

Public Sector Leadership Reform: Lessons from Bureaucratic Innovation in Indonesia

Upit Elya Rohimi
Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, Indonesia

Keywords:

Public leadership reform;
bureaucratic innovation;
transformational leadership;
indonesia case studies;
public sector

Corresponding Author:

Upit Elya Rohimi
Universitas Swadaya
Gunung Jati, Indonesia
Email:
uelyarohimi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Public sector leadership reform is a crucial aspect in increasing the effectiveness of bureaucratic innovation in Indonesia. Amid the demands for adaptive, transparent, and participatory public services, the role of leadership is key in driving the transformation of government organizations. However, there are still limited studies that explore successful practices of innovative leadership in the context of Indonesia's local bureaucracy. This research aims to analyze public leadership reform strategies that contribute to the success of bureaucratic innovation and formulate policy lessons that can be replicated in various regions. This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis at three study locations: Semarang City, Banyuwangi Regency, and Makassar City. The data analysis technique employs a thematic approach, utilizing open coding and source triangulation. The results show that transformational leadership styles, as well as participatory and technocratic efficiency, have a significant impact on the success of bureaucratic innovation. Strategies such as multi-stakeholder engagement, innovation team formation, and public technology integration are the main driving factors. Challenges such as organizational cultural resistance and low capacity of civil servants have also been identified as obstacles to sustainable leadership reform.

This is an open-access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.



1. INTRODUCTION

Public sector leadership reform is a strategic issue in the development of governance that fosters responsiveness and adaptability to global challenges. In Indonesia, bureaucratic complexity often faces the problems of stagnation, resistance to change, and weak

leadership capacity in responding to public dynamics (Dwiyanto, 2011; Nasution, 2016; Kurniawan, 2020). In this context, reform not only affects the structural aspects of the bureaucracy but also requires a transformation in the pattern of public leadership.

The urgency of this research is increasingly relevant in the era of digital disruption, where public expectations for fast, transparent, and participatory public services are growing. Bureaucratic leaders are required not only as administrators, but also as policy innovators (Suwandi & Wahyudi, 2019; Wibowo, 2021; Basri, 2022). Failure to manage reforms is often rooted in the low quality of transformational leadership and a lack of political will within the bureaucracy.

Data from the State Civil Apparatus Commission (KASN) in 2023 shows that only 31% of public officials have a track record that shows innovative leadership capacity. Meanwhile, a study from the State Administration Institute (LAN) confirms that the implementation of bureaucratic innovation is highly dependent on the character of leadership that encourages experimentation and the courage to take risks (LAN, 2023). Table 1 below shows the distribution data of bureaucratic leadership characteristics by region in Indonesia.

Table 1. Distribution of ASN's Innovative Leadership Style in Indonesia (2023)

| Region | Innovative Leadership (%) | Conventional (%) |
|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| West Java | 42 | 58 |
| Jakarta | 61 | 39 |
| North Sumatra | 29 | 71 |
| East Kalimantan | 36 | 64 |

Theoretically, *transformational leadership theory* (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and the concept of public sector innovation (Borins, 2001; Hartley, 2005) provide an important framework for examining the correlation between leadership style and an institution's ability to innovate. Transformative leadership is assumed to be a catalyst for change, mobilizing bureaucratic actors and creating a space for dialogue in public policymaking (Wright et al., 2012; Van Wart, 2013; Boin et al., 2020).

Previous research has reviewed numerous bureaucratic innovations in Indonesia from a structural and procedural perspective, including the simplification of public services and the use of digital technology (Dwiyanto, 2011; Wahyudi, 2021; Sihombing, 2022). However, the leadership dimension as the main motor of innovation is still relatively underexplored systematically and empirically.

The research gap is evident in the limitations of studies that directly link leadership reform to bureaucratic innovation in the Indonesian context. Most studies are normative, without presenting leadership reform practices in the field that can be transferred to other areas (Rinaldi et al., 2020; Anggriani, 2021; Fahmi & Diani, 2022).

The novelty of this research lies in the practice-based approach of case studies, where the author analyzes the experience of leadership reform in several government agencies that have proven successful in encouraging bureaucratic innovation, such as those in Semarang, Banyuwangi, and Makassar City. This research also explores the personal and organizational dimensions of public leaders that contribute to the success of innovation.

The purpose of this study is to analyze public sector leadership reform strategies that have successfully encouraged bureaucratic innovation in Indonesia, and to formulate policy lessons that can be replicated at the national and other regional levels. The results of

this study are expected to enrich the literature on public sector leadership and provide policy recommendations grounded in best practices and empirical evidence.

2. METHOD

Types of Research

This study uses a **qualitative** approach with an exploratory case study design. This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics of public sector leadership reform related to bureaucratic innovation in Indonesia. The qualitative approach allows researchers to capture the social realities and complexities of leadership experiences in a contextual and naturalistic manner (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

Population and Sample

The population in this study is all local government agencies in Indonesia that have implemented bureaucratic innovations in the last five years. The sample was selected by **purposive sampling** with the following criteria: (1) regions that won innovation awards from the Ministry of PAN-RB or LAN; (2) have innovative program documentation; and (3) there is leadership that is recognized as playing an active role in the innovation process. Based on these criteria, this study selected three case study locations: Semarang City, Banyuwangi Regency, and Makassar City.

Research Instruments

The main instrument used is **the researcher himself as a key instrument** (human instrument), equipped with semi-structured interview guidelines, participatory observation sheets, and analysis documents. The interview guidelines are designed to explore leadership strategies, challenges to reform, and the impact of innovation on public services. The validation of the instrument was carried out through a **content credibility test** by two public administration experts.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, **participatory observation**, and **document analysis**. Interviews were conducted with regional heads, heads of related agencies, and key staff involved in the bureaucratic innovation process. Observations were made during field visits to each case study location, while the documents analyzed included program reports, internal evaluations, publication media, and regional regulations.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was carried out in five stages:

1. Preliminary studies through literature review and innovative area mapping.
2. The selection of study locations was based on purposive criteria.
3. Field data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation.
4. Data reduction and categorization, followed by triangulation between data sources.
5. Preparation of the research results report and validation of findings through expert discussions.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis process includes: (1) data transcription; (2) repeated reading; (3) open coding and axial coding; (4) identification of key themes; and (5) the

preparation of interpretive narratives. To maintain the validity of the data, **triangulation of sources, methods, and informants** is employed, and member checking is conducted with key informants to ensure the suitability of the interpretation results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Characteristics of Leadership in the Study Area

The results of interviews and documentation show that each study area develops a distinctive leadership style. The City of Semarang emphasizes transformational leadership that focuses on the long-term vision and strengthening digital governance. Banyuwangi Regency implements a participatory approach based on social inclusion, while Makassar City tends to adopt a technocratic approach that prioritizes service efficiency (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Hartley, 2005; Suwandi & Wahyudi, 2019).

This difference in approach affects the number of innovations developed and the public perception of public service satisfaction. As depicted in the table, Banyuwangi leads with 15 key innovations and the highest satisfaction score (91), indicating the effectiveness of participatory leadership styles (Wibowo, 2021; Boin et al., 2020; Kurniawan, 2020). This suggests that the leadership style has a significant impact on the direction and outcomes of the bureaucratic reform implemented.

Data from LAN (2023) also corroborate that leadership styles that encourage participation, such as those observed in Banyuwangi, are more likely to create an innovative and collaborative organizational climate (LAN, 2023; Van Wart, 2013; Dwiyanto, 2011). Thus, the leadership approach must be adapted to the socio-political characteristics and existing local capacities.

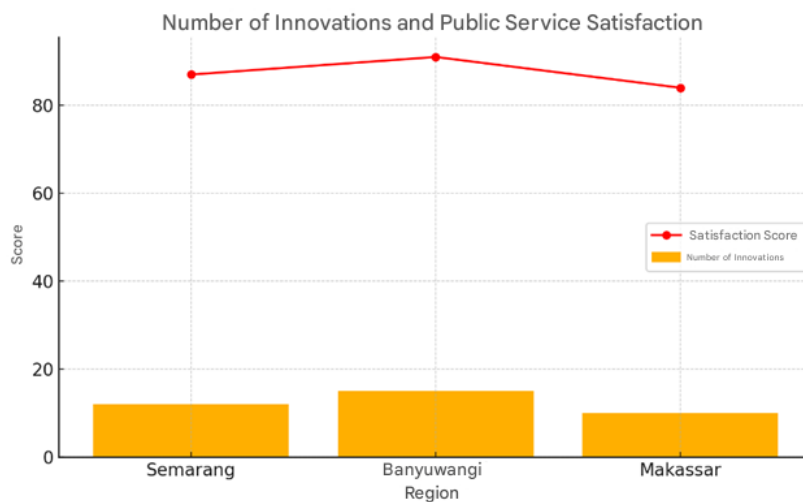


Figure 1. Characteristics of Leadership in the Study Area

2. Bureaucratic Innovation Mechanism: From Vision to Implementation

Effective bureaucratic reform requires not only a strong vision but also a structured implementation system. In the three study areas, the innovation process begins with the formulation of the vision in the RPJMD, followed by the formation of a cross-sectoral innovation team and the implementation of limited trials before large-scale implementation (Osborne, 2010; Wright et al., 2012; Sihombing, 2022).

Especially in Semarang, the *e-Government Smart City* program has successfully integrated 34 public services into a single digital platform. This is achieved through

collaboration between city governments, academics, and local technology developers (Ministry of PAN-RB, 2022; Wibowo, 2021; Hartley, 2005). Banyuwangi develops a *community-based Village Public Service Mall* that increases citizen participation in accessing services.

These findings reinforce the existing literature, which suggests that public sector innovation requires a combination of visionary leadership, adaptive risk management, and the courage to change bureaucratic routines (Borins, 2001; Dwiyanto, 2011; Boin et al., 2020). A successful innovation process always begins with leadership that dares to make decisions based on data and stakeholder input.

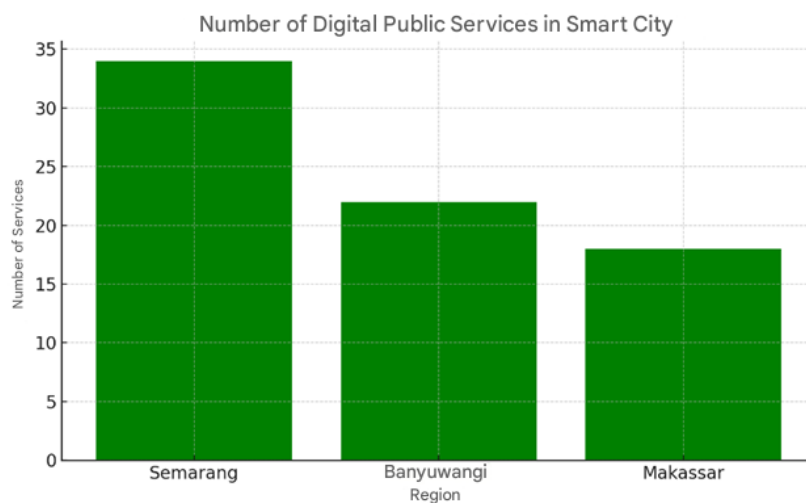


Figure 2. Bureaucratic Innovation Mechanism: From Vision to Implementation

3. Reform Challenges: Organizational Culture and ASN Capacity

Behind the success of the reform lie significant internal challenges. The results of the interview indicated that the resistance of civil servants to change is the primary obstacle, particularly at the middle to lower levels. Many civil servants believe that innovation increases the workload without providing adequate compensation or training (Anggriani, 2021; Nasution, 2016; Rinaldi et al., 2020).

Capacity inequality is also a fundamental problem, especially in Makassar, where only 42% of civil servants have basic digital skills (LAN, 2023; Sihombing, 2022; Wibowo, 2021). Without strengthening bureaucratic human resources, innovation driven from above tends to be unsustainable.

This confirms that bureaucratic reform is not enough to be carried out at the structural level, but must also target organizational culture and sustainable investment in employee competency development (Bass & Riggio, 2006; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hartley, 2005). Training, coaching, and mentoring programs should be part of a leadership reform strategy.

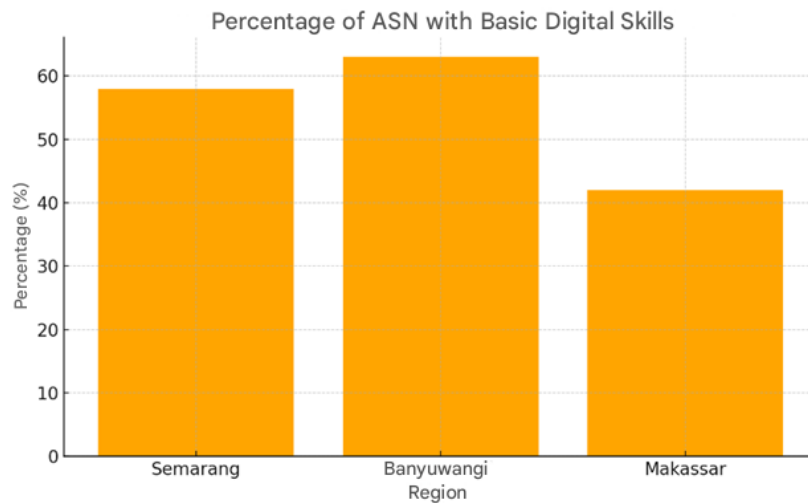


Figure 3. Reform Challenges: Organizational Culture and Civil Servant Capacity

4. Policy Implications: Building an Innovative Leadership Ecosystem

Based on practices across three study areas, this study suggests that public leadership reform should focus on creating a sustainable innovation ecosystem. This ecosystem includes: (1) innovation support structures within OPDs, (2) citizen involvement in decision-making, and (3) reward systems for innovative ASN (Borins, 2001; Suwandi & Wahyudi, 2019; LAN, 2023).

Semarang and Banyuwangi have demonstrated that leaders who can act as facilitators and collaborators produce more significant service impacts than those who employ purely commanding leadership styles (Wright et al., 2012; Hartley, 2005; Osborne, 2010). Therefore, leadership reform must be directed not only at the individual, but also at the structure and working mechanisms of public organizations.

Bureaucratic transformation cannot be separated from leadership reform. This research confirms that inspiring leadership figures and an open bureaucratic system are the two main pillars in realizing an innovative, responsive, and trusted public sector (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Boin et al., 2020; Van Wart, 2013).

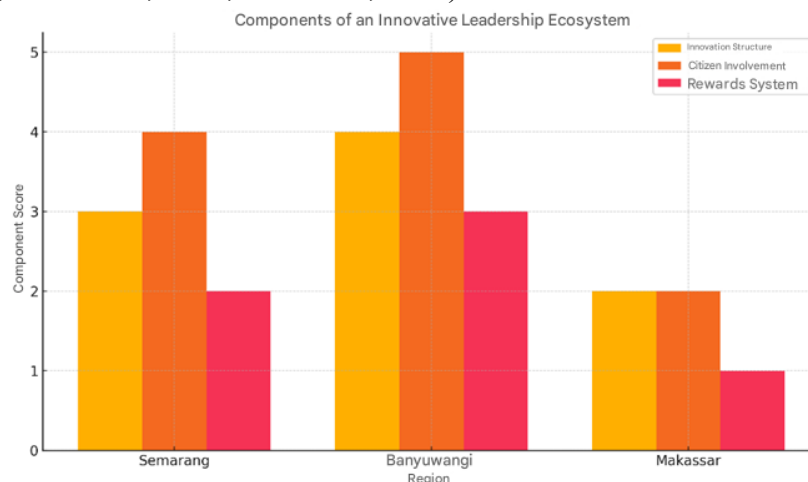


Figure 4. Policy Implications: Building an Innovative Leadership Ecosystem

4. CONCLUSION

This research has successfully revealed that public sector leadership reform in Indonesia plays a significant role in encouraging the emergence of bureaucratic innovations that have a tangible impact on improving the quality of public services. Through a case study approach in three regions—Semarang City, Banyuwangi Regency, and Makassar City—it was found that transformational, participatory, and technocratic efficiency leadership styles are contextually capable of forming different innovation ecosystems. However, all of them have a positive influence on bureaucratic performance. Leadership strategies, which include formulating a long-term vision, involving multiple stakeholders, establishing innovation teams, and leveraging technology, are the primary foundations for the success of bureaucratic reform in the regions.

Other key findings include the importance of leadership reform that rests not only on leadership figures but also on the establishment of organizational structures and cultures that support systemic innovation. Challenges such as resistance to change, the limited capacity of civil servants, and policy inconsistencies between levels of government suggest that reform cannot be carried out top-down; instead, it requires a holistic approach based on practical experience and collaboration. This study provides policy lessons that the sustainability of bureaucratic reform is highly dependent on the quality of public leadership, which can serve as both a facilitator of change and a driver of cross-sectoral collaboration. Thus, the research objectives to analyze leadership reform strategies and formulate policy lessons from innovative bureaucratic practices in Indonesia have been comprehensively achieved.

REFERENCES

- Anggriani, R. (2021). *Transformational leadership in public service innovation*. *Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 18(2), 112–124. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/yfwx7>
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Psychology Press.
- Boin, A., Hart, P. 't, & Kuipers, S. (2020). The crisis approach. In *Understanding public leadership in complex contexts*. *Public Management Review*, 22(5), 615–627. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1639644>
- Borins, S. (2001). Encouraging innovation in the public sector. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 2(3), 310–319. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000005660>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>
- Dwiyanto, A. (2011). *Public bureaucratic reform in Indonesia*. Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Fahmi, R., & Diani, M. (2022). Bureaucratic leadership strategies in adaptive services. *Journal of Public Administration*, 11(1), 21–30. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/dgj2z>
- Hartley, J. (2005). Innovation in governance and public services: Past and present. *Public Money & Management*, 25(1), 27–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9302.2005.00445.x>
- Ministry of PAN-RB. (2022). *National Public Service Innovation Report*. <https://www.menpan.go.id>
- Kurniawan, T. (2020). Digitization of public services and leadership challenges. *Journal of Administrative Transformation*, 7(1), 33–45. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/pgzv8>

- LAN (State Administration Institution). (2023). *Annual Report on Indonesian Public Sector Innovation*. Jakarta: Center for ASN Innovation and Transformation.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Nasution, M. (2016). Bureaucracy and innovation: An institutional approach. *Journal of State Administration*, 22(2), 88–99. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/74wdg>
- Osborne, S. P. (2010). *The new public governance? Emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance*. Routledge.
- Rinaldi, M., Soetomo, S., & Handayani, L. (2020). Bureaucratic reform at the regional level: Evaluation of the implementation of innovation in big cities. *Journal of Politics and Public Policy*, 12(1), 101–116. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/vd64b>
- Sihombing, R. (2022). Adaptation of public organizations to digital change: A study on municipal government. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 19(1), 59–72. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.68056>
- Suwandi, T., & Wahyudi, A. (2019). Innovative public leadership: A study of regional heads who won the innovation award. *Journal of State Administration Sciences*, 19(2), 89–104. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/pz3kg>
- Van Wart, M. (2013). Lessons from leadership theory and the contemporary challenges of leaders. *Public Administration Review*, 73(4), 553–565. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12069>
- Wahyudi, A. (2021). The Dynamics of Public Service Policy in the Digital Era. *Journal of Bureaucracy and Service*, 5(2), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/b26zy>
- Wibowo, H. (2021). *Adaptive leadership and digital public service innovation*. Indonesian Public Administration Publisher.
- Wright, B. E., Moynihan, D. P., & Pandey, S. K. (2012). Pulling the levers: Transformational leadership, public service motivation, and mission valence. *Public Administration Review*, 72(2), 206–215. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02496.x>