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New Public Management and Leadership in Indonesia: A Case Study of Bojonegoro

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the application of New Public Management (NPM) principles in Bojonegoro, East Java, Indonesia, during Suyoto's leadership from 2008 to 2018. Through a qualitative case study utilizing interviews, policy analysis, and observational data, the research investigates how transparency, community engagement, and ethical governance contributed to Bojonegoro's transformation from one of the poorest districts to a more progressive region. Key findings reveal innovative governance practices, such as participatory decision-making and technology integration for public involvement, alongside citizen empowerment initiatives. While these approaches highlight successes, the study also addresses enduring challenges, including entrenched corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and insufficient legal frameworks. These insights advocate for a balanced governance model that merges market-oriented strategies with ethical principles and community collaboration to advance sustainable development in Indonesia.

Keywords: *New Public Management, Leadership, Change Management*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a cornerstone of any thriving society and has become a critical concern in Indonesia despite the nation's ongoing political reforms. These reforms have fostered greater community involvement in politics and reduced state dominance over the populace. However, they have also exposed persistent challenges in achieving effective and accountable leadership, including corruption, military abuses, and the protection of minority rights (Freedman & Tiburzi, 2012).

As human resources practitioners, one of the biggest challenges is to prepare for leadership positions. All leadership theories are good, but their implications are still far from ideal. While leadership theories abound, there remains a notable gap in understanding the practical implications of these theories within Indonesia's decentralized governance framework. Existing studies often focus on macro-level governance reforms or isolated case studies, leaving a lack of comprehensive analysis on how specific leadership styles can address the systemic challenges faced by local governments. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the leadership of former Regent Suyoto in Bojonegoro, East Java—a case that exemplifies both the potential and challenges of transformative governance.

Bojonegoro, a resource-rich yet historically marginalized district, underwent a remarkable transformation under Suyoto's leadership (2008–2018). Bojonegoro, a relatively small and resource-rich district, has long been overshadowed by the political dynamics of larger provinces, such as East Java and Central Java (Hadiz, 2003). Facing recurring natural disasters and systemic underdevelopment, Suyoto implemented innovative governance strategies that prioritized transparency, community engagement, and ethical leadership. His tenure not only lifted Bojonegoro out of the ten poorest districts in East Java but also set a benchmark for Indonesia's regional governance.

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Although the introduction of NPM principles has been widely debated in the Indonesian context, limited research exists on their practical application at the regional level. This study bridges this gap by exploring the alignment between Suyoto's leadership and NPM principles, such as participatory decision-making, technological integration, and citizen empowerment. By critically analyzing Suyoto's governance strategies, this research contributes to the discourse on ethical leadership and public sector reform.

This research seeks to answer the following question: How did Suyoto's leadership style and strategies align with the principles of New Public Management, and what impact did this alignment have on the governance and development of Bojonegoro? By answering this question, this study aims to provide actionable insights for promoting sustainable development and effective governance in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

New Public Management

According to Marshall and Abresch (2016), New Public Management is a conceptual framework that draws on private sector ideas about disaggregated operations with market-based controls to deliver efficient and effective results in the public sector. This public administration paradigm advocates for the professionalization of public sector managers to reform bureaucracy, prioritizing efficiency, cost management, and service quality (Erbacci & Catalano, 2019). In essence, New Public Management is a methodology for reforming public administration that began to gain traction in the 1980s. The objective is to enhance the efficiency and efficacy of the public sector by implementing concepts and techniques typically employed in the private sector.

The eight fundamental components of New Public Management (Andrisani et al., 2002, pp. 2–11) are: a return to core functions; decentralization and devolution; constraining the size and scope of government; revitalizing civil society; embracing market principles; focusing on results, citizen satisfaction, and governmental accountability; empowering employees, citizens, and communities; and implementing e-government and contemporary technology.

Thus, in New Public Management, the government returns to its core function as a facilitator that provides services that meet the needs of the community. This means that civil society must become an empowered part of running community life. It cannot be passive. Civil society needs to actively build itself with government facilitation. Suppose that currently, the community still has a large dependence on the government. It is time for the government to restore the community so that it has more ability and self-confidence.

The position of the government as a facilitator means that the government belongs to the community and provides services that meet the needs of the community. Thus, the community has the right to assess and hold the government accountable for its work. To work well, the government needs to limit its size and scope and work together with various parties, which means it needs to decentralize and delegate authority, introduce e-government and modern technology, and adopt market principles. Only in this way can the government manage resources and their results and provide satisfactory services to civil society.

Research by Najafi Emami et al. (2024) demonstrated the importance of New Public Management. It discusses the dark side of bad succession due to several factors, namely: the lack of transparency and a meritocracy system in the election of the new leader, resistance from the old leader, internal conflict between candidates, and the lack of preparation from future leaders. The results demonstrate how important the New Public Management is because it focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector, the importance of managing human resources professionally, and the importance of transparency and accountability.

Leadership

There is many literature about leadership, including any types and styles of leadership. However, Indonesia still struggles to find good leaders. Indeed, being a leader gives one satisfaction. Assuming a leadership role confers a sense of authority and distinction, the ability to facilitate the growth and development of others, substantial financial rewards, esteem, and recognition, favorable prospects for career progression, an insider perspective, and the capacity to manage financial and material resources (DuBrin, 2010). In this situation, many personality traits come into play. It depends highly on one's personality, experiences, and other background.

Mintzberg mentions ten roles in leadership functions: figurehead, spokesperson, negotiator, coach and motivator, team builder, team player, technical problem solver, entrepreneur, strategic planner, and executor (DuBrin, 2010). An effective leader must possess good communication skills, be able to inspire and motivate, be goal-oriented, and be collaborative (Wilkins, 2014).

The phenomenon of leadership style in Indonesia is a compelling subject that significantly impacts political and governmental affairs, as well as the functioning and sustainability of organizations. Leadership plays a strategic and vital role in an organization and is a key factor of success in fulfilling its purpose, vision, and objectives.

Several important factors should be considered when defining the ideal leadership style for Indonesia. First, the leader should have a strong vision and the ability to effectively communicate and execute that vision (Ahmadi et al., 2023). They should be able to inspire and motivate their followers and foster a collaborative and inclusive environment (Irawanto et al., 2011).

Second, the leader should have a deep understanding of and appreciation for Indonesia's diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. They should be able to bridge different perspectives and interests and find common ground (Irawanto et al., 2011; Wahyudi, 2011). A paternalistic leadership style that emphasizes values of loyalty, hierarchy, and harmony may be more suitable in the Indonesian context (Wahyudi, 2011).

Third, the leader should have a strong moral compass and a commitment to ethical behavior. They should be transparent, accountable, and willing to face criticism. Corruption and abuse of power have been major issues in Indonesia, so leaders who can set an example of integrity and serve the public interest are crucial.

In terms of change management, it is undeniable that leadership is essential. However, the leader should not be left alone. Before being appointed as a leader, they need to have any orientation/workshop or formalized training before their appointments, and they need to acquire office procedures skills before they are appointed (Dogbatse, 2024).

Overall, the ideal leader for Indonesia would be one who can balance visionary thinking with cultural sensitivity, ethical behavior, and dedication to serving the people. This type of leader can help Indonesia navigate its complex challenges and foster sustainable development and social progress (Ahmadi et al., 2023; Irawanto et al., 2011; Purba & Hartijasti, 2021; Wahyudi, 2011).

The difficulties of implementing NPM in Indonesia were conveyed by several researchers: the political and government reforms of 1998, which were expected to be in line with the reform of government bureaucracy, have not been realized, indicated by suboptimal public service, low ASN performance, cases of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN) are still a chronic disease both among the executive and legislative branches and have even spread to the most advanced government level, namely the village (hartati, 2020); the implementation of NPM in public organizations in Indonesia has brought positive changes, but still faces various challenges, such as bureaucratic resistance, limited resources, and lack of political support (Edward et al., 2024); several practical challenges faced by organizations that apply NPM principles, such as internal resistance, changes in organizational culture, and the complexity of performance measurement (Rahim & Adnan, 2023); and there are negative effects of the executive class system on both

accessibility and fairness within public services (Fadoli et al., 2024).

NPM is not something new, but it is difficult to implement in Indonesia considering the leadership culture here, which is still very patriarchal. Leaders are considered to be figures who are higher than the people they lead, and therefore, the concept of leadership in general is still far from the basic nature of leadership itself, which is to provide service to the people they lead. Leaders in Indonesia tend to ask for respect and service from the people around them. They feel they hold power that makes people submit to them. This mindset makes leaders in Indonesia trapped in a cult, and if they do not have the right leadership values can end in abuse of authority and power, such as corruption.

This tendency occurs because they feel more important than others, so they do not need to be accountable for their decisions to the public. The money used by leaders generally comes from the public. However, leaders are not used to doing things transparently. Transparency as a leadership trait directly aligns with the NPM's focus on accountability and citizen satisfaction (Irawanto et al., 2011; Marshall & Abresch, 2016). This study employs a conceptual framework that integrates NPM principles—such as decentralization, accountability, and citizen empowerment, with leadership traits such as ethical governance and participatory decision-making.

According to the Central Statistics Agency, Indonesia's IPAK (Anti-Corruption Behavior Index) in 2024 was at 3.85 on a scale of 0–5, which is still relatively high even though it has shown a decline (BPS, 2024); in addition, the 2023 Indonesia Corruption Watch report recorded various modes of corruption, including corruption in the village, government, and education sectors (Indonesia Corruption Watch (2024); public service policies in Indonesia show that convoluted bureaucracy is still a major challenge, despite efforts such as the One-Stop Integrated Service (PTSP) and digitalization (Seputar Birokrasi (2024); and the Leadership Crisis, where only 7% of millennials in Indonesia are considered competent to be leaders, indicating a shortage of prospective leaders in the private and public sectors (Sarasa, 2021).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach and Rationale for Case Study Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach based on a case study methodology. A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this case, the "bounded system" is the phenomenon of leadership in Indonesia, which is examined through multiple data sources, such as academic literature, policy documents, news articles, and interviews with relevant stakeholders. The case study was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within the natural context (Stake, 1995). In this study, the leadership phenomenon in Indonesia, exemplified by the governance of Suyoto in Bojonegoro, is the focal case. This approach provides rich insights into the application of New Public Management (NPM) principles in a regional governance setting.

While case studies offer valuable exploratory power, they also present certain limitations, such as restricted generalizability and reliance on subjective data. To address these limitations, this study employed data triangulation through multiple sources, including interviews, document analysis, and observations, to enhance the validity of its findings.

Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection Criteria

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure their relevance to the research objectives. The selection criteria include: Government Officials: Individuals who were actively involved in the regional administration of Bojonegoro during Suyoto's tenure; Community Leaders: Representatives from local communities who interacted directly with Suyoto's policies and programs; Public Administration and Leadership Experts: Academics or

practitioners with expertise in NPM and leadership; and Suyoto: As the primary informant, the former Regent of Bojonegoro provides first-hand insights into his leadership strategies and practices.

Interview Process, Protocols, and Ethical Considerations

In-depth interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data on the participants' experiences and perspectives. The interview protocol included questions designed to explore leadership dynamics, such as: What type of leadership does Bojonegoro require? How do you perceive the impact of Suyoto's governance? How do you define effective leadership in the context of regional governance?

Ethical considerations were rigorously applied throughout the research process: informed consent: all participants were briefed on the research objectives and provided written consent; Anonymity: Participant identities were anonymized to ensure privacy; and researcher neutrality: the researcher maintained objectivity and minimized bias during data collection and analysis.

Contribution of Data Collection Methods

- Literature review: This review provides a theoretical foundation and contextual background for the study.
- Document analysis: This section examines policy documents, public reports, and media articles to understand the implementation of NPM principles.
- Interviews: This section captures qualitative insights from key stakeholders on leadership and governance experiences.
- Observations: Facilitates deeper understanding of real-life contexts and interactions within Bojonegoro.

Data Analysis Process

The data were analyzed using coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns, trends, and key issues. The process is as follows:

- Transcription: Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim.
- Coding: Key phrases and themes were identified systematically using NVivo software (Ulfa et al., 2020).
- Theme Categorization: Themes and their interrelationships were organized to ensure a coherent understanding of the data.
- Data Validation: Triangulation of data sources and member-checking with participants were conducted to ensure accuracy and reliability.

NVivo facilitated a systematic and efficient analysis process by identifying thematic connections and enabling the organization of complex qualitative data. These steps ensured the rigor and credibility of the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The leadership Regent of Bojonegoro Suyoto was a unique case. The successful result can be seen in the development of Bojonegoro and its people.

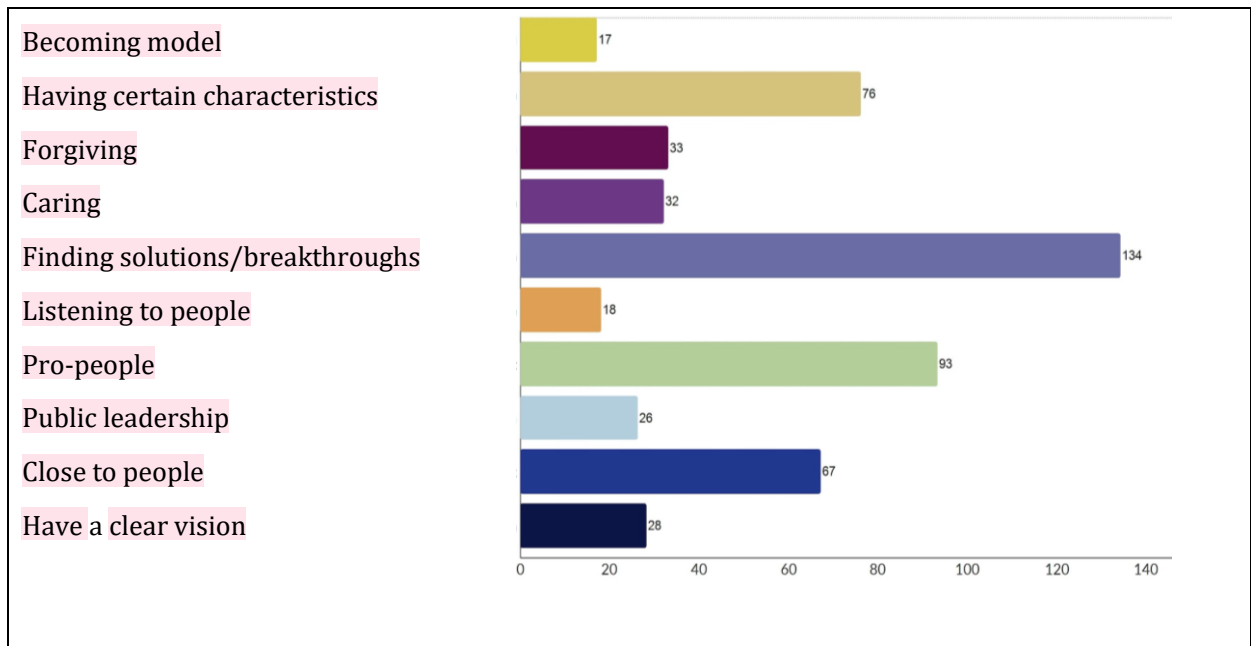


Figure 1. The NVivo processing results

The primary data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including the Regent of Bojonegoro, senior government officials, community leaders, and local citizens. Supplementary secondary data were sourced from government documents, academic literature, and media reports. Using thematic analysis, data transcripts were coded and categorized to identify recurring patterns and critical themes within Suyoto's leadership approach. The result of the informant's response is categorized and shown in Figure 1.

As an academic and a former lecturer at a private university in East Java, Suyoto's capacity for higher-order thinking enabled him to effectively diagnose the complex socioeconomic challenges of Bojonegoro. However, cognitive capabilities alone do not guarantee effective leadership; sincerity and ethical integrity emerged as equally indispensable traits, as emphasized by informants. These qualities distinguish leaders who are genuinely committed to serving the public rather than pursuing personal or group interests.

In response to the research question, informants identified key leadership characteristics exemplified by Suyoto, including solution-oriented thinking, pro-people policies, approachability, empathy, future-oriented vision, and exemplary conduct. These traits resonate strongly with the principles of New Public Management, particularly the emphasis on empowering citizens and limiting direct governmental involvement in community development. For instance, Suyoto's facilitative role aligns with the NPM concept of the government as a provider of resources and enabler of societal progress rather than a direct executor of development activities. The need for an active leader to find solutions or breakthroughs to people's problems is crucial. A leader must also be able to be present and close to the people, listen to their aspirations, and lead by example. Suyoto and his leadership approach have facilitated positive transformation in Bojonegoro by implementing the principles of New Public Management (Sharin, 2020; Zheng et al., 2024), which include: revitalizing civil society; embracing market principles; focusing on results, ensuring citizen satisfaction, and enhancing governmental accountability; empowering employees, citizens, and communities; and applying e-government and modern technology.

Further analysis reveals that being a professional facilitator requires adherence to market principles, decentralized decision-making, and the adoption of modern technology. For Bojonegoro,

these elements translated into transparent asset management, community-driven infrastructure development, and effective use of e-government tools to foster accountability and responsiveness. These innovations demonstrate how leadership rooted in NPM principles can drive substantial transformation in resource-constrained regions. As a leader, Suyoto conducted a breakthrough in making strategic breakthroughs, innovation in public services, and changing the mindset of the people (Sharin, 2020). He empowers and collaborates with the community to drive development. The key success of Bojonegoro's development during Suyoto's leadership is the ability to innovate and lead with integrity. Suyoto is seen as a transformational leader who can effectively manage change, inspire his followers, and lead his people to achieve their shared goals (Marsuq, 2017).

Despite these successes, challenges remain. For instance, while community-led infrastructure projects demonstrate high levels of empowerment, their scalability and long-term sustainability are uncertain. Similarly, Suyoto's reliance on ethical and visionary leadership raises questions about institutionalizing such practices beyond individual efforts.

Suyoto's leadership offers valuable insights into the broader applicability of New Public Management in regional governance. His transformative approach, which emphasized innovation, collaboration, and integrity, exemplifies the potential for decentralized governance models to address systemic poverty and underdevelopment. The lessons from Bojonegoro underscore the need for leaders who not only possess technical and cognitive skills but also embody ethical principles and maintain a genuine connection with the community.

The successful leadership of Regent Suyoto, which has transformed Bojonegoro into a prosperous and progressive region, provides valuable lessons for other local leaders in Indonesia. The key factors that enabled his success were (Kamarulazi et al., 2018; Marsuq, 2017; Siregar & Muslihah, 2019): his strong ethical principles and commitment to public service, his ability to listen and engage with the community, his focus on empowering citizens and leveraging technology, and his will to challenge the status quo and find innovative solutions.

Some of the key features of NPM that are applied in Bojonegoro can be summarized as follows: result orientation, decentralization and empowerment, market mechanisms, customer orientation, and new technology and management tools.

Application of New Public Management

Results Orientation in Bojonegoro: Shifting the Focus from Processes to Outcomes

A fundamental principle of New Public Management (NPM) is its results-oriented approach, which emphasizes achieving measurable outcomes that directly impact societal welfare. This perspective represents a significant departure from traditional public administration, which often prioritizes procedural compliance over substantive outcomes. In the Indonesian context, this paradigm shift has proven challenging, as many government agencies remain entrenched in bureaucratic practices that prioritize outputs, such as project completion, rather than assessing their long-term impact on communities.

The leadership of Suyoto in Bojonegoro illustrates how results orientation can be effectively implemented in local governance. By redirecting the focus from bureaucratic processes to strategic outcomes, Suyoto fostered tangible improvements in community welfare. A notable example is the development of infrastructure through community-driven initiatives. Unlike conventional government procurement processes, which are often plagued by inefficiency and corruption, Suyoto encouraged community members to take the lead in constructing infrastructure such as roads and reservoirs.

This community-driven approach not only optimized resource utilization but also instilled a sense of ownership and accountability among residents. For instance, acknowledging the financial constraints of the regional government, Suyoto transparently disclosed fiscal limitations, including

debts incurred from past corruption. Transparency played a pivotal role in building public trust because citizens were made aware of the government's financial realities, including detailed disclosures of salaries and budget allocations.

This transparency empowered the community to actively contribute to developmental projects. For example, to address the recurring droughts in Bojonegoro, community members collectively donated land to the government for the construction of reservoirs, or "embung," as they are locally known. This initiative, spurred by individual contributions and subsequently embraced by others, exemplifies the alignment of community engagement with NPM principles. The tangible results, such as increased water availability and improved infrastructure, reinforced public trust and demonstrated the efficacy of outcome-oriented governance.

By focusing on results, Suyoto not only improved public welfare but also challenged the status quo of Indonesia's governance, showcasing how transparency, citizen engagement, and strategic leadership can collectively drive transformative change.

Decentralization and Empowerment: Enabling Local Autonomy and Active Participation

Decentralization and empowerment are central tenets of New Public Management (NPM), aiming to grant lower-level units greater autonomy to make decisions and manage resources. In a nation as vast and diverse as Indonesia, with over 30 provinces, 600 districts, and 77,000 villages, this approach holds immense promise. The sheer geographical and demographic scale makes centralized governance impractical for addressing the unique needs of each region. Furthermore, the disparity in resources across Indonesia necessitates localized management that is informed by regional knowledge and tailored to specific community needs. Decentralization, therefore, not only addresses logistical challenges and fosters equity and responsiveness in governance.

Bojonegoro, as a resource-constrained district, exemplifies the transformative potential of decentralization under Suyoto's leadership. Due to limited financial and infrastructural resources, Suyoto implemented a strategy that redistributed responsibility to local communities. By encouraging active participation, he empowered citizens to identify problems, design solutions, and collaborate with the government in implementation.

A notable example is the management of the Village Fund Budget, which exemplifies decentralization in practice. Suyoto entrusted village heads with the responsibility of overseeing fund allocation, supported by community discussions, to determine priorities, such as building roads, irrigation channels, or supporting small businesses. This participatory approach not only enhanced the efficiency and relevance of development initiatives but also fostered accountability. Village heads are required to publicly report expenditures, ensuring transparency and maintaining trust within communities.

Empowerment, however, is contingent on trust—a concept highlighted by [Adah et al. \(2024\)](#), who argued that leaders must cultivate a culture of trust to facilitate knowledge sharing and active participation within organizations. In Bojonegoro, Suyoto's transparent governance created an environment of mutual trust. By openly sharing information about governmental financial constraints, including debts inherited from prior administrations, he earned public confidence and motivated collective action.

The community-based approach used by Suyoto underscores the importance of decentralization in effectively targeting development programs. Local citizens possess intrinsic knowledge about their needs, which enables them to propose practical solutions. This method not only ensures that initiatives are relevant but also fosters a sense of ownership and belonging, as citizens actively contribute to project success.

For instance, to combat seasonal droughts, residents collectively donated land for reservoir construction. This initiative, driven by individual contributions and collective support, exemplifies

the alignment of empowerment with tangible outcomes. The reservoirs, or "embung," significantly mitigated water shortages, demonstrating the far-reaching impact of decentralized governance.

Decentralization and empowerment, as demonstrated in Bojonegoro, provide a blueprint for other Indonesian regions to embrace community-driven governance models. By leveraging local autonomy and participation, leaders can address regional disparities more effectively, create innovative solutions, and foster sustainable development that resonates with the principles of New Public Management.

Market Mechanisms: Leveraging Competition and Innovation in Governance

One of the pivotal principles of New Public Management (NPM) is the incorporation of market mechanisms within the public sector. By introducing competition, performance-based contracts, and incentives, NPM seeks to emulate private sector efficiencies and foster innovation in public service delivery. For a country as expansive as Indonesia, the adoption of market mechanisms offers a transformative opportunity to address inefficiencies in governance. However, many government bodies in Indonesia remain entrenched in a "budget absorption" mindset, prioritizing the disbursement of allocated funds over the evaluation of outcomes and societal impact. This systemic issue often undermines the potential for meaningful competition and service improvement.

In contrast, Suyoto's leadership in Bojonegoro exemplifies how market mechanisms can be effectively applied to enhance public service delivery. Under his administration, regional government divisions operated within a competitive framework, striving not merely to exhaust their budgets but to achieve measurable and impactful results. This shift in focus cultivated a culture of accountability and performance excellence.

A critical tool in this transformation was the implementation of the LAPOR! application—a citizen reporting system designed to enhance transparency and responsiveness. Residents of Bojonegoro used the platform to report issues related to public services, environmental cleanliness, and the efficacy of development programs. Each division of the regional government was required to address these reports promptly, thereby fostering competition among departments to deliver superior services. This mechanism not only enabled Suyoto to monitor the performance of various governmental divisions but also empowered citizens to evaluate and hold local governments accountable.

By aligning the government's service delivery goals with measurable results, Suyoto effectively demonstrated the applicability of market mechanisms in a public sector context. Transparency, a key element of these mechanisms, played a central role in building trust between the government and its citizens. Residents' ability to assess the government's performance reinforced their role as active participants in governance—a hallmark of NPM principles.

The application of market mechanisms in Bojonegoro underscores the potential of such frameworks to build transparent and accountable governance models throughout Indonesia. Wiratma and Gorda (2020) assert that market mechanisms are essential for fostering public sector efficiency and innovation. Suyoto's leadership is a replicable example for other regions and even at the national level. By leveraging competition, incentivizing performance, and embracing innovation, his administration not only improved service delivery but also strengthened citizen trust and engagement.

In summary, the successful implementation of market mechanisms under Suyoto's leadership illustrates how the integration of private sector principles into public governance can yield significant benefits. Bojonegoro is a testament to the power of transparent, accountable, and result-oriented governance, and it sets a benchmark for broader application across Indonesia (Hayat & Artisa, 2019; Maryam et al., 2018).

Customer Orientation: Government as a Service Provider

Customer orientation, a core tenet of New Public Management (NPM), redefines the relationship between the government and its constituents by positioning the public as “customers” and the government as a service provider. This perspective requires a responsive government, accountable, and committed to raising the standards of public services. However, in Indonesia, this concept remains underdeveloped. Public institutions often fail to actively seek feedback, neglect public satisfaction, and provide services with minimal consideration for citizens’ needs. Consequently, communities are compelled to accept government actions without meaningful engagement or opportunities for critique.

In stark contrast, the leadership of Suyoto in Bojonegoro exemplifies how a customer-oriented approach can be operationalized effectively. Under his administration, the local government not only treated citizens as clients but also actively sought their input to improve public services. The implementation of the *LAPOR!* The application is a prominent example of the proposed approach. This platform empowers citizens to report issues in public services, expose corruption, and offer suggestions for government improvement. By incorporating direct client feedback, the government has enhanced the quality and responsiveness of its service delivery.

Suyoto’s commitment to customer orientation extends beyond digital platforms. As a leader, he consistently engaged with communities directly, visiting villages to listen to aspirations and address concerns. This hands-on approach encouraged his staff to follow suit, fostering a culture of empathy and grassroots understanding within the local government. By integrating feedback and maintaining active engagement, the administration can identify and address community needs more effectively.

Ultimately, customer orientation under Suyoto’s leadership transcended the enhancement of service quality—it also rebuilt trust between the government and society. In Indonesia, where hierarchical and feudalistic bureaucratic cultures often undermine public trust, Suyoto’s team transformed the mindset of governance from “ruling” to “serving.” This shift required both courage and commitment to disrupt entrenched practices and promote participatory decision-making, transparency, and accountability.

By redefining the government’s role through a customer-oriented lens, Suyoto demonstrated a model of public governance rooted in inclusivity and responsiveness. The transformation in Bojonegoro highlights how participatory governance and a customer-centric approach can lead to substantial improvements in public service delivery. This model underscores the potential for NPM principles, such as customer orientation and active feedback mechanisms, to rebuild trust and foster lasting societal progress (Rochmansjah, 2019; Ryding, 2010).

Use of Information Technology: Facilitating Digital Leadership and Governance

The leadership of Suyoto in Bojonegoro demonstrates an early form of digital leadership—a concept that has gained traction recently. Digital leadership encompasses managing digital transformations and leading organizations in a digital environment (Hossain et al., 2025). Effective digital leaders are characterized by their ability to initiate and navigate digitalization processes, apply the right technical and strategic competencies, and positively influence organizational members impacted by digital technologies (Avolio et al., 2014; El Sawy et al., 2020; Porfírio et al., 2021; Singh & Hess, 2020). As noted by Tigre et al. (2022), the term “digital” has become increasingly relevant, reflecting the growing necessity to address contemporary organizational challenges through technological advancement.

In Indonesia, the adoption of information technology in governance has been slow, with many public institutions continuing to rely on manual processes and limited transparency. This technological gap has contributed to inefficiencies, including susceptibility to fraud and corruption.

The leadership of Suyoto in Bojonegoro offers a compelling counterexample, demonstrating how technology can transform governance by enhancing productivity, transparency, and accountability.

One significant initiative was the implementation of the LAPOR! application, which empowered citizens to provide real-time feedback, report service issues, and suggest improvements directly to the local government. This platform fostered transparency by enabling the government to oversee and address complaints promptly, while providing citizens a mechanism to hold the government accountable. By integrating such technological tools, Suyoto bridged the gap between the government and its constituents, reinforcing trust and engagement—a core principle of New Public Management.

Additionally, Suyoto leveraged cellular technology to coordinate swift responses during emergencies such as floods. The government used contact networks of local leaders to mobilize resources rapidly and disseminated information to affected communities, including instructions on constructing sandbag walls and evacuation protocols. This efficient use of technology not only mitigated the disaster impact but also showcased the potential of digital tools to save lives.

However, effective use of technology in governance is not merely about access to digital tools. As [Nkambule \(2023\)](#) highlighted, cultural barriers such as anti-collaborative practices and siloed information-sharing often hinder the realization of technology's full potential. Bojonegoro exemplifies this challenge, as public service organizations initially struggled with the "silo culture," where departments refrained from sharing critical data. Overcoming this resistance requires fostering a collaborative environment and encouraging cross-departmental information exchange.

Suyoto's integration of information technology extended beyond operational improvements—it reshaped the relationship between the government and its citizens. By enhancing service delivery, increasing accountability and building trust, the use of technology in Bojonegoro offers a replicable model for other regions in Indonesia. The application of tools like LAPOR! and mobile communications illustrates how digital governance can address institutional inefficiencies while fostering participatory decision-making and transparency ([Dewi et al., 2021](#); [Yogar et al., 2023](#)).

In conclusion, Suyoto's leadership in Bojonegoro exemplifies the transformative potential of information technology in public governance. By adopting innovative digital tools and overcoming cultural barriers, his administration achieved substantial improvements in transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. These efforts underscore the importance of digital leadership in driving positive change and provide a framework for expanding technological governance initiatives throughout Indonesia.

The Next Model of Public Governance in Indonesia

The tenure of Suyoto as Regent of Bojonegoro (2008–2018) is a pivotal example of how New Public Management (NPM) principles can be effectively implemented at the local government level. His administration emphasized efficiency, transparency, and accountability in public service delivery while fostering active citizen participation in the decision-making process ([Hadiz, 2003](#); [Hanis et al., 2011](#)). These efforts marked a significant departure from traditional bureaucratic practices and contributed to Bojonegoro's transformation into a more prosperous and progressive region.

Core Achievements and Challenges

One of the notable initiatives introduced during Suyoto's tenure was the implementation of citizen satisfaction mechanisms, such as general feedback meetings held every Friday. This approach allowed the government to gather direct input from the public, reflecting the NPM's focus on participatory decision-making. Furthermore, Suyoto prioritized transparency through e-

procurement systems, published budget and expenditure reports, and established an anticorruption task force. These initiatives demonstrated his commitment to fostering trust and accountability in governance.

However, although these measures greatly enhanced the efficiency of public services, challenges emerged in balancing efficiency with democratic values. Streamlined administrative processes, while effective in delivering results, at times raised concerns about broader community engagement and the inclusion of diverse stakeholder interests. Additionally, sustaining the momentum of reform posed significant challenges, as the success of these initiatives depended heavily on leadership continuity and commitment to innovation. Suyoto's successors must sustain these reforms to ensure long-term impact.

Structural limitations further constrained the potential of NPM principles in Indonesia, including entrenched bureaucratic inefficiencies, systemic corruption, and weak legal and institutional frameworks (Marsuq, 2017; Turner et al., 2022). These barriers underscore the need for a more comprehensive approach to public governance that builds upon NPM while addressing its limitations.

Toward Public Value Governance

A promising alternative to NPM is the emerging model of Public Value Governance (PVG). Unlike NPM, which predominantly focuses on efficiency and market mechanisms, PVG emphasizes the co-creation of public value through collaboration among governments, citizens, and stakeholders. The experience of Bojonegoro under Suyoto's leadership suggests that PVG may offer a more sustainable path for public sector reform in Indonesia (Hanis et al., 2011; Najafi Emami et al., 2024; Saputra & Fajri, 2020; Turner et al., 2022).

The key aspects of Suyoto's leadership align closely with the principles of Public Value Governance (Anani et al., 2020; Saraswati & Athia, 2018):

- **Focus on Public Value Creation:** Suyoto prioritized improving the well-being and prosperity of Bojonegoro residents over narrow bureaucratic or political goals.
- **Collaborative Governance:** His administration actively engaged citizens, community organizations, and the private sector in co-creating solutions, ensuring inclusive and responsive development.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Suyoto promoted ethical leadership by transparently managing regional assets and implementing rigorous accountability measures.
- **Empowerment and Citizen Engagement:** By empowering citizens to play active roles in decision-making and leveraging their knowledge and resources, Suyoto fostered a sense of ownership and inclusion.
- **Innovation and Continuous Improvement:** Suyoto consistently challenged the status quo, embracing innovative practices, and seeking opportunities for continuous improvement.

Although Suyoto may not have explicitly framed his governance approach within the PVG framework, his leadership style and the outcomes achieved in Bojonegoro resonate strongly with its principles. For instance, the emphasis on co-creation and empowerment reflects PVG's focus on networked governance and citizen-centric solutions.

A Holistic Path Forward

The experience of Bojonegoro illustrates that a balanced approach is necessary—one that integrates the efficiency-driven principles of NPM with the collaborative and inclusive values of traditional public administration and PVG. This hybrid model ensures that efficiency gains do not come at the expense of democratic values or broader social equity. Furthermore, the lessons from

Bojonegoro highlight the importance of leadership in driving public sector reform. A leader like Suyoto who has strong ethical foundations and a commitment to public service, is crucial for achieving meaningful transformation.

To overcome Indonesia's systemic challenges, such as entrenched corruption and fragmented bureaucracy, future public sector reform efforts must adopt a more holistic governance model. Public Value Governance offers a pathway to address these issues by emphasizing collaboration, transparency, and accountability while fostering innovation and citizen engagement.

In conclusion, Suyoto's leadership in Bojonegoro serves as a blueprint for the future of public governance in Indonesia. By demonstrating the successful implementation of PVG principles, his administration provides valuable insights for other regions seeking sustainable development and effective governance.

The Challenges of Leadership in Indonesia

Leadership in Indonesia faces profound challenges stemming from systemic and institutional issues within the nation's democracy and governance structures. Among the most critical obstacles is the pervasive corruption issue, which has long plagued public institutions. Public officials and political elites frequently engage in unethical and illegal practices to consolidate power and influence, resulting in significant erosion of public confidence in the government. The ramifications of corruption extend beyond governance, stalling Indonesia's economic progress and deepening social inequality.

Another formidable challenge is the vast size and complexity of Indonesia's bureaucracy. With overlapping jurisdictions and insufficient coordination between government agencies, inefficiencies are rampant. This fragmented civil service has led to suboptimal service delivery and widespread frustration among citizens, undermining the trust that is essential for effective governance.

Political reorganization and the increasing autonomy of mass media have prompted the emergence of diverse societal groups, each defined by unique identities, scales, and functions (Sari et al., 2020). While these developments can enhance democratic participation, they also pose questions about the political system's ability to balance competing interests and adequately address diverse stakeholder concerns.

The issue of regional autonomy further compounds leadership challenges in Indonesia. Decentralization has empowered local governments to tailor solutions to community needs; however, it has also resulted in fragmented authority and a lack of coordination between different levels of government. Consequently, discrepancies in policy implementation and public service delivery persist, further diminishing citizens' trust in their leaders.

Indonesia's decentralized governance framework, while intended to bring decision-making closer to the people, has created a patchwork of local governments with varying capacities and levels of accountability. This has led to inconsistencies in the execution of policies and delivery of services, revealing the critical need for reforms to harmonize governance standards across regions.

The country's diverse cultural and social landscape presents additional challenges for leaders who must navigate an intricate network of stakeholder interests and expectations. The complexity of this environment necessitates leadership that is not only strategic but also empathetic and capable of fostering unity despite diversity.

Despite these obstacles, transformative leadership examples, such as Suyoto's in Bojonegoro, highlight the potential for change. By promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement, leaders like Suyoto have shown that it is possible to rebuild public trust and drive meaningful reforms within Indonesia's bureaucracy. His administration's commitment to participatory governance and ethical leadership provides valuable lessons for addressing systemic

challenges.

To achieve sustainable and systemic change, Indonesia must confront the deeper structural and institutional issues that perpetuate corruption, inefficiency, and fragmented governance. This requires a concerted effort by policymakers, civil society, and citizens to foster a culture of accountability and collaboration. Moving forward, the integration of emerging governance models, such as Public Value Governance, offers a promising pathway to overcome these challenges and enhance democratic participation while ensuring effective public service delivery.

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine Suyoto's leadership in Bojonegoro within the framework of New Public Management (NPM) principles. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of how visionary leadership and NPM concepts can be effectively implemented in Indonesia's local governance, yielding valuable insights for future public sector reforms.

The case of Bojonegoro highlights the central role of visionary leadership in driving institutional reform and fostering a culture of innovation in the public sector. Suyoto's ability to challenge the status quo and inspire collaboration among stakeholders was instrumental in transforming Bojonegoro. For instance, his emphasis on transparency, as evidenced by public reporting on budget allocation and expenditures, directly contributed to building trust and engagement with citizens. This aligns with the NPM's focus on accountability and result-oriented governance.

Second, this study underscores the necessity of a robust legal and institutional framework to support NPM implementation. The absence of explicit standards for public asset management and regulatory guidelines presented challenges, as observed in the difficulties surrounding Bojonegoro's debt management and resource allocation. These findings stress the importance of structural support to sustain reforms and ensure consistency in applying NPM principles.

Third, the active role of citizens emerged as a critical factor in the success of NPM in Bojonegoro. Through initiatives such as the LAPOR! In application and participatory development projects, Suyoto fostered a culture of citizen engagement. These efforts not only improved service delivery but also empowered the public to actively contribute to governance processes—a core tenet of NPM. For example, the co-creation of infrastructure solutions through community involvement exemplifies how citizen participation enhances the outcomes of NPM-driven initiatives.

Moreover, the study's findings suggest that Suyoto's leadership aligns closely with the emerging model of Public Value Governance (PVG). By prioritizing public welfare, engaging citizens, and fostering transparency, his approach resonates with PVG's emphasis on co-creating value through collaboration. While NPM provided the operational foundation for Bojonegoro's transformation, the elements of PVG highlight the importance of adaptive leadership that transcends efficiency to address broader societal challenges.

In conclusion, Suyoto's leadership demonstrates how NPM principles, when complemented by a collaborative and citizen-focused approach, can drive meaningful change at the local level in Indonesia. His administration's success offers key lessons for leadership development and public sector reform across the country. Specifically, the findings emphasize the importance of ethical, participatory, and visionary leadership in addressing systemic challenges such as corruption, inefficiency, and fragmented governance. By integrating NPM and PVG principles, Indonesia can cultivate leaders capable of creating sustainable and inclusive change in diverse governance contexts.

LIMITATION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is subject to several limitations that should be carefully considered when interpreting its findings. First, this study's focus on Bojonegoro under Suyoto's leadership presents contextual challenges. The socio-cultural uniqueness of Bojonegoro, including its community dynamics and geographic conditions, limits the generalizability of the findings to other Indonesian regions. Leadership strategies that proved effective in Bojonegoro may require significant adaptation to fit the diverse socioeconomic and cultural landscapes across Indonesia.

Second, methodological limitations arise from the qualitative approach used in the study, which relies heavily on in-depth interviews and case analysis. Although this approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena, it does not quantify the impact of specific leadership practices or NPM principles. Consequently, the findings cannot provide statistically significant results, limiting their applicability to broader contexts without additional quantitative support.

Third, the study highlights theoretical challenges regarding leadership frameworks. Suyoto's leadership style successfully integrated elements of NPM and public value governance; however, the absence of a universally accepted theoretical model for leadership in Indonesia makes it difficult to standardize such practices. The effectiveness of his leadership was also heavily influenced by his individual traits, such as visionary thinking and ethical commitment, which may not be replicable across different leaders.

To address these limitations and expand upon the findings, future research could explore the following areas:

- **Comparative Studies:** This study conducts comparative analyses of leadership approaches across different regions in Indonesia. Such studies could identify patterns, shared challenges, and best practices while accounting for variations in sociocultural contexts.
- **Quantitative Approaches:** Qualitative methods can be combined with quantitative approaches, such as surveys or statistical modeling, to measure the impact of leadership practices on governance outcomes. For instance, analyzing correlations between leadership traits and citizen satisfaction metrics can provide valuable insights.
- **Longitudinal analyses:** This study examines leadership effectiveness over time through longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of reforms and the long-term outcomes of governance strategies. This approach allows researchers to evaluate the durability of leadership-driven initiatives beyond the tenure of individual leaders.
- **Public Value Governance (PVG):** This study investigates how PVG principles can be integrated with NPM practices in diverse governance contexts. Future research could examine how collaborative governance and citizen engagement enhance public sector reforms, particularly in regions with limited institutional capacity.
- **Cultural Sensitivity in Leadership Models:** Exploring the role of cultural values in shaping leadership practices. Studies on how paternalistic leadership styles, loyalty-based structures, or hierarchy influence governance outcomes could yield valuable findings tailored to Indonesia's cultural complexity.

By addressing methodological, theoretical, and contextual challenges while expanding research directions, future studies can build a more comprehensive understanding of effective leadership in Indonesia's public sector. These efforts can inform policies and practices aimed at cultivating visionary and ethical leaders capable of driving systemic and sustainable reforms.

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