

An Analysis of Female Leadership in Babatan Sub-District Office, Sukaraja District, Seluma Regency

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Abstract

This research explores the leadership style of a female village head (lurah) in Babatan Sub-District, Sukaraja District, Seluma Regency. The presence of female leaders in public administrative offices is often met with mixed perceptions, reflecting persistent gender stereotypes in leadership roles. This qualitative descriptive study aims to analyze the applied leadership style of the female lurah, using four theoretical frameworks: masculine, feminine, transactional, and transformational leadership models. Data were collected through observations, interviews with staff, community members, and documentation. The findings reveal that the female lurah exhibits both strengths and limitations in her leadership. While her feminine leadership traits promote inclusiveness and collaborative decision-making, the research also found a lack of consistency in asserting authority, particularly in public policy enforcement. Transactional elements, such as contingent rewards, are still underdeveloped, though staff noted improvements in administrative structure. Transformational traits like charisma and individual attention to staff were acknowledged, yet perceived inconsistencies in community engagement were noted. Community perception remains polarized—some appreciate her inclusive approach, while others express skepticism due to entrenched gender norms. Overall, the study suggests that effective female leadership at the local government level requires not only strong administrative capabilities but also broader societal acceptance and support. This research contributes to the discourse on gender equality in public service leadership and calls for institutional strategies to support and legitimize women in decision-making roles.

Keywords

Women Leaders, Village Office, Leadership, Gender, Community Views

Introduction

Leadership is a fundamental aspect of organizational and institutional success, playing a pivotal role in shaping administrative outcomes and influencing employee performance (Northouse, 2018). Within public administration, the leadership style of local officials is especially critical as it directly impacts public service delivery, community engagement, and policy implementation. In recent decades, attention has increasingly shifted toward understanding the unique dimensions of female leadership, particularly in bureaucratic settings where traditional gender roles have historically marginalized women's participation.

The issue of gender and leadership has gained substantial traction in political, academic, and policy discourse. Feminist scholars and gender theorists argue that leadership structures in public administration have long been skewed toward masculine paradigms that value assertiveness, control, and authority (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Female leaders, by contrast, often bring relational and transformative qualities that are equally effective yet undervalued in male-dominated systems (Helgesen, 1990). This has led to calls for a more nuanced understanding of how gender intersects with leadership style in the public sector.

Research on female leadership has generally shown that women tend to employ more democratic, collaborative, and transformational approaches compared to their male counterparts (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Yet, despite growing representation, women leaders still face systemic skepticism, often being judged more harshly than men and perceived as less legitimate in roles that involve decision-making authority. This tension is particularly evident in local governments, where community perception plays a significant role in the effectiveness of governance.

In Indonesia, the discourse on female leadership is compounded by strong cultural and social norms that continue to define leadership in traditionally patriarchal terms (Blackburn, 2004). Although the national government has promoted gender mainstreaming and inclusive policies, implementation at the local level remains inconsistent. The leadership of female village heads, or *lurah*, is often viewed through a gendered lens, affecting both internal office dynamics and external public perception.

This study is situated in Babatan Village, located in Sukaraja District, Seluma Regency. In this context, the appointment of a female *lurah* has stirred varied community reactions, reflecting broader societal ambivalence toward women in authority. Preliminary observations suggest a disconnect between the expectations of leadership performance and the gender of the leader, which raises important questions about how leadership style is perceived and evaluated in a gendered context.

The purpose of this research is to examine the leadership style of the female *lurah* in Babatan and assess its impact on administrative performance and community engagement. By applying four theoretical models—masculine, feminine, transactional, and transformational leadership—this study aims to provide a multidimensional analysis of how gender influences leadership practices in village governance.

Several key studies have influenced the framework of this research. Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that men and women exhibit different leadership styles due to social role expectations, while Bass and Avolio (1994) introduced transformational leadership as a framework that captures the motivational and visionary aspects often associated with female leaders. However, these perspectives are not without controversy; some scholars argue that leadership effectiveness is not gender-dependent but context-dependent (Yukl, 2012).

Debates also continue regarding whether feminine leadership styles are better suited for modern public service environments that prioritize inclusion and citizen participation. Critics

argue that emphasizing gendered leadership traits risks reinforcing stereotypes rather than dismantling them (Kark, Waismel-Manor, & Shamir, 2012). This study acknowledges these tensions and seeks to explore whether female leaders in local government settings conform to, challenge, or blend traditional leadership models.

In doing so, this research contributes to a broader understanding of leadership diversity in the public sector and offers insights for policymakers aiming to promote gender-inclusive governance. The findings are expected to inform discussions on gender sensitivity in leadership evaluation, capacity-building initiatives for female officials, and the need to foster community awareness on gender equality.

Ultimately, the principal conclusion of this work is expected to affirm that leadership style, when effectively aligned with contextual demands and community expectations, transcends gender. However, structural and societal biases must be addressed to ensure that female leaders receive equal opportunities and recognition within the public administration sphere.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology to explore and analyze the leadership style of a female village head (*lurah*) in the Babatan Village Office, Sukaraja District, Seluma Regency, Indonesia. The research was designed to capture the complex social dynamics, community perceptions, and administrative practices related to gendered leadership in a local government context. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it enables the collection of in-depth, nuanced data concerning behavioral patterns, institutional norms, and individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected through three primary techniques: direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted within the village office and surrounding community to examine how the *lurah* interacted with staff and residents. Interviews were carried out with a purposive sample of informants, including five participants representing village staff and community leaders, all of whom had direct knowledge of or interaction with the female *lurah*. Interview questions focused on themes of authority, decision-making, service delivery, and perceptions of leadership style. All interviews were recorded with informed consent and transcribed for analysis.

Documentary evidence was also collected, including organizational charts, public service records, and policy reports. These documents provided institutional context and helped triangulate the interview data. Data analysis was conducted using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns, leadership behaviors, and community reactions. The analytical process involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study employed triangulation across data sources and collection methods. Triangulation included comparing interview data with observational notes and documentary records to verify consistency and reduce bias. Furthermore, peer debriefing was conducted to enhance the credibility of the coding process and interpretation of results.

This research did not involve any experimental intervention on human or animal subjects and thus did not require institutional ethical approval. However, the study adhered to ethical guidelines concerning informed consent, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. All participants were briefed on the objectives of the study and agreed to contribute

anonymously.

All materials and data related to this study, including interview guides, anonymized transcripts, and coding frameworks, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Since the study did not involve computational models, software code, or large datasets, there are no accession numbers to report. Should future readers wish to replicate or expand on this research, detailed methodological documentation is accessible for review and reuse.

Results and Discussion

The study revealed that the female head of Babatan Sub-district exhibited a predominant feminine leadership style, emphasizing empathy, inclusivity, and participatory decision-making. This was observed through her tendency to involve subordinates and community members in deliberations on social, infrastructural, and administrative matters. Interview data suggested that her decision-making process was collective. Issues at the neighborhood level were first handled by RT/RW leaders, and if unresolved, escalated to the kelurahan office. These matters were then discussed through musyawarah (public deliberation), involving all concerned parties.

Respondents acknowledged that the lurah did not rely on familial ties when distributing government aid. Rather, data from the social services office was used, followed by field verification, ensuring aid reached the most eligible beneficiaries. From a task-oriented standpoint, infrastructure improvements under her leadership received mixed reviews. While staff noted improvements through community development planning forums (Musrenbang), some citizens still felt many areas lacked attention—particularly regarding damaged roads and poor public lighting.

Within the office, the lurah was described as firm and diligent. She consistently monitored staff attendance and enforced punctuality, which staff attributed to an increase in professionalism and service delivery standards. However, this firmness seemed limited to the office setting. Interviews indicated that her assertiveness diminished in public settings, with some citizens perceiving her as lacking the decisiveness required to command respect in community matters. Transactional elements of her leadership were noted in her administrative oversight. Staff reported that the lurah emphasized timely performance, yet citizen feedback revealed dissatisfaction with bureaucratic delays and inconsistent staff presence.

In terms of transformational leadership, the lurah was praised by staff for her charisma and motivational qualities. She provided guidance, supported staff well-being, and organized health and fitness programs to enhance morale and productivity. Nevertheless, divergent perceptions emerged from the community. While staff viewed her positively, some residents criticized her limited engagement, noting a lack of transparency and responsiveness to local concerns.

Her collaborative leadership was evident in conflict resolution processes. For disputes such as land ownership, she preferred mediation and sought input from experienced community figures, including former village heads. The team-oriented approach fostered trust among staff and increased their willingness to contribute to problem-solving. However, its effectiveness varied depending on the situation and the level of community cooperation. Community members appreciated her efforts to provide regular religious gatherings and free health check-ups. These programs were seen as tangible expressions of concern for citizens' spiritual and physical well-being.

Despite these initiatives, some community members remained skeptical, expressing preferences for previous male leaders whom they believed had a more assertive approach and stronger presence in community mobilization. In regard to the masculine leadership aspect, the lurah's lack of visible dominance was interpreted by some as a leadership weakness, although her collaborative tone aligned with feminist leadership models.

Her emphasis on inclusive development was further illustrated through consultations in prioritizing infrastructure projects. This included roads, lighting, and community facilities, although resource constraints affected implementation. Health programs such as mobile clinics and weekly fitness sessions demonstrated her commitment to both community and staff welfare, reinforcing transformational elements of her leadership style.

Despite the focus on welfare and inclusivity, the study noted a general hesitation among certain segments of the population to fully accept female leadership, citing traditional views about gender roles in local governance. The data suggested that while the lurah exercised adaptive leadership within the administrative domain, she still struggled to project authority in wider community contexts. Feedback from staff confirmed that structural improvements had occurred, such as clearer reporting procedures and stricter time management. Yet, these changes were not always perceptible to the public.

In conclusion, the results indicate that while the female lurah of Babatan has introduced inclusive and ethical practices in office management, public acceptance of her leadership remains influenced by gender-based biases and expectations, creating challenges in fully translating her leadership potential into broad community impact.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the leadership style of the female lurah in Babatan Sub-district reflects a combination of feminine, transformational, and collaborative approaches, marked by participatory decision-making and ethical administrative practices. Internally, her leadership was appreciated by staff for being supportive, structured, and moderately effective in improving service delivery. However, external perceptions from the community revealed skepticism, influenced more by entrenched gender norms than by performance metrics.

The lurah demonstrated competence in managing routine governance tasks and promoting inclusive welfare initiatives, but faced challenges in asserting authority in broader community contexts. The study highlights a persistent gap between administrative effectiveness and public acceptance of female leadership at the local level. To bridge this gap, it is essential for institutional structures to not only support women in leadership roles but also actively engage communities in shifting gendered perceptions of authority.

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