

Women's leadership style in public office (a case study at the Surakarta City Health Office)

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji gaya kepemimpinan perempuan di Dinas Kesehatan Kota Surakarta, menganalisis peran pemimpin perempuan berdasarkan gaya kepemimpinan dalam jabatan publik, dan mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi pemimpin perempuan dalam jabatan publik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Sumber penelitian meliputi tindakan dan praktik Kepala Dinas Kesehatan Kota Surakarta yang diperoleh melalui observasi lingkungan kerja Dinas Kesehatan Surakarta, wawancara mendalam dengan berbagai narasumber yang relevan, serta dokumentasi berupa biografi dan media sosial. Keabsahan penelitian ini diuji dengan menggunakan triangulasi metode dan sumber data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, pertama, Kepala Dinas Kesehatan Surakarta menunjukkan berbagai unsur gaya kepemimpinan, meliputi pendekatan feminin, maskulin, transformasional, dan transaksional. Hal tersebut terlihat dalam tindakan dan kebijakannya dalam memimpin instansi. Hasil temuan tersebut menunjukkan tidak terdapat korelasi antara jenis kelamin dengan preferensi gaya kepemimpinan. Kedua, Kepala Dinas Kesehatan Surakarta berperan penting dalam memotivasi dan menjadi panutan bagi instansi tersebut, sehingga menjadikan Dinas Kesehatan Surakarta sebagai instansi unggulan dalam pemerintahan Kota Surakarta. Ketiga, sebagai seorang perempuan, Kepala Dinas Kesehatan Kota Surakarta tidak menemui kendala atau hambatan yang bersumber dari perbedaan gender. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa tidak ada perbedaan yang kentara dalam tantangan yang dihadapi oleh pemimpin laki-laki maupun perempuan.

Kata kunci: keberagaman gender; tata kelola administrasi; efektivitas organisasi; kompetensi manajemen; kinerja birokrasi

Abstract

This research aims to examine the leadership style of women in the Surakarta City Health Office, analyze the role of women leaders based on leadership style in public office, and identify the challenges faced by women leaders in public office. This study employed qualitative research methods with a case study approach. The research sources included the actions and practices of the Head of the Surakarta City Health Service, which were

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obtained through observations of the work environment of the Surakarta Health Service, in-depth interviews with various relevant sources, and documentation from biographies and social media. The validity of this research was tested using triangulation of methods and data sources. The results revealed that, first, the Head of the Surakarta Health Service demonstrates various elements of leadership styles, including feminine, masculine, transformational, and transactional approaches. This is evident in her actions and policies in leading the agency. These findings indicate that there is no correlation between gender and leadership style preference. Second, the Head of the Surakarta Health Service plays a significant role in motivating and serving as an exemplary role model for the agency, which has contributed to the Surakarta Health Service becoming the premier agency in the Surakarta City government. Third, as a woman, the Head of the Surakarta City Health Service does not encounter problems or obstacles stemming from gender differences. These results demonstrate that there are no discernible differences in the challenges faced by male or female leaders.

Keywords: gender diversity; administrative governance; organizational effectiveness; management competencies; bureaucratic performance

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Introduction

The ability to guide and direct members determines a leader's effectiveness. A leader's success in managing an organization is influenced by their attitude and behavior in performing their duties. A leader's style can be observed through their methods of giving orders, encouraging task completion, making decisions, and providing direction. Leaders can influence motivation, job satisfaction, security, quality of work life, and organizational achievement. Leadership is inextricably linked to the individual serving as the leader.

The leadership role has traditionally been associated with male figures characterized by toughness, assertiveness, and courage, aligned with the persistent patriarchal culture in Indonesia (Devi, 2019). Within organizations, stereotypes suggesting male dominance in leadership positions remain prevalent (Fitriani, 2015). Women often become secondary options when male leadership is unavailable. Companies or institutions must begin to transform this perspective. According to research by McKinsey (2018), there are three significant aspects of women's leadership in organizations or institutions. First, women are considered capable of creating healthier organizations by driving financial improvement. Second, the presence of women in executive positions establishes more egalitarian leadership and motivates female employees. Third, women can contribute different perspectives to decision-making processes.

Gender equality campaigns in Indonesia have been continuously advocated since the era of R.A. Kartini to the present, resulting in nearly equivalent status for women across various sectors. This is evident in education levels, with comparable numbers of men and women holding undergraduate degrees. However, in the professional realm, only approximately 20% of middle management positions are filled by women, and merely 5% of women occupy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions (Kata Data, 2019). Beyond the business sector, women remain underrepresented in public offices compared to men. In the current 2019-2023 period, the Indonesian Parliament (DPR) has only 117 female representatives out of a total 575 members, representing just 20% female participation.

Male leadership also predominates in Surakarta City government institutions. Among 26 institutions in Surakarta City, 16 are led by men and 10 by women. One of these 10 female-led institutions is the Health Office. The Surakarta City Health Office is a public service institution with substantial female involvement in its organizational structure; the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office is a woman, Dr. Siti Wahyuningsih, M.Kes. According to data from the Surakarta City Central Bureau of Statistics (2020), the Health Office has one of the highest proportions of female civil servants compared

to males: out of 612 civil servants, 462 are women and 150 are men. This situation aligns with women's traditional domestic roles in healthcare and wellness maintenance. Therefore, as women, the Head of the Health Office and her staff are responsible for executing governmental functions in public service delivery.

Based on the intriguing phenomenon of significant female involvement in leadership positions at the Surakarta City Health Office, the authors are interested in analyzing women's leadership styles at the Surakarta City Health Office, as well as examining the roles and challenges faced by women leaders in public office.

Research Methods

This research employed qualitative research methods with a case study approach. The research sources were the actions and practices of the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office, obtained through observation of the Surakarta Health Office work environment, in-depth interviews with various relevant sources, and documentation from biographies and social media. Validity testing to verify the reliability of this research utilized method triangulation and data source triangulation.

Research Results and Discussion

Results

1. Leadership Style of the Head of Surakarta Health Office

The Surakarta City Health Office, under the leadership of a female general practitioner, is tasked with optimizing healthcare services to the community with adequate resources. For the past 14 years, the Office Head has addressed various health issues in the city. Adhering to the Mayor's Structural Task Guidelines, she implements 22 primary duties, including coordination, development, and supervision of health programs. The Office Head also directs the formulation of strategies and work plans. Female leadership characteristics are examined through the actions and policies implemented in managing health issues in Surakarta City. To describe the leadership style of the Head of the Surakarta Health Office, there is a classification of female leadership style characteristics assessed from the actions, policies, and social interactions conducted by the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office, as follows:

a. Feminine Leadership Style

This research analyzes the characteristic dimensions of the feminine leadership style of the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office, namely charismatic, team-oriented, and self-protective. In the charismatic dimension, leadership is evident through visionary qualities in providing direction and mission to advance the institution. Innovations such as mobile vaccine buses also demonstrate the leader's openness to subordinates' ideas. Conversely, the team-oriented dimension is reflected in the Office Head's collaboration and loyalty in decision-making, considering input from subordinates. Additionally, in the self-protective dimension, the leader demonstrates total commitment in prioritizing institutional needs over personal interests. In conclusion, the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office represents a democratic figure who is not self-centered, aligning with the characteristics of a feminine leadership style. These qualities have contributed to her being widely admired.

b. Masculine Leadership Style

This research analyzes the leadership style of the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office with assertive and task-oriented characteristics. The Office Head, Dr. Siti Wahyuningsih, M.Kes., M.H., demonstrates herself as a firm, disciplined, and results-oriented leader. She provides motivation, supports her subordinates, and establishes communication forums to achieve common goals. Furthermore, she offers appreciation and sanctions to employees, such as praise and rewards for high-performing civil servants. The task-oriented leadership style of the Office Head illustrates her commitment and dedication in executing her duties. Consequently, she has effectively led in accordance with the characteristics of a masculine leadership style.

c. Transactional Leadership Style

This research analyzes the transactional leadership style of the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office through the characteristics of (a) Contingent reward, (b) Active management by exception, and (c) Passive management by exception. The Office Head provides recognition to high-achieving employees, offers motivation and correction to subordinates, and implements sanctions for those who fail to fulfill their duties. This research indicates that the Office Head establishes strong relationships consistent with the transactional leadership style by providing appreciation, motivation, correction, and sanctions to her subordinates. These actions are implemented to create a conducive and effective work environment.

d. Transformational Leadership Style

This research analyzes the leadership style of the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office based on transformational leadership characteristics such as charisma, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and inspirational motivation. The Office Head is regarded as a role model by her subordinates, who follow her vision and mission. Additionally, she provides opportunities for subordinates to innovate and make decisions. Moreover, she demonstrates attention to her subordinates by creating a supportive environment. Inspirational motivation also constitutes an essential component of her leadership style, providing motivation and guidance to employees in implementing the vision and mission. Based on informant explanations, the Office Head is recognized as a charismatic, attentive, and inspirational leader, consistent with transformational leadership characteristics.

2. Leadership Role at the Surakarta Health Office

Leaders must serve as exemplars, advisors, guides, and motivators for their subordinates. Gender equality has progressed in Indonesia since the era of R.A. Kartini. Female leadership at the Surakarta City Health Office is exemplified by Dr. Siti Wahyuningsih, who has served as the Office Head for 14 years. This female leadership is reflected in successful task performance and responsibility fulfillment. She is firm, disciplined, and results-oriented. A disciplined culture is emphasized to achieve institutional objectives. In developing subordinates, Dr. Siti consistently motivates them. Supervision is conducted to provide direction and correction when necessary. She also involves subordinates in decision-making processes. To overcome challenges, Dr. Siti implements innovation and collaboration with her staff. Evidence of her female leadership role is apparent in the communication and coordination forums and consolidation activities conducted. Institutions can achieve optimal results with strong and collaborative leadership. Dr. Siti Wahyuningsih exemplifies a successful leader who has guided her organization through various challenges with solid innovation and collaboration. These elements highlight the significance of a leader's role, particularly for organizational success.

3. Challenges for Women Leaders in Public Office

Challenges represent difficult impediments that can obstruct goal achievement, including for leaders such as village heads. Women possess substantial potential and roles in political, economic, and socio-cultural development. Research indicates an absence of gender stereotypes in the leadership of the Surakarta City Health Office, with women having equal opportunities to become leaders. Leadership challenges primarily originate from the individuals themselves. Informants acknowledge that female office heads may even outperform their male counterparts in their positions. Leadership potential is not contingent on gender but on individual willingness to assume responsibility and work diligently.

Discussion

1. Women's Leadership Style in the Surakarta City Health Office

Based on the research results presented above, it is concluded that Dr. Siti Wahyuningsih, M.Kes., M.H., as the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office, incorporates various elements from all leadership styles including feminist, masculine, transactional, and transformational approaches. This finding aligns with research by Wu in Place and Winter (2018), which explains that gender does not restrict leadership style determination, allowing leadership styles to be adopted by anyone regardless of gender. Leadership style selection is based on individual competence and work capacity; thus, leadership between men and women is not fundamentally different. Research conducted by Werder and Holtzhausen

(2009) also found that in leadership style preferences, men also associate themselves with transformational leadership styles, which are considered more communal. Jin (2010) research discovered that women also utilize transactional leadership styles characterized by action or masculinity, as demonstrated by Dr. Siti Wahyuningsih, M.Kes., M.H., who consistently provides sanctions for employees who do not perform their duties effectively.

Leadership styles can develop due to several factors including personality, superior behavior, characteristics, task requirements, policies, and subordinate behavior (H. Joseph Reitz in Rahayu et al., 2017). The leadership style of Dr. Siti Wahyuningsih, M.Kes., M.H. is also influenced by several of these factors, such as regulations where subordinate appreciation must not violate government regulations in state institutions. Additionally, personal characteristics of total commitment and discipline, both within and outside her work, foster masculine leadership characteristics in her leadership style.

2. Women's Leadership Role at the Surakarta Health Office

This research demonstrates that Dr. Siti Wahyuningsih, M.Kes., M.H.'s leadership role is manifested through influential power displayed in building bonds with employees, such as through communication forms, motivation provision, and exemplary behavior. This aligns with Yulianti et al. (2018) perspective that leaders have roles in providing strategic influence on organizational performance, as organizational quality is evident from collaboration among its members. As a leader, she also plays a role in developing innovation within the institution, both through herself and through employee suggestions. According to Musoli (2021), a leader's role in implementing discipline enhances employee performance. Previous studies on transformational leadership explain that leadership not only influences organizational characteristics (such as culture, strategy, structure, resources, and reward systems) but also motivates member creativity, builds organizational culture, influences organizational climate, and develops capacity for change and innovation (Henriyani, 2020; Jyoti & Dev, 2015; Woszczyna, 2015).

Male and female leadership roles are considered different in various aspects such as conflict handling, relationship building, environment and culture, and decision-making (Musa et al., 2023). According to Carli (2001), women and men have different conflict handling approaches, with women preferring peaceful and consensual conflict resolution, while men are more action-oriented and aggressive. In relationship building, differences can be observed in leadership patterns where women possess empathy, thus prioritizing group interests over personal interests in decision-making, while men focus more on formal relationships and tend to prioritize personal interests in decision-making (Northouse, 2016). Environmental and cultural differences can influence male and female leadership. Previous research indicates that more inclusive and diverse environments support women's leadership capabilities comparable to men's (Powell et al., 2002).

3. Challenges for Women Leaders in Public Office

This research's findings, which indicate an absence of leadership obstacles due to the Surakarta City Health Office Head's gender, contradict Smirles et al. (2020) findings, which examined stereotypes of female leadership in Japan. Their results showed that Japanese women continuously face gender stereotype pressure supported by strong cultural, family, and institutional factors. This finding also aligns with research by Abalkhail (2017), where Arab women's status in Saudi society in public spaces, including managerial life, is defined in relation to institutional power. Consequently, men are privileged over women and assigned economic and social leadership and guardianship of women.

Challenges for women in leadership are often associated with gender stereotypes suggesting women are unsuited for leadership roles closely linked to masculinity. Gender-relevant stereotypes depicting leadership characterize women as guardians and men as takeover agents, according to Hoyt and Murphy (2016). This stereotype explains female traits associated with communal characteristics emphasizing care for others. Meanwhile, men are perceived as possessing rationality and agentic characteristics emphasizing self-confidence, dominance, and independence. According to Koenig et al. (2011), quality aspects describing men match quality aspects describing effective leaders, suggesting men are better suited for leadership than women.

The inferior perspective of female leadership embedded in gender stereotypes threatens women and results in reduced female contribution to leadership across various employment sectors (Block et al., 2011). These stereotypes have damaging effects leading to performance declines that accumulate over time, resulting in disengagement and decreased leadership aspirations. According to Shapiro and

Williams (2012), effects produced by these stereotypes can prevent women from identifying with all professions, leaving few women with leadership ambitions.

Conclusion

From the research results and discussion regarding Women's Leadership Style in Public Office (A Case Study at the Surakarta City Health Office), it can be concluded that the Head of the Surakarta City Health Office incorporates all elements of feminist, masculine, transactional, and transformational leadership styles in general leadership. These results align with previous research indicating that an individual's leadership style is not determined by gender but by individual capabilities and competencies. Each leadership style can be implemented by individuals to create comfortable work environments for achieving predetermined goals. A leader's role is not restricted by gender differences. Results from this research demonstrate that the Head of the Surakarta Health Office effectively fulfills her duties and responsibilities as a leader. The leadership role possessed by Dr. Siti Wahyuningsih, M.Kes., M.H. introduces values of discipline and innovation that can enhance employee performance. The final research findings address the challenges of women in public office leadership. Results indicate that as a woman, the Head of the Surakarta Health Office does not encounter obstacles due to gender issues. According to informants, challenges and obstacles arise not from gender but from individual personalities.

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