

Identity Studies: Leadership Communication Style of Local Leaders in Kalimantan Indonesia

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Abstract

A leader is a figure who is considered a role model. In the context of local government leadership, a leader is a figure who is expected to accommodate every single interest for a mutual wellbeing; that seem in their communication. This study aimed at examining how a local leader performs his leadership. Data were collected through semi-structured interview. The transcript of the interview was then analyzed using interpretative phenomenological. The interviewed subjects in this study were the local leaders of East Kalimantan Indonesia. The results of this research found that the transformational leadership style was performed by the heads of Kalimantan local government. This leadership style stood for its local interest. This research discovered that the transformational leadership style addressed various issues in East Kalimantan. There are some characteristics of transformational leadership illustrated by the Regent of Kutai Kertanegara and former Deputy Governor of East Kalimantan. 1) They involved the people as stakeholders and derived the local wisdom to address various issues in the region he leads. 2) They converted the bureaucratic strategy into a "taking initiative" approach. 3) They encouraged the realization of economy transformation by utilizing local products.

Keywords

Style of Leadership Communication, Transformational, Local Leaders

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Introduction

Basically, the leadership in an organization is very important as they are able to direct, motivate, encourage, show an example and issue a fine to members of an organization in order to reach their goal (Suhariadi, 2013). In the context of transformational leadership, the transformational leadership appears to be rarely performed and is considered to be less effective if applied into public leadership since public organizations tend to be bureaucratic (Wright & Pandey, 2010). A research conducted by (Wright & Pandey, 2010) proved that the higher the hierarchy structure of an organization, the less transformational leadership is practiced. A research by (Van der Voet, 2014) explains about the contribution of direct tops' transformational leadership and change approach, in which they emphasized about planned and emergent changes. This change approach shows that the transformational leadership of direct tops has a little effect on the planned change. On the other hand, the transformational leadership is necessary for emergent process within a non-bureaucratic organization. Research has been conducted previously (Darto, Setyadi, Riadi, & Hariyadi, 2015) by involving the civil servants of the Regional Offices of the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) in Indonesia, discovering that transformational leadership did not affect Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Employee Performance.

A distinct empirical evidence was found by (Ancok, 2005), who conducted a research in a military organization. They found that the relationship between transformational leadership style and subordinate's work motivation was stronger than the relationship between transactional leadership style and subordinate's work motivation.

Another study by (Indrayanto, Burgess, & Dayaram, 2014) stated that the transformational leadership can be applied into semi military organizations. Their research has also identified that the transformational leadership can influence the subordinates' performance as mediated through a commitment and trust. A research by (Arifin, Suhariadi, & Damayanti, 2018) notified that the leadership style affected the midwives's performance through the job involvement of midwives in South Kalimantan. The previous empirical finding, has in fact, proved that the transformational leadership style can be applied into public, private, and military organizations. This fact has gained an interest to the authors in examining whether transformational leadership style can also be applied by the leaders of local governments.

Transformational leadership is a leadership that involves treating subordinates as proper human beings; in their communications. This type of leaders regards their subordinates as intelligent and respected men and women. They are able to move their subordinates' heart to raise their maximum potential, (Ancok, 2005); showing an example of being a role model, giving a good attitude, and offer good examples for their subordinates (Rara Sugiarti, Aliyah, & Yudana, 2016). A previous empirical study proves that transformational leadership correlated positively with the subordinates' performance (Caillier, 2014; Purwanto, Bernarto, Asbari, Wijayanti, & Hyun, 2020); and a commitment to change (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; Seo et al., 2012; Shin, Seo, Shapiro, & Taylor, 2015).

According to (Bass & Riggio, 2010) who was cited by (Ancok, 2005), there are 4 characteristics of transformational leaders. The first is the idealized influence, which is any role model traits portrayed to the subordinates and leadership traits admired by the subordinates. The second characteristic is intellectual stimulation, exhibited when leaders invite their subordinates to always question assumptions, and discover new approaches to accomplish a task. The next characteristic is the individual consideration. This is the character of leaders who acknowledge the needs of their subordinates and assist them to improve and develop their career and quality of life. Inspirational motivation is the final characteristic that shows an inspiration at work. By leaders signifying this character encourage their subordinates to realize their goal, thus to have a more meaningful career and life.

Methods

This study has implemented a qualitative method with phenomenological approach. A phenomenological study describes general interpretations from a number of individuals with diverse life experiences in relation to a concept or phenomena (Creswell, 2015). The subjects of this study comprised of two participants who were the leaders of East Kalimantan Provincial

government. Subject FW was a former Deputy Governor of East Kalimantan from the 2008-2013 period of Banjar tribe. Subject ED was a Regent of Kutai Kartanegara, Kutai tribe.

Data collecting process began with building a good rapport with the research subjects to ensure subjects' comfort, so that they can provide information related to the research. The researchers performed observations during the interview and recorded the results of the observation. The researchers conducted the interview in a natural setting and performed a comprehensive interview in accordance to the research goal-based interview guidance. The data obtained consisted of verbatim data and summaries. Apart from the interview, an observational method was also applied in order to obtain information which could not be attained during the interview. The observations covered the subjects' activities, behaviors, and comments, either verbal or nonverbal cues.

Data were analyzed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The stages of IPA begin with: understanding transcript and initial record, formulating the emergent theme and devising the superordinate theme and patterns among the cases of the participants' experiences (Kahija, 2017). According to (Creswell, 2015), the validation test focused on eight strategies that are mostly used in qualitative research. Any qualitative-based studies are best recommended to apply at least two procedures. Therefore, in the research of this study, the validation test implemented strategies of review procedure, peer answer-question sessions and members checking, which simply means that the researchers collect the opinions of the participants about the credibility of their findings and interpretations.

Results

After the analysis was conducted, three themes were identified in terms of leadership as conducted by the subjects of the research of this study: 1). Involving the communities as stakeholders and prioritizing local wisdom to address all issues in the region they led. 2) Converting the bureaucratic strategy into a "taking initiative" approach. 3). Encouraging the realization of economy transformation by utilizing local products.

From the interview, the researchers have identified the overall problems faced by the subjects as the leader of the local regions. The issues ranged from matters regarding human resources, economy, infrastructure, health and communities who are multi-ethnic and multi religion backgrounds.

1. Involving communities as stakeholders and prioritizing local wisdom in solving issues in the region they led.

Engaging communities as stakeholders means that the leaders of local government situated themselves equal to the people. This is accomplished by listening to their aspirations, inviting the communities to solve the rising issues together with the Government. Both subjects used *silaturahmi* (brotherly bond) approach, either with religious leaders, public figures, or the people themselves. *Silaturahmi* means that there is a close relationship or kinship or can be referred to an equal type of relationship. This is the strategy used by the subjects to signify that there is no huge gap between the leaders and the people. *Silaturahmi* is a local wisdom approach.

In this circumstance, *silaturahmi* meant by both subjects is the *silaturahmi* with the people through existing forums, such as Forum Kebangsaan. *Forum Kebangsaan* (Nationalism Forum) is a medium of communication and coordination among ethnic groups, religion affiliations, Government, and the people. These forums are strategic associations for the Government to communicate, coordinate, exchange information in terms of the condition and situation of the regions and Government policies. All these forums aid the Government to address regional issues as well. Moreover, these forums contribute meaningful insight to the Government.

As described in this excerpt of Subject FW interview.

"..... *Forum Kebangsaan* consists of 6 forums : *Forum Kebangsaan Kalimantan Timur* which is *Forum Komunikasi Persaudaraan Antarmasyarakat Kaltim* (FKPMKT) or Communication Forum of Brotherhood among East Kalimantan People, *Forum Kewaspadaan Dini Masyarakat* (FKDM) or Forum of People's Early Warning, *Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama* (FKUB) or Religious Harmony Forum, *Forum Pembauran Kebangsaan* (FPK) or Nation Integration Forum, *Forum Kordinasi Pencegahan Terorisme* (FKPT) or Terrorism Prevention Coordination Forum and *Forum Komunikasi Pengusaha Kaltim* (FKPKT) or East Kalimantan Businessman Communication Forum.

All these forums are very effective to resolve the conflict that may appear in this multi-ethnic society. How we make it positive or negative. How to manage it.... We completely realize that the diversity of East Kalimantan society can trigger any conflict. However, it can also transform into a good thing, it's just about how to manage it,"

Excerpt from the interview with Subject ED

".....We have a complaint media in Public Relation Department. We also form a team in handling problems. So, if there is a problem, it goes there. Then, there is also a routine meeting agenda with *Forum Kebangsaan* and it's active. Meeting up with the forums, we find out various aspirations and we discuss together of the issues within the society."

Making the people as stakeholders and prioritizing local wisdom was also realized by communicating intensively with the diverse ethnics through a cultural approach. This can be achieved by giving an equal opportunity to develop cultures as well as fostering cultures owned by the original tribe of Kalimantan and migrated tribes. In addition to maintaining harmony, the Government also instills the concept of "When in Rome, do what the Romans do" to their people. It means that in this region, there is a development of culture, not to accentuate each own tribe but to enrich the diversity of the regional cultures. A culture from a certain ethnic does not only belong to its ethnic background but also belong to all of the people.

An excerpt of interview with subject ED

"All ethnics have a cultural community. And we do encourage it. So we encourage culture preservation. For example, we have an event such as *erau*, which is an art and culture party. All ethnic groups initiatively came without us inviting them formally, they knew, and then they just contacted us. So, the approach is through culture and communities. And there is an agreement to not accentuate their tribal identities. For example, the culture from Java, there are puppets, in this context, we talked about puppets which was now no longer belonged to the Javanese, in this event the puppet has belonged to the Kutai Kertanegara people. We also instilled the concept of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" to become the main principle here, although there are some irresponsible parties and want to raise conflict among us here, it's difficult to do.

2. Converting the bureaucratic strategy into a "taking initiative" strategy

The most outstanding change ever done during the subjects' leaderships was to transform the bureaucratic strategy into taking an initiative strategy. So far, there has been a distance or gap between leaders and their people. The subjects tried to change their leadership patterns into becoming leaders who are more serving, and placed themselves as the servants of the people, not as rulers. The subjects often visited the villages to learn any problems and to listen aspirations from the people. The subjects also made casual visits to the villages without prior notice in order to avoid ceremonial welcoming acts from the people. The following is the interview excerpts with subject ED:

"I go to villages by motorcycle, not by car. Usually I spend one night in the village. Villages that are difficult to reach became easier this way."

"...I came without any notice. Just appears out of the blue. Even the Village chief was surprised. Because I personally prefer not to be welcomed through formal ceremonies....."

"...I indeed wanted to reduce any protocol or ceremonial activities. Because I think that's not what the people wanted, they wanted something objective. For example, fixing the waterways since Kutai Kertanegara area is rainfed".

The "Taking initiative" strategy was also applied by the leaders of private companies. In the previous Governmental period, the Government invited representatives of companies to attend a meeting. The subject ED preferred to come directly to the private companies.

As described in the following interview excerpt with subject ED:

".....As I have observed, when we invited the representatives of the companies, the members

who came were not competent. After I examined, the information that I intended to address were not well received by the man in charge of the company, let alone the owners. After I tried to visit the companies in person, I could communicate thoroughly about what we actually wanted in the district Government, such as what is the aim of the Government reinforcing investments to keep running and developing well.”

3. Encouraging the realization of economy transformation by utilizing local products
Both of the subjects in this research understood that so far, the East Kalimantan Government has been too reliant with the abundance of natural resources of what the region offers. Henceforth, this has become a critical issue when the natural resources are starting to decline. The East Kalimantan Government still depends on products from outside the region, including agricultural, livestock and plantation. However, products of agriculture, livestock, and plantation made from this region cannot compete with the products from outside the region. Both subjects stated that the suitable solution is to have an economy transformation. As noted in the following excerpt of interview with subject ED:

“In the past, East Kalimantan was rich with natural resources. At that time, we forgot to prepare for the infrastructure, more specifically an agriculture infrastructure. We have also forgotten to prepare in transforming [natural resources] to renewable natural resources. Now we have learned from previous experience, it becomes a lesson for us, in our era we have prepared to accomplish a transformation to our economy.”

“We prepared to transform our economy, from the economy that relied on non-renewable natural resources to the economy that relies on renewable natural resources. As for examples; agriculture, plantation, livestock or farming, and tourism.

The economy transformation procedure that has been conducted was paying more attention to renewable natural resources. Economy transformation program is also followed by protection and prioritization on local products. As described in the following excerpt:

“..... East Kalimantan is still lacking in meat for local needs. Meanwhile in Kukar, we have cattle farm which can help fulfill the needs of meat for East Kalimantan local people. I want the Provincial Government to prioritize supplies from local sources, this means that the province offers protection, proving that the Government is endorsing on local products. If we open supplies from outside, it must be based on the needs. Not like what is currently happening, it's open widely like this, so the local supplies are difficult to be marketed. This is not only happening with meat products, for example basic needs such as rice and vegetables must also be prioritized on local products.”

Their priority on local products reflects in the subjects' decision to allow the operation of convenience store company networks. However, this can only occur under the condition that the companies must provide *UMKM* corner or *SME* corner for local products such as vegetables, farming and agriculture products which are produced by the local people.

Discussion

The research of this article has explained the practice of transformational leadership performed communication by leaders of a local government, which was in East Kalimantan. The fact that transformational leadership is less common and less effective to be applied in public organizations has been proven otherwise in the research of this article. This study also describes how the leaders of local government performed their leadership communication.

Government bureaucracy in Indonesia has big structure design and causes several issues so that it affects the effectiveness and efficiency of government (Habibi, 2020). Historically, bureaucracy in Indonesia represents the colonialism results, whose inherent principle is meeting the authority interest rather than providing public service (Firdaus, Susanto, & Putra, 2021). This affects the central government or regional government in leading. Different attitude was shown by the leader in this research, who made efforts in enriching his personal relationship with the community, empowering, and providing satisfying service.

One of the characteristics of transformational leadership is idealized influence. The realization is such as being a role model of how to behave and treat other people (Ancok, 2005; Bass & Riggio,

2010). In this study, a good example in serving people is shown by meeting their people in person, visiting villages without prior notice in order to avoid formal protocols. The subjects illustrated their good examples not only through their words but also through their behaviors (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010). Transformational leaders led by giving examples, and modeling their decision making by faith, optimism (Rini Sugiarti, Suhariadi, & Erlangga, 2018), hope and resilience, as well as consistency between what they say and what they do (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Leaders in the research of this study took great attention with the people's needs and provided support for them to grow and develop themselves. The *Silaturahmi* approach was a form of the leaders' effort in understanding the people's needs, listening to their aspirations, and making them as stakeholders. The leaders have given support for their people as reflected in their policy to protect and develop local products. This form of caring is one of the transformational leadership characteristics, which can be known as an individual consideration. This is when leaders pay special attention to every single detail to their subordinates' needs by serving as a mentor or coach (Caillier, 2014). Transformational leaders treat their subordinates differently yet reasonably in order to maintain open relationship contact and communication with their subordinates (Ancok, 2005) leaders who rarely have direct communication with their subordinates can decrease their subordinates' performance (Lucca & Putra)

The leaders in this research can also offer inspirations and ask people to realize their common goals, so that their life and career can develop to be more meaningful. This can be referred to one of the characteristics in transformational leadership, which is inspirational motivation (Ancok, 2005). Transformational leadership actively looks for the best things for its followers and increase the self-confidence by giving inspiration (Reza, 2019). The act of giving inspiration reflects in the way that the leaders in this study visited companies and asked them to contribute together for the improvement of their region. Transformational leaders use simple emotional symbols and calls to raise awareness and understanding of the goals that will be achieved collectively (Ancok, 2005). The emotions shown by the leaders, including positive, negative or neutral emotions, can affect the performance of their subordinates. However, this depends on the type of tasks needed to be completed, the motivation of the subordinates, the personality of the subordinates, or the characteristics of the situation (Purwaningrum). Transformational leaders also nurture motivation by empowering the participation of their subordinates (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010; Park & Rainey, 2008). As described in this study, the leaders have implemented some approaches for the businessmen to participate in the regional development. Furthermore, the leaders in this research have improved their people's confidence and make their people proud of their work. This is signified from the way the leaders preserved and appreciated cultures from various ethnic groups existing in the region, such as taking a concern to the farmers, ranchers, as well as protecting local products.

To solve the existing problems, the leaders as the subjects in this study employed new ways of addressing the rising issues, such as converting the bureaucratic strategy into a "taking initiative" strategy. Initially, there was a huge gap between leaders and their people, where the region leaders acting as the rulers. In the "taking initiative" strategy, the subjects changed their leadership patterns into becoming leaders who were the servants of the people not as rulers. Previous researchers found that the higher the hierarchy of an organization structure is, the less practiced of the transformational leadership. This also includes the weaker the lateral communication is, the less practiced of the transformational leadership in an organization (Wright & Pandey, 2010). As for the economy sector, it is achieved by realizing an economy transformation.

Transformational leadership creates good governance. It is proven by the previous research (Dema, Rusdi, Yasin, Hamid, & Abriyanti) that transformational leadership at the regency level is able to increase the compliance of sub-district government apparatus. The effect is seen from the cooperation of the apparatus and the morale of the apparatus which is getting better in providing services to the community.

The implication of this research is that leading using a transformational style can be practiced in various organizations. In government organizations, communication approaches rooted in local culture such as friendship become more effective in gaining public trust. However, this study has limitations by only interviewing leaders in implementing their leadership. Therefore, this research needs to be followed up by examining the leadership of the regional head from the perspective of the community

Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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