



Digital Distractions and Public Service Delivery: Exploring the Unregulated Use of Smartphones in Government Workplaces

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ABSTRACT:

Public employees' extensive smartphone ownership has added a new level of complexity to government institutions' service delivery and workplace productivity. The impact of unrestricted smartphone use during official business hours on service delivery in the South African public sector is examined in this article. By concentrating solely on institutional trends and documented practices, the study circumvents the need for ethical clearance by utilizing secondary data, policy analysis, and organizational reports. It investigates how personal mobile data and Bluetooth tethering can be used to get around departmental network restrictions, exposing how these methods allow for continuous access to social media and irrelevant online content. According to the research, digital distractions may be a factor in sluggish reaction times, decreased accountability, and weakened organizational discipline. The lack of explicit guidelines for digital etiquette and a significant policy gap in the regulation of personal device use in government workspaces are both highlighted in the paper. As part of professionalization and productivity strategies in the public sector, the study's conclusion suggests creating institutional policies for digital usage along with continual training in digital ethics. This article adds to the larger conversation on workplace regulation and digital governance in the South African public sector by emphasizing structural and policy-level factors.

Keywords: Smartphones, Public Service, Productivity, Digital Governance, Workplace Regulation

1. Introduction and Background

The introduction of smartphones has changed how people interact with their surroundings, including the workplace, communicate, and obtain information. Due to their ability to provide instant access to digital platforms, facilitate remote work, and streamline communication channels, smartphones have become essential tools on a global scale (Du Plessis & Botha, 2022). These advantages are especially noticeable in the public sector because state institutions are frequently decentralized and bureaucratic, necessitating faster information flows. But these advantages come with an increasing number of drawbacks, particularly when it comes to using smartphones for personal purposes while at work. The extensive use of smartphones by government workers has raised serious questions about productivity, accountability, and institutional professionalism in South Africa, where the public sector employs a sizable percentage of the working population. According to reports, a large number of public employees use their smartphones for personal activities like social media browsing, content streaming, and private communication during working hours rather than for work-related tasks (Mashiloane & Radebe, 2023). According to Ngobeni and Sehlapelo (2024), employees frequently use mobile data or tether via Bluetooth connections to get around departmental efforts to limit internet access on institutional devices.

This type of digital distraction damages public confidence in government services in addition to interfering with workplace productivity. Employees using their phones while on duty is often linked to complaints about long lines, slow service, and inattentive staff. The credibility of state institutions is damaged by this apparent lack of concern, especially those that offer front-line services like Home Affairs, Social Development, or local governments (Public Service Commission, 2023). More significantly, the ongoing prevalence of this kind of behaviour undermines the normative culture of public administration by indicating a structural inability to uphold professional standards of conduct. Despite these discernible patterns, comprehensive institutional policies governing the use of personal devices in the public sector are conspicuously lacking. Few departments have expanded these regulations to cover privately owned smartphones, even though some have established rules regarding internet use on government computers. Managers frequently lack the technological capability and policy tools necessary to keep an eye on or stop these behaviours (Mokoena & Sithole, 2021). With an emphasis on digital distractions in government workplaces, this article examines the effects of unrestricted smartphone use on the provision of public services in South Africa. It makes the case that unrestrained smartphone use leads to inefficiency, subpar service results, and damage to one's reputation in the absence of clear governance frameworks. The study draws from organisational theory and digital governance perspectives to propose a policy-centred response that balances personal autonomy with institutional accountability.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Digital technology integration in the workplace has emerged as a source of operational challenges as well as a defining characteristic of contemporary organizational efficiency. Smartphones are among the most common technologies, and their use in work settings has brought up difficult issues with discipline, productivity, and workplace governance. Although early discussions primarily praised smartphones' ability to improve connectivity, facilitate communication, and facilitate flexible work arrangements, more recent research has increasingly examined the negative effects of unrestricted smartphone use, particularly in delicate public service settings. Examining the relationship between individual smartphone use and service delivery mandates, organizational discipline, and public trust in state institutions is particularly possible in the South African public sector.

2.2 Smartphones and Workplace Productivity: Dual-Edged Tools

Smartphones offer previously unheard-of levels of mobility, flexibility, and real-time communication, they have completely changed the dynamics of the workplace. Early research on smartphone integration in work environments was largely positive, emphasizing the device's ability to close knowledge gaps and expedite administrative procedures. According to Katz and Aakhus (2019), mobile communication tools promote "communicative affordances", instantaneous interaction and information exchange, which speed up decision-making and improve service responsiveness. Sector-specific studies that emphasized the value of smartphones in enhancing access to vital information and promoting cooperative workflows echoed their findings, especially in fields with decentralized operations or insufficient traditional infrastructure. In the South African public sector, smartphones have been instrumental in addressing logistical challenges, especially in field-based departments such as environmental services, social development, and rural health (Pule & Ncube, 2020). In these contexts, employees are often required to work in remote or under-resourced areas where access to centralized communication systems is limited. Smartphones enable officials to coordinate activities, monitor service delivery operations, and respond to emergencies in real-time, thus enhancing the overall efficiency of public service interventions. For instance, health outreach workers in Limpopo have been documented using smartphones to report patient data, communicate with supervisors, and access mobile applications designed for health education and resource management (Molefe & Tshabalala, 2021).

Smartphones help with professional networking and knowledge sharing in addition to logistical coordination by giving staff members access to peer support groups, policy documents, and training materials. Accordingly, mobile technology is viewed as a democratizing instrument that breaks down hierarchical barriers within organizations and provides employees with information (Naidoo & Govender, 2018). Smartphones offer an alternate method of ongoing education and capacity building, especially in the public sector with limited resources, where formal professional development opportunities are frequently limited. However, the very features that make smartphones valuable also introduce complexities that can hinder workplace productivity. The portability and multifunctionality of smartphones expose workers to a constant stream of digital stimuli, much of which is unrelated to their professional responsibilities. Mark et al. (2022) identify this phenomenon as *digital distraction*, defining it as the habitual and often involuntary shifting of attention away from primary tasks due to incoming notifications, personal messaging, or spontaneous browsing activities. Their multi-site empirical study revealed that even brief smartphone interactions, such as checking a notification or responding to a text message, could interrupt an employee's cognitive flow, forcing the brain to reorient to the original task, a process known as cognitive reconfiguration.

Such micro-interruptions have important ramifications. In a variety of professional contexts, longer task completion times, higher error rates, and lower task quality were noted; the detrimental effects were most noticeable in high-pressure industries like public administration, healthcare, and emergency services. Such performance and focus breakdowns can directly affect service delivery standards in public service settings, where staff members frequently represent government agencies. For instance, a municipal office front desk employee preoccupied with a smartphone notification may inadvertently mishandle a citizen's inquiry, resulting in delays, misunderstandings, or even harm to the organization's reputation. The disruptive potential of smartphones is compounded by the psychological phenomenon of *task-switching costs*. Studies in cognitive psychology suggest that each time an individual diverts attention from one task to another, there is a measurable decline in cognitive efficiency and an increase in the time required to return to the original task at full capacity (Monsell, 2003). This fragmentation of attention is not merely an individual issue but becomes an organizational challenge when it affects multiple employees, leading to cumulative productivity losses and operational inefficiencies.

The role of notification anxiety and phantom vibration syndrome, two psychological disorders connected to excessive smartphone use, is a growing topic of concern in the literature. Walsh et al. (2022) claim that workers frequently feel as though they are receiving phantom alerts, which causes them to check their devices even when they are not receiving any notifications. This routine checking behaviour disrupts productivity and intensifies the distraction cycle. Additionally, the widespread fear of missing out (FOMO) on significant updates, whether personal or professional, can raise cognitive load and impair workers' ability to concentrate on difficult tasks. The cost of divided attention is especially severe in the South African public sector, where staff shortages, infrastructure deficiencies, and backlogs in service delivery are frequent occurrences. Pule and Ncube (2020) warn that although smartphones can help improve operational efficiency, their unchecked use creates a paradox whereby tools meant to boost productivity also threaten it by constantly intruding digitally. The resulting inefficiencies impact the public's perception of the professionalism and competence of government by slowing down administrative procedures and degrading interactions between citizens and public servants.

The social acceptability of smartphone use in work environments is an additional factor to take into account. Organizational culture and leadership attitudes frequently influence behavioural norms in hierarchical public institutions. Senior officials and supervisors who model or condone excessive smartphone use during work hours create a precedent that encourages junior employees to follow suit. On the other hand, companies that promote a

disciplined and focused culture, supported by evident leadership commitment, are more likely to encourage their employees to use smartphones responsibly (Banda & Sebegu, 2021). Fascinatingly, some academics contend that the lack of formal engagement protocols is the issue rather than the smartphone itself. Van der Westhuizen and Mahuma (2022) claim that companies that use organized "technology mindfulness" programs, which teach staff members about responsible and disciplined digital behaviour, report fewer instances of digital distraction and increased focus at work. These programs frequently entail establishing "smartphone-free" zones, encouraging peer accountability systems, and promoting scheduled check-in times for private messages.

2.3 Digital Distractions in Public Institutions

As personal gadgets like smartphones become more and more integrated into public sector workers' daily lives, the issue of digital distractions has gained attention from academics. The public sector faces particular difficulties, in contrast to private businesses where market forces and performance indicators frequently act as a natural disincentive to engage in digital activities unrelated to work. Bureaucratic structures, a variety of service delivery mandates, and the intricate relationship between institutional accountability and individual autonomy are the main causes of these difficulties. As a result, the problem of digital distractions in public institutions involves issues of organizational discipline, service ethics, and public trust in addition to individual productivity. In their ethnographic study of three KwaZulu-Natal municipal offices, Selepe and Ndlovu (2023) discovered that using a personal smartphone while providing services was not only common but had also become ingrained in daily work routines. Workers were frequently seen using their gadgets while interacting directly with customers, checking social media, replying to private messages, or even watching entertainment. Such actions had a discernible effect on the standard of service delivery, leading to long wait times, misunderstandings, and evident annoyance among the populace. Public confidence in local governance structures is weakened by the study's emphasis on the growing public perception that public servants are disrespectful, uncaring, or inattentive.

Beyond observable behaviours, digital distractions also play a role in administrative invisibility, a phenomenon in which workers' digital absence compromises their physical presence at workstations. Nkosi and Modise (2022) looked at how employees worked in provincial government departments and reported instances where they were technically present but were effectively distracted from their work because they were constantly using their smartphones. In frontline service locations where staff attentiveness is essential for effective service flow, such as helpdesks, licensing offices, and reception areas, this phenomenon was especially severe. In addition to lowering client satisfaction, the resulting disengagement put extra pressure on coworkers who had to make up for their distracted coworkers, upsetting team dynamics and increasing tensions at work. The blurring of the lines between personal and professional device use is one of the structural causes of digital distractions in public institutions. Smartphones symbolize the merging of the personal and professional domains, in contrast to landline phones or office computers, which are inevitably linked to work-related activities. Organizational efforts to define acceptable usage parameters are complicated by this dual functionality. According to Pule and Ncube (2020), a lot of workers in the public sector justify using smartphones for work-related purposes by pointing to valid ones like email correspondence, remote collaboration, or accessing online materials. Supervisors find it challenging to effectively monitor or control the grey area created by employees' seamless transitions between work-related and personal activities on the same device.

The absence of thorough internal policies addressing personal smartphone use in the public sector exacerbates this problem. In their analysis of Gauteng Province government departments, Mahlangu and Mofokeng (2021) found that fewer than 20% of them had official policies controlling the use of personal devices at work. Furthermore, enforcement mechanisms were either non-existent or applied inconsistently in cases where policies did exist. Employees self-regulate their smartphone use based on convenience rather than institutional expectations as a result of this policy vacuum, which has encouraged a culture of discretionary digital engagement. Apart from the lack of explicit policies, managerial ambivalence also makes enforcement more difficult. Dlamini and Mashinini (2023) contend that a number of reasons, such as worries about violating privacy, a lack of procedural support, and worries about destroying relationships at work, make supervisors reluctant to confront staff members about their personal smartphone use. This hesitancy effectively undermines middle management's authority, making it challenging to uphold workplace discipline and fostering an atmosphere where digital distractions are tacitly accepted.

Distractions are becoming more commonplace in public institutions due to the larger digital culture. During meetings, inspections, and even public appearances, senior officials and supervisors in many departments also use their personal smartphones. Junior employees are given the impression that such behaviours are institutionally acceptable by this top-down diffusion of digital distraction behaviour. According to Banda and Sebegu (2021), employee attitudes regarding digital conduct are significantly influenced by organizational culture. Attempts to control employee smartphone use may be viewed as hypocritical or unwarranted if leadership does not set an example of disciplined digital behaviour. This could result in passive resistance or outright non-compliance. The impact of digital distractions is not limited to service delivery outcomes but also extends to internal administrative processes. Nkosi and Modise (2022) observed that smartphone-induced interruptions were a significant contributor to procedural delays, document misfiling, and data entry errors. These micro-level inefficiencies accumulate over time, leading to backlogs, missed deadlines, and a general decline in operational effectiveness. In the context of South Africa's public service, where resource constraints and high workloads are already prevalent, such productivity losses have far-reaching implications for institutional performance and citizen satisfaction.

A further dimension of the problem is the psychological and cognitive toll of constant digital engagement. Research by Walsh et al. (2022) suggests that employees who frequently switch between work tasks and personal smartphone interactions experience elevated cognitive fatigue, diminished concentration spans, and increased stress levels. This not only affects individual well-being but also reduces the overall cognitive capital available within an organization, undermining its capacity for innovation, problem-solving, and adaptive learning. The relationship between digital distractions and employee morale is a developing field of study. Some researchers have pointed out that punitive or restrictive approaches to digital regulation can also

have negative effects, even though the majority of the discussion centres on the detrimental effects of smartphone use on service delivery. According to Van der Westhuizen and Mahuma (2022), strict enforcement tactics like complete prohibitions or monitoring based on surveillance can make workers distrustful and resentful. Such strategies run the risk of offending employees, bringing down morale, and possibly inciting unproductive behaviours like purposeful non-compliance or covert usage.

As a result, it's becoming increasingly clear that managing digital distractions effectively calls for a more complex and collaborative strategy. Institutions are urged to implement digital mindfulness frameworks that emphasize awareness, self-regulation, and group accountability rather than seeing smartphone use only as a disciplinary matter. Employee distraction can be decreased while preserving a positive work environment by implementing programs that inform staff members about the cognitive effects of digital disruptions, support peer monitoring, and encourage planned "digital detox" periods (Reid & O'Connor, 2021). The relationship between generational dynamics and digital distractions in public sector workplaces is another aspect that has received little attention. Younger employees, often referred to as "digital natives," tend to exhibit higher levels of comfort with multitasking and digital engagement, whereas older staff may perceive constant smartphone use as unprofessional or disruptive. These differing attitudes can create intergenerational tensions and affect team cohesion. Research by Naidoo and Govender (2018) suggests that intergenerational dialogues on digital conduct can help bridge these attitudinal gaps, fostering a shared understanding of professional expectations across age groups.

2.4 Policy and Governance Gaps

In Gauteng Province, Mahlangu and Mofokeng (2021) reviewed 25 government departments and discovered that only 18% of them had official, written policies prohibiting the use of personal smartphones at work. Even when such policies did exist, they frequently had a narrow focus, ignoring more general behavioural aspects of device usage that affect productivity and workplace discipline in favour of cybersecurity issues like data breaches or unauthorized access to government networks. Furthermore, it was discovered that enforcement mechanisms lacked sufficient supervisory capacity to enforce corrective measures or monitor compliance. In order to improve digital literacy and encourage responsible technology use in both the public and private sectors, South Africa's most ambitious policy initiative is the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy (Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, 2020). However, the strategy pays little attention to the governance of individual digital behaviours in work environments, instead concentrating on digital inclusion, upskilling, and access equity. A lack of standardized monitoring frameworks, disparities in institutional capacities, and resource limitations have also made it difficult for government departments to implement the strategy consistently. Because of this, even though the strategy recognizes responsible digital usage as a national priority, it does not offer public institutions practical guidelines for handling the intricate behavioural dynamics related to personal smartphone use during work hours.

One of the critical weaknesses in existing governance structures is the absence of a dedicated oversight body tasked with monitoring and supporting the development of digital conduct policies within the public sector. Current supervisory responsibilities are dispersed across human resource departments, compliance units, and IT divisions, each with differing mandates and operational priorities. This fragmented approach leads to gaps in accountability, where no single unit assumes primary responsibility for addressing the behavioural implications of smartphone use. Dlamini and Mashinini (2023) argue that effective policy governance requires a centralized coordination mechanism, possibly within the ambit of the Public Service Commission, that can provide standardized policy templates, offer capacity-building support, and monitor compliance across departments. The legal ambiguities surrounding the use of personal devices in work environments make enforcement even more difficult. Personal smartphones are privately owned, in contrast to equipment provided by employers, which raises difficult issues regarding how much control or oversight organizations can have over their use during working hours. Legal experts warn that excessively invasive regulatory measures, like tracking personal device activity or enforcing general usage prohibitions, may infringe upon constitutional rights to autonomy and privacy (Moyo & Radebe, 2022). Therefore, few current public sector policies have sufficiently addressed the challenge of striking a delicate balance between respect for individual rights and institutional discipline.

The governance gaps are not solely procedural but also cultural. Institutional ambivalence towards digital conduct often reflects deeper organizational norms that tolerate or even tacitly endorse personal smartphone use during work hours. For instance, Banda and Sebege (2021) highlight how leadership behaviours significantly influence policy effectiveness. In organizations where senior officials frequently engage in personal smartphone use during meetings, inspections, or public engagements, efforts to regulate digital conduct among junior staff are likely to be perceived as hypocritical or arbitrary. This cultural permissiveness undermines formal policies, rendering them ineffective regardless of their technical robustness. Regulations governing digital conduct lose their legitimacy and acceptability when employees are not involved in the policy-making process. Top-down policy impositions, which are created without employee consultation or operational realities in mind, frequently face opposition or passive non-compliance. It has been demonstrated that policy ownership and compliance are increased through participatory policy development, in which staff members identify problems, suggest solutions, and co-create usage guidelines (Van der Westhuizen & Mahuma, 2022). In the South African public sector, where hierarchical decision-making structures predominate, inclusive policy processes are still uncommon.

The lack of integrated training and awareness initiatives centred on digital discipline represents another gap in policy governance. The majority of technology-related training programs in the public sector are technical in nature, focusing on cybersecurity protocols, software proficiency, or the development of digital skills. Seldom are the behavioural aspects of digital engagement discussed, such as controlling distractions, focusing at work, and comprehending the effects of multitasking on cognition. With a focus on peer accountability systems, self-regulation techniques, and leadership modelling of disciplined digital behaviours, Reid and O'Connor (2021) support integrating digital mindfulness modules into employee induction and ongoing professional development programs.

2.5 Impact on Service Delivery and Public Trust

The infiltration of personal smartphones into the daily workflows of public institutions has precipitated significant debates about their impact on service delivery quality and the broader legitimacy of state institutions. Despite increasing scholarly attention on digital distractions, there remains a conspicuous lack of empirical studies that quantitatively assess how personal smartphone misuse translates into measurable service delivery outcomes such as processing times, service accuracy, client satisfaction, or institutional performance benchmarks. The existing body of knowledge, while rich in anecdotal accounts and qualitative observations, has yet to produce systematic data that captures the operational and reputational costs associated with smartphone-induced distractions in the public sector. One of the few localized studies that details the immediate consequences of smartphone misuse in South African municipal offices is that conducted by Selepe and Ndlovu (2023). Their ethnographic findings showed a correlation between employees' personal smartphone use during service hours and a pattern of service delays, procedural errors, and citizen annoyance. When frontline employees responded to private messages or social media notifications while answering public inquiries, clients said they felt ignored or undervalued. In certain cases, sporadic employee distractions caused simple administrative procedures that should have taken minutes to take much longer than they did. This led to longer wait times, greater backlogs in service delivery, and more procedural errors.

These findings are consistent with international research in public administration that highlights the importance of service quality in influencing institutional legitimacy and public trust. Peters (2020) asserts that daily encounters with public servants have a significant impact on citizens' opinions of how effective the government is. In addition to being service qualities, efficiency, responsiveness, and courteous treatment are important governance markers that influence public trust in government agencies. Therefore, when public employees are seen putting their personal smartphone use ahead of their work-related responsibilities, it creates impressions of incompetence, apathy, and even corruption, even if there is no direct link between the behaviour and misconduct. The appearance of distracted or inattentive public officials can heighten tensions in the South African context, where public discontent with governance and protests over service delivery are common. Misuse of smartphones becomes a metaphor for larger annoyances with ineffective bureaucracy, inadequate accountability, and the apparent lack of concern for the welfare of citizens on the part of the government. Nkosi and Modise (2022) argue that digital distractions, even if they are often subtle and sporadic, can gradually undermine the relationship of trust between the state and its citizens, particularly in frontline service environments where being visible and paying attention are crucial components of the public service ethos.

The implications extend beyond immediate service encounters to influence broader governance narratives. For instance, when citizens consistently encounter distracted or disengaged public servants, it reinforces narratives of an unaccountable and apathetic public sector, undermining the legitimacy of governance structures and policy initiatives. This erosion of public trust has cascading effects, diminishing citizen willingness to engage with formal institutions, comply with regulatory requirements, or participate in public governance processes. In democratic societies, such disengagement undermines the participatory foundations of governance, weakening institutional resilience and state capacity. Perceptions of justice and respect are closely linked to the relationship between smartphone misuse and public trust. In societies where service delivery interactions are among the few direct points of contact between the state and marginalized communities, citizens frequently interpret inattention during service encounters as a sign of disrespect or condescension. According to Pule and Ncube (2020), going to a municipal office, clinic, or social services department is a crucial interaction with state structures for a large number of South Africans who live in rural and peri-urban areas. Perceptions of civic dignity and state legitimacy may be significantly impacted in such situations when personal digital distractions are seen as taking precedence over citizen concerns.

Public servants' professional identities are a further aspect of this discussion. The public sector's normative commitment to impartiality, focus, and service excellence is being undermined by the normalization of personal smartphone use during service delivery, which blurs the lines between professional and personal lives. Both internal workplace cultures and public perceptions are impacted by this deterioration of professional identity. According to Dlamini and Mashinini (2023), when organizational norms implicitly accept or disregard digital distractions, it fosters a permissive atmosphere where subpar service is accepted as the norm, perpetuating cycles of inefficiency and disengagement. From a policy standpoint, the state's fiduciary duty to ensure effective and courteous public service may be violated if digital distractions within public institutions are not addressed. It calls into question managerial accountability, institutional capability, and the compatibility of operational realities with policy frameworks. According to Banda and Sebege (2021), the public sector's overarching mission of promoting legitimacy, trust, and public value requires that digital discipline be viewed as a governance imperative.

2.6 Organizational Culture, Leadership, and Accountability

The common values, beliefs, and behavioral norms that shape an institution's members' conduct are referred to as its organizational culture. Historical legacies, leadership styles, bureaucratic procedures, and external societal expectations all influence the culture of public sector organizations. The dominant organizational culture frequently dictates whether smartphone misuse is viewed as a minor, socially acceptable infraction or as a serious professional failure when it comes to digital conduct. According to Banda and Sebege (2021), a permissive digital culture has established itself in many South African public institutions, normalizing and even tacitly condoning the use of personal smartphones for work-related purposes. Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational culture, particularly in relation to digital discipline. Leaders who model focused, distraction-free work behaviours set a standard that cascades down through the organizational hierarchy. Conversely, when senior officials frequently engage in personal smartphone use during meetings, public engagements, or routine workplace interactions, it sends a message to subordinate staff that such behaviours are institutionally acceptable. This top-down diffusion of norms creates a cultural environment where personal smartphone use is seen as a benign, if not implicit, aspect of workplace conduct.

Leadership ambivalence regarding digital distractions damages the legitimacy of formal policies, making enforcement actions inconsistent and ineffectual, according to Dlamini and Mashinini (2023). When leadership fails to set an example of disciplined digital behaviour, middle managers and supervisors, who are frequently tasked with enforcing policies, find themselves in a difficult situation. Initiatives to reduce junior employees' smartphone abuse may be viewed as capricious or hypocritical, which could result in non-compliance or passive resistance. When policies are in place on paper but lack the leadership support or cultural legitimacy needed for successful implementation, this dynamic results in an accountability vacuum. The fragmented nature of supervisory structures in many public institutions further undermines the efficacy of accountability systems in addressing smartphone misuse. Line managers, compliance units, and human resource departments frequently work in silos with little insight into employees' daily online behaviour. Because of this, instances of service outages brought on by smartphones are rarely reported, looked into, or escalated via official disciplinary procedures. This disparity is made worse by the absence of real-time monitoring tools or feedback systems, which permits smartphone misuse to continue to be an underreported and underregulated behaviour.

Integrating behavioural performance indicators into current appraisal frameworks is one possible tactic for closing these accountability gaps. Institutions can encourage responsible smartphone use by formally recognizing and rewarding behaviours that are consistent with professional digital conduct, such as focusing during service interactions, avoiding needless device use, or following workplace etiquette. However, consistent leadership modelling and cultural reinforcement are necessary for such measures to be successful. Another dimension of the organizational culture challenge is the intergenerational dynamic within public sector workplaces. Younger employees, often digital natives, may perceive constant connectivity and device multitasking as normative, whereas older staff may view such behaviours as unprofessional or disrespectful. These differing attitudes can create workplace tensions, affect team cohesion, and complicate enforcement efforts. Naidoo and Govender (2018) suggest that intergenerational dialogues on digital conduct, facilitated through workshops or team-building activities, can bridge these attitudinal divides, fostering a shared understanding of professional expectations across age groups.

In order to close the gap between policy and practice, leadership commitment is essential. Strong signals about institutional priorities can be sent by symbolic interventions like "device-free" leadership meetings, senior officials' promises of digital discipline, or public support for campaigns encouraging responsible smartphone use. Furthermore, establishing channels for staff input on digital conduct policies, such as anonymous surveys, suggestion boxes, or participatory policy revision committees, can guarantee contextual relevance, strengthen the legitimacy of the policy, and encourage a sense of shared ownership among employees. Ultimately, accountability in digital conduct management needs to move past punitive frameworks and toward a more comprehensive model that prioritizes leadership-driven behavioural change, shared responsibility, and cultural reinforcement. If policies are not assimilated into the institutional culture, they are insufficient on their own. A systemic approach that unifies formal regulations, leadership styles, and workplace cultural norms toward the shared goal of promoting professional digital discipline is necessary for sustainable behavioural change.

2.8 Research Gaps and Future Directions

There are still a number of significant gaps in the literature. First, empirical research that measures the connection between smartphone distractions and particular service delivery outcomes, like processing times, complaint rates, or performance reviews, is required. Second, more research is required to understand how smartphone use patterns and views of appropriate behaviour are influenced by demographic factors like age, rank, or digital literacy. Third, more research is needed to understand how formal regulations and informal practices interact. Even in cases where policies are in place, leadership ambivalence or implicit norms may compromise them. Gaining insight into these dynamics can aid in locating leverage points for better policy execution. Lastly, the potential for positive digital engagement should not be overlooked. Smartphones also offer opportunities for innovation, learning, and citizen engagement, which can be harnessed if guided by thoughtful policy frameworks.

2.9 Conclusion of the Literature Review

Smartphone adoption in public sector workplaces has become a two-pronged phenomenon, offering both chances for improved coordination and communication as well as serious problems with digital distractions, inefficient service delivery, and governance flaws. This review of the literature has explored the complex debate around smartphone use in public institutions, concentrating on five key areas: the dual role of smartphones as productivity boosters and deterrents; the operational impact of digital distractions on service delivery; the obvious gaps in policy and governance that impede effective regulation; the erosion of public trust brought on by public officials' perceived lack of attention; and the significant influence of organizational culture, leadership behaviours, and accountability mechanisms in determining employee digital conduct. The paradoxical nature of smartphones in the public sector is a major theme that emerged from the literature review. Early research mostly praised the benefits of mobile technology in terms of increasing information access, field-based operations, and responsiveness (Katz & Aakhus, 2019; Pule & Ncube, 2020). However, more recent research has critically examined the unintended consequences of unrestricted smartphone use, highlighting how constant digital disruptions, such as notifications, social media browsing, and private messaging, fragment employee attention, decrease task efficiency, and jeopardize service quality (Mark et al., 2022). These observations highlight the need for a more sophisticated view of smartphone integration that places smartphone behaviours within organizational, cultural, and governance frameworks rather than relying solely on the binary distinction between "good" and "bad" technology use.

This discussion is made even more complex by the South African public sector context. Public institutions function within bureaucratic structures that are marked by fragmented accountability, resource constraints, and diverse service delivery mandates, in contrast to private sector environments where market imperatives and competitive pressures naturally incentivize productivity-enhancing digital behaviours. There is strong anecdotal evidence from studies by Selepe and Ndlovu (2023) and Nkosi and Modise (2022) that personal smartphone misuse is associated with longer wait times for service

delivery, procedural mistakes, and discontent among citizens. There aren't many empirical studies that systematically measure the operational and reputational costs of smartphone-induced distractions in public service environments, which is a stark gap that still exists. Future research in this gap is crucial, especially considering how important service delivery performance is in assessing the legitimacy and efficacy of the public sector.

The lack of governance and policy that defines the regulation of digital conduct in the South African public sector exacerbates the issue. Although broad national strategies like the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy (Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, 2020) recognize responsible digital use as a developmental priority, their practical implementation into workplace regulations is still uneven and disjointed. Less than 20% of government departments have formal internal policies addressing the use of personal smartphones, and even in those cases, enforcement mechanisms are either non-existent or very weak, according to Mahlangu and Mofokeng (2021). Legal ambiguities surrounding the regulation of personal devices in professional settings, leadership ambivalence, and cultural tolerance for smartphone misuse all contribute to this policy gap. The decline in institutional legitimacy and public trust associated with digital inattention is arguably the most worrisome. The literature on governance constantly highlights how regular encounters with public servants influence citizens' opinions of the effectiveness, responsiveness, and respect of the state (Peters, 2020). Inattentive service interactions, in which public employees seem preoccupied with using their own smartphones, are a sign of larger annoyances with ineffective bureaucracy and a perceived lack of responsibility. Such views have significant ramifications for social cohesiveness, civic participation, and the overall legitimacy of state institutions in areas characterized by past governance shortcomings and service delivery protests.

The limitations of using punitive methods to control digital distractions are also highlighted in the literature. Strict enforcement tactics, like outright prohibitions or invasive surveillance, run the risk of offending workers, creating animosity, and possibly violating their constitutional rights to privacy and self-determination (Moyo & Radebe, 2022). Scholars instead support context-sensitive, more participatory interventions that strike a balance between employee autonomy and institutional discipline. Promising approaches to promoting long-lasting behavioural change without undermining trust or workplace morale include digital mindfulness training, co-created device etiquette charters, behavioural performance indicators, and feedback-driven accountability systems.

3. Theoretical Framework

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Organizational Discipline Theory are two interconnected theoretical frameworks that are used in this study. When combined, these frameworks offer a conceptual foundation for examining the institutional, behavioural, and policy-related factors that support the unchecked use of smartphones in government offices..

Organisational Discipline Theory addresses the mechanisms by which organisations establish norms, enforce behavioural expectations, and maintain order within the workplace. According to Mngomezulu and Khumalo (2022), organisational discipline in the public sector is often shaped by both formal structures (such as policies and regulations) and informal workplace cultures. In settings where digital conduct is neither explicitly regulated nor consistently enforced, the absence of consequences fosters normalised patterns of indiscipline. This theory is particularly relevant in analysing how public servants' smartphone misuse, such as browsing social media or streaming videos during work hours, reflects deeper systemic issues, including weak supervision, managerial ambivalence, and policy blind spots. By using organizational discipline theory, we can see smartphone misuse as a sign of a structural breakdown in institutional governance rather than just personal wrongdoing. According to Ledwaba and Mulaudzi (2023), rule-breaking becomes ingrained in settings where boundaries are not clearly defined or applied consistently, particularly in industries with disjointed accountability structures.

This is supported by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which was first created by Davis (1989) and then improved by Venkatesh and Bala (2020). TAM describes how users adopt and use new technologies based on their perceived utility and usability. Employees in the public sector frequently see smartphones as useful tools for multitasking, entertainment, and social interaction in addition to communication. According to Tshabalala and Molefe (2023), employees prefer using their personal smartphones because of the improved speed, autonomy, and familiarity of the interface, even in departments where official work devices are available. TAM contributes to the explanation of why, despite organizational restrictions, public employees still use their smartphones for personal purposes during working hours. Technology use becomes individualized and disengaged from workplace productivity expectations and professional norms when convenience surpasses perceived institutional control. Additionally, using a smartphone for personal purposes becomes habitual if it is thought to be a low-risk activity with few repercussions, which supports the behavioural patterns mentioned in organizational discipline theory.

This study places smartphone misuse at the nexus of institutional control and behavioural autonomy by integrating these two theoretical stances. The frameworks enable a nuanced understanding of how digital distractions compromise service delivery in public sector environments, particularly those with inadequate monitoring and policy enforcement. This theoretical framework also emphasizes the necessity of both punitive and developmental policy responses in order to promote a digital culture that values efficiency, ethics, and accountability.

4. Methodology

The research design used in this study is desktop-based, qualitative, and based on document and policy analysis. The study's emphasis on institutional behaviours, public complaints, and organizational frameworks pertaining to smartphone use in South African government workplaces makes this approach appropriate. Crucially, this approach does not require ethical approval because it does not entail human subjects, interviews, or the gathering of private information. The approach is based on the ideas of non-reactive research, which uses publicly available and already-existing sources to make conclusions

about organizational trends and practices (Van Zyl & Moeng, 2021). Examining published policy documents, reports from government agencies, audit findings, records of legislative oversight, media inquiries, and current scholarly works are all included in this.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria:

The sources analysed include:

- Annual reports and IT governance policies from selected national and provincial government departments;
- Public Service Commission (PSC) reports and submissions made to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration;
- Complaints and monitoring data from entities like the Presidential Hotline and the Public Protector's office;
- Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2024 focusing on technology use in the public service, digital distractions, organisational discipline, and public service delivery in South Africa.

Relevance to the research topic, publication date (limited to the previous five years), source credibility (e.g., government or peer-reviewed), and contextual specificity to South Africa were guidelines for the selection process. Unless they were directly related to comparative insights, documents that concentrated on digital governance in the private sector or non-African contexts were not included.

Data Analysis Technique:

Thematic content analysis, which enables the discovery of recurrent patterns, categories, and contradictions within the chosen documents, was used to analyze the data. Naidoo and Govender (2022) claim that this approach works well for extracting themes that are pertinent to policy from non-numeric text-based data. The analysis's main focus was:

The presence or absence of smartphone usage policies;

- Descriptions of disciplinary issues related to mobile device use;
- Reported effects of digital distractions on frontline service delivery;
- Existing interventions and proposed reforms.

Trustworthiness and Validity:

The findings are made more credible and transparent by the use of official documentation, oversight reports, and empirical studies, despite their secondary nature. The reliability of the conclusions is further increased by triangulating data from several sources. Additionally, by avoiding researcher influence over data generation, the desktop method lessens the possibility of biases that come with participant-based qualitative methods (Mabunda & Ngoma, 2023). This study provides a rigorous and morally sound framework for investigating how unrestricted smartphone use in government workplaces compromises service delivery through the use of a policy-focused, document-driven methodology. Additionally, it lays the groundwork for evidence-based policy recommendations without sacrificing institutional integrity or necessitating the participation of human subjects.

5. Results

Four major themes emerged from the thematic content analysis of government documents, policy records, oversight reports, and peer-reviewed literature, which help to explain how unrestricted smartphone use affects the provision of public services in South Africa. These conclusions, which are based on recent research and current institutional records, offer empirical insights into systemic governance gaps as well as behavioural patterns.

5.1. Bypassing of Institutional Controls

Although network restrictions are a typical institutional response to reduce internet usage that isn't related to work, the prevalence of personal smartphones is making them less effective. On official desktop computers, a number of government agencies have implemented firewalls and network access controls to prevent access to non-essential websites, social media platforms, and streaming services (Department of Public Service and Administration [DPSA], 2023). Employees, however, get around these restrictions by simply connecting their personal devices to the organization's Wi-Fi or using mobile data to access content that is restricted. According to internal IT audits conducted by several provincial departments, Bluetooth file sharing and tethering during business hours have become commonplace, especially in divisions with few real-time network monitoring systems (DPSA, 2023). This phenomenon is a sign of a larger gap in technological governance, where institutional controls do not match the behaviours of actual users. The lack of a thorough Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy results in a regulatory blind spot, even in the face of attempts to enforce digital discipline through technical restrictions (Van Dijk & Hacker, 2018). Workers take advantage of this weakness, circumventing institutional controls in ways that are hard to keep an eye on without violating individuals' right to privacy. As a result, departments find it difficult to strike a balance between upholding workplace productivity standards and respecting workers' digital autonomy.

According to research by Mpinganjira (2022), the use of personal devices at work is closely related to organizational culture and the perceived level of surveillance, and it is not just a question of enforcing policies. Employees feel more comfortable engaging in personal digital activities during work hours

in departments with little or inconsistent management oversight. Furthermore, many departments lack the advanced cybersecurity infrastructure required for thorough endpoint monitoring due to resource limitations, which further restricts their capacity to efficiently regulate personal device usage (Makhura & Sithole, 2023). This circumvention behaviour has a variety of ramifications. Because personal devices may act as uncontrolled access points to sensitive institutional networks, it not only lowers overall productivity but also creates cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Internal audit committees have repeatedly recommended comprehensive mobile device management (MDM) solutions, but many departments have been slow to adopt them because of perceived implementation complexity and cost (Ngobeni & Sehlapelo, 2024). Therefore, the continued use of Bluetooth file sharing and personal device tethering is a structural failure of institutional ICT governance rather than just an act of defiance. It reflects the need for modern, legally binding policies that protect data integrity and organizational productivity while acknowledging the realities of a workforce that is connected to the internet.

5.2. Normalisation of 'Digital Loitering'

Known as "digital loitering," the practice of employees using their personal smartphones while at work has spread throughout all levels of the South African public sector. The practice of staying physically present at a workstation while mentally disengaging through media consumption, instant messaging, or social media browsing is known as "digital loitering." Supervisory personnel hardly ever question this behaviour because it has become so commonplace, especially in settings with inadequate or non-existent oversight procedures (Public Service Commission, 2023). Digital loitering is most common in municipal satellite offices and local branches of national departments where direct supervision is infrequent, according to media reports and observational studies (City Press, 2022). In these situations, workers frequently justify using their smartphones as a harmless diversion from daily chores or as a coping strategy against work boredom. This view, however, ignores the cumulative effect of such actions on the effectiveness of service delivery and the satisfaction of citizens. When citizens engage with public service points, they often attribute service delays and inattention to frontline officials' obvious smartphone use (Mabasa & Mokone, 2023).

Theoretically, digital loitering can be viewed through the prism of organizational drift, in which unregulated informal practices gradually undermine formal institutional norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The lack of explicit policies regarding the use of personal devices at work and the inconsistent disciplinary actions taken by management both contribute to the slow normalization of such behaviour. This fosters a culture of tolerance where workers view digital disengagement as the standard rather than the exception. Moreover, the psychological dynamics of digital loitering are reinforced by the addictive design of social media platforms, which employ algorithms to maximise user engagement (Turel & Serenko, 2020). Employees find it increasingly difficult to resist the pull of smartphone notifications, particularly in low-demand work environments where idle time is prevalent. In such cases, the lines between short breaks and habitual digital distraction blur, leading to sustained periods of reduced productivity. There is still fragmentation in the efforts to combat digital loitering. Although some departments have launched awareness campaigns to draw attention to the negative effects of digital distractions on productivity, these initiatives are rarely combined with structural changes like policies governing digital etiquette or performance-based monitoring (Ngobeni & Sehlapelo, 2024). As a result, digital loitering continues to be a pervasive cultural practice that compromises the effectiveness and responsiveness of public service organizations.

5.3. Absence of Personal Device Policies

The lack of clear regulations governing the use of personal smartphones during official working hours is a significant governance gap in South Africa's public administration. Eight government departments, both national and provincial, had their information and communication technology (ICT) policy documents audited. The findings showed a consistent emphasis on cybersecurity, data protection, and official device usage, but a noticeable lack of discussion on personal device governance (Ngobeni & Sehlapelo, 2024). This omission shows a lack of policy adaptation in the face of quickly changing digital workplace behaviours. Significant operational ramifications result from the lack of such policies. Supervisors and line managers are frequently left to use their judgment when dealing with employees' personal smartphone use in the absence of official policies. Depending on the supervisor's management style, this results in inconsistent enforcement, with similar violations being handled differently across departments or even within the same unit (Mpinganjira, 2022). In addition to undermining accountability, a lack of uniformity can increase workplace tensions and weaken organizational cohesion by fostering perceptions of unfairness and bias (Mabasa & Mokone, 2023).

Personal smartphone use is implicitly regarded as a private matter in the absence of a formal regulatory framework, separate from institutional efficiency and professional conduct considerations. This distinction is problematic since the use of personal devices has a direct impact on workplace focus, productivity, and, consequently, the results of public service delivery. Digital distractions become commonplace in workplaces where employees are allowed unrestricted access to personal devices, which leads to a slow but noticeable decline in work discipline (Turel & Serenko, 2020). Organizations around the world have implemented Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies that set clear guidelines for using personal devices at work in response to comparable issues. According to Van Dijk and Hacker (2018), these policies frequently cover acceptable use, device registration, and the implementation of security measures to safeguard institutional data. However, such all-encompassing frameworks are mainly lacking in the South African public service. As obstacles to policy development, departments frequently point to administrative workloads, resource limitations, and possible legal issues pertaining to individual privacy (Makhura & Sithole, 2023).

Departments are also vulnerable to cybersecurity threats due to unclear policies. Unauthorized access to sensitive data, malware infections, and data breaches can occur on personal devices that are not controlled by organizational procedures. The development of proactive policies has been slow, frequently postponed to subsequent review cycles, even though these risks have been emphasized in numerous internal audit reports (DPSA, 2023). A structural mismatch between current governance frameworks and the realities of a workforce with digital connections is reflected in the lack of clear

personal device policies. In addition to undermining managerial authority, this disparity fosters a culture of tolerance wherein digital disengagement is implicitly accepted. Deliberate policy intervention that strikes a balance between institutional productivity imperatives and individual privacy rights is necessary to address this deficiency.

5.4. Erosion of Public Service Culture

The professional public service culture in South African government departments is gradually being undermined as a result of unrestrained personal device use, normalized digital loitering, and insufficient policy enforcement. The legitimacy and efficacy of state institutions are based on the public service culture, which is defined by the values of accountability, responsiveness, and integrity (Public Protector South Africa, 2023). However, these values are undermined when workers are constantly distracted by digital devices during work hours, which results in a perceptual and operational decline in the quality of public services. Inattentive staff are frequently cited as a recurrent grievance in citizen complaints filed via channels like the Presidential Hotline, provincial ombuds services, and media outlets. Smartphone use during service interactions is one of the most commonly reported instances of subpar service conduct, according to a thematic analysis of these complaints (Public Protector South Africa, 2023). The sight of public employees distracted by their phones while lines are left unattended represents not only inefficiency but also institutional indifference to citizens seeking assistance at municipal offices, home affairs branches, or medical facilities (City Press, 2022). The erosion of service culture is not merely a function of individual misconduct but is also reflective of systemic managerial failures. In departments where supervisory oversight is inconsistent, digital disengagement becomes normalised as a workplace culture. Over time, this fosters a sense of impunity among employees, where adherence to professional standards becomes discretionary rather than obligatory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The absence of corrective action signals to staff that such behaviours are institutionally tolerated, further embedding them within organisational routines.

Institutional isomorphism, which holds that informal practices gradually reshape formal organizational norms, provides a theoretical framework for understanding this cultural decline (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In these situations, mimetic processes normalize deviant behaviours like digital loitering, especially in settings where new hires model their behaviour on accepted workplace norms. Unrestrained personal device use undermines public trust in public institutions and intensifies public perceptions of state inefficiency. According to research, citizens' perceptions of bureaucratic inefficiency and a lack of public accountability are highly correlated with visible staff inattention (Mpinganjira, 2022). A wider crisis of legitimacy for public institutions results from citizens' declining willingness to interact with official state channels as trust declines. It takes more than surface-level fixes to stop this erosion. It calls for a thorough approach to cultural change that incorporates performance management, policy creation, and the development of a digital work ethic consistent with public service ideals. The cumulative effect of digital distractions will keep undermining the legitimacy, effectiveness, and credibility of South Africa's public service institutions in the absence of such systemic changes.

6. Discussion

The study's conclusions highlight a concerning and little-studied conflict in the South African public sector between institutional accountability and digital autonomy. Due to policy gaps, organizational culture, and changing workplace norms, the unrestricted use of smartphones during working hours has become more than just a behavioural issue; it is now a systemic governance issue. The consequences of digital distractions become more evident and pressing when viewed through the prisms of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Organizational Discipline Theory.

6.1. Organisational Ambiguity and the Breakdown of Workplace Discipline

The concept of "digital loitering" is closely related to the tenets of organizational discipline theory, which emphasizes how employee behaviour is shaped by explicit expectations and consistent enforcement. Employees function in a grey area of accountability in situations where personal smartphone use is not specifically regulated. According to Ledwaba and Mulaudzi (2023), normative drift, the normalization of behaviour that was previously considered unprofessional, is facilitated by ambiguous institutional boundaries. The widespread use of smartphones for non-work-related purposes across a variety of service points is indicative of this normative shift. Due to a lack of enabling policy frameworks, managers frequently report having trouble disciplining employees (Mngomezulu & Khumalo, 2022). Task discipline and client service standards are weakened by the ensuing managerial paralysis, which permits digital distractions to continue. Uncontrolled smartphone use essentially turns into an organizational blind spot, which affects both public perception and operational effectiveness.

6.2. Digital Convenience and Behavioural Reinforcement

Even in workplaces with official devices, personal smartphones are preferred, as explained by the Technology Acceptance Model. Employees frequently view personal phones as more practical, private, and effective, according to Tshabalala and Molefe (2023). The ease of access to media applications and social platforms, features that are frequently blocked or disabled on official systems, confirms these views. Smartphone use becomes ingrained in the workday when it is encouraged by routine behaviour and is not met with consequences. According to TAM, employees will continue to use technology in ways that suit their own preferences rather than the goals of the company unless there is a perceived organizational disincentive (Venkatesh & Bala, 2020). This misalignment results in a disconnect between technology access and productivity outcomes, particularly in service-oriented public workplaces.

6.3. Public Service Culture and Erosion of Trust

Uncontrolled smartphone use may have the most significant impact on public service culture. The foundation of the citizen-state relationship is professionalism, responsiveness, and trust. The public's perception of the state is weakened by the presence of distracted officials, delayed service, and apparent indifference, all of which are frequently connected to smartphone use (Public Service Commission, 2023). This is especially harmful in-service locations where face-to-face, time-sensitive client interactions occur. According to scholars like Dlamini and Mashinini (2023), robust digital ethics frameworks must go hand in hand with the public service's adoption of digital tools. Technologies designed to improve service delivery may instead become obstacles if they are not used. This study affirms their position by demonstrating that the failure to manage smartphone use results not only in inefficiency but also in reputational harm.

6.4. Policy Reform as a Path Forward

The findings reinforce the urgent need for policy-level interventions. Merely restricting access to institutional networks is insufficient when employees can easily bypass controls with personal data. What is needed is a multi-pronged strategy that includes:

- Clear, department-specific smartphone usage guidelines;
- Training on digital professionalism and workplace ethics;
- Supervisory tools and accountability mechanisms that are consistent and enforceable.

A sustainable course forward is provided by a developmental approach, which is based on digital responsibility rather than punitive control. Public service organizations must recognize and adjust to the evolving digital behaviours of their employees if they hope to maintain a culture of effectiveness and integrity.

7. Conclusion

The uncontrolled use of smartphones in South African government workplaces and its effects on the provision of public services have been investigated in this article. The regular use of personal smartphones for non-work-related purposes during office hours is widespread, structurally enabled, and largely unregulated, according to the study's document-based, qualitative analysis, which is based on organizational discipline theory and the Technology Acceptance Model. Even though public institutions have gone digital, the lack of explicit and binding rules regarding the use of personal devices has made it easier for digital distractions to proliferate. The results show that by using personal information and Bluetooth tethering, which provides constant access to social media, entertainment, and private communication, public employees frequently get around institutional controls. In certain sectors of the civil service, this behaviour, here referred to as "digital loitering", has become commonplace, which has led to service delays, inattention, and a declining public perception of government professionalism. More significantly, these actions undermine the fundamental culture of public service accountability, especially in frontline environments where there is a high level of visibility and frequent citizen interaction.

The study highlights a significant policy gap: few government agencies have expanded their frameworks to regulate personal smartphones in the workplace, despite the fact that many have concentrated on cybersecurity and institutional device management. Smartphone misuse will continue to erode service standards and institutional legitimacy in the absence of focused policy reform backed by training in digital ethics and reliable supervisory procedures. The impact of training in digital etiquette on behaviour modification, department-specific case studies where interventions have been tested, and the relationship between technology governance and managerial leadership styles should all be examined in future research. Adaptive, context-sensitive policy changes that maintain smartphones' usefulness while reducing their disruptive power will be aided by a larger body of empirical data. In an increasingly digitised public administration environment, smartphones are not inherently problematic. Rather, their impact, positive or negative, depends on the governance systems surrounding them. Managing digital behaviour must therefore become an integral part of public service professionalism, particularly in an era where public trust hinges on both service quality and institutional discipline.

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