Innovative Work Behaviour in Local Government: Innovation Process and Gender Differences

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Abstract

This research aims to identify and understand the barriers affecting public sector employees' innovative behaviors, particularly examining how these obstacles differ across stages of innovation and between genders. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research involved in-depth interviews with 40 informants from six agencies in Kupang City and Kupang Regency. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis techniques, revealing eleven major barriers categorized into political-administrative leadership, public management, and individual factors. Political-administrative barriers include insufficient support from political actors and a restrictive organizational climate. Public management challenges encompass a risk-averse culture, weak interdepartmental collaboration, limited knowledge sharing, bureaucratic constraints, and regulatory rigidity that restricts creative ideas perceived as "out of the box." Another key finding highlights the demotivating effect of redundant local digital innovations re-

placed by centrally mandated platforms, fostering employee frustration and discouragement. Individual barriers identified include a lack of expertise, limited access to policymakers, and significant gender-related issues such as patriarchy, stereotypes, and domestic responsibilities. The study highlights its novelty by uncovering how regional contextual factors, especially gender dynamics, uniquely shape barriers to innovation. This study uniquely contributes to the literature by specifically examining barriers to innovative work behavior (IWB) in the under-researched context of Eastern Indonesia, focusing on both innovation stages and gender differences.

INTRODUCTION

Public Sector Innovation (PSI) is a critical element in enhancing the performance of public organizations, involving the adoption of new ideas, practices, or objects (Pradana, 2022). At the core of PSI is Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), where employees introduce and operationalize new ideas to improve organizational outcomes (De Vries, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2016; Oppi et al., 2019). IWB consists of four stages: the creative phase, implementation, advocacy, and institutionalization, each of which presents unique challenges and opportunities (Berry & Berry, 2014; Cinar et al., 2019a; Damanpour & Aravind, 2012; Pradana et al., 2023).

However, existing research on IWB has predominantly employed quantitative methods, primarily conducted within Western, particularly Anglo-American, settings. For instance, Brunetto et al. (2021) quantitatively assessed the role of organizational and peer support in fostering innovation among healthcare workers in Australia and the U.S., Clarke and Higgs (2019) examined the relationship between political skills and workload quantitatively in the context of junior doctors in the UK, and Bysted and Hansen (2015) quantitatively compared innovation behaviors between public and private sectors. Although insightful, these studies primarily reflect Western institutional and cultural contexts. De Vries et al. (De Vries, Bekkers, Tummers, et al., 2016) emphasize that quantitative methods are often insuffi-

cient to deeply understand contextually embedded cultural and organizational nuances that significantly influence innovation, especially in non-Western, developing regions. Consequently, a clear gap exists for qualitative research to explore in depth how cultural, organizational, and individual factors uniquely shape barriers to innovation in non-Western settings.

Additionally, few studies have explored the interaction between gender and barriers to IWB in the non-Western public sector, even though patriarchy and negative stereotypes toward women can impede career advancement and innovation capacity (Dang et al., 2014; Powell & Butterfield, 2015; van Acker et al., 2018). Understanding these barriers is crucial for developing inclusive and effective innovation strategies in the public sector.

This research focuses on local government institutions in eastern Indonesia, addressing a significant gap in the literature concerning innovation within public sector organizations (Muluk & Pratama, 2021; Pratama, 2020). Empirical studies on innovation in public administration within Indonesia have predominantly concentrated on areas in Java and western regions, leaving research on innovation practices in the eastern regions comparatively scarce (Kusumasari et al., 2019; Pradana et al., 2022a). This scarcity underscores the need to further investigate determinants and characteristics of innovation in the context of less-explored local governments (Farhan, 2023;

Pratama, 2020). Thus, this study seeks to answer the central question: What are the critical barriers to IWB among public sector employees across various stages of innovation, and how do gender differences play a role? This research employs qualitative methods to provide deep insights, though limited in scope and generalizability.

This study argues that barriers to Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) directly influence the innovation performance of local governments, conceptualized here as an "innovation index." In this context, the innovation index refers to organizational innovation capability and performance, typically measured by the frequency, scope, and effectiveness of new ideas implemented within local government agencies. Female employees face additional challenges due to a patriarchal bureaucratic culture (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017; Shanker et al., 2017). The conceptual framework of this study includes political-administrative leadership, public management, and individual aspects, including gender differences, to explore how these factors influence the barriers to IWB. Thus, this research contributes to the PSI literature by exploring an under-studied context—local governments in Eastern Indonesia to understand the barriers to IWB and gender differences in the public sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) is increasingly recognized as a critical factor for enhancing the effectiveness and performance of public sector organizations. IWB encompasses the process by which employees actively generate, advocate, and implement novel ideas to improve their work processes, organizational practices, and overall outcomes (Janssen, 2000; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Due to the changing demands in public administration, fostering IWB among public employees has become essential in achieving efficient and responsive governance.

Although the importance of IWB is widely acknowledged, various barriers can impede its realization among public sector employees. Barriers to innovative behavior have been classified broadly into organizational, social, and individual-level factors. However, current literature predominantly addresses organizational-level barriers, resulting in limited insights into individual-level hindrances and a notable research gap (Borins, 2014b; Cinar et al., 2019a, 2019b).

Organizational-level barriers often include rigid hierarchical structures, cultures resistant to risk-taking, and inadequate support from leadership. Such structural constraints can severely limit employee flexibility, autonomy, and overall capacity for innovation (Borins, 2014b; Cinar et al., 2019a, 2019b). Social barriers include inadequate collaboration, ineffective communication, and weak interpersonal relationships, thereby restricting collective efforts in problem-solving and idea-sharing (Cinar et al., 2019a; Torugsa & Arundel, 2016). Meanwhile, individual barriers—although less frequently examined—play a significant role in shaping employees' innovative potential. These include intrinsic elements like personal resistance to change, lack of motivation, insufficient innovative capabilities, fear of failure,
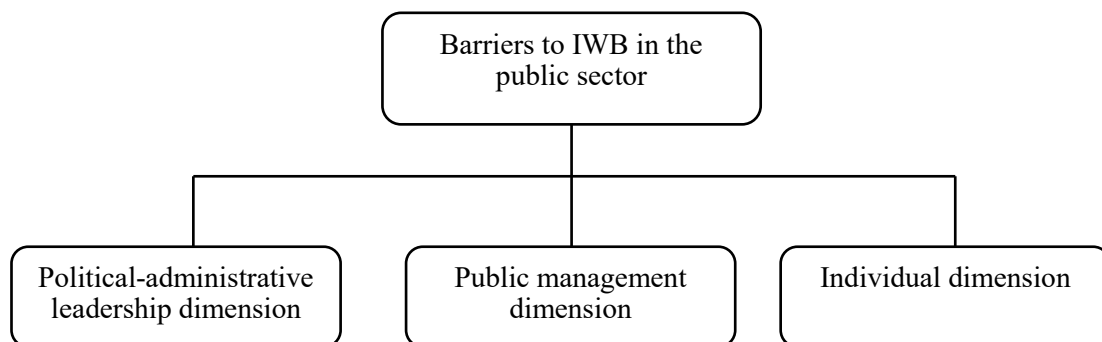
Figure 1: **Theoretical framework**

and unclear organizational expectations (De Vries, Bekkers, Tummers et al., 2016; Peterson, 2019; Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2021).

To address this gap, the current study specifically investigates individual-level barriers using a structured theoretical approach, notably drawing upon Social Cognitive Theory (Lent & Brown, 1996). Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the significance of self-efficacy and personal expectations in influencing behaviors such as innovation. By exploring individual-level determinants in detail, this research seeks to expand existing understandings derived primarily from organizational and social contexts.

This study adopts an integrative theoretical framework of three dimensions—political leadership, public management, and individual attributes (Cinar et al., 2019a; Clausen et al., 2020), as illustrated in Figure 1. The first dimension, Political Leadership, addresses leadership practices that foster an innovation-supportive environment through vision-setting, strategic alignment, and motivational policies (Borins, 2014a; De Vries, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2016). Effective political and administrative leadership significantly shapes a culture conducive to innovation. The second dimension, Public Management, focuses on the structural and procedural constraints within public organizations, such as bureaucratic rigidity, limited incentives, scarce resources, and an aversion to risk (Cinar et al., 2019a; Walker, 2014). Finally, the Individual Dimension highlights personal psychological factors, including intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, personal innovation goals, and perceived expectations regarding innovative behavior (Peterson, 2019; Pradana et al., 2022b; Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2021).

By integrating the individual-level analysis within this broader framework, the current research comprehensively examines how personal attributes interact with organizational and social factors to either facilitate or obstruct innovative work behavior. Consequently, the findings aim to guide targeted managerial strategies and policies for enhancing innovation capacity in public administration contexts.
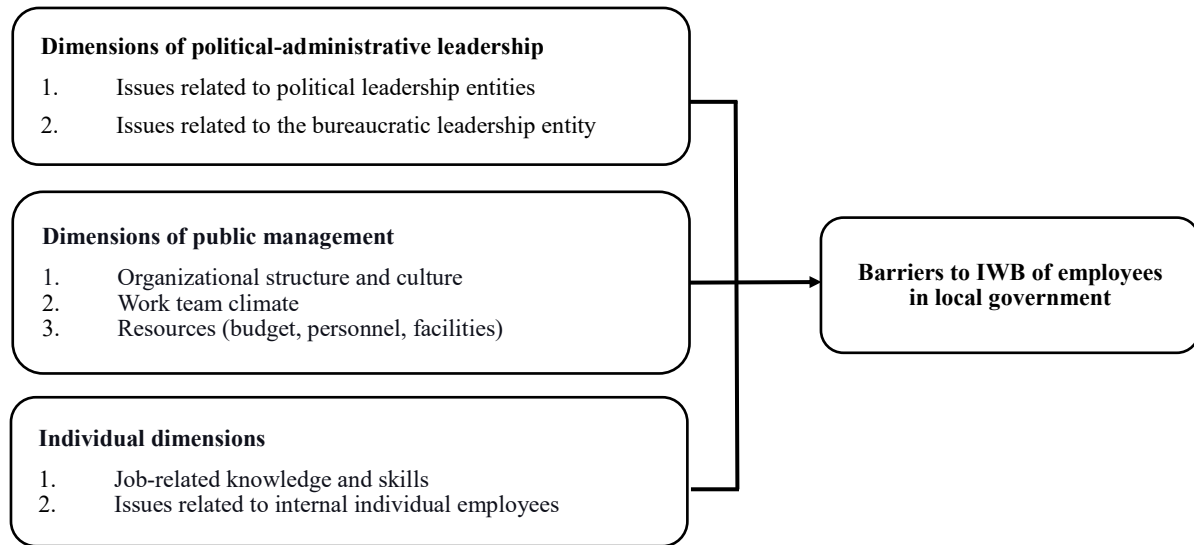
METHOD

This research utilized a qualitative method with a phenomenological type. Creswell (2018) explains that qualitative research aims to comprehend and interpret social phenomena through an in-depth and holistic approach, making it suitable for examining IWB in the public sector. The phenomenological approach specifically captures individuals' lived experiences and subjective interpretations, making it particularly appropriate for this research because it seeks to deeply understand public employees' nuanced and personal experiences concerning the barriers they face in engaging in innovative behaviors. Since innovation is affected heavily by personal perceptions, attitudes, and individual-level psychological factors, phenomenology offers a valuable methodological perspective to explore these dimen-

Table 1: **List of Research Informants**

Local government	Department	Gender	Informants
Kupang municipality	Department of Regional Planning, Development, Research and Development	Male	3 informants
		Female	5 informants
	Department of Regional Personnel, Education and Training	Male	3 informants
		Female	4 informants
	Department of Population and Civil Registration	Male	3 informants
		Female	3 informants
Kupang regency government	Department of Regional Planning, Development, Research and Development	Male	3 informants
		Female	3 informants
	Department of Regional Personnel, Education and Training	Male	3 informants
		Female	5 informants
	Department of Population and Civil Registration	Male	2 informants
		Female	3 informants

Source: Primary Data, 2023

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Dimensions of political-administrative      │
│  leadership                                  │
│                                              │
│  1.   Issues related to political leadership │
│       entities                               │
│  2.   Issues related to the bureaucratic     │
│       leadership entity                      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Dimensions of public management             │
│                                              │          ┌──────────────────────┐
│  1.   Organizational structure and culture   │  ──────▶ │  Barriers to IWB of   │
│  2.   Work team climate                      │          │  employees            │
│  3.   Resources (budget, personnel,          │          │  in local government  │
│       facilities)                            │          └──────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Individual dimensions                       │
│                                              │
│  1.   Job-related knowledge and skills       │
│  2.   Issues related to internal individual  │
│       employees                              │
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Figure 2: **Barrier to employee IWB in local government setting**

Source: Author's construct, 2024

sions from the participants' viewpoints (Miller et al., 2018).

Sampling Technnique

This investigation interviewed 40 informants selected purposively based on their knowledge and aimed to achieve redundancy or data saturation (see Table 1). Specifically, the number of 40 informants was considered sufficient as it provided adequate diversity and depth, ensuring that data saturation was reached when no new information or insights emerged from further data collection (Boddy, 2016; Guest et al., 2006). Furthermore, data saturation became evident during the interview process as subsequent informants consistently provided repetitive information, indicating that additional interviews were unlikely to yield new insights. For instance, informants repeatedly identified "lack of leadership support" and "fear of failure" as key barriers, confirming the saturation point.

Moreover, the selection of informants was guided by two primary criteria: (1) employees of staff and managerial levels and (2) gender differences. Additionally, informants' knowledge was defined as their practical understanding and direct experience with innovative processes, barriers to innovation, and organizational culture within the public sector. This criterion was essential to ensure participants could offer relevant, rich, and
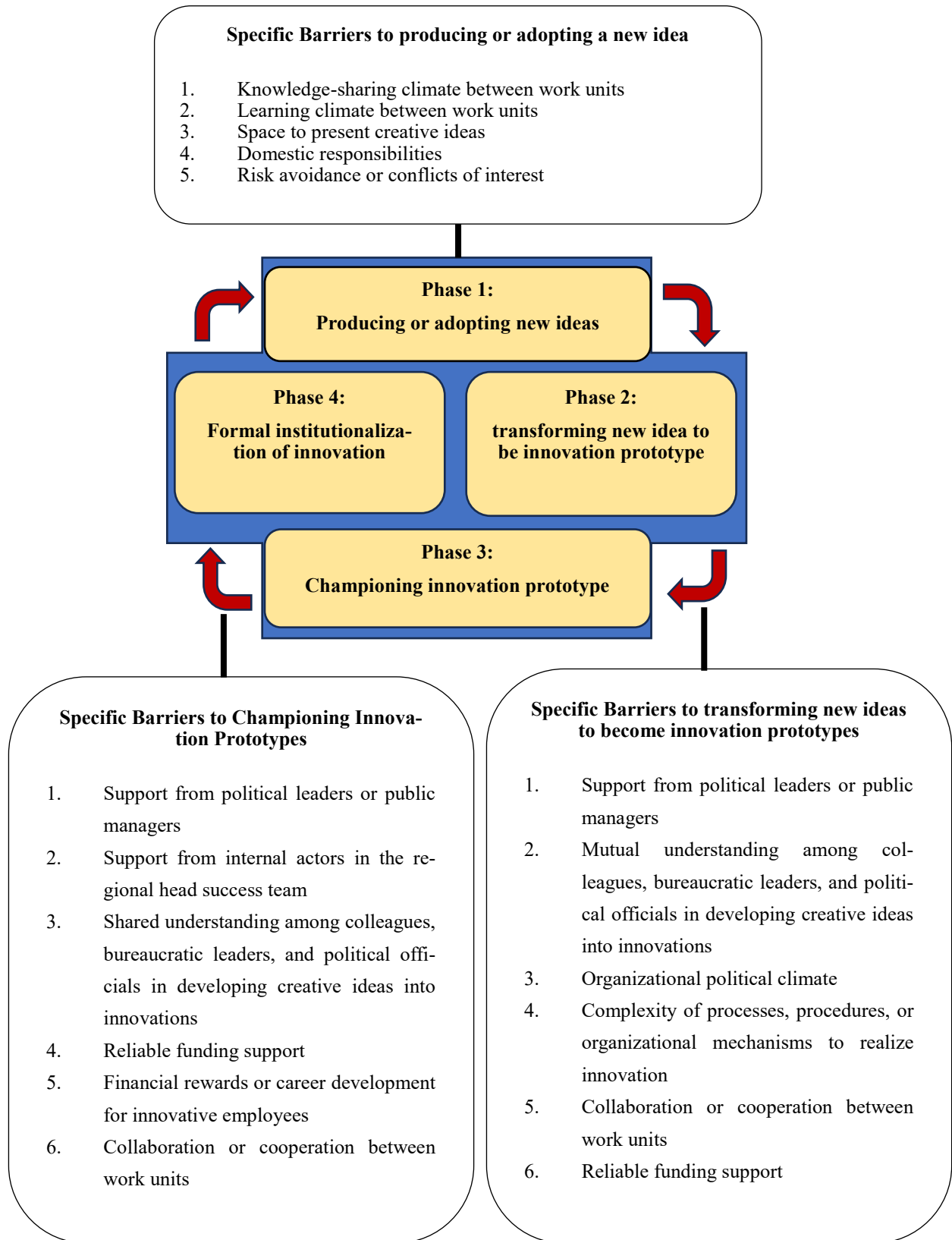
insightful data that effectively aligned with the study's objectives.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data of this study were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or via Zoom or WhatsApp with diverse informants, including bureaucratic managers and employees. This diverse sampling aimed to achieve data triangulation and minimize bias, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to innovative work behavior (IWB). Triangulation was further enhanced by cross-validating findings from interviews with secondary data sources, such as organizational reports, official documents, and relevant scholarly literature, thereby strengthening the study's credibility and validity (Fusch et al., 2018; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The research process began by obtaining informants' consent for interviews and scheduling appointments at convenient locations such as offices, homes, or virtual settings. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes, allowing in-depth exploration of informants' perspectives.

Data analysis followed a transparent three-step approach using NVivo 12 software, following prior studies, such as Pradana et al. (2022a) and Nadia et al. (2020). First, interview recordings were transcribed and systematically coded, breaking

Specific Barriers to producing or adopting a new idea

1. Knowledge-sharing climate between work units
2. Learning climate between work units
3. Space to present creative ideas
4. Domestic responsibilities
5. Risk avoidance or conflicts of interest

Phase 1:

Producing or adopting new ideas

Phase 4:

Formal institutionaliza-tion of innovation

Phase 2:

transforming new idea to be innovation prototype

Phase 3:

Championing innovation prototype

Specific Barriers to Championing Innovation Prototypes

1. Support from political leaders or public managers
2. Support from internal actors in the regional head success team
3. Shared understanding among colleagues, bureaucratic leaders, and political officials in developing creative ideas into innovations
4. Reliable funding support
5. Financial rewards or career development for innovative employees
6. Collaboration or cooperation between work units

Specific Barriers to transforming new ideas to become innovation prototypes

1. Support from political leaders or public managers
2. Mutual understanding among colleagues, bureaucratic leaders, and political officials in developing creative ideas into innovations
3. Organizational political climate
4. Complexity of processes, procedures, or organizational mechanisms to realize innovation
5. Collaboration or cooperation between work units
6. Reliable funding support

Figure 3: **Barriers to employee IWB at each phase of innovation in local government organizations**

qualitative data into manageable segments to identify initial patterns. Second, these patterns were organized into themes, grouping similar codes into broader conceptual categories. Finally, these themes were consolidated into theoretical dimensions, aligning with the study's conceptual framework encompassing political-administrative leadership, public management, and individual aspects (Krippendorff, 2022; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the analysis results, highlighting barriers to Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) across political-administrative leadership, public management, and individual dimensions (see Figures 2 and 3). In the political-administrative leadership dimension, seven out of 40 informants (17.5%) reported that inadequate support from political actors and internal teams hindered innovation, as resources were often redirected to politically favored programs. Additionally, six informants (15%) noted that unclear innovation priorities among political leaders created confusion and discouraged employees from pursuing innovative initiatives.

Figure 2 further illustrates how these barriers are distributed across three interrelated dimensions. Political-administrative barriers include misalignment between political and bureaucratic priorities, while public management barriers stem from rigid organizational structures, an unsupportive work climate, and limited resources. At the individual level, barriers involve a lack of knowledge, limited innovation-related skills, and gendered constraints such as domestic responsibilities and limited access to decision-makers, particularly among female employees.

In the public management dimension, seven informants (17.5%) identified political influence and risk-averse cultures as significant barriers, while five (12.5%) highlighted bureaucratic complexity as a major obstacle. Resource constraints were also evident, with eight informants (20%) citing unreliable funding and minimal incentives as factors limiting innovation efforts. Seven informants (17.5%) reported insufficient knowledge

about organizational processes in the individual dimension, while six out of 23 female informants (26%) pointed to domestic responsibilities as a key barrier. Lastly, four informants (10%) mentioned limited access to policymakers, further restricting opportunities for employees to gain support for their innovative ideas.

Figure 3 adds another layer by mapping how these barriers evolve across the four phases of the innovation process: producing ideas, transforming them into prototypes, championing prototypes, and formal institutionalization. In the first phase, poor knowledge-sharing and limited space for creativity emerge as core constraints. Complex procedures and weak collaboration across units obstruct the second phase. In the third phase, lack of political support and funding limitations weaken the ability to champion innovative efforts. Finally, the fourth phase suffers from regulatory misalignment and inadequate coordination between central and local governments. These findings highlight the need for systemic and phase-specific strategies to foster innovation within local government institutions.

Dimensions of political-administrative leadership

This section analyzes how political and bureaucratic leadership constrains innovative work behavior (IWB) in local governments. Based on data from Kupang, five key barriers emerged: selective political support (17.5%), informal gatekeeping by success teams (10%), conceptual ambiguity among leaders (15%), managerial inertia from echelon II/III officials (10%), and gendered exclusion (10%). As visualized in Figure 4, these factors cluster into two themes—political leadership and public management—forming a broader political-administrative barrier where opaque, informal structures render innovation highly dependent on elite access and discretionary approval.

A primary and recurrent obstacle to innovation lies in the selective and short-term nature of political support, as cited by 17.5% of the informants (7 out of 40). Although political leaders regularly proclaim their commitment to innovation, this support

is often conditional, symbolic, and tied to visible or electorally rewarding outcomes. Informants revealed that proposals to modernize service delivery or introduce administrative efficiencies were frequently disregarded because they lacked mass appeal or immediate political gain. One civil servant lamented, "Our Smart City innovation proposal was shelved because the funds were reallocated to a big public celebration. Innovation does not win votes." (Informant 17). Another added, "They want innovation, but only if it makes them look good on TV." (Informant 18). This pattern reflects the politicization of innovation, where creativity is used for political ends rather than institutional change (Meijer, 2014). Prior studies (H. De Vries, Bekkers, Tummers, et al., 2016; Hansen, 2011) highlight that unclear or politically sensitive innovation goals often lack strategic backing. In Indonesia, Pradana et al. (2022a, 2023) found that local innovations are sidelined by politically driven budget priorities where political agendas overshadow technical innovations, as seen in Kupang. Thus, this finding reinforces these findings by showing how political dynamics in Kupang hinder innovation, calling for strategic political engagement to sustain creative efforts.

Moving from formal to informal political dynamics, the influence of political gatekeepers, namely the regional head's "success team," emerged as a critical barrier, mentioned by 10% of the respondents (4 out of 40). These individuals, who typically emerged during electoral campaigns, operate outside the formal bureaucracy yet exert significant influence over which proposals are endorsed or abandoned. Multiple informants emphasized that approval for innovation often depended less on the idea's merit than on its alignment with the preferences of these insiders. "We always say the 'success team' holds the key. Without their blessing, even brilliant ideas will not move," stated Informant 14. The influence of such actors exemplifies the informal filtration of innovation legitimacy described by Korac et al. (2017) and Orazi et al. (2013), whereby personal relationships and political loyalty outweigh technical feasibility or strategic alignment.

While informal networks complicate access to decision-making, the absence of a coherent, shared understanding of innovation among political elites represents another key obstacle, mentioned by 15% of informants (6 out of 40). Informants described a rhetorical overuse of "innovation" without a corresponding operational definition or strategic framework—this lack of clarity results in confusion and inconsistency across departments. "The regional head says 'be innovative,' but never explains what that means. Each department just makes it up," said Informant 9. Others echoed that the term is used interchangeably for anything from aesthetic improvements to digital platforms. Such ambiguity aligns with Borins' (2001) characterization of innovation failure resulting from vague and conflicting leadership signals. Civil servants are left navigating a policy environment of contradiction and uncertainty without clearly communicated expectations and goals.

Beyond rhetorical inconsistency, the rejection of capacity-building proposals aimed at strengthening innovation capability was reported by 12.5% of the informants (5 out of 40). Training initiatives, digital skill development, and knowledge-sharing events were often dismissed due to a perceived lack of immediate return on investment. "We planned training for digital skills, but the leadership said it would not immediately change service quality, so they cut it." (Informant 15). This preference for short-term outputs over long-term capacity building undermines institutional learning and reinforces the transactional view of innovation.

This finding supports Hartley (2005) and Pradana et al. (2022a), who emphasize that political will and leadership commitment are vital for sustaining public sector innovation without explicit endorsement from leaders, employee morale declines, limiting their innovative capacity. Echoing this, Krissetyanti et al. (2017) found that inconsistent political support and the absence of structured empowerment programs hinder innovative behavior in Indonesia's bureaucracy. Cinar et al. (2019b) further argue that organizational ambiguity and underinvestment in staff development foster risk aversion in such contexts. Together, these studies

1ˢᵗ Order Concept   2ⁿᵈ Order Themes   Agregate Dimensions
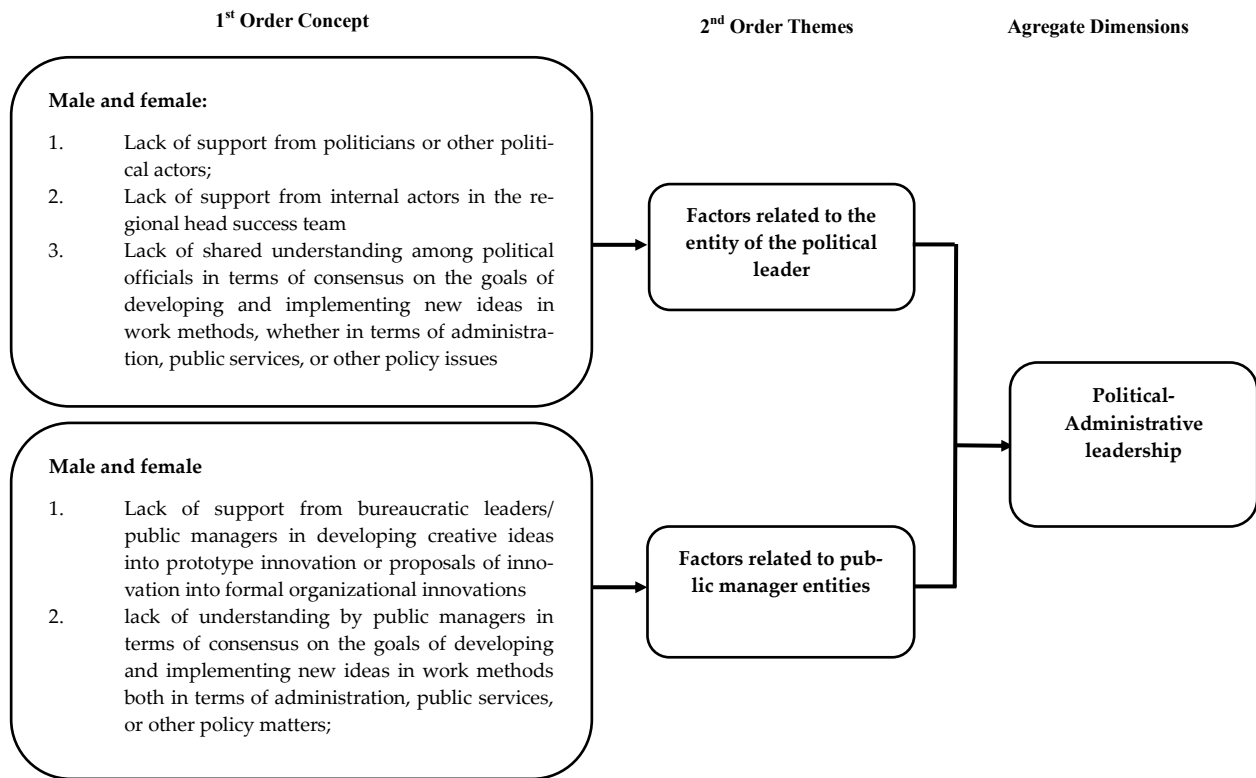
Figure 4: **Data Structure of Political-administrative Leadership Dimension**

Source: Primary data, 2024

highlight a systemic barrier: when innovation goals are unclear and employee development is neglected, bureaucracies struggle to support innovation.

Furthermore, 15% of the informants (6 out of 40) mentioned the demotivation caused by the central government's overriding of local digital innovation. Several local agencies had developed applications tailored to contextual service needs, such as internal reporting tools or e-complaint systems—only to see them replaced by standardized platforms like SIPD and SIAK. "We spent months building a citizen complaint app. It was popular and easy. Then the Ministry said we must use theirs. Our app was deleted," recalled Informant 18. While national platforms may offer interoperability, they often ignore local innovation efforts, creating frustration among civil servants and diminishing future engagement.

Shifting the focus to bureaucratic leadership, a lack of support from echelon II and III public managers during the innova-

tion championing phase was cited by 10% of informants (4 out of 40). These mid-level leaders, although strategically positioned to promote or institutionalize innovation, were often described as indifferent or procedurally inflexible. "Managers do not understand innovation. They stick to what is safe and familiar," said Informant 14. Another informant added, "They ask: 'Is there a rule for that?' If not, they will not support the idea." (Informant 25). It reflects a compliance-driven culture where bureaucratic routines and risk aversion precede proactive problem-solving.

Conversely, positive outcomes were reported when mid-level leadership aligned with innovation. The Brigade Kupang Sehat (BKS) case was mentioned as a successful example due to strong departmental backing. "The BKS worked because the department head backed it 100%. It would not have gone anywhere without that," explained Informant 16. These findings are consistent with Bos-Nehles et al. (2017), Nazir et al. (2019), who stress the importance of leader-

ship support, and Tidd & Bessant (2018), who highlight the need for clear innovation strategies. Regarding the importance of mid-level leaders for IWB, Godlewska and Mackiewicz (2023) also emphasize the impact of institutional and administrative factors on local government innovation networks. This study provides actionable insights for improving innovation and public service delivery in Eastern Indonesia by prioritizing leadership development and targeted training.

Comparative references to local governments in Java indicate that similar constraints are often mitigated by stronger institutional frameworks, standardized procedures, and greater bureaucratic professionalism (Kusumasari et al., 2019; Muluk & Pratama, 2021). In Kupang, political turnover tends to produce abrupt shifts in priorities, whereas in Java, bureaucratic continuity buffers such volatility.

Lastly, gendered exclusion in political and bureaucratic decision-making—although explored in more detail in later sections—was also mentioned in relation to political-administrative leadership, particularly by female informants. Around 10% (4 out of 40) noted that innovation proposals led by women were more likely to be ignored or questioned unless endorsed by senior male figures. "We have ideas, but unless a male boss pushes it, it will not be considered seriously," said Informant 27. It aligns with the Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koburtay et al., 2019), which suggests that innovation and leadership are often perceived as masculine domains, thus creating a bias against female-led initiatives. Further compounded by age, rank, and marital status, these dynamics contribute to layered exclusion and reduced participation in innovation governance.
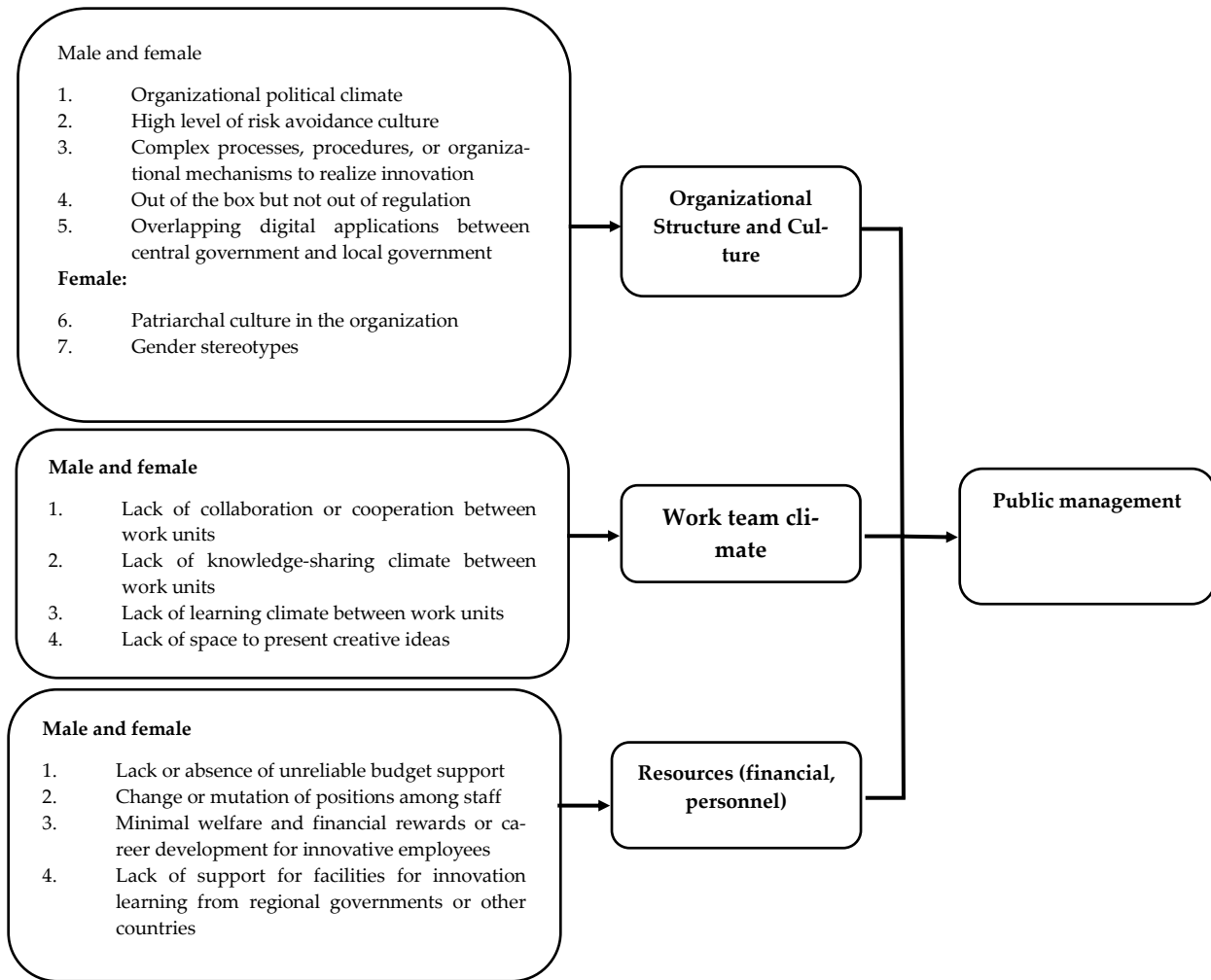
Therefore, political-administrative leadership barriers are complex, multilevel, and mutually reinforcing. This study indicates that these constraints are widely shared but vary in degree and impact across hierarchical positions. Overcoming them requires precise vision alignment, reduction of informal gatekeeping, empowerment of middle managers and formalized channels for capacity development and gender inclusion.

Dimensions of Public Management

This section explores how organizational structures, procedural norms, team dynamics, and institutional cultures shape barriers to Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) within the public sector in Kupang Municipality and Regency. Thematic analysis reveals seven interrelated and mutually reinforcing barriers: politicized and risk-averse work culture (17.5%), regulatory rigidity and compliance orientation (15%), innovation redundancy due to centralized platforms (12.5%), bureaucratic complexity and procedural fragmentation (7.5%), gendered exclusion and unequal innovation access (15%), poor team climate and collaboration silos (17.5%), and resource constraints (15%). These constraints operate across structural, normative, and symbolic domains and are visualized in the thematic model (see Figure 5), which maps how institutional logic shapes employee-level experiences.

The most widely cited constraint, reported by 7 out of 40 informants (17.5%), was the entrenchment of politicized and risk-averse work culture. Informants 3, 8, 10, 17, 23, 25, and 28 described a bureaucratic climate where loyalty to political elites is often rewarded more than merit or creativity. Informant 23 reflected, "Those aligned with the leadership get promoted regardless of performance. Those who are not aligned are left behind, no matter how innovative they are." Complementing this, Informant 8 explained, "Risk-taking is discouraged. Everyone plays it safe because no one wants to make a wrong move." It illustrates a system in which psychological safety, a key enabler of innovation (Binyamin et al., 2018; Cao & Zhang, 2020), is fundamentally compromised. In this environment, even employees with promising ideas often self-censor to avoid reputational or political risk.

The second significant barrier is closely connected, reported by 6 out of 40 informants (15%): regulatory rigidity and an over-compliance mindset. Informants 2, 4, 8, 15, 22, and 30 explained that innovation is frequently blocked due to an excessive emphasis on legal conformity. As Informant 15 observed, "Even if the idea could improve public services, if there is no written legal umbrella, it gets stuck." Informant 22 added,

Male and female

1. Organizational political climate
2. High level of risk avoidance culture
3. Complex processes, procedures, or organizational mechanisms to realize innovation
4. Out of the box but not out of regulation
5. Overlapping digital applications between central government and local government

Female:

6. Patriarchal culture in the organization
7. Gender stereotypes

→ **Organizational Structure and Culture**

Male and female

1. Lack of collaboration or cooperation between work units
2. Lack of knowledge-sharing climate between work units
3. Lack of learning climate between work units
4. Lack of space to present creative ideas

→ **Work team climate**

Male and female

1. Lack or absence of unreliable budget support
2. Change or mutation of positions among staff
3. Minimal welfare and financial rewards or career development for innovative employees
4. Lack of support for facilities for innovation learning from regional governments or other countries

→ **Resources (financial, personnel)**

→ **Public management**

Figure 5: **Data Structure of Public Management Dimension**

Source: Primary data, 2024

"Mid-level leaders are afraid to sign off on anything new. They are scared of audits or being blamed." These perspectives reflect what Cinar et al. (2019b) call "bureaucratic rigidity," a pervasive reluctance to exercise discretion even when legal provisions are ambiguous. It contributes to what De Vries et al. (2016) term a "compliance culture," wherein public managers prioritize rule-following over creative problem-solving.

In Kupang, this culture has become internalized, resulting in what several informants described as the paradox of innovation in government: "out of the box, but not out of regulation." This phrase encapsulates the underlying fear that any attempt to innovate outside pre-existing regulatory texts—even when well-intentioned—may backfire professionally. This finding is con-

sistent with Hartley's (2014) study, which emphasizes that risk aversion in public organizations limits experimentation, particularly among mid-level managers who perceive deviation from established protocols as threatening their career security. Similarly, studies by Torugsa and Arundel (2016) argue that bureaucratic cultures with low tolerance for failure tend to discourage employees from developing creative solutions.

The third notable barrier—highlighted by 5 out of 40 informants (12.5%)—concerns the demotivation caused by centralized ICT mandates that override locally developed innovations. Informants 3, 5, 12, 18, and 25 described how internal digital platforms were abruptly decommissioned following the rollout of nationally standardized platforms like SIPD and SIAK, such as

budgeting systems and complaint apps designed to fit local contexts. Informant 3 stated, "We built a system that worked better than the national one, but we were forced to abandon it. It is frustrating and demoralizing." Informant 18 echoed, "Our complaint app was more user-friendly and well-received, but it was shut down without consultation." It resonates with Mergel's (2018) notion of platform convergence, where national digital strategies displace local efforts in the name of integration. However, this study introduces a novel contribution: innovation fatigue—a condition wherein repeated invalidation of past efforts leads to emotional withdrawal from future innovation. As Informant 12 reflected, "After three failed efforts, no one wants to try again."

The fourth constraint—cited by 3 out of 40 informants (7.5%)—is bureaucratic complexity and procedural fragmentation. Informants 11, 13, and 14 detailed how good ideas are often trapped in multi-layered approval processes that lack transparency. Informant 14 shared, "To get anything approved, you need five signatures across different units. By the time you are done, the context has changed." Informant 13 added, "Unless you have someone at the top championing your idea, it does not move." It reinforces earlier studies by Korac et al. (2017) and De Vries et al. (2018), who identify how procedural delays, fragmented decision-making, and unclear mandates collectively erode momentum. In Kupang, innovation proposals can die not because of poor content but because of inertia embedded in institutional design.

Another deeply embedded barrier is gendered exclusion and unequal innovation access, reported by 6 out of 40 informants (15%)—all of them women. Informants 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 23, 27, and 38 described how innovation spaces are frequently male-dominated and how female-generated proposals are often devalued or ignored unless presented by men. Informant 7 stated, "Even if our proposals are strong, they are taken more seriously when presented by a male colleague." Informant 27 added, "I have good ideas, but I am also expected to care for my family. No one says it directly, but I can see the assumptions." These insights align with the Role Congruity Theory (Koenig et al., 2011; Yadav & Yadav, 2018), which argues that innovation and leadership are socially coded as masculine. Women who display agentic behavior—assertiveness, independence, risk-taking—are often seen as norm violators. Applying an intersectional lens, the study found that unmarried young women (e.g., Informants 9 and 14) lack experience, while married women with children (e.g., Informants 5, 23, and 27) are perceived as too domestically preoccupied. Informant 23 shared, "When the innovation team was formed, I was not considered. They assumed I would be too busy with my family." These dynamics mirror findings by Johannes et al. (2022), who document how implicit gender biases shape access to strategic roles.

A sixth and equally important theme is the exclusionary nature of team climate and collaboration silos, highlighted by 7 out of 40 informants (17.5%). Informants 2, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, and 16 pointed to rigid, hierarchical structures and the absence of open communication as key barriers. Informant 8 remarked, "Meetings are just about reporting, not brainstorming. There is no space for new ideas." Informant 13 added, "It is always the same people who get invited to discussions." These accounts reinforce Baafi et al.'s (2021) and Bekkers and Tummer's (2018) findings on the importance of collaborative trust and cross-unit dialogue in enabling innovation. In Kupang, however, idea flow is restricted by elite filtering and a lack of lateral communication, with many civil servants describing their organizational environment as dominated by "inner circles."

Finally, 6 out of 40 informants (15%) emphasized resource constraints as a persistent barrier. Informants 3, 5, 6, 9, 17, and 39 discussed inadequate internet connectivity, outdated equipment, fragmented training budgets, and politicized access to development opportunities. Informant 5 reported, "There is no multi-year budget for innovation. Even small-scale efforts are subject to political shifts." Informant 9 observed, "We are expected to innovate, but we do not have the time or tools. Even our computers do not work properly." These accounts align with Walker (2014), and Tanesab and Park

(2020), who stress that innovation capability is contingent on basic resource stability. In Kupang, where many departments struggle to meet operational needs, pursuing innovation often feels like a luxury.

These findings also reveal that the barriers to IWB in Kupang are not just technical or managerial but deeply rooted in institutional path dependencies, informal power arrangements, and symbolic hierarchies. Compared with local governments in Java, such as Surabaya and Sleman, where innovation is more institutionalized through grants, performance-based incentives, and cross-agency innovation teams (Indartuti & Sukristyanto, 2022; Wulandari et al., 2019), Kupang faces greater vulnerability to innovation fatigue, procedural stagnation, and patronage-based exclusion.

To address these multi-layered constraints, several strategic interventions are needed. First, legal reform is essential. Kupang's local government could adopt regulatory sandboxes to allow safe experimentation with flexible boundaries, especially for digital innovations (Buocz et al., 2023). Second, innovation must be decoupled from political loyalty. Promotion and reward systems should include innovation indicators, teamwork, and process improvement metrics in performance evaluations (Maishanu et al., 2022). Third, inclusive idea platforms—such as anonymous suggestion portals, innovation hackathons, and peer-reviewed idea boards—should be institutionalized to democratize participation. Fourth, gender equity must be strengthened by establishing "Women in Innovation" forums, flexible scheduling, and leadership mentorships tailored to women balancing family duties. Fifth, resources must be stabilized through multi-year innovation budgeting and procurement of basic digital infrastructure (M. de Vries & Nemec, 2013).

In conclusion, the barriers to innovative work behavior in Kupang's public sector are multi-scalar and cross-dimensional. They stem from formal rules, informal norms, leadership behavior, and embedded gender expectations. Innovation in Kupang is often desired but feared, permitted rhetorically but blocked procedurally, and invited in policy but excluded in practice. To move forward,

Kupang must embed innovation into the DNA of governance—where frontline workers, not just elites, are trusted to think critically, act boldly, and innovate out of the box—but not out of regulation.

Individual Dimensions

This section analyzes individual-level constraints to Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) among Kupang Municipality and Regency civil servants, demonstrating how broader institutional and cultural dynamics reinforce personal barriers. Thematic analysis reveals three interrelated factors: limited innovation literacy (15%), restricted access to decision-makers (12.5%), and gendered burdens related to domestic responsibilities and social role expectations (15%). Figure 6 illustrates that these constraints cluster into two overarching themes—job-related capabilities and identity-based limitations. They are deeply embedded within bureaucratic opacity, hierarchical access to power, and entrenched gender norms.

The most frequently reported barrier, cited by 15% of respondents (Informants 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 15), concerns inadequate innovation literacy. Many employees lack knowledge of navigating administrative procedures or converting creative ideas into formal proposals. Informant 6 explained, "Many employees do not fully understand the necessary organizational processes, which results in innovative ideas getting stuck and not being developed into formal innovations." Informant 7 added, "We lack knowledge about how to turn our ideas into practical applications within the government framework, which limits our ability to innovate effectively." These quotes align with Kalucza and Hattke's (2020) concept of "administrative opacity," where institutional procedures are poorly socialized or contingent upon informal know-how. Compared to more structured bureaucracies in Java, where digital dashboards and mentoring programs streamline innovation access (Kusumasari et al., 2019), Kupang's reliance on personal networks leaves many frontline employees unprepared to institutionalize their ideas.

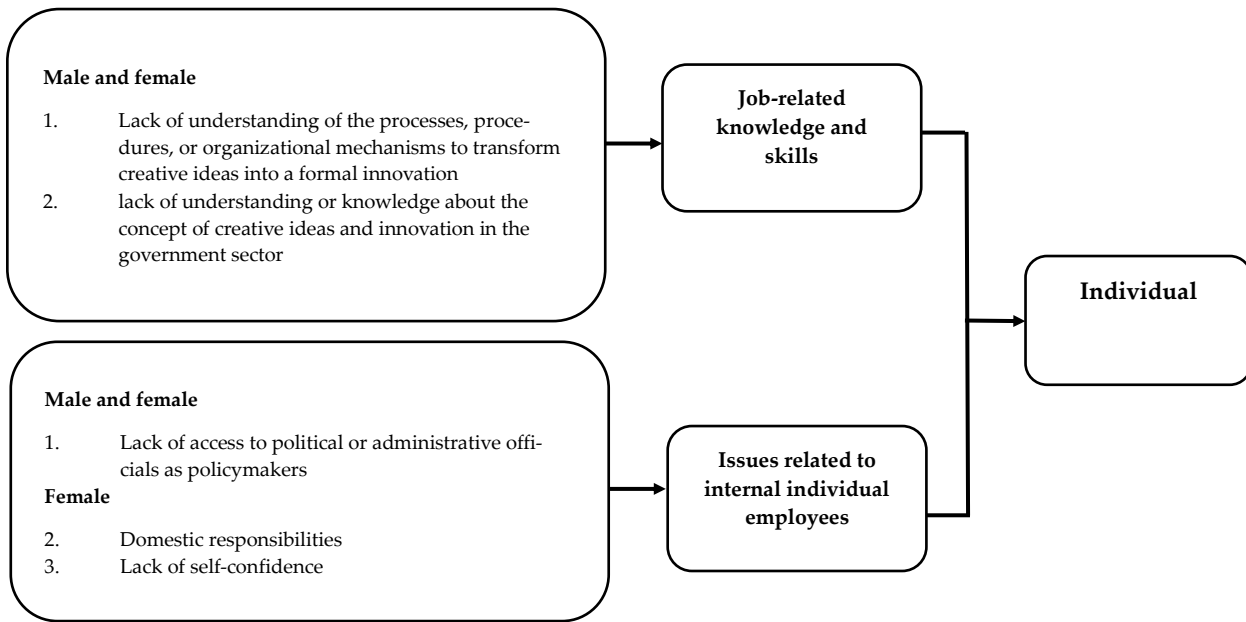Access to decision-makers also emerged as a significant constraint, reported

Figure layout text:

Male and female

1. Lack of understanding of the processes, procedures, or organizational mechanisms to transform creative ideas into a formal innovation
2. lack of understanding or knowledge about the concept of creative ideas and innovation in the government sector

Male and female

1. Lack of access to political or administrative officials as policymakers

Female

2. Domestic responsibilities
3. Lack of self-confidence

Job-related knowledge and skills

Issues related to internal individual employees

Individual

Figure 6: **Data Structure of Individual DImensions**

Source: Primary data, 2024

by 12.5% of informants (Informants 5, 8, 11, 14, and 17). Without formal mechanisms such as open idea submission platforms or merit-based funding, employees often rely on proximity to bureaucratic elites to gain support for their proposals. Informant 8 lamented, "We struggle with getting close to decision-makers, which makes it hard to get the resources needed for our innovative ideas." Informant 11 shared, "The lack of proximity to those in power makes institutionalizing creative ideas very difficult." It aligns with prior studies described as "relational bottlenecks," a system where personal ties, rather than merit, determine innovation viability (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017; Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020). In such a climate, the absence of transparent pathways marginalizes those outside elite circles and fosters perceptions of futility.

Gendered burdens present another deeply embedded barrier to innovation, reported by 15% of informants, particularly women (Informants 3, 5, 9, 12, 21, 27, and 28). Female employees described balancing innovation work with heavy domestic responsibilities. Informant 12 explained, "It is tough to be innovative when you have many household responsibilities. We do not have the same time as our male colleagues." Informant 21 noted, "We are mothers, wives, and workers. Innovation needs energy, but

our energy is split." These findings echo the Role Strain Theory (Ellinas et al., 2018), which argues that conflicting personal and professional responsibilities reduce engagement in discretionary work like innovation.

Beyond workload, psychological and institutional barriers compound these challenges. Informant 9 reported, "The dual burden of professional and domestic responsibilities means women have fewer opportunities for career advancement and personal development." It is reinforced by Lyu et al. (2019), who link high domestic workload to career dissatisfaction, and Hashim (2021), who shows that low self-efficacy among women is a key barrier to innovation. In Kupang's bureaucratic system, where flexible working hours or innovation-friendly environments are rare, this gender-based strain significantly reduces women's capacity to participate in innovation initiatives.

Applying an intersectional lens, the study finds that women experience innovation exclusion differently based on age, marital status, and employment tenure. Informants 9 and 14, both young and unmarried, were often perceived as lacking credibility. Informant 14 shared, "I may have a good idea, but I do not have the right connections or the authority to push it forward." Meanwhile, Informants 5, 23, and 27, married

women with children, were routinely excluded from project teams based on assumptions about their availability. Informant 23 recalled, "When the innovation team was formed, I was not considered. They assumed I would be too busy with my family." Such assumptions are often informal but reinforced structurally through exclusion from innovation forums or leadership roles. These dynamics mirror findings by Johannes et al. (2022), who argue that gendered assumptions, rather than policy—determine women's access to strategic participation.

Men and women also differ in how they confront innovation barriers. While male informants primarily mentioned knowledge gaps or power asymmetries, female informants highlighted additional emotional and logistical burdens. Informant 10 summarized, "Women are expected to handle both family and work, which limits their ability to focus on innovation and career growth." The compounded effect of these overlapping barriers undermines both personal motivation and organizational diversity in innovation leadership.

Addressing these challenges requires a move beyond general recommendations toward institutional design changes. First, governments should embed innovation literacy modules into staff training programs, using real-case simulations, mentoring, and collaborative project design. These modules can build procedural confidence and help employees convert ideas into implementable policies. Second, organizations must create anonymous innovation submission systems and peer-reviewed cross-departmental panels to ensure that ideas are judged on merit rather than proximity to power. Third, flexible career development models should be introduced to accommodate women's dual roles. It may include project-based promotion systems, formal mentorship programs, and caregiving-friendly performance metrics.

In conclusion, individual barriers to IWB in Kupang reflect the complex interplay of cognitive, relational, and cultural constraints. Limited innovation literacy, relational gatekeeping, and gendered social expectations collectively diminish the agency of many civil servants to contribute to reform. Overcoming these constraints requires reconfiguring bureaucratic systems and moving from hierarchical, opaque structures to open inclusive, and supportive ecosystems. Innovation can only become a truly democratic, cross-gender, and system-wide pursuit, no longer a privilege of the few but a responsibility shared across the civil service.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies eleven critical barriers to Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) within local governments in Indonesia, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, encompassing political-administrative leadership, public management, and individual characteristics. These barriers affect all stages of innovation, from generating new ideas to formal institutionalization. The identified impediments include a lack of space to present ideas, a poor knowledge-sharing climate, organizational complexity, limited access to policymakers, and insufficient support from political actors and public managers. Additionally, a risk-averse culture and gender-specific barriers, such as patriarchy, gender stereotypes, and domestic responsibilities, particularly affect women.

Notably, this study identifies two unique and major barriers: the perception that creativity must remain "within regulation," which discourages employees from engaging in innovative ideas, and the demotivating effect of redundant local digital innovations that are replaced by centrally mandated platforms. These barriers stifle innovation and foster a "why bother" mindset that discourages employees from pursuing future innovation initiatives. Addressing these barriers requires adaptive regulatory frameworks, improved dialogue between central and local governments, and mechanisms that support sustainable local innovations.

This research provides clear policy implications for enhancing innovation within local governments. Policymakers should implement structured support mechanisms, such as creating dedicated innovation hubs or platforms where employees can freely propose and discuss new ideas. Additionally, promoting open communication and collab-

orative organizational cultures is critical. Policymakers must foster equitable access to policymakers by institutionalizing inclusive practices, such as regular meetings between employees and decision-makers. To address gender-specific challenges, public managers should establish targeted initiatives, including mentoring programs for female employees, gender sensitivity training, and flexible working arrangements to overcome barriers like patriarchy and gender stereotypes.

Methodologically, future studies could benefit from comparative analyses across different governance levels, such as central and local governments, or comparisons between public and private sectors. Comparative studies would reveal specific or universal barriers and identify context-sensitive policy recommendations. A mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys, would further validate findings and enhance their generalizability. These methodological enhancements would provide deeper insights and practical guidance for policymakers aiming to foster innovation effectively across diverse organizational settings.

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