

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN IMPROVING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AT THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS IN HULU SUNGAI SELATAN REGENCY

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to determine the role of leadership and the factors that influence the improvement of employee performance at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. Informants were determined using purposive sampling techniques, totaling 10 people. The collected data were then analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The research results show that the Role of Leadership in Improving Employee Performance at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency has been quite good. From the aspect of Interpersonal Roles, it is concluded that the leadership is performing quite well, as they are able to provide direction, motivation, and serve as role models for employees. In the aspect of Informational Roles, it is concluded that they are performing quite well, marked by the dissemination of information through various media and the presence of work supervision. However, the involvement of the leadership in supervision and the clarity of information explanations are still not optimal. In the aspect of Decision-Making Role, it is concluded to be quite good. Leaders are able to solve problems through deliberation and resource management, but innovation, breakthroughs, and task distribution are still situational and need strengthening. The driving factors of leadership are good communication, exemplary leadership, and a conducive work environment. Meanwhile, the hindering factors include inconsistent clarity of instructions, suboptimal supervision, and unclear task distribution. Overall, leadership has been quite good but still needs improvement.

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Introduction

In every organization, leaders are expected to guide their organization toward collective well-being. Therefore, the head or leader of an organization bears a great responsibility to motivate and improve the performance of its members so that they can work effectively and professionally. Providing high-quality services to the wider community is the organization's goal.

Various disciplines, such as management, psychology, and social sciences, have long focused on leadership. In certain situations, leadership plays an important role in influencing the behavior and performance of individuals and groups, which are crucial factors in the success of an organization. All types of organizations, including businesses, governments, and non-profits, rely on leadership. Good leadership can make the workplace a motivating place, encourage innovation, and foster trust. Positive changes in employee behavior and performance can be achieved by leaders who can inspire and guide their teams well [1].

Every member of the organization must receive guidance to achieve the goals of effective leadership [2]. Without leadership, the relationship between personal and organizational goals can become unbalanced. As a result, individuals work to achieve their personal goals, while the organization as a whole becomes less effective in achieving its goals. Depending on various internal and external variables, a leader possesses leadership abilities. Because leadership plays a crucial role in the success of an organization through planning, strategy, guidance, and motivation to achieve common goals, the improvement of employee performance heavily depends on the quality of leadership within the organization. This shows that leaders are responsible for inspiring, motivating, and guiding staff to achieve their goals. The success of an organization depends on its leaders. In the sense that this leadership affects the appearance and activities of subordinates in achieving the organization's goals, this leadership also influences the performance of the organization's employees [3].

Leaders hold strategic responsibilities in creating, shaping, and maintaining a productive work culture within the organization [4], [5]. The role of a leader is not limited to administrative functions or merely decision-making, but also includes the role of a vision director, a model of work behavior, and the main driver of collective spirit in the work environment. An effective leader is able to translate the organization's goals into clear directions, create a conducive work environment, and build healthy interpersonal relationships with employees. Through open communication, recognition of performance, and attention to individual needs, leaders can foster a sense of belonging and emotional attachment among employees toward the organization [6]. Additionally, leaders play an important role as a source of inspiration and motivation for employees. Leadership that can consistently provide psychological encouragement will directly influence employee loyalty, work enthusiasm, and productivity levels. Employees who feel valued, supported, and understood by their leaders tend to show higher commitment to their tasks and responsibilities. On the contrary, if leaders are less sensitive to the needs, aspirations, and well-being of employees—whether in terms of workload, work environment, or recognition—this can decrease work motivation. In the long term, this condition has the potential to cause a decline in individual performance, an increase in absenteeism, internal conflicts, and a decrease in overall organizational performance [7].

Self-work motivation is a psychological drive that arises from within the individual (intrinsic) as well as from external factors (extrinsic) that encourage someone to perform their work with a certain level of intensity, focus, and perseverance to achieve organizational goals. Intrinsic motivation can include personal satisfaction, pride in work results, and the desire for self-improvement. Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation can come from rewards, recognition, promotions, or comfortable working conditions. The combination of these two types of motivation greatly determines the quality of a person's performance in carrying out their tasks [8]. Employees with high work motivation generally exhibit characteristics such as better productivity, creativity in problem-solving, discipline in adhering to rules, and a high level of responsibility toward their work. They also tend to have lower absenteeism rates and are able to work effectively in teams. Conversely, less motivated employees often show a decline in service quality, delayed or poorly completed tasks, low initiative, and the emergence of a less harmonious work atmosphere. This condition not only impacts individual performance but can

also affect the image and overall success of the organization [9].

Leaders can motivate employees to work better, so motivated employees will have a higher level of job satisfaction. To improve employee performance, motivation must be provided through training and guidance so that each employee can achieve the expected performance. Therefore, it is very important for organizational leaders or local government officials to understand the factors that can encourage those they lead to work together to achieve common goals.

Discussing leadership is always an interesting topic to study because this concept can be viewed from various perspectives, whether from social, psychological, or organizational aspects. Since ancient times until now, humans have never been free from the issue of leadership, because in every group or organization, there is always a need for someone who can direct, coordinate, and unite various differences toward a common goal. The issue of leadership has existed since humans began living in groups, where the limitations and strengths of each individual necessitate a figure who can manage the distribution of roles, make decisions, and maintain social order.

Basically, leadership is not only related to position or formal title, but also involves the process of interaction between the leader and the led. Leadership encompasses a person's ability to make the right decisions while exercising authority responsibly. It involves the process of influencing, directing, guiding, and motivating others to be willing to cooperate in achieving the set goals. Therefore, leadership can also be understood as a series of actions that produce consistent behavior patterns in the effort to find solutions to various problems faced together.

Furthermore, leadership is often defined as a dynamic process that involves communication, exemplification, and the ability to build trust. A leader is not only expected to give orders but also to create a conducive work environment, foster enthusiasm, and provide clear directions to their team members. In the context of an organization, leadership becomes a determining factor for success because it is directly related to work effectiveness, team coordination, and the achievement of institutional goals [10], [11].

In line with this, George R. Terry defines leadership as an effort to influence individuals so that they are motivated to achieve organizational goals. This definition emphasizes that the essence of leadership lies in the ability to positively influence others. In other words, the success of a leader is not only measured by the power they possess but by how far they can motivate others with awareness, willingness, and commitment to collectively achieve the set goals.

Leaders in sub-district government must always be able to direct their subordinates to carry out their tasks and responsibilities effectively and successfully. Organizational and management experts have studied this issue of employee performance. The study found, among other things, that the leader factor is very important because leaders are responsible for the organization's operations. Leaders are also responsible for directing, motivating, communicating, guiding, and encouraging their subordinates to achieve the organization's goals. This leadership issue is very important because it makes leaders constantly think about what causes the organization to succeed or fail. Based on field observations, several issues related to employee work discipline have not yet been optimized, as indicated by tardiness, low compliance with rules, and lack of punctuality in task completion. The distribution of work among employees is also uneven, leading to an imbalance in workload and potentially reducing work motivation. Additionally, the lack of a reward system for high-performing employees results in good performance not receiving appreciation, which in turn affects the morale and productivity of the employees.

Research Methodology

In this study, the author uses a descriptive research method with a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and document or documentation studies. Data sources were determined using purposive sampling techniques with a total of 10 informants. After the data was collected, the analysis process was carried out through stages of data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusion drawing. Data credibility testing is conducted through prolonged observation, increased diligence in research, triangulation, the use of reference materials, and member checks to ensure data validity. This research focuses on the Role of

Leadership in Improving Employee Performance at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency [12].

Analysis and Results

Encouraging others to understand and reach a consensus is a process known as leadership. It also does it well. Individuals and groups achieve the same goals. The ability to compel a group to achieve a goal is known as leadership. The process that influences goal setting is also included in leadership in a broad definition. organization, encouraging follower behavior to achieve goals, and impacting the improvement of the group and its culture [13]. Leadership is previously defined as the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and direct the behavior of others or groups to achieve the group's goals. Therefore, a leader requires effective cooperation in leading an organization so that cooperation can involve various parties, including collaboration between businesses, government, and society.

According to Henry Mintzberg in Robbins et al, in his observation, he concluded that managers/leaders perform different roles or behaviors that are closely interconnected [14], [15], [16]. These roles can be categorized as interpersonal, informational, and decision-making: (1) Interpersonal roles; The role of the figurehead, where leaders/managers are required to perform routine tasks related to ceremonial duties that are symbolic of a legal or social institution. Leadership role, responsible for motivating and directing subordinates. The liaison role involves maintaining external connections by providing assistance and information. (2) The informational role; The monitor role involves gathering and receiving information from both internal and external organizations or institutions, serving as the internal and external information center of the organization. The disseminator role involves passing on information obtained from outsiders or other employees to members of the organization. The spokesperson role involves representing the organization to convey information to outsiders regarding the organization's plans, policies, and results, and also acting as an expert in the organization's industry. (3) Decision-making roles; Entrepreneurial role, seeking opportunities within the organization and its environment and initiating new projects with the aim of positive change. Role as a problem solver, responsible for taking corrective actions to resolve various unexpected organizational issues. The role of resource allocator, responsible for providing human, physical, and monetary resources. The role of negotiator, responsible for major negotiations as the organization's representative with other units for the organization's own interests.

The results of interviews with 10 (ten) employees of the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency about leadership, titled "The Role of Leadership in Improving Employee Performance at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency," show that:

Interpersonal Role Variable

1. Responsibility Indicator

Based on the results of interviews with the informants, the leadership's responsibility in carrying out leadership functions at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency is generally considered to have been carried out quite well. The leadership is not only perceived as figures who give instructions but also as mentors, guides, and role models for employees in carrying out their duties. The informants described that the leadership is involved in the planning process, implementation of work programs, and performance evaluation, which indicates a concern for the organization's achievements. The presence of leadership in the mentoring and monitoring process also demonstrates an active role in overseeing the execution of employee tasks.

However, the interview results also revealed that this responsibility has not yet been fully optimized in terms of work organization. Some informants believe that the division of tasks is not always clear, so employees sometimes have to take the initiative themselves to complete the work. This condition shows that although the leadership's responsibilities have generally been carried out, there is still room for improvement, particularly in clarifying the work structure and task distribution so that job execution is more directed and not solely dependent on individual initiative.

2. Motivation Indicator

Employee work motivation, based on interview results, is built through an open and two-way communication approach between leaders and employees. The leadership is assessed to strive to create a conducive, positive work environment that supports collaboration. In addition, the leadership also provides direct guidance and strives to be an example in work ethic. One of the important findings from the interview is the existence of an approach that considers the generational differences of employees. The informant mentioned that understanding generational characteristics is an important factor in adjusting motivational methods, so the motivation strategies are not uniform.

Nevertheless, there are notes from informants that the appreciation given for employee performance is not yet fully optimal. Recognition of achievements is considered still inconsistent and not fully objective, causing some employees to feel that the motivation provided is not evenly distributed. This shows that the motivational function of the leadership is already in place, but it needs to be strengthened through a clearer and fairer reward system to enhance overall work enthusiasm.

3. Direction Indicator

Leadership direction is one of the aspects most positively rated by the informants. Almost all informants stated that guidance is very helpful for employees in completing their tasks. Through guidance, employees can understand the objectives of the work, the implementation procedures, and the expected outcomes. Clear guidance also helps employees work in a more structured and measurable manner. Additionally, guidance is considered capable of minimizing work errors and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of task execution. However, the effectiveness of guidance is greatly influenced by the consistency of leadership in providing direction. If the guidance is not conducted continuously or lacks detail, the potential for errors and misunderstandings may increase. Thus, although the guidance has generally been good, the consistency and depth of the content remain important factors that need to be considered.

4. Instruction Indicators

The instructions given by the leadership are generally considered clear and easy for employees to understand. Informants mentioned that the instructions are conveyed through various forums, such as meetings, roll calls, and direct communication, and are often accompanied by explanations or examples. This indicates the leadership's effort to ensure that the conveyed message can be understood by all employees. However, there were also findings that in some situations, instructions were given without detailed explanations, requiring employees to reinterpret the meaning of the instructions. This condition has the potential to cause differences in understanding and impact task execution. Therefore, although the clarity of instructions is already quite good, consistency in delivering complete and detailed instructions still needs to be improved.

Informational Role Variables

1. Observing

Interview results show that the leadership is quite involved in supervising employee work. Supervision is carried out through monitoring, performance reports, and periodic evaluations. In some conditions, the leadership is not directly involved due to task delegation. However, in general, the leadership continues to monitor the progress of the work to ensure that tasks are carried out according to targets. This shows that the supervisory function is functioning, although the intensity of direct involvement varies depending on the situation.

2. Delivering Information

Information is delivered through various channels, both formal and informal, such as meetings, roll calls, circular letters, digital media, and direct communication. This mechanism shows that the leadership strives to ensure that information can be received by all employees. However, interview results reveal that information is sometimes conveyed without adequate explanation, potentially leading to misunderstandings. Therefore, the quality of information delivery still needs to be improved to be clearer, more complete, and easier to understand.

3. Receiving Feedback

All informants stated that the management provides employees with the opportunity to give suggestions and criticism. This indicates the presence of two-way communication and a relatively open work culture. The opportunity is considered important to increase employee participation and support better decision-making. However, its effectiveness greatly depends on the leadership's follow-up on the provided input.

Informational Role Variables

1. Initiative

Based on the interview results, the leadership's role in taking new steps or breakthroughs is considered quite visible, although not yet fully consistent. Some informants stated that the leadership has made innovations, especially in improving services and adjusting work methods according to the organization's conditions. Breakthroughs are made when there is an urgent need or demand for change so that work can be completed more effectively. This shows that the leadership is aware of the importance of adaptation and renewal within the organization.

However, there is also a viewpoint from informants stating that the initiative for renewal more often comes from the staff, while the leadership tends to follow up. This condition indicates that the innovative role of the leadership already exists, but it is not yet fully dominant as the main driver of change. Thus, leadership in the aspect of innovation still requires strengthening so that leaders can be more proactive in creating work breakthroughs.

2. Problem-solving

In resolving issues that arise in the workplace, leaders tend to use a consultative approach, communication, and compromise by involving the relevant parties. The informant stated that every issue is discussed together to find a fair solution that is acceptable to all parties. This approach reflects a participatory leadership style that is oriented toward harmonious working relationships. The deliberative approach is considered quite effective in preventing prolonged conflicts and maintaining a conducive work atmosphere. However, the effectiveness of problem-solving also heavily depends on the leader's decisiveness in making the final decision. If the leader remains in the compromise stage for too long without a firm decision, the problem-solving can become less optimal. Therefore, the balance between a participatory approach and decisiveness becomes an important aspect in this indicator.

3. Managing resources

The management of resources, including employees, facilities, and working hours, is assessed to have been carried out quite well. The leadership strives to assign tasks according to the employees' roles and competencies, as well as to utilize the available facilities to support the execution of work. Work time management is also considered quite structured through the division of schedules and task priorities.

Nevertheless, interviews indicate that there are still employees who are not working optimally, and the division of tasks in certain situations is not yet fully clear. This causes the workload to not always be evenly distributed and can affect the organization's performance effectiveness. Thus, although resource management has been implemented, improvements are still needed in the aspects of work planning and task distribution so that the full potential of employees can be maximally utilized.

Factors Affecting Employee Work Motivation

The interview results show that there are several factors influencing the role of leadership in enhancing employee work motivation. These factors include leadership style, effective communication, exemplary leadership, a conducive work environment, fairness in reward and punishment, and understanding the differences in employee character and generation. Good communication is considered the main factor because it can build harmonious working relationships and reduce misunderstandings. The exemplary behavior of leaders also serves as an important motivator because employees tend to imitate the attitudes and work ethic of their leaders. In addition, a comfortable work environment free from excessive pressure also contributes to the increase in work motivation. Thus, employee motivation is not only influenced by a single factor but is the result of a combination of various interrelated aspects of leadership.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research results show that the role of leadership at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency has been quite good in terms of interpersonal, informational, and decision-making aspects. The leadership plays a role in providing direction, guidance, and building two-way communication that supports the execution of employees' tasks. Guidance is considered to help employees work more purposefully, while the dissemination of information has been carried out through various communication channels. Employees are also given the opportunity to provide suggestions and feedback, reflecting openness in the work environment.

However, there are still obstacles such as unclear instructions in certain situations, an inadequate appreciation system, and an uneven distribution of tasks. In decision-making, the leadership tends to use a deliberative approach and makes sufficient work adjustments, although innovation initiatives are not yet fully dominant. Overall, the role of leadership contributes positively to employee motivation and performance, but it still requires strengthening in aspects of communication, clarity of direction, reward systems, and resource management.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the leadership at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency improve consistency in providing more detailed, clear, and systematic instructions and guidance. Clarity in work communication is very important to avoid multiple interpretations and to ensure that each employee understands their tasks and responsibilities accurately. Additionally, task distribution needs to be strengthened through more structured and proportional work organization, so that job execution does not overly depend on individual initiative alone, but rather is based on a clear work system.

Leaders are also advised to optimize the employee performance appreciation system to be more objective, transparent, and equitable. The provision of awards, whether in the form of recognition or other relevant forms, can serve as an important stimulus in enhancing work motivation and encouraging employees to work more optimally. In addition, the quality of information delivery needs to be continuously improved through more complete, directed, and easily understandable explanations, so that every policy and task can be carried out well by all employees.

In terms of decision-making, leaders are expected to be more proactive in creating work innovations, without neglecting the deliberative approach that has been effective so far. The balance between employee participation and leadership decisiveness in making final decisions is key to maintaining organizational effectiveness. Finally, human resource management needs to be continuously improved through the equitable distribution of workload, enhancement of employee competencies, and sustainable individual capacity development, so that the organization's performance can run more effectively, efficiently, and sustainably.

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