

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AT THE LEBAK REGENCY SOCIAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

Muhamad Agung Dharmajaya

Universitas Mathla'ul Anwar, Banten, Indonesia

Email: agungdharma@unmabanten.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyse adaptive leadership strategies for improving employee performance at the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office. Dynamic demands for public services, the extensive geographical area served, and frequent changes in social sector regulations require a flexible and innovative leadership model. The study employs a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with leaders and employees, field observations, and an analysis of documents relating to organisational performance. The findings indicate that adaptive leadership, characterised by the ability to navigate crises, empower employees through collective problem-solving, and maintain open communication, substantially improves employee effectiveness. Performance improvements are evident in the timeliness of social assistance distribution, responsiveness to complaints, and bureaucratic efficiency, supported by psychological safety in the workplace. The principal enabling factors include the integration of the SIKS-NG application and employees' strong social capital in the form of collective empathy. Challenges include staffing shortages, limited funding for field mobility, and cultural resistance to changes in working practices. The study concludes that adaptive leadership is an important catalyst for developing a resilient and agile organisational culture within local government institutions.

Keywords: *Adaptive Leadership, Employee Performance, Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office, Public Sector Management.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Public sector organisations currently face an era of disruption and rapid changes in their strategic environment. Public demands for timely, transparent, and accountable services compel government institutions to move beyond rigid, conventional bureaucratic practices (Natika, 2024). These conditions require a fundamental transformation in public administration: organisations must evolve from merely implementing fixed regulations into agile and responsive institutions. The success of this transformation depends directly on their internal capacity to adapt to volatility in the external environment (Suriadi & Mulyono, 2024).

Within public sector organisations, the human factor remains the principal determinant of service delivery. Employee performance is a key indicator of an institution's capacity to meet public expectations and achieve its strategic objectives (Ramadian et al., 2021). In practice, however, a gap frequently emerges between high-performance expectations and employees' actual competencies, motivation, and adaptive capacity. When organisations face crises or systemic change, work performance often declines because leadership struggles to navigate the transition (Pratiwi & Seran, 2018).

Leadership plays a central role in bridging this performance gap. Traditional leadership models that are hierarchical, rigid, and instruction-driven are increasingly considered inadequate for addressing the complexity of contemporary challenges (Witri et al., 2024). The public sector requires a new approach capable of mobilising human potential amid uncertainty. Adaptive leadership has emerged as a response to bureaucratic rigidity, requiring leaders to

function not only as decision-makers but also as facilitators of change who guide organisational members beyond their comfort zones (Nahnudin et al., 2023).

Adaptive leadership focuses on the capacity of organisations and individuals to identify unfamiliar challenges and collectively formulate innovative solutions (Ramadani et al., 2024). This leadership approach requires flexibility, sound situational analysis, and a willingness to delegate problem-solving authority to subordinates. Employees are therefore positioned as active participants empowered to take strategic initiatives to improve the quality of public services, rather than as passive recipients of instructions (Manullang & Rizki, 2024).

Theoretically, the relationship between adaptive leadership and employee performance is mediated by the development of an adaptive organisational culture. Adaptive leaders tend to create psychologically safe working environments in which unsuccessful attempts at innovation are regarded as opportunities for learning rather than as violations. Such supportive conditions stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation and creativity, ultimately improving the quality, quantity, and timeliness of their work.

Although the importance of adaptive leadership is widely recognised in contemporary management literature, its implementation within government bureaucracies frequently encounters regulatory barriers and deeply entrenched feudal organisational cultures (Abdullah, 2023). Hierarchical government structures tend to constrain the ability of leaders and employees to act with agility. Consequently, organisational functioning is impaired as reluctance to alter the status quo obstructs efforts to improve employee performance. Empirical investigation of how adaptive leadership operates within these bureaucratic constraints is therefore essential.

The dynamic and urgent nature of social problems underlines the importance of conducting this study at the local government level. The Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office provides a relevant setting because it serves an extensive geographical area characterised by complex poverty-related problems and substantial disaster risks, requiring considerable flexibility from its employees. Internal organisational dynamics indicate that fluctuations in employee performance are strongly influenced by the flexibility of leadership responses to changes in social assistance regulations and the integration of new information technology systems in the region.

Against this background, the study seeks to identify and examine in depth the adaptive leadership strategies implemented within the institution and their contribution to improving employee performance. Its importance lies in providing conceptual and practical recommendations concerning an appropriate bureaucratic leadership model for local public sector organisations. The findings are expected to inform the development of human resource management policies grounded in agility and professionalism in public service delivery.

B. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to develop an in-depth, context-sensitive understanding of adaptive leadership in public sector organisations (Sugiyono, 2020). Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with purposively selected key informants, including organisational leaders and employee representatives at different hierarchical levels. Interviews were supplemented by direct field observations of everyday workplace interactions and a documentary review of employee performance reports, strategic planning documents, and relevant internal regulations.

Data analysis proceeded interactively and continuously, following the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The process began with data reduction, during which raw interview transcripts and field notes were selected, categorised, and focused on adaptive strategies and performance indicators. The data were subsequently displayed as descriptive narratives and relationship matrices to map connections among variables. The final stage

involved drawing and verifying conclusions. Source and method triangulation were used to assess the trustworthiness of the findings and support their objectivity and validity.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of Adaptive Leadership Strategies

Leadership in contemporary public sector organisations can no longer be understood simply as the fulfilment of static hierarchical functions. Bureaucratic environments, particularly those concerned with social services, are continually shaped by substantial uncertainty and dynamic structural problems (Yukl, 2013). At the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office, this complexity is manifested in high poverty levels, an extensive geographical service area, and vulnerability to natural disasters requiring rapid emergency responses. These conditions require organisational leaders to move beyond conventional management approaches and fully embrace adaptive leadership.

Conceptually, adaptive leadership involves stimulating, mobilising, and guiding organisational members to address nonlinear challenges that cannot be resolved through routine standard operating procedures (SOPs) (Gyuroka, 2010). Observations and in-depth interviews at the research site indicate that the head of the office implements adaptive leadership by shifting from a rigid, rule-oriented approach towards one that prioritises solutions and flexibility (Grashow et al., 2009). The leadership recognises that excessive adherence to bureaucratic formalities can delay timely interventions addressing social welfare problems in the community.

The first strategy consistently applied within this adaptive leadership framework is strengthening the organisation's capacity to navigate crises. National social security programmes frequently undergo abrupt regulatory adjustments by the Ministry of Social Affairs, requiring a high degree of responsiveness from the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office. Leaders act as the organisation's early-warning mechanism, anticipating shifts in national policy, translating them into local operational policies, and promptly reallocating internal resources without disrupting other ongoing activities.

This capacity to navigate crises is also reflected in leaders' willingness to exercise measured discretion during social emergencies, such as natural disasters or increases in extreme poverty in remote areas. When formal chains of command risk delaying the distribution of emergency assistance, leaders activate more streamlined horizontal coordination mechanisms. Through this strategy, adaptive leadership has created a working environment in which employees respond to urgent humanitarian needs and actual conditions in the field without rigidly awaiting written instructions.

The second central strategy is the democratisation of problem-solving through collective participation. Leaders move beyond the notion of the "all-knowing leader" commonly associated with feudal bureaucratic cultures. Whenever adaptive challenges arise—such as inaccuracies in the Integrated Social Welfare Data (Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial, DTKS) that trigger public protests—the leadership promptly convenes cross-sectoral and interdepartmental forums within the office to identify underlying causes and formulate solutions collectively.

This collective approach indirectly reduces the power distance between leaders and staff, strengthening employees' sense of ownership of organisational decisions. Operational personnel, including subdistrict social welfare workers (Tenaga Kesejahteraan Sosial Kecamatan, TKSK), are given opportunities to voice the practical difficulties they encounter in the field. By listening to grassroots perspectives, leaders can formulate operational policies that are grounded in local realities, practicable, and less susceptible to distortion during implementation.

The third important aspect of adaptive leadership at the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office is transparency and open communication. Leaders establish multidirectional communication channels that transcend formal hierarchical boundaries. Digital platforms based on instant messaging applications are used extensively for rapid, informal coordination. These channels reduce communication delays that would otherwise take days under formal bureaucratic correspondence procedures to a matter of minutes.

Open communication serves both to transmit operational information and to build trust within the organisation. Leaders regularly communicate the institution's strategic targets and budgetary constraints honestly to all employees. Such transparency is essential to adaptive leadership because openness about organisational limitations is a prerequisite for securing employees' willingness to make sacrifices, undertake additional work, and share the demands associated with changes in working practices.

Adaptive leadership in this institution is also characterised by leaders' capacity to manage employee anxiety, or disequilibrium. Changes in working practices or the introduction of new technologies—such as data migration to the Next Generation Social Welfare Information System (Sistem Informasi Kesejahteraan Sosial Next Generation, SIKS-NG)—inevitably generate some degree of employee stress. Leaders respond by providing psychological support through intensive training, ongoing guidance, and reasonable tolerance for mistakes during the transition, rather than through pressure or threats of sanctions.

The ability to maintain anxiety within a productive zone of disequilibrium distinguishes adaptive leaders from authoritarian leaders. Leaders at the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office act as facilitators who encourage continuous learning while ensuring that workloads do not cause burnout. This balanced managerial approach has helped maintain the organisation's emotional stability despite substantial external public pressure.

A further strategy involves establishing cross-functional teams to address multidimensional social problems. Leaders recognise that poverty and disability-related issues cannot be addressed in isolation by a single section head or department. They therefore flexibly transcend rigid, conventional divisions of duties and functions to establish ad hoc task forces comprising competent personnel with diverse areas of expertise from within the office.

These dynamic teams represent a concrete form of structural adaptation to environmental demands. Employees are encouraged to move beyond departmental thinking “that is not my department's responsibility”, and adopt a holistic perspective focused on overall organisational performance. Flexible task allocation has gradually weakened the silo mentality that has long been a persistent problem in local government bureaucracies.

Theoretically, the practices implemented by the leadership of the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office closely align with the adaptive leadership model developed by Ronald Heifetz (1994). Heifetz emphasises that adaptive leadership involves helping individuals and organisations preserve essential values inherited from the past while relinquishing outdated practices in preparation for the future. The leadership has demonstrated an ability to maintain the core values of public integrity and social service while substantially restructuring slow, conventional working practices.

Successful implementation also depends on leaders' capacity to model the behaviours they seek to promote. Leaders do more than formulate adaptive strategies from their offices; they also participate directly in field operations during critical situations, such as distributing disaster relief supplies in isolated areas (Heifetz, 2003). Their presence on the front line provides a powerful boost to employee morale and reinforces the message that adaptability is a commitment expressed through action rather than a rhetorical slogan.

The implementation of adaptive leadership strategies at the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office has evolved from an individual leadership style into an embedded system of organisational governance. The three principal pillars—crisis navigation, collective problem-

solving, and open communication, provide a strong foundation that enables the institution to remain resilient and function effectively amid regulatory changes and substantial public demands for local social services.

2. Analysis of Enabling and Constraining Factors

The effectiveness of adaptive leadership strategies in improving employee performance at the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office does not develop in isolation. The success of this transformation in bureaucratic governance is shaped by interacting internal and external organisational determinants. A comprehensive understanding therefore requires an in-depth examination of the enabling factors that accelerate change and the constraining factors that impose structural and cultural limits on employee performance in the field.

The most significant enabling factor in advancing adaptive leadership within this institution is the extensive integration of information technology. Digital systems, including the SIKS-NG application and independently managed internal reporting platforms, have shortened previously cumbersome bureaucratic processes. These technologies provide the infrastructure required for leaders and employees to exchange data in real time. Rapid information flows are crucial to timely adaptive decision-making during social emergencies.

Beyond digital infrastructure, political commitment and policy support from the local government constitute strong external enabling factors. The Lebak Regency Government grants the head of the office considerable discretion to innovate in poverty-related services and disaster response programmes. This local regulatory flexibility provides legal certainty for implementing adaptive strategies, reducing leaders' concerns about administrative sanctions when procedural innovations serve the broader public interest.

An equally important enabling factor arises from the organisation's psychosocial characteristics: strong social capital expressed through collective empathy among employees. The Social Affairs Office's direct engagement with the suffering of people experiencing poverty and disaster survivors naturally fosters emotional bonds and solidarity among staff. Adaptive leaders draw on this social capital to strengthen intrinsic motivation. When asked to work beyond normal hours during a crisis, employees respond to the request as a humanitarian calling rather than as an imposed burden.

Regular personal mentoring and coaching by leaders also provide moral support and serve as a positive internal catalyst. Leaders position themselves not merely as performance evaluators but as mentors who actively listen to employees' concerns and the psychological difficulties they encounter in the field. This human-centred approach strengthens employees' confidence, particularly when addressing unfamiliar technical challenges. Supportive interpersonal relationships have been shown to reduce power distance and facilitate the diffusion of adaptive values across organisational units.

External partnerships with businesses through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes, philanthropic organisations, and community-based social support groups such as Disaster Preparedness Volunteers (Taruna Siaga Bencana, Tagana) constitute another strategic enabling factor. These partnerships give the institution flexibility in addressing local budget constraints affecting emergency programmes. Leaders' ability to develop these social and institutional networks provides a dependable reserve of external resources when the office's internal capacity is stretched to its limits.

Despite these enabling conditions, the study identifies several structural challenges, particularly constraints in the number and capabilities of personnel. Staffing levels at the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office are insufficient relative to the geographical area served and the volume of social welfare cases requiring attention. Personnel shortages lead to excessive workloads being concentrated among particular individuals, which may undermine concentration and service quality over time.

In terms of staff capabilities, a major constraint is the intergenerational gap in digital literacy. Frequent updates to social service applications introduced by the central government demand substantial technical competence. Field evidence nevertheless indicates that employees differ in the speed with which they learn to use new technologies. Older employees tend to require longer adjustment periods, often slowing data entry and verification processes that are critical to achieving organisational performance targets.

The most evident cultural constraint is resistance to change among some employees who have long remained within established routines. Conventional bureaucratic working practices, characterised by passivity, formalism, and an emphasis on merely fulfilling administrative obligations, have become deeply entrenched over time. When adaptive leaders introduce dynamic cross-functional teamwork requiring substantial initiative, employees who are reluctant to adapt may express implicit resistance through apathy or delayed task completion.

This resistance is compounded by limited operational funding for employee mobility. Lebak Regency includes remote areas with challenging transport access. Insufficient travel funding for field verification frequently forces employees to use personal resources or postpone the validation of poverty data in isolated villages. These operational financial constraints substantially restrict employees' ability to act with the agility and responsiveness envisaged by the leadership's strategic direction.

A further external constraint is the uneven availability of telecommunications and electricity infrastructure across Lebak Regency. The Social Affairs Office relies heavily on internet connectivity to operate its integrated database applications. When employees attempt to synchronise data from subdistricts with poor signal coverage, service delivery is immediately disrupted. Although these technical constraints lie beyond the office's managerial control, they directly reduce the efficiency of task completion, a key indicator of employee performance.

Moreover, inconsistent and excessively frequent regulatory changes introduced by central government ministries often create confusion among local operational staff. Rapid changes in the technical guidelines for social assistance distribution require employees to repeat public information and outreach activities from the beginning. This uncertainty in national regulations frequently produces regulatory fatigue among staff, ultimately diminishing their enthusiasm for implementing new strategies directed by local leaders.

The hierarchical and rigid organisational structures prescribed for local government agencies under formal legislation also constrain the pace of adaptive leadership. Although leaders have sought to establish flexible horizontal communication, financial accountability and public administration reporting must still follow lengthy formal bureaucratic procedures. The tension between operational agility in the field and rigid administrative accountability requirements often creates dilemmas for employees seeking to execute tasks promptly.

Amid these competing enabling and constraining factors, the effectiveness of adaptive leadership is tested by leaders' ability to coordinate organisational capabilities. Leaders at the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office seek to mitigate staffing-related constraints through complementary skills sharing, pairing younger, technologically proficient employees with senior colleagues to facilitate informal knowledge transfer. This mitigation strategy has helped reduce cultural tensions associated with technological resistance within the institution.

Theoretically, the interplay between enabling and constraining factors demonstrates that adaptive leadership is not an immediate solution that can succeed without systemic alignment. Improvements in local bureaucratic employee performance depend heavily on leaders' ability to use enabling resources, such as technology and social capital, while consistently addressing structural obstacles, including competency gaps and resistance within the working culture. Balancing these two dimensions is central to sustaining organisational performance in the public sector.

Table 1. Analysis of Enabling and Constraining Factors

Category	Enabling Factors	Constraining Factors
Technology and Infrastructure	Integration of large-scale digital systems (the SIKS-NG application), streamlining bureaucracy and accelerating real-time data exchange.	Uneven telecommunications and electricity coverage in remote areas of Lebak, hindering field data synchronisation.
Human Resources	Strong collective empathy and employee solidarity, stimulating intrinsic motivation to undertake additional work during crises.	Personnel shortages resulting in excessive workloads, alongside intergenerational gaps in digital literacy.
Working Culture	Personal coaching by leaders, fostering psychological safety among staff.	Resistance to change among senior employees who tend to favour the status quo.
Policy and Regulation	Considerable discretion granted by the Lebak Regency Government to develop innovative local programmes.	Frequent changes to central government regulations, leading to administrative exhaustion and regulatory fatigue.
Finance and Institutional Resources	Strong external partnerships (CSR programmes, philanthropic organisations, and Tagana), providing alternative resource reserves.	Limited operational funding for deploying employees to isolated service areas.

D. CONCLUSION

The implementation of adaptive leadership strategies at the Lebak Regency Social Affairs Office has proved to be a major catalyst for substantial improvements in employee performance. The leadership has shifted a rigid bureaucratic paradigm towards greater flexibility through three principal strategies: navigating crises in response to regulatory changes, democratising problem-solving through collective participation, and maintaining open, multidirectional communication. This approach has established psychological safety in the workplace, directly encouraging initiative, responsiveness to complaints, and timely social assistance distribution, while weakening the organisation's silo mentality. Despite its positive effects on employee productivity, the effectiveness of adaptive leadership remains shaped by internal and external dynamics. Enabling factors—including the integration of information technology through SIKS-NG, strong social capital in the form of collective empathy, and discretionary support from local government—serve as important accelerators. Conversely, structural challenges, including personnel shortages, intergenerational digital literacy gaps, limited funding for travel across the service area, and resistance rooted in conventional working practices, continue to constrain performance optimisation. Long-term success depends on leaders' consistency in using available enabling resources while adaptively mitigating cultural barriers within the local bureaucracy.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, S. (2023). Problematika dan tantangan kebijakan penyederhanaan birokrasi di Indonesia. *Kebijakan: Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi*, 14(1), 47-55.
- Grashow, A., Linsky, M., & Heifetz, R. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership*. Boston, Massachusetts, Harvard Business Press.

- Gyuroka, T. (2010). The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World [review]/Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, 4(1), 144-147.
- Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Harvard University Press.
- Heifetz, R. A. (2003). Adaptive work. *Demos Collection*, 19, 68-78.
- Manullang, A. P., & Rizky, M. C. (2024). Strategi kepemimpinan: Peran human capital pada perusahaan industri. *Jurnal Kajian dan Penalaran Ilmu Manajemen*, 2(4), 93-104.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Nahnudin, N., Fauzi, A., & Firdaos, R. (2023). Tipe dan Ide Kepemimpinan Adaptif Terhadap Solusi Konflik Organisasi. *Tadbir Muwahhid*, 7(1), 85.
- Natika, L. (2024). Transformasi pelayanan publik Di era digital: Menuju pelayanan masa depan Yang lebih Baik. *The World of Public Administration Journal*, 6(1), 1-11.
- Pratiwi, D., & Seran, S. T. (2018). Strategi peningkatan kinerja ASN melalui aplikasi penilaian kinerja aparatur (SIKERJA) di IPDN Kampus Kalimantan Barat. *TRANSFORMASI: Jurnal Manajemen Pemerintahan*, 165-176.
- Ramadani, T. F., Ahmad, A., Marcellah, A., & Mukhtar, A. (2024). Eksplorasi konsep dan model kepemimpinan dalam manajemen strategik. *Indonesian Journal of Innovation Multidisipliner Research*, 2(2), 243-264.
- Ramadian, A., Mohamad Rizan, M. M., & Suhud, U. (2021). *Manajemen Strategi Pengembangan Aparatur Negara*. Ahlimedia Book.
- Setiyono, B. (2023). *Pemerintahan dan manajemen sektor publik*. Caps.
- Sugiyono. (2020). *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Suriadi, H., & Mulyono, M. (2024). Pemanfaatan teknologi AI untuk meningkatkan kualitas dan responsivitas pelayanan publik di era digital. *Jurnal Media Ilmu*, 3(2), 107-132.
- Witri, R., Zivana, F. H., Purwadhi, P., & Widjaja, Y. R. (2024). Strategi Kepemimpinan Adaptif dalam Menghadapi Tantangan Kewirausahaan di Rumah Sakit. *INNOVATIVE: Journal of Social Science Research*, 4(5), 2324-2334.
- Yukl, G. (2013). *Leadership in organizations*. Pearson.