



Agile Governance in Resource-Limited Settings: Challenges of Bureaucratic Simplification in South-Central Timor

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the failure of bureaucratic simplification policy in South-Central Timor Regency, Indonesia, particularly the mandated transition of echelon IV structural roles into functional positions under Permenpan RB No. 17 of 2021. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research collected data through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis involving affected civil servants, structural officials, and governance experts. Four interrelated barriers were identified: exclusion of civil servants from decision-making processes, demotivation due to unclear career paths and insufficient financial incentives, stagnant leadership at the echelon II level, and inadequate systemic support, including training and infrastructure. These challenges reflect the interplay of socio-political dynamics and regional resource constraints, which complicate the application of agile governance principles in peripheral regions. The study's novelty lies in its localized perspective, which reveals governance and administrative complexities often overlooked in mainstream reform narratives. It emphasizes the critical role of leadership behavior, employee involvement, and institutional readiness in sustaining reform, offering practical insights for policy improvement in resource-limited contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Agile governance, defined as the implementation of adaptive, flexible, and collaborative practices in public administration, has been recognized as a transformative framework to address the multifaceted challenges of modern governance. This concept, rooted in agile methodologies from software development, emphasizes iterative decision-making, responsiveness to societal and technological changes, and the creation of citizen-centric services (Mergel et al., 2021). By prioritizing agility, governments can better navigate volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, enhancing efficiency, public service quality, and overall governance outcomes (Greve et al., 2020).

Despite its theoretical promise, applying agile governance principles has proven challenging, particularly in developing countries. Research from developed nations, such as Estonia's e-government platform and Singapore's Smart Nation initiative, underscores the transformative potential of technology and policy innovation to facilitate agile governance (Kassen, 2019; Mergel et al., 2021). While these studies provide valuable insights into the role of technology and innovation, they primarily focus on high-capacity contexts with robust digital infrastructures and institutional resources. It leaves critical gaps in understanding how agile principles can be operationalized in resource-constrained, decentralized, and culturally diverse environments like Indonesia.

At the global level, previous studies have provided foundational insights into agile governance while revealing notable limitations. Greve et al. (2020) highlight how digital tools enhance decision-making and responsiveness in public

service delivery in high-income nations. However, their analysis overlooks the socio-political barriers and infrastructural deficits common in developing countries. Similarly, Mergel et al. (2021) explore the intersection of agile governance and organizational innovation, emphasizing collaborative frameworks and adaptive policymaking. However, their focus on Western contexts limits their applicability to governance systems in low- and middle-income countries. Höchtl et al. (2016) investigate regulatory innovation in European Union member states, demonstrating the capacity of agile governance to enhance efficiency. While insightful, their research fails to address the complexities associated with resource disparities and local political dynamics in developing regions, particularly Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia.

A bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer further from 60 studies regarding agile governance highlights the dominance of research on agile governance. Visualization of citation networks and thematic clusters reveals a concentration of studies on digital government, innovation, and public sector agility in Western and East Asian contexts. Conversely, regions like Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, are underrepresented. This geographic bias underscores the need for localized studies that address the socio-political and administrative challenges unique to resource-constrained and culturally diverse settings.

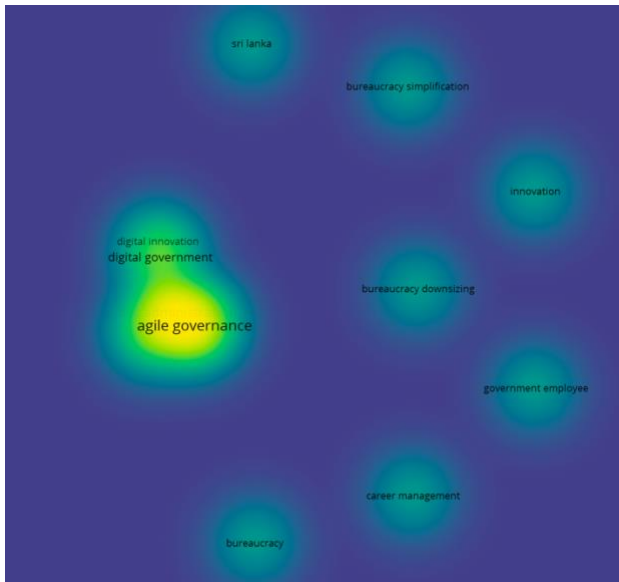


Figure 1. Mapping the Landscape of Agile Governance: A Bibliometric Analysis Using VOSviewer
Source: VOSviewer, 2024

Indonesia's decentralized governance system, one of the most extensive globally, presents a unique context for studying agile governance. Decentralization has granted local governments significant autonomy but has also led to uneven policy implementation and resource disparities across regions (Pradana, 2019; Pradana et al., 2022a). The bureaucratic simplification policy outlined in Permenpan RB No. 17 of 2021 seeks to address these inefficiencies by transitioning echelon IV positions into functional roles, thereby streamlining decision-making and aligning tasks with individual competencies (Pradana et al., 2024). However, implementing this reform has faced persistent challenges, particularly in regions with limited administrative capacities.

Existing studies on agile governance in Indonesia mainly focus on regions with higher governance capacities, such as Java and Sumatra, illustrating a geographic bias. Insani et al. (2021) analyzed the impact of bureaucratic simplification on policy analysts' functional positions, revealing challenges in human resource management, including unclear career trajectories and reduced remuneration. Murwati et al. (2024) applied transaction cost theory to bureaucratic reform, highlighting how regulatory adjustments inadvertently increase administrative costs. Khairi (2022) proposed a simplified bureaucratic structure emphasizing decentralization and functional restructuring to enhance efficiency. Despite position equalization, Gartika et al. (2024) found that bureaucratic simplification in West Java faces technical, economic, and political feasibility challenges. Rahmadany (2024) explored digital financial management's role in agile governance, noting disparities in adoption across regions.

While these studies provide valuable insights into bureaucratic reform dynamics, they primarily focus on well-developed regions. There remains a gap in understanding the challenges resource-constrained local governments face, particularly in eastern Indonesia. Future research should explore how bureaucratic simplification and digital governance strategies can be tailored to underrepresented regions' socio-political and administrative contexts.

To address these gaps, this study focuses on the South-Central Timor Regency in East Nusa Tenggara Province, a region characterized by distinct socio-political and administrative

challenges. First, this regency represents a microcosm of broader governance issues faced by underdeveloped regions in Indonesia. It is predominantly rural, with limited infrastructure, financial resources, and human capital. These constraints amplify the complexities of implementing agile governance principles and make the region an ideal testing ground for assessing their applicability in resource-constrained settings (Pradana, 2019; Riwukore et al., 2021).

Second, pre research highlights significant resistance to reform in South-Central Timor Regency. Approximately 87% of surveyed civil servants expressed uncertainty about their responsibilities due to unclear task allocation, while 63% identified insufficient training as a critical barrier. Resistance to change, driven by hierarchical bureaucratic cultures, has further exacerbated dissatisfaction, with 70% of echelon officials perceiving the transition as a demotion. These challenges mirror broader issues in Indonesia's decentralized governance system and underscore the need for localized policy interventions.

Finally, South-Central Timor is underrepresented in governance studies, which often focus on more developed regions like Java and Sumatra. This geographic bias highlights the importance of exploring governance dynamics in eastern Indonesia, where resource disparities and socio-political complexities are more pronounced. Thus, local government of South-Central Timor is considered a suitable site to fill the gaps.

This study believes that implementing agile governance principles in resource-constrained and culturally diverse settings like the South-Central Timor Regency hinges on four primary dimensions influencing reforms' acceptance. They are participation, motivation, leadership, and systemic support (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Bednall et al., 2018; Grindle, 2017; Ugyel & Daugbjerg, 2020).

First, participation is a foundational dimension in organizational change, fostering a sense of ownership and reducing stakeholder resistance (Tummers, 2012; van der Voet, 2016). Participatory theory emphasizes that involving employees in decision-making enhances their commitment to and acceptance of new policies (Appelbaum et al., 2012). In bureaucratic simplification, participation refers to the extent to which civil servants, mainly those directly affected by the policy, are included in discussions, consultations, and decision-making.

Second, motivation is another critical dimension that influences the success of policy implementation. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between hygiene factors, such as salary and working conditions, and motivators, such as recognition and career advancement, which drive job satisfaction and performance (Herzberg, 1966; Ugyel & Daugbjerg, 2020). In the context of bureaucratic simplification, unclear career paths and unfair allowances emerged as significant demotivating factors.

Third, leadership plays a pivotal role in managing organizational change and ensuring its success. Transformational leadership theory posits that leaders who inspire and motivate their teams can effectively drive change by fostering trust, articulating a clear vision, and empowering employees (Bednall et al., 2018). This study identified the lack of adaptation among echelon II leaders to the new functional structure as a significant barrier.

Fourth, systemic support is the final dimension identified as critical to the success of policy implementation. This dimension encompasses the availability of infrastructure, resources, and monitoring systems necessary to sustain organizational change

(Grindle, 2017). Systemic support requires a comprehensive approach integrating infrastructure, processes, and resource allocation to facilitate change (Mergel et al., 2021; Neumann et al., 2024). Addressing these challenges involves establishing robust support systems, including effective monitoring mechanisms, resource provision, and ongoing training programs to ensure the sustainability of policy changes.

This study contributes to the literature on bureaucratic reform by addressing critical gaps in agile governance research. First, it explores the socio-political and institutional factors that shape adopting and implementing agile governance principles in resource-constrained settings, particularly concerning task allocation clarity, leadership adaptability, capacity-building, and systemic support. Second, the study situates Indonesia's bureaucratic reform efforts within a broader global discourse by drawing comparative insights from similarly decentralized governance contexts, such as the Philippines and Brazil, thereby highlighting both convergences and divergences in reform trajectories. Third, it integrates a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer to map existing scholarship, identify dominant themes and underexplored areas, and illuminate the geographic and conceptual gaps in the current body of research, especially the lack of empirical work in Southeast Asian peripheries.

To guide this inquiry, the study addresses the following research questions: What factors have contributed to the failure of bureaucratic simplification reform in South-Central Timor Regency?

The structure of this article is as follows: literature review, method, results, discussion, and conclusions.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to deeply examine the challenges and failures in implementing the bureaucratic simplification policy mandated by Permenpan RB No. 17 of 2021 in the South-Central Timor Regency. The case study method was selected for its ability to explore context-bound phenomena and to provide rich, holistic insights into the policy process, particularly within decentralized, resource-limited, and culturally complex governance environments (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2011). This methodological choice enables an in-depth understanding of how formal policy design interacts with informal administrative and socio-political realities.

The selection of the South-Central Timor Regency was based on its geographic and empirical representativeness and its broader regional significance. Located in the eastern part of Indonesia, South-Central Timor is characterized by rural dominance, limited fiscal capacity, underdeveloped infrastructure, and persistent human resource constraints, conditions representative of many peripheral regencies in the country. These characteristics make it a particularly relevant setting for analyzing the implementation of national bureaucratic reforms in contexts of institutional fragility and asymmetric development.

Beyond its descriptive relevance, South-Central Timor holds **theoretical significance** as a critical case for testing the feasibility of agile governance frameworks in marginalized bureaucracies. It aligns with Grindle's (2017) assertion that the interaction between formal policy design and localized socio-political and administrative realities shapes implementation outcomes. By focusing on this regency, the study aims to contribute to a growing body of scholarship that critiques the one-size-fits-all approach to bureaucratic reform and

interrogates the contextual limits of agile governance models in resource-limited and culturally diverse environments.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that those interviewed possessed substantial knowledge or direct experience regarding implementing bureaucratic simplification. The study involved 15 participants: 10 civil servants affected by the transition from echelon IV to functional positions, three structural officials in implementation oversight, and two governance experts providing independent analysis and contextual interpretation (see Table 1).

Table 1. List of research informants

Number of Informant	Position	Regional Office/division	Reason for Selection
1	Former Civil Servants Echelon IV	Planning and Development	Policy-affected parties
2	Former Civil Servants Echelon IV	Planning and Development	Policy-affected parties
3	Former Civil Servants Echelon IV	Personnel, Education and Training	Policy-affected parties
4	Former Civil Servants Echelon IV	Population and Civil Registration	Policy-affected parties
5	Former Civil Servants Echelon IV	Research and Development	Policy-affected parties
6	Former Civil Servants Echelon IV	Research and Development	Policy-affected parties
7	Administrative Assistant	The regional Secretariat	Policy-affected parties
8	Social and Government Assistant	The regional Secretariat	Involved in policy implementation
9	Head of Public Government Division	The regional Secretariat	Involved in policy implementation
10	Head of Personnel, Education and Training	Personnel, Education and Training	Involved in policy implementation
11	Head of General Division	The regional Secretariat	Involved in policy implementation
12	Head of Organizational Division	The regional Secretariat	Involved in policy implementation

Source: primary data, 2024

This composition ensured that the study captured micro-level experiences (e.g., individual adaptation, morale, motivation) and macro-level institutional dynamics (e.g., leadership responses, policy execution gaps). Data were collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participatory observation. Interviews allowed respondents to narrate their perceptions, struggles, and reflections on the policy changes. Document analysis covered regulatory frameworks, implementation guidelines, internal government reports, and memos. Participatory observation was used to witness everyday bureaucratic activities, providing contextual depth beyond what could be obtained through interviews alone.

All research activities adhered to ethical standards for qualitative inquiry. Participants were fully informed about the objectives and scope of the study and provided written or verbal consent before being interviewed. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained using neutral identifiers such as 'Informant 1' or 'Informant 2.' Interview transcripts and field notes were securely stored and were used exclusively for academic purposes.

Thematic analysis was applied to the transcribed data using a multi-stage coding process. Initial open coding captured key phrases and meanings from the interviews and observations, which were then clustered into higher-order themes aligned with the theoretical dimensions of participation, motivation, leadership behavior, and systemic support. These themes helped illuminate the region's core barriers to agile governance implementation. To enhance the credibility of the findings, triangulation was conducted across data sources (interviews, documents, observations), and selected findings were subjected to member checking to ensure alignment with participants' experiences. The research process is presented in Figure 2.

This integrated methodological framework thoroughly explores the complex administrative and leadership challenges in implementing reform in low-resource governance settings. It also provides empirical grounding for assessing the feasibility and

limitations of agile governance in Indonesia's peripheral bureaucracies.

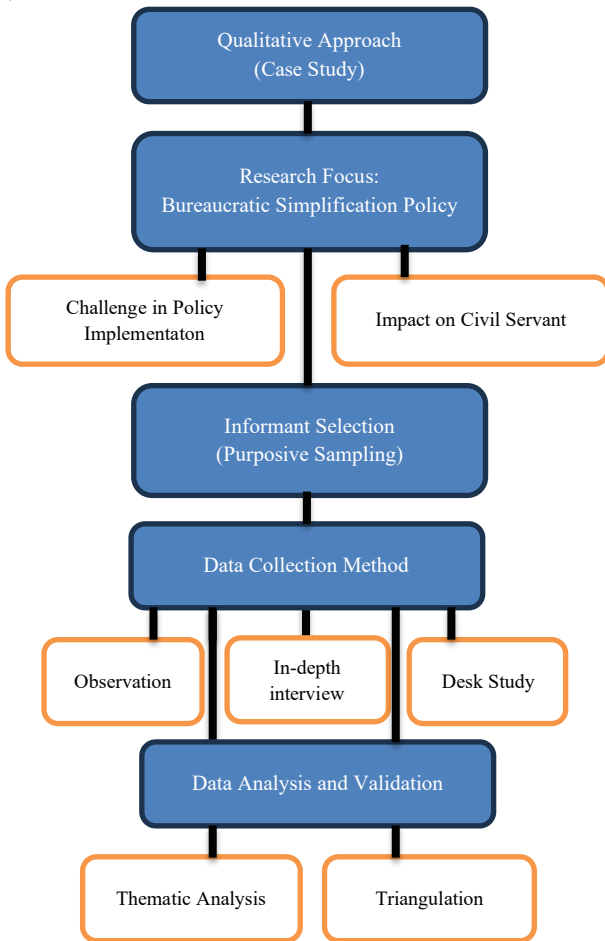


Figure 2. Research Methodology Visualization
Source: Author's construct, 2024

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the factors behind the failure of bureaucratic simplification policies in the South-Central Timor Regency, focusing on the transition of echelon IV structural positions to functional roles. Analysis reveals four key issues: (1) lack of target group involvement in the transfer process, (2) employee demotivation from unclear career paths and inadequate allowances, (3) stagnant leadership orientation at echelon II, and (4) insufficient structural and systemic support (see Figure 3).

Exclusion of Target Groups in Functional Position Transfers

A key finding of this study reveals that the exclusion of target groups, specifically civil servants affected by the bureaucratic simplification policy, from the decision-making process significantly contributed to dissatisfaction and resistance. The transition from echelon IV structural roles to functional positions was implemented without adequate consultation or involvement of these stakeholders. Informants felt excluded, undermining their trust in the process and creating resistance to the policy (see Table 2).

For instance, one informant shared, *"We were just informed that we were transferred to functional positions without any consultation or involvement in the process."* (Informant 1, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Planning and Development Department, July 8, 2024). Another added, *"This decision seems to have been made*

unilaterally without considering our opinions, who are directly affected." (Informant 2, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Planning and Development Department, July 8, 2024). These sentiments reflect a lack of participatory processes, which, according to participatory theory, are essential for fostering a sense of ownership and reducing resistance to change (Kotter, 2012).

Participatory theory emphasizes that involving employees in change processes can enhance their commitment and acceptance of new policies (Appelbaum et al., 2012). However, lacking prior dialogue or consultation left many civil servants feeling unvalued and resistant. *"There was no prior dialogue or discussion regarding this change, so many of us felt unappreciated,"* shared another informant (Informant 3, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Personnel Education and Training Department, July 8, 2024). This lack of involvement violates key principles of change management outlined by Kotter (2012), particularly the steps of empowering employees to act and building a strong coalition.

Effective communication is critical to successful policy implementation, especially in organizational change. Kotter's eight-step model highlights the importance of communicating a clear vision to ensure that all stakeholders understand the goals and benefits of the policy (Kotter, 2012). In South-Central Timor Regency, the absence of a well-communicated vision for the bureaucratic simplification policy exacerbated employee confusion and resistance. *"This process lacked transparency, making it difficult for us to support the policy,"* noted another informant (Informant 5, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Research and Development Department, July 8, 2024).

The lack of transparency and insufficient communication contributed to widespread uncertainty about the policy's objectives and expected outcomes. It aligns with findings by Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015), who argue that poorly communicated changes will likely fail due to a lack of employee understanding and buy-in. Moreover, ineffective communication prevented employees from identifying their roles in achieving the policy's goals, diminishing their motivation and engagement.

The exclusion of employees from the decision-making process also negatively impacted their motivation, a critical dimension influencing the success of policy implementation. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory highlights that motivators such as recognition and inclusion are essential for fostering job satisfaction and performance (Ganesh & Liu, 2022; Herzberg, 1966; Thant & Chang, 2021). However, the lack of involvement left employees feeling marginalized and demotivated. One informant shared, *"We felt forced to accept the change without an opportunity to provide input,"* reflecting a widespread perception of disempowerment (Informant 4, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Population and Civil Registration Department, July 8, 2024).

Employees are less likely to feel committed to organizational goals without inclusion and recognition. Scholars emphasize that unmet motivational needs can lead to dissatisfaction, reducing organizational performance (Alshmemri et al., 2017; Mardanov, 2020; Shih & Susanto, 2010). It highlights the significance of involving employees in decision-making to foster a sense of value and commitment to new initiatives.

The failure to involve target groups in the South-Central Timor Regency also reflects broader challenges in organizational change management. According to previous studies, successful organizational transformation requires building a coalition, empowering employees, and creating a sense of urgency (e.g., Chebbi et al., 2020; Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Santos et al., 2023). However, the government's approach overlooked these critical

steps, resulting in resistance and dissatisfaction. It is evident in statements such as, “*There was no attempt to discuss this policy with us, making it difficult for us to see its relevance or benefits.*” (Informant 6, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Public Works Department, July 8, 2024).

The literature suggests that organizational changes lacking stakeholder involvement are more likely to encounter barriers, including resistance and a lack of commitment (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Clausen et al., 2020; Pradana et al., 2022b). The South-Central Timor Regency Government must adopt a more inclusive approach by involving employees in discussions, consultations, and decision-making processes to address these issues. It aligns with prior research that empowering employees increases their commitment to organizational goals and improves change outcomes (e.g., Al Otaibi et al., 2023; Dust et al., 2014; M. Kim & Beehr, 2020).

Therefore, transferring functional positions without involving target groups significantly contributed to the failure of bureaucratic simplification policies in the South-Central Timor Regency. Exclusion from decision-making processes created dissatisfaction, resistance, and demotivation among civil servants, undermining the policy’s effectiveness. These findings align with participatory theory and Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, which underscore the importance of employee involvement and motivation in organizational change.

Table 2. Issues and Challenges in the Exclusion of Target Groups in Functional Position Transfers

Construct	Theme	Dimension
Decision-Making Exclusion	Lack of involvement fosters distrust and resistance	Employees were not consulted in policy changes
Lack of Consultation	Unilateral decisions lead to dissatisfaction	No participatory process in structural transition
Transparency Issues	Unclear policies create confusion and uncertainty	Lack of clarity on policy objectives and impact
Ineffective Communication	Poor dissemination weakens policy acceptance	No clear vision or structured information sharing
Reduced Motivation	Exclusion leads to disengagement and demotivation	Employees felt forced into functional roles
Increased Resistance	Lack of ownership results in opposition	Employees perceive changes as imposed and unfair

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Demotivation from Unclear Career Paths and Inadequate Allowances

This study identifies work demotivation as a significant factor undermining the implementation of bureaucratic simplification policies in the South-Central Timor Regency (see Table 3). Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory underscores that motivation and hygiene factors—recognition, career advancement opportunities, salary, and working conditions—are critical for job satisfaction and performance (Ganesh & Liu, 2022; Herzberg, 1966). However, findings reveal that the unclear career advancement process and inadequate allowances for civil servants transitioning to functional positions have severely impacted employee morale and commitment to the policy.

A significant obstacle is the absence of a credit score assessment team at the local government level, requiring

employees to submit their assessment processes to central government supervisory agencies. This process is costly and time-consuming, creating significant barriers for employees attempting to navigate their new functional roles. One informant noted, “*The credit score assessment process is very complicated and must be done centrally, which requires personal expenses; this is very ineffective*” (Informant 8, Social and Government Assistant, Regional Secretariat, South Central Timor, July 9, 2024).

The lack of local mechanisms for career assessment contributes to a sense of uncertainty among civil servants. Employees are left without clear guidance on advancing their roles, leading to frustration and demotivation. “*We feel left without clear direction about our future career paths,*” shared one civil servant (Informant 5, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Research and Development Department, July 8, 2024). This lack of planning reflects a broader failure to align policy implementation with employee needs, a critical factor for successful organizational change (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Schwarz et al., 2021; Susanto, 2017).

Another demotivating factor is the disparity in allowances. Civil servants reassigned to functional positions continue to receive their previous structural echelon IV allowances, often lower than appropriate for their new roles. “*Civil servants reassigned to functional positions still receive allowances according to their previous structural positions, and these allowances are lower than what they should receive as functional officers,*” stated an informant (Informant 12, Head of Organizational Division, Regional Secretariat, South Central Timor, July 10, 2024).

This inconsistency undermines employee morale and creates a perception of inequity and lack of recognition for the responsibilities associated with functional positions (Hales & Tyler, 2022; To et al., 2024). Herzberg (1966) emphasizes that hygiene factors such as fair compensation must be addressed to prevent dissatisfaction. Similarly, scholars argue that unmet financial incentives needs can lead to employee demotivation and disengagement, negatively affecting organizational performance (Baethge et al., 2023; Geldenhuys et al., 2014; Zhou et al., 2011).

The combination of unclear career paths and unfair allowances has exacerbated feelings of demotivation among employees. One informant expressed, “*High demotivation because there is no clarity on how we can advance in functional positions*” (Informant 4, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Population and Civil Registration Department, July 8, 2024). These challenges highlight a failure to create a supportive environment that fosters employee engagement and commitment to organizational goals.

Moreover, inadequate support for career development reflects a lack of recognition for employees’ efforts and contributions, further diminishing motivation (Clausen et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Pandie et al., 2024). By failing to address these motivational needs, the South-Central Timor Regency Government has created conditions that hinder the successful implementation of its bureaucratic simplification policy.

The findings align with existing literature on organizational change, emphasising the importance of addressing financial rewards and motivational factors to foster employee satisfaction and commitment (Dust et al., 2014; Pandie et al., 2024; Susanto, 2020). Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) highlight that poorly planned changes, particularly those that neglect employee needs, are more likely to encounter resistance and fail. The lack of a transparent assessment system and equitable allowances in South-Central Timor exemplifies this oversight, underscoring the

need for a more employee-centred approach to policy implementation.

The unclear career paths and unfair allowances identified in this study highlight significant gaps in implementing bureaucratic simplification policies in the South-Central Timor Regency. These challenges have led to widespread demotivation, reflecting a failure to address key hygiene and motivational factors outlined in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. This study highlights the significance of aligning policy implementation with employee needs, providing actionable insights for addressing work demotivation in the context of bureaucratic simplification.

Table 3. Issues and Challenges in Demotivation from Unclear Career Paths and Inadequate Allowances

Construct	Theme	Dimension
Unclear Career Advancement	Lack of career direction causes frustration and disengagement	No local mechanism for career assessment and promotion
Complicated Credit Score Assessment	Bureaucratic hurdles hinder career progression	Centralized assessment increases costs and delays
Inadequate Allowances	Disparity in pay creates perceptions of inequity	Functional officers receive lower compensation than expected
Lack of Recognition	Employees feel undervalued and demotivated	No adjustment in allowances despite increased responsibilities
Low Organizational Commitment	Unclear policies weaken employee morale	Lack of structured career development plan
Resistance to Functional Role Transition	Poor support leads to opposition and dissatisfaction	Employees struggle to adapt due to insufficient guidance

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Leadership Stagnation at Echelon II

A significant finding of this study is the absence of a shift in leadership orientation among echelon II officials despite the structural changes mandated by bureaucratic simplification policies. Leaders at this level have maintained mainly their previous approach to task distribution and oversight, treating civil servants reassigned to functional positions as though they remain part of the old hierarchical structure. This lack of adaptation has led to dissatisfaction and reduced employee support for the policy.

Echelon II officials have demonstrated a reluctance to transition to practices aligned with the new functional structure. An informant remarked, *"Echelon II officials still treat civil servants who have been reassigned to functional positions like structural staff, and there is no change in how they give orders."* (Informant 10, Head of Personnel Education and Training, South Central Timor Regency, July 10, 2024). This observation highlights a failure to adopt leadership strategies that support the distinct roles and responsibilities required under the functional model.

Similarly, another informant emphasized, *"No functional work groups have been formed, so civil servants reassigned to functional positions still seem like part of the old structure."* (Informant 12, Head of Organizational Division, Regional Secretariat, South Central Timor, July 10, 2024). It reflects a broader resistance to

establishing collaborative frameworks essential for empowering functional teams and aligning them with organizational goals.

Employees transitioning to functional roles have expressed feeling unsupported by echelon II officials, who continue to operate within a structural mindset. As one informant shared, *"Leadership at the top level has not adapted to the changes occurring, so we feel unsupported."* (Informant 2, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Planning and Development Department, July 8, 2024). Another echoed this sentiment: *"We are still treated like structural staff even though our tasks and responsibilities have changed."* (Informant 5, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Research and Development Department, July 8, 2024).

The perceived lack of leadership adaptation has undermined employee confidence and commitment to the policy. According to transformational leadership theory, leaders must inspire and motivate their teams to embrace change by fostering trust, articulating a clear vision, and providing support (Clausen et al., 2020; Faupel & Süß, 2019; Wright & Pandey, 2010). However, the findings suggest that echelon II officials in South-Central Timor Regency have not fulfilled these responsibilities, resulting in employee disengagement.

The resistance to change at the echelon II level reflects a broader issue of leadership inertia in the face of structural reform. Transformational leadership theory posits that leaders play a crucial role in managing change by inspiring their teams and aligning their efforts with organizational goals (Herold et al., 2008; S. Kim & Yoon, 2015; Siangchokyo et al., 2020). However, the continued reliance on outdated leadership practices indicates a reluctance to embrace the new functional model.

An informant highlighted this resistance, noting, *"The top-level officials seem more focused on maintaining the status quo than adapting to the new system."* (Informant 8, Social and Government Assistant, Regional Secretariat, South Central Timor, July 9, 2024). It aligns with findings by prior studies that leaders who fail to inspire and motivate subordinates to support change risk creating organizational stagnation and resistance (e.g., Nadia et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020; Struckell et al., 2022).

The findings underscore the need for echelon II officials to adopt transformational leadership behaviours to facilitate the successful implementation of bureaucratic simplification policies. Transformational leaders can inspire trust and commitment by fostering collaboration, providing clear guidance, and supporting employees through periods of uncertainty (Asbari et al., 2020; Yue et al., 2019). For example, one informant suggested, *"If leaders would create work groups or provide clearer direction, it would make the transition much easier for us."* (Informant 3, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Personnel Education and Training Department, July 8, 2024).

Herold et al. (2008) emphasize that transformational leadership is closely linked to employee commitment to change, particularly when the changes significantly impact their roles and responsibilities. By adopting such practices, echelon II officials could reduce resistance, increase employee engagement, and enhance organizational performance. Scholars also highlight that transformational leadership fosters positive perceptions of change consequences, further motivating employees to support new initiatives (Campbell, 2018; Faupel & Süß, 2019).

The lack of change in leadership orientation at echelon II has emerged as a significant barrier to implementing bureaucratic simplification policies in the South-Central Timor Regency. Echelon II officials have undermined employee confidence and engagement by maintaining outdated practices and failing to

adapt to the functional model. These findings highlight the critical role of transformational leadership in managing organizational change, as leaders must inspire, support, and align their teams to achieve policy objectives.

Table 4. Issues and Challenges in Leadership Stagnation at Echelon II

Construct	Theme	Dimension
Lack of Leadership Adaptation	Echelon II officials continue outdated practices	No shift in leadership approach to functional roles
Resistance to Change	Leaders maintain hierarchical structures	No formation of functional work groups
Failure to Provide Support	Employees feel unsupported in role transition	Leadership does not align with new structural model
Reduced Employee Confidence	Lack of leadership vision weakens morale	Employees perceive leaders as maintaining status quo
Absence of Transformational Leadership	Leaders fail to inspire and motivate subordinates	No clear vision or structured change management strategy
Organizational Stagnation	Failure to adopt new practices hinders policy success	Lack of collaboration and strategic guidance

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Insufficient Structural and Systemic Support

This study identified limited structural and systemic support as a critical factor contributing to the failure of bureaucratic simplification policy implementation in the South-Central Timor Regency (see Table 5). Insufficient infrastructure, inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems, and scarce resources have significantly hindered the transition to functional positions. These systemic shortcomings reflect a broader failure in strategic planning and resource allocation, which is vital for successful policy implementation (Pradana et al., 2022a, 2023).

One of the most pressing challenges informants highlighted was the lack of adequate infrastructure to facilitate the transition to functional positions. A civil servant remarked, *"There has been no directive from political officials supporting this change, making it difficult for us to adapt to our new roles."* (Informant 7, Administrative Assistant, Regional Secretariat, South Central Timor, July 9, 2024). This lack of directives and infrastructure has created uncertainty and disorganization, leaving employees without the necessary tools and guidance to effectively carry out their new responsibilities.

Scholars emphasize that systemic support, including infrastructure, enables employees to adapt to organizational changes (Blomkamp, 2022; Hanelt et al., 2021). The absence of these foundational elements undermines the implementation process and reduces employee confidence in the policy's objectives.

Another critical limitation was the inadequacy of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. An informant observed, *"The existing monitoring and evaluation system is not good enough to support the transition to functional positions."* (Informant 8, Head of Public Government Division, Regional Secretariat, South Central Timor, July 9, 2024). Without robust M&E systems, the government cannot assess the progress or identify areas requiring improvement, resulting in inefficient implementation (Mohamed & Kulmie, 2023; Sukristyanto et al., 2018).

Limited resources were another significant barrier identified by this study. Civil servants reported feeling unsupported due to a lack of funding and materials necessary for their new roles. *"We feel there is no adequate support from the local government in carrying out our new roles,"* noted one informant (Informant 3, Former Civil Servants Echelon IV, Personnel Education and Training Department, July 8, 2024). This lack of resources impacts the day-to-day operations of employees and signals a broader neglect of the systemic requirements needed to sustain the transition (Almeida et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2021; Dzulkifli et al., 2023).

Resource constraints also affect the availability of training and development programs, which are critical for preparing employees for functional roles. As Winarno (2012) highlights, the effectiveness of policy implementation relies heavily on sufficient resources and infrastructure to support change. Without these investments, employees cannot perform their tasks effectively, and the organization risks stagnation and inefficiency.

Informants also pointed to systemic limitations as a barrier to operationalizing functional roles. One individual stated, *"This systemic limitation significantly hinders us from operating effectively in functional positions."* (Informant 12, Head of Organizational Division, Regional Secretariat, South Central Timor, July 10, 2024). These systemic barriers reflect broader policy design issues, where insufficient attention is given to the interconnected elements required for successful implementation.

According to scholars, a structural, systemic approach is essential for identifying and addressing challenges in policy execution (Howlett, 2019; Hudson et al., 2019; Upadhye et al., 2011). It includes ensuring that all components, such as infrastructure, resources, and oversight mechanisms, are aligned and mutually reinforcing. Without this holistic approach, policies will likely falter, as evidenced by the challenges faced in South-Central Timor Regency.

Table 5. Issues and Challenges in Insufficient Structural and Systemic Support

Construct	Theme	Dimension
Lack of Infrastructure Support	Absence of directives and resources creates uncertainty	No guidance or tools for transitioning to functional roles
Weak Monitoring and Evaluation	Ineffective oversight hinders policy progress	Inability to track implementation and address gaps
Resource Constraints	Limited funding and materials impact role performance	Insufficient support for employees in functional roles
Training Deficiencies	Lack of development programs limits employee preparedness	No structured training for functional position adaptation
Systemic Barriers	Structural limitations obstruct operational efficiency	Weak integration of support mechanisms for transition
Policy Implementation Gaps	Insufficient strategic planning leads to disorganization	Lack of alignment between policy design and execution

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The limited structural and systemic support identified in this study underscores the importance of a well-planned and adequately resourced approach to policy implementation. The lack of infrastructure, inadequate M&E systems, and resource constraints have significantly hindered the South-Central Timor Regency's transition to functional positions. Addressing these gaps requires a comprehensive strategy integrating infrastructure development, robust evaluation mechanisms, and sufficient resource allocation.



Figure 3. Factors Behind the Failure of Implementing Bureaucratic Simplification Policies in Realizing Agile Government

Source: Author's construct, 2024

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the root causes behind the unsuccessful implementation of bureaucratic simplification reforms in the South-Central Timor Regency, focusing on the transition of echelon IV structural positions into functional roles. The analysis provides fresh perspectives on the complex relationship between decentralization, organizational culture, and reform execution in regions characterized by limited institutional capacity. Rather than attributing failure solely to technical deficiencies, the findings underscore deeper systemic issues that hinder agile governance practices in peripherally governed areas.

Four interlinked factors were found to obstruct the reform process. The absence of participatory mechanisms in decision-making bred distrust and reduced legitimacy, underscoring the value of inclusive governance. Employees' lack of motivation, from ambiguous career trajectories and insufficient financial incentives, highlighted the disconnection between reform objectives and individual well-being. Meanwhile, resistance among echelon II leaders to shift from hierarchical mindsets hampered institutional adaptation. Finally, weak systemic and infrastructural support, ranging from training deficits to the absence of performance monitoring, undermined the long-term viability of the transition.

This study's grounded, localized analysis of agile governance in a marginal and under-researched context sets it apart. While most reform discourse focuses on success stories from urban or high-capacity regions, this study illustrates rural bureaucracies' unique vulnerabilities and institutional frictions. By revealing how reform dynamics are mediated by context-specific challenges, such as weak leadership engagement, inadequate incentives, and exclusionary processes, this research contributes meaningfully to the literature on policy adaptation and decentralization in developing countries.

In terms of policy implications, the findings point to the need for a **context-sensitive reform framework** that integrates four core pillars: participatory decision-making structures, equitable incentive mechanisms for functional roles, leadership transformation through adaptive training, and a robust system of support, including performance-based assessments and local career advancement pathways. National reforms should not be imposed uniformly but adjusted to reflect the administrative realities of each region. For low-capacity areas like South-Central Timor, reform must be accompanied by technical assistance, decentralized resource control, and the cultivation of internal champions who can facilitate mindset shifts within the bureaucracy.

This study, however, acknowledges several limitations. The qualitative design, while suitable for in-depth contextual exploration, relied on a relatively **small sample size of 15 informants**, which may limit the representativeness of the findings. While purposive sampling and triangulation were employed to mitigate this, broader sampling across departments and levels of government may yield additional insights. Moreover, the study's cross-sectional timeframe provides only a snapshot of reform dynamics without capturing the temporal evolution of institutional change. The lack of quantitative data also restricts generalizability and statistical inference.

Future research should adopt a comparative case study design across regions with varying governance capacities to address these limitations and capture inter-regional variation. Large-scale surveys can help validate emerging patterns and provide broader evidence for policy formulation. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to assess the long-term effects of functional position reforms on motivation, performance, and career development. Additionally, future studies may explore how traditional governance structures, such as *adat* institutions, can be strategically incorporated into modern reform frameworks to ensure cultural legitimacy and community ownership.

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