

Navigating change: agile leadership implementation in local government of Palu City

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Abstract

This research investigates the implementation of agile leadership within the Palu City government, adopting a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative approach. Data collection was carried out by interviews with seven informants. Data were collected and analyzed using triangulation techniques and MAXQDA-20 software. The findings reveal that the Palu City government successfully integrates agile leadership principles such as adaptability, stakeholder involvement, transparency, and innovation. Notably, these practices have facilitated effective policy implementation, notably in waste management and urban planning, resulting in the attainment of the Adipura Award. Despite challenges posed by natural disasters and pandemics, the government's agile approach has enabled it to effectively navigate crises and maintain service delivery standards. The study underscores the significance of transitioning from traditional command and control models to collaborative leadership frameworks, emphasizing adaptability and innovation to tackle complex challenges. Recommendations include further enhancing stakeholder engagement and fostering a culture of agility to bolster government responsiveness and efficiency in addressing societal needs.

Keywords: *agility, agile leadership, collaboration, organizational change.*

Introduction

Leadership is a concept that has been studied widely in organizational and management science (Yamak & Eyüpoğlu, 2018). Research on leadership has much potential to develop interesting theories and policy consequences, but only if empirical studies are carried out systematically (Hughes et al., 2018). The study of leadership encompasses a variety of theories and approaches that attempt to understand how leaders can influence their members and direct organizations toward achieving desired goals. Sloof and von Siemens (2021) argue that organizational leaders can make and implement decisions formally and informally. In addition, active participation from followers or organizational members in the decision-making process can increase the sense of ownership and commitment to the decisions taken. This can strengthen the relationship between leaders and followers and increase overall organizational effectiveness. This decision can affect subordinates in an organization, so leaders must

delegate and participate with their followers (Elkhwesky et al., 2021)

There are various leadership styles in the developing literature, such as transformational leadership (Khan et al., 2020), transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership (Sandstrom & Reynolds, 2020), servant leadership (Karatepe et al., 2020), leadership that humility (Chughtai & Arifeen, 2023), ambidextrous leadership (Haider et al., 2023), to agile leadership (Aftab et al., 2022; Attar & Kareem, 2020; Indiarti & Lantu, 2022; Joiner, 2019). However, the high volatility and complexity of today's global environment place high demands on organizations to institute an agile leadership approach to stay ahead of the competition and effectively respond to rapid environmental changes (Attar & Kareem, 2020).

Today, leaders try to deal with elements such as Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA) (Horney et al., 2010). This situation forces organizations to manage complex and dynamic environments and differentiate their understanding of Leadership. For leaders to succeed in a VUCA environment, it is essential to demonstrate a range of effective behaviors such as competitiveness, readiness for change, and effective use of resources. There is a standard view that agile leaders can effectively and efficiently manage uncertain environments to transform organizations into more agile structures (Fielitz & Hug, 2019). Because research on agile leadership is still new and limited to quantitative research, more qualitative research is needed to increase understanding and balance quantitative research.

In the developing literature, there are various leadership styles such as transformational leadership (Khan et al., 2020), transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership (Sandstrom & Reynolds, 2020), service leadership (Karatepe et al., 2020), grounded leadership humility (Chughtai & Arifeen, 2023), ambidextrous leadership (Haider et al., 2023), to agile leadership (Aftab et al., 2022; Attar & Kareem, 2020; Indiarti & Lantu, 2022; Joiner, 2019). Agile leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes flexibility, adaptability and collaboration in the face of rapid change and high complexity in today's global environment. This approach allows organizations to stay ahead of competition and respond to environmental changes more effectively (Attar & Kareem, 2020). The importance of this research lies in the need to understand and implement agile leadership in local government contexts, such as in Palu City, to increase responsive and adaptive capacity to the dynamic challenges faced.

The Palu City Government is one of the public sector organizations at the forefront of public services, so it must carry out innovation. Implementing agile leadership in the public sector involves adapting and applying agile principles and practices to public organizations' unique contexts and challenges (Attar & Kareem, 2020; Doz et al., 2018; Ludviga & Kalvina, 2023). Agile leadership can help public sector leaders drive innovation, improve service delivery, and increase organizational collaboration. Implementing agile leadership in the public sector requires adaptation and adjustment based on each organization's unique characteristics and context. Thus, it is important to continually evaluate and refine the approach to ensure alignment with organizational goals and desired outcomes.

Various studies have proposed that leadership capabilities are necessary as a key driver for resilient agile organizations (Coleman, 2017). According to

Sahin and Alp (2020), agile leadership is a leadership approach that includes effective leadership skills, facilitating organizational adaptation, making fast and flexible decisions to ensure organizational development, supporting teamwork and collaboration within the organization, and adapting to technological developments.

De Smet (2018) believes that when shifting to agility capabilities, the team needs to change, and leaders must change themselves and continue with greater agility. As done by Lund and Andersen (2023), leaders can exercise leadership specifically to gain dynamic agility, but more knowledge about leadership and the intensity of the problem at hand is needed. Therefore, it is important to realize the strategic steps in Palu City government activities in the context of agile leadership.

In the context of improving development and better community services in the City of Palu, the Mayor emphasized the importance of strong synergy between the leaders of regional organizations and their staff to realize 53 work programs by the motto "Palu is Steadily Moving." However, challenges arise due to the organization's traditional work culture, lack of human resource competency, and lack of determination from heads of regional organizations. The Mayor highlighted that government regulations regarding job mapping are also an obstacle to adapting regional organizational leaders to changes in how they work. This raises the question of how agile leadership can become part of a new organizational culture for leaders of regional organizations in Palu City and what strategic steps can be taken to make it happen.

The Government of Palu City experiences problems in coordination between regional organizations and its staff, with a work culture that tends to be traditional and a need for cross-departmental collaboration. The change process that has been undertaken involves efforts to improve communication and collaboration between organizational units, introduce training to develop adaptive leadership skills and adjust internal policies to support greater flexibility and responsiveness to change. Challenges faced on this journey include resistance from some parties to cultural and policy changes and difficulties in aligning various organizational interests and goals. In order to increase the efficiency of public services, strengthen synergy between organizational units, and increase responsiveness to community needs, a better understanding of the focus and benefits of implementing agile leadership in the City of Palu is needed. Thus, this research will provide direction regarding the context, steps taken, obstacles faced, and the goals and benefits expected from this research.

Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to provide an understanding of the implementation of agile leadership. Data collection was carried out using closed interviews with seven informants who were competent and relevant to this research, namely the Mayor of Palu, the Secretary, the Inspector, the Head of the Regional Planning and Development Agency, the Head of the Regional Finance and Assets Agency, the Head of the Regional Personnel Agency and Human Resources, and the Head of the village of North Birobuli. This research also uses a systematic approach to data analysis as done by Gioia et al. (2012;), Neeley & Dumas (2016), and Riaz et al. (2021). This

research focuses on how organizations implement agile leadership (processes) and how employees experience it.

This research uses qualitative data analysis, namely MAXQDA-20, to code and identify themes. Even though MAXQDA has similar functions to other qualitative analysis software (such as NVIVO, ATLAS.ti), MAXQDA-20 can overcome complex obstacles in the research process and is more flexible (Kuckartz, 2010; Oswald, 2019). MAXQDA-20 is also used to assist researchers in organizing and analyzing non-numerical or unstructured data. By using MAXQDA-20, researchers can classify, sort, and organize information. Researchers can also examine relationships between data and combine analysis with linking, shaping, tracking, and modeling processes.

Analysis began by transcribing interviews and conducting initial content analysis to identify key themes, which were then incorporated into the MAXQDA-20. Next, subthemes were identified by further reviewing the interview transcripts and grouped within the software. The themes and subthemes were validated by comparing information from various respondents and additional data from observation and secondary document analysis. Analysis of interview data also uses Miles and Huberman (1994) model by reducing data, presenting data, and drawing conclusions or verification. Data validity testing is carried out through triangulation techniques, which involve comparing data from various sources and data collection methods to ensure the accuracy of the information. Thus, this method aims to reduce subjectivity and increase the validity and reliability of the analyzed data.

During the data analysis process, the identification of themes and subthemes was validated by comparing the information provided by different respondents and then further comparing the information obtained from interviews with data obtained through observation and analysis of secondary documents (Heung et al., 2011). By considering the review of themes and subthemes as well as the researcher's interpretation of interviews, a relationship framework was built to represent the principles of agile leadership in Palu City. Increasing data consistency is needed to prevent bias, so the researcher removes any possible assumptions about the subject during interviews and data analysis (bracketing). Validity of interview content, and transparency of uncertainty, each interview was transcribed to obtain valid and reliable information.

Data collected through in-depth interviews focused on informants' perceptions and experiences regarding the role of leadership in facing development challenges, as well as the leadership strategies and practices used in overcoming these challenges. MAXQDA-20 software is intended to assist the coding process, leading to various sets of meanings recorded in Nodes.

Result and Discussions

The findings show that rapid dynamics have required changes in organizations that want to survive and develop and must be able to adapt to continuous changes. The Palu City Government emphasizes changes to a more decentralized organization so that it can make decisions quickly according to needs and respond to changes more effectively. In addition, keywords such as "leadership," "decisions," "training," "technology adaptation," "challenges," and "collaboration" have become proxies for highlighting aspects that must be

considered in the organizational transformation process. Central to leaders in guiding an organization through change is making the right decisions and ensuring their implementation. Leaders need to consider the long-term impact of their decisions and ensure transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. This can reflect the need to increase employee capacity and skills in facing new challenges and taking advantage of existing opportunities.

In addition, technology adaptation also shows the importance of integrating technology into government operations to increase efficiency and effectiveness. These findings reflect the Palu City Government's efforts to utilize technological innovation as a tool to improve services to the community. This is done through collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders to collectively achieve common goals. In this way, leadership practices in decision-making can be more prepared and effective to face change and meet society's demands.

Referring to the current leadership motto in the City of Palu, "Palu Steadily Moves" (*Palu Mantap Bergerak*) is not just a slogan. Accompanied by an agile leadership approach, it has encouraged a government that is flexible and responsive to change. The Palu City Government continually seeks feedback, reflects on experiences, and adapts approaches as needed. The results will foster a learning mindset among public servants and promote knowledge sharing and collaboration across government to navigate complex governance challenges more effectively.

One striking example of success is the policy of revitalizing the Poi Panda Final Disposal Site in Kawatuna Village. This decision was made quickly and responsively, indicating the ability to adapt and speed up in facing change, which can make it one of the medium cities that received the Adipura award in 2023. Apart from that, the Palu City government also shows its responsibility in managing the environment by adding waste fleets in every sub-district and imposing restrictions on single-use plastics. Considering human resource factors, the government has paid special attention to Padat Karya members as the front guard in environmental management. The 100% salary increase for Padat Karya members reflects the government's commitment to improving their welfare as part of sustainable development efforts.

Palu City's success in achieving the Clean City title also highlights the importance of government and community collaboration. Through close cooperation, including active community participation in cleanliness and environmental programs, the City of Palu has achieved the common goal of maintaining cleanliness and environmental sustainability. Thus, the success of the Palu City government can be understood as the result of implementing responsive, adaptive, and collaboration-oriented agile leadership. The strategic steps taken by the government have been supported by active community participation, thereby providing a positive impact.

This research indicates that organizations need to be prepared to lead change in an ever-evolving world. Organizations must utilize their resources to go beyond what they already have (Mazzola et al., 2016). In line with research findings, this goal can be achieved by working together, competing, and surviving (Griffin et al., 2021). This finding also aligns with social capital theory, which emphasizes that agile innovation efficiency requires cognitive orientation and the use of resources from leaders (Chen et al., 2022). The agility and cognitive

orientation in the social capital perspective emphasizes the government's ability to respond quickly to change, successfully adapt to a rapidly changing environment, and achieve better results (Martinez, 2023). Thus, this can be done through agile as a set of values and principles and an internalized cognitive framework.

Research findings show that agile and continuous interactions between stakeholders, such as leaders and followers, improve the quality, innovation, and speed to market everyday business results. This can increase the need for fast, spontaneous, and still actionable decision-making (Rigby et al., 2016). The basic principles of agile leadership are flat hierarchy, transparency, and individual responsibility, aiming to achieve appropriate results, even for the team (Aftab et al., 2022; Attar & Kareem, 2020). The target is to stay ahead of the competition by being fast, effective, and efficient in a world that continues to experience change and improvement (Joiner, 2019).

Based on the findings of this research, the Central Palu City government focuses on the development and decision-making process by involving community participation. Responsively, the regional government of Palu City absorbs the community's aspirations to identify needs to speed up the decision-making process. These findings indicate that the Palu City government is more flexible in responding to rapid and dynamic changes, making it possible to face challenges and exploit emerging opportunities more effectively.

Research findings also illustrate that leadership in the Palu City government has adopted agile leadership as a pioneer of change that is adaptive, responsive, and value-oriented. The change in question is managed effectively and takes advantage of opportunities for growth and innovation. The government in Palu City has been able to move quickly and flexibly amidst the dynamics of an ever-changing environment.

The research findings illustrate that adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and values-based leadership are important in ensuring organizational success in facing change and challenges. Social capital theory supports these findings by emphasizing the importance of networks of relationships and cooperation between individuals and groups in creating flexibility and responsiveness to change. In addition, leadership theory underlines the importance of the leader's role in leading with values that prioritize common interests and consider the long-term implications of every decision. Collaboration and teamwork are also key aspects supported by social capital theory, where interactions between individuals and groups enable the exchange of ideas and innovative solutions in facing challenges.

Openness to feedback, commitment to clear communication, and the ability to manage conflict were also important factors in ensuring organizational success. Social capital theory explains that open and honest communication and the ability to handle conflict effectively can strengthen interpersonal relationships and build trust among organizational members. On the other hand, leadership theory highlights the importance of leaders in managing communication and conflict wisely, creating a harmonious and productive work environment.

Effective and dynamic risk management has also become a determining factor in facing complex challenges. Leadership theory supports this by emphasizing the leader's role in identifying, evaluating, and managing risks

wisely. In contrast, social capital theory highlights the importance of cooperation and collaboration in anticipating and responding dynamically to environmental changes. Thus, the results of this study indicate that factors related to social capital and leadership have significant implications for managing change and facing challenges in the context of human resource management.

Implementing practices in the form of agility is a concrete step for the Palu City government in applying the principles of agility in facing changes and challenges, especially in integrating technology, increasing positive feedback, transparency, community participation, and responsiveness to problems that arise. The Palu City government adapts to technological developments by adopting the "HADIRKU" application to manage employee absences and an electronic-based administration system to increase efficiency and accuracy. This reflects the importance of adapting to technology to improve organizational performance in human resource management.

Currently, the City of Palu is led by Mr. Hadiano Rasyid as Mayor of Palu for the period 2021 to 2024. In achieving each work program in facing challenges, the Mayor of Palu adopts an adaptive and responsive leadership approach. One concept that can help is the concept of the agile leader. One important aspect of agile leadership is involvement and open communication. Leaders in Palu City actively engage with various stakeholders, including residents, local government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to ensure that the policies and programs implemented are truly beneficial to the community.

The City of Palu has also succeeded in achieving several achievements such as the second-best award in terms of managing assets, handing over receivables, implementing BMD (Regional Property) assessments and BMD auction performance; UHC (Universal Health Coverage) Award for the high-level of population participation in the National Health Insurance Program (JKN-KIS), which BPJS Health manages; Green Predicate from the Indonesian Ombudsman; etc. Palu City also managed to enter the top 11 national cities with the highest Regional Competitiveness Index score in 2023, namely 3.92 (*scale 0-5*). Palu City achieved an institutional score of 4.04, infrastructure 2.68, tik adoption 4.32, macroeconomic stability 3.53, health 3.93, skills 4.30, product market 4.41, labor market 4.26, the financial system 3.11, market size 4.34, business dynamism 3.66, and innovation capability 4.44. This achievement can support, which must continue to be controlled through good planning interventions, regulations, and a focused budget so that it can be on par with other cities in Indonesia.

Most recently, Palu City, the capital province of Central Sulawesi, achieved the title of clean city after going through the Adipura assessment by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry in 2023. This achievement marks an extraordinary achievement for Palu City, being the first achievement in the city's history. The success must be connected to significant contributions from various parties, including local government and the community. One of the keys to success in achieving the title of a clean city is adopting an agile leadership approach in managing environmental and cleanliness policies. The Palu City Government has implemented a responsive, flexible, and results-oriented strategy to overcome complex environmental challenges.

Providing adequate compensation, for example, in the Padat Karya

program, is proof of the government's commitment to providing positive feedback to the community, which is in line with the principles of value-based leadership regarding complaints of minimal compensation as a result of intense interaction between the Mayor and the community as a form of stakeholder involvement. This shows the importance of listening to citizens' aspirations in decision-making. Thus, the government must be willing to accept input from various parties and must be able to manage conflicts by providing fast and appropriate responses. The implementation has shown the government's responsiveness to community complaints, including handling blocked gutters that can cause flooding. This is a clear example of the ability to learn and innovate when facing emerging challenges. The Palu City Government shows dynamism in responding to environmental changes by taking quick action to overcome these problems.

Strategic steps that the Palu City government implements carefully and with long thought are important to adapt to rapid changes. However, responsiveness to emergencies should not come at the expense of organizational quality and sustainability. Therefore, leaders in Palu City must ensure that the decisions taken not only speed up the response to change but also strengthen the organization's sustainability. Based on Table 1, the current focus of the Palu City regional government is on aspects of resilience and responsibility. This means that the government has identified the importance of responding quickly and effectively to change as a key step in responding to growing challenges. This is reflected in the efforts of the Palu City regional government to survive and be responsible amidst complex organizational dynamics by prioritizing open, clear, and fast communication. Thus, the focus and leadership process has managed the challenges and risks that can occur to achieve dynamic change.

The findings show that applying agile leadership has significantly increased adaptation, collaboration, and responsibility in the face of rapid and complex change. This is especially visible in increased collaboration between teams, individual contributions, changing leadership concepts, technology adoption, and openness to innovation. However, several challenges come, such as concerns about the speed of adoption and awareness of the long-term impact of the change. Therefore, the Palu City government must take careful steps and think long and hard.

Apart from that, the regional government of Palu City also emphasizes the importance of involving various stakeholders in the decision-making process, emphasizing value-based leadership. By considering the long-term impact of each decision on various stakeholders, the government is not only concerned with short-term results. However, it is also committed to creating long-term value. These findings show that the regional government of Palu City realizes the importance of creating a work environment that supports the open exchange of ideas and encourages cooperation between stakeholders by prioritizing transparency and accountability. This way, local governments can maximize individual potential and achieve common goals more effectively.

The various achievements of the Palu City government show that leaders have agile leadership with a focus on adaptability that is responsive to changes in environmental conditions and community needs. For example, when there is a spike in the amount of waste in an area due to increasing population, the government immediately adjusts the waste transportation schedule. It increases

the frequency of waste collection to keep the city clean. In the decision-making process related to environmental management, the Palu City government involves stakeholders such as residents, community organizations, and local businesses by holding open meetings, public discussions, and consultations to absorb aspirations before making decisions.

Table 1. Palu City Government Agile Leadership Model.

	Model of Agility	Implementation of Agile Leadership
Focus	Resilience	Adaptability - responding to changing conditions flexibly and quickly, ensuring the organization can function effectively amidst challenges. Stakeholder Engagement - listening to various relevant parties' input, concerns, and aspirations and seeking to integrate these perspectives into the policies and actions. Values-Based Leadership –considers the long-term impact of decisions on various stakeholders.
	Responsible	Collaboration and Teamwork - creating ideas that can be exchanged openly and cooperation between stakeholders. Transparency and Accountability - being open in all decision-making processes, sharing information clearly with stakeholders, and accepting responsibility for errors or failures that occur. Ability to Learn and Innovate - learn from experience to improve organizational performance.
Acceleration process	Communication	Openness to Feedback - make necessary improvements and adjustments on time. Commitment to Clear and Honest Communication - communicating goals, hopes, and expectations, allowing for a common understanding. Ability to Manage Conflict - fast decision-making process without hampering performance progress.
Flexibility	Challenge	Effective Risk Management - identifying, evaluating, and managing risks related to changes and challenges to minimize their impact and take advantage of existing opportunities.
	Change	Dynamic - sensing and responding to internal changes with focused, fast, and flexible actions, as well as the role of human resources.

The Palu City Government makes decisions based on justice, sustainability, and community participation. For example, when planning a waste management program, the government considers the long-term impact on the environment and community welfare to ensure the decisions taken provide maximum benefits for all parties through collaboration with various parties, including government agencies, non-government organizations, and the private sector in efforts to manage waste environment. This can provide comprehensive and sustainable solutions for overcoming complex environmental challenges. During the decision-making process and program implementation, the Palu City government also maintains transparency and accountability to minimize the possibility of conflict. For example, in conflicts related to granting business permits in an area, the government acts as a mediator between investors, communities, and

environmental organizations to reach fair and equitable agreements sustainable for all parties.

Despite the various concrete steps taken, challenges can sometimes hamper the policy implementation process, so it is necessary to anticipate risks that may occur at any time. For example, when Palu City faced the threat of natural disasters in 2018 and the COVID-19 pandemic, the local government immediately implemented an effective risk management strategy by focusing on long-term risk prevention and mitigation by identifying disaster-prone zones and holding evacuation simulations and response training. Emergencies for residents to reduce the risk of disasters. A dynamic approach in facing challenges and rapid change must immediately adapt policies and programs to meet community needs.

The findings in this research show alignment with previous research that agile leadership can adapt to certain issues or opportunities and specifically operates in the context of adaptation, learning, and development (Breakspear, 2017). The regional government of Palu City has always carried out a transformation through its leadership approach from "command and control" to "leadership and collaboration." This research's findings align with similar research (Coimbra et al., 2023), which states that the more functional the leadership factors are, the more satisfied the followers will be. In other words, a positive attitude and acceptance of agile are very important for the organization's main goals to be successful (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021).

Conclusion

The focus of the research is on the implementation of agile leadership in the Regional Government of Palu City. The findings show that the government has successfully implemented agile leadership principles. This is reflected in adaptability, responsiveness, and significant involvement in meeting the needs and aspirations of the community. The application of agile leadership has helped the Palu City Government improve the quality of decision-making and effectiveness in facing complex challenges and interactions between government and society, creating a more inclusive and collaborative environment in the development process and decision-making.

This study has several limitations that need to be noted. The limited number of informants may have affected the representativeness of the findings. In addition, the research focuses only on one geographical area, namely Palu City, so the generalization of the findings is limited. Further research is recommended to expand the scope by involving more informants from various levels of government and regions by conducting comparative studies on applying agile leadership in various contexts. In this way, it is hoped that future research will provide a more holistic understanding of how agile leadership can be applied effectively in local government contexts. In addition, by considering existing limitations, this research offers a basis for future strategic development efforts to improve the quality of government governance and public services in Palu City.

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