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Digital Readiness of Local Government Human Resources : An Analysis of Civil Servants' Competency in Digital Public Service Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Bureaucratic reform in Indonesia positions civil servant human resource management (HRM) as a strategic instrument for realizing professional, adaptive, and service-oriented governance. The enactment of Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) represents a paradigmatic shift in civil service management from an administrative approach toward strategic human resource management grounded in merit systems, competency development, performance orientation, and digitalization. This article aims to analyze the policy design and implementation challenges of ASN Law No. 20/2023 in the context of digital bureaucratic reform, using a contextual study of the implementation of Bedas Digital Services (BDS) in Cicalengka District, Bandung Regency. This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, combining public policy analysis with the Edwards III implementation model. The findings reveal a significant gap between national policy design and implementation practices at the frontline service level, particularly with respect to civil servant digital competency readiness, bureaucratic work culture, and service inclusivity for vulnerable groups such as the elderly. This article proposes a competency-based and inclusive civil servant HRM policy model as a conceptual and practical contribution to strengthening the implementation of digital bureaucratic reform at the local government level.

JEL Classification : H83, J45, M12, O33, H11

Introduction

The acceleration of digital transformation in the public sector has become a strategic priority for governments worldwide, including Indonesia. Digital public services are expected to enhance efficiency, transparency, accountability, and accessibility, while improving the overall quality of governance and citizen satisfaction. In the context of local government, digitalization is not merely a technological shift but represents a fundamental transformation of bureaucratic processes, organizational culture, and public sector human resource management. Consequently, the success of digital public service transformation is highly dependent on the readiness and competency of government human resources. Indonesia's digital transformation agenda is closely associated with broader bureaucratic reform initiatives, including the implementation of the Electronic-Based Government System (Sistem Pemerintahan Berbasis Elektronik/SPBE) and the development of Smart

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Governance. Bureaucratic reform places civil servants as key actors in achieving national development objectives and improving public service quality. Bureaucracy is no longer understood solely as an administrative structure that executes procedures, but as a central instrument of the state in generating public value through service delivery, regulation, and policy implementation. Therefore, the quality of public sector human resource management becomes a determining factor in the success of bureaucratic reform, as civil servants function as frontline implementers who directly interact with citizens.

However, empirical evidence indicates that the adoption of digital governance in local governments often encounters structural and human resource constraints. These include limited digital competencies, resistance to organizational change, uneven capacity among civil servants, weak performance management systems, and bureaucratic cultures that remain procedural and less adaptive. Digital transformation in the public sector requires a shift from hierarchical and rigid work patterns toward more agile, data-driven, and collaborative governance models. Yet, without adequate readiness in human resources, digitalization risks being reduced to the mere provision of applications without producing substantive improvements in service quality. Studies emphasize that digital literacy, data literacy, and digital trust are critical factors shaping organizational digital culture and determining government readiness for digital transformation. In the absence of competent and adaptive civil servants, digital public services may inadvertently create service exclusion and inequitable access, particularly for vulnerable groups.

The enactment of Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus signifies a major paradigm shift in Indonesia's public sector human resource management framework. The law transitions the traditional administrative personnel approach toward a strategic human resource management model based on merit systems, competency development, performance orientation, talent management, and digital adaptation. It aims to establish a professional, integrity-driven, and politically neutral civil service while strengthening institutional capacity to respond to the dynamics of modern governance. Nevertheless, regulatory transformation does not automatically translate into changes in organizational practice. Public sector human resource reforms frequently face tensions between modernization demands and entrenched bureaucratic cultures. Civil servants who lack competency readiness and adaptive mindsets tend to maintain conventional work practices, resulting in reforms that remain formalistic rather than internalized within organizational behavior.

This gap between policy design and implementation becomes increasingly evident in the context of digital public service transformation at the local government level. Digital public services require civil servants not only to operate technological systems but also to function as facilitators, mediators, and communicators for citizens. Without strengthening digital competencies and transforming bureaucratic work culture, digitalization risks reinforcing inefficiencies, perpetuating inequalities, and undermining public trust in government services. Despite the strategic importance of human resource readiness, existing studies on digital public service transformation in Indonesia predominantly focus on technological infrastructure, system performance, or citizen satisfaction. Limited scholarly attention has been given to the digital readiness of local government human resources, particularly regarding employee competency readiness shaped by recent public sector human resource policy reforms.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the digital readiness of local government human resources by examining employee competency in the context of digital public service transformation. Using the policy framework of Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus as an analytical foundation, this study explores how competency readiness among local government employees supports or constrains the implementation of digital public services. The analysis is contextualized through the implementation of Bedas Digital Services (BDS) in Cicalengka Subdistrict, Bandung Regency, to examine the gap between national policy aspirations and local-level service practices. By adopting a public policy approach and the Edwards III implementation model, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of competency-based public sector human resource policies and the advancement of inclusive digital public service transformation.

Literature Review

Digital Transformation in Public Services

Digital transformation in the public sector refers to the integration of digital technologies into governmental processes to fundamentally reshape how public services are designed, delivered, and evaluated. Unlike basic digitization, which focuses primarily on converting manual procedures into digital formats, digital

transformation involves organizational restructuring, cultural change, and the reconfiguration of governance mechanisms to enhance public value creation (Johannessen, 2025; Howlett & Mukherjee, 2018). In public administration, digital public service transformation aims to improve efficiency, transparency, responsiveness, and citizen engagement while strengthening accountability and public trust in government institutions. At the local government level, digital transformation plays a critical role, as local governments serve as frontline institutions that directly interact with citizens. However, empirical studies indicate that digital public service initiatives frequently encounter challenges related to organizational readiness, institutional capacity, and human resource limitations (Setiawan, 2021; Rahmayanti & Salomo, 2023). These findings suggest that technology alone is insufficient to ensure successful digital transformation; instead, the readiness and capability of public sector human resources emerge as decisive factors in determining whether digital initiatives translate into meaningful improvements in public service delivery.

Digital Readiness and Human Resource Readiness

Digital readiness refers to the extent to which organizations and individuals are prepared to adopt, implement, and effectively utilize digital technologies. In the public sector, digital readiness encompasses not only technological infrastructure and regulatory frameworks but also organizational culture, leadership commitment, and human resource capacity (Johannessen, 2025). Human resource readiness specifically emphasizes employees' preparedness to operate within digital work environments, including their skills, attitudes, adaptability, and willingness to engage with organizational change. Scholars argue that digital readiness at the individual level is closely associated with competency readiness, particularly in terms of digital literacy, data literacy, problem-solving ability, adaptability, and collaborative capacity (Khamiliyah et al., 2025). Public organizations characterized by low levels of employee readiness often experience resistance to change, underutilization of digital systems, and fragmented service delivery. Consequently, digital readiness should be understood as a socio-organizational condition rather than a purely technical attribute (Bao et al., 2025).

Employee Competency in Public Sector Digital Transformation

In public sector human resource management, competency is commonly defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes required to perform tasks effectively (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2018). In the era of digital governance, employee competency extends beyond technical skills to include digital literacy, data-driven decision-making, innovation capability, communication skills, and service-oriented mindsets (Johannessen, 2025). Civil servants are expected not only to operate digital systems but also to facilitate citizen access, provide guidance, and ensure inclusivity in digital public services (Kanya et al., 2025). Empirical research highlights that employee competency significantly influences the effectiveness and sustainability of digital transformation initiatives. Inadequate competency often results in superficial implementation, where digital platforms exist but fail to generate substantive improvements in service quality (Setiawan, 2021). Conversely, competent and adaptive employees enable public organizations to strategically leverage digital tools, redesign service processes, and respond flexibly to citizen needs (Bao et al., 2025). Therefore, employee competency constitutes a central determinant of digital readiness within government institutions.

Bureaucratic Reform and Public Sector Human Resource Management

Bureaucratic reform represents a systematic effort to improve bureaucratic structures, processes, and organizational culture to ensure that government operates effectively, efficiently, transparently, and in the public interest. From a public policy perspective, bureaucratic reform is understood as a process of institutional change aimed at enhancing state capacity to generate public value through service delivery, regulation, and policy implementation (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2018). Accordingly, reform initiatives emphasize not only procedural simplification but also transformations in mindset and work culture among civil servants to foster professionalism and responsiveness. In Indonesia, bureaucratic reform has become a strategic national agenda to address persistent challenges such as low public service quality, weak accountability, and disparities in bureaucratic capacity across regions. Setiawan (2021) emphasizes that the success of bureaucratic reform is strongly influenced by the quality of public sector human resource management, particularly in performance appraisal and competency development. Without comprehensive reform of human resource management practices, bureaucratic reform risks remaining formalistic and failing to produce tangible improvements in public service outcomes (Suhendra, 2022).

Merit System and Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus

Public sector human resource reform in Indonesia culminated in the enactment of Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus, which reinforces the merit system as the foundational principle governing the entire human resource management cycle. The merit system emphasizes that recruitment, development, promotion, and career advancement should be based on competence, qualifications, and performance rather than political considerations or personal affiliations (Suhendra, 2022). Law Number 20 of 2023 marks a paradigm shift from administrative personnel management toward strategic human resource management grounded in competency-based development, performance orientation, and talent management (Republic of Indonesia, 2023a). The law implicitly recognizes digital competency as a critical requirement for civil servants operating in increasingly digital governance environments. However, as highlighted in public administration studies, regulatory reform does not automatically lead to changes in organizational practice. Institutional capacity, leadership commitment, organizational culture, and employee readiness remain decisive factors in determining whether policy objectives are effectively realized at the implementation level (Rahmayanti & Salomo, 2023; Zolak Poljašević et al., 2025).

Policy Implementation and the Edwards III Model

To analyze the gap between policy formulation and implementation, this study adopts the policy implementation framework proposed by Edwards III. The model identifies four key variables influencing policy implementation: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Within the context of digital public service transformation, employee competency can be conceptualized as a critical resource that shapes implementation effectiveness (Edwards III, 1980). Communication reflects the clarity and consistency of policy objectives related to digital reform, disposition refers to employees' attitudes toward digital change, and bureaucratic structure affects coordination, authority, and flexibility in service delivery. The Edwards III model provides a comprehensive analytical lens for examining how human resource competency readiness interacts with institutional and organizational factors in implementing digital public service policies.

While the Edwards III framework is well established in the general policy implementation literature, its application in this study departs from conventional usage in three respects, which together constitute the analytical novelty of this article. First, rather than treating the four Edwards III variables as a generic implementation checklist, this study positions civil servant digital competency as a construct that operates simultaneously across two dimensions—resources and disposition—thereby illuminating how a single HRM attribute can function both as an enabling asset and as a behavioral determinant of policy success. Second, the model is deliberately extended to incorporate an inclusivity lens attentive to vulnerable citizen groups, such as the elderly, a concern that is largely absent from prior Edwards III applications to e-government and digital infrastructure policy. Third, this study anchors the framework specifically to the immediate post-reform context of Law No. 20/2023, using a very recent national HRM policy shift as the object of analysis rather than a longer-standing digitalization program, which allows the model to capture implementation dynamics at an earlier and more formative stage of policy rollout than most existing applications. Taken together, this competency-centered and inclusivity-attentive adaptation of the Edwards III model, examined through the concrete case of BDS in Cicalengka District, distinguishes the analytical contribution of this study from prior policy implementation research.

Digital Transformation and Inclusive Public Services

Inclusive public service delivery seeks to ensure equitable access to services for all citizens, including vulnerable groups such as the elderly and individuals with limited digital literacy. In the context of digital transformation, inclusivity becomes a critical concern, as unequal access to technology and digital skills may exacerbate service disparities (Branderhorst & Ruijer, 2024). Studies emphasize that inclusive digital public services require civil servants to act not only as system operators but also as facilitators and mediators who assist citizens in navigating digital platforms (Khamiliyah et al., 2025). Consequently, digital competency must encompass not only technical skills but also communication abilities, empathy, and service orientation. In local government digital service initiatives such as Bedas Digital Services (BDS), frontline civil servants play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between technology and citizens, underscoring the importance of human resource quality in achieving inclusive digital transformation.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method. The qualitative approach is chosen because the study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of the transformation of public sector

human resource management (HRM) policies within the framework of bureaucratic reform, particularly through a normative and implementation-oriented analysis of Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus. This approach enables the researcher to explore the meaning of policy provisions, the context of their application, and the dynamics of HRM policy implementation in bureaucratic practice—dimensions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. The descriptive-analytical method is applied to systematically describe the design of public sector HRM policies as regulated in Law Number 20 of 2023, while simultaneously analyzing the challenges of their implementation in the context of bureaucratic reform and digital government transformation. Through this method, the study does not merely describe regulatory content but critically links policy provisions to key concepts discussed in the theoretical framework, including bureaucratic reform, the merit system, digital transformation, and inclusive public service delivery.

The object of this study is public sector human resource management policy as stipulated in Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus, with particular attention to merit system implementation, competency development, performance management, and the role of civil servants in supporting digital bureaucratic transformation. The analytical subject of the study encompasses the implementation of HRM policies in the context of digital public services at the local government level, serving as an illustration of how national policies are operationalized within frontline public service institutions. The study relies exclusively on secondary data, obtained through document analysis and literature review. Secondary data sources include relevant laws and regulations—most notably Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus and Presidential Regulation Number 82 of 2023 on the Acceleration of Digital Transformation and Integration of National Digital Services. In addition, the study draws upon national and international scholarly journals, public policy textbooks, and academic publications addressing bureaucratic reform, public sector HRM, merit systems, digital government transformation, and inclusive public service delivery.

Data collection techniques consist of library research and document analysis. Library research is employed to construct the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, while document analysis is used to examine the substance of HRM policies within Law Number 20 of 2023 and their relevance to bureaucratic reform and digital transformation agendas. This approach is considered appropriate given that the study focuses on public policy analysis and does not involve the collection of primary empirical data. Data analysis is conducted using a public policy analysis approach, integrated with the Edwards III policy implementation model. The Edwards III framework is applied to examine the challenges of HRM policy implementation through four key dimensions: policy communication, availability of resources, disposition or attitudes of policy implementers, and bureaucratic structure. These dimensions serve as analytical tools to explain the gap between the policy design articulated in Law Number 20 of 2023 and its implementation in bureaucratic reform practices, particularly in the context of digital public service transformation.

To ensure the validity and robustness of the analysis, the study applies source triangulation by comparing findings derived from regulatory documents, academic literature, and prior research. This strategy is intended to strengthen the theoretical and empirical foundations of policy interpretation and research conclusions. Furthermore, the analysis is conducted systematically and consistently with the conceptual frameworkdeveloped in the literature review, ensuring coherence between theory, method, and analysis. Through this methodological approach, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of public sector HRM policies under Law Number 20 of 2023, while identifying key implementation challenges and their implications for bureaucratic reform and the improvement of public service quality in Indonesia, particularly within the context of digital governance.

Result and Discussion

Policy Design Analysis of Public Sector Human Resource Management

From a public policy design perspective, Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus represents a significant shift toward a strategic human resource management (SHRM) approach in the Indonesian public sector. Howlett and Mukherjee (2018) argue that strategic HRM policy design positions human resources as organizational assets that must be managed systematically to achieve policy objectives. Within this framework, Law No. 20/2023 moves beyond traditional administrative personnel management by emphasizing talent management, continuous competency development, and performance management based on measurable contributions. A key feature of this policy design is the promotion of digitalized civil servant management through nationally integrated personnel data systems. This orientation aligns with the findings of Adila and

Putri (2024), who suggest that digital HR governance enhances transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making in public organizations.

For local governments, data-driven HR systems are expected to reduce mismatches between organizational needs and employee competencies—an issue widely documented in regional bureaucracies (Wardiyanto et al., 2025). Furthermore, the regulation of talent mobility across institutions and regions reflects an effort to establish a more flexible and adaptive bureaucracy. This policy direction corresponds with the concept of agile bureaucracy, as proposed by Johannessen (2025), which emphasizes flexibility, cross-sector collaboration, and responsiveness to dynamic strategic environments. However, despite its progressive design, this policy framework remains highly dependent on implementation capacity. Without adequate institutional readiness and human resource competence, the policy risks remaining normative rather than transformative.

Policy Implementation Analysis Using the Edwards III Model

The effectiveness of Law No. 20/2023 is strongly influenced by implementation factors, as conceptualized in the Edwards III policy implementation model, which highlights four critical dimensions: communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure (Edwards III, 1980). From a communication perspective, policy implementation studies consistently indicate that complex reforms are often insufficiently understood at the operational level, resulting in inconsistent implementation (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983). In the context of civil servant HRM reform, ambiguity in communicating merit-based systems and digital governance principles may lead employees to continue traditional administrative practices, thereby weakening policy effectiveness. Regarding resources, the implementation of Law No. 20/2023 requires adequate budgetary support, digital infrastructure, and competency development programs. Susanto and Purnamasari (2023) emphasize that the success of Electronic-Based Government Systems (SPBE) and digital public services is highly contingent on the availability of supporting resources, particularly digitally competent human resources. Disparities in fiscal and technological capacity across local governments risk creating uneven implementation outcomes and widening service quality gaps.

Implementer disposition constitutes another crucial dimension. Zolak Poljašević et al. (2025) demonstrate that public sector HRM reforms frequently encounter resistance rooted in entrenched bureaucratic cultures. Civil servants who lack trust in digital systems or fear increased accountability may prefer manual procedures, limiting the institutionalization of digital innovation. Finally, the bureaucratic structure dimension reveals persistent challenges. Hierarchical and rigid organizational arrangements often fail to support the flexibility required for digital governance. Purwanto (2024) identifies outdated standard operating procedures (SOPs) and organizational structures as major barriers to Indonesia's bureaucratic digital transformation, resulting in the coexistence of digital systems and manual mechanisms that undermine efficiency.

Implementation Gaps in Digital Public Services: The Case of BDS in Cicalengka District

The gap between policy design and implementation is evident in the operation of Bedas Digital Services (BDS) in Cicalengka District. Although BDS was introduced as a digital service innovation to enhance access and efficiency, field observations indicate that health services—such as primary healthcare queue management—remain predominantly manual. This situation reflects Bao et al.'s (2025) findings that e-government initiatives often fail to produce agile bureaucratic responses when civil servants are insufficiently prepared and lack confidence in digital systems. Moreover, the limited utilization of digital queue features by elderly users highlights the persistence of a digital divide, which directly affects service equity. Branderhorst and Ruijer (2024) argue that local government digital transformation must generate public value and ensure inclusivity, rather than merely improving administrative efficiency. In this context, civil servants play a critical role not only as service providers but also as facilitators who assist citizens in navigating digital platforms. The absence of this facilitative role risks reinforcing service asymmetries and excluding vulnerable groups from the benefits of digital public services. Overall, these findings suggest that digital readiness in local governments is not solely a technological issue, but fundamentally a matter of human resource competency, organizational culture, and policy implementation capacity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Law Number 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) represents a strategic policy shift toward modern public sector human resource management aligned with the demands of digital governance and public service transformation. The policy framework emphasizes merit-based systems, competency development, performance-oriented management, and talent mobility, reflecting global best practices in strategic human resource management and bureaucratic reform. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of

this reform agenda is highly contingent upon implementation capacity at the local government level. Applying the Edwards III policy implementation model, this study identifies persistent challenges related to policy communication, resource availability, implementer disposition, and rigid bureaucratic structures. These constraints limit the translation of normative policy objectives into operational practices, particularly in the context of digital transformation.

The case of Bedas Digital Services (BDS) in Cicalengka District illustrates how insufficient civil servant digital readiness can undermine the effectiveness and inclusivity of digital public services. Digital initiatives implemented without adequate competency strengthening, organizational culture change, and inclusive service strategies risk generating service gaps and reinforcing inequality in access. This finding confirms that digital transformation cannot be treated merely as a technological intervention, but must be understood as a socio-organizational process requiring adaptive human resources and institutional flexibility. Accordingly, the policy implications of this study highlight the urgent need for local-level operational policies that explicitly target the development of digital competencies among village- and sub-district-level civil servants, in line with the mandate of Law No. 20/2023 and empirical findings in public sector HRM literature (Khamiliyah et al., 2025; Wardiyanto et al., 2025). Strengthening competency readiness should encompass not only technical digital skills, but also cultural transformation, organizational restructuring, and sustained policy communication. Through an integrated approach to human resource reform, digital public service transformation can deliver equitable public value, improve service quality, and enhance citizen satisfaction—key indicators of successful bureaucratic reform and sustainable governance development.

To operationalize the conceptual and practical contribution introduced in the abstract, this study proposes a competency-based and inclusive civil servant HRM policy model comprising four interrelated components. First, digital competency standards should be formally integrated into merit-based recruitment, performance appraisal, and promotion mechanisms under Law No. 20/2023, so that digital literacy, data literacy, and problem-solving ability become measurable merit criteria rather than optional supplementary skills. Second, a tiered digital capacity-building pathway is required, spanning basic digital literacy, service-specific digital skills, and data-driven decision-making, calibrated to the varying baseline competencies of civil servants, particularly at village- and sub-district-level service points such as Cicalengka District. Third, an inclusive-service protocol should formally assign frontline civil servants a facilitation role in assisting elderly and low-digital-literacy citizens, pairing digital channels with sustained human-assisted access points so that digitalization does not become a precondition for accessing public services. Fourth, an organizational enabling mechanism—covering leadership commitment, revised standard operating procedures, and structured communication channels—should operationalize the four Edwards III dimensions as continuous monitoring indicators within local government digital transformation roadmaps. Together, these four components translate the normative mandate of Law No. 20/2023 into an actionable HRM policy model that local governments can adopt to close the gap between national policy design and frontline service delivery identified in this study.

Research Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research relies exclusively on secondary data obtained through document analysis and literature review; no primary data collection—such as interviews with civil servants, focus group discussions, or citizen surveys—was undertaken, which limits the ability to capture first-hand perceptions of digital readiness and implementation barriers. Second, the empirical illustration is confined to a single case, Bedas Digital Services (BDS) in Cicalengka District, Bandung Regency, and the findings should therefore be interpreted as context-specific rather than generalizable to all Indonesian local governments, whose fiscal capacity, digital infrastructure, and bureaucratic culture vary considerably. Third, as a qualitative descriptive-analytical study, this research offers analytical rather than statistical evidence and does not measure the strength of association between civil servant digital competency and service performance outcomes.

Future Research Directions

Building on these limitations, several directions for future research are recommended. Future studies could employ primary data collection methods, such as structured interviews or focus group discussions with civil servants and citizen satisfaction surveys, to validate and enrich the findings reported here. Comparative case studies across multiple local governments with differing fiscal and infrastructural capacities would help establish whether the implementation gaps identified in this study are context-specific or broadly generalizable across Indonesia. Quantitative or mixed-methods research is also recommended to empirically test the relationship between civil servant digital competency, the four Edwards III implementation dimensions, and

measurable service performance or citizen satisfaction outcomes. Finally, longitudinal research tracking the implementation of Law No. 20/2023 over time, together with empirical piloting of the competency-based and inclusive HRM policy model proposed in this study within actual local government settings, would offer valuable insight into whether such reforms produce sustained improvements in digital public service inclusivity.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material that may be helpful in the review process should be prepared and provided as a separate electronic file. That file can then be transformed into PDF format and submitted along with the manuscript and graphic files to the appropriate editorial office.