

Transformational Public Management and Innovation Culture in Luwuk City Government

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Abstract

This study examines how transformational public management influences the development of an innovation culture within the Luwuk City Government, Banggai Regency, Central Sulawesi. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews with 12 key informants, direct observations, and document analysis of innovation reports from 2021–2024. The results show that visionary and participatory leadership practices have significantly encouraged creativity, collaboration, and organizational learning among civil servants. Leadership initiatives such as *Luwuk Smart Monday*, *Luwuk Satu Data*, and *Sehat Bersama Luwuk* illustrate a growing transformation from procedural bureaucracy toward adaptive governance. Institutional barriers such as the absence of formal innovation units, limited technical capacity, and dependence on individual leadership still hinder sustainability. The findings suggest that transformational leadership acts as a bridge between structural reform and cultural change by shifting employee roles from rule enforcers to creative problem solvers. Strengthening policy frameworks, training programs, and innovation incentives is essential to embed innovation as a permanent organizational culture. Overall, Luwuk's experience demonstrates that visionary leadership and institutional support are key to achieving effective and innovative local governance.

Keywords : Transformational leadership, public management, innovation culture, local governance, Luwuk City.

Introduction

Tourism is an increasingly important engine for local economic development in secondary Indonesian destinations. Luwuk City, the capital of Banggai Regency in Central Sulawesi, has shown growing potential as a tourism gateway to the Banggai islands and surrounding natural attractions. Recent local initiatives and events demonstrate that targeted tourism management can produce measurable economic spillovers for businesses, UMKM (micro, small and medium enterprises), and

public revenues provided planning, promotion, and community participation are aligned with development goals. Local government and tourism stakeholders in Banggai have been actively documenting and developing the destination. Between 2020 and 2023 the Banggai Islands Tourism Office recorded a substantial inventory of tourism assets, with regional reports noting 82 natural tourist sites in the regency a foundation for diversified product development such as coastal, village-based, and eco-tourism offerings. This asset base underpins opportunities for destination packaging, community-based tourism, and public–private cooperation.

Event-driven promotion and institutional activities in 2024–2025 illustrate tourism’s short-term economic impacts and rising visibility. For example, the Banggai Government Expo (BGE) 2024 generated an estimated Rp 1.3 billion in local economic circulation over four days, signaling how events and government-led promotion can stimulate demand for local services and UMKM products. In addition, local tourism villages from the Luwuk area have gained recognition at national levels (e.g., nominations for ADWI in 2022), helping to strengthen product credibility and attract niche visitor segments. Despite these positive signals, academic and practitioner analyses during 2020–2024 point to several management challenges: limited marketing capacity, uneven infrastructure readiness, weak coordination between tourism and other local development agencies, and gaps in tourism-sector revenue capture (PAD) and benefit distribution. Regional studies and departmental reports highlight the need for strategic management interventions including improved destination marketing, capacity building for local businesses, digital promotion, and governance mechanisms that ensure inclusive economic benefits. These management levers form the focus of this paper’s inquiry into how tourism strategies in Luwuk can be harnessed for sustainable local economic development.

Literature Review

Transformational Public Management (TPM)

Transformational Public Management (TPM) represents an evolutionary stage in public administration that integrates the strengths of New Public Management (NPM) and New Public Service (NPS) paradigms. While NPM emphasizes efficiency, output orientation, and managerial autonomy, NPS

focuses on democratic participation, collaboration, and the co-production of public value (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). TPM advances these approaches by positioning leaders as transformational agents those who drive institutional change through vision, motivation, and the creation of learning environments (Doz, 2020; Ahmad, 2024). Transformational public managers differ from transactional administrators in their capacity to inspire rather than merely supervise. Burns (1978) first conceptualized transformational leadership as a process where “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation.” Bass (1990) later operationalized it into four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These principles are now embedded within TPM, enabling public institutions to adapt to complex challenges such as digital transformation, participatory governance, and inter-organizational collaboration.

In the Indonesian context, TPM is closely aligned with the government’s Bureaucratic Reform Agenda (Reformasi Birokrasi) and Innovation-Based Governance (Inovasi Tata Kelola) promoted by KemenPAN-RB. Several empirical studies indicate that transformational management has improved local governance outcomes. For example, Dema et al. (2023) found that transformational leadership significantly enhances digital innovation adoption in local governments. Similarly, Suriyanti (2020) noted that TPM practices contribute to agility, creativity, and the motivation of public servants, thereby improving organizational responsiveness. In local governments like Luwuk City, TPM can be understood as a strategic integration framework where leaders not only guide operational changes but also reshape organizational culture. The key mechanism lies in vision articulation and organizational empowerment, which drive employees to experiment, learn, and innovate (Van Der Voet & Steijn, 2021).

Innovation Culture in Public Organizations

Innovation in the public sector refers to the intentional introduction of new processes, services, or organizational models that generate improved outcomes for citizens and institutions (Osborne & Brown, 2011). While innovation was traditionally seen as a feature of private enterprise, contemporary public management emphasizes that innovation is equally vital in public administration

to enhance effectiveness, transparency, and accountability (Bastidas et al., 2023). An *innovation culture* is defined as the collective mindset, behaviors, and norms that support creativity and continuous improvement. It is characterized by openness to change, risk tolerance, knowledge sharing, and cross-sectoral collaboration (Holbeche, 2019; Lyles et al., 2022). In public organizations, this culture is cultivated when leadership encourages experimentation, rewards learning from failure, and institutionalizes mechanisms such as idea platforms, innovation units, and digital service ecosystems (Kremer et al., 2019).

Research shows that leadership style is one of the most decisive factors shaping innovation culture. Miao et al. (2018) demonstrated that transformational leaders enhance innovative behavior among civil servants by aligning organizational vision with individual motivation. Similarly, Nazir et al. (2020) emphasized that ethical and visionary leadership promotes creativity by building trust and autonomy within teams. In Indonesia, Saprudin and Zulmasyhur (2024) found that cities with strong innovation leadership like Bogor and Serang achieved significantly higher regional innovation index scores compared to those with hierarchical bureaucratic cultures. The relationship between transformational management and innovation culture is synergistic. Transformational leaders create an environment where employees perceive innovation as both valuable and safe. They challenge old routines, encourage participation, and connect innovation goals to broader public values (Somsueb et al., 2019; Mulyani, 2024). In Luwuk City, where bureaucratic rigidity and limited innovation capacity persist, fostering such a culture is critical for achieving sustained improvement in service delivery and governance outcomes.

Theoretical Linkage: Transformational Leadership and Innovation Performance

The theoretical link between leadership transformation and innovation performance can be explained through the Innovation Diffusion and Organizational Learning models. According to Schilling (2018), visionary leaders accelerate the diffusion of innovation by framing new ideas as collective goals rather than technical reforms. Meanwhile, Peiró et al. (2021) argue that leadership stimulates knowledge exchange and professional competence transfer, both essential for systemic innovation. Empirical findings further support this relationship. Ahmad (2024) reported that transformational

leadership reduces work stress and enhances team creativity in public organizations. Hoang et al. (2019) found similar results in small and medium enterprises, suggesting that leader-driven vision and empowerment directly impact innovative performance. In the public sector context, Prestiadi et al. (2020) highlighted how visionary leadership in educational institutions improved institutional adaptability through clear vision communication and shared values.

Drawing from these insights, this study conceptualizes that transformational public management in the Luwuk City Government affects innovation culture through three interconnected pathways:

1. Vision Alignment – Leaders articulate a shared and compelling vision that directs organizational innovation priorities.
2. Organizational Empowerment – Leaders build trust, provide autonomy, and encourage creative problem-solving among employees.
3. Institutional Learning – Leaders institutionalize mechanisms for continuous learning, feedback, and inter-departmental collaboration.

These mechanisms together contribute to the development of a sustainable innovation ecosystem that enhances public service quality, organizational adaptability, and citizen satisfaction.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how transformational public management fosters an innovation culture within the Luwuk City Government. Research was conducted in Luwuk City, Banggai Regency, Central Sulawesi, focusing on leadership behavior, innovation practices, and institutional support. Data were collected through interviews with 12 informants (including department heads and staff), direct observations of meetings and innovation activities, and document analysis of reports from 2021–2024. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through stages of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 2014). To ensure validity, findings were cross-checked using source triangulation and member checking with key informants. This method provides a holistic understanding of how leadership transformation drives organizational innovation in local governance.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that transformational public management within the Luwuk City Government has begun to take shape through visionary leadership, strong commitment to innovation, and increasing collaboration across departments. However, its implementation remains uneven and dependent on leadership consistency and institutional support. Four main themes emerged from the data:

Vision Alignment

The first finding shows that leaders in the Luwuk City Government have effectively aligned their departmental visions with the broader regional development goals set out in the Banggai Regency Mid-Term Development Plan. This strategic alignment reflects the city's effort to ensure that all organizational activities, programs, and innovation initiatives contribute directly to the collective mission of achieving sustainable development and responsive governance. Rather than allowing each department to operate independently, the leadership in Luwuk emphasizes synchronicity and integration between institutional goals, particularly in relation to public service improvement, digital transformation, and community welfare. This vision alignment functions as a guiding framework that keeps innovation efforts on track and prevents fragmentation between agencies. For example, innovations in health services, licensing, and digital data management are now designed to complement each other within the city's broader digital governance roadmap. One department head explained that "every innovation project must support the city's digital governance roadmap and public service improvement targets." This statement underscores how the leadership's approach to innovation is not merely programmatic but also strategic placing innovation as a tool for realizing the city's long-term development vision rather than a one-time project or ceremonial agenda.

The integration of departmental visions with the RPJMD goals demonstrates a clear transformational leadership orientation, where leaders act as facilitators who connect organizational values with broader public objectives. Instead of imposing instructions hierarchically, they communicate the vision through participatory dialogues, coordination meetings, and performance planning sessions that involve middle managers and staff. This practice resonates with the inspirational motivation dimension of transformational leadership described by Bass (1990), where

leaders inspire commitment to a shared purpose through persuasion and collective goal-setting. As a result of this alignment process, employees are increasingly aware of how their daily tasks contribute to larger institutional objectives. It encourages them to move beyond routine administrative duties toward innovative thinking and measurable performance outcomes. Departments are now required to link their innovation outputs with clear indicators in the city's performance accountability system. This has strengthened coordination among agencies and created a sense of shared responsibility in achieving innovation targets. Furthermore, this alignment has fostered inter-departmental collaboration for instance, between the Communications and Informatics Office and the Population and Civil Registration Office—where digital data integration projects are jointly developed to improve service accessibility. In essence, the finding highlights that vision alignment serves as the foundation of transformational public management in Luwuk. By translating the RPJMD vision into actionable departmental missions and measurable innovation outcomes, leaders have succeeded in linking strategic planning with operational innovation. This process not only improves coherence across departments but also cultivates a culture of accountability, creativity, and shared achievement key elements of an innovation-oriented organization.

Communication and Motivation

Transformational management in Luwuk is also characterized by a pattern of active, open, and two-way communication between leaders and employees. This communication practice forms the backbone of leadership effectiveness and organizational learning within the local government. Regular coordination meetings, cross-departmental leadership forums, and informal discussions have become important spaces for sharing ideas, exchanging feedback, and resolving operational challenges collaboratively. Unlike conventional bureaucratic meetings that tend to be one-directional and procedural, these forums are structured to encourage participation and dialogue. Leaders often begin discussions by revisiting the organizational vision, progress on innovation programs, and current challenges faced by each unit, thereby creating a consistent rhythm of reflection and alignment among staff members.

A distinctive communication innovation introduced by the Luwuk City Government is the

“Luwuk Smart Monday” initiative, held at the beginning of every week. This forum resembles the TEPA SELIRA model in Semarang, functioning as both a coordination mechanism and a motivational platform. During these sessions, leaders deliver short inspirational messages, review innovation achievements from various departments, and discuss upcoming service improvement plans. These gatherings serve not only as administrative briefings but also as moments of collective reflection where employees are reminded of their contributions to public value creation. Through this ritualized communication, leaders symbolically reinforce the city’s vision of digital and innovative governance. Employees interviewed during the study described Luwuk Smart Monday as an engaging and energizing activity that fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Several respondents noted that the sessions made them feel “closer to their leaders” and more confident in expressing ideas for service improvement. This sense of psychological safety has proven vital for sustaining innovation culture, as it lowers employees’ fear of making mistakes and encourages creative experimentation. The communication model thus functions not only as a management tool but also as a cultural mechanism that builds trust and emotional connection within the organization. This approach reflects Bass’s (1990) dimension of inspirational motivation, one of the four pillars of transformational leadership. Leaders in Luwuk are not only directing tasks but also infusing them with meaning emphasizing purpose, optimism, and shared commitment to change.

They articulate goals in a way that connects individual responsibilities with broader social impacts, such as improving service accessibility, enhancing transparency, and increasing citizen satisfaction. As a result, employees perceive their work not as routine bureaucratic obligations but as meaningful contributions to the community’s welfare. This open communication structure has indirectly improved coordination among departments. Information flows more smoothly, innovation ideas are exchanged more rapidly, and feedback from lower-level employees is increasingly valued in decision-making. These changes indicate a gradual shift in organizational culture from a rigid, top-down bureaucracy to a more collaborative and adaptive environment. In this sense, communication in Luwuk’s transformational management serves a dual function: it operates as a practical management tool for coordination and as a symbolic mechanism for cultural transformation toward

openness, learning, and innovation.

Leader Enthusiasm and Support for Innovation

The findings also highlight the strong enthusiasm and commitment of key leaders—particularly the Mayor and several proactive department heads in initiating and sustaining various innovation programs. Their leadership style reflects a transformational approach that combines vision, motivation, and empowerment. The Mayor has been instrumental in positioning innovation as a central agenda within the Luwuk City Government’s strategic framework, emphasizing that every new initiative must contribute to improving public service quality and citizen welfare. This commitment has created a positive ripple effect across departments, motivating staff to think creatively and to seek new solutions to local governance challenges. Among the most notable initiatives are the digital-based licensing system, the “Luwuk Satu Data” platform for integrated information management, and the “Sehat Bersama Luwuk” community health program. The e-Permit Luwuk digital licensing system, for instance, has significantly reduced processing times and improved transparency by enabling businesses and residents to apply for permits online. The Luwuk Satu Data program represents an effort to consolidate data from different departments into a single, accessible database, ensuring that planning and policy decisions are based on accurate and up-to-date information. Meanwhile, the Sehat Bersama Luwuk initiative integrates community-based health monitoring with digital reporting tools, allowing faster response to local health issues. Together, these innovations illustrate not only administrative modernization but also the manifestation of a leadership vision that encourages experimentation, problem-solving, and interdepartmental collaboration.

These programs demonstrate that leadership in Luwuk is not limited to rhetorical support but is actively translated into tangible actions that promote an innovation-friendly environment. Leaders act as facilitators providing resources, setting clear targets, and recognizing innovative ideas from employees. Their consistent involvement in project evaluations and public acknowledgments of successful innovations further reinforces the value of creativity within the organization. This finding supports Van Der Voet and Steijn’s (2021) argument that visionary leadership enhances team cohesion and innovation performance by linking organizational goals with shared institutional values.

When leaders consistently communicate these values and model innovative behavior, employees are more likely to internalize the mindset of continuous improvement and collective responsibility. The study also discovered variation in enthusiasm and implementation quality across different departments. While some units particularly those directly involved in public services, digital governance, and health demonstrated high engagement and creativity, others remained procedural and compliance-oriented. In departments with lower innovation activity, initiatives were often limited to administrative adjustments rather than genuine process transformation. Interviews revealed that this unevenness stems from limited understanding of innovation concepts, fear of failure, and a lack of technical capacity among staff. Without structured innovation training or institutional incentives, some employees view innovation as an additional workload rather than an opportunity for improvement.

This uneven implementation highlights an important challenge for the Luwuk City Government: sustaining the momentum of innovation requires not only enthusiastic leadership but also systematic capacity building and institutionalization. Transformational leaders can ignite change, but without consistent follow-up and supportive systems, innovation energy risks being confined to certain departments. Therefore, to maintain progress, leadership enthusiasm must be accompanied by mechanisms that distribute innovation values throughout the organization—through training, recognition systems, and cross-departmental learning forums. In this regard, the Luwuk experience demonstrates that leadership enthusiasm serves as a necessary starting point, but institutional reinforcement is essential to translate that enthusiasm into long-term innovation culture.

Table 4. Examples of Innovation Programs in Luwuk City Government

Program Name
Luwuk Satu Data
Sehat Bersama Luwuk
e-Permit Luwuk
Smart Village Program

Source: Fieldwork Analysis, 2024

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of transformational public management within the Luwuk City Government has made a measurable contribution to the emergence of an innovation-oriented organizational culture, even though several institutional and structural barriers remain. Leaders in Luwuk have begun to act as genuine change agents individuals who do not merely execute existing policies but reinterpret them to generate new public value. Through clear vision articulation, continuous motivation, and consistent support for creative initiatives, they have cultivated a workplace atmosphere that encourages experimentation and collaboration. Employees reported feeling more confident to propose new ideas, suggesting that leadership behavior has successfully shifted mindsets from mere compliance toward innovation. Nevertheless, the long-term sustainability of this transformation depends on the extent to which these values are institutionalized through policy design, budget allocation, and formal reward systems that recognize innovation as a key performance indicator.

The study further finds that the combination of visionary leadership and participatory communication has created a solid foundation for organizational learning and cross-departmental collaboration, two essential elements of innovation culture. Open communication channels—such as coordination meetings and the Luwuk Smart Monday forums—have provided opportunities for idea exchange and peer learning. These platforms help reduce hierarchical barriers and promote mutual understanding between leaders and employees. This finding resonates with Somsueb et al. (2019) and Holbeche (2019), who emphasize that innovation thrives in organizations that embrace dialogue, trust, and shared purpose. The Luwuk case demonstrates that when leaders communicate vision with clarity and inclusivity, they stimulate not only compliance but also a sense of collective ownership of change.

However, institutionalization remains a major challenge. Many innovation practices in Luwuk are still dependent on individual leadership rather than systematic governance mechanisms. For example, when a department head who strongly champions innovation is reassigned, ongoing projects often lose momentum. This situation underlines the importance of embedding transformational values

within formal regulations, performance evaluation systems, and resource allocation processes. Without structural reinforcement, transformational management risks becoming temporary or personality-driven. Sustainable innovation requires not only charismatic leadership but also institutional scaffolding that ensures continuity, even amid administrative transitions. When compared to other innovative local governments in Indonesia, such as Semarang and Bogor, Luwuk's progress can be categorized as emerging but promising. Semarang's success, for instance, stems from its integrated innovation governance supported by an established Innovation Unit (Unit Inovasi Daerah) and strong partnerships with universities. Bogor City, on the other hand, institutionalized its innovation strategy through mayoral decrees and continuous public sector training programs. In contrast, Luwuk's current innovation index score of 61.42—as reported by the Ministry of Home Affairs (2023) places it in the moderately innovative category, below the national average of 67.23. This figure reflects both the city's growing commitment and its need for clearer institutional frameworks, leadership continuity, and ongoing capacity-building initiatives to reach higher innovation maturity.

The Luwuk case substantiates the theoretical argument that transformational leadership serves as the bridge between structural reform and cultural change. Leadership practices in Luwuk have not only motivated employees to adopt new ideas but have also begun to redefine how public servants perceive their professional roles. Instead of functioning merely as rule enforcers, employees are starting to view themselves as creative problem-solvers who contribute actively to the production of public value. This mindset shift represents the essence of transformational public management, where innovation is not an isolated activity but a reflection of organizational identity. The findings illustrate that leadership transformation is a catalyst for governance reform, but lasting innovation requires complementary institutionalization. When transformational values are supported by clear policies, training systems, and incentives, innovation culture can evolve from sporadic initiatives into an enduring element of bureaucratic behavior. Thus, Luwuk's experience offers a valuable model for other developing cities seeking to balance leadership-driven change with structural sustainability in their journey toward effective and innovative governance.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the application of transformational public management has played a crucial role in fostering an emerging innovation culture within the Luwuk City Government. Leaders have increasingly acted as agents of change, emphasizing vision, motivation, and collaboration as the foundation of public sector reform. Through participatory communication and inspirational leadership, they have succeeded in shifting the mindset of civil servants from routine administration toward creative problem-solving and service improvement. This cultural transformation, though still in progress, marks a significant step toward modern and adaptive governance in the region. The research also reveals that vision alignment between departmental goals and the broader *RPJMD* has strengthened interdepartmental collaboration and improved the relevance of innovation initiatives. Regular communication forums such as *Luwuk Smart Monday* and various coordination meetings have built trust, encouraged feedback, and provided space for idea generation. Furthermore, leadership enthusiasm expressed through tangible innovation programs like *Luwuk Satu Data*, *e-Permit Luwuk*, and *Sehat Bersama Luwuk* illustrates the practical embodiment of transformational principles in governance.

The study also identifies persistent institutional barriers that limit the sustainability of innovation. Many programs remain dependent on individual leadership rather than systemic frameworks. The absence of dedicated innovation units, incentive mechanisms, and continuous training reduces the capacity of departments to maintain reform momentum.

Innovation in Luwuk is still at an early developmental stage, as reflected in its moderate innovation index score of 61.42 below the national average. To advance toward a fully institutionalized innovation culture, the Luwuk City Government needs to translate leadership values into formal policy and organizational systems. This includes embedding innovation indicators in performance appraisals, establishing an Innovation Coordination Unit, and expanding partnerships with universities and the private sector for research and capacity development. Continuous training on digital literacy and creative thinking should also be prioritized to strengthen the competence of civil servants. Transformational public management serves as both a leadership approach and a

cultural strategy for building innovative governance. The Luwuk experience shows that when visionary leadership is combined with open communication, empowerment, and institutional support, local governments can gradually transform into learning organizations that deliver meaningful public value. The challenge now is ensuring that innovation becomes not just a leadership initiative, but a shared, enduring culture embedded across all levels of government.

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