

Strengthening Human Resource Capacity through Human Capital Development Transformation: Evidence from the Protocol and Leadership Communication Unit of Polewali Mandar Regency Government

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Abstract: This study examines how Human Capital Development (HCD) transformation strengthens human resource capacity within the Protocol and Leadership Communication Unit of the Polewali Mandar Regency Government, Indonesia. In the context of increasing public demands for transparency, responsiveness, and effective communication, local governments are required to develop adaptive and competent human resources. This research aims to analyze the implementation of HCD and to identify supporting and constraining factors influencing its effectiveness in the public sector. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis involving officials and staff of the unit. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by data triangulation to ensure validity. The findings indicate that HCD initiatives have contributed positively to improving technical and managerial competencies in protocol and leadership communication functions. However, the transformation process faces persistent challenges, particularly limited training budgets, inadequate technological infrastructure, low digital literacy, and bureaucratic constraints. Leadership commitment and organizational support were found to be critical enablers, although their impact remains constrained by structural and resource limitations. This study contributes to the human capital literature by providing empirical evidence from a local government setting, highlighting the gap between HCD policy formulation and operational implementation. Practically, the findings suggest the need for more integrated HCD policies, enhanced investment in digital infrastructure, and continuous capacity-building programs to support sustainable human resource development in the public sector. The study offers insights for policymakers seeking to strengthen institutional performance through strategic human capital transformation.

Keywords : human capital development, human resource capacity, protocol and communication, local government, public sector transformation.

1. Introduction

Human resource capacity has become a central determinant of organizational performance in the public sector, particularly in the context of rapid digital transformation and increasing societal expectations for transparency, responsiveness, and accountability. Governments across the globe are facing mounting pressure to modernize their administrative systems and enhance service delivery quality, which requires not only technological advancement but also strategic investment in human capital development (HCD) (OECD, 2021; World Bank, 2022). In this context, human resources are no longer perceived merely as administrative assets but as strategic capital capable of driving institutional effectiveness and public value creation.

The integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into public governance has fundamentally reshaped how governments interact with citizens and manage internal processes. Digital governance initiatives demand civil servants who possess not only technical competencies but also adaptive, communicative, and managerial skills (Mergel et al., 2020; van der Voet et al., 2021). Consequently, strengthening human resource capacity through a systematic and transformative approach to human capital development has become a strategic priority, particularly at the local government level where resource constraints and implementation challenges are more pronounced.

Human Capital Development refers to a structured process of enhancing employees' knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes through education, training, and experiential learning to improve organizational performance (Kim & Park, 2022). In public sector organizations, effective HCD

contributes to improved policy implementation, service innovation, and institutional resilience (Boon et al., 2019; Poocharoen & Ting, 2023). Recent studies emphasize that HCD transformation must go beyond traditional training models and incorporate digital literacy, leadership development, and organizational learning mechanisms to respond effectively to contemporary governance challenges (Janssen et al., 2020; OECD, 2023).

Within the framework of local governance, protocol and leadership communication units occupy a strategically significant role. These units are responsible for managing official events, coordinating leadership activities, and facilitating public communication between government leaders and stakeholders. The effectiveness of these functions directly influences public trust, institutional legitimacy, and government credibility (Sanders & Canel, 2021). As public communication increasingly shifts toward digital platforms and real-time information exchange, protocol and communication personnel are required to master new communication technologies, crisis communication strategies, and adaptive coordination skills (Zhang & Chen, 2022).

In Indonesia, local governments face unique challenges in implementing human capital transformation. While national policies emphasize bureaucratic reform and digital governance, disparities in institutional capacity, technological infrastructure, and human resource quality persist across regions (Prasojo & Kurniawan, 2020; Dwiyanto et al., 2021). The Protocol and Leadership Communication Unit of the Polewali Mandar Regency Government exemplifies this condition. As a key supporting unit for regional leadership, it is expected to ensure professional protocol services and effective public communication. However, limitations in training budgets, access to digital tools, and organizational support often constrain the optimal development of staff competencies.

Empirical evidence suggests that many local government institutions struggle to translate human capital policies into effective operational practices. Studies conducted in developing country contexts highlight persistent gaps between HCD policy design and implementation, often caused by bureaucratic rigidity, limited financial resources, and inadequate leadership commitment (Kim et al., 2021; Nurdin et al., 2022). Furthermore, insufficient digital skills among civil servants have been identified as a critical barrier to successful public sector transformation (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020; Svava et al., 2023). These challenges are particularly evident in functional units that rely heavily on communication effectiveness and coordination, such as protocol and leadership communication divisions.

Recent research underscores the importance of leadership support and organizational culture in enabling successful human capital transformation. Transformational leadership has been shown to positively influence employee learning, innovation, and performance in public organizations (Vogel & Masal, 2021; Hassan et al., 2022). However, without adequate institutional support systems—including continuous training programs, performance-based incentives, and access to modern communication technologies—leadership initiatives alone are insufficient to sustain long-term human resource capacity building (Van Wart et al., 2022).

Despite the growing body of literature on human capital development in the public sector, empirical studies focusing on protocol and leadership communication units at the local government level remain limited. Most existing studies concentrate on general administrative reform or digital government initiatives, with less attention given to specialized units that play a critical role in leadership support and public engagement (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2020; Meijer et al., 2021). Moreover, few studies adopt an in-depth qualitative approach to explore how HCD transformation is implemented in practice and how contextual factors shape its outcomes in local governance settings.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the transformation of Human Capital Development within the Protocol and Leadership Communication Unit of the Polewali Mandar Regency Government. By employing a qualitative case study approach, this research aims to capture the lived experiences of public officials, identify key enabling and constraining factors, and analyze how HCD

initiatives contribute to strengthening human resource capacity in a localized institutional context. The study is grounded in contemporary human capital and public management theories, emphasizing the strategic role of human resources in achieving effective and responsive governance.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical perspective, the study enriches the literature on human capital development by providing empirical insights from a local government context, particularly within a specialized administrative unit. Practically, the study offers policy-relevant recommendations for local governments seeking to enhance human resource capacity through integrated and sustainable HCD strategies. Ultimately, strengthening human resource capacity through effective human capital development transformation is essential for improving public service delivery, reinforcing institutional performance, and advancing democratic governance at the local level.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive-exploratory approach to examine the transformation of Human Capital Development (HCD) in strengthening human resource capacity within the Protocol and Leadership Communication Unit of the Polewali Mandar Regency Government. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research seeks to explore processes, experiences, perceptions, and institutional dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone. The study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding social phenomena from the perspectives of the actors involved. This approach enables an in-depth analysis of how human capital development policies are implemented in practice and how organizational, leadership, and contextual factors influence their outcomes. By focusing on meanings, interactions, and institutional practices, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of human resource capacity development in a local government setting.

2.2 Research Site and Context

The research was conducted at the Protocol and Leadership Communication Unit of the Polewali Mandar Regency Government, Indonesia. This unit plays a strategic role in supporting regional leadership activities, managing official protocols, and facilitating public communication between the local government and stakeholders. Polewali Mandar Regency was selected as the research site due to its relevance in representing local government institutions facing challenges related to bureaucratic reform, digital governance adaptation, and human resource capacity development. The unit's responsibilities require personnel to possess strong communication skills, coordination abilities, and adaptability to digital transformation, making it a suitable context for examining human capital development transformation in the public sector.

3.3 Data Sources and Informants

This study utilizes primary and secondary data sources to ensure comprehensive and triangulated findings.

Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants selected using purposive sampling. Informants included:

- Officials responsible for human resource management and training,
- Protocol and leadership communication staff,
- Structural leaders directly involved in policy implementation and organizational decision-making.

These informants were chosen based on their direct involvement and experience with human capital development programs and organizational transformation processes.

Secondary data were collected from official documents, including:

- Regional regulations and policy documents,
- Human resource development plans,
- Training reports and internal evaluations,
- Organizational performance reports and archival records.

The use of multiple data sources strengthens the validity of the research findings through data triangulation.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted using the following techniques:

1. In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed to allow flexibility in exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding human capital development practices. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing informants to elaborate on key issues relevant to the study.

2. Document Analysis

Document analysis was conducted to examine formal policies, strategic plans, and institutional reports related to human capital development and organizational performance. This technique enabled the researcher to contextualize interview findings within the broader institutional and regulatory framework.

3. Non-Participant Observation (Limited)

Limited non-participant observation was undertaken to gain contextual understanding of daily work practices, coordination mechanisms, and communication processes within the unit. Observational notes were used to support and enrich interview and document data.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, conducted systematically through several stages. First, interview transcripts and documents were carefully read to achieve data familiarization. Second, initial codes were generated to identify meaningful patterns related to human capital development, capacity building, leadership support, and organizational challenges. Third, the codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected key dimensions of HCD transformation, such as training effectiveness, digital competency development, leadership roles, and institutional support mechanisms. Finally, themes were reviewed and interpreted in relation to existing theories and empirical findings in public sector human resource management and governance studies.

To enhance analytical rigor, the study applied iterative comparison between data sources and theoretical frameworks, ensuring consistency and depth in interpretation.

3.6 Research Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, several strategies were employed in accordance with qualitative research standards:

- Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation across interviews, documents, and observations.
- Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear audit trail of research procedures, including data collection and analysis steps.
- Confirmability was supported by minimizing researcher bias through reflective notes and cross-checking interpretations with data sources.

- Transferability was addressed by providing detailed contextual descriptions, allowing readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar institutional settings.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. All informants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by excluding personal identifiers from interview transcripts and research reports. The study adhered to academic research ethics by ensuring voluntary participation, data security, and responsible use of information. Institutional approval was obtained where necessary to conduct interviews and access official documents.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Research Results

This section presents the empirical findings derived from in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis conducted within the Protocol and Leadership Communication Unit of the Polewali Mandar Regency Government. The findings are organized thematically to reflect key dimensions of Human Capital Development (HCD) transformation and its role in strengthening human resource capacity.

3.1.1 Human Resource Competency Development Initiatives

The findings indicate that the local government has initiated several efforts to enhance human resource competencies, particularly through technical and managerial training programs. Informants reported that training activities primarily focused on protocol procedures, administrative coordination, and basic public communication skills. These initiatives were intended to improve staff professionalism in managing official events and leadership communication. However, most informants emphasized that training programs were irregular and highly dependent on annual budget availability. While some staff members had opportunities to attend workshops or short courses organized by provincial or national institutions, these opportunities were limited in scope and frequency. As a result, competency development tended to be uneven across staff members, with disparities in skills and performance levels. From an observational standpoint, staff demonstrated adequate competence in routine protocol activities but faced difficulties when handling complex or technology-driven communication tasks. This finding suggests that existing training programs have not fully addressed emerging competency requirements, particularly those related to digital communication and crisis management.

3.1.2 Digital Skills and Technology Utilization

A major theme emerging from the data concerns limitations in digital skills and technology utilization. Informants consistently highlighted inadequate access to communication technologies, including limited availability of computers, outdated software, and unstable internet connectivity. These constraints significantly affected the effectiveness of HCD transformation, particularly in the context of digital governance demands. Although the organization acknowledged the importance of digital communication tools—such as social media platforms, online press releases, and real-time information dissemination—many staff members lacked sufficient digital literacy to utilize these tools optimally. Training related to digital communication was reported to be minimal and often self-initiated rather than institutionally structured. Document analysis further revealed that human resource development plans largely emphasized administrative compliance rather than digital competency development. This finding indicates a misalignment between policy objectives and the practical demands of contemporary public communication, which increasingly requires digital proficiency.

3.1.3 Leadership Support and Organizational Commitment

Leadership support emerged as a critical enabling factor in HCD implementation. Informants acknowledged that unit leaders demonstrated a positive attitude toward staff development and encouraged participation in available training programs. Leadership commitment was reflected in policy statements and internal directives emphasizing professionalism and service quality. Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that leadership support was constrained by structural and bureaucratic limitations. Decision-making authority related to training budgets and technology procurement resided largely at higher administrative levels, limiting the unit's flexibility in implementing comprehensive HCD strategies. Consequently, leadership support was more normative than operational, with limited capacity to translate commitment into concrete organizational investments. This gap between leadership intention and organizational capability highlights the importance of institutional alignment in supporting sustainable HCD transformation.

3.1.4 Organizational and Budgetary Constraints

Organizational and budgetary constraints were identified as the most significant barriers to effective HCD implementation. Informants consistently reported that limited financial resources restricted access to continuous training, modern technology, and professional development programs. Budget allocations for human resource development were often prioritized for mandatory administrative needs rather than capacity-building initiatives. Furthermore, bureaucratic procedures related to training approval and resource allocation were perceived as rigid and time-consuming. These procedures reduced organizational responsiveness to emerging skill requirements, particularly in rapidly evolving communication environments. Document analysis confirmed that human resource development expenditures constituted a relatively small portion of the unit's overall budget, reinforcing the perception that HCD had not yet become a strategic priority at the organizational level.

3.2 Discussion

This section interprets the research findings in relation to Human Capital Theory and existing empirical studies, while highlighting their implications for public sector human resource development.

3.2.1 Human Capital Development as a Strategic Investment

The findings support Becker's (1994) Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes that investment in education and training enhances individual productivity and organizational performance. In the context of the Protocol and Leadership Communication Unit, competency development initiatives contributed positively to staff professionalism and routine task performance. However, the limited scale and continuity of training programs constrained their overall impact. This result aligns with previous studies indicating that fragmented and short-term training initiatives are insufficient to produce sustainable human capital transformation in the public sector (Selden, 2008; Bhattacharyya et al., 2020). Effective HCD requires long-term strategic planning, consistent investment, and institutional commitment.

3.2.2 Digital Competency Gaps in Local Government Institutions

The study highlights a significant gap between digital governance demands and existing human resource capacities. This finding is consistent with Revunov et al. (2019) and Lincaru et al. (2018), who argue that digital infrastructure and digital skills are essential components of modern human capital development. In Polewali Mandar Regency, limited access to technology and insufficient digital training hindered staff adaptability to evolving communication challenges. The absence of structured digital competency programs suggests that HCD policies have not fully integrated technological transformation

into human resource development strategies. This gap underscores the need for local governments to prioritize digital literacy and technology-based training as core components of HCD transformation.

3.2.3 The Role of Leadership in Enabling HCD Transformation

Leadership support played an important but constrained role in HCD implementation. While leaders demonstrated normative commitment to staff development, structural limitations reduced their capacity to enact transformative change. This finding corroborates Agranoff's (2008) argument that leadership effectiveness in human capital development depends on institutional networks and organizational resources. The study also aligns with Bhattacharyya et al. (2020), who found that leadership commitment alone is insufficient without adequate organizational support systems. In this case, leadership advocacy was not matched by sufficient budgetary authority or technological investment, limiting its practical impact.

3.2.4 Organizational Constraints and Policy–Practice Gaps

The persistence of organizational and budgetary constraints reflects a broader policy–practice gap commonly observed in public sector reform initiatives. Although human resource development is formally recognized as a strategic priority, actual resource allocation remains limited. This finding supports previous research by Bada and Madon (2006), which highlights how institutional and infrastructural limitations undermine the effectiveness of ICT-based human capital development initiatives in developing country contexts. The bureaucratic rigidity observed in this study further illustrates how administrative structures can impede adaptive and responsive HCD implementation.

3.2.5 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Theoretically, this study contributes to human capital literature by providing empirical evidence from a local government protocol and communication unit—a context that remains underexplored in existing research. The findings extend Becker's Human Capital Theory by emphasizing the importance of contextual and institutional factors in shaping HCD outcomes. Practically, the study offers several implications for policymakers. First, local governments should adopt integrated HCD strategies that combine competency development, digital skills training, and organizational support. Second, greater flexibility in budget allocation and decision-making authority is needed to enable unit-level HCD innovation. Third, investment in digital infrastructure should be prioritized to support modern public communication functions.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study examined the transformation of Human Capital Development (HCD) in strengthening human resource capacity within the Protocol and Leadership Communication Unit of the Polewali Mandar Regency Government. The findings demonstrate that HCD initiatives have contributed positively to improving technical and administrative competencies, particularly in routine protocol management and leadership communication tasks. Training programs and limited managerial development efforts have supported staff professionalism and task execution. However, the study also reveals that the overall impact of HCD transformation remains constrained by structural challenges. Persistent budget limitations, inadequate technological infrastructure, and insufficient digital literacy among staff significantly hinder the effectiveness and sustainability of human resource development efforts. Leadership support, while evident at the normative level, has not been fully translated into operational and strategic investments due to bureaucratic and institutional constraints.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the human capital literature by providing empirical evidence from a local government context that is rarely explored in existing studies. The findings extend Becker's (1994) Human Capital Theory by demonstrating that investment in human capital alone is insufficient without supportive institutional structures, technological readiness, and policy alignment. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of contextual factors in shaping HCD outcomes, reinforcing the argument that human capital development in the public sector must be understood as a systemic and multidimensional process. By focusing on protocol and leadership communication functions, this research broadens the scope of HCD studies beyond conventional administrative and service delivery units.

4.3 Practical and Policy Implications

The findings offer several practical implications for policymakers and public sector managers. First, local governments should adopt more integrated HCD strategies that combine technical training, digital competency development, and soft skill enhancement. Second, greater flexibility in budget allocation and decision-making authority is required to enable organizational units to respond effectively to evolving competency demands. In addition, investment in digital infrastructure and structured technology-based training programs should be prioritized to strengthen public communication capacity. Leadership commitment must also be reinforced through concrete organizational support, including long-term human resource planning and performance-based development policies. These measures are essential to ensure that HCD transformation contributes meaningfully to improved public service quality and institutional performance.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The research focuses on a single organizational unit within one local government, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or institutional contexts. Additionally, the qualitative approach relies on participant perceptions and observations, which may be subject to interpretive bias despite the use of data triangulation. Future research should consider comparative studies across multiple local governments or employ mixed-method approaches to validate and extend the findings. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of HCD transformation in diverse public sector settings.

4.5 Directions for Future Research

Future studies are encouraged to explore the development of technology-based HCD models that are tailored to the specific needs of local government institutions. Research examining the relationship between digital competency development, organizational performance, and public trust would also be valuable. Moreover, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term impacts of HCD transformation on institutional resilience and governance effectiveness.

By addressing these research gaps, future studies can contribute to the development of more adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable human capital strategies in the public sector.

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