International Journal of Law
www.lawjournals.org
ISSN: 2455-2194
Received: 30-01-2026, Accepted: 01-03-2026, Published: 16-03-2026
Volume 12, Issue 1, 2026, Page No. 468-473

Application of information technology in the context of government institutional reform: The case of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract
In the context of ongoing government institutional reform and the growing trend of digital transformation in public administration, the application of information technology (IT) has become an important tool to improve governance efficiency, enhance transparency, and better serve citizens and businesses. As one of the pioneering localities in promoting digital government in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City has actively implemented various IT applications in state management and public service delivery. These efforts have contributed to improving administrative procedures, strengthening coordination among government agencies, and supporting the reform of the state administrative apparatus. Based on the practical experience of Ho Chi Minh City, this article analyzes and evaluates the effectiveness of IT application in the context of government institutional reform. At the same time, it identifies several shortcomings and challenges arising during the implementation process. On that basis, the article proposes a number of solutions to further enhance the effectiveness of IT application in supporting government reform and digital governance in the coming period.

Keywords: Information technology, government institutional reform, digital transformation, digital government, Ho Chi Minh City

Introduction

In recent years, digital transformation has become a major trend in public administration worldwide, creating new opportunities to improve governance efficiency and the quality of public services [1]. The application of information technology (IT) is increasingly recognized as an important instrument for modernizing government operations, enhancing transparency, and strengthening interactions between public authorities and citizens. In many countries, IT has played a crucial role in supporting government institutional reform by simplifying administrative procedures, improving data management, and facilitating more effective decision-making processes [2].

Therby, in Vietnam, the reform of the state administrative apparatus has been closely associated with the development of digital government and the promotion of information technology in public management. National strategies on digital transformation have emphasized the importance of applying IT to enhance administrative efficiency, improve public service delivery, and build a more transparent and accountable government system. Within this broader context, local governments have been encouraged to actively adopt technological solutions to support institutional reform and administrative modernization.

As the largest economic center of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City has been one of the pioneering localities in implementing digital transformation initiatives in public administration. Through the application of IT in administrative procedures, public service platforms, and data management systems, the city has achieved several initial results in improving governance efficiency. This article examines the practical application of information technology in the context of government institutional reform in Ho Chi Minh City, identifies key challenges in the implementation process, and proposes several recommendations to enhance effectiveness in the future.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the application of information technology (IT) in the context of government institutional reform in Ho Chi Minh City. The research primarily relies on secondary data collected from official documents, government reports, academic publications, and policy analyses related to digital transformation, public administration reform, and digital government development in Vietnam. Relevant legal documents, policy strategies, and statistical reports issued by central and local authorities are also reviewed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current situation.

In addition, the study adopts the case study method, with Ho Chi Minh City selected as the research case due to its pioneering role in implementing digital transformation initiatives and promoting the application of information technology in public administration. Through this case study, the research examines practical experiences, implementation processes, and outcomes of IT application in administrative management and public service delivery.

Furthermore, the methods of analysis, synthesis, and comparison are used to evaluate the effectiveness of IT application in supporting government institutional reform. These methods help identify key achievements, existing limitations, and challenges in the implementation process. Based on these findings, the study proposes several policy recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness of information technology application and promoting digital governance in the context of ongoing public administration reform in Vietnam.

Results and discussion

1. Practical Application of Information Technology in Government Institutional Reform in Ho Chi Minh City

Implementation of Digital Infrastructure and Smart Governance Platforms

With the goal that by 2030 Vietnam will rank among the top 50 countries in the world and third in ASEAN in terms of e-government and digital economy, streamlining local government structures and promoting the application of digital technology in state management has become essential. In the context of implementing the two-tier local government model, the application of information technology (IT) is considered a key factor in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of state management as well as improving the quality of services provided to citizens and businesses [3].

Ho Chi Minh City is a pioneer in digital transformation, implementing major policies and orientations of the Party and the State, such as Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW of the Politburo on breakthroughs in the development of science, technology, innovation, and national digital transformation; the National AI Strategy; the National Digital Transformation Program under Decision No. 749/QĐ-TTg; and strategic orientations for building digital government, smart cities, and open data systems.

Specifically, in 2022 the City issued the program "Research and Development of Artificial Intelligence Applications in Ho Chi Minh City for the period 2020–2030," which aims to use AI as a breakthrough tool in urban governance, public administration, and data-driven decision-making.

At the same time, in implementing Directive No. 24/CT-TTg dated September 13, 2025, of the Prime Minister on promoting technological solutions to serve citizens and businesses in association with population data, digital identification, and electronic authentication, the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City has adopted a range of synchronized digital solutions. These solutions include biometric technology in traffic-related procedures, integration of identification data on the VNeID platform, expansion of the "Digital Literacy for All" movement, and the application of digital government management systems.

To enhance the effectiveness of IT utilization, Ho Chi Minh City has also been developing the Smart City Operations Center (IOC), which is expected to become operational during 2025–2026. This center will serve as a hub for collecting, analyzing, and sharing real-time data from departments, agencies, districts, and commune-level authorities, based on the integration and synchronization of existing databases and infrastructure inherited from the IOC centers of Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, and Ba Ria – Vung Tau (prior to administrative consolidation). The IOC system integrates multiple functions, including monitoring public security, traffic, environmental conditions, field feedback from citizens, and public administrative management.

In addition, Ho Chi Minh City has introduced intelligent virtual assistants to support both citizens and public officials. These virtual assistants can answer inquiries, guide administrative procedures, and provide information on legal documents and work schedules. This represents an important step in the transition toward a citizen-centered digital governance model [4].

Currently, Ho Chi Minh City has also been researching and implementing a digital government management platform. This platform helps remind and monitor the processing of documents, directives, and assigned tasks, while also notifying users of tasks requiring their attention.

At the same time, the 1022 Portal system, which receives feedback and recommendations from citizens, has been connected to the IOC, enabling the rapid handling of local issues. According to a report from the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Science and Technology, from the beginning of the year to the end of September 2025, the total number of feedback submissions exceeded 32,000 cases, of which more than 97% were resolved on time, demonstrating the clear efforts of relevant authorities in improving procedures and enhancing the quality of public administrative services. This result indicates that the operational capacity and technological accessibility of the administrative apparatus after institutional restructuring have remained stable and well-functioning [5].

In August 2025, the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City issued Decision No. 2448/2025, approving the project on improving information technology infrastructure and equipment for the City Public Administrative Service Center and commune-level People's Committees, serving the operation of the two-tier government model. According to this project, Ho Chi Minh City aims to build a new-generation network infrastructure that is unified, secure, and high-performing, meeting Level 2 information security standards, and ready to support the development of e-government and smart city models. The system is designed to accommodate at least 500 simultaneous users at the City Public Administrative Service Center and 400–500 users at each ward, commune, or special administrative unit.

Regarding the "Digital Literacy for All" platform, the Municipal Police Department has been assigned to take the lead, in coordination with the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Science and Technology, and the Digital Transformation Center, to review and provide electronic learning materials. In particular, materials related to the implementation of the two-tier government model and the resolution of administrative procedures have been compiled and submitted to the Ministry of Public Security for integration into the "Digital Literacy for All" platform, with completion scheduled for September 2025.

Overall, Ho Chi Minh City has placed significant emphasis on the application of information technology from the early stages of building the two-tier government model. Timely policies and regulatory frameworks have enabled the locality to proactively reform administrative procedures and improve the efficiency of public administration.

Initial Results at Commune and Ward Levels in Ho Chi Minh City and Notable Highlights

According to Notice No. 593/TB-VPCP dated October 31, 2025, issued by the Government Office, the two-tier local government model has gradually entered stable operation, ensuring consistency, coordination, and initial effectiveness. Ho Chi Minh City stands out as a notable example, having streamlined 28.5% of its specialized agencies (from 21 to 15) and reduced 61.9% of commune-level administrative units, while still maintaining the stability of essential public services.

Thanks to thorough preparation and the synchronized application of information technology, clear results have been observed in the reduction and simplification of 298 administrative procedures, saving approximately 1,944 working days, equivalent to more than 15,500 working hours. The electronic document management and administrative system received nearly 12,000 documents within the first two weeks of implementation, demonstrating a significant improvement in administrative processing capacity.

In several wards and communes of Ho Chi Minh City, the application of information technology in the management of the two-tier government model has yielded positive outcomes. For example, in Ban Co Ward, the Ward Public Administrative Service Center has publicly disclosed 356 out of 363 administrative procedures under the authority of the ward-level People's Committee. The system is connected via LAN/WAN/Internet networks to specialized agencies and the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee. The center is equipped with three high-speed transmission lines (Metronet, Viettel, and VNPT), and 100% of officials and civil servants use digital signatures issued by the Government Cipher Committee. From July 1 to the present, the ward has received 4,806 administrative applications under its jurisdiction.

Similarly, in An Nhon Ward, the local government has focused on improving service quality for citizens and promoting administrative procedure reform. As a result, 99.3% of administrative dossiers have been resolved on time or ahead of schedule, placing the ward in the "green zone" on the Government's Institutional Implementation Map. The satisfaction rate of citizens and businesses has reached 18/18 points (100%). The Ward Public Administrative Service Center has publicly listed 369 administrative procedures across 73 sectors using QR codes and has effectively operated the "Digital Citizen Space" model, which provides integrated "5-in-1" services including taxation, postal services, insurance, banking, and technology. This model allows citizens to conveniently access multiple services at a single location [6].

In Tang Nhon Phu Ward, the total number of administrative procedure dossiers received by September 2025 reached 9,958, including 7,321 online submissions, accounting for 73.51% of the total. The ward-level People's Committee has directed the Public Administrative Service Center to regularly monitor and control 100% of administrative dossiers processed through the Administrative Procedure Information System, ensuring compliance with prescribed procedures and timeframes, and regularly reporting on the status of administrative procedure resolution. At the same time, authorities have emphasized strict implementation of the one-stop-shop and interlinked one-stop-shop mechanisms, as well as administrative procedures conducted under the "five on-the-spot" and "five-step" models in the electronic environment [7].

In summary, the practical application of information technology in the management of the two-tier government model in Ho Chi Minh City has produced many significant benefits. The implementation of IT solutions in Ho Chi Minh City is fully aligned with the global trend of "smart governance," which refers to governance based on data integration, digital connectivity, and real-time decision-making, ensuring greater transparency, efficiency, and improved public service delivery for citizens.

Limitations and Challenges in the Implementation Process and Their Causes

Although Ho Chi Minh City has achieved many notable results in building digital government and implementing the two-tier government model, practical implementation still faces numerous difficulties. These limitations stem from various factors, including financial resources, human resources, infrastructure, and existing working habits, all of which affect the effectiveness of technology application in governance and public service delivery. Identifying and analyzing these shortcomings provides an important basis for proposing solutions to improve and promote digital transformation in a coordinated and sustainable manner. Several key challenges in the implementation process are outlined below.

First, limited budget for digital infrastructure investment

One of the fundamental obstacles in implementing digital government and the two-tier government model in Ho Chi Minh City is the insufficient level of investment in digital infrastructure. Although the city has been allocated a large amount of capital for public investment—with more than VND 118.9 trillion allocated in 2025, of which over VND 62.3 trillion (equivalent to 52.4%) had been disbursed as of October 17, 2025—the disbursement rate and investment progress for digitalization projects and IT infrastructure have still been considered slow. This situation directly affects the development of shared infrastructure, open data platforms, IoT systems, artificial intelligence applications, and connectivity between different levels of government.

When infrastructure components such as equipment, transmission networks, or software systems are not fully developed, the implementation of information technology tends to be delayed, resulting in lower-than-expected efficiency.

Moreover, with limited financial resources, Ho Chi Minh City must balance multiple investment priorities such as transportation, environmental protection, smart urban development, and public service provision. As a result, digital investment has not always received proportional priority. The lack of stable financial resources for digital infrastructure also makes it difficult for grassroots-level units (wards and communes)—which often have weaker physical facilities—to implement digital systems in a synchronized manner. In the context of implementing the two-tier government model, changes in administrative boundaries and the consolidation of administrative units further require significant investment in IT infrastructure at the commune level.

Second, data systems remain incomplete and insufficiently integrated

Another major obstacle in the implementation of digital government in Ho Chi Minh City relates to digital data management. At present, national databases have not yet been fully updated and still lack synchronization among different levels of government, agencies, and digital platforms.

Ho Chi Minh City has proposed the development of a shared data system to support digital government and the two-tier local government model. However, difficulties remain due to limited coordination from central ministries and agencies in providing data, online administrative

procedures, and specialized operational software. Information systems in some sectors remain inconsistent, and data have not yet been fully integrated with the National Public Service Portal, creating challenges in information retrieval and administrative dossier processing.

In particular, the integration of data related to civil registration, population management, education, healthcare, and enterprises is still underway. As a result, cross-sectoral and multi-level data integration has not yet reached the desired level. When data systems are not connected or contain duplicated information, administrative authorities face difficulties in processing procedures quickly, making timely decisions, or obtaining standardized information for applying advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and predictive analytics.

For example, if population data are not synchronized between commune-level authorities and provincial-level databases, or with national databases, it becomes difficult to conduct electronic identity verification and provide online public services. Consequently, citizens may still need to submit paper documents or experience longer waiting times, thereby affecting the efficiency of public service delivery [8].

Third, insufficient human resources for digital transformation

The operation of the two-tier government model requires higher levels of technological skills, data governance capacity, information analysis, and the ability to work in digital environments. Although Ho Chi Minh City has planned to train more than 2,000 officials, civil servants, and public employees and establish a specialized workforce of approximately 1,500 personnel dedicated to digital transformation, there remains a gap in implementation capacity at the grassroots level.

Many local officials still lack the habit of working in a digital environment or are not fully proficient in digital tools, data management, and the application of technologies such as artificial intelligence in administrative work and public service delivery.

Another major limitation is that although the number of trained officials has increased, many training programs are short-term and lack depth, resulting in limited practical applicability. Some key IT positions still lack highly qualified personnel, while younger staff with strong technological knowledge are not always assigned tasks that match their capabilities. In addition, overlapping responsibilities and the lack of mechanisms to encourage innovation further hinder the process of enhancing the digital capacity of public officials.

Fourth, limited digital literacy among citizens in using IT for administrative procedures

In several communes of Ho Chi Minh City, a portion of citizens are still unfamiliar with submitting administrative applications online from home. As a result, many people continue to visit Public Administrative Service Centers in person to seek assistance.

Most of these cases occur in areas with more difficult economic conditions and lower levels of digital literacy. Consequently, efforts to promote and disseminate the use of information technology in administrative procedures still face many obstacles. During this process, public officials must continue to guide citizens through operational steps, digitize documents, and assist them in completing online administrative procedures.

Nevertheless, these support activities demonstrate the strong sense of responsibility and dedication of civil servants in serving the public, while also gradually improving citizens' digital skills and encouraging the adoption of online public services among the population.

Solutions to Improve the Effectiveness of Information Technology Application in the Management of the Two-Tier Government Model in Ho Chi Minh City

Firstly, improving the Legal and Policy Framework to Orient IT Application in Association with Decentralization and Delegation of Authority in the Two-Tier Government Model

When Ho Chi Minh City implements the two-tier government model (provincial level – commune level), improving the legal and policy framework toward the application of information technology in association with decentralization and delegation of authority becomes a crucial requirement [9]. The issuance of legal documents that clearly orient IT application will help each level of government properly understand the objectives: not only streamlining the administrative apparatus but also enhancing transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Information technology serves as an important tool for ensuring that decentralization and delegation operate effectively.

For example, electronic document management systems and Level 3 and Level 4 online public services enable commune-level authorities to proactively process administrative dossiers, thereby reducing dependence on the provincial level. This approach facilitates an appropriate distribution of authority while ensuring that each level of government can fully exercise its functions.

Accordingly, it is necessary to review and amend relevant legal documents such as the Law on Organization of Local Government, the Law on Handling Administrative Violations, and the Law on Promulgation of Legal Normative Documents so that they are consistent with the two-tier government model and the requirements of digital transformation. These reforms should aim to:

1. Enhance transparency of authority through digital platforms;
2. Eliminate redundant procedures and shorten administrative processing time; and
3. Facilitate synchronization with national data systems.

In particular, implementing regulations should be issued to guide the application of the Law on Organization of Local Government and the electronic handling of administrative violations. Procedures for issuing legal documents signed with digital signatures and published on national digital platforms should also be clearly regulated, together with provisions defining the responsibilities of authorities in managing data related to digital government.

In addition, to enhance efficiency, Ho Chi Minh City should establish a digital-based decentralization mechanism, whereby transactions and procedures are coded with authorization levels corresponding to each administrative tier. At the same time, an automated monitoring and alert system should be developed to notify authorities when administrative dossiers exceed the jurisdiction of the commune level. Such a mechanism would optimize resource

allocation, ensure transparent governance, and reduce delays or overlaps in administrative procedure processing.

Secondly, strengthening Human Resources and IT Infrastructure to Support Digital Transformation and the Development of Digital Government at the Commune Level

To ensure the effective operation of digital government at the commune level, Ho Chi Minh City needs to focus on synchronizing two key factors: human resources and technological infrastructure.

Regarding human resources, the city should intensify training in digital skills, data governance, electronic administrative software operation, and the application of artificial intelligence (AI) for commune-level officials and civil servants. Policies should be developed to attract, utilize, and provide appropriate incentives for high-quality IT professionals, while also establishing specialized digital transformation teams at each ward and commune. Regular assessment of digital competencies, linked with performance evaluation and promotion criteria, would help foster a working culture based on digital platforms.

Regarding infrastructure, the city should continue investing in upgrading network systems, data centers, electronic equipment, and information security solutions to ensure that all administrative activities are conducted through a unified digital platform. Furthermore, the standardization and integration of administrative management software, online public service systems, and data monitoring systems between the provincial and commune levels are essential. These measures will increase transparency, reduce intermediate administrative procedures, and improve service delivery for citizens and businesses.

Thirdly, improving the National Database System, Especially Commune-Level Data

National databases constitute a crucial foundation for effective decentralization and delegation of authority within the two-tier government model. Information technology resources are essential for supporting, managing, and innovating urban services provided to citizens, particularly in the context of smart city development.

Accordingly, Ho Chi Minh City should coordinate with central ministries and agencies to accelerate the completion and synchronization of national databases on population, land, enterprises, insurance, finance, and urban infrastructure. On this basis, the city should develop a shared local data center directly connected with national data systems, enabling commune-level authorities to easily access, exploit, and process information for management purposes.

Standardizing data formats and applying technologies such as Big Data, artificial intelligence (AI), and blockchain will improve accuracy, security, and predictive analytical capacity. At the same time, the legal framework governing data sharing, exploitation, and protection should be strengthened in order to prevent fragmentation, duplication, or localized data management [10].

Each government agency must assume responsibility for updating and maintaining the quality of the data under its management. When national database systems operate effectively, the two-tier government will possess accurate and timely information for decision-making and for delivering transparent, modern public services.

In particular, each commune should operate an electronic system for receiving, processing, and responding to public service requests, while the provincial level should effectively operate the Intelligent Operations Center (IOC) to monitor implementation quality and evaluate performance through specific indicators. In addition, the city may consider piloting digital twin models in several wards and communes to support smart urban development solutions.

Fourthly, strengthening cybersecurity and the protection of data and personal information

In the process of building a two-tier digital government, cybersecurity and personal data protection represent fundamental requirements for maintaining public trust among citizens and businesses.

Ho Chi Minh City should implement synchronized technical, legal, and governance solutions to ensure the safety of information systems across all levels of government. First, it is necessary to establish a multi-layer security architecture, including data encryption, intelligent firewalls, intrusion detection and prevention systems, and continuous network security monitoring at the city's Security Operations Center (SOC).

In addition, strict implementation of regulations on personal data protection in accordance with the Law on Cybersecurity and Decree No. 13/2023/ND-CP on Personal Data Protection is essential, particularly in the management of population, healthcare, education, and online public service data.

The city should also organize regular cybersecurity incident response exercises and provide information security training for commune-level officials, ensuring that each individual clearly understands their responsibility in protecting digital information systems. When data security is prioritized, Ho Chi Minh City's digital government will operate more stably and transparently, thereby strengthening public trust.

Electronic government can provide local authorities with a new strategic approach to carrying out their tasks more effectively and productively.

Fifthly, establishing Effective Monitoring, Inspection, and Feedback Mechanisms

To ensure the effectiveness of decentralization and IT application in administrative management, Ho Chi Minh City should establish mechanisms for monitoring, inspection, and handling feedback from citizens and businesses regarding the activities of commune-level authorities.

This mechanism should consist of three main components: (i) community monitoring, in which the Vietnam Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations, and citizens are encouraged to participate in evaluating and providing feedback on the quality of public services at the commune level; (ii) professional supervision, whereby the provincial level establishes inspection and audit teams to ensure that commune-level authorities properly exercise their assigned powers and responsibilities, while also promptly identifying and addressing shortcomings; (iii) electronic feedback mechanisms, in which information technology systems integrate functions for receiving complaints and recommendations, measuring the processing time of administrative dossiers, and evaluating the quality of public services. These systems will allow continuous improvement

of administrative procedures and public officials' performance. Such monitoring and feedback mechanisms will not only enhance transparency and accountability in the two-tier government system but also strengthen public trust in the effectiveness of digital governance.

Sixthly, raising awareness and promoting the application of it in government management

To effectively build digital government, raising awareness and promoting the application of information technology among officials, civil servants, and citizens is a critical first step.

Ho Chi Minh City should implement programs to disseminate knowledge about the benefits of digital transformation, emphasizing the role of IT in improving management efficiency, enhancing transparency in administrative procedures, and improving public service quality.

Communication methods should be diversified, including workshops, training programs, and both online and offline communication campaigns. These activities will help officials at all levels fully understand their responsibilities, authority, and opportunities in applying information technology.

At the same time, citizens should be guided on how to use online public services, access digital data, provide feedback, and monitor government activities. Raising awareness will not only create a foundation for successful digital transformation but also foster a digital culture in which all members of society actively participate, thereby improving governance effectiveness and increasing citizens' satisfaction with government services.

Conclusion

The practical application of information technology in Ho Chi Minh City demonstrates that digitalizing administrative management, public services, and data connectivity among different levels of government can produce significant benefits. Information technology enhances transparency, shortens administrative processing time, improves service quality for citizens and businesses, reduces administrative costs, and minimizes errors.

This model opens new approaches for administrative reform and local governance, facilitating the development of digital government, smart cities, and modern management systems based on data and evidence-based decision-making. The synchronized implementation of digital platforms also strengthens the capacity for decision-making, resource management, urban planning, economic development, and social welfare management.

In summary, the application of information technology in Ho Chi Minh City's two-tier government management is not only a management tool but also a strategic step toward realizing digital government, smart cities, and comprehensive administrative reform in Vietnam.

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