

## GOVERNANCE OF PUBLIC SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANIZATIONS: MANAGERIAL THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM

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### **Abstract:**

*Public science and technology (S&T) organizations serve as pillars of the national innovation system, playing a central role in knowledge creation, technological development, and the transfer of innovations into practical production and daily life. However, the governance of these organizations in Vietnam currently faces numerous challenges, including institutional constraints, rigid financial mechanisms, limited human resources, low levels of autonomy, and ineffective collaboration with the business sector. To fundamentally address these issues, it is essential to study and apply modern management theories, particularly agency theory, property rights theory, and new public management. This theoretical approach not only helps identify the root causes of governance bottlenecks in public S&T organizations but also provides a scientific foundation for proposing reform solutions tailored to Vietnam's specific context amid integration and development. The article is structured into five main sections: (1) Background; (2) The connotation of public organization governance; (3) Theoretical basis for governance of public science and technology organizations; (4) Vietnam's practice from a theoretical perspective; (5) Lessons drawn from theoretical perspectives.*

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### **1. Background and requirements for the governance mechanism reform of public science and technology organizations**

Reform of the governance mechanism of public science and technology organizations is an inevitable requirement, originating from both theoretical and practical bases. From a theoretical perspective, modern science and technology systems need to adapt to the context of rapid, multidimensional, and complex development of the knowledge society, the digital economy, and the trend of global integration. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), one of the biggest challenges in the governance of the public research system is to ensure a balance between the effective use of public resources and promoting innovation to serve socio-economic development (OECD, 2011). Modern public governance theory emphasizes the role of institutional autonomy, Intersectoralism, and output-based evaluation mechanisms to enhance the flexibility, adaptability, and accountability of public S&T organizations (Meng, 2024; Zayats et al., 2024). These factors help public organizations shift from a centralized, compliance-oriented administrative management model to an open, flexible governance model that focuses on efficiency and social impact.

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From a practical perspective, like many countries in the world, the S&T management system in Vietnam still has many limitations such as a heavily subsidized administrative management mechanism, lack of real autonomy, scattered resource allocation, overlapping tasks, low efficiency of linkages with businesses and markets, and the innovation motivation of scientific staff has not been fully promoted (*OECD, 2014; WB, 2021*). In particular, the traditional management model is not compatible with the requirements of an innovation-oriented market economy, has not created an environment to encourage competition, commercialize research results, and has not effectively linked science and technology organizations with businesses, society, and other economic sectors.

For public S&T organizations to truly play a central role in the national innovation ecosystem, it is necessary to strongly shift from an administrative management model to a mission-based governance model, with efficiency and impact as the main metrics (*OECD, 2011*). This process requires increasing financial, personnel, and organizational autonomy for research institutes and public universities; applying a budget allocation mechanism based on results, evaluating output efficiency instead of relying only on inputs; promoting public-private partnerships, developing technology markets and knowledge commercialization; and enhancing monitoring, accountability, and transparency of research activities comprehensively (*OECD, 2011*).

In addition, in the context of deep international integration, digital transformation, and commitments to sustainable development, Vietnam's public S&T organization system is also facing pressure to improve its competitiveness, proactively participate in global value chains in research, innovation, and commercialization of scientific results. Major policies of the Party and State such as Resolution No. 19-NQ/TW dated October 25, 2017 of the 12th Party Central Committee "On continuing to reform the organization and management system, improving the quality and efficiency of public service units", along with programs and projects related to reform in the organization and operation of public service units have created an important legal foundation for the transition from a traditional management model to a modern governance model.

However, the realization of this goal still faces many institutional barriers, unsynchronized financial mechanisms, limitations in high-quality human resources, and an administrative organizational culture.

This poses an urgent need to continue researching, analyzing, and proposing solutions to reform the management mechanism of public science and technology organizations towards modernity, flexibility, and integration. The focus of this process is to take innovation and impact efficiency as the central goal, to meet the requirements of rapid and sustainable development in the new development stage of the country.

## **2. The content of public organization governance**

Selecting the core content of modern public organization governance is an important step to evaluate and improve the performance of the public sector. Based on theoretical studies and practical recommendations from international organizations

and many recent academic works, modern public organization governance is defined by the following six main contents:

- *Institutional autonomy*: Institutional autonomy is considered the foundation for public organizations to proactively adjust their structures, processes, and resources, thereby enhancing their ability to adapt to rapidly changing environments (*Meng, 2024; Zayats et al., 2024*). However, for autonomy to be effective, there must be clear control, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms, especially in centralized administrative systems such as in China or many developing countries (*OECD, 2020; SIGMA, 2023*);
- *Cross-sectoral cooperation and network governance*: Cooperation between government agencies, businesses, civil society organizations, and non-state actors is a driving force for innovation, increased adaptability, and solving complex multi-sectoral problems (*Chen et al., 2023; OECD, 2020*). Modern governance models emphasize the role of cross-sectoral cooperation, public-private partnerships, and building multi-stakeholder coordination networks to improve the quality of public services and the effectiveness of policy implementation (*Temitope, 2023*);
- *Accountability and transparency*: Accountability is considered a central factor in reducing agency risks, improving governance efficiency, and strengthening social trust in the public sector (*WB, 2020*). Information transparency, financial disclosure, independent monitoring mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement are key tools to ensure accountability in public organization governance (*IFAC, 2014*);
- *Efficiency, effectiveness, and innovation*: Modern public governance models emphasize results-based governance, with efficiency in serving society as the center. The application of key performance indicators (KPIs), process innovation, and digital technology applications is to improve quality, reduce costs, and better meet people's needs (*OECD, 2020*). Innovation, digitalization of public services, and process optimization are pillars of modern public governance reform;
- *Leadership and organizational capacity*: Leadership style, especially transformational leadership, is emphasized as a key factor connecting autonomy, cross-sectoral cooperation, and governance results (*Meng, 2024*). Organizational capacity, including the quality of human resources, training systems, adaptability, and innovation, is a decisive factor for effective and sustainable public governance (*Olowu, 2024*);
- *Principles of rule of law, equity, and inclusiveness*: International standards on public governance emphasize the principles of rule of law, equity, non-discrimination, and ensuring the participation of all social groups in the decision-making process (*OECD, 2020; IFAC & CIPFA, 2014*). Inclusiveness and social consensus are conditions for policies to be legitimate and sustainable.

In summary, the core content of modern public organization governance is shaped by the six (06) factors mentioned above. These are the core elements that are most

emphasized through international studies and recommendations on modern public administration.

To have a deeper insight into the theoretical basis that forms these contents, the next section will analyze an overview of some important public organization management theories, thereby clarifying the academic foundation and development of the concept of modern public organization management suitable for Vietnamese conditions.

### **3. Theoretical basis of public science and technology organization management**

#### ***3.1. Agency theory***

Agency theory is an important analytical framework for explaining delegation relationships in public organizations, especially in the context of modernizing state governance. This theory focuses on the relationship between the principal - usually the State or a governing body - and the agent - the public organizations assigned to perform tasks. The core of agency theory is the assumption that the parties have different goals and incentives, and that information asymmetries exist when the agent has more information about the task implementation process (*OECD, 2021*).

In public organization governance, information asymmetries create problems such as opportunistic behaviour, conflicts of interest, or abuse of power. Public organizations may prioritize the interests of small organizations or groups over the overall goals of the State, especially when monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are inadequate. This leads to agency costs, including monitoring costs, contract design costs, and costs arising from inappropriate behaviour by the public organization.

To mitigate agency risk, public organizations often apply both ex-ante and ex-post control mechanisms. Ex-ante controls include: organizational structure design, recruitment processes, administrative procedures, and operating rules that guide the behaviour of the public organization from the outset. Ex-post controls include monitoring, auditing, performance evaluation, rewards, sanctions, and accountability.

Agency theory also emphasizes the role of motivation and incentives in the public sector. While the private sector relies mainly on financial motivation, the public sector needs to combine intrinsic motivation (professional values, public service ethics) with extrinsic motivation (promotion, rewards, accountability). Transparency, information disclosure, and stakeholder participation are also key factors to reduce information asymmetry and improve governance efficiency.

Agency theory is the foundation for the development of autonomous or semi-autonomous public organization models (agencification), in which public organizations are granted organizational, financial, and personnel autonomy but are still accountable to management agencies through performance indicators, responsibility contracts, and periodic audits. The balance between autonomy and control is considered a key condition to optimize the motivation and performance of public organizations, while minimizing the risk of “interest deviation” or operating away from public goals.

However, researchers also warn of new challenges such as multiple principals, conflicting goals among stakeholders, or the phenomenon of “governance gaps” when agents operate without effective supervision. To overcome this, many studies propose to strengthen coordination between management levels, build a multi-level supervision model, and promote the role of society and the media in supervising the operations of public organizations.

In summary, agency theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding and improving the relationship between owners and agents in public organizations, especially through control mechanisms, appropriate incentive design, and increased transparency. Effective application of this theory helps improve public governance efficiency, reduce agency risks, and better meet economic and social development goals.

In the management practice of public organizations in China, agency theory is flexibly applied through the controlled decentralization model, granting conditional autonomy to public organizations while maintaining strategic supervision from the Central Government. Empirical research shows that institutional autonomy has a positive impact on decentralization but has a limited impact on governance flexibility, reflecting the strong regulatory role of state owners. In addition, developing cross-sectoral collaboration models and applying transformational leadership also contribute to reducing agency risks, enhancing the adaptability and effectiveness of public policy implementation.

### ***3.2. Property rights theory***

Property rights theory is one of the important foundations in organizational economics and public administration, focusing on the establishment, delimitation, protection, and transfer of control, use, and benefit rights over the resources, assets, and outputs of the organization. According to the classical view, ownership is the exclusive power to decide how to use a resource, whether the resource belongs to an individual, an organization, or the State; society and law recognize and protect these rights through the system of institutions and rules.

In public organization management, property rights theory emphasizes the role of clearly establishing ownership rights over public assets, research results, inventions, intellectual property, and other resources. When ownership is clearly defined, organizations and individuals have stronger incentives to invest, innovate, use assets efficiently, and take responsibility for their performance. Conversely, ambiguous or fragmented ownership can easily lead to abuse, loss, lack of innovation, and low resource efficiency.

Modern property rights theory, represented by the work of Grossman, Hart, and Moore, emphasizes that in reality, contracts are always incomplete, because it is impossible to foresee all situations that arise. Therefore, property rights determine who has the ultimate decision-making power over assets in cases that are not specified in advance, thereby directly affecting the motivation for investment, innovation, and resource allocation in the organization. The three basic criteria for an effective property rights system are: (1) universality - every asset must have an

owner; (2) exclusivity - the owner has the right to control the asset; (3) transferability - ownership can be transferred so that the asset can be moved to the most effective use.

In the public sector, the establishment of property rights is not only related to physical assets but also includes intellectual property, data, research results, and other intangible resources. If ownership is unclear, public organizations are susceptible to falling into the “common asset trap,” where responsibilities and incentives for using and protecting assets are dispersed, leading to waste, loss, or conflicts of interest among stakeholders. Conversely, when ownership and benefit rights are clearly established, public organizations can proactively cooperate, share benefits, commercialize research results, promote innovation, and improve social service efficiency.

International experience, especially from China, shows that reforming ownership rights in the public sector through equitization, developing mixed ownership models, and legalizing intellectual property rights and public assets has created a strong impetus for innovation and improved public governance efficiency. However, this process also poses challenges in benefit distribution, supervision, risk control, and ensuring social equity. Therefore, an effective public governance system needs to simultaneously establish clear ownership rights, design control mechanisms, accountability, and encourage multi-stakeholder cooperation, thereby optimizing public value and promoting sustainable development.

In short, ownership theory provides an important theoretical and practical framework for designing, operating, and reforming public organizations, helping to address issues of motivation, accountability, efficiency, and innovation in public asset management as well as socio-economic development.

### **3.3. New public management (NPM)**

New Public Management Theory is one of the most important trends in public administration reform that emerged in the late 20th century, with the aim of modernizing, improving the efficiency and adaptability of the public sector through the application of private sector management principles and practices to public organizations. NPM theory emerged in the context of traditional administrative models being assessed as cumbersome, inflexible, ineffective, and failing to meet the increasing expectations of modern society.

The theoretical foundation of NPM is based on schools such as new institutional economics, public choice theory, transaction cost theory, and agency theory, emphasizing the role of individual motivation, competition, control of results, and accountability in public administration. Accordingly, NPM proposes a series of key principles and reform measures:

- *Decentralization and increased autonomy*: NPM encourages the transfer of power from the central government to local levels, giving greater autonomy to public organizations, and promoting a decentralized, flexible, and locally adaptable governance model;

- *Results-based governance and performance measurement*: Public organizations are required to set specific goals, measure performance through output indicators, results-based budgets, and performance contracts. Results-based evaluation helps improve accountability and optimize resources;
- *Competition and marketization of public services*: NPM promotes competition through privatization, outsourcing, public-private partnerships (PPP), expanding the public service supply market, creating incentives for innovation, and improving service quality;
- *Enhanced accountability*: Public managers are given greater autonomy but also have to take clear responsibility for performance, through control mechanisms, independent evaluation, and information disclosure;
- *Organizational innovation and flexible governance*: NPM encourages public organizations to innovate their structures, reduce intermediaries, apply information technology, improve governance capacity, and adapt quickly to environmental changes.

In public management practice, NPM has brought about many fundamental changes: Public agencies have been reorganized into more autonomous units, performance contracting has been introduced, competition in service provision has been introduced, and public-private partnerships have been developed.

In China, factors such as institutional autonomy, cross-sectoral cooperation, and transformational leadership style have been identified as important catalysts for change and adaptation of the public governance system, helping to improve efficiency and responsiveness to modern challenges. NPM theory has been implemented through policies of decentralization, granting controlled autonomy to public and local organizations, applying results-based governance, and enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation.

China has reduced administrative procedures, modernized management processes, and proactively established public-private partnerships, in which the State plays a coordinating role. State-led cross-sectoral collaboration has a significant positive impact on both governance flexibility and decentralization, especially in areas such as environment, education, and health. The role of transformational leadership is prominent in linking institutional autonomy and cross-sectoral collaboration to governance outcomes.

Transformational leadership promotes innovation, empowerment, and resilience, while paternalistic leadership maintains centralized control, inhibits innovation, and prevents effective decentralization. The results show that transformational leadership has a more favourable impact on governance flexibility and decentralization than paternalistic leadership.

However, NPM also faces limitations in terms of the risk of over-commercialization of the public sector, a reduced focus on public values and social equity, as well as risks of transparency, ethics, and service quality control. Therefore, countries applying NPM need to consider adjusting it to suit their institutional context, culture,

and development goals to achieve a balance between efficiency, accountability, and long-term public values.

#### **4. Practices of governance of public science and technology organizations in Vietnam from a theoretical perspective**

From the perspective of agency theory and new public management theory, the current state of public organization governance, especially public S&T organizations in Vietnam, shows many shortcomings in decentralization, autonomy, accountability, and innovation motivation.

##### ***4.1. Analysis from the perspective of agency theory***

According to agency theory, the relationship between the State (the subject that grants authority) and public organizations (the subject that receives authority) in Vietnam is still strongly influenced by the centralized administrative control model. The majority of public service units, including those with high autonomy, are still bound by rigid regulations on organizational structure, staffing quota, finance, and personnel. The recruitment, appointment, and approval process of research projects is lengthy and depends on the decisions of superiors, reducing the initiative of organizational leaders in selecting personnel and implementing tasks. Financial and organizational autonomy are stipulated in a number of documents, but in reality, they are only formalities. Regulations concerning the establishment of additional income funds, the use of public assets, and the signing of labor contracts still face many barriers or lack detailed instructions (*Ministry of Science and Technology, 2022*).

Agency theory also points out the risk of “benefit deviation” when the authorized subject does not have enough motivation to stick with the goals of the authorizing subject. In reality, low salaries and benefits, lack of benefit-sharing mechanisms from commercialization of research results, along with institutional overlap and administrative control, cause many talented scientists and experts to move to the private sector or abroad. The internal control system is still weak, lacking standards for evaluating effectiveness, leading to financial violations being discovered only through inspections instead of through periodic internal controls, and at the same time, the evaluation criteria are still based on the number of academic publications rather than the socio-economic impact of the research.

##### ***4.2. Analysis from the perspective of new public management theory***

From the perspective of new public management theory, Vietnam has made certain changes, such as conditionally granting autonomy to public organizations, implementing cost-contracting mechanisms of spending allocation, performance-based contracts, promoting socialization, and advancing public-private partnerships. However, in practice, there are still many limitations, such as the mechanism of lump-sum funding allocation is not suitable for the unique characteristics of research, due to difficulties in defining output products. There is a lack of flexibility in budget adjustment, and the financial autonomy roadmap does not clearly



distinguish between basic research and applied research. Resource allocation is still scattered, lacking quantitative criteria; the budget is wasted on administrative costs and duplicate research.

Core elements of NPM, such as results-based management, accountability, competition, and customer orientation, have not been implemented synchronously. The performance evaluation system is mainly based on inputs, lacking transparency in social impact; the linkage between institutes, universities, and enterprises is still weak; The mechanism for sharing benefits from research, scientific risk insurance, and commercialization of research results still lacks transparency and is not attractive enough to attract social investment.

In short, the governance of public science and technology organizations in Vietnam is still highly bureaucratic, lacking the motivation for innovation and real autonomy. To overcome this, it is necessary to perfect the legal framework on autonomy, decentralization, along with effective accountability, reform the financial mechanism towards flexibility, strengthen governance based on results, and encourage multi-stakeholder cooperation, focusing on the effectiveness of serving society instead of just following and complying with the process.

## 5. Policy implications and recommendations

From the above analysis, many important lessons can be drawn for Vietnam on reforming public organization management, especially in the field of public science and technology, from the perspective of Agency theory and new public management.

**First**, it is necessary to establish a substantive autonomy mechanism associated with accountability based on output results. Lessons from agency theory show that if only power is delegated without an effective monitoring mechanism, it will lead to "benefit deviation".

*Specific actions:* Review and amend relevant legal documents such as: Decree No. 120/2020/ND-CP dated October 7, 2020 regulating the establishment, reorganization, and dissolution of public service units, Decree No. 106/2020/ND-CP dated September 10, 2020 on job positions and number of employees in public service units, Decree No. 60/2021/ND-CP dated June 21, 2021 of the Government regulating the financial autonomy mechanism of public service units in the direction of: (a) classifying and categorizing S&T organizations to establish a suitable autonomy roadmap; (b) promulgating a set of national performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate performance; (c) publicizing evaluation results.

**Second**, it is necessary to build a flexible financial mechanism and allocate resources in accordance with the characteristics of each type of scientific research; apply the cost-contracting mechanism of spending allocation according to output results, develop science and technology funds, diversify socialized capital sources; at the same time, perfect the legal framework on intellectual property, share benefits in institute - enterprise collaboration research, build venture capital funds and risk insurance mechanisms for innovative research. The reason is that the current application of a common autonomous model for both basic and applied research

organizations has led to a paradox: strategic research institutes without commercial revenue must cut off their staff, while applied organizations lack the motivation to innovate due to procedural problems. Flexible financial mechanisms and support solutions will help increase investment efficiency, reduce dependence on the state budget, and promote innovation in Vietnam's science, technology, and innovation ecosystem.

*Specific actions:* Issue principles and criteria for budget allocation based on results and efficiency of fund use, instead of dispersing allocations or relying solely on procedures. Build and develop venture capital funds with flexible legal conditions, reduce capital and procedural constraints, and facilitate high-tech and innovative projects to access larger capital sources. Amend legal regulations on intellectual property, especially the benefit-sharing mechanism between research institutes and enterprises in cooperation and technology transfer activities.

**Third,** it is necessary to transform the public organization governance model into a new public management model, focusing on the effectiveness of serving society and the market. The current traditional management model is still heavily reliant on procedures, lacks flexibility, and fails to meet the requirements of innovation in the context of integration, leading to low operational efficiency, overlapping functions, and failure to make full use of social resources.

*Specific actions:* First, it is necessary to design and implement a results-based governance policy where outcomes, as well as satisfaction levels from society and businesses, are used as the primary evaluation criteria. Next, it is necessary to streamline organizational units and review and eliminate overlapping functions and tasks between units to improve operational efficiency. In addition, it is very important to build interdisciplinary research centers to link regional and national resources, thereby solving big and important issues comprehensively. Finally, it is necessary to develop a modern digital infrastructure for the public science and technology system, thereby creating a foundation for smart governance, enhancing connectivity, and effective data sharing among organizations.

**Fourth,** developing high-quality human resources and improving the working environment are prerequisites. According to the new public management theory, people are the center of innovation and the decisive factor in organizational effectiveness; a flexible, competitive, and open working environment will help attract and retain talent, while creating motivation for innovation to meet the requirements of development and international integration.

*Specific actions:* It is necessary to reform the recruitment, appointment, and remuneration process in a flexible, transparent, and competitive manner, ensuring the attraction of high-quality human resources. At the same time, building an open organizational culture, encouraging innovation, and accepting risks in research and development creates long-term motivation for the science and technology workforce.

**Finally,** the biggest lesson is that institutional reform must be implemented in a synchronous, consistent manner and based on modern governance practices. International experience and modern state governance theory show that only when

institutions are built consistently, synchronously, in line with practice and approaching international standards on autonomy, accountability, and public financial management, can public organizations maximize their pivotal role in the national innovation ecosystem, meeting the requirements of rapid, sustainable development and international integration.

*Specific actions:* It is necessary to review, amend, or abolish overlapping and contradictory legal documents that hinder the operations of public organizations. Categorize and group public units according to their specific operations, thereby developing appropriate management policies, avoiding applying a uniform management mechanism to all types of organizations. Apply international standards on autonomy, accountability, and public financial management, thereby creating a transparent and stable legal environment, promoting innovation, and improving the operational efficiency of public organizations.

Only then can Vietnam's public organizations truly play a pivotal role in the national innovation system, meeting the requirements of rapid and sustainable development in the context of international integration.

## **6. Conclusion**

Effective management of public S&T organizations plays a key role in enhancing national innovation capacity, meeting the requirements of rapid, sustainable development, and international integration. Analysis from the perspective of new public management and agency theory shows that the major bottlenecks of the public S&T organization system in Vietnam today lie in the limited level of autonomy, unclear accountability mechanisms, weak innovation motivation, and low efficiency of linkages with businesses and markets.

Granting autonomy to public organizations must, in fact, go hand in hand with control, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms based on output results, while clearly establishing the authority and responsibility of the head of the organization. Financial mechanisms and resource allocation need to be flexible, suitable to the characteristics of scientific research, encouraging innovation, and reducing dependence on the state budget. International experience, especially from China, shows that a harmonious combination of institutional autonomy, clear ownership establishment, and reform in governance towards multi-stakeholder cooperation is a necessary condition for improving the effectiveness of public governance.

The role of transformational leadership, cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as competitive pressure and results-based governance mechanisms need to be emphasized in the process of reforming public S&T organizations in Vietnam. In addition, developing high-quality human resources, improving the working environment, and perfecting the legal framework on autonomy, accountability, and public financial management are indispensable factors.

For public S&T organizations to truly play a central role in the national innovation ecosystem, Vietnam needs to continue to improve institutions, reform governance models, promote multi-stakeholder linkages, and take social service effectiveness

as the central goal. Only then can these organizations make practical contributions to socio-economic development, enhancing the country's competitiveness and adaptability in the current context of rapid transformation and deep integration./.

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