



Innovation Culture Development Strategy in Rembang Regency Local Government

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Abstract. Innovation in the context of regional governance is a determinant factor to increase the effectiveness and responsiveness of public services, especially in facing the challenges of the Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA) era. This study explores the strategy for developing a culture of innovation in Rembang Regency. Despite having a competitive innovation index, Rembang Regency still faces structural and cultural obstacles in its implementation. With a qualitative approach, this study examines the dynamics of innovation culture through in-depth interviews, observations, and analysis of policy documents. The findings show that the main obstacles in strengthening the culture of innovation include a bureaucracy that is still hierarchical and rigid, limited transformative leadership, minimal space for experimentation and collaboration, and incentives that are not fully innovation-based. To overcome these challenges, this study recommends several strategies, including strengthening innovation-oriented leadership, restructuring the organization to be more adaptive, developing the capacity of the apparatus based on innovative competencies, optimizing digital technology, and synergy between the public, private, and academic sectors in the regional innovation ecosystem. Through the implementation of a comprehensive strategy, it is hoped that a more dynamic, participatory, and solution-based public administration paradigm will be realized in supporting the transformation of regional governance.

Keywords: Innovation Culture, Governance, Public Administration, Transformational Leadership, Innovation Strategy

1 Introduction

In an era marked by uncertainty, complexity and rapid change, local governments are required to be more innovative in carrying out governance [Kok, 2019; Ismawaty, 2022; Afkarina, 2023]. The concept of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA) emphasizes the need for adaptive strategies in improving the effectiveness of public services. The government is required to be reflective of past experiences, responsive to current experiences, and predictive of future challenges in order to create good governance [Addink, 2019; Miller & Kirkpatrick, 2021]. In addition, the government needs policies that are able to provide appropriate, fast, and data-based solutions [Parkhurst, 2017]. This policy strategy can create various solutions that are able to handle problems according to the situation and conditions in the field,

for example using technology [Fagerberg, 2018]. Both of these things should be able to drive public policy innovation. However, their implementation has not been running optimally.

Global Innovation Index data released by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) shows that Indonesia's innovation ranking is at 87. This figure places Indonesia below Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Several problems have emerged, ranging from poor server optimization, limited human resources, to a culture of fostering innovation in the public sector [Manar & Alfirdaus, 2023]. Departing from this, there is a perspective that says that a policy must be innovative [Yi & Chen, 2019].

Basically, innovation is a new endeavor that is carried out by implementing the results of thinking in the form of creative ideas based on research that has been carried out [Sururi, 2016]. Another explanation states that innovation is related to a management process [Mirnasari, 2013]. The history of the implementation of innovation in Indonesia cannot be separated from the implementation of the concept of regional autonomy in the reform era [Mariana, 2010; Badrudin & Siregar, 2015]. At that time, Indonesia was in the process of transition from an authoritarian or centralized government to a decentralized one using the concept of regional autonomy [Jadidah, 2020; Muhajir & Wulandari, 2023]. This transition process contributes positively to realizing good governance while simultaneously building optimization of public services to the community [Zubaedah & Hafizi, 2022].

In order to create maximum innovation, a process is needed to create innovation. This process is a stage to provide innovation results that are in accordance with the goals that have been set. There are four processes that must be passed, namely creating innovation based on ideas, developing the design of ideas that have been set, implementation, and sustainability [Cinar, Trott, & Simms, 2019; Osborne & Brown, 2013]. Legally and formally, Indonesia has included innovation as part of regional government. This is stated in Undang-undang No. 23 Tahun 2014, especially Bab XXI on Regional Innovation. In formulating innovation policies, regional governments refer to the principles of effectiveness, efficiency, improving service quality, no conflict of interest, oriented towards the public interest, transparency, accountability, and can be accounted for.

However, in the implementation of innovation in regional government, there are several problems that cause the implementation of innovation-based regional government to not be able to run optimally [Andhika, 2018]. Some of these problems include the lack of commitment from regional heads [Sofianto, 2019], lack of employee understanding [Saharuddin & Suryani, 2020], the budget is not optimal [Amri, Adianto, & As'ari, 2022], and the weakness of innovation culture [Lamsihar & Huseini, 2019; Villaluz & Hechanova, 2019; Nurmawan, 2021]. All of these problems ultimately place the culture of innovation as an important part. Because, the greatest power in an organization is culture. Creating an innovative culture is a very complex process that needs to be implemented from the top to the bottom of the organization.

Rembang Regency is a region in Central Java Province that has a relatively high innovation index. Based on the Decree of the Minister of Home Affairs Number

400.10.11 - 6301.A of 2022 concerning the Regional Innovation Index of Provinces, Regencies, and Cities in 2022, it is stated that Rembang Regency is in 25th position in the category of innovative regencies with an index of 59.60. Rembang Regency has a score of 1430 and is a regency with a very innovative indicator. However, Rembang Regency experiences a paradox in developing regional innovation. Quoting statements from the Regent and Deputy Regent of Rembang, the most dominant problem is related to building a culture of innovation. This means that the ranking index does not necessarily run linearly with the overall facts in the complex field.

This study aims to analyze the condition of innovation culture in Rembang Regency, identify inhibiting factors, and formulate development strategies. By understanding the factors that influence innovation culture, it is expected to produce applicable recommendations for local governments in improving public service innovation. The governance paradigm is used as an analytical tool in the framework of the government bureaucratic reform concept. The typology of innovation refers to the Public Sector Innovation Theory which divides the types of innovation into 6, namely the creation of new services, process innovation, administrative innovation, system innovation, conceptual innovation, and radical change [Halvorsen, 2005]. The operationalization of the concept used in the study to analyze innovation culture is divided into 5, including: (1) innovative behavior; (2) leadership; (3) strategy; (4) communication; (5) structure; and (6) support.

2 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to understand the phenomenon of innovation culture in Rembang Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and analysis of official documents. The main informants consisted of local government officials, state civil servants (ASN), and other stakeholders who play a role in developing innovation.

The informant determination technique was carried out purposively by selecting informants who had knowledge and experience in implementing innovation in Rembang Regency. The snowball technique was also used to complete data and information. The interview process was carried out with a structured and semi-structured approach to allow for in-depth exploration of the informant's experiences and perspectives. In addition, observations were conducted in various local government work units to understand how the culture of innovation develops in the bureaucratic environment.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, where key patterns and themes related to innovation culture were identified and categorized. Data verification was conducted through source triangulation to ensure the validity of the research results.

3 Results and Discussion

The implementation of the authority to develop regional innovation (both in the form of public service innovation and non-public service innovation) in the Rembang Regency Government has so far been carried out by several regional apparatuses in an

integrated manner. Several regional apparatuses include the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda) of Rembang Regency, the Organizational Section of the Rembang Regency Regional Secretariat, and the Human Resources Development and Personnel Agency (BKPSDM) of Rembang Regency. In regional development and construction, innovation has become one of the important priorities in the Rembang Regency Regional Government.

In implementing innovation, the Rembang Regency Government (Pemkab) is guided by Pasal 388 Undang-undang No. 23 Tahun 2014. This means that normatively innovation initiatives can be proposed by the Regional Head, Members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), Regional Government Organizations (OPD), and Citizens. In practice, innovation initiatives from DPRD Members and Regional Apparatus Organizations must be submitted to the Regional Head. In addition, residents can submit innovation proposals to the DPRD and the regional government. Then, the Regional Head as the executive has an important role in determining regional head regulations (Perda) to formalize innovation initiatives as regional innovations.

Field findings noted that there were at least three Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD) in Rembang Regency that were classified as innovative. The OPDs in question were the Rembang Regency General Hospital (RSUD), the Social Service (Dinsos), and the Population and Civil Registration Service (Disdukcatpil). One of the informants in the study said that the emergence of innovation at the Rembang Hospital was motivated by the needs of the community from year to year. The forms of innovation that emerged included OS-Jek in the form of a free patient return home service and 24-hour health services via telemedicine. On the other hand, the emergence of innovation in the Dinsos environment was largely driven by problems in the field. For example, the Independent and Responsive Home Industry (ISTRI MANTAP) program innovation was present to address problems related to poverty. The program was targeted to increase family income through training and mentoring for women or single mothers who act as heads of households. A similar background also applies to Disdukcatpil. Innovation emerged because of the drive to facilitate services to the community, reflecting on several existing problems. Rembang Regency has implemented an E-KTP printing service that can be done at the sub-district office. The informant also said that starting February 2025, the creation of population documents such as birth certificates, family cards, and death certificates can be done at each village office to facilitate access for all people.

At a glance, it can be seen that OPD in Rembang Regency has implemented various innovations in its field. However, there is an important note conveyed by the Regional Secretary (Sekda) of Rembang Regency. He said that President Joko Widodo had evaluated regional governments, including Rembang Regency, to implement innovation not only in terms of tools, but also the process of government management and improving the quality of human resources. This note is closely related to the culture of innovation. The Rembang Regional Secretary stated that the true essence of innovation lies in culture. He also added a note that innovation in the form of tools or the use of technology as is often glorified has other implications, one of which is consuming a large budget. Therefore, a culture of innovation is a very important element in realizing optimal and efficient public services.

3.1 Condition of Innovation Culture in Rembang Regency

This study uses indicators from Martins & Terblanche [2003] to analyze innovation culture. Martins & Terblanche [2003] found that in an effort to create a creative and innovative work culture, an approach is needed to describe organizational culture, namely the open systems approach. The pattern of interaction between human resources, rules or regulations, technology, and external climate is very complex. Creativity and innovation will only develop in the right situation in the organization. Values, norms, and motivations that play a role in the organization can support or inhibit creativity and innovation, depending on how they affect individual and group behavior. Then there are determinant factors that encourage creativity and innovation, namely behavior, leadership, strategy, communication, structure, and support. These six determinant factors are indicators for analyzing innovation culture.

Based on the research results, the condition of innovation culture in Rembang Regency is as follows:

a. Innovative Behavior

Field findings show that the emergence of ideas for innovation is largely driven by problems they find from outside, especially public complaints about the services provided by OPDs. In other words, innovation is born from the demands and needs to provide effective and efficient public services. They emphasize that their status as Civil Servants (PNS) requires them to work in accordance with regulations, so that all forms of out-of-the-box innovation must be in accordance with existing paths and regulations. However, this view also places public servants in a dilemma. On the one hand, regulations are a corridor to remain in accordance with their main tasks and functions. However, on the other hand, some argue that regulations are also a justification for being reluctant to innovate, because they feel that conventional tasks are sufficient.

b. Leadership

Bappedda Rembang Regency plays a role as a leader to encourage regional innovation. Findings in the field show that leaders often provide direction and are directly involved in overseeing the innovation process, including the initiation of digital applications that facilitate the performance of OPDs. In this case, agency leaders also have the awareness to reflect good examples by being role models. Some of the attitudes that are put forward are objective, appreciative, and daring to take risks. Some of these attitudes are closely related to the government organizational environment which should uphold the constitution for the welfare of the wider community. Leaders must build values and a work culture that can ignite the enthusiasm of their members to become the best public servants. In addition, risk management is an important aspect to be considered carefully amidst various potential obstacles in government organizations, given the complexity of the tasks and responsibilities they have.

c. Strategy

The Rembang Regency Government synchronizes innovation by including it as one of the elements of value that underlies the vision, mission, and regional programs. The preparation of the Long-Term Development Plan (RPJP) and the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) is also one of the bases for planning to foster a culture of innovation. The Rembang Regency Government strives for the growth of a culture of innovation in parallel which is not only carried out within the OPD, but also involves the wider community. Such as the Tourism and Cultural Village in Lasem, home industries in Tanjung, and efforts to reduce stunting rates in a participatory manner. The Rembang Regency Government accommodates innovation aspirations from the community through the Community Creativity and Innovation Award (KRENOVA).

d. Communication

The communication process within the Rembang Regency OPD is carried out directly and openly. Unit, division, and organizational leaders are included in the same forum as members, such as a WhatsApp group to facilitate coordination. This group is also used to discuss matters that must be resolved quickly. Leaders provide direction and discuss it with members. In addition, team communication is also built in each OPD unit or division related to specific tasks according to their job descriptions. More specifically, delegates who receive training or technical guidance related to certain matters are also required to carry out the process of disseminating information and knowledge or transferring knowledge to other members. This is done so that the provision of information, knowledge, and skills can be distributed widely.

e. Structure

The innovation structure in Rembang Regency is still under development. The discourse to integrate research and innovation functions into Bappeda to become Bapperida places coordination between BRIDA and other OPDs as important. One of the informants in the study argued that in reality the formation of new structures or organizations is not fundamental, as long as the research and innovation functions can be carried out optimally by existing institutions. However, the integration of structures and functions instructed top down requires regions to follow in stages. This is because it will have implications for ease of access to obtain assistance or budget. The suitability of nomenclature will have significant implications for procedural matters. Furthermore, there is hope to compile a "mega application" that synchronizes various application systems when the new structure has been implemented.

f. Support

The reward system is implemented to appreciate individuals and organizations that actively innovate in Rembang Regency. Such as in the KRENOVA and OPD Innovation events. However, findings in the field noted that there had not been any promotions due to innovation. This is due to the rigidity of bureaucratic regulations. Informants said that in order to foster a culture of innovation, other forms of appreciation can be given to employees in the form of recommendations to continue

their education or undertake training. The ease of these recommendations is provided so that employees can explore knowledge as widely as possible. In addition, forms of cooperation with third parties become other support systems in order to overcome various deficiencies or challenges that arise. Examples include cooperation with academics and universities in research and development projects and the existence of several funding assistance from institutions such as the National Zakat Agency (Baznas) which collaborates with Dinsos.

The results of the study indicate that the culture of innovation in Rembang Regency has not yet fully developed. Although there are various policies that encourage innovation, their implementation is often hampered by structural factors and organizational culture that tend to be conservative. Referring to the typology of innovation according to Halvorsen [2005], Rembang Regency has implemented four of the six types of innovation. The four innovations that have been carried out include administrative innovation, process innovation, system innovation, and the creation of new services in certain sectors. The types of conceptual innovation and radical change have not been implemented, because the status of the Rembang Regency OPD which is an inseparable part of the regional government requires them to obey the rules and bureaucratic structure.

From the perspective of public administration theory proposed by Denhardt & Denhardt [2000], the paradigm of public administration has shifted from Old Public Administration (OPA) to New Public Service (NPS). However, this study found that the implementation of innovation culture in Rembang Regency is still trapped in the characteristics of bureaucratic and rigid OPA. Public interest is still defined in the political realm and refers to the rules. The government still plays a very dominant role as the main organization that organizes public services, so that accountability is based on the administrative hierarchy.

Some factors that hinder the culture of innovation in Rembang Regency include:

1. Dominance of Rigid Hierarchy and Bureaucracy. The hierarchical organizational structure of government hinders flexibility in implementing innovation. Employees tend to be reluctant to take the initiative because they are reluctant to step over the structure above them and are afraid of administrative consequences.
2. Lack of Transformative Leadership. Regional leaders have a central role in shaping a culture of innovation. However, this study found that some leaders in Rembang Regency have not fully adopted a leadership style that supports innovation. Transformative leaders not only direct, but also build a work culture that is oriented towards positive change, creativity, and performance improvement.
3. Lack of Experimental and Collaborative Space. A work culture that is still dominated by administrative routines makes space for experimentation and collaboration between work units limited. Most of the employees' time and energy has been absorbed in completing procedural bureaucratic tasks.
4. Lack of Motivation and Incentives for Employees. The absence of a clear reward system for innovators in government results in minimal employee motivation to create innovative solutions. Studies show that incentives and institutional support are critical in driving innovation in the public sector.

5. **Limited Access to Technology and Resources.** Inadequate technological infrastructure is an obstacle to the implementation of digital innovation in the public sector. This obstacle is also often related to limited budget for investment in cutting-edge technology, lack of human resources with expertise in information technology, and low digital literacy among government officials.

3.2 Innovation Culture Development Strategy

The strategy of developing a culture of innovation is one of the important steps in encouraging creativity, increasing competitiveness, accelerating sustainable regional development, and optimizing public services. Based on the results of the analysis, the strategy of developing a culture of innovation in Rembang Regency can be formulated as follows:

1. **Encouraging Innovative Leadership.** Local leaders need to adopt a transformative and entrepreneurial leadership style. This pattern allows a leader to inspire, motivate, and encourage his subordinates to create significant change, while entrepreneurial leadership focuses on taking calculated risks, exploring new opportunities, and developing creative solutions to public problems. In the context of local government, innovative leaders must be able to identify challenges faced by the community, set a clear vision for improving services, and instill a work culture that encourages experimentation and the development of new ideas. In addition, local leaders need to open up space for constructive discussions, accommodate various perspectives, and be flexible in adjusting policy strategies to remain relevant to current developments.
2. **Changing the Organizational Structure to be More Flexible.** Bureaucratic reform needs to be directed at creating a more adaptive system by encouraging decentralization of authority in decision-making. Organizational structures that are too hierarchical and rigid are often obstacles to encouraging innovation because they slow down the decision-making process and reduce space for individual initiative. Therefore, local governments need to design a leaner bureaucratic system, by providing greater flexibility for work units in designing and implementing innovative programs. A more flexible organizational structure model also allows for cross-sector collaboration, both within the government and with external parties such as the private sector and academics, to increase effectiveness in addressing various social and economic challenges in the region.
3. **Building Collaborative Spaces.** Local governments need to create regular discussion forums between work units to share innovative ideas and test new solutions before they are widely implemented. Structured discussion forums can be a place for government employees to share experiences and increase synergy between various sectors in government. These collaborative spaces can take the form of regular meetings, workshops, or digital platforms that support online communication and collaboration. In addition, local governments can also build innovation labs that function as places to test various new initiatives before they are implemented on a large scale. With the existence of active collaborative spaces, it is hoped that a more dynamic work culture will emerge, where every employee feels they have a role in creating change and improving the quality of public services.

4. Improving ASN Capacity. In facing the increasingly complex demands of the times, State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in regional governments need to be equipped with broader skills and insights in the field of innovation. Therefore, ASN training and capacity development programs must be expanded, not only covering technical skills but also aspects of leadership, problem solving, and creative thinking. Regional governments need to collaborate with educational institutions and training centers to provide learning programs that are oriented to real needs in the field. In addition, the use of technology in training, such as e-learning and interactive webinars, can also be a solution to reach more ASN with more effective and efficient methods. By increasing the capacity of ASN in identifying and implementing innovative solutions, it is hoped that there will be an increase in the quality of public services that are more responsive to the needs of the community.
5. Providing Incentives for Innovative Employees. One factor that can encourage ASN to be more active in innovation is the existence of a fair and performance-based incentive scheme. Local governments need to design a reward system that not only considers routine productivity aspects, but also employee contributions in creating innovative solutions that have a positive impact on public services. These incentives can be in the form of financial rewards, promotions, or public recognition through the publication of employee achievements in internal and external media. With clear and measurable incentives, employees will be more motivated to dare to try new things and actively contribute to efforts to reform bureaucracy that are more progressive and results-oriented.
6. Utilizing Digital Technology Optimally: The government needs to develop better technological infrastructure to support digital-based innovation in government administration. This step includes digitizing public services, using data-based management systems, and utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics to support more accurate decision-making. In addition, the implementation of e-government and mobile-based public service applications can increase accessibility and transparency in the implementation of regional government. With a comprehensive digitalization strategy, it is hoped that regional governments can provide services that are faster, cheaper, and more responsive to community needs.
7. Collaboration with the Private Sector and Academics. Strategic partnerships with universities and the private sector are one strategy that can accelerate the development of innovation in local government. The academic sector has a role in providing research, data analysis, and evidence-based policy recommendations that can help the government design more effective innovative programs. Meanwhile, the private sector can contribute in terms of technology, investment, and business solutions that can be adapted to improve the quality of public services. Therefore, local governments need to build mutually beneficial cooperation mechanisms, such as through innovation incubation programs, pilot projects, or joint funding schemes for initiatives that have a broad impact on society. With close collaboration between the government, academics, and the private sector, innovation in public services can develop more rapidly and sustainably.

4 Conclusion

This study emphasizes the urgency of strengthening the culture of innovation in local governance, especially in Rembang Regency, in order to answer the challenges of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA). Although normatively Rembang Regency has shown a competitive level of innovation on a national scale, concrete implementation in the field still faces structural obstacles and organizational culture that are bureaucratic and tend to be conservative.

The main findings of the study indicate that several Regional Government Organizations (OPD), such as RSUD, Social Services, and Disdukcapil, have initiated innovations in public services based on community needs. However, the culture of innovation has not been fully internalized in the government bureaucracy holistically. The main inhibiting factors include the rigidity of the bureaucratic hierarchy, weak transformative leadership, limited space for experimentation and collaboration, lack of an innovation-oriented incentive system, and still limited access to supporting technology and resources, including the budget.

In order to accelerate the transformation of innovation culture, a comprehensive strategy based on adaptive policies is needed. The strategy includes strengthening transformative leadership that is able to encourage innovation based on long-term vision, restructuring the bureaucracy to be more flexible and responsive, facilitating collaborative spaces to encourage synergy between work units, and increasing the capacity of state civil servants (ASN) through innovation-based competency development programs. In addition, providing incentives based on innovative achievements, optimizing digital technology in public services, and strategic partnerships with the private sector and academics are fundamental steps that need to be implemented.

Overall, this study emphasizes that building a culture of innovation in local government does not only depend on formal policies, but also requires a change in mindset and a more dynamic governance approach. With the implementation of an integrated and sustainability-oriented strategy, it is hoped that innovation in public services can develop significantly, support bureaucratic effectiveness, and provide a real positive impact on community welfare.

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