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Mapping Strategic Management Research in the Public Sector: An Integrated Bibliometric and Machine Learning Approach

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Abstrak

Manajemen strategis menjadi cara penting untuk memahami bagaimana organisasi publik menghadapi tuntutan kinerja, namun kajian yang ada masih terpisah dan belum tersintesis dengan baik. Studi ini memetakan perkembangan riset manajemen strategis di sektor publik, memetakan tema utama dan tema baru, serta menunjukkan perubahan arah kajian dari waktu ke waktu. Dengan PRISMA, 5.749 rekam data disaring ke 132 publikasi terindeks Scopus. Analisis bibliometrik melalui Biblioshiny digunakan untuk membaca pola publikasi dan aktor yang berpengaruh, sedangkan pemodelan topik menggunakan LDA di Python dilakukan untuk menemukan struktur tema tersembunyi dan perubahan probabilitas topik dari waktu ke waktu. Temuan menunjukkan sepuluh topik dalam empat kelompok besar, yaitu pembelajaran organisasi, kepemimpinan, reformasi dan perubahan, serta inovasi perkotaan. Kajian bergeser dari fokus perencanaan strategis dan alat kinerja menuju isu resistensi perubahan, keterlibatan kepemimpinan, dan kemampuan pembelajaran yang adaptif. Kepemimpinan tetap menjadi faktor kunci, sementara peningkatan minat pada inovasi perkotaan mencerminkan perhatian pada tata kelola kolaboratif dan transformasi digital. Secara keseluruhan, arah perkembangan menunjukkan pergeseran dari pendekatan berbasis alat menuju praktik yang lebih dinamis, partisipatif, dan sesuai dengan konteks. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi metodologis dengan mengintegrasikan analisis bibliometrik untuk pemetaan makro aktor riset dan pemodelan topik *Latent Dirichlet Allocation* (LDA) untuk mengekstraksi struktur tematik laten secara granular.

Kata Kunci: Manajemen Strategis; Sektor Publik; Bibliometrik; Pemodelan Topik

Abstract

Strategic management is a key lens for understanding how public organizations respond to increasing performance demands, yet existing studies remain fragmented and lack systematic synthesis. This study maps the evolution of strategic management research in the public sector, identifies core and emerging themes, and examines shifts in research trajectories over time. Using the PRISMA protocol, 5,749 records were screened and reduced to 132 Scopus-indexed publications. Bibliometric analysis using Biblioshiny® identified publication patterns and influential contributors, while topic modeling using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) in Python uncovered latent thematic structures and changes in topic probabilities over time. The findings reveal ten topics grouped into four major domains: organizational learning, leadership, reform and change, and urban innovation. The literature shows a shift from a dominant focus on strategic planning and performance tools toward change resistance, leadership engagement, and adaptive learning capabilities. Leadership remains a central driver, while increasing attention to urban innovation reflects the growing importance of collaborative governance and digital transformation. Overall, this study provides a methodological contribution by integrating bibliometric analysis for the macro-mapping of research actors and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling to extract latent thematic structures at a granular level.

Keywords: *Strategic Management; Public Sector; Bibliometric; Topic Modelling*

INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, strategic management has become a cornerstone of modern public administration, providing a framework through which public organizations pursue performance, legitimacy, and innovation in increasingly complex governance environments. As governments confront fiscal austerity, digital transformation, and rising citizen expectations, strategic management offers a systematic approach to aligning missions, resources, and performance outcomes (Bryson & George, 2024; Moore, 2001). The adaptation of strategic management from the private to the public sector has redefined how public organizations conceptualize effectiveness—moving from hierarchical control toward performance-

based, networked, and value-driven management (Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022).

Despite its prominence, research on strategic management in the public sector remains conceptually fragmented and methodologically dispersed. Studies draw from diverse traditions (including institutional theory, public value, and organizational learning) but often lack integration into a coherent body of knowledge (Gomes & De Azevedo, 2025; Rosenberg Hansen & Ferlie, 2016). Earlier works emphasized strategic planning as a rational tool for setting priorities (Bryson & George, 2024; Vandersmissen & George, 2024), while subsequent research explored how strategic leadership, change management, and innovation shape organizational adaptation (Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022; Schwarz et al., 2016). However, these strands frequently evolve in isolation, resulting in limited theoretical accumulation and contextual understanding across administrative systems.

Empirical research also highlights the tension between managerial tools and institutional realities. The widespread use of performance frameworks such as the Balanced Scorecard demonstrates attempts to operationalize strategic goals, yet their success is often constrained by political complexity and bureaucratic culture (Gomes & De Azevedo, 2025; Northcott & Ma'amora Taulapapa, 2012; Vrabie et al., 2022). This challenge underscores a persistent gap between strategic intent and implementation capacity in public organizations (Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022). Moreover, recent contributions reveal the importance of leadership, organizational learning, and employee engagement as critical enablers of strategy execution, particularly in local government and multi-level governance settings (Rosenberg Hansen & Ferlie, 2016; Schwarz et al., 2016).

However, the field still lacks a systematic synthesis of its intellectual evolution and thematic structure. While existing reviews (Vandersmissen & George, 2024) have mapped selected themes, no study has comprehensively analyzed how research on strategic management in the public sector has developed over time, who drives it, and which theoretical and practical gaps remain. As global contributions expand—particularly from emerging contexts such as Indonesia, Greece, and China—there is a growing need to understand how strategic management scholarship is diversifying beyond Western paradigms (Biermann, 2012).

In this paper, the researchers perform a bibliometric analysis and topic modeling to provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted perspective on the research field. This study seeks to uncover the intellectual foundations, knowledge gaps, and future research directions of the field. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates on how strategic management can enhance public sector performance, legitimacy, and innovation, while fostering a more integrated and global understanding of strategic governance in public administration.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researchers conduct a combined bibliometric analysis and topic modeling to develop a comprehensive, multi-faceted understanding of the research field. Aligned with the main objective—to uncover knowledge gaps and ongoing challenges that can inform future inquiry—this study focuses on the evolution of strategic management literature in the public sector. The integration of bibliometric techniques with topic modeling allows the researchers to capture both the quantitative structure and the qualitative dynamics of the field (Donthu et al., 2021). While bibliometric analysis provides a numerical overview of publication patterns, impact, and scholarly networks, topic modeling offers a deeper qualitative interpretation by revealing latent themes within the corpus.

Topic modeling, a statistical method in Natural Language Processing (NLP), identifies underlying topics based on patterns of word co-occurrence in large textual datasets. The widely used Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) assumes that each document contains a mixture of topics, each represented by a distinct probability distribution of words (Vayansky & Kumar, 2020). LDA employs a probabilistic framework to estimate both the distribution of topics across documents and the distribution of words within each topic, refining

these estimates iteratively until convergence is reached (Gurcan et al., 2021). Through the integration of these approaches, the researchers generate a holistic view of the trends, structures, and thematic shifts within strategic management scholarship in the public sector.

The methodological process consists of three main stages: 1) Literature Identification and Selection: The researchers apply the PRISMA protocol to identify, assess, and determine the inclusion of relevant studies, 2) Bibliometric Analysis: Using the Bibliometrix package in the R environment, the researchers produce a quantitative mapping of the literature, 3) Topic Modeling: Leveraging the Scikit-Learn library in Python, the researchers conduct topic modeling to extract qualitative insights from the textual data.

In the first stage, Scopus was selected as the sole database due to its integrated platform and consistency in indexing. Following the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021), the researchers conducted an advanced search on October 1, 2025, using the query:

> TITLE-ABS-KEY ("strategic management") AND ("public sector" OR "government" OR "public administration" OR "public service" OR "bureaucracy" OR "public policy").

This search generated 5,749 documents, which were exported in CSV format for screening. After manual assessment of titles and abstracts, 5,617 records were excluded due to irrelevance or lack of substantial connection to strategic management in the public sector (Figure 1). The final dataset included 132 studies, which formed the basis of the bibliometric and topic-modeling analyses.

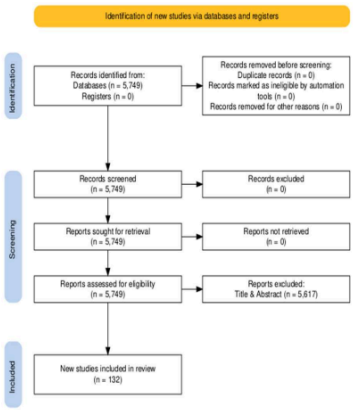

Figure. 1 Record Identification, Screening and Inclusion
Source: By Author, 2025

In the second stage of the examination, the metadata of the 132 selected studies—including citation data, bibliographic information, abstracts, keywords, and references—was processed using Bibliometrix®. Through this platform, we conducted an exploratory data analysis (EDA) to generate key descriptive information about the literature. We then performed a performance analysis to identify the most relevant sources, sources with the highest local impact, the most prominent affiliations, the most globally cited documents, co-occurrence networks, and the most frequently used words. However, because Bibliometrix® limits its keyword-based analysis to author-provided terms, its ability to capture the broader thematic landscape of the field is constrained.

To overcome this limitation and obtain a more comprehensive qualitative understanding, we conducted a third stage of analysis using Topic Modeling, which synthesizes information from both titles and abstracts. Using Python, we implemented a multi-step topic modeling procedure designed to enhance the depth and breadth of the literature review. First, we extracted the titles and abstracts

from all 132 documents and merged each pair into a single textual corpus, resulting in a total word count of 1,389 across the dataset. We then performed text preprocessing, which included cleaning the text, removing stop words, eliminating punctuation, and filtering out non-informative terms. After preprocessing, we applied a topic modeling algorithm to the refined corpus to identify latent themes within the literature. The resulting output was carefully interpreted to determine the most salient topics, the key terms associated with each topic, and the documents most strongly connected to them. These insights contributed substantially to the development of the literature review by revealing the thematic structure, dominant areas of inquiry, and emerging patterns within the strategic management literature in the public sector..

FINDINGS

Main Information

The bibliometric analysis of strategic management in the public sector (1997–2025) reveals a moderately growing yet maturing research domain as see in Table 1. The dataset comprises 132 documents from 113 different sources, showing an annual growth rate of 10.15%, which indicates sustained scholarly interest over nearly three decades. Research output demonstrates moderate collaboration, with an average of 2.98 co-authors per paper and 19.7% international co-authorship, reflecting a gradually globalizing but still regionally concentrated field. The presence of 29 single-authored papers (27 authors) suggests a balance between individual theoretical contributions and collaborative empirical works. In terms of impact, documents receive an average of 27.49 citations per paper, supported by 8,015 references, suggesting solid integration with broader management and governance literature. The document types show dominance of journal articles (100), complemented by book chapters (12) and reviews (7), reflecting both conceptual development and literature synthesis. With 337 Keywords Plus and 346 author keywords, thematic diversity appears high, indicating evolving intersections between strategic management, governance, performance, and innovation in the public sector. Overall, the field is well-established, increasingly interdisciplinary, and continues to expand its international research footprint.

Table 1. Main Information

Description	Results
Timespan	1997:2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	113
Documents	132
Annual Growth Rate %	10.15
Document Average Age	7.42
Average citations per doc	27.49
References	8015
Keywords Plus (ID)	337
Author's Keywords (DE)	346
Authors	379
Authors of single-authored docs	27
Single-authored docs	29
Co-Authors per Doc	2.98
International co-authorships %	19.7
article	100
book	5
book chapter	12
conference paper	8
review	7

Source: By authors

Most Relevant Sources

The analysis of most relevant publication sources on *strategic management in the public sector* provided in Table 2 highlights a concentrated yet diverse scholarly base anchored in leading public administration and management journals. The top contributor, *International Public Management Journal* (Taylor & Francis, 4 articles), serves as a central outlet bridging public management theory and strategic practice. Close behind are *Administrative Sciences* (MDPI), *Governance and Public Management* (Springer), *International Journal of Public Sector Management* (Emerald), and *Public Administration Review* (Wiley) — each with 3 articles, reflecting strong representation across both traditional and open-access publishers. Notably, *Australian Journal of Public Administration* and *Public Administration* (both Wiley) further reinforce the field's institutional grounding, particularly within the Anglo-centric academic sphere. Contributions from *International Review of Administrative Sciences* (Sage) and

Management Decision (Emerald) illustrate growing cross-pollination between strategic management and administrative science. Overall, these sources suggest that the field's intellectual core lies within established public administration journals, while also extending toward broader management and organizational effectiveness domains, underscoring its interdisciplinary and applied orientation.

Table 2. Most Relevant Sources

Sources	Publisher	Articles
International Public Management Journal	Taylor & Francis	4
Administrative Sciences	MDPI	3
Governance And Public Management	Springer	3
International Journal Of Public Sector Management	Emerald	3
Public Administration Review	Wiley	3
Australian Journal Of Public Administration	Wiley	2
International Review Of Administrative Sciences	Sage	2
Journal Of Organizational Effectiveness	Emerald	2
Management Decision	Emerald	2
Public Administration	Wiley	2

Source: By authors

Sources Local Impact

The local source impact analysis for *strategic management in the public sector* indicates a balanced yet maturing citation landscape, with influence distributed across key journals in both public administration and management studies as seen in Table 3. Among the most impactful sources, *Public Administration Review* (TC = 200) and *International Journal of Public Sector Management* (TC = 173) exhibit the highest total citations, reflecting their long-standing roles in advancing strategic management discourse since the late 1990s. *International Public Management Journal* also shows strong engagement (TC = 150) with a slightly higher G-Index (4), denoting its sustained citation influence across multiple papers. Recent contributors such as *Administrative Sciences* (since 2019) and *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness* (since 2021) display moderate local impact (H = 3 and H = 2, respectively), suggesting emerging relevance in contemporary strategic governance discussions. Older journals like *Management Decision* (since 2003) and *Australian Journal of Public Administration* (since 2004) maintain steady, though lower, citation activity — indicating their continuing, yet specialized, engagement with public sector strategy themes. Overall, the citation profile demonstrates a core cluster of high-impact, established journals (PAR, IJPSM, IPMJ) complemented by newer interdisciplinary outlets, confirming the field's intellectual continuity and diversification toward modern public management paradigms.

Table 3. Sources Local Impact

Source	H_Index	G_Index	M_Index	TC	NP	PY_Start
Administrative Sciences	3	3	0.42857143	59	3	2019
International Journal Of Public Sector Management	3	3	0.10344828	173	3	1997
International Public Management Journal	3	4	0.2	150	4	2011
Public Administration Review	3	3	0.1875	200	3	2010
Australian Journal Of Public Administration	2	2	0.09090909	67	2	2004
Governance And Public Management	2	3	0.125	13	3	2010

International Review Of Administrative Sciences	2	2	0.2	85	2	2016
Journal Of Organizational Effectiveness	2	2	0.4	43	2	2021
Management Decision	2	2	0.08695652	120	2	2003
Public Administration	2	2	0.222222222	24	2	2017

Source: By authors

Author Local Impact

The author local impact analysis highlights a group of influential scholars shaping the strategic management discourse in the public sector, with varying degrees of productivity and citation influence provided in Table 4. At the forefront is Ewan Ferlie (*H-index = 5; TC = 444; PY_start = 2003*), representing the most influential and sustained contributor. His extensive body of work bridges strategic change, organizational reform, and governance transformation in public organizations, establishing a conceptual foundation for the field. Following him, Edoardo Ongaro (*H = 3; TC = 157*) emerges as a key contemporary scholar, advancing comparative perspectives on strategy and public governance since 2015. Scholars such as Rhys Andrews, George A. Boyne, and Richard M. Walker (each *H = 2; TC = 105*) form a cohesive intellectual cluster known for empirical examinations of strategic management and performance in public institutions. Paul Joyce (*H = 2; G = 4; TC = 53*) shows a broad publication footprint, emphasizing strategic leadership and planning in public governance, while Koen Verhoest contributes notably to institutional and coordination perspectives within strategic management. Emerging voices such as Abbasi (2011), Abbott (2012), and Abdeldayem (2022) indicate diversifying research geographies and themes, from governance frameworks to digital strategy. Overall, the author impact pattern reflects a strong UK–European scholarly dominance, with Ferlie, Ongaro, and the Cardiff group (Andrews, Boyne, Walker) forming the intellectual backbone of strategic management research in the public sector.

Table 4. Author Local Impact

Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
Ferlie Ewan	5	5	0.2173913	444	5	2003
Ongaro Edoardo	3	3	0.27272727	157	3	2015
Andrews Rhys	2	2	0.125	105	2	2010
Boyne George A.	2	2	0.125	105	2	2010
Joyce Paul	2	4	0.16666667	53	4	2014
Verhoest Koen	2	2	0.0952381	70	2	2005
Walker Richard M.	2	2	0.125	105	2	2010
Abbasi Tayebeh	1	1	0.06666667	14	1	2011
Abbott Kenneth	1	1	0.07142857	160	1	2012
Abdeldayem Marwan M.	1	1	0.25	5	1	2022

Source: By authors

Most Relevant Affiliation

The most relevant affiliations in *strategic management research within the public sector* demonstrate a geographically diversified yet regionally clustered research network, with growing contributions from both established and emerging academic institutions (Table 5). At the leading edge, Brawijaya University (Indonesia, 7 articles) stands out as the most productive institution, signaling the rising prominence of Southeast Asian scholarship in public sector strategy and governance studies. Cardiff University (UK, 6 articles) follows closely, representing the European intellectual hub anchored by scholars such as Andrews, Boyne, and Walker — pivotal figures in empirical research on

strategic public management. Other strong contributors from Indonesia, including Universitas Diponegoro (6 articles) and Airlangga University (4 articles), indicate the institutional consolidation of public management research in the Global South. Their work often contextualizes strategy within bureaucratic reform, local governance, and public innovation frameworks. Beyond Indonesia and the UK, notable engagement comes from University of West Attica (Greece, 5 articles) and University of the Peloponnese (Greece, 4 articles), reflecting Southern Europe's expanding focus on public sector modernization and strategic adaptation. Additional international presence from Islamic Azad University (Iran), Lanzhou University (China), VU University Amsterdam (Netherlands), and University of Brasília (Brazil) underscores a growing multipolar research ecosystem, extending strategic management debates beyond traditional Western centers. Overall, this pattern highlights an ongoing global diffusion of strategic management scholarship, with increasing contributions from Asian and Southern European universities, marking a shift toward more diverse contextual and comparative analyses in public sector strategic research.

Table 5. Most Relevant Affiliation

Affiliation	Country	Articles
Brawijaya University	Indonesia	7
Cardiff University	United Kingdom	6
Universitas Diponegoro	Indonesia	6
University Of West Attica	Greece	5
Airlangga University	Indonesia	4
Islamic Azad University	Iran	4
Lanzhou University	China	4
Vu University Amsterdam	Netherlands	4
University Of Brasília	Brazil	4
University Of The Peloponnese	Greece	4

Source: By authors

Most Globally Cited Documents

The most globally cited documents in *strategic management in the public sector* reveal the intellectual foundations and evolving thematic directions of the field, bridging classical management theory with public governance applications as seen in Table 6. The most influential work, Oliver (2008) in *Academy of Management Review* (545 citations), provides a seminal theoretical lens on the institutional antecedents of strategic action, establishing a core conceptual framework widely applied in public sector studies. Following this, Grigoroudis & Siskos (2012) in *Omega* (240 citations) contributes methodological rigor through multi-criteria satisfaction measurement, influencing performance management approaches in public institutions. Ferlie & Geraghty (2003) and Ferlie et al. (2015) further anchor the field conceptually, with the former emphasizing organizational learning in public services (178 citations) and the latter — the *Routledge handbook on strategic management in public service organizations* (111 citations) — serving as a key reference for integrating strategy, management, and governance perspectives. Rosenberg Hansen & Ferlie (2016) (109 citations) and Schwarz et al. (2020) (97 citations) mark a shift toward contemporary issues, such as the application of private-sector strategic models, leadership, and employee engagement within public organizations. Methodologically applied works — such as Northcott & Taulapapa (2012) and Waal (2003) on the Balanced Scorecard — demonstrate the operationalization of strategy tools in government contexts, highlighting the translation of managerial techniques into public sector settings. Finally, papers by Biermann (2012) and Krause (2006) extend strategic management discourse to global governance and policy performance, signaling the field's increasing interdisciplinarity and policy relevance. Overall, these highly cited works delineate a trajectory from theoretical institutional foundations to applied strategic governance, underscoring the field's maturation and integration across management, policy, and organizational behavior domains.

Table 6. Most Globally Cited Documents

Paper	Total Citations
Oliver, C. (2008). The institutional antecedents of strategic actions. Academy of Management Review, 33(1), 56–76.	545
Grigoroudis, E., & Siskos, Y. (2012). Measurement of satisfaction in multi-criteria analysis. Omega, 40(1), 1–9.	240
Ferlie, E., & Geraghty, K. J. (2003). Organizational learning in public services: Theoretical themes and challenges. British Journal of Management, 14(S1), S1–S14.	178
Biermann, F. (2012). Planetary boundaries and global environmental governance: Exploring the links. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 4(1), 1–6.	160
Krause, G. A. (2006). Policy conflict and agency performance. American Journal of Political Science, 50(2), 365–382.	113
Ferlie, E., Lynn, L. E., & Pollitt, C. (Eds.). (2015). Strategic management in public services organizations: Concepts, schools and contemporary issues. Routledge.	111
Rosenberg Hansen, J., & Ferlie, E. (2016). Applying strategic management theories in public sector organizations: Developing a typology. Public Management Review, 18(1), 1–21.	109
Northcott, D., & Taulapapa, T. M. (2012). Using the balanced scorecard to manage performance in public sector organizations. International Journal of Public Sector Management, 25(3), 166–191.	104
Waal, A. A. (2003). The future of the balanced scorecard: The balanced scorecard beyond reports and figures. Management Decision, 41(9), 882–886.	101
Schwarz, G., Newman, A., Cooper, B., & Eva, N. (2020). Strategic management in public sector organizations: The role of leadership and employees' attitudes. Public Administration Review, 80(6), 964–975.	97

Source: By authors

Most Frequent Word

Table 7 shows the most frequent words in the dataset which reveal the core conceptual focus and evolving priorities of *strategic management research in the public sector*. Unsurprisingly, "public sector" (23 occurrences) and "strategic management" (16) dominate the discourse, affirming the field's central concern with how public organizations formulate and implement strategy within bureaucratic and political constraints. The strong presence of "strategic planning" (13) underscores the enduring importance of formalized planning processes as a foundational managerial tool in government settings. Methodological and performance-oriented themes emerge through "balanced scorecard" (11) and "decision making" (8) — reflecting a managerialist turn where performance measurement and evidence-based decision frameworks are adapted from private sector models to public governance. Keywords such as "change management" (7) and "leadership" (7), including "transformational leadership" (7), point to the human and organizational dimensions of strategy, emphasizing how leadership behaviors and organizational culture shape strategic outcomes. The recurrence of "local government" (7) highlights the decentralized application of strategic management, where contextual governance challenges and service delivery reforms are most tangible. The term "human" (6), though broad, reinforces the people-centered perspective emerging in recent years, aligning with trends in public value creation and co-production. Overall, these linguistic patterns depict a balanced research agenda — combining strategic design and performance frameworks with leadership, change, and human-centered governance themes, marking a continued integration of management and public administration paradigms in the study of public sector strategy.

Table 7. Most Frequent Word

Words	Occurrences
public sector	23
strategic management	16
strategic planning	13
balanced scorecard	11

decision making	8
change management	7
leadership	7
local government	7
transformational leadership	7
human	6

Source: By authors

Topic Modelling

The topic model is estimated using the default settings proposed by Schwarz (2018), which include 10 topics to be estimated. The output, as indicated before, is 10 new variables – each representing a topic – and a score for each article indicating how probable it is that the article belongs to the topic. However, the command does not give a "name" to the topic, this requires human intervention and sensemaking. To do so, a word probability matrix is created which is given in Figure 2. Basically, this table demonstrates per topic the 10 most probable words belonging to that topic. These words (and the combination of words) allow the construction of a relevant title for each of the topics. Words are sorted based on their word probability score. Words like '*organization*', '*methodology*', '*organizational*', '*police*', '*organizations*', '*making*', '*tools*', '*employee*', '*used*', '*subsystems*', '*based*', '*book*', '*principles*', '*forces*', '*level*', '*systemic*', '*systems*', '*methodologies*', '*integrated*', '*perceived*', '*purpose*', '*administration*', '*administrative*', '*governance*', '*government*', '*public*', '*sector*', '*service*', '*services*', '*organization*', '*organisations*', '*organizational*', '*institutions*', '*institutional*', '*authority*', '*authorities*', '*agency*', '*agencies*', '*bureau*', '*bureaus*', '*strategy*', '*strategic*', '*management*', '*managers*', '*managing*', '*effectiveness*', '*efficiency*', '*planning*', '*plan*', '*implementation*', '*process*', '*processes*', '*framework*', '*model*', '*approach*', '*analysis*', '*evaluation*', '*assessment*', '*impact*', '*study*', '*paper*', '*article*', '*research*', '*findings*', '*results*', '*implications*', '*conclusion*', '*discussion*', '*literature*', '*review*', '*perspective*', '*policy*', '*policies*', '*policymaking*', '*regulation*', '*rules*', '*decision*', '*decisions*', '*decision-making*', '*development*', '*case*', '*cases*', '*context*', '*practice*', '*practices*', '*issues*', '*challenges*', '*factors*', '*role*', '*roles*', '*perspectives*', '*use*', '*outcomes*', '*success*', '*effective*', '*program*', '*techniques*', '*effect*', '*employees*', '*provides*', '*best*', '*theory*', '*theories*', '*mechanism*', '*approaches*', '*organisational*', and '*organisation*' were removed as they did not help to differentiate between topics nor make sense of underlying topic communities.

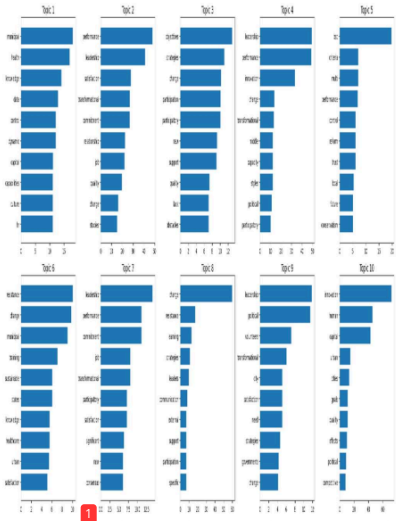

Figure 2. Word probability matrix (10 most probable words per topic)

Source: By authors

As Figure 2 shows, all ten topics have several distinct words that allow the identification of a topic title or label. Some words emerge in different topics, but typically indicate generic strategic activities (e.g., development, management, model) so logically these would pop up across topics. Below, each topic is discussed as well as assigned a label.

Topic 1 is labeled Knowledge Management. This topic captures the role of knowledge, data, and human capital in strengthening municipal governance. It reflects how local governments leverage organizational learning and dynamic capabilities to enhance service delivery, particularly in sectors like health and public administration. Effective knowledge management helps align institutional culture with adaptive performance systems.

Topic 2 is labeled Transformational Leadership. This theme highlights leadership behaviors that inspire commitment, satisfaction, and performance. Transformational leadership is essential in public organizations to motivate employees beyond formal obligations, especially during periods of organizational change. Studies consistently show its positive relationship with job satisfaction and organizational quality outcomes.

Topic 3 is labeled Participatory Change. This topic emphasizes the importance of participation and collaboration in implementing change strategies. It reveals that public organizations often face obstacles—such as lack of support or conflicting objectives—when trying to adopt participatory models. Encouraging stakeholder involvement enhances legitimacy and fosters collective ownership of reform.

Topic 4 is labeled Innovation Leadership. Here, leadership is linked with innovation and change capacity. The topic reflects how mid-level and political leaders act as catalysts for innovation, balancing top-down directives with participatory approaches. Such leadership is vital for transforming rigid bureaucratic structures into adaptive, learning-oriented organizations.

Topic 5 is labeled Performance Reform. This topic represents efforts to institutionalize performance measurement systems, particularly through tools like the Balanced Scorecard (BSC). It addresses how control mechanisms, trust, and reform initiatives drive accountability and local governance improvement. Performance reform ensures transparency while aligning organizational goals with citizen outcomes.

Topic 6 is labeled Change Resistance. This topic deals with the human and institutional barriers to change, often found in urban or healthcare governance. Resistance may stem from uncertainty, lack of training, or entrenched norms. Addressing it requires continuous learning, communication, and leadership that integrates sustainability and employee satisfaction.

Topic 7 is labeled Leadership Commitment. Focusing on commitment and consensus-building, this topic reveals how participatory and transformational leadership styles strengthen motivation and job performance. Leadership commitment ensures alignment between organizational goals and employee values, fostering an environment where performance is sustained through trust and shared purpose.

Topic 8 is labeled Organizational Learning. This theme explores how organizations learn and adapt during transformation. It underlines the importance of communication, feedback, and external collaboration in overcoming resistance. Public institutions that embed learning mechanisms tend to manage change more effectively and sustain innovation over time.

Topic 9 is labeled Political Leadership. This topic examines leadership within political and civic environments, especially in city governance. It shows how political leaders and volunteers drive local initiatives, mobilize participation, and manage competing interests. Political leadership is central to strategic governance, linking legitimacy, accountability, and performance.

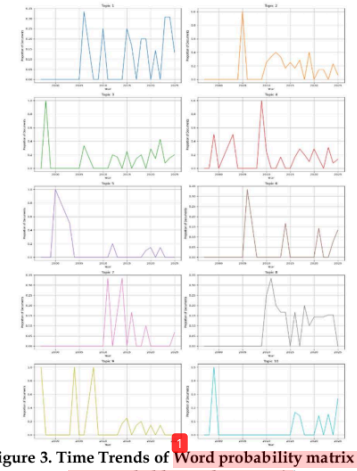

Figure 3. Time Trends of Word probability matrix (10 most probable words per topic)
Source: By authors

Topic 10 is labeled Urban Innovation. The final topic centers on innovation and human capital in urban contexts. It reflects how cities pursue

competitiveness and sustainable growth through knowledge-based strategies and governance reforms. Urban innovation requires collaboration among public institutions, private sectors, and communities to achieve developmental goals. The analysis in extended to the time trend to show the temporal trajection of the topic labeled. The time trend show the declining and increasing topic labeled (Figure 3).

The first label, Knowledge Management, centers on how organizations—particularly in municipal and health contexts—manage knowledge, capabilities, and data-driven practices. Although closely aligned with the broader theme of *Knowledge and Organizational Learning*, scholarly interest in this topic is currently declining. The second label, Transformational Leadership, reflects research on leadership behaviors that enhance performance, satisfaction, and organizational commitment; this label, situated under the broader *Leadership* theme, is also experiencing a downward trend.

The third label, Participatory Change, concerns the involvement of citizens or employees in reform strategies and the obstacles that shape these processes. As part of the *Change and Reforms* theme, interest in this area is likewise declining. The fourth label, Innovation Leadership, explores leadership styles that foster innovation, particularly within political or public-sector environments, and is also receiving decreasing scholarly attention within the *Leadership* domain.

The fifth label, Performance Reform, focuses on performance management tools—such as the Balanced Scorecard—and their role in public-sector reform, trust-building, and performance control. Consistent with other labels in the *Change and Reforms* theme, this topic is trending downward. In contrast, the sixth label, Change Resistance, highlights barriers to reform, including employee resistance, training gaps, and issues of satisfaction. This label shows increasing academic interest within the *Change and Reforms* theme.

The seventh label, Leadership Commitment, examines how leadership commitment influences organizational performance and employee attitudes. Unlike the general decline within the *Leadership* theme, this label is trending upward. The eighth label, Organizational Learning, encompasses adaptive strategies, communication patterns, and learning processes; however, interest in this area—also part of *Knowledge and Organizational Learning*—is decreasing.

The ninth label, Political Leadership, represents leadership dynamics in governmental and volunteer contexts, particularly within city governance, but is likewise experiencing a declining trend within the *Leadership* category. Finally, the tenth label, Urban Innovation, captures themes of innovation, human capital, competitiveness, and urban transformation. This label stands out as one of the few experiencing rising scholarly attention, situated under the broader theme of *Innovation and Urban Transformation*.

Overall, the topic-modelling results (Table 8) reveal clear relationships between the word–probability matrix, assigned labels, thematic classifications, and temporal trends. The ten labels can be summarized into four overarching themes: (1) *Knowledge and Organizational Learning*, (2) *Leadership*, (3) *Change and Reforms*, and (4) *Innovation and Urban Transformation*. The temporal analysis indicates that both *Knowledge and Organizational Learning* and *Leadership* are generally declining fields of inquiry. The theme *Change and Reforms* shows a mixed pattern, with some labels (e.g., Change Resistance) trending upward while others (e.g., Performance Reform, Participatory Change) are declining. Notably, *Innovation and Urban Transformation* is the only theme demonstrating a consistent increase in scholarly attention.

Table 8. The Interaction between Word Matrix, Label, Theme and Trend

Topic	Word Probability Matrix	Label	Theme	Trend
1	municipal, health, knowledge, data, control,	Knowledge Management	Knowledge and Organizational Learning	Declining

	dynamic, capital, capabilities, culture, hr			
2	performance, leadership, satisfaction, transformational, commitment, relationship, job, quality, change, studies	Transformational Leadership	Leadership	Declining
3	objectives, strategies, change, participation, participatory, new, support, quality, lack, obstacles	Participatory Change	Change and Reforms	Declining
4	leadership, performance, innovation, change, transformational, middle, capacity, styles, political, participatory	Innovation Leadership	Leadership	Declining
5	bsc, criteria, multi, performance, control, reform, trust, local, future, conservatism	Performance Reform	Change and Reforms	Declining
6	resistance, change, municipal, training, sustainable, states, knowledge, healthcare, urban, satisfaction	Change Resistance	Change and Reforms	Increasing
7	leadership, performance, commitment, job, transformational, participatory, satisfaction, significant, new, consensus	Leadership Commitment	Leadership	Increasing
8	change, resistance, learning, strategies, leaders, communication, external, support, participation, specific	Organizational Learning	Knowledge and Organizational Learning	Declining
9	leadership, political, volunteers, transformational, city, satisfaction, need, strategies, governments, change	Political Leadership	Leadership	Declining
10	innovation, human, capital, urban, cities, goals, quality, effects, political, competitive	Urban Innovation	Innovation and Urban Transformation	Increasing

Source: By authors

DISCUSSION

This study used a combination of bibliometric analysis and machine learning–based topic modelling to map nearly three decades of scholarship on strategic management in the public sector. The results show a field that has achieved conceptual maturity while undergoing substantial thematic realignment. Strategic management

scholarship has long played a central role in public administration, particularly since the rise of New Public Management (NPM) and the later emergence of post-NPM and public value frameworks (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2006). Yet, as this study demonstrates, the intellectual architecture of the field continues to evolve, reflecting deeper shifts in public governance, organizational behavior, and institutional complexity. This discussion interprets these patterns in relation to current debates, offering a richly layered account of where the field has been and where it appears to be heading.

A Maturing Field Undergoing Thematic Reorientation

The bibliometric patterns reflect a field that has matured, showing consistent publication activity, growing citations, and a balanced authorship structure. However, beneath this stability lies a deeper thematic reorientation. Early research in the late 1990s and early 2000s was dominated by managerial-rationalist concerns such as strategic planning, performance measurement, and the Balanced Scorecard—all central components of the NPM paradigm (Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). As these tools became institutionalized in many governments, scholarly attention naturally shifted toward assessing their implementation, understanding their limitations, and exploring variations across contexts (Huber et al., 2025). The declining trajectory of these topics in the model supports this interpretation.

At the same time, the field has not abandoned the managerial paradigm entirely. Instead, it has internalized its central concepts, incorporating them into more nuanced analyses of organizational dynamics. Recent scholarship often highlights the socio-political conditions under which strategic planning functions effectively, emphasizing that managerial tools must be embedded within institutional norms, leadership commitments, and organizational culture (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). This shift indicates a move away from viewing strategy as a technocratic algorithm toward understanding it as an ongoing practice shaped by actors, routines, and governance systems.

The thematic reorientation also aligns with broader trends in the public management literature, which increasingly foreground behavioral insights, complexity, and multi-level governance. Rather than asking whether strategic tools "work," scholars now examine how and why they work in some contexts and not in others, drawing from theories of sensemaking, institutional logics, and organizational learning (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Rashman et al., 2009). This evolution marks the field's transition from instrumental to interpretive sophistication.

Finally, the observed shifts reflect an implicit critique of the managerial orthodoxies that dominated earlier reform waves. Scholars increasingly question the assumption that strategy can be centrally designed and hierarchically implemented in complex public-sector settings. Instead, they highlight emergent, relational, and adaptive forms of strategy, consistent with contemporary governance models emphasizing co-creation, networks, and collaborative problem-solving (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). This suggests that strategic management is being reinterpreted in light of the more fluid, interdependent governance conditions of the 21st century.

Institutional Anchoring and Intellectual Concentration

The bibliometric mapping reveals the ongoing influence of established journals—notably Public Administration Review, International Public Management Journal, and Public Administration—in shaping strategic management scholarship. These outlets have historically served as intellectual hubs that integrate public administration theory with managerial practice, and their continued prominence reinforces the centrality of strategic management within the public governance discourse (Osborne, 2006). Their status as high-impact journals ensures that strategy remains firmly positioned within mainstream theoretical developments.

At the author level, the concentration of influence among scholars such as Ferlie, Ongaro, Andrews, Boyne, and Walker reflects long-standing research communities that anchor the field. These

scholars are associated with institutional traditions emphasizing organizational change, public performance, and comparative public management (Andrews et al., 2017; Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022). Their contributions form a canonical base upon which later scholars build, demonstrating how intellectual lineages shape the evolution of subfields in public management.

However, the prominence of these scholars also raises questions about intellectual diversification and inclusivity. Institutionalized academic networks can sometimes constrain theoretical innovation, particularly when dominant frameworks become entrenched (Van Der Wal et al., 2021). While foundational work by these scholars remains influential, the field benefits from emerging voices, particularly from underrepresented regions, bringing alternative perspectives on strategy, leadership, and reform.

The interplay between intellectual concentration and thematic diversification underscores an important tension within public management research: the balance between theoretical continuity and contextual innovation. While core theoretical constructs endure across decades, new empirical settings and governance challenges demand fresh lenses and conceptual expansions. The evolution of strategic management reflects this dynamic, showing both stability and creative renewal.

Geographical Diversification and the Rise of the Global South

One of the most important contributions of the present study is the identification of a growing scholarly footprint from Global South institutions—particularly Indonesia, Iran, China, Greece, and Brazil. This finding aligns with calls for greater geographic pluralism in public management research (Chen & Kim, 2024). Historically, strategic management scholarship has been dominated by Western perspectives that assume particular bureaucratic, political, and institutional configurations. The rise of Global South scholarship challenges these assumptions and underscores the importance of context-sensitive theorizing.

Scholars in Indonesia and other emerging research hubs frequently examine strategic governance in highly decentralized, resource-constrained, and politically complex environments. These contexts provide fertile ground for rethinking strategic management beyond Western managerialism. For example, the dynamics of local politics, informal institutions, community participation, and bureaucratic culture often fundamentally reshape how strategy is formulated and implemented—phenomena insufficiently explained by classical strategic planning models (Schall, 1997).

This shift toward a more global research ecosystem enhances the field's theoretical robustness. Comparative research has shown that strategic practices vary substantially across political-administrative systems, reflecting different institutional legacies, governance structures, and leadership norms (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Including Global South cases thus challenges the universality of dominant frameworks and opens paths toward more inclusive, contextually grounded models of strategic management.

Global South voices gain prominence, public management scholarship moves closer to addressing global public-sector challenges—urbanization, sustainability, inequality, and vulnerability—in more nuanced ways. Strategic management, as this study shows, is no longer a Western managerial export but a globally contested, contextually negotiated practice.

Intellectual Foundations: Institutional, Behavioral, and Managerial Hybridity

Analysis of globally cited works reveals a hybrid intellectual foundation underlying strategic management in the public sector. On one hand, institutional theory—represented by (Oliver, 1997)) work on strategic responses to institutional pressures—provides a powerful lens to understand conformity, resistance, adaptation, and decoupling in public organizations. Institutional theory explains why strategies often fail to produce intended outcomes: they encounter competing logics, legitimacy demands, and embedded routines.

On the other hand, managerial and performance frameworks, such as the Balanced Scorecard ((Kaplan & Norton, 1996), represent the enduring influence of private-sector strategic models. These tools have been widely adopted, particularly in countries pursuing managerial reforms, and scholars have examined their adaptation within public-service environments (Grigoroudis & Siskos, 2002). This reflects a persistent managerial rationality that underlies strategic planning and performance systems in many governments.

Meanwhile, organizational learning theories (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011) contribute to a more dynamic understanding of how public organizations build capabilities and adapt to external change. Learning perspectives complement institutional and managerial frameworks by highlighting the internal processes through which organizations interpret information, develop routines, and update practices over time.

Together, these three intellectual traditions—institutional, managerial, and learning—reflect the multidimensional nature of strategy in public organizations. Strategy cannot be understood solely as a technical design nor as a political artifact; it is a hybrid practice shaped by structures, agency, norms, and knowledge processes. The field's most influential works embody this hybridity, and the topics identified in this study reaffirm its relevance.

Topic Modelling and the Multi-Level Architecture of Strategic Management

The ten topics identified through machine learning illustrate the complex, multi-level architecture of strategic management. Grouping these topics into four aggregate dimensions—knowledge and learning, leadership, change and reform, and urban innovation—reveals how the field spans micro-level behaviors, meso-level organizational processes, and macro-level governance challenges. This aligns with public management approach to integrating behavioral, organizational, and institutional perspectives (Ansell & Torfing, 2021).

Knowledge and organizational learning themes highlight the importance of data, expertise, and capability development in public strategy. As public-sector environments become more information-intensive, strategic decisions increasingly depend on the ability to acquire, interpret, and apply knowledge (Dunleavy & Carrera, 2013). This dimension underscores the cognitive foundations of strategy and the role of learning routines in sustaining reform.

Leadership-related themes transformational, innovation-oriented, political, and commitment-based—reveal the field's continuous reliance on leadership as an explanatory mechanism. Leadership is central not only to vision-setting but also to navigating complexity, mobilizing employees, and shaping organizational culture (Van Wart, 2013). The multiplicity of leadership-related topics indicates a shift toward integrating both relational and structural dimensions of leadership.

Themes related to participation, performance reforms, and resistance emphasize the behavioral and political challenges of implementing strategy in the public sector. These maps closely onto long-standing debates about legitimacy, stakeholder engagement, and the difficult realities of organizational change in bureaucratic environments (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Rather than viewing change as a linear process, these topics underscore its contested, emergent nature.

Finally, the rising topic of urban innovation highlights the growing importance of cities as strategic governance arenas. Urban environments demand more networked, collaborative, and technology-driven approaches to strategic management (Meijer & Bolivar, 2016). This dimension represents a frontier where strategic management intersects with digital transformation, resilience, and cross-sector collaboration.

A Turning Point: From Managerial Rationality to Behavioral and Urban Complexity

One of the most significant contributions of this study is identifying rising versus declining research topics over time. The declining interest in classical managerial topics—strategic planning,

Balanced Scorecard, transformational leadership—suggests that these areas have matured and stabilized in the literature. Scholars may be turning their attention to the "softer," more politically contested elements that determine whether these tools succeed or fail (Oreg, 2006). This marks a shift from instrument-focused research toward behaviorally grounded inquiry.

The rise of change resistance as a major topic supports this interpretation. Resistance is now widely recognized as a predictable and often rational response to reform, especially when reforms are perceived as misaligned with organizational identity or values (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Studying resistance deepens our understanding of how strategic change actually unfolds—often not as a rational implementation sequence but as a negotiation among actors embedded in institutional systems.

The increasing attention to leadership commitment highlights a growing interest in the affective, relational, and motivational aspects of leadership. Commitment is not merely a behavioral attribute but a mechanism that shapes sensemaking, trust, and legitimacy during reform (Van Wart, 2013). This shift signals that scholars increasingly recognize leadership as a social process rather than a trait or positional authority.

Finally, the emergence of urban innovation reflects broader shifts toward polycentric, networked, and digitally enabled governance. Cities are becoming laboratories for experimentation, where strategic management intersects with citizen co-production, digital governance, and cross-sectoral coordination (Meijer & Bolivar, 2016). The rise of urban innovation research suggests that strategic management is no longer confined to organizational boundaries but now extends into multi-actor governance ecosystems.

Implications for Research

The findings present several implications for future scholarship. First, strategic management theories should increasingly integrate behavioral microfoundations, recognizing that motivation, resistance, identity, and emotion significantly shape strategic action. This aligns with the behavioral turn in public management (Grimmelikhujsen et al., 2016). Second, the growing diversity of empirical settings suggests that comparative research, especially involving non-Western contexts, is essential. Existing theories may need to be refined or reinterpreted in light of Global South evidence ((Samaratunge et al., 2008). Third, urban governance represents a promising arena for theorizing strategy as a networked, multi-actor, and technologically mediated process. Strategic management at the city level involves complex coordination challenges that traditional organizational models may not fully explain. Fourth, there is a need for stronger integration across the institutional, managerial, and learning traditions. Strategy is simultaneously constrained by institutions, guided by managerial rationality, and shaped by adaptive learning processes—future theories must reconcile these dimensions.

Finally, methodological developments—such as dynamic topic modelling, agent-based simulation, and cross-national datasets—could help capture the evolving and multi-level nature of strategic management. The present study demonstrates the potential of combining machine learning with qualitative interpretation, but further innovation is needed to deepen explanatory power.

Implications for Practice

For practitioners, the findings underscore several practical lessons. First, strategic reforms must integrate change-readiness assessments, communication strategies, and resistance mitigation plans. Technical designs alone are insufficient without behavioral and relational groundwork (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Second, leadership development programs should emphasize relational, emotional, and cultural competencies, not merely strategic analytics. Leadership commitment directly shapes organizational climate, trust, and reform legitimacy (Van Wart, 2013). Third, public organizations should embrace learning-oriented approaches to strategy, fostering experimentation, feedback loops, and adaptive capacity (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011). This requires creating

environments where information flows freely, errors are treated as learning opportunities, and employees share agency in strategic decisions. Fourth, urban managers must recognize cities as strategic ecosystems. Strategic management should leverage digital technologies, cross-sector partnerships, and citizen engagement to address complex urban challenges (Meijer & Bolivar, 2016).

Finally, policymakers should support efforts to contextualize strategic frameworks rather than impose standardized models across diverse administrative systems. Local cultures, institutional histories, and political dynamics profoundly shape strategic behavior, especially in non-Western settings. Adapting strategic tools to local realities increases their legitimacy, feasibility, and effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study reveals a field in transition. Strategic management in the public sector has matured beyond its managerial origins to embrace behavioral complexity, institutional diversity, and urban governance challenges. While foundational tools and theories remain influential, emerging research increasingly focuses on resistance, commitment, learning, and innovation in multi-actor environments. These developments resonate strongly with Public Management that emphasis on contextualized, complexity-aware, and theoretically pluralistic research. Strategic management in the public sector is thus becoming more behaviorally attuned, institutionally reflexive, and globally diverse. This shift not only reflects changing realities in public governance but also positions the field to contribute meaningfully to the major policy and administrative challenges of the coming decades.

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