

The Micro-Foundations of Public Service Reform: Transformational Leadership in Setu Urban Village, East Jakarta

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ABSTRACT

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Public service reform at the urban-village level remains constrained by procedural rigidity, limited administrative capacity, uneven digital readiness, and the gap between formal service standards and citizens' everyday service experiences. This article aims to analyze how transformational leadership functions as a micro-foundation of public service reform in Setu Urban Village, East Jakarta. Using a qualitative single-case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and document analysis involving urban-village officials, frontline service officers, community representatives, and residents. The findings reveal that the Lurah's transformational leadership was manifested through exemplary discipline, integrity, motivational communication, participatory coordination, intellectual stimulation, and individualized staff support. These practices contributed to stronger service readiness, improved internal coordination, adaptive digital service assistance, community outreach, and more citizen-oriented service behavior. The study implies that public service reform is not produced solely by formal procedures or digital systems, but also by everyday leadership mechanisms that shape frontline bureaucratic behavior. Sustainable reform therefore requires institutionalizing leadership-driven practices into service standards, staff capacity development, feedback systems, and accountability mechanisms.



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INTRODUCTION

Public service delivery at the urban-village level constitutes the most immediate interface between citizens and the local state (Sulila et al., 2024). In East Jakarta Administrative City, this interface operates within a highly dense urban environment, as the official demographic dashboard recorded 3,224,519 residents and a population density of 16,401 people per km² as of 17 November 2025. Within this broader administrative context, Cipayung District consists of 8 urban villages, 51 community units (RW), 470 neighborhood units (RT), and 243,664 residents, while Setu Urban Village alone serves 6 RW, 44 RT, and 26,014 residents, consisting of 13,036 males and 12,978 females (Anggarina et al., 2024). These figures indicate that public service delivery in Setu is not a minor administrative routine, but a frontline governance function embedded in a dense, diverse, and service-demanding urban society.

The complexity of public service delivery at the urban-village level is further reflected in the range of functions formally assigned to kelurahan institutions. Setu Urban Village is responsible not only for administrative services, but also for community empowerment, public order, maintenance of public facilities, coordination with community organizations, and facilitation of health, education, sanitation, and child-friendly public space programs (Maulana et al., 2024). Its service portfolio includes essential population and civil registration services such as birth certificates, death certificates, electronic identity cards, family cards, data changes, child identity cards, and domicile transfer administration. This administrative breadth places the Lurah in a strategic position, because leadership at this level directly shapes whether public services are delivered as rigid bureaucratic procedures or as responsive, citizen-oriented governance practices (Setiawan, 2022).

The need to strengthen leadership in local public service delivery is also supported by broader evidence on public complaints and service responsiveness in Indonesia. In 2024, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia received 10,846 public complaints, representing a 28% increase from the previous year, with local governments constituting the largest reported institution category at 45.88%. The most frequently resolved maladministration types were prolonged delay at 33.86%, failure to provide service at 30.31%, and procedural deviation at 20.61%, indicating that timeliness, reliability, and procedural clarity remain persistent challenges in public service delivery (Hertati, 2023). In Jakarta, the Cepat Respon Masyarakat system also illustrates the intensity of citizen demand, with 185,852 citizen reports followed up throughout 2024, while the CRM platform integrates five official complaint channels to support more responsive, efficient, and transparent complaint handling.

Existing studies have emphasized that the effectiveness of public service delivery depends not only on formal rules, standard operating procedures, and institutional design, but also on the quality of leadership that mobilizes bureaucratic actors and community stakeholders (Wongpreedee & Sudhipongpracha, 2024). Transformational leadership is particularly relevant in this regard because it emphasizes vision building, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, all of which are essential for moving public organizations beyond routine compliance (Vignieri & Santoni, 2025). Prior studies suggest that effective leadership can strengthen work discipline, improve staff motivation, stimulate innovation, and foster collaborative relationships between government officials and citizens. In the context of kelurahan governance, these leadership qualities are crucial because the Lurah must simultaneously manage internal administrative performance and external citizen expectations.

The state of the art in public administration research increasingly recognizes transformational leadership as a driver of public service performance, organizational change, and service innovation. Recent scholarship has linked transformational leadership with public service

efficacy, employee motivation, service quality, good governance, and digital-era administrative transformation (Branderhorst & Ruijer, 2025). At the same time, the microfoundations perspective offers a useful analytical lens because it explains how macro-level organizational outcomes emerge from micro-level actions, interactions, decisions, and routines among individual actors within organizations. Therefore, examining transformational leadership at the urban-village level allows public service reform to be understood not merely as a policy agenda, but as a process shaped by everyday leadership practices, staff behavior, coordination patterns, and citizen-facing interactions.

Despite these developments, several research gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature on transformational leadership and public service delivery tends to examine leadership as an aggregate variable, rather than unpacking the concrete mechanisms through which leaders shape daily bureaucratic routines at the frontline level (Mensah et al., 2022). Second, studies on local governance in Indonesia often focus on district, municipal, or village government contexts, while the urban-village setting, particularly the *kelurahan* as a frontline administrative unit in a metropolitan city, remains relatively underexplored (Sukmawan et al., 2023). Third, limited attention has been given to how the Lurah's transformational leadership practices operate as microfoundations of public service reform by influencing staff discipline, service responsiveness, internal coordination, innovation, and citizen-oriented administrative behavior.

The central problem addressed in this study is that public service reform in Setu Urban Village cannot be adequately explained only through formal procedures, institutional mandates, or aggregate service performance indicators. Reform at this level depends on how the Lurah translates policy expectations into daily organizational practices, motivates staff to work beyond routine compliance, coordinates community-facing services, and cultivates a service culture oriented toward responsiveness and public value. In this sense, transformational leadership becomes a critical mechanism through which abstract reform agendas are converted into concrete changes in administrative behavior, service quality, and citizen experience.

This research is urgent because urban-village governments are increasingly required to respond to rising public expectations, digital complaint mechanisms, and more complex social problems at the community level. The combination of Setu's population scale, its wide range of administrative and community functions, and the broader increase in public complaints in Indonesia demonstrates the need for leadership models that can strengthen responsiveness, accountability, and innovation at the frontline of government. By analyzing the microfoundations of public service reform through the transformational leadership of the Lurah in Setu Urban Village, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to public administration literature and practically to the improvement of leadership capacity in urban local governance. The findings may also provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, municipal administrators, and *kelurahan* officials seeking to build adaptive, participatory, and citizen-centered public services in metropolitan Indonesia).

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design with a descriptive-interpretive approach to examine how transformational leadership is practiced by the Lurah in the implementation of public services in Setu Urban Village, East Jakarta. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of leadership practices, bureaucratic interactions, service routines, and organizational dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement alone. The case study approach enabled the researcher to investigate transformational leadership within its real-life

administrative setting, particularly in relation to how leadership behaviors shape the micro-foundations of public service reform at the urban-village level.

The study focused on Setu Urban Village as a specific institutional context where public service reform is implemented through daily administrative practices, staff coordination, citizen interaction, and service problem-solving. Rather than treating leadership as an abstract managerial concept, this research examined how the Lurah translates vision, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration into concrete service-related actions. This design allowed the study to explore the relationship between leadership practices and public service delivery from the perspectives of government officials, frontline service staff, community representatives, and service users.

Participant

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, which enabled the researcher to identify informants who possessed direct knowledge, experience, or involvement in the implementation of public services in Setu Urban Village. The participants consisted of internal administrative actors and external community stakeholders. Internal participants included the Lurah, urban-village secretary, section heads, and frontline public service officers, while external participants included community leaders and residents who had accessed public services at the urban-village office.

The selection of participants was based on their relevance to the research focus. Government officials were selected because they were directly involved in planning, coordinating, and delivering public services, while community members were included to provide citizen-based perspectives on service responsiveness, accessibility, and quality. The final number of participants was determined by the principle of data saturation, meaning that data collection continued until no substantially new information or themes emerged from the interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher, who played a central role in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing qualitative data. To ensure systematic data collection, the researcher used three supporting instruments: a semi-structured interview guide, an observation checklist, and a document review protocol. These instruments were designed to capture leadership practices, public service processes, staff behavior, citizen interaction, and institutional documentation related to service delivery.

The semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions were used to explore how the Lurah acts as a role model, communicates service-oriented goals, encourages innovation, and supports staff development. The observation checklist was used to record service interactions, office workflow, staff responsiveness, coordination practices, and the general atmosphere of public service delivery. Meanwhile, the document review protocol was used to examine relevant administrative documents, service standards, organizational profiles, service reports, complaint records, regulations, and other supporting materials.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive understanding of transformational leadership and public service implementation in Setu Urban Village. The use of multiple data collection techniques allowed the researcher to conduct triangulation and reduce the risk of relying on a single source of information. Each

technique was used to capture different dimensions of the research problem, ranging from leadership narratives to observable service practices and formal administrative evidence.

First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including the Lurah, administrative officials, frontline staff, community representatives, and residents. The interviews focused on leadership practices, internal coordination, work discipline, public service challenges, innovation, and citizen responsiveness. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to maintain consistency across participants while still providing flexibility to explore emerging issues in greater depth.

Second, direct observation was carried out at the Setu Urban Village office to examine how public services were delivered in practice. The observation focused on service flow, staff-citizen interaction, waiting time, administrative procedures, coordination among officers, and the visible influence of leadership on work culture. This technique was important because leadership and service quality are not only expressed through formal statements, but also through everyday routines, behavioral patterns, and organizational climate.

Third, documentation was used to complement interview and observation data. The documents reviewed may include the organizational structure of Setu Urban Village, service standards, public service announcements, complaint records, service reports, regulations, internal administrative documents, and relevant government publications. Document analysis helped verify whether the information obtained from interviews and observations was consistent with formal institutional procedures and recorded service practices.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process, rather than only after fieldwork had been completed. This enabled the researcher to identify emerging patterns, refine interview questions, and deepen the interpretation of leadership practices and service reform processes.

The first stage was data condensation, in which interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were organized, selected, simplified, and categorized according to the research focus. At this stage, irrelevant or repetitive information was reduced, while meaningful statements related to transformational leadership and public service reform were retained. The second stage was coding, where data were grouped into thematic categories based on both deductive and inductive logic. Deductive coding was guided by the four dimensions of transformational leadership, while inductive coding was used to identify themes emerging from the field, such as coordination barriers, staff discipline, service innovation, citizen complaints, and informal problem-solving practices.

The third stage was data display, in which the categorized findings were presented in matrices, thematic tables, and narrative descriptions. This process helped the researcher compare data across different participant groups and identify relationships between leadership behavior, bureaucratic routines, and public service outcomes. The fourth stage was conclusion drawing and verification, where the researcher interpreted the meaning of the findings and verified them through triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents. Conclusions were drawn carefully by comparing participant statements, observed practices, and documentary evidence to ensure the credibility and consistency of the findings.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied. Source triangulation was used by comparing data from government officials, frontline staff, community representatives, and residents. Method triangulation was conducted by integrating interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking may be conducted by confirming

key findings with selected informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation accurately reflects the field reality. These procedures strengthened the validity of the analysis and ensured that the study provides a credible explanation of how transformational leadership functions as a micro-foundation of public service reform in Setu Urban Village.

RESULTS

The findings of this study indicate that transformational leadership in Setu Urban Village was reflected in the daily practices of the Lurah in guiding employees, coordinating public services, encouraging innovation, and building direct communication with the community. Data obtained through interviews, observation, and documentation show that the Lurah's leadership was not limited to formal administrative authority, but was also manifested through exemplary behavior, motivational communication, participatory coordination, problem-solving, and individualized attention to employees. These leadership practices were observed in the implementation of routine administrative services, public information services, community engagement activities, and the Digital Population Identity program.

Interview data revealed that the Lurah was perceived by employees as a role model in terms of discipline and work commitment. Most employees associated the Lurah's leadership with punctuality, consistency, and direct involvement in service activities. Based on employee responses, 85% of staff stated that the Lurah regularly arrived on time during working days. This punctuality was considered important because it influenced the readiness of employees to begin service activities and created a more disciplined office atmosphere. One frontline service officer stated, *"When the Lurah comes early and directly checks the service room, we also feel responsible to be ready before residents arrive. It is not only about attendance, but about preparing ourselves to serve properly."* This statement indicates that the Lurah's daily presence contributed to shaping employee discipline and readiness in public service delivery.

The role-modeling function of the Lurah was also evident in the way employees described her integrity and consistency in decision-making. Several informants stated that the Lurah emphasized honesty, responsibility, and transparency in carrying out service-related tasks. An administrative staff member explained, *"The Lurah always reminds us that public service must be accountable. If there is a problem, we have to explain it clearly to residents and not make the process complicated."* Another employee similarly stated, *"She gives instructions clearly and asks us to follow the procedure, but at the same time she also reminds us to help residents who do not understand the requirements."* These interview findings show that employees perceived the Lurah's leadership as combining procedural discipline with a service-oriented attitude.

The findings also show that the Lurah consistently communicated the values of fast, accurate, and responsive public service through internal meetings and weekly briefings. These forums were used not only to discuss technical matters, but also to reinforce the meaning of public service as a responsibility to citizens. One section head stated, *"In weekly briefings, the Lurah usually does not only talk about tasks. She also motivates us to work sincerely and reminds us that people come to the kelurahan because they need help."* A frontline employee added, *"The briefing helps us understand what should be prioritized that week. We know which services need more attention and what problems must be anticipated."* These statements show that internal communication functioned as a mechanism for aligning employee understanding, strengthening motivation, and clarifying service priorities.

Observation at the urban-village office confirmed that internal coordination was conducted in a relatively participatory manner. Employees were given opportunities to report service constraints, including technical problems, citizen complaints, workload distribution, and challenges in digital service implementation. Staff members stated that they could communicate operational difficulties directly to the Lurah or through section heads. One employee explained, *"If we face obstacles at the service counter, especially when the application is slow or residents do*

not bring complete documents, we can report it immediately. Usually, the Lurah asks what solution can be done first so the service does not stop." This finding indicates that problem-solving in Setu Urban Village was not entirely centralized, but involved communication between the Lurah and service staff.

In relation to the implementation of the Digital Population Identity program, the findings show that the Lurah was directly involved in socialization, monitoring, and staff assistance. Interviews with employees revealed that the program created several practical challenges, particularly among residents with limited digital literacy. Common problems included forgotten PINs or passwords, unstable applications, insufficient understanding of smartphone use, and difficulties experienced by elderly residents. One service officer stated, *"Many residents, especially older people, do not understand how to activate the digital identity. Some forget their PIN, some do not know how to use the application, so we have to guide them step by step."* Another officer added, *"The Lurah often asks us to be patient because digital services are still new for many residents. She reminds us not to blame the residents when they do not understand."* These findings indicate that digital service implementation required not only technical capacity, but also patience, communication skills, and direct assistance from officers.

The Lurah's involvement in digital service implementation was also confirmed by community-level informants. An RT/RW representative stated, *"The kelurahan does not only wait for residents to come to the office. There are efforts to inform residents through RT and RW, especially for programs such as Digital Population Identity."* This statement shows that coordination with community actors was used to support the dissemination of public service information. Documentation reviewed during the study also showed that community-based coordination was used to strengthen public communication and service outreach.

The findings further reveal that inspirational communication was an important part of the Lurah's leadership. Employees reported that motivational messages delivered during briefings helped build collective responsibility and improve work enthusiasm. One employee stated, *"When the Lurah gives motivation, we feel that our work is appreciated. Sometimes public service is tiring because residents have many different needs, but the Lurah reminds us that our work has direct value for the community."* Another informant noted, *"She often says that we should not only complete files, but also help people understand the process."* These statements suggest that the Lurah's communication encouraged employees to interpret public service not merely as administrative processing, but as citizen assistance.

In addition to internal leadership, the results show that the Lurah built direct communication with residents through community-based forums. One of the documented activities was the coffee morning program, which was held regularly in different RW areas and involved RT/RW administrators, LMK, FKDM, PKK cadres, Dasawisma members, Jumantik cadres, religious leaders, community figures, Babinsa, and Bhabinkamtibmas. This forum served as a space for dialogue, socialization, and the collection of community aspirations. A community representative explained, *"Through coffee morning, residents can speak more openly. Sometimes they feel more comfortable talking in the neighborhood than coming formally to the office."* Another resident stated, *"We can directly convey problems in the environment, and the kelurahan can immediately respond or explain what will be followed up."* These findings show that the coffee morning program functioned as an informal but structured channel for public communication.

The coffee morning activity was also used to socialize various government programs, including PBB-P2 payment, Bazis, waste sorting, neighborhood security, youth supervision, and drug prevention. Residents and community leaders stated that the forum helped strengthen the relationship between the urban-village administration and the community. One RW representative stated, *"The activity is useful because information from the government reaches residents more directly. We also know what programs need support from the community."* Another

informant explained, "When the Lurah comes directly to the RW, residents feel that the kelurahan is closer to them." These statements indicate that community engagement was not only used to disseminate information, but also to create a sense of proximity between the local government and citizens.

The findings also show that the Lurah encouraged employees to think creatively in responding to service problems. Interviews with staff revealed that employees were given opportunities to propose practical solutions when service procedures encountered obstacles. One administrative officer stated, *"If there is a problem in service, we are encouraged not only to wait for instructions. We can suggest what can be done, as long as it follows the rules and helps residents."* Another employee explained, *"For digital services, sometimes the situation in the field is different from the procedure. We need to adjust our explanation depending on the resident's ability."* These findings indicate that employees were encouraged to use situational judgment in service delivery while remaining within administrative procedures.

Training and technical guidance also emerged as important findings in relation to service improvement. Employees with stronger information technology skills were assigned to support digital population administration services, while employees with stronger communication skills were involved in outreach and direct assistance to residents. One staff member stated, *"Those who understand the application better usually help with technical matters. Those who are more used to communicating with residents are asked to assist in the field."* Another informant added, *"The division of tasks is adjusted to our abilities, so the work becomes easier to coordinate."* These findings show that role distribution was based not only on formal position, but also on employee capacity and suitability for specific service tasks.

Individualized attention was also found in the Lurah's approach to managing employees. Interviews indicated that staff members were given space to communicate work-related difficulties, personal constraints, and career aspirations. A staff member stated, *"The Lurah is willing to listen when we have difficulties, whether related to workload or service problems. We can explain what happens in the field."* Another employee noted, *"She does not treat all staff in the same way. If someone needs guidance, she provides direction, but if someone already understands the task, she gives trust."* These findings suggest that employees perceived the Lurah's leadership as attentive to individual capability and work conditions.

The study also identified several constraints in the implementation of public services. Technical problems included slow computer devices, unstable internet connection, application errors, and server disruptions. These constraints were especially visible in digital population administration services. One service officer stated, *"Sometimes the computer is slow or the network is unstable, so residents have to wait longer. When this happens, we explain the situation and try to continue the process when the system returns to normal."* Another employee explained, *"The difficulty is not only from the equipment, but also from residents who are not familiar with digital applications. We have to repeat the explanation several times."* These findings show that service delays were influenced by both technical infrastructure and citizen readiness.

Despite these constraints, coordination between the Lurah, employees, and community-level actors helped maintain service continuity. RT and RW administrators supported information dissemination, resident mobilization, and outreach activities. One RT representative stated, *"We help inform residents when there is a program from the kelurahan. If residents are confused, they usually ask us first, and then we coordinate with the kelurahan."* This finding indicates that community actors played an important role in bridging communication between the urban-village administration and residents.

Overall, the results show that the transformational leadership of the Lurah in Setu Urban Village was manifested through exemplary discipline, integrity, motivational communication, participatory coordination, encouragement of problem-solving, community engagement, and

individualized employee support. The interview findings indicate that employees perceived these leadership practices as influencing work discipline, motivation, service responsiveness, and willingness to solve service problems. Observation and documentation further confirmed that leadership practices were visible in internal bureaucratic routines, digital service implementation, community forums, and direct interaction with residents. The empirical findings therefore demonstrate that the leadership of the Lurah played a central role in shaping the everyday implementation of public services in Setu Urban Village.

DISCUSSION

The results reveal that transformational leadership in Setu Urban Village operates as a practical mechanism through which public service reform is translated into everyday bureaucratic behavior. The significance of the Lurah's leadership does not lie merely in formal authority, but in the capacity to shape how employees interpret discipline, service responsibility, citizen interaction, and problem-solving (Bahagia et al., 2024). From the perspective of transformational leadership theory, leadership becomes transformative when it moves followers beyond mechanical compliance and encourages them to internalize collective goals, moral responsibility, and higher service commitment (Pribadi et al., 2024). The empirical pattern in Setu reflects this logic, particularly because employee behavior appears to be influenced not only by rules and procedures, but also by the leader's visible example, communicative intensity, and direct engagement with service problems.

The Lurah's exemplary discipline illustrates the operation of idealized influence in a frontline bureaucratic setting. In Bass's transformational leadership framework, idealized influence refers to the ability of a leader to become a credible model whose behavior generates respect, trust, and identification among followers (Maulana et al., 2026). In Setu, punctuality and consistency function as more than personal virtues; they become organizational signals that define acceptable bureaucratic conduct. When employees perceive the leader's presence as a standard for readiness and responsibility, discipline is no longer enforced solely through formal supervision. It becomes a social norm reproduced through observation, imitation, and internalization (Octavianne et al., 2025). This explains why the leader's punctuality appears to influence employee readiness and service atmosphere: frontline workers interpret visible leadership behavior as a cue for institutional seriousness.

However, the same pattern also exposes a critical limitation. Discipline that depends heavily on the symbolic presence of a leader may remain fragile if not institutionalized into stable administrative systems. A leader's personal example can produce immediate behavioral alignment, but long-term reform requires mechanisms that outlive the leader, such as attendance monitoring, service performance indicators, internal accountability routines, and standardized service evaluation (Maulana et al., 2024). Without such institutional embedding, idealized influence risks becoming person-centered rather than system-centered. The implication is that transformational leadership should not be evaluated only by its ability to inspire compliance, but by its capacity to convert exemplary behavior into durable organizational routines. In practical terms, this means that the leadership model observed in Setu should be translated into a simple and replicable Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for frontline service reform. Such an SOP may include four minimum routines: first, a daily readiness routine requiring punctual attendance, service-counter preparation, and the assignment of officers before public service begins; second, a weekly leadership briefing in which the Lurah or unit head communicates service priorities, reviews recurring problems, and reinforces ethical standards; third, a service-response routine that defines how officers should assist citizens facing administrative or digital difficulties; and fourth, a monthly evaluation routine that records attendance, service delays, citizen complaints, follow-up actions, and staff learning needs. By transforming leadership behavior into these

recurring administrative routines, other urban-village or sub-district units can replicate the Setu model without depending solely on the personal charisma or informal initiative of a particular leader.

The motivational dimension of leadership also requires deeper interpretation. The weekly briefings and internal communication practices indicate that the Lurah provides meaning to routine administrative work. This aligns with inspirational motivation, where leaders articulate a shared purpose and connect individual tasks to broader collective goals (Syamsir et al., 2026). In public service organizations, such meaning-making is particularly important because bureaucratic work is often repetitive, procedurally constrained, and exposed to citizen dissatisfaction. By framing service work as a responsibility to help citizens, the Lurah appears to shift employees' perception of their role from document processing to public problem-solving. This shift is crucial because service quality at the frontline depends not only on technical competence, but also on how employees understand the moral and social value of their work (Fitriani et al., 2026).

At the same time, motivational communication has clear boundaries. Motivation can strengthen commitment, but it cannot fully compensate for structural weaknesses such as limited human resources, unstable digital systems, insufficient equipment, or high service demand (Nurullah et al., 2025). A critical interpretation of the results suggests that inspirational leadership functions as an enabling condition, not a complete solution. Employees may become more patient, empathetic, and responsive, yet their ability to deliver fast and reliable services remains constrained by infrastructure and administrative capacity. Therefore, leadership motivation must be supported by material and institutional conditions. Otherwise, the burden of reform may be shifted disproportionately onto frontline employees, who are expected to compensate for systemic deficiencies through personal dedication (Schott & Bouwman, 2024). For this reason, the institutionalization of motivational practices should not be limited to speeches or informal encouragement. Other sub-district units can adopt a brief "service-value communication protocol" in which weekly briefings are documented, key service problems are listed, responsible officers are assigned, and unresolved issues are carried forward to the next meeting. This would allow motivational leadership to become part of organizational memory and performance management rather than remaining an episodic act of personal persuasion.

The role of intellectual stimulation is especially important in explaining how employees respond to complex service challenges. Transformational leadership encourages staff to question routines, identify problems, and propose practical solutions. In Setu, this dimension becomes visible in the handling of digital population services, where employees are required to adapt procedures to citizens' varying levels of digital literacy (Komariyah, 2022). Theoretically, this reflects the logic of street-level bureaucracy developed by Lipsky, where frontline officials exercise discretion when formal procedures encounter real-life complexity. Digital service delivery may appear standardized at the policy level, but its implementation depends heavily on frontline interpretation, improvisation, and situational judgment. Employees must translate digital procedures into language and assistance that citizens can actually understand.

This point is particularly important because digitalization does not automatically create better public service. The results show that digital public service reform produces new forms of exclusion when citizens lack digital literacy, appropriate devices, stable internet access, or familiarity with application-based procedures. The Digital Population Identity program therefore creates a dual challenge (Vignieri & Santoni, 2025). On one hand, it promises efficiency, modernization, and administrative integration. On the other hand, it increases the need for human assistance, especially for elderly residents and digitally vulnerable citizens. The Lurah's leadership helps reduce this gap by encouraging patience, outreach, and direct assistance, but the deeper issue remains structural. Digital reform at the kelurahan level requires not only leadership

adaptability, but also inclusive service design, user education, technical reliability, and accessible assistance channels. A concrete SOP for this dimension should therefore require each urban-village office to maintain a digital assistance desk or designated digital support officer, prepare simple citizen-facing guidance materials, record frequent technical problems, and establish escalation channels when applications or servers fail. These procedures would convert intellectual stimulation into a practical problem-solving system that can be standardized across comparable administrative units.

The interaction between digital reform and leadership also reveals a paradox. Digitalization is often introduced to reduce bureaucratic workload and simplify procedures, yet in practice it may temporarily increase workload for frontline officers (Branderhorst & Ruijter, 2025). Employees must not only process services, but also teach citizens how to use applications, troubleshoot technical errors, respond to forgotten passwords, and explain system disruptions. This means that digital reform can intensify emotional labor and cognitive labor at the frontline (Maulana et al., 2024). Transformational leadership becomes relevant because it provides psychological encouragement and problem-solving orientation, but relying on leadership alone may obscure the additional labor produced by digital systems. A more critical reading suggests that digital transformation must be evaluated from the perspective of both citizens and frontline workers.

Community engagement through forums such as coffee morning reflects another important dimension of reform (Mulaphong, 2023). The findings indicate that public service responsiveness in Setu is not produced solely within the kelurahan office, but through relational networks involving RT/RW administrators, community leaders, and local stakeholders. This is consistent with the concept of co-production in public administration, where citizens and community actors contribute to the delivery, communication, and improvement of public services (Bonnesen, 2026). In Setu, community-level actors help disseminate information, identify local problems, mobilize residents, and bridge communication between citizens and the kelurahan. This relational infrastructure expands the reach of public service beyond the formal office counter.

Yet community engagement should not be treated uncritically as evidence of participatory governance (Mogues et al., 2023). Informal forums may improve proximity and trust, but they do not automatically produce accountable participation. The critical question is whether citizen input is systematically documented, prioritized, followed up, and integrated into service improvement. If community forums remain conversational and informal, they may generate symbolic responsiveness without producing measurable institutional change (Monroe et al., 2025). For community engagement to become a genuine mechanism of public service reform, it must be connected to feedback records, follow-up tracking, complaint resolution systems, and transparent reporting. Otherwise, participation risks functioning as a communication strategy rather than an accountability mechanism.

Individualized consideration also has a deeper organizational meaning. The Lurah's effort to match employees with tasks according to technical competence and communication ability reflects an informal form of competency-based management. Employees with stronger digital skills are positioned to support technical services, while those with stronger interpersonal skills are deployed for citizen-facing outreach. This practice improves role fit and allows service delivery to respond more flexibly to different citizen needs (Motsi et al., 2024). In transformational leadership theory, individualized consideration emphasizes attention to followers' needs, potential, and development. In a public service context, however, its significance extends beyond personal support (Mogues et al., 2023). It becomes a method for optimizing limited human resources under complex service demands.

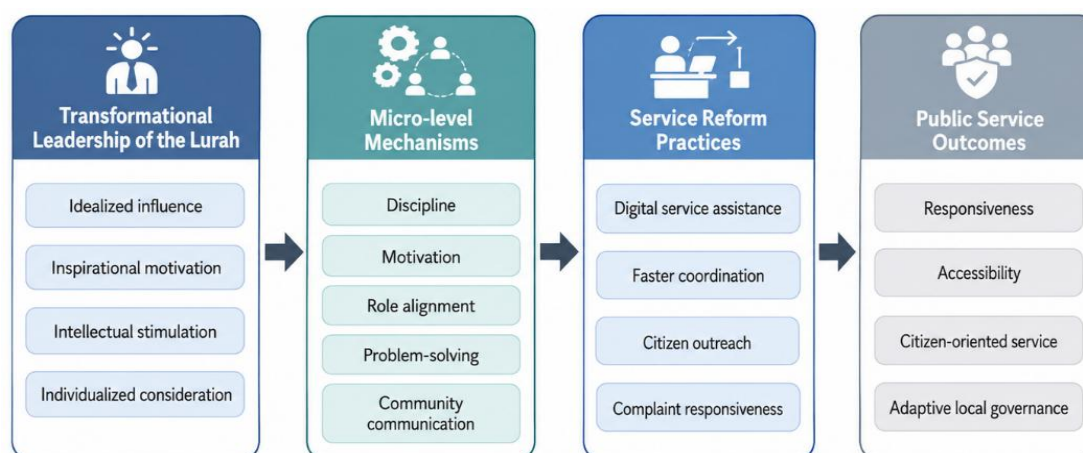
Nevertheless, individualized consideration also carries institutional risk when it remains informal. Role allocation based on personal knowledge of employee strengths can be effective in small organizations, but it may become inconsistent if not supported by formal competency mapping, training documentation, and succession planning. If service quality depends on a few capable individuals, the organization becomes vulnerable to staff rotation, workload imbalance, or leadership transition (Cazzuffi & Retamal, 2026). Therefore, the practical value of individualized consideration lies not only in the leader's ability to understand staff personally, but in the transformation of that understanding into systematic human resource development. Staff capability must be recorded, strengthened, and distributed across the organization rather than concentrated in selected individuals (Mansoor & Hussain, 2024).

The results also show that transformational leadership in Setu operates within a hybrid governance environment (Kiettikunwong, 2024). The Lurah must simultaneously perform as a bureaucratic manager, public communicator, community mobilizer, and digital service facilitator. This hybridity is characteristic of urban-village governance in metropolitan settings, where administrative demand is high, citizen expectations are immediate, and social problems are diverse. The kelurahan is not merely an administrative extension of municipal government; it is a frontline arena where citizens directly experience state presence. Leadership at this level therefore carries a strong relational dimension. The quality of governance is judged not only by whether services are formally available, but by whether officials are accessible, responsive, and capable of helping citizens navigate administrative complexity (Ahmad et al., 2025).

The empirical pattern can be interpreted through the micro-foundations perspective. Public service reform does not occur only through policy design or organizational restructuring. It emerges from repeated micro-actions: employees arriving prepared, leaders communicating expectations, staff assisting confused residents, officers adapting explanations, RT/RW actors spreading information, and community forums channeling local concerns. These small actions accumulate into service culture. The value of the micro-foundations perspective lies in showing that reform is not an abstract institutional outcome, but a behavioral and relational process (Tran & Hoang, 2024). The Setu experience demonstrates that leadership shapes reform by influencing the routines, interactions, and interpretations through which public service is enacted.

However, micro-level reform should not be romanticized. The results also expose the limits of leadership-based improvement. Technical infrastructure, application stability, digital literacy, service workload, and administrative resources remain decisive factors. Transformational leadership can mitigate the effects of these constraints, but it cannot eliminate them. A leader can motivate staff to be patient with residents, but cannot fully resolve unstable servers (Sudha et al., 2023). A leader can encourage innovation, but cannot ensure digital inclusion without adequate devices, connectivity, training, and system design (Lauritzen et al., 2022). A leader can build community trust, but cannot institutionalize accountability without formal feedback and monitoring mechanisms. This distinction is essential because overemphasizing leadership may lead to an overly individualized explanation of reform while neglecting structural reform requirements.

Figure 1. Micro-foundational mechanism of public service reform in Setu Urban Village



The broader implication for public administration is that transformational leadership at the urban-village level should be understood as a bridge between bureaucratic structure and citizen experience. Formal rules define what services must be delivered, but leadership influences how those services are interpreted, prioritized, and enacted by frontline employees (Moffett & Weare, 2022). In Setu, leadership appears to strengthen the behavioral side of reform: discipline, motivation, adaptability, empathy, and responsiveness. Yet sustainable reform requires these behavioral improvements to be connected with institutional systems. Public service quality becomes more durable when leadership-driven practices are converted into procedures, training systems, feedback mechanisms, digital support structures, and measurable accountability (Sigurjonsson et al., 2024).

Based on these findings, a minimal policy framework for institutionalizing leadership-driven public service reform can be proposed. First, municipal or sub-district authorities should issue a basic service-leadership guideline that defines the expected routines of frontline leadership, including daily readiness checks, weekly service briefings, digital assistance arrangements, community feedback documentation, and monthly performance review. Second, each urban-village unit should be required to prepare a simple service-improvement dashboard containing indicators such as attendance compliance, number of assisted digital-service users, unresolved complaints, average follow-up time, and completed community issues. Third, local government should integrate competency mapping and staff development into routine supervision so that service quality is not dependent on a few high-performing officers. Fourth, community forums should be formally linked to complaint-handling and follow-up systems, ensuring that citizen input is not only heard but also recorded, assigned, and resolved. Finally, periodic cross-unit learning sessions should be organized so that successful practices from one *kelurahan* can be adapted by other sub-district units according to their workload, staffing, and citizen profiles. This framework is intentionally minimal because it does not require major organizational restructuring; rather, it converts existing leadership practices into standardized, monitorable, and transferable administrative routines.

The results also suggest that public service reform in urban villages requires a balance between transformational and institutional leadership. Transformational leadership provides energy for change by inspiring employees, encouraging innovation, and building trust. Institutional leadership ensures that change is embedded into structures that can survive beyond individual leadership style (Fareed & Su, 2022). The strongest reform trajectory emerges when both dimensions reinforce each other (Choi & Cho, 2025). Without transformational leadership,

formal systems may remain rigid and mechanical. Without institutionalization, transformational practices may remain temporary, personal, and difficult to sustain (Kjeldsen et al., 2024).

Ultimately, the meaning behind the results is that leadership matters most when it shapes the everyday conditions under which citizens encounter the state. In Setu Urban Village, transformational leadership helps convert administrative routines into more responsive public service practices. Its greatest value lies not in charisma, but in the capacity to create disciplined routines, motivate service ethics, activate community networks, and support frontline adaptation. Its greatest limitation lies in the risk of overdependence on personal initiative in the absence of stronger institutional systems. Public service reform at the kelurahan level therefore requires not only leaders who inspire, but also organizations capable of preserving, measuring, and scaling the improvements that leadership makes possible.

CONCLUSION

Transformational leadership at the urban-village level constitutes an important micro-foundation of public service reform because it shapes how frontline bureaucrats interpret, perform, and improve daily administrative routines. In Setu Urban Village, the Lurah's leadership was manifested through exemplary discipline, integrity, motivational communication, participatory coordination, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support. These practices strengthened staff readiness, internal coordination, digital service assistance, and community-based communication, thereby contributing to a more responsive public service culture.

The main contribution of this study is to show that public service reform is not produced solely by formal regulations, institutional mandates, or digital systems, but also by everyday leadership practices that connect bureaucratic behavior with citizen needs. The findings demonstrate that transformational leadership improves service responsiveness when it is translated into concrete organizational routines, such as disciplined work practices, problem-solving communication, citizen assistance, and community feedback mechanisms. However, the sustainability of such reform depends on whether these leadership-driven practices are institutionalized into service standards, staff capacity systems, monitoring routines, and accountability mechanisms.

Therefore, this study contributes to public administration scholarship by linking transformational leadership theory with the micro-foundations of frontline service reform. Practically, it suggests that urban-village reform should not rely only on individual leadership capacity, but should convert effective leadership practices into replicable SOPs and minimal policy frameworks that can be adapted by other sub-district units. Public service reform at the kelurahan level is most likely to endure when inspirational leadership is supported by institutional systems capable of preserving, measuring, and scaling responsive service practices beyond a particular leader's tenure.

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