

ANALYSIS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF SUB-DISTRICT HEAD IN INCREASING EMPLOYEE WORK MOTIVATION AT TERING DISTRICT OFFICE, WEST KUTAI REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

The success of public services at the sub-district level depends heavily on the work motivation of its personnel. This study analyzes the implementation of transformational leadership by the Sub-District Head (Camat) of Tering in increasing employee work motivation at the Tering Sub-District Office, Kutai Barat Regency, and identifies the inhibiting factors. A qualitative case-study approach was employed, with data gathered through in-depth interviews with the Camat, the Sub-District Secretary, Section Heads, permanent and contract staff, and service users, supported by observation and documentation, and analyzed using Creswell's qualitative model. The findings show that the four dimensions of transformational leadership practiced by the Camat effectively shifted employee work orientation from external motivation (fear of sanctions) to internal motivation grounded in moral responsibility. Leading by example eased rigid bureaucratic communication, while inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention fostered a sense of belonging, initiative, and commitment among staff. Nevertheless, this leadership's effectiveness remains constrained by the rigid, instructional style of several Section Heads and by external factors such as inadequate infrastructure and poor internet connectivity (blank spots) typical of the remote Kutai Barat region. Strong solidarity and family-like relationships among staff serve as vital social capital in sustaining public service delivery despite these constraints.

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INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of a government agency is not solely judged by the achievement of its work program, but also by the degree of efficiency and professionalism of the apparatus in carrying out its responsibilities. As the driving force of state policy, the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) holds a crucial position in determining the quality of public services, so that the management of human resources (HR) becomes a determining element for the success of government organizations. Without the involvement of employees with integrity and strong internal drive, it will be difficult to achieve optimal performance (Rahmadani et al., 2025; Supriyatno et al., 2025).

Reality in the field shows that problems such as low work morale, high absenteeism, lack of innovation, and insincere public service mentality are still often found in regional agencies. The State Administration Institution (LAN, 2020) report noted that the national ASN Professionalism Index was at 58.69 with a score of regional ASN (57.07) lower than that of central agencies (61.34), and the weakest indicator lies in the aspects of competence and work motivation (56.12). This condition indicates that the low professionalism of regional apparatus is rooted in weak performance coaching management and the lack of proper leadership in boosting employee morale (Pasek & Pasek, 2023; Sanjaya et al., 2025).

Work motivation basically does not grow only because of regulatory coercion or rigid bureaucratic structures, but is born from a harmonious pattern of interpersonal communication between superiors and subordinates. The results of a 2022 Kemenpan RB poll of 9,842 civil servants in 34 provinces revealed that 62% of employees assessed that their superiors had not optimally appreciated their work achievements, while 58% felt obstacles to two-way communication, especially in providing feedback and career guidance (Lafitri et al., 2026). On the other hand, leaders who are able to position themselves as role models, communicate visions, and provide intellectual stimulation and moral support are proven to be more successful in boosting the work motivation of their subordinates. Transformational leadership that emphasizes example, evocative communication, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention is seen as a relevant model for addressing these challenges, as it is oriented towards shifting work culture and strengthening employee participation, not just administrative compliance (Azizah et al., 2023; Satyadharma et al., 2025).

The empirical condition at the Tering District Office, West Kutai Regency, shows a real picture of this problem. Although the employee performance report is administratively considered good, public complaints about the slow service process, the attitude of the apparatus are less responsive, and the lack of dialogue between the sub-district and residents at the village level continue to emerge (Ardinata et al., 2022). This phenomenon indicates that the root of the problem is not just a technical problem, but comes from the weak leadership capability in internalizing motivation, integrity, and a work culture that is oriented towards community satisfaction. This challenge is aggravated by the geographical characteristics of Tering District which is located in the interior of the upper Mahakam River, with limited accessibility, limited facilities, and the composition of employees who are filled with many contract/honorary personnel due to the lack of implementing civil servants.

Based on this description, this research was formulated to answer two main questions, namely: (1) how transformational leadership is applied in increasing employee work motivation at the Tering District Office, West Kutai Regency; and (2) what are the factors that hinder the effectiveness of the implementation of transformational leadership. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the study of leadership and behavior of public organizations, as well as a practical contribution for sub-district leaders, local governments, and academic institutions in formulating a more inspiring and motivation-oriented apparatus development strategy in rural areas.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to deeply understand the application of transformational leadership and its influence on employee work motivation in the Tering District Office. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to interpret the meaning behind the behaviors, views, and experiences of employees and leaders in the social context of real government organizations, with research locations focused on one specific unit of analysis. The data source consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through *in-depth interviews* with informants selected by purposive sampling, including the Tering Sub-district Head, the Sub-district Secretary, five Section Heads (Governance, Community and Village Empowerment, Public Peace and Order, People's Welfare, and Public Services), executive staff from each section, and service users. Secondary data is obtained from personnel documents, performance reports, attendance data, and relevant previous research results. Data collection techniques are carried out through interviews, direct observation, and documentation, with triangulation of sources to maintain the validity of the data (Sari et al., 2025). The focus of the research is directed at two main aspects: (1) the application of the four dimensions of transformational leadership according to Bass in Amrullah et al. (2022), namely Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration; and (2) the identification of factors that inhibit the effectiveness of leadership. Data analysis follows the qualitative model of Rachman et al. (2024) which includes data organization, thorough reading, coding process, description of key themes and patterns, to theoretical interpretation by relating field findings to transformational leadership theory.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Overview of Research Locations

The Tering District Office is a *street-level bureaucracy* under the Government of West Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan Province, which is geographically located in the interior of the upper Mahakam River with topography in the form of undulating lowlands and residential areas spread over long distances. Some villages in the upstream area are not connected to adequate land infrastructure, so residents still depend on water transportation. The population is heterogeneous, dominated by the Dayak and Kutai sub-tribes who coexist with immigrant communities, with the main livelihood in the agricultural sector. Institutionally, this sub-district is led by a sub-district head who oversees the Sub-district Secretariat, the ranks of Section Heads, and executive staff dominated by Government Employees with Employment Agreements (PPPK) and contract/honorary personnel due to the limited number of civil servants. These geographical characteristics and personnel composition demand the presence of a leadership style that does not just rely on formal authority, but is able to embrace and motivate all the limited potential of the apparatus.

Initial Conditions Before the Implementation of Transformational Leadership

Prior to the implementation of transformational leadership by the current Sub-district Head, public services at the Tering District Office were monotonous and less responsive. The communication pattern between leaders, structural officials, and staff is rigid due to thick hierarchical barriers, so employees tend to be passive and only move based on direct instructions

"In the past, before the current Head of District, we worked ordinarily, Mas. Come and sit down, and answer if you have any questions. If there is no instruction from above or the Head of State, we do not dare to take a step" (Interview with the Executive Staff, May 8, 2026).

This condition causes the work motivation of employees to be highly dependent on the intensity of supervisory supervision, as emphasized by the District Secretary that the habit of postponing work when the leader is not in place has become a chronic "bureaucratic disease". The impact was felt directly by the community in the form of the slow completion of administrative documents, because the counter staff did not dare to make decisions without official disposition from their superiors. This stagnant condition is what encourages the Tering Sub-district to implement transformational leadership gradually through four main dimensions (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

The Implementation of the Four Dimensions of Transformational Leadership

a. Idealized Influence (Pengaruh yang Diidealkan)

The Tering Sub-district applies the ideal influence through consistency of real actions, especially in the aspects of time discipline and service transparency. His presence in the office early before the morning apple, his willingness to serve the residents of the upstream village until the evening at the official house, and his firmness in rejecting all forms of illegal levies have fostered sincere respect from the structural ranks, executive staff, and the community.

"The Head of the Sub-district is a typical leader who leads by direct example. He is almost always the first to come before the morning apple starts" (Interview with the District Secretary, May 8, 2026).

These findings are in line with Bass's view of idealized influence, which asserts that leaders with ideal influence are able to awaken the emotional side of subordinates through the alignment between speech and actions (Marlina & Tasar, 2025). When employees witness firsthand how their leaders prioritize the public interest over personal comfort, there is a process of internalizing values that change the meaning of work from just making a living to a field of service. These findings reinforce the results of studies by Al-Ambari et al. (2025) and Agusnur (2025) which show that leader role models are a key variable in suppressing staff resistance to change, especially in organizations with limited human resources such as in rural/rural areas.

b. Inspirational Motivation (Motivasi Inspiratif)

This dimension is realized by the Sub-district Head through interactive dialogue that instills the meaning of devotion to daily administrative tasks, instead of a formal-instructive approach alone. The leadership consistently affirms the position of the sub-district as the "first face of the country" for the rural community, while routinely giving open appreciation for the contribution of employees in the plenary meeting forum.

"I always emphasize to my friends in the office, we in Tering District are the first face of the government for the people of this village in West Kutai" (Interview with the Tering Sub-district Head, May 11, 2026).

This approach of moral motivation and consistent verbal appreciation changes the work orientation of employees from simply aborting administrative obligations to a commitment of service that spurs them to work beyond ordinary standards (Komala, 2023). This finding is consistent with Waluyo et al. (2025) who emphasized that accelerating bureaucratic performance is no longer effective if it only relies on enforcing rules, but must be driven by leadership that touches on spiritual job satisfaction and employee self-esteem.

c. Intellectual Stimulation (Stimulasi Intelektual)

The Tering Sub-district Head actively invites his subordinates to discuss finding solutions to service problems, instead of giving rigid instructions. The assurance of security from the leadership that staff will not be immediately blamed if the breakthrough tested is not perfect encourages the birth of independent initiatives, including the preparation of a manual recording system as an emergency solution when the internet network is disconnected.

"What do we think we can cut from this table flow so that residents do not wait more than 15 minutes? ... It's okay, let's evaluate together, the important thing is that you have the courage to try new ways" (Interview with the Head of the Public Service Section, May 11, 2026).

This open-minded climate shifts the work paradigm of the apparatus from passive-waiting to active-solution, while at the same time triggering the flourishing of local initiatives in every section line to unravel bureaucratic impasse and accelerate the acceleration of public services (Kasmawanto, 2024).

d. Individualized Consideration (Pertimbangan Individual)

The sub-district head takes a personal approach to recognize the characteristics, talents, and work obstacles of each employee, including providing schedule flexibility for staff who face family constraints and ensuring that training/technical guidance recommendations are based on real track records and needs, not proximity or seniority.

"The Head of the Sub-district is very concerned about our personal condition. He knows the capacity of each of his staff... His assignment fits what we are good at, so his work does not feel pressured" (Interview with Contract Labor Staff, May 12, 2026).

This fair and empathetic treatment has been proven to bring meaningful changes to the internal motivation of employees, which in turn has direct implications for community satisfaction as service recipients, as felt by one of the residents who takes care of population documents (Harsoyo, 2022).

Factors That Hinder Transformational Leadership

Despite bringing positive impacts, the effectiveness of transformational leadership in the Tering District Office is still faced with three main inhibiting factors.

1. The Old Bureaucratic Culture. The way of thinking of some senior employees who have been accustomed to manual and passive work patterns for decades causes the adjustment of work rhythms to run slowly. The District Secretary emphasized that changing the comfort zone of senior employees requires great energy from the leadership.
2. Lack of Intermediate Structural Exemplary (*miss-match*). Not all Section Heads are able to translate the transformational leadership style of the Sub-district Head to their subordinate staff; The rigid instruction pattern at the Kasi level causes information blockages and work confusion for the implementing staff who receive two different treatment from the Sub-district Head and his direct superiors.
3. Geographical Factors and Limitations of Infrastructure. Internet networks that are often lost (*blank spots*), old office computers, and the high cost of water transportation to upstream villages are external obstacles that limit the speed of digital-based services.

"Our spirit to serve quickly is often broken by technical factors, Mas. In West Kutai, the internet network often suddenly disappears, even though all service applications are now online" (Interview with the Head of the Public Service Section, May 14, 2026).

These findings are relevant to Environmental Contingency Theory, where employee commitment and morale are ultimately limited by the availability of supporting infrastructure. Interestingly, this physical limitation is actually answered through social capital: the emotional and familial relationships built by the Sub-district Head become a *social buffer* that makes employees willing to switch to manual services in a friendly manner when the network goes out, in line with the findings of Nuriati et al. (2023) regarding the role of solidarity in encouraging organizational involvement in the public sector.

Summary of Research Findings

In summary, the research findings on the three main focuses are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings

Yes	Focus	Sub-Focus	Research Findings
1	Early Organizational Conditions	Bureaucratic dynamics before change	Monotonous work rhythms, rigid communication due to hierarchical barriers, passive employees and work based on external motivations (avoiding sanctions).
2	Transformational Leadership	Four-dimensional implementation of Bass & Avolio	Idealized Influence: exemplary discipline and integrity; Inspirational Motivation: instilling the meaning of devotion and open appreciation; Intellectual Stimulation: a space for discussion and tolerance for trial failure; Individualized

Yes	Focus	Sub-Focus	Research Findings
			Consideration: a personal approach, talent mapping, and career development fairness.
3	Inhibiting Factors	Internal and external constraints	The old bureaucratic culture in senior employees; lack of structural role models at the level of Section Heads (mismatch); geographical limitations, infrastructure, and internet networks (blank spots) in West Kutai.

Overall, the above discussion emphasizes that the change in employee motivation orientation from external to internal in the Tering District Office cannot be separated from the central role of transformational leadership of the Sub-district Head. These findings also refute the general assumption that low work motivation for ASN/PPPK in rural areas is solely due to individual laziness; on the contrary, it is more an impact of the previous leadership model that lacks moral exemplars (Azzahra et al., 2025). However, the sustainability of this change is highly dependent on the alignment of leadership values at all structural levels (*managerial alignment*), in line with the views of Telaumbanua & Al-Amin (2025) and Taib & Indayani (2025), so that the transformation of work culture does not stop at the highest leadership level alone, but flows to the front line of service.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the application of transformational leadership by the Tering Sub-district through the four dimensions of *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration* effectively changes the orientation of employee work motivation from what was originally external-transactional (driven by fear of sanctions) to internal motivation based on responsibility morals and a sense of belonging to the organization. Example, inspiring communication, open discussion spaces, and personal attention have proven to be able to dilute bureaucratic rigidity and encourage independent initiative among staff, including contract/honorary personnel, which ultimately has an impact on improving the quality of public services in the eyes of the public.

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this transformational leadership is still limited by two categories of barriers. First, internal-structural obstacles in the form of the rigidity of the old bureaucratic culture in senior employees and the breaking of the chain of example at the level of the Head of Section, which causes the transformational message of the Sub-district Head not to fully reach the executive staff. Second, external-sociogeographical obstacles in the form of large areas, limited facilities, and poor internet networks in West Kutai. Nevertheless, solidity and strong family relationships between employees are important social capital that maintains the sustainability of public services in the midst of these limitations.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Tering District Office conduct regular internal coaching for the District Secretary and Section Heads to harmonize leadership communication styles at all structural levels, develop a non-material award scheme for contract/honorary employees, and issue structured manual service procedures in anticipation of network disruptions. For further research, it is recommended to expand the research locus to several other inland sub-districts with a mixed-methods approach, as well as explore additional variables such as shared leadership and organizational resilience in frontline government organizations.

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