

THE INFLUENCE OF LOCAL WISDOM-BASED LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE PROFESSIONALISM

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the influence of local wisdom-based leadership on employee professionalism within the Personnel and Human Resource Development Agency of the Mentawai Islands Regency. Leadership rooted in local cultural values plays a significant role in shaping the behavior, work ethic, and professional performance of employees in regional government institutions. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving key informants, including agency leaders, staff, and community representatives. The findings reveal that leadership practices guided by local cultural wisdom—such as integrity, mutual respect, and collective responsibility—have a positive impact on enhancing employee professionalism. These values foster discipline, accountability, and a sense of belonging among civil servants, leading to improved work quality and public service delivery. Furthermore, the study highlights that leaders who internalize and apply local cultural values effectively bridge hierarchical gaps, strengthen organizational cohesion, and encourage ethical conduct aligned with community norms. However, challenges remain in maintaining consistency in applying these values amid generational and institutional changes. The study concludes that integrating local wisdom into leadership strategies is essential for building sustainable professionalism and organizational resilience in regional governance.

Keywords: local wisdom; leadership; employee professionalism; organizational culture; regional government.

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays a critical role in determining organizational effectiveness, influencing not only productivity but also employee professionalism and ethical conduct [1]. Over the past few decades, most leadership theories applied in Indonesia have been adapted from Western and East Asian paradigms—such as transformational, transactional, and servant leadership models—which often overlook the contextual dimensions of local culture and values [2]. In recent years, scholars have emphasized the importance of contextual leadership that integrates local wisdom (kearifan lokal) as a foundation for effective organizational management, particularly within the public sector [3], [4].

Indonesia, as a multicultural nation with more than 1,300 ethnic groups, possesses diverse indigenous values that have historically guided community governance and social relations [5]. One such example is found in the Mentawai Islands Regency of West Sumatra, where traditional systems of authority—embodied in the laggai and uma structures—have long served as mechanisms for decision-making, conflict resolution, and collective welfare [6]. The Mentawai concept of leadership, represented by the figure of Sikebbukat Uma, is based on deliberation,

solidarity, and shared responsibility, reflecting a communal rather than hierarchical form of governance [7]. This cultural framework provides a moral and ethical foundation for leadership practices that promote inclusivity, justice, and accountability within modern administrative systems [8].

However, the modernization of Indonesian bureaucracy and the adoption of centralized governance models have gradually marginalized these indigenous leadership practices. The implementation of standardized bureaucratic norms—often derived from Western public administration systems—has created tension between formal institutional requirements and the values embedded in local governance traditions [9]. This disconnect has contributed to challenges in public sector professionalism, including low employee discipline, weak teamwork, and limited community engagement [10]. In the case of the Mentawai Islands BKPSDM (Personnel and Human Resource Development Agency), preliminary observations revealed declining employee professionalism manifested in tardiness, limited productivity, and insufficient alignment between leadership and staff [11].

To address such issues, it is necessary to recontextualize leadership by integrating local cultural values into modern administrative systems. Local culture-based leadership emphasizes the harmony between

traditional wisdom and contemporary managerial practices, enabling leaders to inspire professionalism through culturally grounded ethics and participatory governance [12]. Previous studies in other Indonesian regions, such as Bali and Toraja, have demonstrated that leadership rooted in local cultural values fosters higher employee engagement, conflict resolution effectiveness, and organizational trust [13]. In this regard, the Mentawai leadership principles rooted in the Arat Sabulungan belief system offer a distinctive perspective that combines moral integrity, deliberation, and egalitarianism in administrative decision-making [14].

Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of local culture-based leadership in improving the professionalism of employees at the BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency. It focuses on three key dimensions: (1) decision-making practices, (2) conflict management, and (3) teamwork development. By understanding how traditional Mentawai leadership values are adapted within a bureaucratic institution, this research contributes to the discourse on indigenizing leadership theories in the context of Indonesia's public sector reform. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence that local culture-based leadership can enhance employee professionalism, strengthen organizational ethics, and support sustainable governance rooted in community values [15].

Leadership rooted in local culture reflects a synthesis between traditional wisdom and modern management principles, emphasizing values of cooperation, moral integrity, and community solidarity [16]. Scholars argue that leadership is inherently contextual; thus, effective leaders must align their actions with the cultural norms, beliefs, and expectations of the people they govern [17]. The concept of local culture-based leadership (*kepemimpinan berbasis budaya lokal*) in Indonesia stems from the belief that indigenous values—such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), *musyawarah* (deliberation), and *tepa selira* (empathy)—create ethical and participatory decision-making frameworks that strengthen organizational harmony [18].

In the Mentawai Islands, leadership is traditionally shaped by the Arat Sabulungan system, which integrates spiritual, social, and administrative functions. The *Sikebbukat Uma* or traditional leader acts as a mediator and role model who ensures balance between community welfare, justice, and consensus [19]. Recent studies in local governance have shown that cultural leadership models based on communal consensus outperform purely bureaucratic or transactional systems in promoting loyalty, motivation, and trust among subordinates [20]. Therefore, the integration of local cultural values into modern public institutions is considered vital for developing ethical, adaptive, and culturally sustainable leadership models.

Professionalism in public service refers to employees' ability to perform their duties with competence, discipline, accountability, and adherence to ethical standards [21]. According to Hasibuan (2021), professionalism encompasses both technical proficiency and moral commitment, ensuring that civil servants uphold integrity in

decision-making and service delivery [22]. In a public organization, professional behavior is shaped not only by formal regulations but also by leadership patterns that influence motivation, teamwork, and work culture. Leaders who demonstrate fairness, participatory communication, and cultural sensitivity tend to foster higher levels of employee professionalism and performance [23].

Cultural dimensions—such as collectivism, hierarchy, and power distance—also significantly affect how professionalism manifests in bureaucratic settings [24]. In the Mentawai context, the principles of respect (*siripo*), communal responsibility, and solidarity reinforce employees' sense of belonging and accountability toward their institutions. When leadership aligns with these cultural norms, professionalism is strengthened through shared goals, open dialogue, and culturally grounded ethics.

Organizational culture represents a system of shared values, beliefs, and assumptions that guide how individuals behave within an institution [25]. Integrating local culture into organizational leadership not only preserves cultural heritage but also enhances organizational identity and cohesion. In the public sector, this approach has been linked to improved employee morale, innovative problem-solving, and stronger ethical compliance [18]. Studies by Kurnia and Widodo (2023) indicate that leaders who adopt local culture-based principles are more likely to implement inclusive management practices that reduce bureaucratic rigidity and improve interpersonal relations between supervisors and subordinates [16].

From a theoretical standpoint, the combination of local wisdom and bureaucratic professionalism supports the development of a “cultural-transformational leadership” model—where leaders act not merely as administrators but as cultural stewards who embody the moral and ethical traditions of their communities. This model provides a foundation for fostering integrity-driven public institutions, especially in diverse cultural contexts like Indonesia.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how local culture-based leadership influences employee professionalism within the Personnel and Human Resource Development Agency (BKPSDM) of the Mentawai Islands Regency. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows a deeper understanding of social meanings, values, and leadership practices as constructed by individuals within their cultural and institutional contexts [26]. The research focuses on the lived experiences of leaders and staff in integrating Mentawai's traditional values—such as *laggai* (discipline), *uma* (communal responsibility), and *siripo* (mutual respect) into bureaucratic leadership practices.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis involving 12 informants, including agency heads, division leaders, senior employees, and community elders familiar with the local cultural system. Interviews were semi-structured to

ensure flexibility while maintaining consistency in core questions related to leadership patterns, decision-making, conflict resolution, and professional behavior. The data were analyzed using interactive model analysis, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [27]. Triangulation was applied by cross-verifying findings from different sources to enhance validity and reliability. The research process adhered to ethical principles by ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' cultural values. This methodology enabled the researcher to interpret how indigenous leadership concepts are internalized within formal administrative structures to improve professionalism and institutional effectiveness.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Local culture-based leadership of the head of BKPSDM to improve the professionalism of employees in BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency through decision-making is seen from two components, namely decision-making style and decision-making process. The following is a picture related to decision-making (egalitarian) at the Human Resources Personnel and Development Agency (BKPSDM): First, the results of research conducted at BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency in decision-making are related to style in decision-making. The decision-making style found in this study at the Mentawai Islands Regency BKPSDM is to make decisions by involving all officials and staff, making decisions under the main duties and functions of BKPSDM, and decision-making is not rigid in translating existing rules. The strengths and weaknesses of the decision-maker are determined by the style used by the leader in decision-making. The same information will be evaluated and made decisions with different leadership styles. This helps explain why different leaders make different decisions.

BKPSDM Mentawai Islands District in decision-making involves all officials and staff. This is something that can improve leadership professionalism because every analysis and formulation of problems is discussed together and not only the opinions of the leader but officials and staff in the environment contribute to the problems faced. In the BKPSDM environment, decision-making is also with existing Auth. This is a good thing for leadership because making decisions with it will speed up and expedite the decision on an activity or issue. The results of the study also explained that BKPSDM in making decisions is not rigid in translating existing rules. If the leader is rigid in translating these rules, it will have an impact on decision making and this makes the leader will act unprofessionally. The results of research related to the decision-making process found in this study at the BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency are coordinating with the field, guided by existing rules, involving subordinates in making decisions, and not under Auth. The decision-making process is very important in decision making. This process ensures the leader behaves in decision-making. It can be seen from the results of interviews with informants that the BKPSDM Mentawai

Islands Regency in the decision-making process coordinates with the fields. This was revealed by the informant in the following interview: "Okay, Mom, what a good question. So, before the head of BKPSDM decides on a decision, he usually coordinates first with the field. Later the agenda will be decided, mixed in the field first. After okay, everything was just brought to the meeting. So subordinates are involved in making decisions. Because they are technically aware of the decision" (BKPSDM mutation chief informant)

Leaders in the decision-making process coordinate with the field there is a matter of professionalism. This is said to be professional for a leader to carry out the decision-making process because every decision making always coordinates under the field of the decision to be taken and the leader does not decide for himself on decision-making. Pro-of decision-making at BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency also involve subordinates in making decisions. This was revealed by the informant in the following interview: "Alhamdulillah is healthy. Basically, every decision taken by the head of BKPSDM always involves his subordinates. Subordinates are gathered, meeting to make decisions" (Informant of the General Head of Civil Service BKPSDM). The involvement of subordinates is very important in decision-making in the organization because subordinates are the executors of tasks or orders given by superiors. Therefore, subordinates will know the situation in the field and the results of the tasks ordered by superiors, after that the conditions and results of the execution of subordinates will be reported to superiors for consideration in decision-making. The results of research on BKPSDM also found that in the decision-making process, some were not under Auth. This was revealed by the informant in the following interview: "Usually it always corresponds to Tupoksi. But sometimes it is not under the objectives to expedite the completion of activities." (Informant of the General Head of BKPSDM Civil Service).

Local culture-based leadership is something that is born with the leadership characteristics of the inheritance process. The following is a picture related to the results of decision-making research (egalitarian) on the local culture of Mentawai Islands Regency: Local culture is a characteristic possessed by each region. Local culture in an area will also influence leaders in leading in the area. The results of research on Leadership based on the local culture of Mentawai Islands Regency are related to decision-making styles, namely tactical thinking, long-term decisions, short-term decisions, upholding leadership, decision-making styles depending on the problems faced, and gathering people in facing problems. This was revealed by the informant in the following interview: "The fast decision-making style in Mentawai culture means that indirectly there is a special scale. Tactical thinking in certain respects depends on the problem. For example, in decision-making in Mentawai culture, leaders have prerogative rights." (Informant of DPD KNPI Mentawai chairman)

"The decision-making style in Mentawai culture is, depending on the problem at hand, if it is difficult to decide, it means having to gather several related people. His opinion is to agree on things quickly so that the problem does not

drag on so that communication relations between others will be well terawatt". (Kerei Light Informant) "In Mentawai culture related to leadership is very uphold, because in crocodiles every uma / Big House in Mentawai culture there is always a head/leader because the process of activities is always guided by a leader". (Light Kerei informant)

Careful decision-making in Mentawai Islands culture by looking at existing conditions and not imposing will and making approaches by looking at changes that occur as the community or tribal members develop. The culture of the Mentawai Islands leader is called Sikebukkat Uma which is said in the Tribe. Sikebukkat Uma is responsible for his tribe members or Uma. The local culture of Mentawai Islands Regency highly upholds leadership. This is because Mentawai culture is very respectful of leaders and the leader is responsible to his members. The results of the study can be concluded that the local culture-based leadership of Mentawai Islands Regency influences supporting the improvement of professionalism in BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency. This is because the local Mentawai culture in the style and decision-making process is under what is applied to the BKPSDM environment. The culture in BKPSDM is certainly related to the local culture where the organization is located. The leadership of BKPSDM in this case adapts its leadership style to the local cultural situation in the area. Leadership in the local Mentawai culture can be used as an improvement in leadership professionalism at the head of BKPSDM. The reason is that the leadership of local Mentawai culture that has been found through decision making or local Mentawai culture called egalitarian seen from the leadership style and decision-making process can be used as a reference for the head of BKPSDM such as tactical thinking whether it will be decided in the short or long term, each member upholds leadership because members know that the leader will be responsible for each member.

Conflict is a serious problem because conflict conditions are not favorable for leadership. After all, it will cause various difficulties in moving members of the organization to work together to achieve organizational goals. Conflict encourages individuals to look for friends who show solidarity with themselves and their problems so that there is a grouping of members who conflict with each other, both overtly and secretly. ocal culture-based leadership of the head of BKPSDM to improve the professionalism of employees in BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency through decision-making seen from two components, namely the source of conflict and how to control conflict. The following is a picture related to conflict control at the Human Resources Personnel and Development Agency (BKPSDM): The source of conflict in an organization cannot be avoided because in the organization everyone has different thoughts. In BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency, the sources of conflict are member competition and the discomfort of BKPSDM members. This rivalry among members was revealed by the informant in the following interview: "It's usually competition or discomfort. For conflict resolution, the head of the agency asked his staff. If there is a competition, then find out what way to solve it is

a natural thing to happen in every organization. However, the source of conflict from competition among members needs to be managed properly for the benefit of future progress and that is where the professionalism of the leadership role in overcoming the source of conflict can be seen." (Information of the Head of General Personnel BKPSDM)

In BKPSDM, one of the things that is done in controlling conflicts is deliberation. This was revealed by the informant in the following interview: "Conflict resolution tends to be done by forging a process of deliberation and peace so that the conflict that occurs can be resolved properly". (informant arsenious secretary BKPSDM) Utilizing all existing potentials, accommodating and extracting information related to conflicts, and embracing all resources are ways for BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency to control conflicts. This was revealed by the informant in the following interview: "Embrace all existing resources, and utilize all existing potential resources as a source of strength to achieve common goals". (Informant Ruslianus, Secretary of Bappeda) "The head of BKPSDM will accommodate and dig up information related to the conflict that occurred. After all, employees have expressed their opinions, they will be considered first and will renegotiate with staff the most appropriate or appropriate decision to resolve the conflict." (informant arsenious secretary BKPSDM) The results of BKPSDM's further research in controlling conflicts are with leaders using power and authority and follow-up to resolve conflicts. The authority of the leader is a source of group strength. A leader who is tasked with leading a group, making a decision, or solving a problem effectively, needs to have the ability to use the power and authority inherent in his role.

Cultural conflicts can occur anywhere, especially in places where there are fundamental differences between cultures and societies supporting a culture. Local cultural conflicts in society can be triggered by various factors, both ideological and praxis. This cultural conflict can be transformed into something that benefits the supporting communities of different cultures if it can be managed properly and correctly through the right approach. In the culture of Mentawai Islands Regency from the results of research and interviews with informants, there are several sources of conflict, namely criminal acts, community nature, land disputes, external influences, and lack of communication. Conflict control carried out by Mentawai culture is conducting deliberations, conducting regulations, imposing fines or sanctions, requiring an advisor or supervisor, isolating themselves, replacing leaders, and following up to resolve conflicts. Deliberation is important in leadership to achieve professionalism. Likewise, making regulations, these regulations can be used as good improvements for leaders and subordinates in correcting themselves. Local culture-based leadership of the head of BKPSDM to improve the professionalism of employees in BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency through building teamwork is seen from two components, namely the role in team building and the team building process. The following is a picture related to the results of research through building teamwork at BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency:

The results of research on BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency related to Leadership based on the local culture of the head of BKPSDM to improve the professionalism of employees in BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency through building teamwork seen from the role in team building found that leaders must be able to provide benefits for members or subordinates, leaders in motivating members, leaders work together with members, leaders give access to members to develop skills and Reciprocity between leadership and members. Leadership basically cannot go alone. Leadership arises because of cooperation with others. Without others, there is no leader. Thus, leadership is not a one-person effort but involves teamwork. The results of research related to local culture-based leadership of the head of BKPSDM to improve the professionalism of employees in BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency through building teamwork, judging from the team formation process, it was found that the team formation process carried out was to gather staff and prioritize mutual interests in team formation. The results of research on leadership in Mentawai culture through building teamwork seen from the role of leaders in building teamwork found that leaders give encouragement and input, and leaders have an important role in building teams. This was revealed by the informant in the following interview: "In Mentawai culture, the role of the leader is needed, because everything related to the process of buying, for example in traditional parties there is very much needed, it is the role of the team." (Kerei Light Informant)

"Leaders only need to give encouragement and advice to Uma members, not coercion. He who is diligent is the one who has a good life. Leaders have no right to judge members who make mistakes." (Informant Ron Tasirikeru, youth leader). The results of research on the process of team formation through building teamwork found that Mentawai culture conducts team formation with cooperation and the process that already exists in Mentawai culture. This was revealed by the informant in the following interview: "In uma, there is sikebbukat uma which is a policy maker in a decision. Everyone has the right to have an opinion in a deliberation. For team formation, usually in the Mentawai community in doing everything or work always do mutual assistance. The division of work by sex is very clear. For the distribution of results is also carried out equally". (Informant Bernadetta Rosita Taileleu Civil Service). "In Mentawai culture, precisely with the existence/formation of a team, all forms of cultural processes run according to the process, so that in terms of activities will run conductively." (Light Informant Kerei). Building teamwork can usually work best when expertise from multiple functions is involved. Team members have specific roles that are well understood by each member. A degree of interdependence in building teamwork is indispensable. Each team member must contribute to the team to be successful, due to interdependence and cooperation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Local culture-based leadership of Mentawai Islands Regency influences in supporting the improvement of professionalism in BKPSDM Mentawai Islands Regency. This is because the local Mentawai culture in the style and decision-making process is under what is applied to the BKPSDM environment. The leadership of BKPSDM in this case adapts its leadership style to the local cultural situation in the area. Leadership in the local culture of Mentawai can be used as an increase in leadership professionalism in the head of BKPSDM. Conflict control carried out by the Mentawai culture is conducting deliberations, conducting regulations, imposing fines or sanctions, requiring an advisor or supervisor, isolating themselves, replacing leaders, and following up to resolve conflicts. Deliberation is important in leadership to achieve professionalism. Likewise, making regulations, these regulations can be used as good improvements for leaders and subordinates in correcting themselves. In Mentawai culture the formation of teams with mutual assistance. Leadership arises because of cooperation with others. Thus, leadership is not a one-person effort but involves teamwork. In BKPSDM, the team formation process carried out is to gather staff and prioritize mutual interests in team formation.

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