



District Head Leadership and Employee Performance: A Study in Muara Tami District, Jayapura City, Papua

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of district head leadership in improving employee performance in Muara Tami District, Jayapura City, Papua. The approach used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques in the form of interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The results of the study show that the leadership of the District Head is reflected in three dimensions: leadership traits (exemplary, assertive, open, motivational), leadership behavior (friendly, participatory, egalitarian), and situational leadership (adjusting style to employee conditions). Employee performance was assessed as good in terms of quantity, quality, and competence. Factors that are generally considered obstacles, such as motivation, transparency, and work discipline, were not found to be dominant in this study. This shows that the leadership of the District Head is effective in encouraging the creation of more optimal public services. As a recommendation, the District Head needs to tighten supervision of discipline, especially attendance, divide the workload proportionally to prevent employee fatigue, and be supported by the Jayapura City Government through continuous training to improve public service competence.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a key element in organizational management, especially in the public sector, which is oriented towards public service. In the context of local government bureaucracy, leaders have a dual function: as directors in achieving organizational goals and as motivators who are able to foster discipline, responsibility, and work commitment among officials. The quality of leadership demonstrated by a regional head greatly determines the performance of employees, because effective leadership can create a conducive working atmosphere, increase motivation, and encourage productivity.

According to Djibu et al. (2024), leadership style is a method or approach applied by a leader in guiding, encouraging, and influencing other individuals to achieve common goals. In line with this, the application of leadership style requires leaders to have a good attitude and performance so that strategies can run effectively and produce optimal performance. In carrying out their roles, leaders must also guarantee the protection of employee rights and create a superior work culture (Skeepers & Mbohwa, 2015).

Muara Tami District, one of the districts in Jayapura City, has strategic yet challenging characteristics. This region is Indonesia's gateway, directly bordering Papua New Guinea (Pakasi, 2018), resulting in a high demand for public services. Therefore, the performance of organizations in the public sector plays a crucial role in determining the level of effectiveness and efficiency of services provided to the community (Yukanissa & Maesaroh (2025). This condition requires government officials at the district level to work more professionally, disciplined, and responsively. However, the reality on the ground often shows obstacles in the performance of officials, such as low work motivation, limited facilities, and suboptimal coordination between employees.

In such situations, the role of the District Head becomes very important. The District Head is not only required to carry out administrative functions, but must also be able to be a visionary, communicative, and adaptive leader in the face of local challenges. Appropriate leadership is expected to improve the quality of employee work, both in terms of discipline, responsibility, and the ability to provide quality public services. In addition, Nuraini & Rahayu (2025) state that a more humanistic and personal approach is needed, where leaders do not merely focus on tasks and work results, but also pay attention to the welfare and development of each individual in the team and organization.

A number of studies show that transformational and participatory leadership styles tend to have a positive influence on improving the performance of civil servants. As stated by Yunita et al. (2025), leadership exercised in a government organization can contribute to improving the performance of civil servants. In addition, the sincerity of commitment shown by employees is essential to creating a comfortable and harmonious work atmosphere, thereby supporting the company to operate effectively and efficiently (Ananda & Winata, 2017). In the social and cultural context of Papua, including Muara Tami District, there are unique characteristics that require adjustments to the leadership approach. Leaders at the district level are required to be able to integrate local wisdom values with management

principles in order to create synergy that supports organizational performance. According to Tumiran (2024: 215), local wisdom values can shape employee performance and increase organizational productivity. In line with these findings, Saripuddin & Maryadi (2023) show that the application of local wisdom values can make a real contribution to improving employee performance. Thus, local wisdom not only functions as a cultural identity but also as a factor that strengthens work ethic, increases productivity, and supports the achievement of organizational goals more optimally.

Based on this description, this study is important to examine in depth how the leadership of the District Head plays a role in improving employee performance in the Muara Tami District. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of leadership theory in the public sector, as well as provide evaluation material and practical recommendations for local governments in their efforts to strengthen the capacity of officials in border areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership

Leadership comes from the root word *pimpin*, which means to guide or lead. From this word comes the verb *memimpin*, which means to provide guidance or direction, and the noun *pemimpin*, which refers to someone who plays a role in leading or guiding (Pamudji, 1995). Leadership is a person's ability to influence, direct, and motivate others to achieve organizational goals. Leadership requires the ability to motivate staff by inspiring them and encouraging creativity in their work (Murni, 2021). According to Siagian (2003:76), one of the definitions of leadership that is widely accepted by both theorists and practitioners is that the higher a person's position in the organizational leadership hierarchy, the greater the demand for them to be able to think and act as a generalist.

According to Siagian (2003), leadership can be understood through three main aspects, namely the nature of the leader, the behavior of the leader, and situational leadership. The leader's traits include character, assertiveness, intelligence, and communication skills; the leader's behavior emphasizes involvement and relationships with subordinates; while situational leadership emphasizes the leader's flexibility in adjusting their leadership style to the conditions of the organization and the abilities of their subordinates.

Bass (1990) adds that transformational leadership plays an important role in increasing employee motivation, commitment, and performance. Leaders who are able to provide inspiration, individual attention, and a clear vision will be more effective in encouraging subordinates to work optimally. Leadership in an organization plays a very important role because leadership is closely related to motivation. According to Muchtar (2010), a leader's success in motivating others to achieve predetermined goals is greatly influenced by their ability to build communication, both with themselves, colleagues, and superiors.

Leadership Behavior

Leadership is collective in nature, meaning that every action or behavior exhibited by a leader not only affects themselves, but also influences all members of the organization (Hajar et al., 2018). Robbins and Judge (2015) explain that leadership behavior can be divided into two main orientations: (1) task orientation, which is how leaders direct work to meet organizational targets, and (2) relationship orientation, which emphasizes the importance of building communication, closeness, and concern for subordinates. Effective leadership behavior is one that is able to combine these two orientations so that organizational goals are achieved without neglecting employee welfare.

Employee Performance

Improving employee performance is a continuous process that requires a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence motivation, competence, and human resource development (Lestari, 2023). Employee performance is defined as the quality and quantity of work achieved by employees in accordance with their assigned duties and responsibilities (Mangkunegara, 2017). Employee performance is usually measured through several indicators, including work quantity, work quality, and knowledge or competence in performing tasks (Mathis & Jackson, 2011).

Robbins and Judge (2015) state that employee performance is not only influenced by individual factors (ability, skills, motivation), but also organizational factors such as leadership, work culture, and reward systems. In the context of government, employee performance is closely related to the quality of public services provided to the community.

Public Service and Leadership

Pasolong in Erlianti (2019) explains that service is an activity carried out by individuals, groups, and/or organizations, either directly or indirectly, with the aim of meeting needs. Currently, the low quality of public services is one of the main criticisms directed at government bureaucracy in its efforts to serve the community (Patmasari, 2020). Meanwhile, the quality of public services is one of the benchmarks for the success of government organizations. The role of leaders at the local level, including district heads, is very important because it is directly related to the provision of services to the community. Leaders who have exemplary characteristics, participatory behavior, and a situational leadership style will be better able to encourage employees to provide fast, accurate, and quality services.

METHODOLOGY

In a study, methodology plays an important role as an instrument that can guide the research process to achieve the desired objectives (Patmasari, 2022; Renyaan, 2023; Tebay & Ilham, 2023). Therefore, this study applies a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Moleong in Sapioper et al. (2021), qualitative research is synthesized from various definitions as research that aims to understand the phenomena experienced by the research subjects. Therefore, this study examines in depth the role of district head leadership in efforts to improve the performance of the apparatus in Muara Tami District, Jayapura City. This approach was chosen based on the consideration that

qualitative methods allow researchers to explore experiences, views, and leadership practices more comprehensively, especially in the context of public service. The research was conducted at the Muara Tami District Office, Jayapura City, Papua Province, which was chosen because this region has a dynamic government and public service needs that require effective leadership in motivating employee performance. Research informants were determined using purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of sources according to criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria included: holding a structural or functional position, understanding the process of public service delivery, and having a direct working relationship with the District Head. The informants involved included the District Head, District Secretary, Section Heads, and a number of staff members who were considered competent to provide information related to the focus of the research.

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: interviews, direct observation, and documentation studies. Data analysis referred to the Miles & Huberman (1994) model, which consists of three stages. The first stage is data reduction, which involves selecting, filtering, and summarizing relevant data. The second stage is data presentation, which involves organizing the findings into a narrative form for easier understanding. The third stage is drawing conclusions and verification, which involves interpreting the data to find patterns, relationships, and meanings that are relevant to the focus of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of District Head Leadership in Improving Employee Performance

1. District Head Leadership Characteristics

Based on interviews and observations, the leadership characteristics of the Muara Tami District Head can be categorized as quite good, as demonstrated through exemplary behavior, assertiveness, openness, and a friendly attitude towards subordinates and the community. This is in line with Siagian's (2003) theory, which emphasizes that leadership characteristics include intelligence, communication skills, exemplary behavior, and the courage to make decisions. Informants from the Section Heads (SU and YOR) mentioned that the District Head has a firm character, is a good listener, and actively gives directions to subordinates. His decisiveness is evident in his willingness to reprimand negligent employees, while his friendly nature is reflected in his interactions with the community and subordinates, even with a humorous style that makes the work atmosphere more relaxed. In terms of decision-making, the District Head involves employees in internal meetings and development consultations (Sub-district Development Planning Forum). This participation demonstrates openness, where employees are allowed to provide input before a final decision is made. This is in line with the principle of participatory leadership, which emphasizes the involvement of subordinates in the decision-making process. In addition, the District Head also plays a motivational role. Based on interviews with the Head of Community Empowerment (MN) and the Head of Governance (YOR), motivation is provided through a personal approach, intensive communication, and rewards

for employees who complete their tasks well. Observations show that this motivational approach has an impact on increasing work enthusiasm and creating a harmonious work environment.

Thus, it can be concluded that the leadership style of the Head of Muara Tami District has fulfilled most of the indicators of effective leadership: exemplary, assertive, open, and able to motivate subordinates. However, there are still weaknesses in the aspect of disciplinary control, particularly related to employee absenteeism, which needs to be improved in order to realize more optimal public services.

2. Leadership Behavior of the District Head

The results of the study show that the leadership behavior of the Muara Tami District Head is generally considered good, characterized by a friendly attitude, openness, and attention to subordinates and the community. Informants (HGR, MN, GU, and SU) stated that the District Head not only gave instructions but was also willing to listen to suggestions, discuss problems with subordinates, and even get directly involved in several activities such as overtime work. This demonstrates participatory and egalitarian leadership behavior. The District Head's friendly and humorous behavior creates a familiar working atmosphere, thereby reducing employee stress. Field observations also show that the District Head does not discriminate between employees, is fair, and actively maintains communication with all staff. This attitude contributes to the creation of a conducive working climate, where subordinates feel valued and supported in carrying out their duties. These findings are consistent with participatory leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of subordinate involvement in the decision-making process. By giving employees space to express their opinions, the District Head has succeeded in building harmonious working relationships and a sense of belonging among subordinates. Thus, it can be concluded that the leadership behavior of the Head of Muara Tami District is oriented towards two things: (1) building emotional closeness with subordinates through a friendly, humorous, and open attitude, and (2) maintaining organizational professionalism through clear direction and continuous motivation. This behavior pattern has proven to be effective in increasing employee morale while supporting the achievement of more optimal public services. In line with Nyukorong & Quisenberry (2015), a servant leader has an obligation to listen carefully to subordinates, understand their needs, expectations, and aspirations, and empathize with their suffering and disappointment.

3. Situational Leadership of District Heads

The results of the study show that the Muara Tami District Head has implemented situational leadership patterns in accordance with Siagian's theory (2003), which emphasizes the importance of a leader's ability to adapt their leadership style to the conditions and capabilities of their subordinates. Based on interviews, the District Head actively provides technical guidance and instructions before assigning tasks, and adjusts the type of task to the capacity and expertise of the employees. Informants W.M.R. and L.H.S. confirmed that the guidance is accompanied by motivation, even simple forms of reward such

as bonuses or treats, which strengthen the employees' work ethic. This shows a balance between the instructional and socio-emotional support aspects. In addition, the District Head (RS) himself emphasized the importance of adjusting the division of tasks to the expertise of subordinates, while still providing guidance so that work can be completed according to standards. This approach demonstrates flexibility in leadership, where leaders not only give orders but also consider the individual capacities of their subordinates. In general, the practice of situational leadership in the Muara Tami District has had a positive impact on improving employee performance and the quality of public services. Employees feel cared for and trusted, creating a more productive and harmonious work environment. These findings reinforce the view that adaptive and contextual leadership is highly relevant in government bureaucracy, especially at the district level, which deals directly with the community.

Employee Performance at the Muara Tami District Office

1. Employee Workload

Based on interviews with the District Secretary (BF) and one of the employees (GU), it was found that the workload of employees at the Muara Tami District Office is relatively high. Employees are required to complete a large amount of work, often working overtime and returning home late to meet targets. However, most of the work is completed properly and on time. These findings indicate that employees have a heavy workload, but are still able to optimize their available working time. This is in line with the concept of work quantity according to Robbins & Judge (2015), namely, the amount of output produced in a certain period. With a high intensity of work, employee performance shows commitment and responsibility to government tasks at the district level. However, the high volume of work also has the potential to cause fatigue and work-related stress if it is not balanced with time management and a proportional distribution of tasks. Therefore, the leadership of the District Head, who provides motivation and emotional support, as found in the previous section, is an important factor in maintaining the stability of employee performance. Thus, the workload of employees at the Muara Tami District Office can be categorized as high and productive, although it is necessary to anticipate the negative impact of excessive workloads that have the potential to interfere with the quality of work and employee welfare.

2. Employee Work Quality

Interviews with several informants, such as the District Secretary (BF), SU, and MN, showed that the quality of work of employees at the Muara Tami District Office was relatively good. Employees were considered disciplined, arrived on time, and were able to complete their work according to the specified deadlines. Although there were occasional cases of employees arriving late, this was rare and usually resulted in immediate sanctions and guidance to improve discipline. This level of work quality is also reflected in the employees' acknowledgment that they receive direct appreciation from the District Head. The absence of employee rotation or replacement in recent years indicates that their performance is still in line with organizational standards.

This signifies the consistency and accountability of employees in carrying out government duties. When linked to performance theory, work quality includes timeliness, accuracy, and precision of work results (Mangkunegara, 2017). Field findings show that Muara Tami District employees can meet these indicators. In addition, appreciation from leaders plays an important role in maintaining work enthusiasm so that performance quality remains stable.

3. Knowledge of Work

Interviews with the District Secretary (BF) and employees (WMR) showed that Muara Tami District Office employees have adequate knowledge and competence in carrying out their respective duties. This can be seen from their ability to complete work correctly, on time, and in accordance with their assigned responsibilities. The competence of employees is not only demonstrated through technical skills, but also through their ability to work together and consult with each other in the division of tasks. Through internal consultation, each employee can understand the scope of their responsibilities, so that work can be completed more effectively. These findings reinforce the view that job knowledge is an important aspect of employee performance that is directly related to organizational productivity (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). In addition, the high level of competence among employees in the Muara Tami District reflects the success of the District Head's leadership in directing and motivating his subordinates. With good knowledge, employees find it easier to accept directions, understand instructions, and apply their skills in providing quality public services. Thus, it can be concluded that employees at the Muara Tami District Office have a high level of work knowledge and adequate competence, which are key assets in supporting the smooth implementation of government tasks and improving the quality of public services.

Barriers to Improving Employee Performance

Based on interviews and observations, this study found that there were relatively few barriers to improving employee performance in Muara Tami District. Several aspects that are usually challenges, such as motivation, transparency, and discipline, did not emerge as significant barriers in the context of this study.

First, work motivation is not an obstacle because the District Head is active in providing encouragement, guidance, and direct attention to his subordinates. This is reinforced by the statement of the District Secretary, who emphasized that the District Head always provides motivation and guidance before tasks are carried out. This motivational leadership practice is in line with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of the leader's role in providing inspiration and work enthusiasm (Bass, 1990).

Second, transparency in the performance of duties is also not an inhibiting factor. Muara Tami District employees are accustomed to carrying out their work with openness, both in the delivery of information and in accountability for their work. This demonstrates a healthy and accountable work culture that supports the achievement of organizational performance.

Third, in terms of work discipline, the majority of employees comply with working hours, although occasional tardiness is immediately followed up

with sanctions and guidance. Thus, work discipline in Muara Tami District is maintained and does not interfere with overall performance.

With these findings, it can be concluded that there are no significant obstacles to improving employee performance in the Muara Tami District. This condition demonstrates the success of the District Head in building a positive, disciplined, transparent, and highly motivated work culture. However, further research is still needed to explore other factors that may arise outside of these three indicators, such as resource constraints, workload, and external dynamics that may affect employee performance. The results of the study indicate that the leadership of the Head of Muara Tami District plays a significant role in improving employee performance, both through character, behavior, and the situational approach applied. This is in line with the leadership theory proposed by Sondang P. Siagian (2003), in which leadership effectiveness can be seen from character, behavior, and the ability to adapt to the situation at hand. The research findings show that the Head of Muara Tami District demonstrates exemplary behavior, assertiveness, openness, and a friendly attitude towards subordinates and the community. These traits strengthen the trust of subordinates and encourage work loyalty, although weaknesses are still found in the aspect of controlling employee discipline, particularly in relation to attendance. Theoretically, good leadership traits are an important foundation in influencing the behavior and performance of subordinates (Siagian, 2003).

The District Head's behavior is considered participatory and egalitarian, as evidenced by his willingness to listen to input, discuss issues together, and even get directly involved in his subordinates' activities. His friendly and humorous attitude also creates a conducive working climate, reduces stress, and increases employee motivation. This is consistent with the theory of participatory leadership, which emphasizes the involvement of subordinates in the decision-making process (Yukl, 2010). This study also found that the District Head adapts his leadership style to the conditions of his subordinates. Tasks are distributed according to the capacity and expertise of each employee, accompanied by guidance and emotional support. This approach is in line with Hersey & Blanchard's (1969) concept of situational leadership, which states that effective leaders are those who are able to adjust their leadership style to the readiness and competence of their subordinates. Meanwhile, the quantity of work performed by employees in the Muara Tami District is relatively high, with overtime required to complete tasks. The quality of work is also quite good, as demonstrated by discipline, punctuality, and minimal disciplinary sanctions. In addition, employee knowledge is considered adequate, as seen in their ability to complete tasks according to their respective fields and competencies. This condition is in line with the performance indicators proposed by Mangkunegara (2017), which include quality, quantity, punctuality, and teamwork skills. The study did not find any significant obstacles to improving employee performance. The aspects of motivation, transparency, and discipline were well maintained due to the active role of the District Head. These findings show that successful leadership greatly influences the creation of a positive work culture. However, the risk of excessive

workloads still needs to be anticipated so that it does not impact employee work stress.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study shows that the leadership of the Head of Muara Tami District plays an important role in improving employee performance. Leadership traits such as exemplary behavior, assertiveness, openness, and friendliness can create a conducive working atmosphere. Participatory and egalitarian leadership behaviors strengthen the relationship between leaders and subordinates, while the application of situational leadership allows for the adjustment of instructions and motivation according to employee capacity.

The performance of employees at the Muara Tami District Office is considered good, as demonstrated by high work quantity, disciplined work quality, and adequate knowledge and competence. Factors that are generally considered obstacles, such as motivation, transparency, and work discipline, were not found to be dominant in this study. This shows that the leadership of the District Head is effective in encouraging the creation of more optimal public services. Based on the findings of research on district head leadership and employee performance, several recommendations can be proposed that are expected to contribute practically to improving the quality of leadership, the effectiveness of the civil service, and the quality of public services at the district level. The recommendations are as follows: 1) District Heads need to strengthen disciplinary oversight, particularly regarding employee attendance, to ensure consistent quality of public services. 2) Workloads should be distributed more proportionally to prevent employee fatigue due to high work intensity. 3) The Jayapura City Government is expected to provide support in the form of ongoing training for district employees to further improve their public service competencies. 4) Further research is recommended to examine other external factors, such as infrastructure limitations and budgetary support, which have the potential to affect the performance of district officials.

FURTHER STUDY

This study still has limitations in terms of the scope of the region and the variables analyzed. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the scope to other regions, add variables such as organizational culture, motivation, and work environment, and use a mixed-method or longitudinal research approach so that the results obtained are more comprehensive and in-depth.

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