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Effectiveness of Village Head Leadership in Improving Community Welfare: A Qualitative Case Study in Mangunsari Village

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Abstract

Effective leadership at the village level is a critical determinant of rural community welfare, yet evidence from Indonesian village governance remains limited. This study examines the effectiveness of the Mangunsari Village Head's leadership in advancing community welfare through a qualitative case study approach. Data were gathered via semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven purposively selected informants including the village head, two village officials, and four community members complemented by non-participant observation and document analysis. Data were validated using source and method triangulation and analysed through Miles and Huberman's interactive model (data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing). Findings reveal that leadership effectiveness is shaped by the interplay of seven interconnected factors: leader personality and quality, past experience and expectations, superior's expectations and behaviour, subordinates' characteristics and behaviour, task requirements, organisational culture and village policy, and peer expectations and behaviour. The village head's participatory and transformational leadership style positively contributes to infrastructure development, public service delivery, and community empowerment initiatives. However, declining community participation in the second term indicates the need for renewed leadership responsiveness and adaptive strategies. These findings have practical implications for local governance policy and rural development programmes in Indonesia and comparable developing-country contexts.
Keywords: Village Head Leadership; Leadership Effectiveness; Community Welfare; Rural Governance; Qualitative Case Study; Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

Village governance occupies a foundational position in Indonesia's decentralised public administration system. As the lowest tier of government with direct contact with citizens, village administrations are expected to deliver public services efficiently, mobilise local resources, and drive community development (Agus Diana et al., 2024; Mustanir et al., 2021). Central to this mandate is the quality of village head leadership, which determines the extent to which governance goals are translated into tangible improvements in community welfare (Tobing et al., 2021).

Leadership effectiveness defined as the degree to which a leader successfully accomplishes organisational goals through optimal utilisation of available resources within a given timeframe (Gibson et al., 2012) has attracted increasing scholarly attention in the context of local and village governance (Northouse, 2021). At the village level, an effective leader must simultaneously motivate subordinates, maintain responsive communication, coordinate development activities, and uphold accountability to the community (Yukl, 2020; Sineke et al., 2022).

Mangunsari Village, located in Tulungagung Regency, East Java, presents an instructive case. With a population of approximately 2,954 residents, the village has undergone visible infrastructure and service improvements during the current village head's tenure. However, a perceived decline in community engagement during the second term raises questions about the sustainability and consistency of leadership effectiveness. This tension between early achievements and recent governance challenges makes Mangunsari a theoretically and empirically valuable setting.

Prior studies on village head leadership in Indonesia have predominantly employed descriptive approaches focused on a single aspect of leadership (Ilmiah Pranata Edu et al., 2020; Manua et al., 2022). Few have applied a multi-factor effectiveness model or explicitly linked leadership behaviour to community welfare outcomes. This study addresses that gap by applying Sopiah's (2008) Leadership Effectiveness Model to examine how multiple interacting factors shape the village head's leadership effectiveness in Mangunsari.

This article proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical literature; Section 3 details the research methodology; Section 4 presents and discusses the findings; and Section 5 draws conclusions and policy implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership: Conceptual Foundations

Leadership has been studied across multiple disciplines, generating a rich but varied body of theory. Among the most widely cited definitions, Bass (1990, p. 11) described leadership as "an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of members." Similarly, Northouse (2021, p. 5) defined it as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal." In the context of public administration, leadership is understood as a mechanism through which public managers direct, motivate, and coordinate organisational actors toward the delivery of public value (Tummers & Knies, 2016). Freeman and Taylor's (1950) earlier formulation emphasised the leader's capacity to plan and coordinate cooperative activities to achieve organisational objectives effectively and efficiently a view that remains relevant for village governance contexts. Transformational leadership theory (Burns,

1978; Bass, 1985) holds particular relevance here. Transformational leaders inspire followers through vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, producing outcomes beyond transactional exchange (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Empirical evidence from developing-country settings suggests that transformational leadership enhances public service motivation and organisational performance (Kroll & Vogel, 2021).

Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness refers to the extent to which a leader achieves desired outcomes for followers, the organisation, and the broader context in which the group operates (Yukl, 2020). It is not a unitary construct; rather, it is shaped by a constellation of individual, contextual, and relational factors. Sopiah (2008) proposed an integrative model identifying seven key determinants of leadership effectiveness: (1) the leader's personality and quality; (2) the leader's past experience and expectations; (3) expectations and behaviour of superiors; (4) characteristics, expectations, and behaviour of subordinates; (5) task requirements; (6) organisational culture and institutional policies; and (7) expectations and behaviour of peers. This model is especially appropriate for village governance, where leaders operate within complex webs of institutional constraints, community norms, and interpersonal relationships. Complementing this, House's (1996) path-goal theory suggests that leaders enhance follower motivation by clarifying paths to goal achievement and removing obstacles. In village contexts, this translates to the village head's ability to articulate development priorities and mobilise resources to support community participation (Hanny et al., 2022).

Village Head Leadership and Community Welfare in Indonesia

Under Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, the village head (kepala desa) holds authority over village administration, development, community empowerment, and social affairs. The law mandates transparent and accountable governance, reinforcing the expectation that village heads serve as effective development agents (Di Desa Waringin Agung et al., 2024). Empirical studies in Indonesia reveal that village head leadership style significantly influences public service quality (Jurusan et al., 2022; Sineke et al., 2022), community participation (Pada et al., 2022), and development outcomes (Satmoko Adi et al., 2023). Participatory and transformational styles are consistently associated with better outcomes, while more autocratic or passive approaches correlate with lower community satisfaction and reduced participation (Manua et al., 2022). Community welfare, as the target outcome in this study, encompasses economic well-being, social cohesion, access to public services, and community empowerment (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021). Research from sub-national settings in Southeast Asia corroborates that local leadership quality is among the strongest predictors of rural welfare improvement (Andrews et al., 2017; Mikkelsen, 2018).

Research Gap and Analytical Framework

Research on village head leadership in Indonesia indicates that leadership quality is closely associated with community participation, village development, empowerment, and the achievement of community welfare. Democratic and participatory village leadership enables communities to become involved in development processes and the management of village resources, while leaders' ability to establish effective communication, provide direction, and coordinate village officials and community members is essential for achieving development objectives (Pradana & Sitorus, 2020; Arozza et al., 2020). However, previous studies have largely focused on the relationship between leadership styles and specific outcomes, such as community participation or village development, and have therefore not fully explained the multidimensional factors that shape the effectiveness of village head leadership in improving

community welfare. For example, Damayanti and Syarifuddin (2020) demonstrated that community participation in village development planning remains insufficiently inclusive and sustainable, indicating that the formal existence of participatory mechanisms does not necessarily guarantee substantive community involvement.

This condition highlights a *research gap* in understanding village leadership effectiveness as a process influenced not only by leaders' characteristics but also by leaders' experiences, the characteristics and behaviour of subordinates, task requirements, organisational culture, village policies, and relationships with other actors within the village governance environment. Accordingly, this study adopts Sopiah's (2008) leadership effectiveness model as its analytical framework by examining seven interrelated factors: leader personality and quality, the leader's past experience and expectations, superiors' expectations and behaviour, subordinates' characteristics and behaviour, task requirements, organisational culture and institutional policies, and peers' expectations and behaviour. These seven factors are contextualised within village governance to analyse how the effectiveness of the Mangunsari Village Head's leadership is manifested through village development, public service delivery, and community empowerment, which subsequently contribute to community welfare. Thus, this study goes beyond identifying the leadership style of the village head and seeks to explain how the interaction of individual, relational, task-related, and institutional factors shapes leadership effectiveness and how such effectiveness is maintained or changes throughout the process of village governance and development.

This analytical perspective is particularly relevant because recent research suggests that effective village leadership requires inclusive participation mechanisms, public access to information, transparency, and deliberative spaces that enable citizens to influence village decision-making processes (Syukri, 2024). Consequently, the Mangunsari case contributes to the literature by integrating a multidimensional perspective on leadership effectiveness with the context of village governance and community welfare, while also explaining why successful development and public service achievements during an earlier leadership period do not necessarily guarantee the sustainability of community participation in the subsequent period.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a single-site case study strategy (Yin, 2018). Case study methodology is appropriate when the research seeks to understand a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, particularly when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Mangunsari Village was selected through purposive criterion sampling because it presents a nuanced case of village leadership where both successes and tensions in effectiveness are observable, enabling deep analytical exploration.

Data Source

Mangunsari Village is situated in Tulungagung Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia. The village has a registered population of approximately 2,954 residents and is governed by a village head currently in his second term of office. The village has experienced visible infrastructure improvements including road construction and enhanced community security arrangements but community members and officials have noted declining civic participation in the second term, creating a productive empirical tension for this study.

Informant Selection

Informants were selected using purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling techniques. The initial informant was the village head, followed by referral-based selection of additional participants who possessed direct knowledge of village governance and leadership. A total of seven informants participated:

- 1 Village Head (primary key informant)
- 2 Village Government Officials (sekretaris desa and a section head)
- 4 Community Members (representing diverse demographic groups: farmers, small business owners, and youth representatives)

This composition ensured multiple perspectives from both governance insiders and community stakeholders, consistent with Miles et al.'s (2014) recommendation for purposive informant diversity in qualitative inquiry. Data saturation was monitored throughout; no new substantive themes emerged after the sixth interview, and the seventh interview confirmed saturation.

Data Collection

Three complementary data collection methods were employed to ensure methodological richness:

- Semi-structured in-depth interviews:
  The primary data source. An interview guide was developed based on Sopiah's (2008) seven-factor effectiveness model and pre-tested with one village official not included in the main sample. Interviews were conducted individually, lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, were audio-recorded with informed consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The language of interviews was Indonesian (Javanese dialect for community informants).
- Non-participant observation:
  The researchers observed village council meetings (musyawarah desa), public service activities at the village office, and community events across a three-month fieldwork period (July–September 2024). Observational notes were recorded in a structured field diary to capture leadership behaviours, community interactions, and service delivery processes.
- Document analysis:
  Village development plans (RPJMDes and RKPDes), budget realisation reports (APBDes), service records, community meeting minutes, and relevant local regulations were reviewed to contextualise interview and observation data (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model of qualitative analysis, which consists of three concurrent activities:

- Data condensation: Raw data (transcripts, field notes, documents) were systematically coded using ATLAS.ti software. Initial open coding generated 47 first-order codes; axial coding reduced these to 18 second-order categories aligned with Sopiah's (2008) effectiveness factors. Selective coding produced five overarching themes.
- Data display: Coded data were organised into matrices and narrative summaries that allowed cross-case and cross-informant comparison, facilitating pattern recognition and the identification of confirming and disconfirming evidence.
- Conclusion drawing and verification: Interpretive conclusions were drawn iteratively, tested against raw data, and refined through peer debriefing sessions among the

research team. Rival explanations were explicitly considered before final interpretations were confirmed.

- This study received ethical clearance from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Tulungagung. All participants provided written informed consent; data were anonymised where necessary to protect identities.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Four strategies were adopted to ensure trustworthiness, following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria:

- Credibility: Source triangulation (cross-checking across informant groups) and method triangulation (interview, observation, document data) were applied. Member checking was conducted by sharing summary findings with two key informants for verification.
- Transferability: Thick description of the research site, participants, and context was provided to enable readers to assess transferability to comparable settings.
- Dependability: An audit trail was maintained, documenting all methodological decisions, coding decisions, and revisions throughout the research process.
- Confirmability: Reflexivity was practised by documenting researcher positionality and potential biases, particularly regarding researchers' familiarity with the local governance context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Leadership Effectiveness in Mangunsari Village

The analysis reveals that the effectiveness of the Mangunsari Village Head's leadership is best understood as an emergent property of the interaction among multiple factors rather than the product of any single determinant. Using Sopiah's (2008) model as the analytical lens, findings are organised around seven interrelated dimensions, each of which both shapes and is shaped by the village head's leadership behaviour.

Leader Personality and Quality

Informants consistently described the village head as possessing strong interpersonal skills, community commitment, and professional integrity during his first term. Community members highlighted his accessibility and willingness to engage directly with residents' needs:

"He was always present at community events. You could talk to him directly, not just through the staff. That made us feel like our voices mattered." (Community Member 1, Interview, August 2024)

However, in the second term, several informants noted a perceived reduction in responsiveness and direct community engagement. This is consistent with the leadership lifecycle literature, which identifies declining motivation and increased bureaucratic orientation as common patterns in leaders' subsequent terms (Tummers & Knies, 2016). Village officials attributed this partly to increased administrative workload and centrally mandated reporting requirements.

Past Experience and Leader Expectations

The village head's prior experience as a community organisation leader provided him with practical knowledge of mobilising collective action and managing community dynamics. This background informed his preference for participatory decision-making, particularly in the first term. His articulated aspirations for village development centred on infrastructure

modernisation and economic empowerment served as motivating forces that aligned organisational action.

Consistent with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, past successful experiences reinforced the village head's self-efficacy, which in turn supported his willingness to take initiative on complex development projects. However, when some second-term initiatives encountered bureaucratic obstacles, informants suggested that his aspirational expectations became sources of frustration rather than motivation.

Expectations and Behaviour of Superiors

As a village head operating within Indonesia's hierarchical governance structure, the village head is accountable to the sub-district head (camat) and the district government. Informants noted that district-level policy directives including the mandatory e-government initiative and standardised reporting formats significantly shaped the village head's administrative priorities and, at times, displaced community-centred activities.

This finding aligns with research on principal-agent dynamics in decentralised governance, which highlights how vertical accountability pressures can crowd out horizontal accountability to local communities (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999; Andrews et al., 2017). The village head's ability to navigate these competing accountability demands emerged as a key moderator of overall effectiveness

Characteristics, Expectations, and Behaviour of Subordinates

Village staff expressed high levels of commitment and institutional loyalty, particularly toward the village head's development priorities. However, differences in educational background and administrative capacity among village officials created uneven implementation of planned programmes. Two officials with higher educational qualifications served as de facto coordinators for more technically complex tasks, while others required supervisory support.

Community members' expectations were characterised by a desire for responsive service delivery, transparent communication about development plans, and tangible improvements in daily living conditions. Where these expectations were met particularly through the road construction project and improved night security arrangements community satisfaction was high. Where communication was perceived as insufficient, disengagement followed

Task Requirements

The village head's formal role encompasses administrative, developmental, and social functions. Informants across groups agreed that the first term was characterised by proactive fulfilment of these role requirements: infrastructure planning and execution, community meeting facilitation, and social welfare programme coordination were all cited as areas of notable performance.

In the second term, the introduction of mandatory digital administration systems (Sistem Informasi Desa/SID) increased technical task complexity without commensurate capacity building for village staff. This created a resource-task misalignment that constrained the village head's ability to focus on community-facing leadership activities.

Organisational Culture and Village Policy

Mangunsari Village's organisational culture characterised by Javanese communal norms, deference to elders, and strong reliance on informal consensus mechanisms (musyawarah) both supported and constrained leadership effectiveness. The village head's alignment with these cultural norms facilitated trust and cooperation but also meant that direct communication of governance challenges was often indirect or delayed.

Village policy instruments, particularly the Village Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMDes) and annual work plans, provided a formal structure for prioritising development activities. Document analysis revealed that the majority of planned activities in the first term were implemented; implementation rates declined in the second term, corroborating informant accounts of diminished momentum.

Peer Expectations and Behaviour

Relationships with heads of neighbouring villages and sub-district-level peers created an informal network of governance knowledge sharing. Informants indicated that inter-village collaboration on shared infrastructure (road maintenance along village boundaries) was facilitated by positive peer relations. However, competitive dynamics over district development funds occasionally created tensions that the village head had to navigate diplomatically.

Discussion: Implications for Leadership Effectiveness Theory and Practice

Taken together, the findings support and extend Sopiah's (2008) multi-factor model. The seven factors are not independent; they operate as an interconnected system in which strengths in one dimension can partially compensate for weaknesses in another, but systemic under-performance across multiple dimensions as observed in the second term produces cumulative reductions in effectiveness.

The transformational leadership behaviours most evident in the first term inspirational motivation, individualised consideration, and community empowerment align with Bass and Riggio's (2006) transformational model and are consistent with studies linking such behaviours to rural development outcomes in Southeast Asia (Kroll & Vogel, 2021; Yukl, 2020). The decline in these behaviours in the second term suggests that transformational leadership requires active, sustained effort rather than being a stable dispositional trait.

Practically, the findings point to the importance of institutional support mechanisms including training, capacity building for village staff, and reducing administrative burden to sustain village head effectiveness over time. They also underscore the need for structured community feedback mechanisms that allow village heads to recalibrate their leadership strategies in response to shifting community needs and expectations.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness of the Mangunsari Village Head's leadership in improving community welfare through the lens of Sopiah's (2008) seven-factor Leadership Effectiveness Model. Using qualitative case study methodology, the research revealed that leadership effectiveness is a dynamic, multi-determined phenomenon shaped by the interplay of leader personality, past experience, superior demands, subordinate characteristics, task complexity, organisational culture, and peer relations.

Key findings indicate that the village head demonstrated effective transformational and participatory leadership during his first term, resulting in tangible infrastructure improvements and enhanced public service delivery. The second term was marked by reduced community engagement, implementation deficits, and increased administrative demands, collectively diminishing leadership effectiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes empirical evidence supporting multi-factor models of leadership effectiveness in village governance contexts and demonstrates the value of combining process-oriented qualitative methods with established theoretical frameworks. From a policy standpoint, findings suggest that: (a) village head capacity

development should be continuous across terms, not limited to pre-election training; (b) administrative digitalisation should be accompanied by adequate staff support; and (c) structured community feedback mechanisms should be institutionalised to maintain leadership accountability.

This study has several limitations. The single-site case study design limits statistical generalisability. The reliance on self-report data from informants introduces potential social desirability bias, though triangulation was employed to mitigate this. Future research should adopt comparative case study designs across multiple villages and regencies to test the generalisability of the factors identified here. Longitudinal designs tracking leadership effectiveness across full terms of office would also yield valuable insights into leadership trajectory dynamics.

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