Enhancing Public Service Delivery in Nigeria Through Agile Practice

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Abstract

The dynamic nature of today’s public sector demands innovative approaches to service delivery, leading to the emergence of agility as a vital paradigm. This research investigates the transformative potential of agile methodologies in restructuring the Nigerian public sector for enhanced service delivery. Emphasizing the need for agility in response to technological advancements and global shifts, the study draws on Nigeria's digital policy frameworks, such as the Nigeria e-Government Interoperability Framework (Ne-GIF) and the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS) 2020-2030. The research advocates a shift from traditional bureaucratic structures to a more integrated, networked approach that prioritizes citizen participation and fosters service-centric cultures. The study uses a qualitative approach to gather secondary data from diverse sources and employs thematic and content analysis. The findings reveal that agile methodologies have the potential to reshape the Nigerian public sector.

Keywords: Agile; Public Sector; Digital Government; Citizen-Centric Services; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Public administration worldwide has been subject to theoretical and practical changes through the introduction of novel management paradigms to improve performance and output in response to public needs. From Webber's bureaucratic postulations to NPM of the late 20th century, government institutions have been a focus of institutional re-engineering with novel ideas from practitioners, technocrats, and academics, usually in response to social and economic evolution in the larger society. Pressures for change in public administrations have predominantly been influenced by private sector practices, with the guiding rationale that the success of the private sector can be replicated in the public sector if, to a significant extent, private-style practices can be mimicked and tailored to the institutional design of public sector institutions.

As aforementioned, a significant outcome of this was the development of the new public management paradigm in the 1980s, which involved the re-jigging of government bureaucracies in replicating private sector management principles to reduce cost and improve efficiency and output within the public sector. Therefore, this trend set a precedent for adopting private-sector institutional practices in public agencies to ensure the relevance of public institutions to society (Kumorotomo, 2020). In the same vein, the concept and practice of “agile”, were developed and adopted widely in private institutions and are now being proposed amongst government technocrats as a viable strategy to ensure the responsiveness of public institutions to diverse and ever-evolving public needs.

The growth of agile concepts and practices became expedient with the recognition that the world has become increasingly complex, denoted by the acronym VUCA, which means volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. As such, systems and institutions that are the core of social existence must continuously evolve and adapt their functions as quickly as possible for continuity and development (Ylinen, 2021). Government institutions also exist in the current VUCA climate, and given their primacy as an essential service provider, it faces its ever-constant dilemma of adopting current industry trends to reconfigure its operations for better performance and service delivery. Therefore, agile provides robust support by facilitating adaptable requirements, which involves regular engagement with stakeholders, synchronized modifications, and the ability to reevaluate service requirements based on fresh insights or customer demands to improve service delivery (Baxter et al., 2023).

In the Nigerian environment, agile has become a familiar concept and practice within most private institutions, as it has been adopted as a strategy to ensure quick and satisfactory customer service (Laniyan, 2020). Thus, underlining agile is customer satisfaction, prioritizing customer-centric outcomes with timeliness, responsiveness, accuracy, quality, etc. (Looks, 2022). The increasing sophistication of the private sector in providing its services to customers who are also citizens places enormous responsibilities on public sector institutions in the country, particularly as citizens expect similar standards from government agencies. The Nigerian public sector is characterized by poor service delivery in all ramifications, and the recognition of this has prompted several reforms and initiatives (Ikeanyibe, 2016).

In the continual culture of reforms, public institutions in Nigeria must work towards becoming agile, which requires reconfiguring established bureaucratic setups to allow agile practice for better and increased efficiency. This research investigates how agile methodologies can play a pivotal role in transforming the
Nigerian public sector to enhance service delivery, transparency, and the overall welfare of citizens. The study underlines the necessity of embracing agile approaches to adapt to the changing technological landscape, global shifts, and the growing need for more efficient and transparent public institutions. Furthermore, the research draws attention to recent policy documents, notably the Nigeria e-Government Interoperability Framework (Ne-GIF) and the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS) 2020-2030, which align with the fundamental principles of agile methodologies.

The paper is divided into five sections. Section one looks at the origin, concept, and evolution of agile practice; section two discusses the role of agile in the public sector across digital government/governance initiatives and organizational reconfiguration; section three looks at strategies for implementing agile in the public sector, section four examines agility in Nigeria's public sector, while the last section gives a conclusion and recommendation.

RESEARCH METHODS
This paper employed a qualitative approach to explore diverse perspectives on the phenomenon under study. Secondary data were sourced from documents, books, articles, policy documents, and journals. Significant information was extracted from these secondary data and analyzed using thematic and content analysis.

Agile is an industry invention that emanated in the late 20th century and became popular at the turn of the millennium. Although different authors differ on the specific industry domain it originated from, Madsen (2020) affirms that its origins have roots in sociology, education, and manufacturing. However, it gained popularity in the IT industry, particularly after its adoption for software development in private firms. Therefore, the consensual agreement is that agile emanated from the IT industry (Looks et al., 2022; Ganapati, 2021).

Hence, given its established origins in the IT industry, particularly after the inauguration of the agile manifesto in 2001 with 12 guiding principles (Mergel et al., 2018), its definitions were narrowed to technological interpretations, implied as responsiveness to the rapidly changing innovations in the technology ecosystem (Tripon & Hener, 2020). Its growing popularity within other industry fields, particularly management, necessitated a more robust and capturing definition as industry stakeholders and academics became interested in the subject matter.

Accordingly, Dingsøyr et al. (2012) define agile as the ability "to rapidly and flexibly create and respond to change in the business and technical domains." In the same vein, as defined in Mergel et al. (2018), agile refers to the requirement for organizations, particularly bureaucracies, to become more flexible, adaptive, and fast in their behavior, especially in response to external social, economic, and market pressures, which might involve the adoption of new technology or systems. Dingsøyr et al. (2019) stress that agile comprises seven elements: efficiency, cost-effectiveness, leanness, speed, flexibility, quality, and simplicity. The constellation of these definitions highlights the primacy of adaptability and responsiveness, which has become necessary for institutions in a current global climate perceived as turbulent, chaotic, and uncertain (Tripon & Hener, 2020).

These definitions and their implicit meanings were adopted in the broader management industry. They became a buzzword for a new management paradigm, for re-engineering work processes for faster and improved service delivery to meet diverse customer expectations (Kumorotomo, 2020).
According to Bogdanova & Parashkevova (2022), agility has expanded to larger organizational scales while infiltrating new, "atypical" areas. The government is no exception, with agile currently employed in software development teams and non-IT operations like marketing, HR, Innovation, leadership, etc. (Madsen, 2020). In other words, agile is more than just a new approach to developing and deploying functional software; it is a comprehensive approach, a concept that enables organizations to generate new ideas, improve management, and produce better results (Bogdanova & Parashkevova, 2022).

In government specifically, Mohagheghi et al. (2020) affirm that agile is used to solve various problems, including faster value delivery, higher end-user satisfaction, improved collaboration between institutions, and cost reduction. Implicit, therefore, is that agile finds use in government digital projects, which is a core of the digital transformation of government and governance to enhance procedures and processes for improved citizen satisfaction. For example, Abdullah et al. (2023) note that in 2017, 80% of US federal IT projects were categorized as Agile or iterative, further underscoring the indispensability of an agile approach to government digital projects for service delivery. In further discussion of the imperative of agile to digital government projects and organizational refinement, the following section looks at how agile practices potentially influence the public sector, specifically focusing on digital government/governance and organizational processes and procedures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Agile in the Public sector

Digital Government/Digital Governance. Digitalization in government, generally understood as the adoption of ICT by the government for service delivery, implies the use of relevant technologies to improve the internal workings of government and the adaptation of such technologies as a platform for citizen engagement (Howes & Bishop, 2018). Studies on digital governance and government have mostly looked at the outcome of technology use in government, with little attention paid to the back end of deploying such technologies and how they are designed and configured to be relevant for public use. Agile in digital government focuses on the backend interaction of how technologies are developed and the dynamics of the human and engineering components, making the technologies convenient for public consumption and citizen satisfaction.

Government digital projects usually followed the NPM paradigm of decentralization and outsourcing services, which were encumbered with pathologies that hindered the effectiveness of digital programs and projects. According to Clarke (2020), outsourcing ICT development for government use was characterized by siloed operations, where the government agencies had no control over procurement or ownership of the digital infrastructure. Therefore, the result was that the digital infrastructure and databases powering government services and policy work were hardly interoperable, making it difficult or impossible to link diverse projects and policy work across several government departments. In the same vein, Looks (2022) contends that government digital projects at the point of their structural conception have rigid requirements, which, in the course of development and changes in the external environment, create problems such as strong hierarchies, poor communication, inflexibility to respond to change. The impact of this on digital governance, which involves service delivery to citizens, is that at the point of the digital service launch, the technology becomes
redundant and unresponsive to citizen needs (Mergel et al., 2021).

Detailing the traditional approach to technology development in the public sector, Mergel et al. (2018) explain that the waterfall approach was the earliest method, which involved step-by-step development and testing of larger projects without the ability to return to prior steps. Mergel (2016) explains that the traditional waterfall approach in public sector IT development follows a sequential approach, which flows from top to bottom, like a cascading waterfall. This strategy is founded on the premise that each project step must be finished before going on to the next to avoid faults affecting subsequent phases. The idea is to save time and money by dealing with problems as they arise. However, acquiring the details required to define a technology development contract upfront with government IT projects is frequently difficult, necessitating extensions to accommodate modifications or fill gaps that arise throughout the project. As a result, waterfall methods are criticized for their inflexibility and lack of communication with clients and users. They prioritize contract compliance and risk aversion over meeting the needs of users and government employees who rely on the final product. Waterfall methods struggle to respond to changing environments, especially in long-term, large-scale projects (Mergel, 2016).

Simonofski et al., (2018) opine that the waterfall model held prominence in the evolution of e-government services, depending heavily on meticulous planning and the establishment of standardized procedures, assuming that the project requirements remain constant throughout the development journey. However, it hinders public organizations from promptly adjusting their procedures in response to the evolving demands of e-government users. Additionally, it poses challenges in fostering effective communication among citizens, government officials, and other involved parties.

The problems associated with the waterfall management approach to public sector IT development led to the adoption of agile methodology. Government agencies are increasingly interested in agile development to improve responsiveness and collaboration. New work habits and digital initiatives that advocate for a more collaborative work environment in governments have established the need for increasing user participation and internal collaboration in digital-era governments (Simonofski et al., 2018). Mergel et al. (2018) explicate that agile software development methods entail producing, testing, and enhancing technology products progressively in short, iterative sprints. The idea is to respond quickly to modifications or problems discovered throughout development. Simonofski et al. (2018) describe it as a collection of flexible and lightweight approaches for software development that rely on a set of concepts and practices, e.g., time-boxed iterations, customer participation, daily meetings, continuous process improvement, all in a bid to improve citizen satisfaction.

Bogdanova & Parashkevova (2022) elucidate that institutions testing agile methods proceed by forming small, independent teams communicating with consumers or users of the product or service under development. As a result, rather than relying on thorough documentation, the team acquires first-hand knowledge of the needs directly from the consumers. Thus, unlike the previous waterfall approach, the development process begins with a generic description of the needed capability, which is then discussed, split into components, and created in a sprint cycle. The operating principle is a slow iterative construction of the ultimate result, typically described in the IT sector...
as continual enhancement of the required functionality through code development (Bogdanova & Parashkevova, 2022; Mergel, 2016)

In software development, agile methodologies, in contrast to the traditional waterfall approach, are likely to be twice as successful and one-third less likely to fail than waterfall projects (Ganapati, 2021). Similarly, Mergel et al. (2018) affirm that agile methodologies have made organizations more collaborative, communicative, and swifter by increasing the number of outputs to match the continuously changing technology ecosystem. Because of the greater quality of software solutions, agile methodologies contribute to increased user loyalty and citizen satisfaction. These characteristics that agile methodology produces are reflected in the 12 principles of agile methodology as described by the founding fathers in the Agile Manifesto of 2001 (Simonofski et al., 2018). These benefits also find space for use in public administration, and according to Looks (2022), agile process models may be one strategy for overcoming the issues associated with the demand for flexibility in public administrations and improving the ability to handle changing priorities and increased productivity.

Thus, it is assumed that the agile method is auspicious for executing digital government projects in public administration, as the paradigm shift from a plan-oriented to a human-oriented approach allows for far more user-oriented digital product development (Looks, 2022). For example, the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund embarked on a significant IT project, implementing an agile development approach to acquire a new office automation system. Over four years, a team of 175 individuals, including 100 external consultants from five different firms, invested roughly 800,000 person-hours in creating approximately 300 epics, each containing about 2,500 user stories. These epics were subsequently organized into 12 releases.

Similarly, the UK government employed agile development to construct its government website. Within three years, this website successfully replaced the online platforms of 1,882 government organizations. More than eight years after its initial launch in 2012, Gov. UK continues to undergo further enhancements and refinements driven by user feedback. (Deloitte Insights, 2021.)

Organisational Management and Refinement of the Public Sector

Awamleh et al. (2022) state that old public management paradigms could not fulfill citizens’ customer service expectations or maintain the requisite efficiency given the revolutionary developments in technology and citizens’ expectations of the function of the government. Schaebs (2021) stresses that agile organizations are not merely about the robust use of digital technologies but about a fundamental change to existing organizational and work culture, which de-emphasizes stiff processes, systems, and procedures for a flexible reconfiguration with network-like structures that adequately and sufficiently respond to public needs. According to Carrasco et al. (2018), agile requires a change in perspective that strongly emphasizes having a well-defined, overarching vision rather than getting bogged down in overly detailed instructions. This approach enables adaptable leadership and organizational setups, encourages forming cross-functional teams, fosters diverse talent pools, and promotes collaborative cultures and behaviors. When implemented on a larger scale within a company, agility dismantles departmental barriers, enhances transparency and responsibility, and empowers the workforce (Carrasco et al., 2018).
The inevitability of agile in public sector institutions was re-affirmed by the global pandemic of the year 2020, which saw the inescapable transition of most public sector institutions to the digital stream to meet public needs (Schaebbs, 2021). Kumorotomo (2020) asserts that agile government is not just creating a public management system responsive to public needs but also adapting to the fourth industrial revolution characterized by emerging digital technologies reshaping global economic, social, and political spheres. However, Awamleh et al. (2022) stress that more than digital readiness is needed in modern governance, as government requires a sustained approach to coordination and integration of services and policies, which can only be achieved by agile government strategies. Agility enables public administration to be strategic, adaptive, and responsive. Given the uncertain, volatile, and unpredictable environments that seem to be the norm, agile government’s emphasis on effectiveness and responsiveness offers complex government institutions the elements to combat rigidity and promote public value (Awamleh et al., 2022).

Parker & Bartlett (2008) contends that agility in the public sector means understanding and addressing citizens’ short-term needs, modifying structures, and services to address medium-term trends, and designing long-term demands, all of which help the government to address complex problems in an uncertain environment. Bogdanova & Parashkevova, (2022), illuminating how these processes can be enhanced with agile in the public sector, explain that the traditional public sector service delivery method is often accomplished using a centralized service design that adheres to the well-known linear model. As a result, there is a lack of input from citizens who are the end users of such services, resulting in a mismatch of needs and what is eventually provided. Adopting agile starts from the bottom by incorporating the citizens’ needs into the policy program’s implementation, done by an iterative process that seeks feedback from citizens, which then informs the next level of iteration before being upscaled to a larger audience. A complementary benefit of this is that junior staff personnel are involved in the design of public services, which increases their responsibility for quality service delivery and commitment to the organization through involvement. Agile fosters an organizational culture that values individual contributions. Employees become more accountable, engaged, and empowered as a result. Overcoming the culture of punishment for mistakes is a crucial requirement for agility. On the contrary, it is thought that administrations that make mistakes during the initial iteration process learn faster and are more positioned to make adjustments (Bogdanova & Parashkevova, 2022).

Other benefits of agile to organizational management enumerated by Mergel et al. (2021) include its capacity for a greater knowledge of decision-making processes, which improves transparency and accountability. The procedural arrangement of feedback loops and iterations helps to modify organizational hierarchy and silos, which are crucial for responsive service delivery. Similarly, its bottom-up approach helps to improve the expertise of civil servants, by making them responsible for decisions that improve craft and management skills. In addition, agile management helps to encourage a fail-forward approach for public organizations and become better and more relevant to societal needs.

With these benefits, agile has seen a gradual global uptake in public sector institutions worldwide. According to Carrasco et al. (2018), in Australia, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US, approximately 90% of public
sector agencies have embraced agile practices, with nearly half of them having done so for over two years. The dominant areas where agile methods have been adopted include IT, policymaking, and service delivery. As a result, these organizations have managed to expedite service delivery by up to 50% and enhance citizens' satisfaction levels by as much as 25%. Similarly, in the World Bank, the need to reform its organizational procedures to meet global demand for loans, which took an extended duration of time to approve, led to the deployment of agile approaches, with a corresponding significant improvement in its policy interventions, saving time and improving quality with improved employee output (Carrasco et al., 2018).

Furthermore, illustrations of the agile organizational approach are apparent in various countries. For instance, the US Office of Personnel Management granted agencies the authority to expedite the typically time-consuming hiring procedures. Similarly, Australia introduced a digital marketplace to streamline the process of government agencies finding and contracting digital experts, obtaining project-specific quotations, or accessing digital training services. In Canada, agile initiatives for recruitment enable the transition toward a talent model that focuses on skills and project-based recruitment. An associated project from it, known as Free Agents, permits a select group of public servants to shift from one department to another based on their interests and competencies (Deloitte Insights, 2023).

Despite the lofty benefits of agile, scholars have pointed out various challenges that would make the adoption of agile methodology problematic in the public sector. The constellation of these reasons includes risk aversion given the reluctance of the public sector to try out new approaches, cultural constraints, which are most likely to inhibit agile work processes, and institutional structure, as agile requires cross-functional teams constantly collaborating and cooperating, which is an antithesis of how major public sector institutions are set up and run, usually working in functional silos, lack of internal competence to ensure an agile transformation, laws, and regulations, bureaucratic hierarchy, which impedes the horizontal authority required for an agile methodology to be effective, and lack of flexible procurement procedure (Parker & Bartlett, 2008; Simonofski et al., 2018; Vacari & Prikladnicki, 2015).

In sum, Mergel et al. (2021) contend that at its core, adopting an agile approach requires a significant shift away from entrenched and inflexible bureaucratic cultures that traditionally operate with top-down directives and a zero-failure mentality. Nonetheless, a compounding benefit of agile in the public sector is its capacity to transform government into adaptive bureaucracies/governments. Adaptive government, unlike the rigid and linear procedural activities of government as it currently exists, enables flexibility in responding to changes in the broader socio-economic and political climate, which is often uncertain and chaotic. It allows for a malleable proactive response to changes in the external environment (Mergel, 2016). Soe & Drechsler (2018) explain further that characteristics of adaptive governance include decentralized decision-making, mobilization of capabilities (internal/external), broader participation, and adjustments to deal with uncertainty. Given the discussions on agile adoption in the public sector, the next section will focus on the strategies for implementing agile in the public sector. These strategies are the key foundational element for transitioning into an agile work practice. 

**Strategies for Implementing Agile in the Public Sector**
Attaining an agile public sector requires various strategies. Mergel (2016) sums into policy and management frameworks. The policy framework serves as the pioneer for any innovation, which, according to Ganapati (2021), necessitates a commitment to embrace innovation at the highest levels of government. The management framework requires willing leadership with a zest for innovative procedures. Successful agile methodology transfer requires organizational maturity at both team and management levels, with management expected to ensure a transition to decentralized decision-making and new customer communication methods while creating adequate team training conditions. (Mergel, 2016; Bogdanova & Parashkevova, 2022) In essence, fostering an agile culture requires leaders who can provide clear direction and purpose while empowering teams to adapt and innovate.

Other strategies, as enumerated by Parker & Bartlett (2008), Rieckhoff & Maxwell (2017) and Carrasco et al. (2018), include

- **Vision and Purpose:** Transitioning to agile in the public sector requires a unified vision and clear strategic differentiators to respond to changing circumstances by allocating resources and embracing a culture of experimentation. Teams must have a clear understanding of their role and efficient decision-making processes.

- **Structure:** Agile organizations establish a stable and straightforward structural framework as their fundamental structure. It requires horizontally structured organizations with flatter hierarchies and accountability that empower employees to take responsibility for decision-making and problem-solving, with supervisors transitioning from authoritative bosses to coaches and facilitators.

- **Process:** Agile organizations require standardized core processes to maintain operational stability. Cross-agency coordination, cross-functional teams, and close cooperation with citizens are essential to flexible, multidisciplinary working methods.

- **People:** Agile organizations foster a culture of self-improvement, ambitious goals, and open feedback, while smaller, dynamic teams collaborate to explore and refine new ideas. In addition, organizations need to structure their reward systems around achieved outcomes and feedback from peers. This approach prioritizes the development of expertise and the creation of new career paths and practices that have yet to see widespread adoption in the public sector.

- **Governance and Funding:** The public sector would need to transition towards a more adaptable funding model based on capacity, with periodic assessments of initiatives to confirm their alignment with organizational objectives and merit for ongoing funding. This approach involves regularly reevaluating initiatives to ensure they remain on the right track and continue to justify allocating resources. A steady financial foundation contributes to the endurance of the established institutional frameworks, enabling the continued adoption of Agile practices within government entities.

- **Culture and Behavior:** Agile transformation involves organizational culture shifting, promoting autonomy and problem-solving at all levels. However, this autonomy must be balanced with a shared understanding of the organization’s purpose and strategy.

- **Measurement Framework:** Data analytics is essential for evaluating organizational progress and
establishing transparency in measurement frameworks. It should be widely accessible, enabling data-driven decision-making and enhancing overall performance by providing clear visibility into progress and areas for improvement.

- **Technological Enablers:** Embracing agile methodologies necessitates a shift from cumbersome mainframe systems to more modular ones that empower teams to take ownership of their end-to-end processes. Agile development relies on key technological enablers like APIs, shared tools, Continuous Delivery practices, Automated Testing, DevOps, and a well-defined Technology Architecture. APIs facilitate seamless communication and collaboration between software systems, while shared tools streamline workflow. Continuous Delivery practices automate software updates, Automated Testing reduces manual testing, and DevOps unifies development and operations teams for faster releases. Organizations can modernize their technology infrastructure by adopting these technological enablers, enhancing agility, and better aligning with agile development principles.

In a world of complexity and uncertainty, fixed systems and set expectations cannot effectively address challenges, seize opportunities, or prevent crises. Agile, which refers to a flexible and adaptable approach to utilizing public resources to maximize public value generation, will be required. The essence of agility in government lies in the mindset and attitude of all human resources involved. Public value is determined by the outcomes of interactions among various stakeholders, including public officials, citizens, and the private sector (Awamleh et al., 2022).

**Agility in the Nigerian Public Sector.**

Ukeje et al. (2019) contend that the decline in the performance levels in public service delivery in Nigeria has prompted changes to reorient the country’s bureaucracy for enhanced citizen welfare. Nonetheless, the Nigerian public service is one encumbered by pathologies summed by (Ikeanyibe et al. 2021) as one that has long exhibited significant rigidity, a persistent attachment to outdated practices and laws, excessive bureaucracy, slow and inefficient procedures, and a propensity for procrastination. Ojogiwa (2021) affirms that technological advancements, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic growth, and global advancements have compelled organizations, including governments, to adapt and modernize management methods, particularly in public institutions demanding transparency and efficiency, amid resource constraints.

Agile has been touted as a transformational approach to reforming the Nigerian public sector because it enables a paradigm shift towards an innovative and problem-solving mindset in today’s constantly changing business environment, driven by market needs, customer expectations, and expanding technology innovation (Akiyode-Lawanson, 2018). The starting point for improved service delivery, especially within the Nigerian public sector, has been the adoption of emerging technologies, as digital government and governance strategies alter work processes and procedures. Agile, as aforementioned, permeates institutions from the technological facet, which then gradually diffuses to other aspects of the organization, reforming and repositioning such organizations for better outcomes in terms of citizen satisfaction.

Recent policy documents such as the Nigeria e-Government Interoperability Framework (Ne-GIF) and National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS)
2020-2030 contain pillars that emphasize outputs similar to outputs guaranteed by agile principles. The Ne GIF specifically recognizes that

...Governments are moving away from structural devolution, disaggregation, and single-purpose organizations to a more integrated approach to public service delivery. It is a paradigm shift toward the vision of a connected, networked, citizen-centered government.... Advanced phases of service innovation cannot be achieved without integrating many back-office functions. For instance, citizen-centered service delivery involves breaking up silos, integrating across agencies, innovating new ways of doing business, and creating a service-focused culture...

The critical goal of the Ne GIF has 6 outcomes which include

- Improve synergy between government organizations by promoting easy communication and exchange of data
- Fully integrated public sector e-government/IT systems for the provision of efficient cross-portfolio services
- Affordable and accessible e-Government services;
- Seamless and smooth online interaction between government organizations, businesses, and citizens
- Increase citizens’ participation in governance
- Promote and ensure the actualization of government policies on the ease of doing business

Source: (Ne-GIF 2019)

In the same vein, pillar four of the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS): 2020-2030 emphasises as one of its core objectives to accelerate the digitalisation of government processes and improve service delivery, transparency, and accountability, with specific pillars such as

- address the provision of robust digital platforms to drive the digital economy.
- enable transactions and interactions online and provide a pool of enabling a supply of data from which both the government and the private sector can gain useful insights with which to develop the digital economy.
- the provision of a one-stop online platform for government to interact with citizens and investors.
- supports the deployment of government digital services and a paperless system.

Source: (FMCDE, 2019)

Although not explicitly stated, underlying these national digital policies is the imperative of agile working methods to government digital services and, subsequently, public sector adoption for improving service delivery. The Ne-GIF emphasizes a shift toward a connected, networked, citizen-centered government. This vision aligns with agile principles, such as customer-centricity, as agile methodologies prioritize meeting customer needs and expectations. Furthermore, the framework promotes integrated government services for improved service delivery. Agile methods focus on collaboration and integration, and the Ne-GIF echoes this by advocating for the integration of back-office functions and breaking up silos, which is in line with agile principles.

In a similar vein, the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy aims to accelerate the digitalization of government processes and improve service delivery. Agile methodologies are well-suited for digital transformation projects, enabling adaptability, flexibility, and responsiveness to changing technological landscapes. It also emphasizes the provision of robust digital platforms to drive the digital economy. Agile practices, with their focus on iterative development, allow for the continuous improvement of digital platforms based on feedback, aligning with NDEPS objectives. Finally, NDEPS
aims to provide a one-stop online platform for government to interact with citizens and investors. Agile principles advocate for active citizen involvement in development, promoting co-creation and alignment with citizen needs.

The implication is that the agile approach, through the digital transformation of government in Nigeria, helps to enhance the processes and procedures of service delivery. It ensures a citizen-centric public sector that adequately and responsively caters to citizen needs by allowing citizen feedback into policy implementation processes. In addition, digitalization, which enhances government openness, helps ensure the transparency and integrity of public sector institutions. Citizens, as part of the co-creation process under agile adoption, help to ensure inclusion in decision-making processes, thus enhancing the credibility and acceptability of decision mechanisms of public sector institutions. These factors, therefore, contribute to citizens’ overall confidence and trust in government institutions, consequently enabling socio-economic and political development in the country.

Reengineering the public sector through technology and its unification across agencies is critical to the success of the aforementioned policies and achieving agility within the country’s public sector. For example, the government’s attempt in Nigeria to have a unified national database that its institutions can access is a significant challenge bedeviling the public sector and hampers efficient service delivery to citizens. The problem, as pointed out by Ikeanyibe et al. (2021), is that the absence of compatible information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure within government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) poses a significant barrier to the implementation of government services integration. Other obstacles include a lack of coordination across government departments, limited computer literacy at various bureaucratic levels, the introduction of technology without adequate process re-engineering, and issues related to a consistent power supply. These challenges must be addressed effectively for any meaningful takeoff of the agile approach in the Nigerian public sector.

Agile can significantly aid public sector interoperability in Nigeria, as this constitutes a key concern for the government (Laniyan, 2020). affirms that agile, as a style of working and a mindset, is still in its infancy in Nigeria, with the contention that the public sector in Nigeria would benefit immensely from this way of working, particularly for the mindset shift it delivers. The novelty of the agile approach in the public sector was recently given attention in the Lagos state public sector, as the Lagos State Government and its affiliated institutions are actively preparing to adapt and implement agile as a modern and adaptable management approach that aligns with the demands of the 21st century, with the recognized benefits of increase responsibility, diversity of ideas, quick delivery of services, etc. (Akintola, 2018).

In addition to the aforementioned, the Nigerian public sector, with the problems recognized by Ikeanyibe et al. (2021), can be arbitrated with an agile approach, which by its core foundation involves a new work mindset that then translates to organizational recalibration, with emphasis on a horizontal management approach, citizen inclusion in product and service delivery, increased intra and inter-agency collaboration, etc. all of which has the potential benefit of enhancing and sustaining the ease of doing business in Nigeria, critical to attracting FDI for economic growth and development. The implications of public value to citizens are also immense. Agile
methodologies prioritize close collaboration and communication with end-users; it ensures that services align closely with the needs and expectations of the people they serve. It also fosters a continuous feedback loop, as citizens can provide feedback on public services as they are being developed or improved, making them co-creators in the development of public service. In the same vein, it also ensures cost-effective service delivery that citizens can afford.

These benefits are, therefore, key to modern public sector service delivery, which requires, in Nigeria’s case, the transition and continuity of agile practice in its institutions. Therefore, sustaining agile in the Nigerian public sector will require Continuous training and capacity-building programs to ensure that public sector employees are well-versed in Agile practices and have an Agile mindset. Fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and adaptability within government agencies, where experimentation and learning from failures are also key. Public sector projects would also follow incremental processes to regularly assess progress, make improvements, and adjust priorities based on evolving needs. Legal and regulatory frameworks would also need to be strengthened, and lastly, there will be the need to develop and implement key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the impact of Agile practices on public service delivery. These KPIs can track citizen satisfaction, project delivery times, and efficiency gains.

CONCLUSION

Agile methodologies present a promising avenue for revitalizing the Nigerian public sector, fostering an innovative mindset aligned with citizen expectations. The transformative potential of Agile extends to influencing organizational reforms, resulting in streamlined processes, superior service delivery, and heightened citizen satisfaction. Incorporating agile principles in government digital projects holds the promise of fortifying democratic foundations, placing citizens at the forefront of product and service development.

However, the adoption of Agile has its challenges. Barriers such as risk aversion, cultural constraints, institutional structures, internal competence, legal and regulatory obstacles, and resistance to procurement changes must be addressed to facilitate a successful transition.

Effective implementation of Agile requires a comprehensive approach, encompassing well-defined policy and management frameworks, unwavering leadership commitment, organizational maturity, a clear vision, flexible structures, continuous self-improvement, alignment of governance and funding with Agile principles, and the promotion of collaboration and problem-solving.

Nigeria’s digital policy frameworks have laid a foundation for integrating Agile practices in the public sector. Recognizing this, the paper recommends leadership commitment at all government levels, fostering a culture of innovation and responsiveness. Additionally, developing and implementing detailed, agile-friendly policy and management frameworks are crucial, encouraging flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness in government operations.

Other recommendations include providing training and support to enhance the skills and capabilities of the public sector workforce in adopting Agile methodologies effectively. Promoting a culture of collaboration and problem-solving within government agencies can be achieved by encouraging cross-functional teams to work together. Furthermore, involving citizens in the decision-making process and establishing
regular feedback and iteration mechanisms are essential components of a successful Agile implementation strategy.

REFERENCES


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