

THE CULTURE OF “EWUH PAKEWUH” AND THE PROFESSIONALISM OF CIVIL SERVANTS UNDER BUREAUCRATIC REFORM PROGRAM IN JOKO WIDODO’S ERA: A CASE STUDY OF THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION’S ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Daffarel Arkandra
Department of Political Governance, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,
Diponegoro University, Semarang – Indonesia
daffa.arkandra@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

During Joko Widodo's administration, bureaucratic reform was prioritized to improve public services and government efficiency. Among the changes implemented, the work culture of ewuh pakewuh—a Javanese concept reflecting respect and deference to superiors—has significantly impacted the professionalism of civil servants. This study analyzes the manifestations of the ewuh pakewuh culture within the Ministry of Transportation's bureaucracy, focusing on its practices, and effects on organizational performance and integrity. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research draws on insights from staff in the Ministry's Human Resources and Organization Bureau conducted by interviews.

Findings indicate that the practice of ewuh pakewuh is viewed positively by employees, who see it as a necessary cultural norm that maintains respectful relationships with superiors. However, this ingrained practice can lead to delays in decision-making processes. In the context of Joko Widodo's bureaucratic reform, which emphasizes professionalism and structured leadership, ewuh pakewuh presents a complex challenge. While it helps sustain harmonious working relationships and organizational commitment, it may also undermine efficiency by fostering hierarchical dependency and slowing down administrative processes

Keywords: Bureaucratic Reform, Ewuh Pakewuh, Professionalism

INTRODUCTION

During Joko Widodo's administration, bureaucratic reform emerged as a top priority to enhance the quality of public services and improve government efficiency (CSIS, 2019). President Jokowi observed that the Indonesian bureaucracy was still heavily influenced by a feudal legacy and entrenched comfort zones, which hindered productivity and stifled innovation. To address these issues, Jokowi initiated fundamental changes in the system and governance, emphasizing digitalization,

procedural simplification, and capacity building for civil servants through quality education and training. These reforms aimed to create a more modern, transparent, and accountable work environment, thereby ensuring that public servants could better meet the needs of society.

The reforms sought to leverage information technology to expedite licensing processes, increase transparency, and reduce corruption within the government. Jokowi stressed the importance of fostering civil servants who

are characterized by integrity, professionalism, and innovation, as these qualities are crucial for achieving tangible bureaucratic transformation. However, the existing work culture, deeply rooted in comfort zones and a legacy of feudal bureaucracy, posed a significant challenge. This cultural backdrop resulted in a lack of productivity and innovation, prompting Jokowi to emphasize the necessity of a total shift in work ethos and governance to overcome these longstanding obstacles.

The Ministry of Transportation, as a key player in national infrastructure and connectivity, plays a vital role in Indonesia's economic growth. As the regulator and implementer of transportation policies, the Ministry is responsible for managing air, sea, and land transportation sectors, which are crucial for the flow of goods and population mobility. In line with Jokowi's bureaucratic reform agenda, the Ministry has undertaken efforts to improve and perfect its programs. However, the Ministry faces unique challenges, such as public dissatisfaction with service quality, delays, and the condition of transportation facilities. Additionally, strong patron-client relationships within the Ministry can hinder open communication, with employees often feeling compelled to please their superiors, even if it means concealing problems. This dynamic fosters a culture of *ewuh pakewuh*, which can obstruct the effective implementation of bureaucratic reforms.

Bureaucratic reform within the Ministry of Transportation is crucial for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of human resource management in the transportation sector. By streamlining

processes and eliminating unnecessary red tape, the Ministry can better utilize its workforce and respond more swiftly to public and industry needs. Simplifying licensing and regulatory procedures also aids in reducing delays and speeding up decision-making, contributing to improved public services and more responsible management of natural resources. Despite these efforts, challenges persist, particularly related to the entrenched culture of *ewuh pakewuh*, which can impede decision-making and innovation. Addressing this cultural issue is essential for the successful implementation of bureaucratic reforms and for ensuring that the Ministry can effectively contribute to national development. The research presented in this study focuses on the impact of *ewuh pakewuh* on the professionalism of civil servants within the Ministry of Transportation during the era of Joko Widodo's bureaucratic reforms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Patron Client Theory

The patron-client relationship is an exchange relationship between two roles that can be seen as a specific case of a bond involving instrumental friendship, where an individual with higher socio-economic status (patron) uses influence and resources to provide protection and benefits to someone with a perceived lower status (client). In return, the client reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to their patron. As a dispersed exchange pattern, the services and goods exchanged between patron and client reflect emerging needs and resources possessed by each party (Scott, 1993). The patron-client

relationship is also a reciprocal relationship between two individuals bound by specific (personal) ties, based on mutual benefit and exchange (dyadic and reciprocal in nature). This bond serves as one of the livelihood strategies applied through the utilization of social capital to sustain or improve living standards. Within this reciprocal relationship, it's reflected in their working relationship and the social interactions conducted beyond their work-related ties.

Ewuh Pakewuh

Ewuh Pakewuh is one of the cultures deeply ingrained in Javanese society. According to Tobing, ewuh pakewuh or deference is a manifestation of the basic norms in Javanese society. It resembles a feeling of discomfort akin to shyness; individuals worry that their behavior or words might offend or upset someone. Soeharjono defines ewuh pakewuh as a sense of deference or shyness and high regard for superiors or seniors. It's not only limited to superiors or seniors; according to Tobing (2010), ewuh pakewuh can also arise because an individual has received kindness from others, making it difficult for them to refuse or disregard requests or opinions from those individuals. This feeling can also stem from age differences, often observed when younger individuals defer to older ones.

Tobing suggests that ewuh pakewuh, a cultural value in Javanese society, consists of principles closely related to aspects within it, namely the principles of harmony and respect. In bureaucratic culture, ewuh pakewuh manifests as a pattern of courteous behavior among employees or officials who, as subordinates, are hesitant or shy to

express conflicting opinions to avoid conflict and maintain good relationships with their superiors or seniors, who are perceived to hold higher social status.

The influence of this bureaucratic culture of ewuh pakewuh creates an ineffective work environment, although in certain situations, it may prompt cautious assertiveness from subordinates towards superiors (conditional and situational) (Soeharjono, 2011). From the perspectives of these experts, it can be inferred that ewuh pakewuh leads to a tendency for leaders to awkwardly receive assessments from their subordinates and vice versa (Bestari, 2010). The strong influence of culture and social relationships within the organization renders management control ineffective.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research to be conducted in this study is qualitative research. Qualitative research is a research process aimed at understanding human or social phenomena by creating a comprehensive and complex portrayal that can be presented in words, reporting detailed views obtained from informant sources, and conducted in natural settings.

In this research, Researcher utilized a descriptive qualitative approach to gather and analyze data, primarily through interviews and document analysis. The interviews allowed to obtain detailed and personal insights from informants. By using semi-structured interviews, Researcher could explore specific themes while allowing informants the freedom to express their thoughts openly. This method provided rich, nuanced data that was essential for understanding the

complexities of the subject matter. Additionally, document analysis was also conducted to supplement and corroborate the information gathered from interviews. This involved reviewing relevant documents, such as reports, official records, and other written materials, to identify recurring themes, patterns, and discrepancies. By comparing these documents with the interview data, researcher could cross-validate findings and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the context and dynamics involved. Together, these methods enabled researcher to construct a well-rounded and detailed analysis of the research topic. In this research, the data collection method involved conducting interviews via Zoom with five selected informants, which are the Human Resource Analysis of State Apparatus, Personnel Analysis, Personnel Manager, and Junior Expert Human Resource Analyst. Each interview was carefully planned and executed to gather in-depth information relevant to the study's objectives. The choice of using Zoom for the interviews was made to accommodate the informants' locations and ensure convenience, allowing them to participate without geographical constraints. All interviews were recorded with the informants' consent to ensure accuracy in capturing their responses. These recordings were later transcribed and analyzed to identify key themes and insights, providing a rich source of qualitative data for the research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Analysis of the Implementation of Bureaucratic Reform in the Human Resources and Organization Bureau

1. Program Implementation

Bureaucratic reform in Indonesia aims to address political, economic, social, and legal challenges by shifting from a paternal, autocratic system to a more open, democratic, and market-oriented approach. According to Tjokroamidjojo (2001), reform seeks to move away from centralized and regimental governance, characterized by corruption and nepotism, toward a system that promotes democracy and fairness. Interviews and research, such as Yusriadi's (2018) study, indicate that bureaucratic reform has led to the adoption of e-governance, improving service quality by making it more effective and efficient through digital platforms.

The reform effort focuses on making public administration more efficient, transparent, and accountable. Dwiyanto (2003) describes bureaucratic reform as a systematic effort to create a government system that is efficient, effective, clean, and responsible, involving changes in organizational structure, procedures, and work culture. Under President Joko Widodo's administration, the implementation of these reforms has led to significant changes, such as the adoption of digital tools like Simadu in the Human Resources and Organization Bureau, reflecting a shift towards more modern and streamlined service delivery.

2. Work Culture

Work culture in the Bureau of Personnel and Organization at the Ministry of Transportation is guided by key values and regulations that shape employee behavior and performance. The implementation of work culture is crucial in achieving the organization's vision, mission, and goals, as it influences attitudes

and behaviors, driving higher productivity and effectiveness. The Bureau's work culture emphasizes discipline, punctuality, and professionalism, ensuring employees adhere to strict working hours and maintain high standards in their duties. These values are integral to creating a productive and efficient work environment, where employees are encouraged to continuously improve their skills and deliver high-quality public services.

The Bureau's work culture is structured around Ministerial Regulation No. 17 of 2022, which outlines the organization and work procedures. The Bureau is divided into four sections, each responsible for specific areas like personnel planning, competency development, employee welfare, and organizational administration. The core value of "BerAKHLAK," an acronym for Service-Oriented, Accountable, Competent, Harmonious, Loyal, Adaptive, and Collaborative, serves as the foundation for this culture. These values are designed to foster a supportive and respectful work environment, where teamwork and a commitment to public service are prioritized. By internalizing these values, employees are better equipped to meet the demands of their roles while upholding integrity and professionalism.

Before the adoption of the "BerAKHLAK" core value, the Ministry of Transportation adhered to the "Five Images of Human Transportation," which emphasized piety, responsiveness, resilience, skill, and responsibility. Although the introduction of "BerAKHLAK" has unified the core values across all civil servants, the principles of

the "Five Images" still complement and enhance the new framework. The alignment of these values ensures that the Bureau maintains a high standard of service while adapting to changes and challenges in the workplace. This transition reflects a broader effort to standardize values across government ministries, fostering a cohesive and unified work culture dedicated to serving the nation effectively.

3. Practice of Ewuh Pakewuh

The "ewuh pakewuh" culture, deeply rooted in Javanese and other Eastern traditions, is still prevalent in the Human Resources Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation. This cultural norm reflects a sense of reluctance or unease in expressing opinions that might offend or create conflict, particularly with superiors or senior colleagues. In daily interactions, employees tend to prioritize maintaining harmony and respectful relationships, often being cautious in expressing criticisms or differing opinions. While this culture fosters a respectful and harmonious work environment, it is important to balance it with openness and transparency to ensure effective communication and decision-making.

The "ewuh pakewuh" culture is seen as a form of respect toward leaders, especially in hierarchical or age-differentiated relationships. While this attitude is common in personal interactions, it doesn't generally hinder formal work duties like reporting to superiors, which employees view as routine responsibilities. This cultural norm, influenced by the predominantly Javanese background of the staff, is consistent with research by Frinaldi (2019) and Soeharjono (2011), highlighting its role in promoting

politeness and respect toward authority. However, it can also pose challenges to honest communication, particularly when criticism or disagreement is necessary.

Professionalism of Civil Servants in Bureaucratic Reform Era

1. Organizational Performance

To achieve high performance and strong work ethics at the Ministry of Transportation, civil servants professionalism focuses on several key elements. Compliance with rules and regulations is paramount, requiring all civil servants to follow applicable laws and internal policies consistently. Competence and quality of work are also emphasized, with a continuous push for skill development to ensure responsive and effective public service. Ethics and integrity are crucial, with civil servants expected to avoid conflicts of interest, corruption, and adhere strictly to the professional code of ethics. Transparency and accountability are maintained by providing clear information to the public and taking responsibility for actions through timely reporting.

Discipline and teamwork are essential, with a strong focus on punctuality, meeting deadlines, and collaborating effectively to achieve collective goals. Public service is prioritized, requiring civil servants to place public interests first and maintain open communication to address public needs. Leadership professionalism is reinforced during weekly morning assemblies, where leaders set tasks and targets, emphasize respect and harmony, and encourage ethical behavior. These assemblies also stress the importance of discipline, adherence to regulations, and avoiding

misuse of authority, fostering a supportive and ethical work environment.

2. Individual Performance

Bureaucratic reform has gradually improved employee performance at the Bureau of Personnel and Organization, particularly through better performance assessments based on Employee Performance Targets (SKP). Civil servants now create work contracts with their leaders at the beginning of the year, which serve as the basis for periodic evaluations. These assessments ensure that employees meet organizational expectations, and those who perform well receive positive evaluations. This transparent and objective system reflects the positive impact of bureaucratic reform on civil servant performance.

Under Joko Widodo's bureaucratic reform, civil servant professionalism is measured by skills, knowledge, and adherence to the "BERAKHLAK" values: service-oriented, accountable, competent, harmonious, adaptive, and loyal. These values guide civil servants in providing high-quality public service while maintaining transparency and accountability. The evaluation of bureaucratic reform programs also directly impacts employee performance allowances, motivating civil servants to strive for excellence. This system fosters a culture of accountability and continuous improvement, enhancing public service quality.

3. Personnel Development

The professionalism of civil servants at the Ministry of Transportation is demonstrated through high work standards, discipline, and adherence to ethical codes. Employees consistently meet

leadership expectations by performing tasks punctually and responsibly, ensuring alignment with organizational goals. They focus on enhancing productivity and efficiency while maintaining integrity in public service delivery. This combination of discipline, responsibility, and ethical adherence ensures that the Ministry provides effective and reliable services to the public.

Research highlights the importance of meeting leadership expectations and adhering to codes of conduct, which are crucial for employee success at the Ministry. Performance evaluations and strict enforcement of rules, including sanctions for violations, contribute to a professional and orderly work environment. The Human Resources and Organization Bureau, in particular, has seen improvements in professionalism through increased use of online services and adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Leaders reinforce these values through regular guidance, emphasizing punctuality, integrity, and ethical behavior, which are essential for maintaining a professional and compliant work culture.

4. Ewuh Pakewuh on Professionalism Civil Servants

The "Ewuh Pakewuh" culture, rooted in deep respect and deference, shapes the professionalism of civil servants by emphasizing politeness and respect toward superiors. This cultural norm encourages employees to carefully consider their actions and words to maintain harmony and avoid causing offense. As a result, civil servants often prioritize respecting authority, which influences their interactions and decisions in the workplace.

This fosters a respectful and considerate work environment that aligns with organizational values.

A positive working relationship between superiors and subordinates is essential for creating a productive and supportive work environment. Such relationships enhance team performance, emotional well-being, and collaboration, enabling teams to address challenges and achieve goals effectively. Building trust through consistent communication, appreciation, and professional development is key to nurturing these relationships. By fostering mutual respect and open dialogue, organizations can create a thriving workplace where all individuals feel valued and motivated.

CLOSING

Conclusion

In conclusion, the "ewuh pakewuh" culture can be viewed as a positive cultural value that is evident in daily interactions within the workplace. Employees who embrace this culture tend to be more cautious when expressing opinions or criticism and prioritize maintaining harmonious relationships with their colleagues. This cultural norm encourages a respectful and considerate work environment, where the focus is on preserving mutual respect and avoiding conflicts. However, while this culture supports the creation of a peaceful and cooperative atmosphere, it is essential to balance it with openness and transparency to ensure that communication remains clear and decision-making processes are effective.

The "ewuh pakewuh" attitude is particularly noticeable among employees with Javanese cultural backgrounds, where

there is a strong sense of deference and respect towards superiors or senior colleagues. This deference often manifests in a reluctance to challenge authority or offer direct criticism, as employees may feel hesitant to disrupt the established hierarchy or cause discomfort. Despite this, the relationships between superiors and subordinates generally remain strong and supportive. Leaders often demonstrate their commitment to their teams by stepping in to assist with tasks when staff are absent or unavailable, such as preparing materials or printing documents themselves. This practice of mutual assistance and respect not only strengthens the bond between leaders and their teams but also contributes to a positive and productive work environment. By fostering an atmosphere where employees feel valued and supported, the "ewuh pakewuh" culture can coexist with a more open and progressive approach, ultimately leading to a more cohesive and effective working relationship within the organization.

On the other hand, the bureaucratic reforms implemented during Joko Widodo's administration have had a significant positive impact on the professionalism of civil servants (ASN). These reforms have led to the adoption of a more transparent and objective performance assessment system, which is based on work contracts or Employee Performance Targets (SKP). By tying performance evaluations and allowances to these assessments, civil servants are motivated to improve their skills, discipline, and adherence to high standards despite the persistence of ewuh pakewuh culture.

Recommendations

Based on the finding in this research it is revealed that *ewuh pakewuh* culture is not perceived as mainly negative, rather a number of positive features is acknowledged. The finding of this research is still limited due to a number of weaknesses described in the methodology. however, for the improvement of similar research in the future several recommendations can be suggested as follows:

1. In further research, it is recommended to conduct this research in other ministries / institutions since the case in Ministry of Transportation doesn't represent the same situation in other ministry or institutions
2. In further research, it is recommended to conduct the research over a longer period, ideally one year and involve a larger number of respondents to obtain more comprehensive and accurate data, and to analyze the cultural differences across bureaus and their impact.
3. In further research, it is suggested to implement face-to-face interviews as it is hoped to make informants more comfortable and open to the researcher.
4. In further research, it is suggested to conduct the research on other bureau to analyze the work culture on

other bureau in Ministry of
Transportation

Wakhid, A. A. (2011). EKSISTENSI
KONSEP BIROKRASI MAX
WEBEREKSISTENSI KONSEP
BIROKRASI MAX WEBER. TAPIS,
127-146.

Wibowo, D. E. (2020). ewuh pakewuh
Cultural Reconstruction to Equal
Consumer Protection. Jurnal Bestuur,
1-8.

Yusriadi. (2018). Indonesian
Bureaucratic Reform: Opportunities
and Obstacles. Public Administration
Journal, 178-185

REFERENCE

Bestari, P. 2010. The Employers
Performance Evaluation (A Case At
Secretariat West Java Local
Government). Bandung: Universitas
Padjadjaran Bandung.

Berenschot, W. (2021). The
informality trap: Democracy against
governance in Asia

CSIS. (2019, October 18). Jokowi 2.0:
Policy, Politics, and Prospects for
Reform. Retrieved from Center Of
Strategic & International Studies:
[https://www.csis.org/analysis/jokowi-
20-policy-politics-and-prospects-
reform](https://www.csis.org/analysis/jokowi-20-policy-politics-and-prospects-reform)

Rozai, M. A. (2019). PERSPEKTIF
INDEPENDENSI DAN BUDAYA
JAWA “EWUH. ASSETS, 98-111.

Soeharjono, H. I. 2011. Pengaruh
Budaya Birokrasi “ewuh-pakewuh”
Terhadap Efektivitas Sistem
Pengendalian Intern. Jurnal Ilmu
Administrasi Vol. VIII No. 3

Tobing, D. H. 2010. Asertivitas
Perokok Pasif Dalam Budaya Ewuh
Pakewuh. Thesis. Yogyakarta: Program
Magister Psikologi Fakultas Psikologi
Universitas Gadjah Mada

