization policies [5].

Furthermore, the literature on public governance in developing states highlights that organizational change processes frequently fail when they do not take into account local socio-political dynamics, informal practices, and internal cultural resistance [6]. In the DRC, these factors result in fragmented implementation of reforms, weak institutionalization of innovations, and difficulty in establishing a culture of performance and sustainable accountability.

## **2.2. Innovation to restore trust in the Congolese State**

The relationship between Congolese citizens and the public administration has historically been marked by persistent mistrust, fueled by perceptions of procedural slowness, bureaucratic complexity, and red tape. This distrust is part of a broader context specific to states with limited institutional capacity, where the perceived quality of public services directly influences the legitimacy of state action [1]. In the DRC, these perceptions affect not only trust in the administration, but also civic engagement, tax compliance, and the effectiveness of public policies [2].

From this perspective, administrative innovation, particularly through e-government systems, appears as a strategic lever for rebuilding trust and strengthening institutional legitimacy. The digitalization of public procedures aims to increase transparency, reduce information asymmetry, and limit physical interactions that foster informal or discretionary practices [3]. Initiatives such as the dematerialization of tax payments, digital traceability of files, and online access to administrative documents contribute to streamlining processes, reducing transaction costs, and improving the user experience [4].

Beyond its technical dimension, e-government constitutes a powerful symbolic instrument: it helps transform the image of a public service perceived as "budget-devouring" into one oriented towards performance, speed, and quality of service to citizens [5]. This shift reflects a logic of modern public governance, based on accountability, results measurement, and user satisfaction [6]. However, the literature emphasizes that the real impact of these innovations depends heavily on contextual factors, including the availability of digital infrastructure, the digital skills of public servants, the interoperability of systems, and the social appropriation of technological tools [7].

In the DRC, the central challenge lies not only in the introduction of technologies, but also in the administration's ability to demonstrate, tangibly, a measurable improvement in the speed, reliability, and transparency of public services. Only then can administrative innovation become a credible driver for restoring public trust and strengthening state authority.

## **2.3. Structural obstacles: the weight of centralism and the "prestige hierarchy"**

The Congolese administrative model is characterized by a high degree of hierarchy and centralized decision-making, a historical legacy of Weberian-type bureaucratic structures, reinforced by postcolonial dynamics of institutional control [1], [2]. Within this organizational framework, individual initiative, particularly when taken by young managers, can be interpreted as an implicit transgression of established hierarchical norms, where conformity and structural loyalty often take precedence over innovation and managerial creativity [3].

Furthermore, the persistent institutional silos between ministries and public services, often referred to colloquially as "red squares" or "private preserves," constitute a major obstacle to cross-cutting innovation. This organizational fragmentation limits the flow of information, hinders inter-institutional coordination, and reduces the administration's capacity to develop integrated solutions to complex problems [4]. The literature on public governance emphasizes that these organizational silo dynamics generate structural inefficiencies and weaken the overall performance of public policies [5].

Furthermore, the weight of legal and administrative formalism accentuates the rigidities of the system. Experimentation with new working methods, though essential in organizational modernization processes, frequently encounters the absence of explicit regulatory frameworks (decrees, orders, circulars). This regulatory dependence, characteristic of administrations with a strong

legalistic culture, can generate a “procedural paralysis” where regulatory compliance prevails over operational efficiency and organizational agility [6], [7].

The combination of a rigid hierarchy, marked institutional compartmentalization, and pervasive legal formalism contributes to limiting the capacity for administrative innovation in the DRC. These structural constraints reduce managerial autonomy, hinder the adoption of adaptive organizational practices, and complicate the effective implementation of public reforms.

#### **2.4. Managerial constraints: from survival to performance**

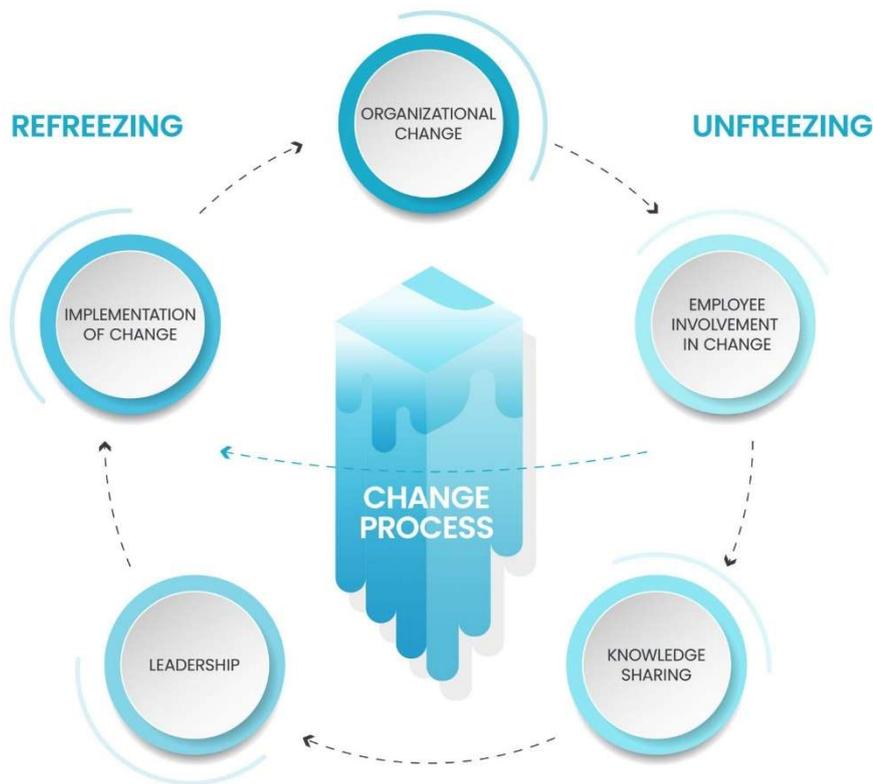
In the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo, resistance to organizational change cannot be understood solely from a psychological or cultural perspective; it is also rooted in structuring socio-economic realities. When administrative reforms, particularly digitization initiatives, are perceived as likely to disrupt or eliminate certain informal income streams, they tend to generate explicit or latent forms of opposition. The literature on institutional economics and public governance shows that, in environments characterized by high levels of informality, actors develop adaptation strategies aimed at preserving their rents, discretionary margins, or relational advantages [1], [2]. From this perspective, innovation can be interpreted not as organizational progress, but as a direct economic threat.

Furthermore, the burnout observed among public sector employees does not stem solely from reform overload or "change fatigue," but also from a persistent gap between the ambitions of reforms and the resources actually mobilized for their implementation. The lack of adequate infrastructure, technological resources, targeted training, and support mechanisms exacerbates feelings of constraint, uncertainty, and demotivation [3]. This situation can generate a form of organizational cynicism, where successive reforms are perceived as symbolic, unrealistic, or disconnected from operational conditions [4].

In this context, the role of middle managers—Directors and Division Heads—appears crucial. Situated at the interface between strategic decision-making and operational execution, these actors are essential drivers of appropriation, translation, and stabilization of change [5]. Their buy-in largely depends on the perceived benefits associated with innovation: improved working conditions, enhanced professional status, clarified responsibilities, and reduced bureaucratic constraints. Conversely, when innovation is perceived as fostering the marginalization of internal skills in favor of external experts (consultants, IT specialists), it can strengthen resistance, fuel identity anxieties, and weaken the dynamics of organizational transformation [6].

In the DRC, the success of innovative reforms depends as much on the availability of resources as on managing perceptions, incentives, and organizational balances. Aligning technological innovation, socio-professional security, and empowering internal stakeholders is a critical condition for the acceptability and sustainability of change.

Figure: Lewin's change management



## 2.5. Towards rooted innovation: beyond "pilot projects" in Kinshasa

For administrative innovation to have a tangible impact in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it must move beyond a technocratic centralization model and be embedded in an inclusive territorial dynamic. Modernization confined to the decision-making centers of Kinshasa, particularly in the best-resourced institutional spaces, risks creating a “digital showcase,” characterized by visible but geographically limited progress. This situation can exacerbate territorial and institutional inequalities, keeping some provinces in less modernized administrative systems [1], [2].

The literature on e-government in developing countries emphasizes that the success of digital reforms depends heavily on their contextualization. Constraints related to access to energy, internet connectivity, technical infrastructure, and digital skills are critical factors that can affect the adoption and sustainability of innovations [3]. From this perspective, change management cannot be limited to the introduction of technological tools; it involves a process of organizational, institutional, and socio-technical adaptation that integrates local realities and the actual capacities of deconcentrated and decentralized administrations [4].

Sustainable reform also requires the institutionalization of best practices, such as systems for monitoring and tracking administrative files, standardizing procedures, and ensuring transparency in decision-making processes. Institutionalization is indeed a key mechanism for stabilizing organizational change, enabling the transformation of ad hoc initiatives into long-term administrative routines [5]. However, this institutionalization must remain flexible and contextualized to avoid a mechanical transposition of models designed for more favorable institutional environments.

Finally, valuing the public servant appears to be an essential condition for the success of transformations. The adoption of innovations largely depends on the perception of individual and collective benefits: improved working conditions, reduction of repetitive tasks, professional recognition, and skills development [6]. The public servant cannot be considered a mere executor of

reforms, but rather a strategic actor of change, whose commitment determines the effectiveness and credibility of modernization policies.

Thus, in the DRC, successful change management will be that which combines technological innovation, territorial adaptation, progressive institutionalization and mobilization of human resources, within a framework of administrative equity and operational efficiency.

## Conclusion

The analysis showed that the difficulties in innovation are not solely due to technical or regulatory factors. They are also rooted in rigid administrative hierarchies, institutional silos, the burden of legal formalities, and inherited organizational structures. These elements contribute to limiting the agility of public structures and hindering the adoption of innovative management practices.

Furthermore, the success of reforms appears inextricably linked to considering the human dimension of change. The perceptions of public employees, resistance mechanisms, job security concerns, and the strategic role of middle managers directly influence the adoption and sustainability of the transformations undertaken. A reform that is not supported, insufficiently explained, or disconnected from operational realities risks remaining merely formal and producing limited effects.

The study also highlights the risk of asymmetrical modernization, concentrated in certain administrative centers, to the detriment of a balanced dissemination of innovations across the country. Sustainable administrative innovation requires adaptation to local constraints, the gradual institutionalization of best practices, and the development of the public sector's human capital.

Ultimately, innovation within the Congolese administration implies a systemic transformation that goes beyond the mere introduction of new technologies or procedures. It requires a coherent integration of organizational reforms, evolving management practices, strengthening institutional capacities, and mobilizing stakeholders. Only under these conditions can administrative modernization effectively contribute to improving public performance and restoring trust between the state and its citizens.

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