Practices and Challenges in the Implementation of Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Projects

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10100081

Received: 26 December 2025; Accepted: 31 December 2025; Published: 22 January 2026

ABSTRACT

Infrastructure development plays a vital role in national progress, yet its success depends largely on how projects are implemented within public institutions. This study examined the practices and challenges in the implementation of projects of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) in the First District Engineering Office, Province of Iloilo, for Fiscal Year 2024. Employing a quantitative–descriptive research design, the study assessed the level of implementation practices and challenges as perceived by DPWH personnel and determined whether significant differences existed when respondents were classified according to age, educational attainment, length of service, status of employment, and section. It also examined the relationship between implementation practices and challenges. Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings of the study provide empirical insights that may inform policy refinement, strengthen institutional monitoring systems, and enhance governance and accountability in public infrastructure implementation.

Keywords: Infrastructure implementation; DPWH projects; institutional practices; implementation challenges; public works governance

INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure development is a cornerstone of national growth, economic connectivity, and public welfare. In the Philippines, this mandate is primarily carried out by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), which is responsible for planning, constructing, and maintaining major public infrastructure. Despite its critical role, the implementation of DPWH projects remains beset by institutional, procedural, and operational challenges that affect efficiency, accountability, and project outcomes.

The success of public infrastructure projects depends not only on technical competence but also on the quality of implementation practices, including regulatory compliance, procurement procedures, coordination mechanisms, and professional conduct. However, rigid bureaucratic structures, resistance to technological innovation, and policy inconsistencies continue to hinder effective project execution. These challenges, if unresolved, may lead to project delays, cost overruns, and erosion of public trust.

Understanding how implementation practices interact with operational challenges is therefore essential for strengthening institutional capacity and improving public infrastructure governance. This study investigates these dynamics within the DPWH First District Engineering Office in Iloilo, focusing on how employee characteristics and organizational conditions influence project implementation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on **Institutional Theory** (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which posits that organizational behavior is shaped by formal regulations, informal norms, and cultural expectations. Public institutions such as the DPWH operate within a system of coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures that influence compliance, decision-making, and performance.

Coercive isomorphism arises from legal mandates, audit requirements, and government regulations that compel adherence to standardized procedures. **Mimetic isomorphism** occurs when organizations adopt practices from peer institutions to reduce uncertainty, while **normative isomorphism** stems from professional training, ethical standards, and shared expertise that guide employee conduct.

The study is further informed by **Institutional Logics Theory** (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012), which explains how multiple value systems—bureaucratic, professional, and public service logics—coexist and compete within public organizations. DPWH personnel must balance regulatory compliance, engineering quality, political expectations, and service delivery, often leading to implementation tensions.

Additionally, **Institutional Change and Innovation Theory** (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996), complemented by **Diffusion of Innovations Theory** (Rogers, 2003), explains organizational adaptation and resistance to change. While DPWH has introduced digital monitoring and procurement systems, adoption varies due to institutional readiness, perceived complexity, and compatibility with existing practices.

Taken together, the theoretical perspectives explain that implementation practices and challenges in DPWH projects are not isolated phenomena but are products of institutional pressures, competing organizational logics, and uneven innovation adoption. Institutional Theory explains compliance-oriented behavior, Institutional Logics Theory accounts for operational tensions, and Innovation Theory clarifies resistance to modernization. These frameworks collectively guide the examination of how DPWH personnel implement projects and confront challenges within a bureaucratic environment.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To determine the practices and challenges in the implementation of DPWH projects in the First District Engineering Office, Province of Iloilo, for Fiscal Year 2024.

Specific Objectives

Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. Describe the profile of the respondents in terms of age, educational attainment, length of service, status of employment, and section.

2. Determine the level of practices in the implementation of DPWH projects when taken as a whole and when classified according to respondent profile variables.

3. Determine the level of challenges encountered in the implementation of DPWH projects when taken as a whole and when classified according to respondent profile variables.

4. Identify whether significant differences exist in implementation practices when respondents are grouped according to profile variables.

5. Identify whether significant differences exist in implementation challenges when respondents are grouped according to profile variables.

6. Determine whether a significant relationship exists between implementation practices and challenges.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a **quantitative–descriptive research design**, appropriate for describing existing conditions and examining relationships among variables without manipulating them.

Participants and Locale

The respondents were DPWH personnel involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and supervision of infrastructure projects in the **DPWH First District Engineering Office, Province of Iloilo**.

Research Instruments

Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire consisting of three parts: respondent profile, implementation practices, and implementation challenges. Items were measured using a Likert-scale format.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was secured from appropriate authorities prior to data collection. Questionnaires were administered to the respondents, retrieved upon completion, and checked for completeness.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean) were used to summarize respondent profiles and variable levels. Inferential statistics were employed to determine significant differences and relationships between variables.

Despite very high practice adherence, respondents still reported **moderate, recurring challenges**, led by **technology adoption resistance**, **process rigidity**, and **industry standards alignment**. This pattern suggests that DPWH implementation is not mainly constrained by lack of effort or knowledge, but by **institutional friction** during modernization and procedural change.

Differences in Practices and Challenges by Profile

Table 4. Chi-square Test Results on Differences

A. Differences in Practices

Profile	**χ^2-value**	**p-value**	**Remarks**
Age	6.628	0.085	Not significant
Status of employment	0.073	0.787	Not significant
Educational background	5.859	0.053	Not significant
Length of service	8.228	0.084	Not significant
Section	4.973	0.290	Not significant

B. Differences in Challenges

Profile	**χ^2-value**	**p-value**	**Remarks**
Age	6.755	0.080	Not significant
Status of employment	0.253	0.615	Not significant
Educational background	7.820	0.020	**Significant**
Length of service	11.343	0.023	**Significant**
Section	7.101	0.131	Not significant

The findings show **no significant differences in practices** across any profile group, implying a **standardized, institutionally uniform implementation culture**. In contrast, **challenges significantly differed by educational background and length of service**, indicating that coping capacity varies depending on **academic preparation** and **tenure position** (with mid-career and bachelor-level groups generally reporting higher difficulty patterns in the detailed tables).

Relationship Between Practices and Challenges

Table 5. Correlation Between Practices and Challenges

Variable	Mean	r-value	p-value	Remarks
Practices	14.13	0.723	0.000	Significant
Challenges	2.78			

A **strong positive correlation** indicates that higher implementation practice levels are associated with higher reported challenges. This suggests that employees who are **more engaged in procedural compliance and implementation intensity** are also those who **encounter and recognize more constraints** (e.g., policy shifts, procurement complexity, technology transition), reflecting **exposure**, not incompetence.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. DPWH Iloilo 1st DEO is youth-leaning yet professionally prepared across key sections.

2. Implementation practices are robust and uniform across groups.

3. Core challenges are tech readiness and process adaptability, not material shortages.

4. Practices are consistently high and standardized across groups.

5. Differences in challenges are driven by educational attainment and tenure.

6. High practice intensity coexists with (and exposes) challenges—a productive tension for improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following corresponding recommendations are presented:

1. Formalize mentoring and succession plans; sustain postgraduate incentives; balance staffing across sections to reduce bottlenecks.

2. Create a deadline–quality playbook, strengthen transparency dashboards, and continue cross-section collaboration rituals.

3. Implement tiered ICT training, change-management sprints, and role-specific SOP refreshers; target early/mid-career cohorts.

4. Maintain agency-wide standards; use micro-audits to keep consistency; share practice exemplars across sections.

5. Deploy differentiated CPD pathways (advanced modules for bachelor's-level; leadership/transition support for 6–10 yrs); mentorship loops.

6. Pair process excellence with bottleneck removal: continuous improvement cells, procurement fast-lanes, and policy-update briefings tied to high-practice teams.

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