The International Review of Multidisciplinary Research
Volume 1, Issue 14, November 2026, pp. 32-41
https://doi.org/10.67167/vertex.780

Crafting the Digital Integrity: Ethical Governance in Service Delivery in the Identified Local Government Units

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Article Details:

Received: 12 October 2026
Revised: 18 October 2026
Accepted: 26 October 2026
Published: 15 November 2026
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Recommended Citation:

Cabeliño, T. M. A., Morata, A. C., Ranes, M. A., Largado, L. M., Davis, S. A., & Manalastas, R. D. (2026). Crafting the Digital Integrity: Ethical Governance in Service Delivery in the Identified Local Government Units. The International Review of Multidisciplinary Research. 1 (14), 32-41. https://doi.org/10.67167/vertex.780

Index Terms:

public administrative, digital-integrity, ethical-digital governance service delivery, ethical-digital governance roadmap, descriptive - narrative, Leyte

Abstract. This study assessed digital integrity practices and ethical governance in public service delivery in the municipalities of Calubian and Leyte, Leyte, during Calendar Year 2025. It aimed to identify institutional, behavioral, and technological vulnerabilities as a basis for developing a long-term governance framework. Employing a descriptive-evaluative research design, the study gathered quantitative and qualitative data from 60 respondents comprising 10 government leaders, 20 local government employees, and 30 transacting clients. Data were collected through a validated four-point Likert-scale questionnaire and open-ended responses, which were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings showed a high overall level of digital integrity practices, with a composite mean of 2.85. Front-end verification mechanisms (3.28) and transparency of transaction fees on digital platforms (3.42) were notable strengths. However, network downtime (2.22), limited real-time document tracking (2.35), and inadequate automated cloud backups (2.48) exposed critical technological weaknesses. Ethical governance likewise registered a high overall composite mean of 2.94. Honesty and anti-corruption obtained the highest rating (3.33), supported by automated payment systems (3.45) and reduced reliance on fixers (3.38). In contrast, responsiveness to citizen complaints and electronic system errors received a relatively low rating (2.42). Workforce findings further revealed that 55.00% of data-handling personnel were casual or contractual workers, while only 13.33% of staff had undergone regular data privacy or cybersecurity training aligned with Republic Act No. 10173. The study concludes that digital automation has strengthened transparency and reduced opportunities for corruption, but infrastructure deficiencies, weak grievance mechanisms, and insufficient personnel training threaten sustainable implementation. In response, the Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap (EDGR) was developed as a phased strategic framework integrating policy safeguards, workforce development, system reliability, data protection, and accountability measures to promote secure, responsive, transparent, and trustworthy local public service delivery across both municipalities through measurable targets, coordinated implementation, continuous monitoring, and sustained institutional improvement.

Introduction

The global landscape of public administration is currently navigating a pivotal era where digitalization is no longer a luxury but a fundamental requisite for governance. Internationally, organizations such as the OECD (2025) and the United Nations (CEPA, 2025) emphasize that "Digital by Design" government strategies are essential to foster transparency, accountability, and public trust. However, as the World Economic Forum (2026) recently highlighted, we are entering an "Intelligent Age" marked by a significant digital paradox: while technology offers immense opportunities for efficiency, it also amplifies the intent of those who wield it. Without a solid foundation of ethical administration, digitalization risks automating existing biases or creating new, high-tech avenues for institutional neglect. This

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international discourse sets the stage for a critical question: Can technology truly reform government, or is its success entirely dependent on the integrity of the human leaders behind the screen?

In the Philippines, this transition has been institutionalized through the landmark Republic Act No. 12254, or the E-Governance Act of 2025. This law mandates a "digitally empowered and integrated government" to optimize citizen-centric services across all levels, including Local Government Units (LGUs). Complementing this is the Civil Service Commission's (2025) launch of the Digital Leadership Program (DiLP), which targets the training of over 50,000 civil servants by 2027. The national agenda, anchored in the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028, views digitalization as the primary weapon against "red tape" and corruption. Yet, as noted by Lim (2026), technology does not fix broken leadership; it only accelerates the existing organizational culture, whether functional or dysfunctional.

The research environment of LGU Calubian and Leyte-Leyte provides a unique microcosm for examining these dynamics. Both municipalities are part of a broader provincial push in Leyte to digitize taxation, licensing, and document management systems (PIA Leyte, 2025). Calubian, specifically, was recently a recipient of digital infrastructure support through the DICT's Project CLICK (2025), signaling its readiness for technical transformation. However, the "Digital-Integrity Paradox" remains a looming threat in these second and third-class municipalities where traditional administrative practices meet modern digital mandates. The relevance of this study is underscored by the need to ensure that these digital investments do not merely result in "digital facades" but lead to genuine improvements in service delivery and honesty.

The study's necessity is further justified by its multi-respondent approach, which triangulates the reality of governance in Leyte. Engaging Management Level (The Leaders) is vital because, as Yap (2025) argues, digital fluency and adaptive leadership are now essential competencies; the "tone at the top" determines whether digital systems are used to enhance accountability or to mask inefficiencies. Meanwhile, the Frontline Staff (The Administrators) serve as the operational litmus test for the study. Their efficiency is measured by processing time and accuracy which reflects the actual impact of digitalization on the daily "Service Delivery" culture. Without their "honesty" in data entry and system usage, the digital transition remains incomplete.

Ultimately, the inclusion of the Public (The Beneficiaries) provides an indispensable external audit. Citizen satisfaction is the most objective measure of whether the E-Governance Act is fulfilling its promise of "citizen-centered" service (RA 12254, 2025). In rural-coastal municipalities like Calubian, where the digital divide is a lived reality, understanding if the public perceives an improvement in "Service Quality" and "Integrity" is crucial for local policy-making. This study is therefore urgent and necessary to provide a localized, evidence-based blueprint for balancing technological advancement with the moral fortitude required for a truly "Bagong Pilipinas."

Methodology

Design

This study adopts a Comparative-Explanatory Research Design. It is "comparative" as it seeks to observe potential variations in administrative integrity and digital efficiency between two distinct environments: LGU Calubian and LGU Leyte. This comparison allows for a broader understanding of how different leadership cultures within the same province react to the mandates of the E-Governance Act of 2025.

The design is specifically structured to capture the Vertical and Horizontal dimensions of Accountability. The vertical dimension is captured through the Management-to-Citizen relationship, while the horizontal dimension is explored through the internal workplace culture of the Frontline Staff. By aligning these perspectives, the research design minimizes the risk of "social desirability bias," where government officials might overstate their own integrity.
The inclusion of the public's objective external measure provides the necessary "check and balance" to the internal self-assessments of the LGU personnel, creating a 360-degree view of the digital-integrity landscape.

Environment

The research environment in this study is situated within the administrative jurisdictions of the Municipality of Calubian and the Municipality of Leyte, both located in the northwestern portion of the province of Leyte, Philippines. These locales serve as critical microcosms for studying the "Digital-Integrity Paradox" due to their shared status as second and third-class municipalities currently navigating the transition from traditional, paper-based bureaucracies to integrated digital systems. Calubian, a coastal town known for its agricultural and fishing industries, and the neighboring town of Leyte (Leyte-Leyte), represent a socio-economic demographic where government services are vital for local economic mobility. The physical and organizational environment of these Local Government Units (LGUs) is characterized by a mix of

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centralized municipal halls and localized frontline desks where citizens frequently interact with the state for business permits, clearances, and social welfare support.

The relevance of these specific environments lies in their participation in the 2025-2027 Provincial Digitalization Push, which has seen the introduction of digital taxation and civil registry platforms across the province. However, the environmental challenge in these areas is the potential disconnect between new technology and legacy administrative habits. As municipalities that are not yet "highly urbanized," Calubian and Leyte-Leyte provide a unique setting to observe how ethical leadership influences the "success" of digitalization in a rural-coastal context. The research environment is further defined by the implementation of Republic Act No. 11032, where the "Citizen's Charter" is physically posted in municipal lobbies, creating a high-pressure environment for Frontline Staff to meet efficiency targets while maintaining "Honesty" under the scrutiny of the Management Level and the watchful eye of The Public.

Furthermore, the administrative environment of these LGUs is currently governed by the E-Governance Act of 2025, which necessitates a shift in organizational culture toward "Intelligent Governance." In Calubian and Leyte-Leyte, the demographic profile of the bureaucracy includes a blend of veteran civil servants accustomed to manual recording and younger, tech-savvy "digital natives" entering the public service. This generational and technical mix within the research environment is crucial for evaluating the "Digital-Integrity Paradox," as it tests whether integrity is maintained through technological guardrails or through the ethical leadership styles of the local executives and department heads. By situating the study in these specific Leyte municipalities, the researcher can gather localized, high-fidelity data that reflects the real-world struggles and successes of the Philippine government's digital transformation.

The choice of Calubian and Leyte-Leyte as the research environment ensures that the resulting Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap (EDGR) is not a generic framework but one that is deeply sensitive to the geographical, political, and cultural nuances of the province. This environment allows for the triangulation of data from the town halls where policies are made (Management), the cubicles where services are processed (Frontline), and the community squares where the impact of those services is felt (The Public). Consequently, the study captures a holistic view of how "Integrity-Driven Administration" can be institutionalized in the heart of Leyte's local governance.

Respondents

The selection of respondents for this study is strategically designed to provide a 360-degree evaluation of the "Digital-Integrity Paradox" within the local government units of Calubian and Leyte-Leyte. By engaging three distinct layers of the administrative ecosystem, the leaders, administrators, and beneficiaries. The research ensures a triangulated perspective that mitigates "social desirability bias," where government officials might overrate their own ethical performance.
This multi-sectoral approach is grounded in Public Value Theory, which posits that the success of government reforms is not merely a matter of internal efficiency but is ultimately validated by the quality of service experienced by the public. Each respondent group serves as a critical variable in the transition toward the E-Governance Act of 2025, providing the empirical data necessary to formulate the Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap (EDGR).

Government Leaders, comprising ten key officials such as Department Heads and Local Executives per LGU, represent the "architects of integrity." Their role is vital to the study as they establish the "tone at the top," dictating the leadership styles that either foster or hinder digital accountability. Following them are the Twenty Employees, who serve as the operational litmus test for the study. As "street-level bureaucrats," their daily adherence to processing accuracy and workplace honesty determines whether digitalization translates into actual administrative efficiency.

Finally, the 30 Clients (The Beneficiaries) act as the objective external evaluators. Their lived experiences with service delivery provide the necessary "check and balance," verifying if the digital initiatives of the LGUs have genuinely reduced red tape and enhanced the integrity of public transactions in the province of Leyte.
To ensure a balanced comparison between the two research environments, the total sample of 90 respondents is distributed equally between LGU Calubian and LGU Leyte-Leyte.

Respondent Category	LGU Calubian	LGU Leyte-Leyte	Total Count	Percentage (%)
Government Leaders	5	5	10	16.67%
Employees	10	10	20	33.33%
Clients	15	15	30	50 %
TOTAL	**30**	**30**	**60**	**100.00%**

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents

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The relevance of this specific respondent configuration lies in the Principle of Multi-level Accountability. In the Philippine LGU setting, the success of digitalization often hinges on the synergy between these three groups. The inclusion of the Government leaders allows the study to assess if leaders are utilizing "Ethical Stewardship" to guide digital shifts. The Employees are relevant because they provide the primary data on whether technology actually improves speed and accuracy or if it is being bypassed by manual corruption. Lastly, the clients is the most critical respondent group; without their external validation, any claim of "administrative success" remains an internal assumption.

By collecting data from a total of 90 participants across Calubian and Leyte-Leyte, the researchers identified precisely where the "Digital-Integrity Paradox" occurs, whether it is a failure of leadership vision, a breakdown in frontline execution, or a gap in public trust. This data-driven approach is essential for creating the EDGR, as it allows for targeted interventions such as ethical leadership training for managers or digital integrity workshops for frontline workers, ensuring that the LGU's digital transition is rooted in the ideals of honesty and rapid service delivery.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in the study entitled “Crafting the Digital Integrity: Ethical Governance in Service Delivery in the Identified Local Government Units” was a researcher-made questionnaire designed to assess digital integrity practices and the level of ethical governance in the local government units of Calubian and Leyte, Leyte, during Calendar Year 2025. The questionnaire was developed based on the objectives of the study and the key dimensions of digital integrity, ethical governance, and public service delivery.

The instrument consisted of sections that gathered information on the respondents’ profiles and assessed existing digital integrity practices, including front-end verification mechanisms, transparency of transaction fees, network reliability, citizen document tracking, and data backup systems. It also examined ethical governance in terms of honesty, anti-corruption measures, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to public grievances and electronic system errors. Additional items explored human resource concerns, particularly staff employment status, data privacy awareness, and cybersecurity training.

A four-point Likert scale was used to measure the respondents’ assessments and encourage clear judgments regarding the implementation of digital integrity and ethical governance practices. The questionnaire was administered to 60 respondents, comprising government leaders, local government unit employees, and clients transacting with the selected municipalities. To complement the quantitative data, open-ended questions were included to allow respondents to describe their experiences, identify challenges, and suggest improvements in digital public service delivery.

To establish the instrument’s validity and reliability, it should undergo expert validation and appropriate reliability testing before administration. The quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical measures, particularly frequency, percentage, and weighted mean, while the qualitative responses were examined thematically. The combined findings served as the empirical basis for developing the Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap (EDGR), a strategic framework intended to strengthen accountability, transparency, cybersecurity, and public trust in local government services.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering process is executed in a systematic, four-phased approach to maintain data integrity and ethical standards. First, the Preliminary Phase involves securing formal gatekeeper permission from the MLGOO - Department Heads of the target LGUs. Second, the Preparation Phase includes the orientation of respondents regarding the study's objectives and the issuance of Informed Consent forms, ensuring compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Third, the Implementation Phase employs a "Hybrid Distribution" method: digital surveys (Google Forms) were sent to Management and Staff to accommodate their busy schedules, while "On-site Intercept Surveys" are conducted for the Public respondents at municipal lobbies. Finally, the Collection Phase involves auditing all responses for completeness before they are encoded for statistical analysis.

Statistical Treatment of Data

To provide a comprehensive answer to the Statement of the Problem, the data were subjected to several statistical treatments. For SOP 1, Frequency and Percentage Distribution were used to summarize the demographic and professional profiles of the leaders, administrators, and beneficiaries. On Efficiency and perceived integrity, the Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation were the primary tools. SOP 5, regarding best practices to digital integrity and ethical governance in service delivery of LGU’s was employed to determine if ethical leadership styles positively correlate with digital efficiency

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and public trust. Lastly, for SOP 6, the results will undergo Thematic Integration, where the quantitative gaps identified are translated into the strategic pillars of the Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap (EDGR).

Scoring Procedures

The evaluative sections of the survey use a Four-Point Likert Scale to avoid "central tendency bias," requiring respondents to provide a definitive positive or negative assessment. The interpretation of the weighted means followed the table below:

Range of Means	Qualitative Description	Interpretation
3.26 – 4.00	Strongly Agree / Very High	The indicator is exceptionally evident and consistently practiced.
2.51 – 3.25	Agree / High	The indicator is evident and frequently practiced.
1.76 – 2.50	Disagree / Low	The indicator is rarely evident and seldom practiced.
1.00 – 1.75	Strongly Disagree / Very Low	The indicator is not evident and never practiced.

Ethical Considerations

The study, entitled "Crafting the Digital Integrity: Ethical Governance in Service Delivery in the Identified Local Government Units," observed ethical principles throughout the research process to protect the rights, privacy, and welfare of all participants. Since the investigation involved government leaders, local government unit (LGU) employees, and clients transacting with the municipalities of Calubian and Leyte, Leyte, during Calendar Year 2025, particular attention was given to voluntary participation, confidentiality, informed consent, and the responsible handling of research data.

Before conducting the study, the researcher sought the necessary permissions from the appropriate authorities of the identified local government units. The purpose, scope, and procedures of the research were clearly explained to the prospective respondents. Their participation was voluntary, and they were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw without penalty or adverse consequences. Informed consent was obtained before collecting any information. To safeguard the respondents' privacy, personal information and responses were treated confidentially and used solely for academic and research purposes. Data were stored securely, and access was limited to authorized individuals involved in the study. The researcher ensured that individual responses would not be disclosed in a manner that could identify participants, particularly when discussing sensitive concerns involving administrative practices, digital security, and ethical governance.

The study also observed the principles of honesty, objectivity, and academic integrity. Data were recorded, analyzed, and interpreted accurately without fabrication, falsification, or deliberate manipulation of findings. Both favorable practices and identified weaknesses in digital public service delivery were reported fairly and objectively. Furthermore, the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) were considered in handling information and protecting respondents' personal data.

Data Analysis

The data gathered in this study were analyzed using appropriate quantitative and qualitative methods to assess digital integrity practices and ethical governance in the local government units of Calubian and Leyte, Leyte, during Calendar Year 2025. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the distribution of the 60 respondents according to their classification as government leaders, LGU employees, and transacting clients. These measures provided a clear overview of the participants and their representation in the study.

The weighted mean was employed to determine the respondents' assessments of digital integrity practices and the level of ethical governance using a four-point Likert scale. The results were interpreted based on the established descriptive rating scale to identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing public service delivery. Composite means were computed to summarize the overall results for the major dimensions of digital integrity and ethical governance. Particular attention was given to verification mechanisms, transparency of transaction fees, network reliability, document tracking, data backup systems, anti-corruption measures, and responsiveness to public concerns.

Frequency and percentage were also used to examine human resource-related concerns, particularly the employment status of personnel handling government data and their participation in data privacy and cybersecurity training. These findings helped identify potential risks affecting information security and the continuity of digital public services.

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Meanwhile, qualitative responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis. Responses with similar meanings were grouped into recurring themes to identify common experiences, operational challenges, and suggestions for improving digital governance. The quantitative and qualitative findings were then compared and integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of existing practices and institutional gaps. Finally, the results served as the empirical basis for developing the Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap (EDGR), a strategic framework intended to strengthen transparency, accountability, cybersecurity, and public trust in local government service delivery.

Results and Discussion

Results

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the current state of digital integrity practices and the level of ethical governance within local government units, utilizing mixed-methods feedback from 60 distinct respondents. The synthesized findings are organized below according to the specific sub-problems raised in the research framework.
The baseline data from Table 1 established a balanced and representative sample allocation across both research environments. It included 30 participants from LGU Calubian and 30 from LGU Leyte, Leyte. Government Leaders: The executive cohort (n = 10) is characterized by a mature, experienced demographic. Sixty percent of leaders fall within the 51–60 age range or older, and 80.00 percent possess more than six years of executive management experience. This group is academically well-prepared, with 80.00 percent holding advanced postgraduate units or completed master's and doctoral degrees.

LGU Employees: The workforce group (n = 20) is generationally younger, with 65.00 percent of personnel under the age of 40, and is predominantly female (65.00 percent). However, a significant operational risk emerged: 55.00 percent of these frontliners lack permanent status, working instead under casual (25.00 percent) or short-term Job Order/contractual agreements (30.00 percent). While 60.00 percent demonstrate intermediate capabilities with digital office tools, a notable 20.00 percent remain at a beginner proficiency tier.

Clients: The transacting public (n = 30) spans diverse age demographics, including 10.00 percent senior citizens. Their primary interactions with local government systems occur within high-volume service offices: Civil Registry applications account for 40.00 percent of traffic, followed by Social Services at 26.67 percent, and Business Permitting at 23.33 percent. The evaluation of digital integrity across its core dimensions (Table 5) yielded an overall composite mean of 2.85, indicating a high level of implementation across the municipalities.

The highest-rated item within this dimension was the enforcement of secure verification protocols (such as user passwords and access controls), which scored 3.28 (Very High). Similarly, the clear breakdown of necessary transaction fees on electronic portals scored 3.42 (Very High).Conversely, critical infrastructure vulnerabilities were revealed. The reliability of local network operations and systemic server downtime scored a low 2.22 (Low). Additionally, real-time application status tracking for citizens scored 2.35 (Low), and the presence of resilient, automated back-end data backup systems scored 2.48 (Low).The assessment of institutional ethics (Table 6) resulted in an overall composite mean of 2.94, which translates to a High level of manifestation.

The domain of Honesty and Anti-Corruption achieved the highest sub-composite rating at 3.33 (Very High). This success was led by centralized or automated payment and assessment channels, which scored 3.45 (Very High), and the successful minimization of external "fixers" within municipal buildings, which scored 3.38 (Very High). Fairness and impartiality in public service delivery also scored strongly at 3.34 (Very High).

However, systemic weaknesses were identified in the area of administrative response loops. The speed and quality of institutional feedback regarding citizen grievances and platform malfunctions scored a low 2.42 (Low). Furthermore, the immediate application of corrections when automated system discrepancies occur scored 2.58 (High but weak).
The empirical mapping in Table 7 confirmed that mobile and electronic payment integrations (such as Landbank Link.BizPortal, GCash, and Maya) are widely adopted, with 86.67 percent visibility. This is followed by the physical separation of front-end document counters from back-end evaluators at 76.67 percent.

The most significant operational challenges identified through qualitative responses include:
Persistent internet connectivity drops and rural electrical disruptions.
An over-reliance on temporary, short-term personnel to handle sensitive data registers.
A lack of structured training, with only 13.33 percent of staff reporting regular access to updated data privacy and cybersecurity workshops

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Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that digital integrity and ethical governance in the local government units of Calubian and Leyte, Leyte, were generally practiced at a high level. The composite mean of 2.85 for digital integrity and 2.94 for ethical governance suggests that the local governments have made meaningful progress in improving transparency, accountability, and the delivery of public services through digital systems. The high ratings for transaction fee transparency (3.42) and front-end verification mechanisms (3.28) indicate that digital processes have helped make transactions clearer, more organized, and less vulnerable to unauthorized practices. Similarly, the strong performance in honesty and anti-corruption (3.33) highlights the value of centralized automated payment channels in reducing opportunities for corruption and limiting the influence of external fixers.

Despite these positive developments, the findings also revealed important gaps that require immediate attention. Low ratings for network reliability (2.22), real-time document tracking (2.35), and automated cloud data backups (2.48) suggest that technological limitations continue to affect the efficiency, security, and continuity of digital public services. These weaknesses may cause delays, inconvenience clients, and reduce confidence in electronic transactions. Moreover, the low rating for responsiveness to public grievances and electronic system errors (2.42) indicates the need for accessible feedback mechanisms and timely resolution of citizen concerns.

Human resource concerns further highlight the importance of sustainable digital governance. The high proportion of contractual personnel handling data, combined with limited participation in data privacy and cybersecurity training, raises concerns about institutional continuity and information security. These findings emphasize that digital transformation requires more than technological investment; it also demands competent personnel, clear policies, and consistent monitoring. In response, the proposed Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap (EDGR) offers a practical direction for strengthening infrastructure, improving staff capacity, and promoting secure, transparent, and citizen-centered public service delivery.

Limitations

This study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research was limited to 60 respondents from the local government units of Calubian and Leyte, Leyte, during Calendar Year 2025; therefore, the results may not fully represent digital integrity and ethical governance practices in other municipalities. Second, the study relied partly on respondents' perceptions and self-reported experiences, which may have been influenced by personal biases or differences in understanding. Third, the assessment reflected practices during the study period and may not capture subsequent technological or policy changes. Finally, the proposed Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap (EDGR) requires further implementation and evaluation to determine its long-term effectiveness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Based on the empirical findings of this study, the following structural conclusions are drawn:
Automation Successfully Reduces Opportunistic corruptions, but Face-to-Face Accountability Gaps Remain. The integration of electronic payment tools and automated queuing has successfully minimized traditional avenues for petty corruption and the influence of external fixers. This aligns with the classic economic theory that reducing monopoly and administrative discretion while increasing structural visibility lowers the incidence of corruption (Klitgaard, 1988). However, when errors occur within these systems, administrative response mechanisms remain slow, meaning that citizen grievances are often left unresolved.

Structural Disconnects Risk Institutional Data Integrity. While front-end identity check mechanisms are well-implemented, back-end infrastructure safeguards, specifically secure, automated data backups, are lacking. This vulnerability, combined with the fact that over half of the workforce consists of temporary or contractual personnel who rarely receive formal data privacy training, presents a significant risk to information security (Janssen et al., 2013).

Local E-Governance Follows an Informational Rather Than an Interactive Framework. Local government units have been highly successful at using digital tools to display fees, regulations, and processing requirements clearly, which significantly reduces informational gaps for transacting citizens (West, 2004). However, the systems fall short of providing a fully interactive experience. Because citizens cannot track their documents online in real time, they are still forced to make physical visits to municipal offices simply to monitor application updates.

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Generational Variations in Leadership and the Workforce Affect Digital Agility. The local workforce is younger and demonstrates intermediate digital proficiency, making them highly capable of executing modern digital operations. However, municipal leadership cohorts are older and more accustomed to traditional manual administration. This gap can lead to a form of passive administrative inertia, where leaders support basic automation for payments but hesitate to fully modernize internal workflows or invest in robust digital infrastructure (Fountain, 2001; Kotter, 2012).

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions generated by this study, the following targeted, actionable recommendations are offered to optimize public service delivery and support the adoption of the proposed roadmap:

1. For Local Chief Executives and Municipal Administrators
Formalize and Adopt the Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap: Local leaders should officially institutionalize the roadmap via local executive orders or municipal ordinances. This step ensures that future technological upgrades remain explicitly bound to institutional ethics, data privacy protocols, and anti-corruption frameworks.
Establish Dedicated Funding for IT Infrastructure: Budgetary allocations should prioritize infrastructure stability, specifically investing in secondary internet connections, backup power solutions, and cloud-based automated recovery systems to address network interruptions.

2. For Human Resource Management and Civil Service Compliance Officers
Mandate Continuous Cybersecurity and Data Privacy Training: Human resource departments should establish mandatory, annual training certifications focused on data privacy and professional ethics, ensuring full alignment with Republic Act No. 10173.

Enforce Strict Confidentiality Agreements for Non-Permanent Staff: Given the high percentage of casual and contractual employees handling public records, the HR department must implement mandatory non-disclosure and data custody agreements during onboarding to safeguard institutional records.

3. For Information Technology (IT) and Systems Management Units
Develop an End-to-End Online Application Tracking Interface: IT sections should transition from static web portals to interactive systems. Integrating simple automated SMS text alerts or online tracking options will allow citizens to trace the real-time movement of their documents without needing to visit the municipal hall physically.
Implement Scheduled, Automated Backups: IT departments must implement strict, automated weekly backup schedules to remote or off-site storage environments to eliminate data loss risks.

4. For Policy Makers and Local Legislative Councils (Sangguniang Bayan)
Establish Digital Service Standards for Citizen Grievances: Local legislative councils should pass measures that mandate strict turnaround times for resolving digital errors and responding to citizen complaints submitted through electronic helpdesks. This directly addresses the responsiveness challenges identified in this research.

5. For Future Researchers
Expand the Geographic and Methodological Scope: Future studies should expand on this work by conducting larger comparative evaluations across a wider selection of third and fourth-class municipalities. This will help validate the broad applicability of the Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap across diverse local public administration environments.

Acknowledgement

The completion of our research study entitled “Evaluating the Role of Digital Integrity and Ethical Governance in Service Delivery in the Identified Local Government Units” would not have been possible without the guidance, encouragement, and support of the individuals and institutions who shared their time, knowledge, and resources with us. We sincerely express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to the successful completion of this research endeavor.

First and foremost, we offer our highest praise and deepest thanksgiving to God the Father and His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are truly grateful for His divine wisdom, grace, strength, and guidance throughout our research journey. In moments of difficulty and uncertainty, our faith sustained us and gave us the courage and determination to persevere. We dedicate this accomplishment to His greater glory, recognizing that all our efforts and achievements are made possible through His abundant blessings.

We express our profound gratitude to our research adviser, Dr. Becky Manalastas, for her invaluable guidance, patience, encouragement, and professional expertise. Her insightful recommendations and constructive feedback helped us refine

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our research and strengthen the quality of our work. Her commitment to academic excellence greatly contributed to the development of the Ethical-Digital Governance Roadmap (EDGR), our proposed framework for promoting transparent, accountable, and effective digital public service delivery.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to the members of the Panel of Examiners for their careful evaluation, thoughtful suggestions, and constructive criticisms. Their valuable insights encouraged us to examine our study more critically, improve our research methodology, and strengthen the presentation and interpretation of our findings.

Our heartfelt thanks go to the Local Government Units of Calubian and Leyte, Leyte, particularly Hon. Marciano A. Batiancila Jr. and Hon. Jed C. Granados, for granting us permission to conduct our study in their respective municipalities. We appreciate their cooperation and support, which enabled us to gather the information necessary to accomplish our research objectives.

We are equally grateful to all the respondents who willingly shared their experiences, insights, and perspectives on digital integrity and ethical governance. Their participation provided valuable information about the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in local public service delivery. Their contributions served as an essential foundation for the development of our proposed EDGR framework.

To our families and friends, we extend our deepest appreciation for their unwavering love, prayers, understanding, and encouragement. Their emotional and financial support gave us the motivation to overcome challenges and remain committed to completing this study.

Finally, we sincerely thank everyone who, in one way or another, contributed to the completion of this research. Although we may not be able to mention each person individually, we deeply appreciate every form of assistance and encouragement we received.

May this research serve as a meaningful contribution to the continuing pursuit of integrity, transparency, accountability, and innovation in local government administration, and may its findings help inspire more responsive, trustworthy, and digitally empowered public service in Leyte.

Funding

This research received no external funding from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agency, and no organization provided financial support for the conduct of the study, authorship, or publication of this article.

Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.

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