

# Analysis of the Role of Ethical Culture in Increasing Public Transparency and Accountability in the City of Palopo

Riska Firdaus<sup>1</sup>, Andi Ni'mah Sulfiani<sup>1</sup>, Widyawati<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Public Administration, Universitas Hasanuddin, Indonesia

## Abstract

This research aims to understand how ethical practices influence governance dynamics and identify areas that need improvement in promoting integrity and ethical behavior. This research uses descriptive qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with public officials, community leaders, and the public to gain insight into the ethical practices, perceptions, and challenges that exist in Palopo's current public administration. Research shows that ethical culture has a significant influence on public transparency and accountability in Palopo. Participants emphasized that high ethical standards encourage honest reporting and a sense of moral responsibility among public officials to hold them accountable for their actions. However, there is a real gap between policy and practice, where inconsistent enforcement of ethical standards hinders the effectiveness of the policy. Community members suggested several improvements, including increasing community awareness and involvement, implementing more transparent processes, and establishing stronger penalties for unethical actions. These suggestions are in line with previous research highlighting the importance of public involvement and strong law enforcement mechanisms in promoting accountability and transparency in public administration.

**Keywords:** Ethical Culture, Transparency and Accountability

## 1. Introduction

Transparency and accountability are basic principles of public administration that underlie good governance and democratic integrity. Transparency refers to the accessibility of government information to the public, ensuring that government actions are carried out in an open manner that allows for monitoring and informed public involvement. This includes the obligation of public institutions to provide clear, accurate and timely information regarding their operations, decisions and performance. Meanwhile, accountability includes the responsibility of public officials to be accountable for their actions and decisions. This principle ensures that officials are held accountable through various mechanisms, such as audits, evaluations and public feedback, thereby strengthening the supremacy of law and ethical behaviour in public services (Ulum, 2018). Together, transparency and accountability help prevent corruption, increase efficiency, and increase people's trust and confidence in their government.

The importance of an ethical culture in government governance is very important because this

provides the basis for building transparency and accountability. Ethical culture in public administration prioritizes values such as integrity, honesty and justice, which are important for fostering responsible and trustworthy government (Pattipawae, 2011; Herawati, n.d). Ethical behavior in public service ensures that officials act in the public interest and not for personal gain, thereby supporting fair and just policies and practices (Sawir, 2020). In addition, an ethical culture encourages a positive work environment where civil servants are motivated to uphold high standards of behaviour (Gustapito et al., 2021; Rahmawati, 2023). This culture is critical in mitigating the risk of unethical behaviour, such as bribery and nepotism, which can undermine public trust and governance effectiveness. By embedding ethical principles into the structure of public administration, governments can create resilient systems where transparency and accountability can grow naturally.

Palopo City, a city in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, provides a relevant context for examining the role of ethical culture in increasing transparency and accountability in public administration. With a population of around 150,000 people, Palopo functions as the administrative and economic center of the region. The city has a unique socio-political landscape, shaped by history, cultural diversity and evolving government structures. In recent years, Palopo has faced challenges related to public administration, including issues of transparency and accountability which have an impact on public trust and the effectiveness of governance (Yulianto & Harsoyo, 2023). Understanding existing ethical practices in Palopo's public sector, and their impact on transparency and accountability, is critical to identifying areas for improvement and implementing strategies that can strengthen governance. Analysing the dynamics at play in Palopo can provide valuable insight into how ethical culture influences public administration, and provide lessons that can be applied in other areas that have similar challenges.

The integration of transparency and accountability in public administration is essential to good governance, and an ethical culture plays an important role in supporting these principles. The city of Palopo, with its distinct governance landscape, provides an interesting case study to explore the relationship between ethical culture and effective public administration. This research aims to investigate how ethical practices in the Palopo public sector can increase transparency and accountability, contribute to better governance and increase public trust.

## **2. Methods**

This research uses a qualitative research design to explore the role of ethical culture in increasing the transparency and accountability of Palopo City's public administration. A qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to provide deep insight into the complex dynamics of public administration and ethical culture. Semi-structured interviews are a primary data collection method involving public officials, community leaders and Palopo residents. This method allows flexible questioning to probe in depth on specific issues while maintaining a consistent comparative framework. Additionally, focus groups were conducted to gather collective perspectives and stimulate discussions regarding ethics, transparency, and accountability. The data analysis process involves several steps. Interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript was then reviewed thoroughly to familiarize the researcher with its content. Using thematic analysis, data was coded to identify recurring patterns and themes. These themes are categorized into broader areas and are relevant to the research objectives. The coding process was iterative, refining initial codes as more data were analyzed.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

This study explores the role of ethical culture in increasing the transparency and accountability of Palopo City's public administration through semi-structured interviews with public officials, community leaders and residents. Following are the results of the interview:

### **The Ethical Culture Has an Impact on Transparency and Public Accountability in Palopo**

*"When ethical standards are high, people are more likely to report accurate information and be transparent in their dealings"*

This statement shows that a strong ethical culture encourages honesty among public officials. When ethical standards are enforced, officials feel obliged to provide accurate and transparent information. This transparency is important to ensure that the public has access to correct and complete information regarding government activities, thereby helping to build trust between the government and the public.

*"Ethical behavior ensures that public officials are accountable for their actions because they feel a moral responsibility to the public"*

An ethical culture instills a sense of responsibility in public officials. Ethical behaviour creates an environment in which officials are motivated by a moral obligation to act in the public interest and are accountable for their actions. This sense of accountability is critical to maintaining public trust and ensuring that officials comply with laws and ethical standards.

### **Ethical Practices in Palopo Public Administration**

*"We hold regular ethics training and a code of conduct that everyone must adhere to"*

This shows that Palopo has established formal measures to encourage ethical behaviour among civil servants. Regular ethics training and codes of conduct are designed to educate and remind officers of the ethical standards they are expected to uphold. These steps are intended to create a consistent ethical framework within which public officials operate.

*"Although there are rules, not everyone follows them strictly, and sometimes violations get out of control."*

This statement shows the gap between the existence of ethical policies and their enforcement. Despite formal ethical practices, there is inconsistency in compliance with these rules. A lack of strict law enforcement allows unethical behavior to continue, thereby weakening the effectiveness of ethical standards and eroding public trust.

### **Efforts to Improve Ethical Standards in Public Services**

*"Increasing public awareness and involvement can help hold officials accountable. The public needs to know that they have the right to question and report unethical behavior."*

This emphasizes the importance of community involvement in promoting accountability. By increasing public awareness of their rights and mechanisms for reporting unethical behaviour, the public can play an important role in holding public officials accountable. This active community involvement can help ensure that unethical behaviour is identified and dealt with promptly.

*"We need more transparent processes and stronger penalties for unethical behavior to prevent violations."*

This statement suggests that clearer procedures and stricter consequences for unethical actions are needed to effectively prevent violations. Transparent processes ensure that actions and decisions are visible and understandable to the public, while tough penalties for violations reinforce the seriousness of compliance with ethical standards. These steps can help create a more accountable and transparent public administration.

The results of this research show the important role of ethical culture in encouraging transparency and accountability in Palopo public administration. Although ethical practices such as training and codes of conduct exist, their impact is limited due to inconsistent enforcement. To bridge this gap, increasing community awareness and engagement is critical, as this empowers communities to demand accountability and transparency from government. Additionally, implementing more transparent processes and stricter penalties for unethical behavior could further strengthen ethical standards.

A strong ethical culture not only improves the internal behaviour of public officials but also empowers the public to play an active role in government. By creating an environment where ethical behaviour is the norm, Palopo can increase the transparency and accountability of its public administration, ultimately leading to better governance and increased public trust.

### **The Ethical Culture Has an Impact on Transparency and Public Accountability in Palopo**

Ethical culture functions as a moral compass that guides the actions and decisions of individuals within an organization, including those in public administration. In Palopo, a strong ethical culture encourages public officials to prioritize honesty, integrity and accountability in their actions. When ethical standards are enforced, officials are more likely to provide accurate information to the public and adhere to ethical principles even when faced with challenging situations. This creates a culture of transparency where information is shared freely, and decision-making processes are carried out openly, thereby fostering trust between the government and society.

In addition, an ethical culture instills a sense of responsibility among public officials to act in the public interest and not for personal gain. When officials feel morally obligated to serve the public interest, they tend to make decisions that prioritize the public welfare over individual interests. This sense of responsibility also includes taking responsibility for their actions, as officials recognize that their decisions have consequences for wider society. As a result, an ethical culture acts as a deterrent to unethical behaviour, reducing the possibility of corruption, fraud, and abuse of power.

Combining insights from Denhardt & Denhardt's (2015) research on ethical leadership, it becomes clear that ethical culture starts at the top. Leaders in public administration determine ethical behavior through their actions, attitudes, and decisions. At Palopo, ethical leaders serve as role models, demonstrating integrity, fairness and accountability in their actions. Their commitment to ethical principles inspires others in the organization to uphold similar standards, thereby creating a ripple effect that spreads throughout the bureaucracy.

The implication of this observation is that cultivating an ethical culture in public administration is more than just instituting rules and regulations; this requires a comprehensive approach that addresses leadership, organizational culture, and individual behavior. In Palopo, efforts to improve an ethical culture should focus on developing ethical leadership capabilities, encouraging a culture of integrity and accountability, and providing ongoing ethical training and support for public officials. By embedding ethical principles in the governance structure, Palopo

can create a more transparent, accountable and effective public administration that serves the needs of its citizens.

### **Ethical Practices in Palopo Public Administration**

The Palopo government has made various efforts to encourage ethical behavior among its officials. This includes regular ethics training programs aimed at educating civil servants about ethical principles, standards of conduct, and the consequences of unethical behavior. Additionally, a code of ethics has been established to outline the behavior and responsibilities expected of officers in their roles. These initiatives reflect a commitment to embed ethical values and norms within the organization, in line with best practices in public sector governance.

However, despite these ethical practices, research findings show a gap between policies on paper and their implementation in practice. This inconsistency in law enforcement poses a major challenge to the effectiveness of the ethical framework in public administration in Palopo. Without a strong law enforcement mechanism, ethical standards may only be considered a formality and not a guiding principle for behavior.

Menzel et al.'s research (2007) emphasize the importance of effective law enforcement in ensuring the integrity and credibility of ethical standards in organizations. In the Palopo context, this shows that implementing ethical policies is not enough if it is not accompanied by strict monitoring and law enforcement mechanisms. Without consistent law enforcement, there is a risk of ethical lapses that cannot be controlled, thereby eroding public trust and weakening government legitimacy.

The implication of these findings is that the Palopo public administration must prioritize strengthening the enforcement of ethical standards to bridge the gap between policy and practice. This may include implementing regular audits and evaluations to assess compliance with ethical guidelines, establishing clear mechanisms for reporting and addressing ethical violations, and ensuring that appropriate sanctions are imposed on violators. Additionally, there must be a concerted effort to foster a culture where ethical behavior is valued, acknowledged, and rewarded, while unethical behavior is met with swift and appropriate consequences.

By addressing these law enforcement challenges and fostering a culture of integrity and accountability, Palopo can ensure that its ethical standards are not only well defined but also effectively enforced in practice. This in turn will contribute to building public trust, enhancing government credibility, and encouraging more transparent and accountable public administration.

### **Efforts to Improve Ethical Standards in Public Services**

Participants suggested several improvements, including increasing public awareness and involvement and implementing more transparent processes with stronger penalties for unethical actions. These suggestions are in line with the findings of Heald (2006) and Bovens (2007), who argue that public involvement and strong law enforcement mechanisms are essential to increase accountability and transparency in public administration.

The implication of these findings is that public administration in Palopo must focus on increasing community involvement and transparency mechanisms. Increasing public awareness of their rights and the importance of ethical governance can empower communities to hold officials accountable. This can be achieved through public education campaigns and the creation of

platforms for people to easily report unethical behavior. Additionally, implementing transparent processes and ensuring significant penalties for unethical actions can prevent violations and foster a culture of integrity. Strengthening these areas will not only improve ethical standards in Palopo public administration but also increase public trust and participation in government.

#### 4. Conclusion

Ethical culture in increasing transparency and accountability in the administration of Palopo City government. These findings suggest that high ethical standards increase honesty and a sense of responsibility among public officials, thereby contributing to a more open and trustworthy government environment. However, there is a significant gap between policy and practice, with inconsistent enforcement of ethical standards weakening their effectiveness. To address these challenges, the study suggests several improvements, including increasing public awareness and involvement, implementing more transparent processes, and establishing stronger penalties for unethical actions. These recommendations are in line with previous research and emphasize the importance of public involvement and strong law enforcement mechanisms in promoting accountability and transparency in public administration. By implementing these improvements, Palopo can strengthen ethical standards, foster a culture of integrity, and increase public trust in government institutions. Ultimately, these efforts are important to improve the quality of governance, ensure fair service delivery, and uphold democratic values in Palopo City.

#### 5. Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the support funding for research, authorship and publication of this article from Center for Education Financial Service-Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Puslapdik-Kemendikbudristek) and Indonesia Endowment Funds for Education (LPDP).

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