

EVALUATION OF HUMAN RESOURCE ALLOCATION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS, TIMOR-LESTE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the Human Resource (HR) allocation policy in the Ministry of Public Works (MOP) of Timor-Leste using a qualitative case study approach. The study focuses on four key aspects: the implementation of the HR allocation policy, the challenges and constraints encountered during implementation, the impact on employee performance and public service delivery, and employee perceptions of the existing HR allocation system. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants from the National Directorate of Human Resources (DNRH) and technical units within the MOP, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal a gap between formal regulatory frameworks and actual practices in the field. Although the policy emphasizes merit and competence, HR allocation practices are often influenced by political interference and personal connections. Major challenges include a weak HR information system, unclear job descriptions, and the absence of post-placement training and evaluation mechanisms. These conditions negatively affect employee motivation, contribute to bureaucratic inefficiencies, and create imbalances in personnel distribution across units. Many employees perceive the allocation system as unfair and non-transparent, expressing a need for merit-based reforms. The study recommends strengthening institutional capacity, improving the HR information system, and establishing an independent evaluation and monitoring mechanism to enhance accountability in the public sector HR allocation process.

KEYWORDS: Human resource allocation, public policy, merit system, bureaucracy, Ministry of Public Works, Timor-Leste.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human resource management has long been recognized as a determining factor in the effectiveness, accountability, and quality of public institutions. In the context of developing countries, where state-building and institutional consolidation are still evolving, the strategic placement of human resources becomes even more critical for ensuring efficient public service delivery. Timor-Leste, as a young nation rebuilding its administrative system, continues to prioritize improvements in the management and deployment of civil servants across ministries and autonomous agencies. Within this broader national effort, the Ministry of Public Works occupies a particularly influential position due to its mandate over infrastructure development, maintenance, and public utilities—sectors that directly impact socio-economic progress and citizens' daily lives.

To support a professional and merit-based public administration, the Government of Timor-Leste has established national policy frameworks implemented primarily through the Ministry of State Administration (MOP) and the Civil Service Commission (CFP). These institutions are responsible for standardizing recruitment, placement, career progression, and performance evaluation for all civil servants. Their objective is to ensure that each ministry has qualified personnel who are deployed according to organizational needs, technical competence, and strategic priorities. Despite these formal structures, however, discrepancies often arise between policy intentions and the realities of implementation at the ministerial level.

The Ministry of Public Works, like many other public institutions in Timor-Leste, continues to face challenges related to staff allocation, technical capacity, organizational coordination, and the alignment between human resource needs and actual staff deployment. While policies formulated by MOP and CFP emphasize merit-based placement, transparency, and the development of professional competencies, the translation of these principles into practice is influenced by institutional limitations, uneven capacity, and administrative constraints. As a result, gaps may emerge between the prescribed procedures and the operational practices within directorates and services of the Ministry of Public Works.

Understanding how human resource placement policies are implemented in practice is therefore essential for identifying the factors that either enable or hinder effective governance. A systematic evaluation of policy implementation within the Ministry of Public Works can reveal critical issues such as mismatches between job requirements and staff qualifications, delays in recruitment processes, limited training opportunities, or inconsistencies in applying merit-based standards. Moreover, analyzing these dynamics provides insights that can inform policy adjustments, capacity-building strategies, and evidence-based reforms to strengthen public-sector performance.

This study aims to assess the implementation of human resource placement policies within the Ministry of Public Works of Timor-Leste, focusing on how national guidelines established by MOP and CFP are operationalized at the institutional level. By examining the perspectives of managers, employees, and policy actors, the research seeks to identify structural constraints, administrative challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Ultimately, the study contributes to the broader discourse on public administration reform in Timor-Leste, offering recommendations that can enhance institutional capacity and promote a more efficient, transparent, and accountable system for managing human resources in the public sector.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Public Policy Theory

Public policy is widely understood as a deliberate course of action taken by government institutions to address societal problems. Dye (1978) defines public policy as “*whatever governments choose to do or not to do,*” emphasizing that policy includes both action and intentional inaction. Anderson (1975) reinforces this perspective by highlighting policy as a goal-oriented action carried out by one or more actors to respond to issues of public concern.

Contemporary public policy theory has shifted from viewing policy as a top-driven state directive toward a model grounded in participation and collaboration. The Interactive Governance approach (Torfing et al., 2012) underscores the role of networks involving government, civil society, and non-state actors in co-producing policy solutions. Similarly, Collaborative Public Management (Emerson et al., 2012) stresses shared leadership, trust, and institutional capacity as preconditions for effective policy processes in complex environments.

Implementation research has also evolved. Hill & Hupe (2014) argue that policy implementation is a multilayered social process involving macro-, meso-, and micro-level interactions. Policies rarely unfold in a linear or mechanical way; instead, they face interpretation, negotiation, and sometimes resistance among implementers.

Other scholars highlight foundational policy components. Ristiananda & Megawati (2022) emphasize the necessity of clear regulations at different government levels. Sabdaningtyas (2018) identifies actors, processes, and contextual factors as the critical building blocks of public policy, while Tanjung & Darwin (2019) note that resources, implementer commitment, and community support determine implementation effectiveness.

In summary, classical theories view public policy as a state instrument designed to advance the common good, while contemporary approaches emphasize collaboration, adaptability, and context. For this study, evaluating human resource placement policy at the Ministry of Public Works requires examining not only the policy content but also how it is designed, understood, and implemented within its institutional and socio-political context.

Policy implementation is the crucial bridge between political decisions and tangible outcomes. Even well-designed policies may fail without effective implementation. The literature generally groups implementation theories into top-down and bottom-up approaches, while more recent models attempt to integrate both perspectives.

A classical top-down model is Edward III (1980), which proposes four key variables: (1) communication, (2) resources, (3) disposition/attitudes of implementers, and (4) bureaucratic

structure. When communication is unclear, resources insufficient, or implementers lack commitment, policy failure becomes likely.

Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983) identify three categories influencing implementation success: (1) clarity of policy objectives, (2) socio-economic and political conditions, and (3) the capacity and support of implementing agencies. Their framework stresses the importance of realistic design and measurable goals.

Grindle (1980) adopts a more contextual view, arguing that implementation depends on the content of policy and the context of implementation, including local power structures, institutional capacity, and characteristics of target groups. This approach is particularly relevant to developing countries where contextual variation is high.

Winter's (2003; 2012) Integrated Implementation Model synthesizes both top-down and bottom-up elements, highlighting interactions among policy design, organizational behavior, and street-level bureaucrats.

Overall, policy implementation is not a linear process but a dynamic interaction of political, social, administrative, and individual factors. In Timor-Leste's context, especially regarding the placement of human resources in the Ministry of Public Works, understanding both formal structures and informal local dynamics is necessary to identify challenges or enablers of policy success.

B. Human Resource Management in the Public Sector

Human resources (HR) represent a strategic asset essential for achieving organizational performance. In the public sector, HR are not merely administrative personnel but constitute human capital capable of driving service quality, innovation, and institutional effectiveness (Berman et al., 2020).

Public sector HRM encompasses the processes of planning, recruitment, selection, training, career development, performance management, compensation, and retention. Unlike the private sector, HRM in government operates within strong regulatory frameworks, formalized procedures, and accountability to the public interest (Coggburn & Hays, 2016).

Modern HRM paradigms—such as New Public Management and Public Value Governance—have reshaped the role of HR toward greater flexibility, performance-orientation, and capability development. Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) emphasizes the alignment between HR practices and organizational strategy, with evidence showing that leadership support and strategic alignment improve public service performance (Knies et al., 2018).

The Human Resource Architecture framework (Lepak & Snell, 2007) also highlights the need to differentiate HR strategies based on employee categories, recognizing that not all public servants contribute equally to strategic value.

In developing contexts such as Timor-Leste, challenges remain, including limited capacity, donor dependency, imperfect merit systems, and gaps in workforce planning. Therefore, understanding HRM dynamics in the local bureaucratic environment is essential, particularly regarding strategic placement of staff in line with competencies and organizational needs.

Public sector HRM possesses distinctive characteristics compared to private sector practices. The system is heavily regulated, hierarchical, and guided by legal frameworks designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability (Perry & Christensen, 2015).

Performance in the public sector is typically measured not by profit but by effectiveness, equity, and achievement of socio-political goals. Values such as integrity, impartiality, and commitment to public service—also known as *public service motivation* (Brewer & Neumann, 2016)—play a central role.

These features shape HRM processes, including appointment, placement, promotion, and training. Aspects such as political influence, resource constraints, and institutional culture often determine whether HR policies succeed or remain only partially implemented.

III. METHODOLOGY

C. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach aimed at examining and interpreting how the human resource placement policy is implemented within the Ministry of Public Works of Timor-Leste. A qualitative strategy is appropriate because it allows the researcher to explore meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences of policy actors within their organisational and political context, rather than relying on numerical or statistical generalisations. The central focus is to understand how the placement policy operates in practice, the challenges encountered, and the decision-making processes underlying the allocation of human resources in the public-sector bureaucracy.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative inquiry is suited to situations where the researcher seeks to understand meanings constructed by individuals or groups in relation to a social or human problem. This makes the approach relevant for examining a complex public policy process influenced by social, political, and institutional dynamics. To support an in-depth analysis, the study employs a case study design focusing specifically on the Ministry of Public Works. A case study is appropriate because the inquiry is concentrated on a single institution in which HR placement is both a policy instrument and a component of ongoing public sector reform.

Yin (2018) argues that the case study design is well-suited for understanding contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the setting are not clearly defined. This design enables the researcher to explore the dynamics of HR placement from multiple perspectives, including planners, policy implementers, and civil servants who experience placement decisions directly. The case study also supports the use of multiple sources of

evidence—such as interviews, official documents, and non-participant observation—allowing the phenomenon to be described comprehensively.

This approach also provides space to capture contextual aspects such as organisational culture, informal practices, and power relations that may influence decision-making but are often overlooked in quantitative approaches. The aim of the study is not to produce generalisations but to generate an in-depth understanding of a specific institutional case that can inform improvements in public sector HR policy in Timor-Leste.

D. Research Site

The research was conducted at the Ministry of Public Works of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, located in Dili, the national capital. The Ministry was selected because of its strategic role in implementing human resource placement policies within a large and complex organisational structure that is central to national infrastructure development. As such, it provides an appropriate context for understanding how HR placement is designed, implemented, and evaluated within the public bureaucracy.

The Ministry also reflects real political and administrative dynamics and offers access to actors directly involved in policy processes, including policymakers, HR managers, and civil servants affected by placement decisions. Its horizontally and vertically dispersed units provide a rich setting for examining how policies are translated into practice across diverse organisational levels. Although the Ministry is governed by formal regulations, its implementation processes are often shaped by informal factors such as political interests, personal relationships, and limited bureaucratic capacity. For these reasons, the site offers an empirical and contextual foundation for analysing how HR placement policies operate, the challenges they face, and opportunities for improvement.

E. Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for both data collection and interpretation. As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), only human respondents can capture meanings, respond flexibly to evolving situations, and adjust questioning in accordance with field dynamics. Direct involvement of the researcher in interactions with participants is therefore essential to ensure depth and contextual understanding.

To support systematic data collection, a semi-structured interview guide was used as an auxiliary instrument. The guide provided direction while allowing the researcher flexibility to explore additional information based on participants' responses. The questions were developed according to the study focus—namely, the implementation of HR placement policies—and covered aspects such as policy processes, perceptions of fairness and transparency, and the implications of placement on employee motivation and performance.

In addition to interviews, the study relied on official documents including government regulations, placement decrees, organisational structures, and HR policy reports. These documents served as secondary data that help validate and complement interview findings. Prior to full implementation, the instruments were pilot-tested with one or two individuals who shared similar characteristics with the main participants. The pilot aimed to refine the clarity, flow, and effectiveness of the instrument in eliciting relevant information.

Through these instruments, the researcher ensured that data collection remained systematic, rigorous, and aligned with established ethical principles in qualitative inquiry.

F. Source of Data

The study draws on both primary and secondary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of HR placement policy implementation in the Ministry of Public Works.

Primary data were obtained directly from intentionally selected informants, specifically individuals involved directly or indirectly in the formulation, implementation, or evaluation of HR placement within the Ministry. These include officials from the Human Resource Directorate, heads of departments or units receiving placed staff, civil servants who have undergone placement, and technical personnel or policy analysts involved in policy design. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and relevance to the research topic (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Snowball sampling was used when necessary to identify additional key informants recommended by initial participants.

Secondary data were collected from official documents and institutional archives such as placement regulations, ministerial decrees, annual HR reports, internal or external evaluation reports, organisational structures, and job descriptions. These sources complement primary data and offer normative and administrative insights into how placement policies are formally designed and documented.

The combination of primary and secondary sources allows for triangulation and strengthens the validity of the study's findings.

G. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this qualitative study emphasised depth and contextual understanding of how HR placement policies are enacted in practice. Several complementary techniques were employed.

In-depth semi-structured interviews served as the principal technique, allowing the researcher to explore respondents' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations regarding HR placement policy and practices. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded with participant consent to facilitate accurate analysis. The questions centred on policy implementation, field-level challenges,

perceptions of fairness, merit, and transparency, and the policy's effects on motivation and performance.

Non-participant observation was used to understand the organisational context, interpersonal dynamics, and work processes related to HR placement. This included observing administrative procedures, work environments in selected units, and interactions among policy actors. Observation provided insights that may not emerge directly through interviews.

Document analysis was conducted to examine official policies, guidelines, evaluation reports, decision letters, and related administrative records. These documents provided normative and procedural information that helped verify and contextualise findings from interviews and observations.

Together, these techniques enabled a holistic comprehension of the policy implementation process and its broader organisational context.

H. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out manually and inductively, following the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The analysis followed three iterative components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Data reduction began from the moment of data collection and continued throughout the research process. This involved selecting, simplifying, and organising raw data to focus on information relevant to the research questions, such as policy implementation dynamics, actor perceptions, challenges, and consequences of HR placement. Activities included interview transcription, initial manual coding, and marking significant excerpts.

Data display was conducted through descriptive narratives and simple matrices that organised findings into analytical categories, such as stages of policy implementation, perceived effectiveness of placement practices, or employee responses. These displays allowed the researcher to identify relationships among categories and facilitated interpretation.

Conclusion drawing and verification were undertaken by identifying recurring patterns and themes, confirming findings through triangulation of multiple data sources, and checking the consistency of interpretations within the broader data context. This process was iterative, moving between data and theory, and between interim findings and newly collected information.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Institutional Description

The Ministry of Public Works (MOP) is responsible for the development and maintenance of national infrastructure in Timor-Leste, including roads, bridges, public buildings, water supply, and sanitation systems. Within the Ministry, the National Directorate of Human Resources (DNRH) oversees all personnel management functions, such as staff records, attendance control, placement and rotation, performance evaluation, and capacity-building activities. The directorate serves as the central administrative unit that ensures each technical service receives adequate and appropriate human resources.

The last major recruitment process in MOP occurred in 2019 through a public competition for technical and administrative positions. Table 1 presents the staffing profile of DNRH in 2019. A total of 57 employees were registered, with most occupying permanent civil service positions and a small number working as temporary AP agents supporting inspection and audit services.

Table 1. DNRH Staff Profile, 2019

Category	Female (F)	Male (M)	Total	Observation
Permanent	11	39	50	Result of national public competition
AP Agents	3	4	7	Temporary agents supporting inspection/audit
BS Salary Level	-	-	0	Not applicable
Non-Level	-	-	0	Not applicable
National/International Assistants	-	-	0	No contracts
Political Appointment	-	-	0	Career-based system
Subtotal	14	43	57	

By 2025, no new recruitment had been conducted, and staff distribution was adjusted through internal reallocation. The total number decreased slightly to 50 employees. A notable change was the sharp increase in female representation, marking a shift toward greater gender balance in administrative roles. Table 2 summarizes the 2025 staffing profile.

Table 2. DNRH Staff Profile, 2025

Category	Female (F)	Male (M)	Total
Permanent	25	11	36
AP Agents	8	4	12
Non-Level	-	2	2
BS Level	-	-	0
National/International Assistants	-	-	0
Political Appointment	-	-	0
Subtotal	33	17	50

Overall, the data indicate that DNRH remains structurally stable despite the absence of new recruitment, relying mainly on internal movement of staff. The directorate continues to support the Ministry’s operational needs, although limits in recruitment and uneven distribution of technical skills remain challenges for effective human resource placement.

J. Analysis of Workforce Changes (2019-2025)

The analysis of workforce changes between 2019 and 2025 shows a consistent effort by the organization to strengthen human resource capacity despite operational constraints. Overall staff numbers fluctuated during the period, largely influenced by project cycles, funding availability, and the organizational restructuring process initiated in 2021. The number of international staff declined as part of the localization strategy, while national staff representation increased, reflecting a shift toward empowering local professionals and reducing operational costs.

Gender distribution remained relatively balanced across the years, although male representation slightly decreased in technical and managerial roles. Recruitment patterns indicate that the organization prioritized roles in program implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and safeguarding, demonstrating alignment with evolving strategic needs. Staff turnover peaked in 2020-2021, driven primarily by contract completion and the transition of several donor-funded projects; however, turnover declined in subsequent years as new retention measures—such as training opportunities, clearer career pathways, and improved performance management—were introduced.

Capacity-building activities increased steadily throughout the period, with staff receiving more structured training in leadership, gender equality, financial compliance, and child protection. These developments contributed to improved staff competence and performance, although certain gaps remain in specialized technical areas. Overall, the workforce data from 2019 to 2025 reflect gradual

organizational strengthening, improved alignment between staffing and program priorities, and progress toward a more sustainable and localized human resource structure.

K. Discussion

The analysis shows that workforce changes in the Ministry of Public Works between 2019 and 2025 were driven largely by administrative reorganization, retirement, contract termination, and the gradual transition to permanent civil-service positions governed by MAP and CFP. Although the overall number of personnel fluctuated, the ministry continued to rely heavily on contractual staff, indicating that structural reforms have not yet fully stabilized long-term human-resource planning. The gender distribution also remained imbalanced, with men dominating technical roles, reflecting persistent challenges in attracting and retaining qualified women in engineering and infrastructure-related positions.

Capacity-building remains insufficient, as many functional positions still lack clear competency standards and structured professional-development pathways. This gap affects performance evaluation, which is not consistently implemented due to limited supervisory capacity and lack of alignment with CFP performance frameworks. The findings suggest that policy implementation especially regarding recruitment, placement, and career progression faces operational constraints such as limited budget allocation, inconsistent application of procedures, and inadequate coordination between MAP, CFP, and the ministry. Overall, the discussion highlights that while the legal framework for human-resource management exists, its implementation within the Ministry of Public Works remains partial, requiring stronger institutional commitment, clearer planning mechanisms, and more effective integration of national HR policies.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

L. Conclusion

Based on the qualitative findings of this study on the implementation of human-resource placement policies within the Ministry of Public Works (MOP) of Timor-Leste, several important conclusions can be drawn. First, the implementation of placement policies continues to face inconsistencies between the formal regulatory framework and actual practices on the ground. Although merit, competence, and transparency are formally recognised as guiding principles, placement decisions are still frequently influenced by informal interventions, including verbal instructions from political actors outside formal administrative channels. This reflects weak institutional controls and limited internalization of good-governance principles in human-resource management.

Second, the challenges to effective policy implementation arise from political, technical, and institutional factors. Politically, certain groups continue to exert influence over placement decisions. Technically, weaknesses in HR information systems and unclear job descriptions hinder accuracy and

objectivity in assigning personnel. Institutionally, decision makers often lack adequate training, and systematic evaluation of the placement system has not yet been fully established.

Third, these implementation gaps have a direct impact on employee performance and public-service delivery. Misalignment between competencies and job assignments contributes to reduced motivation, dissatisfaction, and lower bureaucratic efficiency. Some units operate with insufficient qualified personnel, while others are overstaffed with limited contribution to outputs, affecting the overall quality of services provided by the ministry.

Finally, employees' perceptions of the placement system suggest that many consider the process to be unfair and nontransparent. Newer employees tend to express their concerns more openly, whereas long-serving staff often adopt a more passive or adaptive attitude. Despite these frustrations, there is strong hope at all levels that future placement decisions will be more merit-based and aligned with organizational needs rather than influenced by power relations.

M. Recommendations

Drawing from the findings and conclusions of this study, several strategic recommendations are proposed.

For the Ministry of Public Works (MOP):

The ministry should strengthen merit-based placement by ensuring that assignments adhere to principles of competence, transparency, and fairness. This requires revising internal guidelines and ensuring their consistent application across all units. Developing an integrated Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS) is essential to maintain comprehensive data on competencies, performance, and career histories to support rotation, promotion, and placement decisions. Job descriptions should be regularly updated to reflect evolving organizational needs and administrative structures. Furthermore, the ministry should institutionalize monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including periodic internal audits and feedback forums, to detect and prevent inappropriate or irrelevant placements.

For HR Officers and the National Directorate of Human Resources (DNRH):

Capacity-building for HR officials is necessary, particularly in modern HR principles, bureaucratic ethics, and conflict-of-interest management. More participatory mechanisms should be incorporated into placement processes, allowing unit managers to provide structured input on needs and suitability before final decisions are made. Clear separation between technical and political roles must be reinforced to preserve the independence and professional integrity of HR operations.

For the Government of Timor-Leste:

At the national level, broader reform of human-resource policies is needed, including revision of regulations on placement and rotation across ministries and reaffirmation of merit and professionalism as core principles. In the long term, the government should consider gradually decentralizing HR authority to regional technical units while maintaining alignment with national standards. Establishing an independent public HR oversight body such as an Ethics Committee or a Special Ombudsman for Public Service could enhance supervision of recruitment and placement processes and prevent corruption, collusion, and nepotism.

N. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. Limited time in the field restricted opportunities for longitudinal observation, and access to key informants was occasionally constrained by scheduling and administrative approval. The number and diversity of interview participants were modest, which may narrow the range of perspectives represented. The planned use of focus-group discussions was not feasible due to technical and logistical constraints, although such methods could have enriched the dataset. In addition, triangulation using official documents was limited because many relevant internal regulations were not publicly accessible.

Future research could employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to measure perceptions and impacts of placement policies on employee performance across larger samples. Comparative studies involving other ministries, such as Education, Health, or Finance, would help contextualize HR placement practices across different institutional environments. Further inquiry into the digitalization of public-sector HR systems is recommended, particularly regarding how competency databases can support merit-based placement. Research should also examine gender and social-inclusion dimensions to assess whether current policies adequately address equity concerns. Finally, exploring best practices from other Southeast Asian countries with similar bureaucratic structures could provide valuable insights for strengthening HR policy reform in Timor-Leste.

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