Daengku: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Innovation *ISSN: 2775-6165 (online)*
Vol. 6 No. 4 (2026)
https://doi.org/10.35877/454RI.daengku4833

Reconstructing Public Accountability in Evidence Management within Law Enforcement Institutions

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Abstract

This study examines the reconstruction of public accountability in evidence management within law enforcement institutions through a relational–systemic governance perspective. A qualitative case study was conducted at the Public Prosecutor's Office of Palembang. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving prosecutors, evidence officers, administrative personnel, and institutional supervisors directly engaged in evidence management activities. The analysis focused on four accountability dimensions: actors, objects, forums, and interaction mechanisms. The results reveal that accountability practices remain predominantly procedural, hierarchical, and compliance-oriented, emphasizing administrative reporting, inventory control, and procedural conformity. Broader dimensions of accountability, including transparency, public trust, collaborative governance, responsiveness, and organizational learning, have not been fully integrated into institutional practices. The findings also indicate that fragmented coordination among actors, limited participatory accountability forums, and rigid bureaucratic communication mechanisms reduce accountability effectiveness and institutional adaptability. Based on these findings, the study develops the Relational–Systemic Accountability Model Based on Public Service (ARS–PP Model), which integrates collaborative institutional responsibility, public value orientation, participatory accountability forums, and adaptive interaction mechanisms into a unified accountability framework. The study demonstrates that effective accountability in evidence management requires institutional integration, adaptive coordination, collaborative governance, and a stronger public service orientation.

Keywords: public accountability; evidence management; collaborative governance; law enforcement institutions; public service

Received: 15 May 2026 Revised: 1 July 2026 Published: 31 August 2026

1. Introduction

Public accountability has become one of the central pillars in contemporary public administration and governance discourse, particularly in relation to transparency, legitimacy, institutional trust, and public service quality (Birdayanthi et al., 2025; Muslim et al., 2023; Negash & Hassan, 2024). In democratic governance systems, accountability is no longer interpreted merely as bureaucratic compliance with rules and procedures, but as a multidimensional process involving responsibility, answerability, transparency, responsiveness, and institutional learning (Tanchai, 2024). The increasing complexity of governance structures has shifted accountability from a rigid hierarchical mechanism toward a collaborative and relational process involving multiple actors, institutions, and stakeholders (Lægreid & Rykkja, 2022; Lee & Ospina, 2022). Consequently, accountability in public institutions is expected not only to ensure legal conformity but also to create public value and strengthen citizen trust in government institutions (Irvita & Asriani, 2025).

Within law enforcement institutions, accountability occupies a particularly strategic position because these organizations exercise coercive authority on behalf of the state (Zare et al., 2025). The legitimacy of prosecutorial agencies, police organizations, and judicial institutions depends heavily on their ability to demonstrate transparent, fair, and responsible governance practices (Ojeabulu et al., 2025). However, despite extensive studies on accountability in public administration, limited attention has been directed toward accountability in evidence

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management systems within law enforcement institutions (O'Regan et al., 2022). Existing studies generally focus on procedural compliance, chain of custody, forensic procedures, and legal documentation rather than examining evidence management as an integrated system of public accountability (Batista et al., 2023; Khanyile, 2025).

Evidence management constitutes a critical component of criminal justice administration because evidence directly affects legal certainty, judicial integrity, human rights protection, and public trust in law enforcement institutions (Illési, 2025). Improper evidence management may result in procedural injustice, loss of public confidence, institutional corruption, legal disputes, and ineffective prosecution processes (Dandurand, 2014). Therefore, accountability in evidence management should not merely emphasize administrative orderliness, but also include transparency, risk management, information accessibility, institutional responsiveness, and public service orientation (Sarifudin et al., 2024).

Although accountability has been widely discussed in public administration, previous studies have largely examined it from procedural, legal, or organizational perspectives. Likewise, research on evidence management has primarily concentrated on chain of custody, forensic procedures, and administrative compliance, with limited attention to how accountability operates as an integrated governance system. Consequently, empirical evidence explaining the relationships among institutional actors, accountability objects, accountability forums, and interaction mechanisms in evidence management remains limited. This gap suggests the need for a more comprehensive accountability framework capable of addressing the institutional complexity of law enforcement organizations.

Several empirical studies reveal persistent challenges in evidence management practices across law enforcement institutions globally. Research demonstrates that inadequate digital systems, fragmented documentation processes, weak oversight mechanisms, and limited transparency often reduce the effectiveness of evidence management accountability (Saiba et al., 2025). In many developing countries, evidence management systems continue to rely heavily on manual administrative procedures, creating vulnerabilities to data inconsistency, corruption, evidence loss, and delayed legal processes (Lawan & Henttonen, 2024). Moreover, institutional accountability mechanisms often remain hierarchical and procedural rather than adaptive and collaborative (Lægreid & Rykkja, 2022). These conditions indicate a significant gap between normative accountability principles and actual organizational practices (Arnold, 2022).

Despite growing scholarly attention to governance and accountability reform, the conceptualization of accountability in evidence management remains fragmented and underdeveloped. Existing studies rarely integrate relational accountability, collaborative governance, public value orientation, and institutional learning into a unified analytical framework (Lee, 2022). Most research still conceptualizes accountability as a legal-administrative obligation rather than a dynamic ecosystem involving actors, objects, forums, interaction mechanisms, and institutional consequences (Henrard & Duin, 2025). Consequently, there is a pressing need to reconstruct public accountability frameworks capable of addressing contemporary governance challenges within law enforcement institutions (Zare et al., 2025).

This study addresses that gap by reconstructing public accountability in evidence management within law enforcement institutions through a relational–systemic perspective. The study argues that accountability should be understood as an integrated system connecting actors, accountability objects, accountability forums, and interaction mechanisms within an adaptive governance environment. By moving beyond procedural accountability, this research emphasizes public value creation, collaborative governance, institutional legitimacy, and organizational learning as central dimensions of evidence management accountability.

Therefore, this paper contributes to contemporary governance literature by proposing a reconstructed model of public accountability capable of addressing the institutional complexity of evidence management within modern law enforcement systems. The study ultimately positions accountability not merely as a mechanism of bureaucratic control, but as a transformative governance process that strengthens institutional legitimacy, democratic values, and sustainable public service quality.

2. Literature Review

Public accountability has evolved into one of the most debated concepts in governance and public administration studies. Traditionally, accountability was understood as a mechanism of bureaucratic control emphasizing compliance with rules, hierarchical supervision, and legal responsibility (Tu, 2025). However, contemporary governance scholarship recognizes accountability as a multidimensional process involving transparency, responsiveness, answerability, participation, and institutional legitimacy (Prencipe, 2025). This shift reflects broader transformations in public administration from rigid bureaucratic systems toward collaborative governance and networked institutions (Kanon, 2024).

Bovens (2005) defined public accountability as a relationship in which an actor has an obligation to explain and justify conduct to a forum that may question and evaluate the actor's actions. This definition became foundational in accountability studies because it emphasizes relational interactions rather than merely administrative compliance. Nevertheless, scholars argue that accountability in complex governance systems cannot rely solely on hierarchical relationships because public institutions increasingly operate within collaborative and interdependent organizational environments (Schillemans, 2022). Consequently, accountability must be understood as a dynamic process involving multiple actors, overlapping responsibilities, and negotiated institutional practices (Kanon, 2024).

Within law enforcement institutions, accountability possesses unique characteristics due to the coercive authority exercised by state agencies. Police organizations, prosecution offices, and judicial institutions possess significant discretionary power that directly affects civil liberties, legal certainty, and public trust (Deny et al., 2026). Therefore, accountability in law enforcement institutions extends beyond managerial efficiency and includes ethical legitimacy, transparency, procedural justice, and public confidence (Irvita & Asriani, 2025). Research indicates that citizens are more likely to trust legal institutions when they perceive institutional processes as transparent, fair, and accountable (Tešović, 2025).

One crucial but underexplored dimension of accountability in law enforcement institutions concerns evidence management systems. Evidence management refers to the procedures, systems, and institutional mechanisms used to collect, classify, document, store, transfer, analyze, and dispose of legal evidence within criminal justice processes (Vestad, 2025). Effective evidence management is essential because evidence integrity determines the legitimacy of judicial outcomes and procedural fairness (Yong, 2024). Weak evidence management may result in wrongful convictions, procedural delays, corruption, evidence tampering, and declining public trust in legal institutions (Mensah, 2024).

The concept of chain of custody represents one of the primary accountability mechanisms in evidence management systems. Chain of custody refers to documented procedures ensuring that evidence remains authentic, traceable, and protected from alteration throughout judicial processes (Premanand Narasimhan & Dr.N.Kala, 2024). Although chain of custody procedures strengthen procedural accountability, scholars argue that technical compliance alone cannot guarantee institutional accountability because broader governance dimensions such as transparency, interagency coordination, and organizational ethics also influence evidence integrity (Akinsola, 2025). This suggests that accountability in evidence management should not be reduced to administrative documentation but should encompass broader governance relationships and institutional cultures.

The emergence of New Public Management (NPM) during the late twentieth century significantly influenced accountability practices within public organizations. NPM promoted managerial efficiency, performance measurement, and output-based governance mechanisms (Harake, 2025). Under this paradigm, accountability was frequently associated with measurable performance indicators, procedural efficiency, and managerial control (Cäker et al., 2022). Although NPM improved administrative efficiency in some sectors, critics argue that excessive emphasis on performance metrics often weakened democratic accountability and ethical responsibility (Christensen & Lægreid, 2022). In law enforcement contexts, purely managerial accountability may neglect procedural justice, human rights protection, and institutional legitimacy.

As a response to the limitations of NPM, governance scholars introduced the New Public Service (NPS) perspective emphasizing democratic citizenship, public participation, and public value creation (Lebkhachi & Chraibi, 2025). According to NPS theory, public institutions should prioritize serving citizens rather than merely achieving organizational efficiency. Accountability therefore becomes broader, involving democratic responsiveness, ethical governance, and public trust (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). This theoretical perspective is highly relevant to evidence management systems because evidence administration directly influences citizens' legal rights and perceptions of justice.

Public value theory further enriches accountability discourse by emphasizing that public institutions should generate societal value through trust, legitimacy, transparency, and collective welfare (Cruz Dallagnol et al., 2023). In evidence management contexts, public value can be reflected in reliable legal processes, transparent documentation systems, procedural fairness, and protection of citizens' rights. Bryson et al. (2014) argued that public value governance requires collaborative institutional relationships capable of integrating multiple stakeholders and accountability forums. Consequently, accountability in evidence management should involve not only internal institutional supervision but also external oversight mechanisms and public scrutiny.

Collaborative governance theory also provides important insights into accountability reconstruction within law enforcement institutions. Ansell and Gash (Ansell & Gash, 2008) defined collaborative governance as a governing arrangement where public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in collective decision-making processes. Contemporary evidence management systems often require collaboration among police departments, prosecutors, forensic laboratories, courts, correctional institutions, and oversight agencies (Spyropoulos et al., 2023). Such interdependence creates accountability challenges because responsibilities become fragmented across institutional boundaries (Lægreid & Rykkja, 2022). Therefore, accountability frameworks must integrate coordination, information sharing, and adaptive governance mechanisms.

Digital transformation has also reshaped accountability practices within evidence management systems. The adoption of electronic evidence management systems, digital chain-of-custody technologies, and integrated forensic databases has increased administrative efficiency and information accessibility (Abdullah et al., 2025). Digital systems may strengthen accountability through audit trails, data traceability, and real-time monitoring (Maryani et al., 2026). However, technological modernization also creates new governance challenges including cybersecurity risks, data privacy concerns, unequal technological capacity, and institutional resistance to change (Kavanagh, 2019). Consequently, accountability reconstruction must consider technological adaptation alongside institutional and ethical dimensions.

Institutional theory further explains how organizational norms, cultures, and routines shape accountability practices. DiMaggio and Powell (2021) argued that organizations often adopt formal accountability mechanisms to achieve legitimacy rather than substantive governance reform. In many law enforcement institutions, accountability systems may function symbolically while operational practices remain opaque and hierarchical (DeAnna Marie Williams-Smith, 2024). This phenomenon demonstrates that accountability reconstruction requires not only procedural reform but also cultural transformation and organizational learning.

Organizational learning theory emphasizes that accountability should support institutional adaptation, reflection, and continuous improvement (Alderman, 2022). Traditional accountability models frequently focus on blame allocation and sanctions, which may discourage innovation and transparency (Aston et al., 2022). Conversely, learning-oriented accountability encourages dialogue, feedback mechanisms, institutional reflection, and corrective action (Bovens, 2005). In evidence management systems, learning-oriented accountability can improve procedural quality, reduce administrative errors, and strengthen institutional resilience.

Based on the literature above, it can be concluded that accountability in evidence management within law enforcement institutions should be reconstructed beyond procedural and hierarchical perspectives. Existing studies indicate that accountability is increasingly relational, collaborative, adaptive, and value-oriented. Therefore, this study positions accountability as an integrated governance framework connecting institutional transparency, public value creation, collaborative coordination, technological adaptation, and organizational learning within evidence management systems.

3. Research Method and Materials

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to examine accountability practices in evidence management at Kejaksaan Negeri Kota Palembang (Mey, 2022). The research was conducted from December 2025, following the issuance of the research permit from the Doctoral Program in Public Administration, Universitas Sriwijaya, until March 2026. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to understand institutional interactions, accountability mechanisms, governance practices, and organizational dynamics in depth within their natural setting. The case study approach enabled the researcher to explore the complexity of accountability relationships embedded in evidence management processes comprehensively (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The study focused on the management of evidence and confiscated assets within the institutional environment of the Public Prosecutor's Office of Palembang. The research particularly examined the reconstruction of accountability from a formal administrative–procedural orientation toward a relational systemic accountability model oriented to public service quality and public value creation. This approach was considered relevant because accountability in evidence management involves multidimensional interactions among institutional actors, administrative procedures, legal mechanisms, and public service responsibilities.

The research involved nine informants consisting of prosecutors, officers responsible for evidence and confiscated assets management, administrative personnel, and related institutional actors directly involved in evidence management processes. Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on specific criteria, including institutional position, length of professional experience, direct involvement in evidence management activities, authority in decision-making processes, and understanding of accountability mechanisms within the organization. The purposive sampling approach was employed to identify participants who possessed rich, relevant, and in-depth information concerning accountability practices, governance coordination, transparency mechanisms, and operational challenges in evidence management. This technique enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive insights from key institutional actors who were considered capable of explaining the dynamics of accountability implementation within the Public Prosecutor's Office of Palembang (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Table 1. Profile of Research Informants

Code	Position	Institution	Role in Evidence Management
I1	Head of Division	Prosecutor's Office	Policy and supervision
I2	Prosecutor	Criminal Division	Evidence handling
I3	Evidence Officer	Asset and Evidence Unit	Evidence administration
I4	Administrative Staff	Evidence Unit	Documentation
I5	Prosecutor	Criminal Division	Case management
I6	Evidence Officer	Evidence Unit	Storage management
I7	Administrative Officer	Prosecutor's Office	Reporting
I8	Supervisor	Prosecutor's Office	Monitoring
I9	Senior Officer	Prosecutor's Office	Coordination

Table 1 presents the profile of research informants selected through purposive sampling. The informants were chosen based on their institutional roles, professional experience, and direct involvement in evidence management processes. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were utilized to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations regarding accountability practices, institutional coordination, transparency, procedural responsibility, and service quality in evidence management. Interviews also explored the interaction patterns among actors involved in accountability forums and institutional governance processes. Observation techniques were employed to examine actual evidence management practices, including procedures for evidence registration, storage, transfer, supervision, and administrative coordination. Observation enabled the researcher to understand how accountability mechanisms operated in practical institutional contexts rather than solely relying on formal procedural descriptions. Document analysis was conducted on institutional regulations, evidence management reports, administrative records, standard operating procedures, official correspondence, and legal documents related to evidence management and public accountability. Documentary analysis was important for understanding formal accountability structures, institutional governance arrangements, and procedural compliance mechanisms within the organization (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

This study utilized four principal analytical dimensions consisting of actors, objects, forums, and interaction mechanisms of accountability. The actor dimension focused on institutional roles, authority distribution, responsibility patterns, and coordination among organizational actors. The object dimension examined the scope of accountability, including administrative compliance, transparency, legal certainty, risk management, and public service quality. The forum dimension analyzed formal and informal accountability arenas where institutional evaluation, reporting, and legitimacy processes occurred. Meanwhile, the interaction mechanism dimension explored communication patterns, feedback systems, coordination processes, and institutional learning mechanisms among actors and accountability forums.

Data analysis employed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The analysis process was conducted continuously throughout the research process. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents were coded, categorized, interpreted, and synthesized into conceptual themes related to accountability reconstruction in evidence management (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, the study applied triangulation techniques through the comparison of interview data, observational findings, and documentary evidence. Member checking was also conducted by confirming research interpretations with selected informants to ensure interpretive accuracy and contextual appropriateness. In addition, prolonged engagement and continuous observation were employed to strengthen the reliability of the findings. The study also applied a governance and public accountability perspective as the analytical framework (Phil, 2022).

Governance theory was used to examine institutional coordination, interorganizational relationships, and accountability structures, while public accountability theory was utilized to analyze responsibility mechanisms, transparency practices, institutional legitimacy, and public service orientation. These perspectives supported the development of the Relational Systemic Accountability Model Based on Public Service (ARS–PP Model) (Wilson et al., 2024) as the principal outcome of the research. Ethically, the research maintained confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation throughout the study process. All informants were informed regarding the objectives of the research, and informed consent was obtained prior to interviews and observations. Ethical considerations were particularly important because the study involved institutional processes related to evidence management within law enforcement administration.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

This study identified that accountability practices in evidence management at the Public Prosecutor's Office of Palembang were still dominated by procedural and administrative accountability orientations. Accountability mechanisms mainly emphasized formal reporting, inventory administration, and procedural compliance, while aspects related to relational accountability, inter-actor coordination, transparency, and public service quality had not yet been optimally integrated. Based on the findings from interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study revealed four principal dimensions shaping accountability practices in evidence management: actors, objects, forums, and interaction mechanisms. Table 2 summarizes the main findings derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis across the four accountability dimensions examined in this study.

Table 2. Summary of Findings Across Accountability Dimensions

Dimension	Empirical Findings	Main Challenges
Actors	Multiple actors involved in evidence management	Fragmented coordination and overlapping responsibilities
Objects	Accountability focuses on inventory and procedural compliance	Limited public value orientation and transparency
Forums	Accountability forums operate internally	Limited stakeholder participation
Interaction Mechanisms	Communication is formal and hierarchical	Weak feedback and adaptive coordination

4.1.1. Actor Dimension

The actor dimension demonstrated that accountability in evidence management involved multiple institutional actors, including prosecutors, evidence officers, administrative personnel, and institutional leaders. Each actor possessed different responsibilities and authority within the evidence management process. However, the findings showed that coordination among actors frequently depended on hierarchical administrative procedures rather than collaborative institutional mechanisms (Lægreid & Rykkja, 2022).

Several informants explained that evidence management responsibilities were often concentrated on particular officers without sufficient integration among divisions. One prosecutor explained:

"Evidence management is not solely the responsibility of the evidence unit. In practice, coordination still depends on each officer, and communication among divisions is sometimes delayed because every process must follow hierarchical approval." (Informant I2)

Similarly, an evidence officer stated:

"Administrative responsibilities are often overlapping, especially when evidence is transferred between divisions. We still rely on manual coordination rather than an integrated system." (Informant I3)

This condition created overlapping responsibilities, communication gaps, and delays in administrative verification processes. Observation findings further indicated that coordination between legal administration units and evidence management officers was not always supported by integrated information systems. The study also identified that institutional accountability culture remained compliance-oriented. Accountability was generally interpreted as procedural obedience to formal regulations instead of collective responsibility for improving public service quality and institutional transparency.

4.1.2. Object Dimension

The object dimension revealed that accountability objects in evidence management were still narrowly interpreted as physical control and administrative recording of evidence. Institutional practices primarily focused on inventory management, storage documentation, and procedural reporting (Ahmad et al., 2025). However, findings showed that broader accountability components such as transparency, legal certainty, risk management, public trust, and service responsiveness had not yet become central indicators within institutional evaluation systems. Some informants acknowledged that public access to information regarding evidence management remained limited due to administrative constraints and institutional caution. One administrative officer remarked:

"Our accountability is generally measured by whether the documentation is complete and complies with procedures. Public access to information is still very limited because evidence management is considered sensitive." (Informant I4)

Document analysis indicated that standard operating procedures already regulated evidence management stages, including registration, storage, transfer, and destruction of evidence. Nevertheless, implementation practices varied depending on institutional capacity, officer workload, and coordination effectiveness (Omolo Awino, 2025). The findings also identified several operational challenges, including limited storage facilities, administrative workload accumulation, and inconsistencies in documentation practices. These conditions potentially influenced the effectiveness and reliability of accountability implementation.

4.1.3. Forum Dimension

The forum dimension demonstrated that accountability forums mainly operated through internal administrative supervision and hierarchical reporting systems. Accountability evaluation processes were generally conducted through formal reporting mechanisms, periodic supervision, and internal coordination meetings (Mahmoud Saleh & Karia, 2024; Pratama et al., 2025). Although formal accountability forums existed institutionally, public-oriented accountability forums were still limited. Public participation in evaluating evidence management practices was minimal, and institutional communication with external stakeholders remained procedural rather than participatory.

Several informants explained that accountability discussions were often focused on administrative completeness rather than institutional learning and service improvement. One supervisor explained:

"Evaluation meetings mostly discuss administrative completeness and compliance with regulations. Discussions about improving services or involving external stakeholders are still uncommon." (Informant I8)

As a result, accountability forums functioned more as compliance-monitoring mechanisms instead of collaborative governance spaces for organizational improvement. Observation findings further indicated that institutional evaluation processes rarely incorporated systematic feedback from service users or external oversight perspectives. This condition limited opportunities for institutional adaptation and accountability innovation.

4.1.4. Interaction Mechanism Dimension

The interaction mechanism dimension showed that accountability interactions among actors were predominantly formal, bureaucratic, and document-oriented. Communication processes largely depended on written administrative procedures and hierarchical instructions (Planer, 2023). The findings revealed that institutional interaction mechanisms had not yet fully supported adaptive coordination and collaborative accountability practices. In several cases, communication delays occurred because administrative information moved sequentially through bureaucratic levels without integrated coordination systems (Dash & Dixit, 2024).

Informants also explained that institutional feedback mechanisms were relatively weak. Accountability evaluation often emphasized identifying procedural errors rather than developing organizational learning processes and preventive governance mechanisms (Boufounou et al., 2024). A senior institutional officer stated:

"Communication among units follows the organizational hierarchy. Although this maintains procedural order, it sometimes slows coordination and feedback, especially when immediate decisions are required." (Informant I9)

Despite these limitations, the study identified emerging institutional awareness regarding the importance of improving transparency, coordination, and service quality in evidence management. Some organizational actors had begun encouraging digital administration systems and more integrated coordination models to strengthen accountability effectiveness (Kezazy & Hilmi, 2023).

4.1.5. Development of the ARS–PP Accountability Model

Based on the empirical findings, this study formulated the Relational–Systemic Accountability Model Based on Public Service (ARS–PP Model). The model reconstructs accountability from a procedural-administrative orientation toward a relational and systemic governance framework emphasizing institutional collaboration, transparency, adaptive coordination, and public service value. The ARS–PP Model integrates four interrelated dimensions:

a. Institutional actors and collaborative responsibilities;
b. Accountability objects oriented toward public value and service quality;
c. Participatory accountability forums;
d. Adaptive interaction mechanisms supported by coordination and feedback systems.

The model positions accountability not merely as administrative compliance, but as an integrated governance process connecting institutional legitimacy, public trust, organizational learning, and service effectiveness (Prencipe, 2025). To synthesize the empirical findings, this study proposes the Relational–Systemic Accountability Model Based on Public Service (ARS–PP Model) as a reconstructed framework for public accountability in evidence management within law enforcement institutions. The model was developed from qualitative findings obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis, and integrates the four principal dimensions identified in this study, namely actors, objects, accountability forums, and interaction mechanisms. Unlike conventional accountability models that primarily emphasize procedural compliance and hierarchical control, the ARS–PP Model conceptualizes accountability as an integrated and dynamic governance process in which institutional actors interact through participatory accountability forums and adaptive coordination mechanisms to achieve public service objectives. The model further illustrates that effective evidence management accountability ultimately contributes to four strategic outcomes: institutional legitimacy, public trust, organizational learning, and service effectiveness. Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual model.

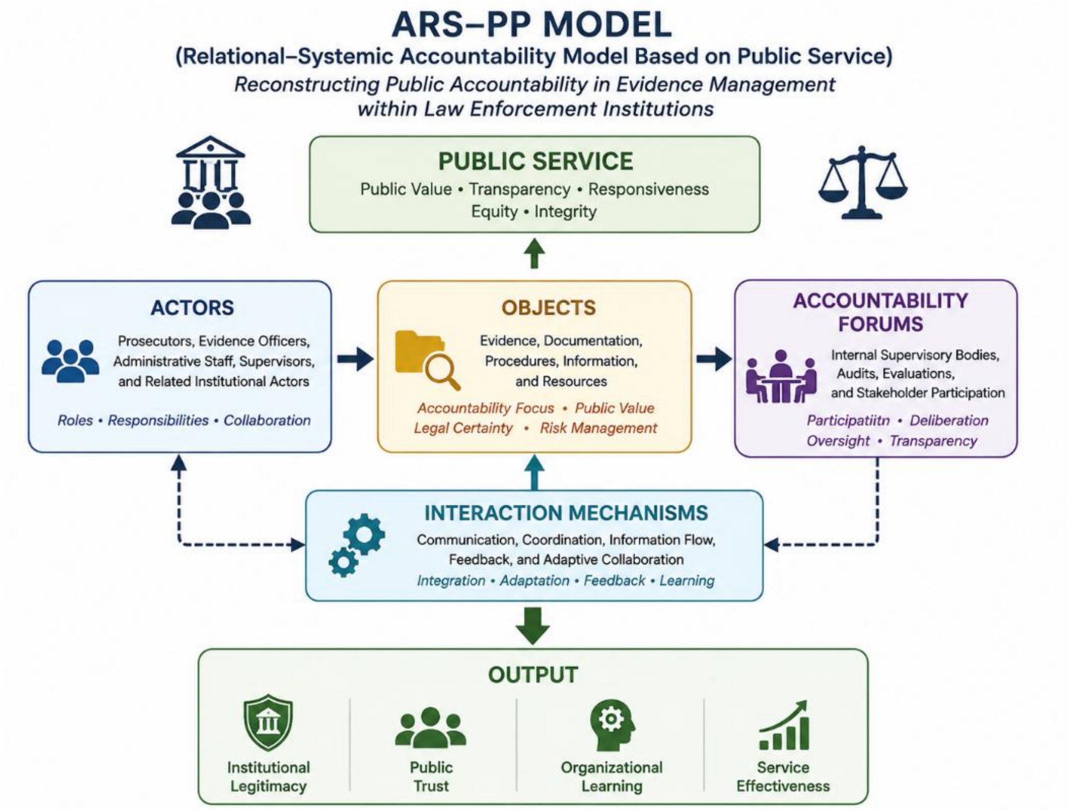

Figure 1. Relational-Systemic Accountability Model Based on Public Service (ARS-PP Model)

4.2. Discssuion

The findings demonstrate that accountability in evidence management within the Public Prosecutor's Office of Palembang remains strongly influenced by conventional bureaucratic governance characterized by hierarchical control, procedural formalism, and compliance-oriented administration. Accountability practices mainly emphasize procedural certainty, inventory documentation, and administrative reporting as indicators of institutional performance. This orientation reflects the sensitive nature of evidence management, which is closely associated with judicial legitimacy, legal certainty, and institutional credibility. Consequently, institutional actors tend to prioritize procedural compliance to minimize legal risks and administrative irregularities. However, although procedural accountability contributes to administrative order and legal protection, the findings indicate that such an approach is insufficient to address contemporary governance demands emphasizing transparency, responsiveness, adaptability, and public-oriented accountability (Bovens, 2005).

The study reveals that accountability within evidence management has not yet fully evolved into relational accountability. Accountability practices were generally interpreted as obligations to fulfill formal procedures and hierarchical instructions rather than as collaborative responsibilities aimed at improving institutional effectiveness and public service quality. This condition reflects the persistence of traditional bureaucratic culture in which institutional performance is measured primarily through procedural compliance rather than governance outcomes (Meier et al., 2004). As a result, accountability mechanisms often function administratively rather than strategically for organizational learning and institutional improvement.

The actor dimension findings indicate that fragmented coordination among institutional actors weakened accountability integration. Evidence management involved prosecutors, evidence custodians, administrative officers, and institutional leaders with distinct authority and responsibilities. Nevertheless, interactions among these actors frequently depended on formal bureaucratic procedures rather than collaborative coordination systems. Accountability responsibilities were often concentrated within certain administrative units without sufficient integration among divisions, creating communication gaps, overlapping responsibilities, and delays in administrative verification processes.

Several findings showed that evidence transfer and documentation verification required lengthy bureaucratic procedures because information circulation depended on sequential hierarchical approvals. These findings confirm that accountability effectiveness depends not only on formal authority structures but also on collaborative governance capacity and institutional interaction quality (Siddiki et al., 2015). Therefore, accountability integration requires adaptive coordination systems, effective communication mechanisms, and collaborative decision-making processes.

The findings also demonstrate that institutional accountability culture remained highly hierarchical. Decision-making authority was centralized within leadership structures, while lower-level officers mainly functioned as administrative implementers. Although hierarchical supervision is necessary for maintaining legal certainty and organizational discipline, excessive dependence on vertical authority structures may reduce institutional flexibility and discourage participatory accountability practices. Organizational actors become more focused on avoiding procedural errors than on developing innovative governance solutions or improving service quality.

The object dimension findings further reveal that accountability in evidence management was interpreted narrowly as physical inventory control and procedural reporting. Existing accountability practices focused mainly on evidence storage, administrative documentation, and chain-of-custody procedures. Although these components are essential because evidence management requires procedural consistency and legal precision, accountability within contemporary public governance should also encompass transparency, public trust, legal protection, responsiveness, and service accessibility (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

The findings indicate that broader governance indicators had not yet become central components within institutional accountability evaluation systems. Institutional performance was measured largely through procedural compliance indicators rather than governance effectiveness or public service outcomes. Consequently, accountability mechanisms tended to prioritize internal administrative security while paying limited attention to external public expectations. This narrow interpretation potentially reduces institutional sensitivity toward public-oriented governance principles because accountability should also ensure information transparency, accessible communication, and effective public service delivery.

Operational challenges also affected accountability implementation. Limited storage facilities, increasing administrative workload, and inconsistencies in documentation procedures created obstacles for evidence management effectiveness. In some cases, evidence accumulation exceeded available storage capacity, thereby increasing the risk of procedural inefficiency and administrative errors. Furthermore, manual documentation systems required repetitive verification processes that consumed institutional resources and time. These findings demonstrate that accountability effectiveness is closely related to institutional capacity, including administrative infrastructure, technological support, and organizational coordination systems.

The forum dimension findings reveal that accountability forums primarily functioned as internal supervisory instruments emphasizing procedural monitoring and hierarchical reporting. Accountability meetings, audits, and evaluations focused mainly on compliance monitoring rather than organizational learning or governance innovation. Public participation within accountability processes remained limited, and communication with external stakeholders was still procedural rather than participatory.

This condition reflects the persistence of inward-looking bureaucratic culture within institutional governance. Contemporary governance increasingly emphasizes participatory accountability because institutional legitimacy depends not only on procedural correctness but also on transparency, responsiveness, and stakeholder trust (Bryson et al., 2014). Public-oriented accountability therefore requires institutions to establish communication channels facilitating dialogue, feedback circulation, and collaborative evaluation between institutions and society.

Similarly, the interaction mechanism findings demonstrate that bureaucratic communication patterns significantly influenced accountability effectiveness. Institutional interactions remained predominantly formal, hierarchical, and document-oriented. Communication processes depended heavily on written administrative instructions, sequential reporting procedures, and bureaucratic approvals. While such mechanisms contribute to procedural order and administrative traceability, excessive rigidity reduced institutional adaptability and coordination efficiency.

Several findings indicate that communication delays frequently emerged because information circulation depended on multiple bureaucratic stages before decisions could be implemented. Consequently, institutional responsiveness weakened, particularly in situations requiring rapid coordination and inter-unit collaboration. These findings suggest that effective accountability requires adaptive interaction mechanisms supporting efficient communication, collaborative coordination, and responsive decision-making processes.

The findings further reveal that institutional feedback mechanisms remained relatively weak. Accountability evaluations focused mainly on identifying procedural errors rather than encouraging organizational learning and governance innovation. As a result, accountability mechanisms functioned more as corrective instruments than as developmental governance processes. This condition highlights the importance of organizational learning within accountability governance because accountability should function not only as a control mechanism but also as a process for institutional adaptation and performance improvement (Baxter et al., 2017; Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2025).

Based on these findings, this study developed the Relational–Systemic Accountability Model Based on Public Service (ARS–PP Model) as an effort to reconstruct accountability within evidence management governance. The model conceptualizes accountability as an integrated governance process connecting institutional actors, accountability objects, participatory forums, interaction mechanisms, and public service objectives simultaneously. Accountability is therefore positioned not merely as an administrative reporting obligation but as a multidimensional governance instrument supporting institutional legitimacy, organizational coordination, public trust, and service effectiveness.

The ARS–PP Model consists of four interconnected dimensions: actors, objects, forums, and interaction mechanisms. The actor dimension emphasizes collaborative institutional responsibility. The object dimension broadens accountability orientation from procedural inventory management toward governance effectiveness and public value creation. The forum dimension highlights participatory accountability spaces facilitating institutional learning and stakeholder engagement. Meanwhile, the interaction mechanism dimension emphasizes adaptive coordination, communication efficiency, and feedback integration within organizational governance.

Practically, the findings imply the need for institutional transformation within evidence management governance. Strengthening accountability requires integrated coordination systems, digital administrative infrastructure, participatory evaluation mechanisms, and adaptive organizational culture. Digital administration systems may improve accountability effectiveness through integrated documentation, faster information circulation, and real-time monitoring. Participatory accountability mechanisms may strengthen institutional transparency and public trust by involving broader stakeholders within evaluation processes.

Overall, the findings confirm that accountability effectiveness in evidence management depends on the integration of institutional actors, accountability objects, participatory forums, and adaptive interaction mechanisms. Without systemic integration, accountability risks remaining symbolic and procedural rather than transformative and service-oriented. Conversely, institutions capable of integrating collaborative coordination, adaptive communication systems, participatory accountability forums, and public-oriented governance are more likely to achieve sustainable institutional legitimacy, governance effectiveness, and public trust in contemporary public administration.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that accountability in evidence management within the Public Prosecutor's Office of Palembang remains predominantly influenced by conventional bureaucratic governance characterized by hierarchical control, procedural formalism, and compliance-oriented administration. Although these mechanisms contribute to legal certainty and procedural order, they have not fully accommodated contemporary public governance demands emphasizing transparency, responsiveness, collaboration, and public service orientation. Accountability practices were still largely interpreted as formal administrative obligations rather than as strategic instruments for institutional learning and governance improvement.

The findings further reveal that fragmented coordination among institutional actors, limited participatory accountability forums, and rigid bureaucratic interaction mechanisms weakened accountability effectiveness. Accountability implementation tended to focus primarily on procedural compliance, inventory control, and administrative reporting while broader dimensions such as public trust, service accessibility, transparency, and adaptive governance received less attention. Consequently, accountability mechanisms risk functioning symbolically and procedurally rather than transformatively and service-oriented.

To address these limitations, this study developed the ARS–PP Model as a relational and systemic accountability framework integrating actors, accountability objects, participatory forums, and adaptive interaction mechanisms. The model emphasizes that accountability effectiveness depends on collaborative governance, integrated institutional coordination, participatory evaluation systems, and continuous organizational learning. Therefore, strengthening accountability in evidence management requires institutional transformation through digital administrative integration, adaptive communication systems, participatory governance mechanisms, and stronger public-oriented service culture. Overall, the study confirms that sustainable accountability can only be achieved when accountability is positioned not merely as procedural compliance but as a multidimensional governance instrument for strengthening institutional legitimacy, organizational effectiveness, and public trust.

Based on these findings, law enforcement institutions are encouraged to strengthen evidence management accountability by implementing integrated digital evidence management systems, enhancing inter-unit coordination, institutionalizing participatory accountability forums, and developing continuous organizational learning mechanisms that support transparency and public service quality. These practical measures are expected to improve accountability effectiveness while reinforcing institutional legitimacy and public trust. Future research should examine the applicability of the ARS–PP Model across multiple prosecutor's offices or other law enforcement institutions using comparative case studies or mixed-method approaches. Such studies would provide broader empirical validation and refine the model for wider implementation in different organizational and governance contexts.

6. Limitation

Although this study provides important empirical insights into public accountability in evidence management, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research employed a single-case qualitative design focusing exclusively on the Public Prosecutor's Office of Palembang. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically generalizable to all law enforcement institutions. Instead, the results provide analytical and contextual insights that may be transferable to institutions with similar organizational characteristics and governance contexts. Second, the study involved a limited number of purposively selected informants whose perspectives represent key institutional actors directly engaged in evidence management. Future studies are encouraged to examine multiple prosecutor's offices or other law enforcement agencies using comparative case studies or mixed-method approaches to further validate and refine the proposed Relational–Systemic Accountability Model Based on Public Service (ARS–PP Model).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the South Sumatra High Prosecutor's Office (Kejaksaan Tinggi Sumatera Selatan) and all related officials for their support, cooperation, and valuable contributions during the research process. Special appreciation is also extended to the Public Prosecutor's Office of Palembang (Kejaksaan Negeri Palembang) and its staff for providing access to data, information, and institutional insights essential to this study. The authors further acknowledge the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sriwijaya, for its academic support and encouragement throughout the completion of this research. Special thanks are also addressed to the Doctoral Program in Public Administration, Universitas Sriwijaya, for providing academic guidance, intellectual resources, and a supportive research environment that contributed significantly to the completion of this study.

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