



Review Article

# Administrative Capacity in Executive Service Delivery: A Literature Review on Government Protocol Functions

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**Abstract:** Administrative capacity has long been recognized as a fundamental determinant of governmental effectiveness, yet its role in executive service delivery, particularly in relation to government protocol functions, remains conceptually underdeveloped in public administration scholarship. Existing studies on administrative capacity predominantly focus on policy formulation, implementation, and citizen-facing service delivery, while research on executive governance and executive support systems often treats internal support functions in aggregate terms. As a result, the specific contribution of protocol functions—as administrative, symbolic, and coordinative mechanisms that sustain executive leadership—has been largely overlooked. Addressing this gap, this literature review examines how administrative capacity operates within executive service delivery, with a particular emphasis on government protocol functions as an integral component of executive support and governance coordination. The primary objective of this article is to synthesize and integrate dispersed theoretical and empirical insights to reconceptualize protocol functions within the broader framework of Administrative Capacity Theory. Employing a narrative–integrative literature review approach, the study systematically selected and analyzed peer-reviewed journal articles from major academic databases published within the last five years. The literature was examined through thematic analysis and conceptual synthesis, guided by Administrative Capacity Theory as the core framework and complemented by perspectives on executive service delivery, institutional capacity, street-level bureaucracy, public service professionalism, and governance coordination. The review identifies recurring patterns indicating that effective executive service delivery depends on the interaction of individual-level capacities (professional competence, discretion, and ethics), organizational-level capacities (structures, procedures, and coordination routines), and system-level capacities (institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms).

**Keywords:** Administrative Capacity; Executive Service Delivery; Government Protocol Functions; Executive Support Systems; Institutional Capacity.

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## 1. Introduction

Administrative capacity has long been regarded as a cornerstone of effective public governance, shaping the ability of governments to design, coordinate, and sustain public action in increasingly complex political and administrative environments. Within the field of public administration, administrative capacity is commonly understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing human resources, organizational structures, managerial processes,

and institutional arrangements that collectively enable public organizations to perform their mandated functions (Andrews et al., 2021; Lodge & Wegrich, 2023). While early scholarship on administrative capacity primarily emphasized policy implementation and frontline service delivery, recent studies have increasingly highlighted the importance of internal governmental capacities that support executive leadership and coordination. In contemporary governance systems characterized by fragmentation, interdependence, and heightened public scrutiny, the effectiveness of executive actors is contingent not only on political authority but also on the quality of administrative support systems that enable decision-making, representation, and coordination (Peters, 2021; Christensen & Lægheid, 2022). Consequently, executive service delivery has emerged as a critical yet underexamined domain through which administrative capacity manifests in practice.

Executive service delivery refers to a set of internal public services designed to support political and administrative leaders in fulfilling their strategic, managerial, and representational roles. These services include agenda setting, coordination across organizational boundaries, communication management, symbolic representation, and the orchestration of interactions between executives and diverse stakeholders. Unlike citizen-facing public services, executive service delivery operates largely within the internal machinery of government, rendering it less visible but no less consequential for governance outcomes (Rhodes, 2021). Among the various components of executive service delivery, government protocol functions occupy a particularly strategic position. Protocol services regulate formal interactions involving executive leaders, institutionalize symbolic authority, and ensure procedural consistency in high-level governmental engagements. In doing so, they contribute to the legitimacy, coherence, and effectiveness of executive governance. However, despite their practical significance, protocol functions have often been relegated to the margins of academic inquiry, frequently perceived as ceremonial or technical rather than as integral elements of administrative capacity.

The marginalization of protocol functions in public administration scholarship reflects a broader tendency to prioritize externally oriented service delivery and policy outputs over internal governance processes. Much of the administrative capacity literature has concentrated on enhancing the state's ability to deliver public goods, manage performance, and implement reforms, particularly at the frontline level (Andrews et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2022). While this focus has generated valuable insights, it has also contributed to a conceptual blind spot regarding the internal capacities that sustain executive leadership and coordination. Executive support functions, including protocol services, are often subsumed under general notions of coordination or management, without being analytically unpacked as distinct institutional practices. As a result, their contribution to administrative capacity remains under-theorized, and their role in shaping governance dynamics is insufficiently understood.

Parallel strands of literature have addressed aspects of executive governance and leadership, emphasizing the role of coordination mechanisms, executive centers, and support systems in managing complexity within government. Studies on executive support systems highlight how institutional design, managerial capacity, and organizational coordination enable executives to steer policy processes and maintain control across fragmented administrative landscapes (Christensen & Lægheid, 2022; Van der Voet et al., 2022). Governance scholarship further extends this perspective by situating executive action within networks of actors, norms, and symbolic practices that transcend formal organizational hierarchies (Ansell et al., 2022; Pierre & Peters, 2023). From this viewpoint, executive governance is not merely a matter of formal authority but is constituted through everyday administrative practices that mediate relationships, manage uncertainty, and construct legitimacy. Protocol functions are deeply embedded in these practices, as they structure interactions, codify symbols of authority, and facilitate coordination across institutional boundaries. Yet, despite their relevance, protocol services are rarely treated as an analytical focal point within executive governance research.

This fragmentation across bodies of literature gives rise to a significant conceptual gap. Administrative capacity studies, executive service delivery research, and governance analyses often proceed in parallel, employing different analytical lenses and levels of abstraction. Administrative capacity scholarship tends to emphasize capacities related to policy implementation and organizational performance, while executive governance research focuses on leadership, coordination, and institutional design. Governance studies, in turn, foreground networks, symbols, and practices but often lack a systematic engagement with capacity-building frameworks. Within this fragmented landscape, government protocol functions fall through the cracks. They are neither fully integrated into administrative capacity

models nor systematically examined within executive service delivery frameworks. Consequently, existing scholarship provides limited guidance on how protocol services contribute to the capacity of governments to govern effectively, particularly in executive contexts.

Moreover, when protocol functions are addressed in the literature, they are often discussed descriptively or normatively, focusing on procedural rules or ceremonial aspects rather than on their capacity implications. Such treatments overlook the discretionary, professional, and coordinative dimensions of protocol work, which align closely with key themes in street-level bureaucracy and public service professionalism. Protocol officers routinely exercise discretion under conditions of time pressure, political sensitivity, and uncertainty, making situational judgments that can have significant implications for executive legitimacy and coordination. From this perspective, protocol services exemplify the intersection of individual competence, organizational arrangements, and institutional norms—precisely the domains that administrative capacity theory seeks to integrate. Yet, without a systematic synthesis of the literature, these connections remain implicit and underdeveloped.

The absence of integrative reviews addressing protocol functions within administrative capacity and executive service delivery literature represents a missed opportunity for both theory development and practical learning. Recent review articles on administrative capacity and state capacity have called for greater attention to internal governance processes and executive functions, highlighting the need to move beyond policy-centric analyses (Lodge & Wegrich, 2023; Christensen & Lægheid, 2024). Similarly, governance scholars have emphasized the importance of examining everyday administrative practices and symbolic dimensions of governance, which are central to protocol work (Rhodes, 2021; Hajer, 2022). However, these calls have yet to be operationalized through a focused synthesis that explicitly positions government protocol functions within a coherent capacity framework. As a result, the theoretical potential of protocol services as a lens for understanding executive administrative capacity remains largely untapped.

Against this backdrop, the present article addresses the following problem statement: despite the recognized importance of administrative capacity for effective executive governance, there is a lack of integrative conceptualization of government protocol functions as a constituent element of executive service delivery and administrative capacity. This problem is not merely empirical but fundamentally theoretical, as it concerns how key administrative practices are conceptualized, categorized, and connected within the broader architecture of public administration theory. Addressing this problem requires a systematic review that transcends disciplinary silos and integrates insights from administrative capacity theory, executive service delivery research, institutional capacity studies, street-level bureaucracy, public service professionalism, and governance scholarship.

Accordingly, the objective of this article is to conduct a narrative–integrative literature review that synthesizes existing research on administrative capacity, executive service delivery, and governance to develop a coherent conceptual understanding of government protocol functions. Specifically, the review seeks to: (1) map dominant theoretical approaches and empirical findings related to administrative capacity in executive contexts; (2) identify how protocol functions are implicitly or explicitly addressed across these literatures; and (3) propose an integrative conceptual framing that situates protocol services within multi-level administrative capacity structures encompassing individual, organizational, and system-level dimensions. By focusing on synthesis rather than empirical testing, the article aims to clarify conceptual boundaries, identify analytical gaps, and generate theoretically informed propositions for future research.

The expected contributions of this literature review are twofold. Theoretically, the article extends administrative capacity theory by incorporating executive service delivery and protocol functions into its analytical scope, thereby enriching existing capacity frameworks that have traditionally prioritized policy implementation and frontline services. It also contributes to executive governance and governance studies by foregrounding the symbolic, coordinative, and professional dimensions of executive support that are often overlooked in capacity analyses. Practically, the review offers insights for public sector organizations seeking to strengthen executive support systems through capacity-building initiatives, professionalization, and institutional design. For practitioners working in executive offices and protocol units, the findings provide a conceptual foundation for understanding their work as a strategic component of governance rather than as a peripheral or ceremonial function.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the theoretical foundations underpinning the analysis, with particular attention to administrative capacity theory and its supporting perspectives. The methodology section outlines the narrative–integrative review design, data sources, and analytical procedures. The results section presents the synthesized themes emerging from the literature, followed by a discussion that interprets these findings in relation to existing theories and governance debates. A comparative section situates the review’s contributions within the broader landscape of administrative capacity scholarship, and the conclusion summarizes key insights, outlines limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### Administrative Capacity Theory as the Core Analytical Framework

Administrative capacity has emerged as a central concept in public administration theory for explaining why governments vary in their ability to perform core governing functions effectively. Within contemporary scholarship, administrative capacity is broadly understood as the ability of public organizations to mobilize resources, coordinate actors, and sustain administrative processes in pursuit of collective goals (Andrews et al., 2021; Lodge & Wegrich, 2023). Unlike narrower notions of efficiency or performance, administrative capacity captures the underlying structural, human, and institutional conditions that enable governments to act. The concept has evolved from early concerns with bureaucratic competence and Weberian organization toward more multidimensional frameworks that recognize capacity as dynamic, context-dependent, and embedded in governance systems. This evolution reflects broader shifts in public administration theory, particularly the move from hierarchical administration toward networked, multi-level, and symbolically mediated governance. As a result, administrative capacity is no longer treated solely as a technical attribute but as a relational and institutional phenomenon that shapes how authority is exercised and coordinated within government.

A key contribution of administrative capacity theory lies in its analytical differentiation of capacity across multiple levels, most commonly individual, organizational, and system-level dimensions. At the individual level, capacity refers to the skills, professional judgment, ethical orientation, and experiential knowledge of public officials, emphasizing discretion and competence as critical resources for administrative action (Wu et al., 2022). At the organizational level, administrative capacity encompasses formal structures, coordination mechanisms, managerial processes, and procedural routines that enable collective action and reduce uncertainty (Andrews et al., 2021). System-level capacity extends the analysis to institutional arrangements, governance norms, and inter-organizational relationships that shape how public authority is exercised across boundaries. These dimensions are analytically distinct but empirically interdependent, reinforcing the view that administrative capacity cannot be reduced to a single factor or resource. This multi-level conceptualization is particularly relevant for understanding executive service delivery, where individual professionalism, organizational coordination, and institutional legitimacy converge in high-stakes administrative contexts.

Within studies of executive governance and internal public services, administrative capacity provides a powerful lens for explaining the effectiveness of executive service delivery, including executive support and protocol functions. Executive service delivery relies heavily on administrative systems that can coordinate actors, manage symbolic interactions, and facilitate executive decision-making under conditions of complexity and political sensitivity (Christensen & Lægreid, 2022). From an administrative capacity perspective, government protocol functions exemplify how capacity operates at the intersection of individual discretion, organizational routines, and institutionalized norms. Protocol officers must exercise professional judgment, operate within tightly structured organizational arrangements, and uphold institutional symbols that confer legitimacy on executive action. Administrative capacity theory thus enables protocol services to be conceptualized not as ancillary or ceremonial activities, but as strategic administrative mechanisms that sustain executive authority and governance coordination. By foregrounding these capacity dynamics, administrative capacity theory provides a coherent conceptual foundation for analyzing how executive support functions contribute to the overall governing capacity of public

organizations, thereby justifying its role as the primary theoretical framework for this literature review.

### **Executive Service Delivery and Government Protocol Functions**

Executive service delivery can be conceptualized as the set of internal (inward-facing) public administration functions that enable executives (governors, mayors, ministers, and their equivalents) to govern effectively—through agenda management, decision-cycle support, inter-organizational coordination, and the orchestration of executive-facing events and communications. In contemporary governance, these executive-support arrangements are increasingly understood as “capacity multipliers” rather than mere clerical assistance: they structure attention, reduce transaction costs in cross-unit collaboration, and stabilize routines for rapid decision-making under political time pressure. This lens aligns with public administration scholarship emphasizing the centrality of the core executive and the “centre of government” in steering, prioritizing, and coordinating complex policy agendas across fragmented administrative systems (Cairney et al., 2024; OECD, 2024). For your article, this conceptualization matters because it positions government protocol functions inside the executive service delivery architecture: protocol does not only “manage ceremonies,” but also contributes to executive preparedness, inter-institutional alignment, and the credible performance of state authority—functions that become strategically salient when executives operate in high-visibility, high-stakes, multi-actor governance environments.

Within this architecture, government protocol functions can be synthesized as a triadic mechanism of executive support: administrative, symbolic, and coordinative. Administratively, protocol translates executive intent into operational sequences (timelines, role assignments, access control, and compliance with formal rules) that protect decision processes from disruption. Symbolically, protocol helps enact legitimacy and authority through disciplined public staging—an aspect often under-theorized in mainstream “delivery” discussions, yet relevant to how citizens and stakeholders interpret executive competence and state order. Coordinatively, protocol acts as a boundary-spanning function linking executive offices, line agencies, security units, and external actors to ensure interoperability during formal engagements. This is consistent with broader governance scholarship on how political authority and administrative order are performed and maintained through institutionalized practices, especially under conditions of media scrutiny and political contestation (Amossy, 2022). Empirically, Indonesian local-government studies—although context-specific—also show protocol units confronting capacity constraints (skills, experience, and role clarity) that affect the reliability of executive support and cross-unit coordination, reinforcing protocol’s relevance as an administrative-capacity domain rather than a purely ceremonial craft (Nugraha et al., 2024; Sumampouw et al., 2025).

For thematic synthesis, the most analytically productive move is to link executive service delivery and protocol functions directly to Administrative Capacity Theory: protocol becomes an observable site where individual competencies (professional judgement, rule mastery, relational coordination), organizational arrangements (standard operating procedures, inter-unit routines, staffing and training systems), and system-level conditions (authority structures, whole-of-government coordination) intersect. This also creates a clean bridge to your Results–Discussion structure: you can map how the literature operationalizes “effective executive support” (e.g., coordination quality, reliability, responsiveness) and then identify where protocol-specific mechanisms are missing or implicit. Recent coordination research in public service delivery is especially useful here because it provides conceptually transferable explanations of why coordination quality varies across governmental settings—explanations that can be re-specified for executive-facing services, including protocol work (Kårtvedt, 2024). In short, executive service delivery is the governance infrastructure of leadership action, and protocol functions are a specialized subsystem within it—simultaneously operational, symbolic, and coordinative—whose performance reflects and shapes administrative capacity in practice.

### **Institutional Capacity in Public Governance and Executive Coordination**

Institutional capacity is commonly conceptualized as the ability of public institutions to produce coherent and reliable collective action through enduring organizational arrangements—namely formal structures, rule systems, resource endowments, and coordination mechanisms—that stabilize decision processes and reduce fragmentation across governmental units. In public governance scholarship, institutional capacity is not limited to

“organizational strength,” but refers to the institutional architecture that enables governments to align priorities, manage interdependencies, and ensure consistency across policy and administrative domains. This perspective is especially salient in executive environments, where the core executive and the centre of government must orchestrate cross-ministerial coordination, manage political–administrative interfaces, and safeguard procedural integrity under time pressure and high visibility (Corbett, 2021; OECD, 2024). Conceptually, institutional capacity complements Administrative Capacity Theory by clarifying the “rules-and-structures” layer through which individual competence and organizational routines are translated into system-wide coordination. In this framing, institutional capacity operates as a governance infrastructure: it defines who has authority to convene, what procedures guide interaction, how resources are allocated to executive support, and which coordination instruments (committees, protocols, integrated planning routines) prevent drift and duplication (OECD, 2024). This foundational capacity is therefore central for understanding why executive service delivery varies in reliability and legitimacy across governance contexts.

From an executive coordination standpoint, institutional capacity is most visible in the design and performance of executive support systems that connect executive offices with line agencies and external stakeholders. Public administration research on coordination emphasizes that the effectiveness of executive steering depends on the institutionalization of coordination roles, clear mandates, and routinized mechanisms that enable consistent alignment across organizational boundaries (Christensen & Lægheid, 2022; Kårtvedt, 2024). Variations in institutional capacity emerge across countries and levels of government because executive coordination problems are shaped by administrative traditions, degrees of fragmentation, and the strength of centre-of-government instruments (Corbett, 2021; OECD, 2024). Where institutional capacity is strong, executive support systems can standardize information flows, reduce coordination transaction costs, and ensure coherent sequencing of executive engagements; where it is weak, executive tasks are more vulnerable to siloed action, inconsistent compliance, and ad hoc coordination. Importantly, coordination quality is not simply a managerial preference; it is an institutional outcome produced by rules, authority structures, and dedicated coordination resources that allow executive support functions to operate predictably (Kårtvedt, 2024). For this review, these arguments establish institutional capacity as a necessary bridge between administrative capacity and executive service delivery, with executive coordination functioning as the primary mechanism through which institutional capacity is expressed.

This institutional lens is directly applicable to government protocol functions as a specialized domain of executive service delivery, because protocol work is inherently inter-institutional: it requires alignment among executive offices, security units, sectoral agencies, and external actors, while simultaneously upholding formal rules and symbolic order. When institutional capacity is robust, protocol functions benefit from clear jurisdictional boundaries, standardized procedures, stable staffing resources, and authoritative coordination channels—conditions that improve reliability, reduce role conflict, and reinforce executive legitimacy through consistent state representation (Christensen & Lægheid, 2022; OECD, 2024). Conversely, weak institutional capacity can generate fragmented authority, overlapping mandates, and inconsistent interpretations of procedural rules, which undermine protocol reliability and, by extension, the credibility and efficiency of executive action. These capacity deficits can also spill over into broader governance performance by amplifying coordination failures and creating reputational risks in high-visibility executive events. Conceptually, positioning protocol functions within institutional capacity clarifies that protocol is not merely “ceremonial work,” but a governance mechanism through which executive authority is coordinated and institutionalized. This framing also prepares the analytical ground for the Results and Discussion sections, where protocol-related findings can be mapped across capacity elements (structure, rules, resources, coordination instruments) and linked back to Administrative Capacity Theory’s multi-level logic.

### **Street-Level Bureaucracy and Public Service Professionalism in Executive Service Delivery**

Street-level bureaucracy (SLB) provides a critical analytical lens for understanding how administrative capacity is enacted through the everyday behavior of public officials who operate at the interface between formal rules and situational demands. Originally developed to explain frontline service delivery, the SLB perspective has been progressively extended to encompass internal executive services, where bureaucrats exercise discretion under conditions

of time pressure, political sensitivity, and incomplete information (Hupe, 2021; Tummers & Bekkers, 2022). In executive service delivery, including government protocol functions, officials routinely translate abstract rules into concrete actions that shape executive interactions, institutional representation, and coordination outcomes. This discretionary space is not a deviation from governance but a constitutive feature of administrative capacity, as it enables adaptability and continuity in complex executive environments. From an administrative capacity standpoint, SLB emphasizes that capacity is not solely embedded in structures or procedures, but also in the judgment, situational awareness, and coping strategies of individual bureaucrats. Consequently, the effectiveness of protocol services depends heavily on how street-level actors balance formal compliance with contextual responsiveness, making SLB a key conceptual bridge between individual-level capacity and organizational performance in executive support systems.

Public service professionalism complements the SLB perspective by foregrounding the normative and competence-based foundations that shape bureaucratic discretion. Professionalism in public administration is commonly associated with specialized knowledge, ethical standards, role identity, and commitment to public values, which together constrain and guide discretionary behavior (Noordegraaf, 2021; Evetts, 2022). In executive service delivery, professionalism is particularly salient because protocol officers act as custodians of institutional symbols and representatives of state authority. Their conduct directly affects perceptions of executive legitimacy, procedural integrity, and administrative reliability. The literature suggests that professional norms and ethical frameworks function as “soft controls” that stabilize executive services when formal rules are insufficient or ambiguous (Van der Wal, 2023). From this perspective, professionalism enhances administrative capacity by aligning individual discretion with organizational and institutional objectives. Rather than undermining accountability, professional judgment—when embedded in strong normative frameworks—enables protocol officials to manage uncertainty, prevent coordination failures, and maintain consistency across executive engagements. Thus, professionalism transforms discretionary space from a source of variability into a resource for adaptive and credible executive service delivery.

Integrating street-level bureaucracy and public service professionalism within Administrative Capacity Theory clarifies how individual-level capacities aggregate into organizational and system-level performance in executive contexts. Administrative capacity frameworks increasingly recognize that capacity emerges from the interaction between competent actors, supportive organizational arrangements, and enabling institutional environments (Andrews et al., 2021; Lodge & Wegrich, 2023). In government protocol functions, this interaction is especially pronounced: individual knowledge and ethical judgment inform discretionary decisions; organizational routines provide coordination scaffolding; and institutional norms confer legitimacy on executive actions. Weaknesses at the individual level—such as insufficient training or unclear professional standards—can amplify discretionary inconsistencies and erode executive coordination, even when formal structures are in place. Conversely, strong professional capacity can partially compensate for organizational or institutional gaps by sustaining reliability and trust in executive services. This synthesis positions SLB and professionalism not as peripheral theories, but as integral components of administrative capacity in executive service delivery. It also establishes a clear analytical pathway for the Results and Discussion sections, where protocol-related findings can be interpreted as outcomes of the dynamic interplay between discretion, professional norms, and capacity-building arrangements within executive governance systems.

### 3. Materials and Method

This study employs a narrative–integrative literature review approach, which is particularly appropriate for synthesizing fragmented theoretical and empirical insights across multiple strands of public administration and governance scholarship. Unlike systematic reviews or meta-analyses that prioritize exhaustive coverage or quantitative aggregation, the narrative–integrative review is designed to advance conceptual understanding, theory integration, and analytical reinterpretation of existing knowledge (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). In the context of this study, this approach enables a structured synthesis of literature on administrative capacity, executive service delivery, and government protocol functions, which are dispersed across different theoretical traditions and empirical settings. The review is guided by Administrative Capacity Theory as the core analytical framework, complemented by executive service delivery, institutional capacity, street-level bureaucracy, public service

professionalism, and governance coordination perspectives. These theories function not as variables to be tested but as interpretive lenses that structure the selection, coding, and synthesis of the literature, ensuring conceptual coherence throughout the review.

The literature search was conducted using multiple academic databases to ensure breadth, rigor, and disciplinary relevance. The primary databases included Scopus, Web of Science, and DOAJ, selected for their comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in public administration, public management, and governance studies. Google Scholar was used as a supplementary source to capture additional peer-reviewed articles not fully indexed in the primary databases. The search strategy relied on a combination of keywords and Boolean operators to reflect the multidimensional focus of the study. Core search terms included “administrative capacity,” “executive service delivery,” “executive support,” “government protocol,” “institutional capacity,” “street-level bureaucracy,” “public service professionalism,” and “governance.” These terms were combined using Boolean operators (AND/OR) and iteratively refined to balance conceptual inclusiveness with analytical relevance. The review was restricted to journal articles published within the last five years, ensuring that the synthesis reflects contemporary debates and recent theoretical developments in administrative capacity and executive governance.

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to enhance transparency and analytical rigor. Included studies were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in reputable academic outlets that explicitly addressed administrative capacity, executive service delivery, executive coordination, or closely related governance mechanisms. Articles were required to demonstrate clear conceptual or empirical relevance to public sector administration and governance. Excluded from the review were non-academic publications, practitioner reports, policy briefs, opinion pieces, and studies lacking theoretical grounding or direct relevance to the review focus. The selection process followed a multi-stage screening procedure, beginning with title screening to remove irrelevant records, followed by abstract screening to assess conceptual alignment, and concluding with full-text assessment to evaluate analytical depth and contribution. Selected articles were then subjected to thematic analysis and conceptual synthesis, with findings coded and grouped according to three analytical dimensions of administrative capacity: individual-level capacity (competence, discretion, professionalism), organizational-level capacity (structures, routines, coordination mechanisms), and system-level capacity (institutional arrangements, governance networks). This analytical structure ensured alignment between theory, method, and interpretation, providing a coherent foundation for the Results and Discussion sections.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### Results

The reviewed literature reveals a consistent recognition of administrative capacity as a foundational determinant of effective executive service delivery, although the specific articulation of this relationship varies across theoretical traditions and empirical contexts. Across studies in public administration and governance, administrative capacity is commonly associated with the ability of public organizations to provide reliable, timely, and coordinated support to executive leadership, particularly in complex and politically sensitive environments (Andrews et al., 2021; Christensen & Lægheid, 2022). A dominant pattern in the literature is the shift from viewing executive support as a peripheral administrative function toward recognizing it as a central governance mechanism that conditions executive effectiveness. Studies emphasize that executive service delivery depends not only on political authority but also on administrative systems capable of managing coordination, information flows, and symbolic representation (Peters, 2021; Lodge & Wegrich, 2023). Within this body of work, protocol-related activities are frequently mentioned indirectly—embedded in discussions of coordination, executive offices, or centre-of-government arrangements—rather than as a standalone analytical category. Nonetheless, the literature consistently links weaknesses in administrative capacity to disruptions in executive support, including fragmented coordination, procedural inconsistency, and reputational risks during high-level governmental engagements. These findings establish a general empirical–conceptual pattern: administrative capacity functions as an enabling condition for executive service delivery, shaping how effectively executive roles are supported and enacted.

A second major finding concerns the classification of administrative capacity into individual-, organizational-, and system-level dimensions, which appears as a recurring

analytical framework across the reviewed studies. At the individual level, the literature highlights competencies, professional judgment, experiential knowledge, and ethical orientation of public officials involved in executive support roles (Wu et al., 2022; Noordegraaf, 2021). Studies indicate that individual capacity is particularly salient in executive contexts characterized by uncertainty and time pressure, where discretion and situational awareness are required. At the organizational level, administrative capacity is associated with formal structures, standard operating procedures, coordination routines, and managerial systems that enable collective action and reduce ambiguity (Andrews et al., 2021). Organizational capacity is frequently linked to the reliability and predictability of executive services, including agenda management and inter-unit coordination. At the system level, capacity is conceptualized in terms of institutional arrangements, governance norms, and inter-organizational relationships that shape authority distribution and coordination across the public sector (Lodge & Wegrich, 2023; OECD, 2024). Across the literature, these dimensions are treated as analytically distinct but empirically interdependent, with studies consistently reporting that deficiencies at one level tend to amplify weaknesses at others. This multi-level classification provides a dominant organizing principle for understanding how administrative capacity manifests in executive service delivery.

The literature further demonstrates variation in how administrative capacity and executive service delivery are conceptualized across institutional contexts, particularly in comparative and multi-level governance studies. Research conducted in centralized administrative systems tends to emphasize formal coordination mechanisms and centre-of-government arrangements as primary capacity drivers (Christensen & Lægveid, 2022). In contrast, studies focusing on decentralized or federal systems highlight the challenges of horizontal and vertical coordination, where executive support functions must navigate fragmented authority and overlapping mandates (Kuhlmann & Wayenberg, 2023). At the subnational level, including regional and local governments, the literature frequently reports capacity constraints related to staffing, professionalization, and institutional clarity, which affect the consistency of executive service delivery (Cepiku et al., 2021). Despite these contextual differences, a common finding is that executive service delivery is most effective when institutional roles are clearly defined and supported by stable coordination mechanisms. Protocol functions are often discussed in these studies as part of broader coordination challenges, particularly in multi-actor settings involving security agencies, sectoral departments, and external stakeholders. These variations suggest that while administrative capacity is a universal concern, its configuration and operationalization in executive service delivery are highly context-dependent.

A recurring theme in the reviewed literature is the centrality of coordination as a core function of executive service delivery, closely linked to administrative and institutional capacity. Studies consistently report that executive support systems operate as coordination hubs, aligning organizational actors and sequencing executive activities to ensure coherence and continuity (Ansell et al., 2022; Kårtvedt, 2024). Coordination is described as both a structural and procedural outcome, shaped by formal mandates, informal practices, and resource availability. Within this context, protocol functions are frequently identified as coordination-intensive activities, requiring alignment among executive offices, line agencies, security units, and external actors. The literature documents that effective protocol arrangements contribute to reduced transaction costs, clearer role expectations, and smoother execution of executive engagements. Conversely, weak coordination capacity is associated with duplicated efforts, miscommunication, and procedural breakdowns during high-profile events. Importantly, these findings are reported descriptively across studies without normative judgment, indicating a broad empirical consensus that coordination capacity is a critical dimension of executive service delivery and that protocol functions are embedded within this coordination landscape.

Another set of findings relates to the role of professionalism and discretion in executive service delivery, particularly as discussed in street-level bureaucracy and public service professionalism literature. Studies extending street-level bureaucracy beyond citizen-facing services highlight that executive support officials exercise discretion in interpreting rules, managing contingencies, and responding to situational demands (Hupe, 2021; Tummers & Bekkers, 2022). In executive contexts, discretion is not portrayed as rule-breaking but as a necessary operational feature, enabling continuity under dynamic conditions. Public service professionalism literature complements this view by emphasizing the role of professional norms, ethical standards, and role identity in guiding discretionary behavior (Evetts, 2022; Van der Wal, 2023). Within the reviewed studies, protocol officers are often implicitly

described as professional actors whose conduct directly affects perceptions of executive legitimacy and institutional credibility. Although protocol functions are rarely the explicit focus of these studies, findings consistently associate professional competence and ethical orientation with higher reliability and consistency in executive support services. These findings underscore the individual-level capacity dimensions that underpin executive service delivery without advancing evaluative claims.

The reviewed literature also identifies institutional capacity as a determinant of consistency and integration in executive service delivery, particularly in governance-oriented studies. Institutional capacity is described in terms of stable rules, clear mandates, resource allocation, and formalized coordination mechanisms that enable collective action across organizational boundaries (Scott, 2021; OECD, 2024). Studies report that strong institutional capacity supports executive offices in maintaining procedural consistency, managing symbolic representation, and coordinating across sectors. In contrast, institutional weaknesses—such as overlapping authority, ambiguous mandates, or insufficient coordination instruments—are associated with fragmented executive support and increased reliance on ad hoc arrangements. Protocol functions appear in this literature as institutionalized practices that reflect the strength or weakness of governance arrangements. Where institutional capacity is robust, protocol services are standardized and predictable; where it is weak, protocol practices are more variable and vulnerable to disruption. These findings highlight institutional capacity as a contextual condition shaping executive service delivery outcomes, including protocol performance.

Finally, the synthesis reveals convergent findings regarding the contribution of protocol functions to executive legitimacy and governance stability, albeit often implicitly. Across governance and executive studies, symbolic practices and formalized interactions are identified as mechanisms through which authority and legitimacy are enacted (Rhodes, 2021; Hajer, 2022). Protocol functions are described as organizing these practices, ensuring that executive actions are publicly recognizable as authoritative and procedurally valid. The literature reports that failures in protocol arrangements can have disproportionate reputational effects, affecting public perceptions of executive competence and institutional order. Conversely, well-functioning protocol services are associated with smooth executive engagements and reinforced institutional credibility. Although these observations are not always framed explicitly as findings about protocol functions, they recur across multiple studies, indicating a shared empirical understanding of protocol's role in executive service delivery. Collectively, these results establish a descriptive foundation for subsequent interpretive analysis, demonstrating how administrative capacity manifests across levels and contexts in shaping executive support and protocol functions.

## Discussion

The findings synthesized in this literature review underscore the analytical usefulness of Administrative Capacity Theory as a unifying framework for understanding executive service delivery and, more specifically, government protocol functions. Across the reviewed studies, administrative capacity consistently emerges not as a static organizational attribute but as a relational and multi-level construct that shapes how executive authority is supported, coordinated, and enacted in practice. This observation reinforces contemporary capacity scholarship that emphasizes capacity as an enabling condition for governance rather than a narrow measure of organizational efficiency (Andrews et al., 2021; Lodge & Wegrich, 2023). When interpreted through this lens, protocol functions are no longer peripheral or ceremonial activities; instead, they constitute a strategic interface where individual competence, organizational routines, and institutional arrangements converge to sustain executive performance. The discussion thus repositions protocol work as an empirical manifestation of administrative capacity in executive governance contexts, aligning with broader calls to expand capacity analysis beyond policy implementation and frontline service delivery.

At the individual level, the Results highlight the centrality of professional competence, discretion, and ethical judgment in executive service delivery, findings that resonate strongly with both Street-Level Bureaucracy and Public Service Professionalism theories. While SLB traditionally focuses on citizen-facing services, its extension to executive support contexts reveals that discretion remains indispensable even in highly formalized administrative environments (Hupe, 2021; Tummers & Bekkers, 2022). Protocol officers, like other street-level actors, must routinely interpret rules, anticipate contingencies, and make rapid decisions under political and symbolic pressure. From an administrative capacity perspective, this

discretion is not a liability but a critical resource, provided it is embedded within strong professional norms and ethical frameworks. Public service professionalism literature clarifies how such norms function as internalized controls that align individual behavior with institutional objectives (Noordegraaf, 2021; Van der Wal, 2023). The interaction between discretion and professionalism thus explains why individual capacity plays a disproportionate role in executive service delivery: failures at this level can quickly translate into reputational risks for executive leaders, while strong professional judgment can stabilize executive support even when organizational or institutional conditions are imperfect.

At the organizational level, the literature consistently points to the importance of formal structures, standard operating procedures, and coordination routines in shaping the reliability of executive service delivery. Interpreted through Administrative Capacity Theory, these organizational elements function as capacity scaffolding, transforming individual competence into collective performance (Andrews et al., 2021). The Results show that executive support systems—including protocol units—are most effective when roles are clearly defined, coordination responsibilities are institutionalized, and communication routines are routinized rather than improvised. This finding aligns with Executive Service Delivery and Executive Support theories, which emphasize that executive effectiveness depends on administrative systems capable of structuring attention, sequencing activities, and managing interdependencies (Christensen & Lægread, 2022). However, the literature also reveals tensions at this level: overly rigid procedures can constrain necessary discretion, while weak organizational arrangements can overburden individuals. This tension suggests that administrative capacity at the organizational level must balance standardization with flexibility, a balance that is particularly salient in protocol work where symbolic precision and situational responsiveness are equally required.

The system-level dimension of administrative capacity emerges as a critical contextual condition shaping executive service delivery, especially in governance systems characterized by fragmentation and multi-level coordination. Institutional Capacity and Governance studies highlight how rules, mandates, and coordination instruments at the system level enable—or constrain—executive support functions (Scott, 2021; OECD, 2024). The Results indicate that protocol functions are deeply embedded in these institutional arrangements, as they require alignment across executive offices, line agencies, security units, and external stakeholders. Weak institutional capacity—manifested in overlapping mandates or ambiguous authority—tends to generate coordination failures that undermine executive service delivery. Conversely, strong institutional capacity stabilizes protocol practices by clarifying jurisdiction, allocating resources, and legitimizing coordination roles. From a governance perspective, this finding reinforces the argument that executive coordination is not merely a managerial challenge but an institutional outcome, shaped by the design and performance of governance architectures (Ansell et al., 2022). Administrative Capacity Theory thus gains explanatory depth by incorporating institutional capacity as the system-level condition through which executive support functions operate.

The integration of Governance and Executive Coordination theories further illuminates the role of protocol functions as boundary-spanning mechanisms within complex governance networks. The Results show that coordination is a recurring theme across the literature, consistently associated with executive service delivery effectiveness. Governance scholarship conceptualizes coordination as both a structural and relational process, involving formal instruments and informal practices that align actors across organizational boundaries (Pierre & Peters, 2023). Protocol functions exemplify this duality: they rely on formal rules and schedules, yet also depend on relational skills and informal negotiation to synchronize diverse actors. Interpreting these findings through an administrative capacity lens reveals that coordination capacity is not reducible to organizational design alone but emerges from the interaction of individual competence, organizational routines, and institutional authority. This interpretation helps reconcile differing emphases in the literature, where some studies privilege structural solutions while others highlight behavioral or relational factors. Administrative Capacity Theory provides a synthetic framework that accommodates both perspectives without collapsing them into a single explanatory variable.

The discussion also exposes conceptual tensions within the existing literature. While administrative capacity studies increasingly adopt multi-dimensional frameworks, executive governance research often treats support functions in aggregate terms, without distinguishing among specific practices such as protocol services. Conversely, governance studies that focus on symbolic authority and everyday practices rarely engage explicitly with capacity concepts. This disconnect limits cumulative knowledge development and obscures how capacity is

operationalized in executive contexts. By synthesizing these strands, this review demonstrates that protocol functions are analytically valuable precisely because they sit at the intersection of these literatures. They reveal how capacity is enacted through symbolic, coordinative, and professional practices that are central to executive governance but underrepresented in capacity research. This insight addresses the research gap identified earlier and extends the conceptual reach of Administrative Capacity Theory.

From a practical and policy perspective, the findings suggest several implications for strengthening executive service delivery. First, capacity-building initiatives should move beyond generic training and address the specific competence and ethical demands of executive support roles, particularly protocol functions. Second, organizational reforms should prioritize clarity of roles, coordination routines, and professional standards within executive support systems. Third, institutional reforms at the system level—such as strengthening centre-of-government coordination mechanisms—are essential for stabilizing protocol practices in multi-level governance contexts. Importantly, these implications are not prescriptive recommendations but logical extensions of the synthesized findings, demonstrating how administrative capacity operates across levels to shape executive service delivery outcomes.

Finally, the discussion situates this review within the broader discourse of public administration by highlighting its conceptual contribution. By explicitly integrating protocol functions into Administrative Capacity Theory, the article expands the analytical scope of capacity studies and bridges gaps between administrative capacity, executive governance, and professionalism literatures. At the same time, the discussion acknowledges limitations in the existing literature, including the scarcity of protocol-focused empirical studies and the dominance of Western governance contexts. These limitations point to opportunities for future research, including comparative studies, sector-specific analyses, and empirical examinations of protocol capacity in diverse institutional settings. Collectively, the Discussion establishes a coherent interpretive foundation for the subsequent Comparison and Conclusion sections, demonstrating how the synthesized results advance theory and inform governance practice.

## 5. Comparison

When positioned against the state of the art in Administrative Capacity Theory, this literature review departs from dominant emphases in prior scholarship by shifting analytical attention from policy implementation and frontline service delivery toward internal executive services as a core site of capacity enactment. Seminal and contemporary studies conceptualize administrative capacity primarily through dimensions of organizational performance, policy competence, and state problem-solving ability, often operationalized in relation to program outcomes or service delivery to citizens (Andrews et al., 2021; Lodge & Wegrich, 2023). While these works provide robust multi-dimensional frameworks, they typically leave executive support functions analytically implicit or subsumed under broad coordination mechanisms. In contrast, the present review explicitly foregrounds executive service delivery, arguing that administrative capacity is equally constituted through the quality of internal services that enable executive leadership. By repositioning capacity at the executive-support interface, this article extends existing capacity frameworks without displacing them, thereby complementing rather than contradicting the prevailing analytical canon.

Compared with literature on executive service delivery and executive support systems, this review diverges in both scope and conceptual integration. Existing studies in this area focus predominantly on executive leadership, centre-of-government arrangements, and coordination instruments designed to manage policy complexity (Christensen & Lægreid, 2022; Peters, 2021). These analyses tend to conceptualize executive support at an aggregate level, emphasizing institutional design and coordination outcomes rather than the micro-level administrative practices that sustain them. Government protocol functions, when mentioned at all, are treated as operational details rather than analytical objects. The present review differs by isolating protocol functions as a distinct and theoretically meaningful component of executive service delivery. This focus enables a finer-grained analysis of how executive support is enacted through administrative, symbolic, and coordinative practices, thereby bridging a gap between macro-level executive governance studies and micro-level administrative behavior research.

From a governance studies perspective, this article also occupies a distinctive position. Governance scholarship has extensively examined coordination, networks, and symbolic

authority in modern states, highlighting how executive action is embedded in relational and institutional contexts (Ansell et al., 2022; Pierre & Peters, 2023; Rhodes, 2021). However, much of this literature privileges political leadership, inter-organizational networks, or discursive practices, often without systematically engaging administrative capacity as an explanatory framework. Conversely, administrative capacity studies have not fully incorporated governance insights on symbolism and everyday practices. This review contributes by synthesizing these strands, demonstrating how protocol functions operate as governance mechanisms through which authority, legitimacy, and coordination are practically realized. In doing so, it offers a conceptual bridge between capacity-based explanations and governance-oriented analyses, which have largely evolved in parallel.

A further point of comparison concerns levels of analysis. Many existing studies concentrate on a single analytical level—either individual competence (e.g., professionalism and discretion), organizational design, or system-level governance arrangements. Even when multi-level frameworks are proposed, empirical applications often privilege one level over others. This review advances the literature by systematically mapping protocol functions across individual, organizational, and system-level dimensions of administrative capacity, showing how these levels interact in executive service delivery contexts. For example, street-level bureaucracy and public service professionalism literature emphasizes discretion and ethical judgment (Hupe, 2021; Noordegraaf, 2021), while institutional capacity research highlights rules and coordination structures (Scott, 2021). The present article integrates these perspectives, demonstrating that protocol effectiveness cannot be explained by any single level of capacity, but rather by their dynamic interplay. This integrative approach distinguishes the review from more compartmentalized analyses in the existing literature.

In terms of contextual coverage, prior research on administrative capacity and executive governance has been dominated by studies from Western, centralized, or federal administrative systems, often focusing on national governments or major public sector reforms. While valuable, this focus limits the generalizability of findings to diverse governance contexts, particularly subnational and non-Western settings. Although the present review does not introduce new empirical cases, it explicitly synthesizes literature across different levels of government and institutional arrangements, including regional and local executive contexts (Cepiku et al., 2021; Kuhlmann & Wayenberg, 2023). By doing so, it highlights how protocol functions and executive support capacities are shaped by decentralization, institutional fragmentation, and varying administrative traditions. This comparative sensitivity enhances the conceptual robustness of the review and positions it as a framework applicable across governance systems rather than tied to a single institutional model.

Most importantly, what distinguishes this literature review from prior studies is its explicit conceptualization of government protocol functions as an element of administrative capacity. Existing reviews on administrative capacity rarely mention protocol functions, while studies on protocol tend to be descriptive, normative, or practitioner-oriented, lacking integration with mainstream public administration theory. By embedding protocol functions within Administrative Capacity Theory and executive service delivery frameworks, this article offers a novel synthesis that elevates protocol from a peripheral administrative activity to a strategic governance function. This contribution is not merely additive; it reshapes how executive support is theorized by revealing protocol as a site where administrative capacity, governance coordination, professionalism, and symbolic authority intersect. In this sense, the review advances the literature by expanding the conceptual boundaries of administrative capacity and enriching executive governance scholarship with insights from administrative practice.

## 6. Conclusion

This literature review has demonstrated that administrative capacity constitutes a critical enabling condition for executive service delivery, shaping how executive authority is supported, coordinated, and enacted in contemporary governance systems. Synthesizing findings across administrative capacity, executive support, institutional capacity, street-level bureaucracy, professionalism, and governance studies, the review shows that executive service delivery is not a peripheral administrative function but a core dimension of state capacity. Within this domain, government protocol functions emerge as a strategic component of administrative capacity, operating at the intersection of administrative coordination, symbolic governance, and professional judgment. The reviewed literature consistently indicates that protocol functions contribute to executive effectiveness by stabilizing coordination, ensuring

procedural consistency, and reinforcing institutional legitimacy, particularly in high-visibility and high-stakes executive contexts. These findings confirm that the effectiveness of executive leadership is deeply contingent on the quality of internal administrative support systems, thereby extending prevailing understandings of administrative capacity beyond policy implementation and citizen-facing services.

In relation to the research gap identified in the Introduction, this review achieves its primary objective by reconceptualizing government protocol functions as an integral element of administrative capacity in executive service delivery. While prior studies on administrative capacity and executive governance have largely evolved in parallel, often neglecting protocol functions or treating them implicitly, this article provides an integrative synthesis that connects these strands into a coherent conceptual framework. By mapping protocol functions across individual-, organizational-, and system-level dimensions of administrative capacity, the review clarifies how executive support is produced through the interaction of professional competence, organizational routines, and institutional coordination mechanisms. In doing so, the article makes a theoretical contribution to public administration and governance studies by expanding the analytical scope of Administrative Capacity Theory and by positioning executive support—particularly protocol work—as a meaningful site for understanding how governance capacity is enacted in practice.

From a practical and policy perspective, the findings underscore the importance of capacity-building strategies that explicitly address executive service delivery. Strengthening protocol functions requires investment not only in formal rules and organizational structures, but also in the professional competence, ethical orientation, and discretionary capabilities of public officials. For policymakers and senior administrators, the review highlights the need to view executive support units as strategic governance assets rather than merely operational or ceremonial entities. At the same time, this literature review is subject to limitations, including its reliance on peer-reviewed journal literature, the predominance of studies from Western governance contexts, and the relative scarcity of protocol-specific empirical research. These limitations point to important avenues for future research, such as comparative and subnational studies, empirical investigations of protocol capacity in diverse administrative traditions, and theory-driven analyses linking executive support more explicitly to governance outcomes. Collectively, the review provides a robust conceptual foundation for advancing research and practice on administrative capacity in executive service delivery.

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