

Empathy-Driven Ethical Interaction: A Catalyst for Creativity and Organizational Performance in Local Government Institutions of West Java

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Abstract

Public sector organizations play a vital role in providing public goods and services and ensuring transparency and accountability. However, there are significant challenges, as evidenced by West Java being ranked among the top three provinces with the highest number of public service complaints in 2022 (21 complaints). The 2023 pre-survey results show public dissatisfaction with service delivery, staff behavior, and complaint mechanisms. This highlights the urgent need to improve service ethics, empathy, and creativity in public services. This study aims to analyze the relationship between Organizational Reward, Knowledge-Oriented Leadership (KOL), Empathy Ethical Interaction (EEI), Creativity, and Organizational Performance (OP). Using explanatory research and the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method, this study involved a sample of 262 Heads of Departments from 27 Regencies/Cities in West Java. The analysis results show that the model has a very high predictive power ($Q^2 = 0.998$), where exogenous variables explain 90.5% of OP variation. All eight hypotheses were significantly accepted. KOL proved to be a dominant factor, having the strongest influence on EEI ($t = 5.285$) and OP ($t = 3.047$). Crucially, EEI significantly influenced Creativity ($t = 2.305$) and Organizational Performance ($t = 2.186$), functioning as a mediating variable that strengthened the relationship between variables. In conclusion, EEI is a vital catalyst for bureaucratic creativity and innovative public performance, especially given the cultural diversity in West Java. An empathy- and ethics-based leadership approach will strengthen innovation and organizational effectiveness, ultimately accelerating the realization of good governance.

Keywords: *Empathy Ethical Interaction, Knowledge-Oriented Leadership, Creativity, Organizational Performance, Local Government*

INTRODUCTION

Public sector organizations play an important role in running a government that is oriented towards the interests of the community. As institutions that provide public goods and services, public sector organizations are responsible for ensuring that the services provided meet the needs of the community using funds sourced from public taxes. The main roles of public sector organizations include managing resources for the efficient use of tax funds, providing quality public services such as education and health, and ensuring transparency and accountability

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in the use of funds. In addition, they are involved in public policy planning, facilitating community involvement in budget decisions, and stimulating economic growth through strategic investment (Hantel et al., 2024).

The report serves to assess the extent to which local governments have successfully carried out their mandates. Public trust in government must be balanced with improvements in the quality of public services that are effective, efficient, and accountable (Cai, 2023; Hartanto et al., 2021; Kurmanov & Knox, 2022). Performance in the context of local government organizations is defined as a measure of success in achieving established goals, both in the short and long term. The performance of public organizations differs from that of business organizations because their orientation is not on profit, but on public satisfaction and welfare. Therefore, evaluating the performance of public organizations is important as a basis for continuous improvement and increased public accountability.

Table 1. Ombudsman Annual Report 2022, Ranking of Public Reports on Local Government Service

Regencies/Cities	Report
East Java	28
Central Java	26
West Java	21
South Sulawesi	18
North Sumatra	17
Lampung	13
West Sumatra	12
Aceh	11
East Nusa Tenggara	11
Southeast Sulawesi	10
Bali	9
West Kalimantan	9
Central Sulawesi	9
South Sumatra	9
Banten	8
Bengkulu	8

Source: Ombudsman Annual Report, 2022

Based on the Ombudsman's 2022 annual report, West Java is among the top three provinces with the highest number of public service complaints in Indonesia, after East Java and Central Java. This condition indicates that there is still public dissatisfaction with the quality of public services in the province.

Table 2. Results of the Preliminary Survey on Public Agency Services in West Java Province Year 2023

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4
1	What is your opinion on the suitability of service requirements for the type of service?	2	6	22	1
2	How do you perceive the ease of service procedures at this Regional Apparatus/Work Unit?	3	9	18	1
3	What is your opinion about the service completion time?	2	15	13	1
4	What is your opinion on the appropriateness of the fees/rates paid compared to the established fees?	3	11	13	4

5	What is your opinion on the suitability of the services provided by Regional Apparatus/Work Units that provide services with the provisions stipulated in service standards?	4	5	22	0
6	What is your opinion about the ability of officers to provide good service in terms of knowledge, expertise, skills, and experience?	1	8	21	1
7	What is your opinion about the behavior of officers in providing services?	1	24	5	1
8	What is your opinion on the suitability of service standards with the capabilities and obligations of Regional Apparatus/Work Units in providing services as stated in the service announcement?	1	11	18	1
9	What is your opinion on the mechanism and follow-up of complaints, suggestions, and input in Regional Apparatus/Work Units that provide public services?	3	16	11	1
10	Activities/programs developed by agencies have accommodated every change and demand in the community	1	21	8	1

Source: Processed data, 2023

Explanation: 1. Not suitable, 2. Less suitable, 3. Suitable, 4. Very suitable

A preliminary survey of 54 respondents from 27 districts/cities in West Java shows public dissatisfaction with the quality of public services. Aspects such as service delivery, staff attitude, complaint mechanisms, and the ability to accommodate public aspirations are still rated low, requiring serious attention from local government leaders. This phenomenon underscores the urgent need to improve service ethics, empathy, and creativity in the delivery of public services.

Organizational performance encompasses not only work results, but also the processes by which work is carried out effectively. Performance is closely related to organizational strategy and its contribution to economic and social value. In the context of government, the effectiveness of public organizations must be evaluated based on their ability to meet the needs of stakeholders in a sustainable manner (Johnsen et al., 2024; Moon & Christensen, 2021). Improving the performance of local government organizations requires good governance, a strong internal control system, and leadership that is capable of mobilizing all elements of the organization to be oriented towards public service.

Leadership is a key factor in determining the quality of public organization performance. Effective leaders are required to have not only managerial skills, but also social sensitivity and empathy towards the community. Leadership is the ability of a person to influence others to achieve common goals. In the context of government, the quality of leadership is determined by the leader's ability to understand the needs of the people and adapt strategies to the changing times (Donkor et al., 2021; Lund, 2022). Leaders who are able to communicate openly and ethically will find it easier to build trust and encourage public participation in the development process.

Knowledge-oriented leadership is a modern approach that is relevant for addressing complex challenges in public organizations. This type of leadership focuses on the creation, transfer, and application of knowledge as the main resource of the organization. Knowledge-oriented

leaders act as facilitators of learning and innovation in the work environment. Knowledge-oriented leadership has a positive relationship with organizational performance through increased creativity and team collaboration (Mehmood et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023). In the context of local government, this approach is particularly important because it enables the transfer of experience, service innovation, and the application of data-driven solutions in public decision-making.

However, the effectiveness of knowledge-oriented leadership cannot be separated from the dimensions of ethics and empathy. Leadership ethics are the moral foundation that guides the behavior and decisions of leaders. Leaders who lack ethics tend to cause mistrust, conflict, and instability within organizations. Ethical leadership can increase the affective and normative commitment of subordinates by supporting ethical organizational behavior (Udin, 2024). In addition, empathy allows leaders to understand the feelings, needs, and aspirations of the community, so that the resulting public policies are more responsive and humanistic (Jian, 2021). The addition of empathy in leadership is not only an individual practice but also a social construct that strengthens relational ethics in social interactions. This shows that ethics and empathy complement each other in building healthy social interactions between leaders and subordinates as well as between the government and the community (Linville & Onosu, 2023).

The concept of Empathy Ethical Interaction is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of diverse public organizations such as those in West Java. This region has a high level of cultural, ethnic, and social diversity, which can be a source of both potential and conflict. Therefore, the ability of leaders and officials to interact ethically and empathetically is very important for creating social harmony and improving the quality of public services. It is clear that effective social interaction is a prerequisite for the creation of a well-functioning society. In this case, leaders who are able to foster ethical and empathetic interactions within organizations not only strengthen internal social cohesion, but also increase public trust in government (Al Halbusi et al., 2021).

Empathy Ethical Interaction has also been shown to play a role in encouraging organizational creativity and innovation. Yue et al.(2022) found that ethical empathetic interactions strengthen emotional connections between employees, which ultimately increases creativity and organizational performance. Empathetic leaders create a safe psychological environment where employees feel comfortable expressing new ideas without fear of being blamed. In the context of public organizations, this means opening up space for officials to convey innovative ideas related to bureaucratic simplification, service digitalization, or the development of policies based on community needs.

Research on the influence of knowledge-oriented leadership (KOL) on organizational performance shows mixed results. This factor appears to play a different role depending on the organizational context and various intermediaries involved. Some studies show that KOL plays a

positive role in improving organizational performance by encouraging innovation and its absorption capacity. For example, research shows that KOL can increase business model innovation and openness to innovation through absorption capacity (Bashir & Pradhan, 2023). This is in line with findings indicating that KOL has a significant influence on team performance in the health sector by mediating team collaboration (Khan et al., 2023).

On the other hand, several studies show that the direct influence of KOLs on organizational performance may not be prominent if it is not mediated by other factors such as service innovation and knowledge sharing quality (Sahibzada et al., 2023). These findings underscore the importance of knowledge sharing quality and service innovation as intermediaries that connect KOLs with organizational performance. Another study found that although KOLs have a direct impact on the satisfaction and productivity of knowledge workers, this impact ultimately contributes to organizational performance (Sahibzada et al., 2023). This highlights that KOLs can support performance through more complex pathways involving various interacting factors.

This study fills a gap in public sector leadership studies by integrating Knowledge-Oriented Leadership (KOL), Empathy Ethical Interaction (EEI), and Creativity as determinants of organizational performance. Most previous studies have highlighted KOL in a business context, but have not considered the role of empathy and ethics as social mediators in public bureaucracy. The novelty of this research lies in the development of an integrative model based on humanist values and the multicultural local culture of West Java, which positions empathy and ethics as catalysts for bureaucratic creativity towards innovative, adaptive, and community service-oriented public performance.

In the context of the West Java regional government, the application of Empathy Ethical Interaction can be the key to transformation towards a public organization that is innovation-oriented and provides excellent service. Leaders need to internalize the values of empathy in the decision-making process, while ethics serve as moral guidelines in every administrative action. Bureaucratic creativity must be directed towards responding to community needs in an adaptive manner, such as developing inclusive digital services for vulnerable groups and accelerating the resolution of public complaints through transparency-based mechanisms.

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Organizational Rewards, Knowledge-Oriented Leadership, Empathetic Ethical Interaction, Creativity, and Organizational Performance in West Java public organizations. By considering local cultural and contextual factors, this study is expected to not only contribute theoretically to public management literature, but also offer practical solutions for improving bureaucratic performance. An approach to leadership based on empathy and ethics is expected to build a creative, collaborative, and community service-oriented work culture. In the long term, the transformation of these values will strengthen

public trust in local government and accelerate the realization of good governance in West Java Province.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creativity

Creativity from a managerial perspective has been described as a subjective assessment, as the generation of original and useful ideas as complex activities including expertise, creative thinking, and motivation as a complex interaction between individuals and their environment, as a critical process, as a social activity, especially in context, as different thinking including fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration, and so on (Cirella, 2021; Lee & Lee, 2023). Creativity is an important element for organizations, especially in improving employee performance. With creativity, employees can design new procedures or processes that are more effective in carrying out tasks, as well as identify products or services that are more suited to customer needs. Improving existing procedures or processes is also a form of creativity that can increase organizational efficiency (Lua et al., 2023; Muñoz-Pascual et al., 2021).

In this study, the dimensions of creativity can be measured through the following dimensions (Dumas et al., 2024; Emami et al., 2022; Pinkow, 2022): (1) Creative Process, (2) Motivation and Initiative, (3) Knowledge and Expertise, (4) Work Environment and Culture, (5) Attractiveness and Interest, (6) Openness to New Experiences, (7) Uncertainty and Resilience, (8) Collaboration, (9) Evaluation and Reflection.

Organizational Performance

Performance is the result of cooperation among members or components of an organization in order to achieve organizational goals. Simply put, performance is the product of administrative activities, namely cooperative activities within an organization or group to achieve goals, the management of which is commonly referred to as management (Klein et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2023). Organizational performance reflects the level of achievement in carrying out tasks within an organization in realizing its goals, mission, and vision. This includes the functions and results of activities carried out within the organization, which are influenced by internal factors such as leadership style, communication, and team skills, as well as external pressures such as market conditions and institutional pressures (Fehan & Aigbogun, 2021; Utaminingsih et al., 2023).

This study uses performance evaluation for government offices involving several key dimensions, each of which is important for assessing the overall effectiveness and impact of public sector organizations, which can be measured through (Atobishi et al., 2024; Drolc & Keiser, 2020; Rabbi & Sabharwal, 2024) including: (1) Finance,

(2) Public service, (3) Operational efficiency, (4) Accountability, (5) Innovation, (6) Social impact.

Empathy Ethical Interaction

Ethical interactions based on empathy in leadership play an important role in maintaining and improving group dynamics. Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and feel the feelings of others, is the basis for ethical leadership, which includes fairness, integrity, and respect. Empathetic leaders encourage open communication, helping to create a safe environment for team members to express themselves, thereby enhancing collaboration. Additionally, empathy fosters trust, as team members feel understood and valued, ultimately increasing loyalty and commitment to group goals (Linvill & Onosu, 2023 ; Markey et al., 2020). Ethical interaction with empathy is a concept that involves a combination of empathy and ethical interaction in relationships between individuals, or between individuals and groups or organizations. Empathy, which is the ability to understand and feel the feelings of others, plays an important role in promoting morally and ethically guided interactions. This concept has implications in various fields, including healthcare, education, and even technology, as it emphasizes the importance of integrating empathy into ethical decision-making processes and social interactions (Heggstad et al., 2022).

Empathy in ethical interactions can be understood through several key dimensions that reflect how individuals view and respond to others in social and ethical contexts. These dimensions include (Bonfils et al., 2022; Stupacher et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2023) : (1) Emotional awareness (2) Perspective taking. (3) Responsiveness. (4) Emotional involvement. (5) Desire to help. (6) Tolerance for differences. (7) Commitment to justice. (8) Alignment with personal ethics and values.

Organizational Rewards

Rewards are benefits obtained from performing tasks, providing services, or fulfilling certain responsibilities. A sense of fairness in the distribution of rewards can increase employee satisfaction with the compensation they receive. The importance of rewards in increasing job satisfaction and motivation is explained in several studies, which show that rewards are not only limited to direct benefits, but also have a positive impact on intrinsic motivation and employees' intention to remain in their jobs (Abhicharttibutra et al., 2022; Salaten et al., 2023).

Organizational rewards are money, objects, or specific events that employees receive as compensation for their work or for doing something well, given by the organization. Research reveals that organizational rewards play an important role in workplace dynamics. For example, the type of reward, whether financial or non-financial, can influence behaviors such as knowledge sharing or employee creativity (Opoku et al., 2021; Zhang & Min, 2021). The importance of organizational support and understanding of employee preferences for rewards is also a

significant factor in the success of reward systems (Pearl Dlamini et al., 2022).

The dimensions of organizational recognition encompass various aspects that are crucial for improving employee performance and satisfaction. The main dimensions in this study include (Halbusi et al., 2021; Liu & Ren, 2022; Peng et al., 2022) : (1) Balance and Fairness Dimension. (2) Performance-Related Dimension. (3) Openness and Transparency Dimension. (4) Flexibility Dimension. (5) Organizational Values and Culture-Related Dimension. (6) Opportunities for Development and Growth Dimension. (7) Psychological Impact Dimension

Knowledge-Oriented Leadership

Knowledge-oriented leadership is defined as any attitude or action, whether individual or collective, that encourages new and important knowledge to be created, shared, and used in ways that bring about change in collective thinking and outcomes (Alzghoul et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2022). Knowledge-Oriented Leadership is a style in which a leader plays the role of a facilitator in knowledge and as a role model who recognizes and values knowledge sharing. This leadership style promotes trust and learning that emphasizes staff empowerment. In this context, knowledge-oriented leadership not only improves the quality of sustainable services but also mediates organizational innovation and psychological empowerment as important factors in improving service quality. This shows that knowledge-oriented leaders encourage employees to be more actively involved in knowledge management activities, especially in situations where they feel empowered (Malik et al., 2023).

In this study, the dimension of Knowledge Oriented Leadership covers four main aspects (Alzghoul et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023; Sahibzada et al., 2023), namely: (1) The dimension of knowledge development. (2) The dimension of knowledge management. (3) The dimension of communication and collaboration. (4) Facilitation of learning and development dimension.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical review and research paradigm framework described above, a number of research hypotheses have been formulated that reflect the relationships between the main variables and the suspected effects to be tested empirically in this study:

- H1: Organizational reward influences empathy ethical interaction.
- H2: Knowledge oriented leadership influences ethical empathy interaction.
- H3: Organizational rewards influence creativity.
- H4: Knowledge-oriented leadership influences creativity.
- H5: Organizational rewards influence organizational

performance.

H6: Knowledge-oriented leadership affects organizational performance.

H7: Empathy ethical interaction affects organizational performance.

H8: Empathy ethical interaction affects creativity.

The conceptual framework of the study is illustrated in the following figure, which shows the relationships between the variables studied. This model was constructed based on theoretical reviews and empirical findings from various previous studies described earlier.

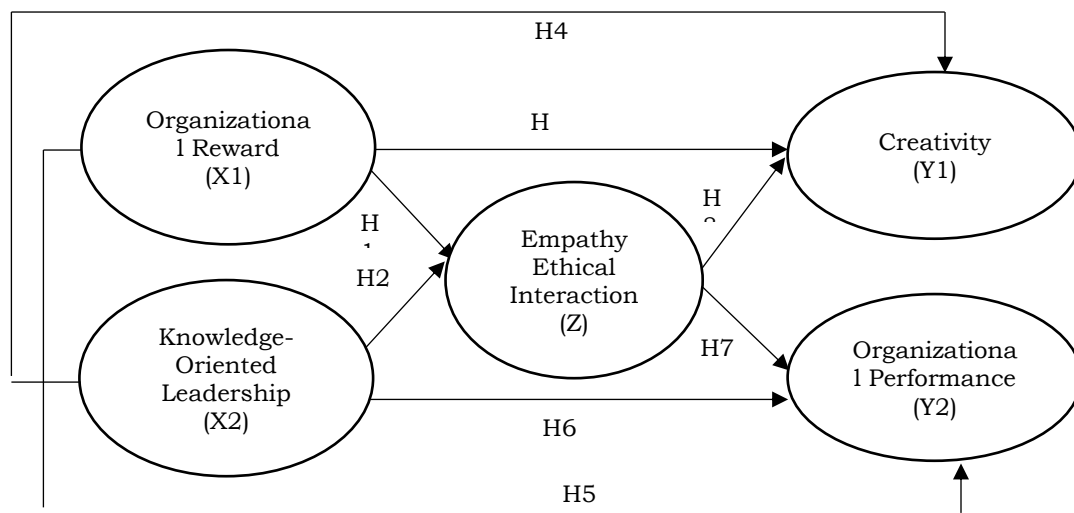


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHOD

This study is classified as explanatory research, which focuses on analyzing causal relationships between variables. Although it includes descriptions, its main objective is to test hypotheses to understand how one variable empirically affects another (Jensen, 2021; Setiadi et al., 2025). The variables include: organizational reward, knowledge-oriented leadership, empathy ethical interaction, creativity, and organizational performance.

The population of this study included all department heads in 27 districts and cities in West Java Province, totaling 775 people. The sample was determined using stratified random sampling techniques. Based on the Slovin formula calculation with a 5% margin of error, the number of research samples obtained was 262 respondents.

The data were analyzed through validity and reliability tests, as well as descriptive and inferential statistical analyses that included testing the outer model and inner model of the . This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ethical behavior and performance of department heads in

the West Java Province in the context of public organization governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

This study uses descriptive statistical analysis to describe the respondents' response patterns to each research variable. Data were obtained from 262 respondents using a five-point ordinal scale (1–5) with an agree–disagree scale technique. The interval value was set at 0.80, resulting in the following categories: strongly disagree (1.00–1.80), disagree (1.81–2.60), neutral (2.61–3.40), agree (3.41–4.20), and strongly agree (4.21–5.00). The mean score of each indicator was used to interpret the overall perception of respondents. The responses were then grouped based on descriptive statistics for five research variables, namely Organizational Reward, Knowledge-Oriented Leadership, Empathy Ethical Interaction, Creativity, and Organizational Performance, to describe the perception trends of the majority of respondents.

Table 3. Summary of Respondent Responses

No	Variable	Number of Indicators	Score Obtained	Maximum Score	Mean	Category
1	Organizational Reward	14	61.56	70	4,397	Very good
2	Knowledge-Oriented Leadership	16	70.47	80	4,404	Very good
3	Empathy Ethical Interaction	16	70.29	80	4,393	Very good
4	Creativity	18	77.26	90	4,292	Very good
5	Organizational Performance	12	52.79	60	4,399	Very good

Based on the results of descriptive analysis of the five research variables, all variables showed a "very good" category, with an average score above 4.29. This reflects that respondents have a positive perception of the managerial practices and organizational culture implemented. The Knowledge Oriented Leadership variable had the highest average (4.404), indicating the important role of knowledge-based leadership in driving organizational performance and innovation. Meanwhile, Creativity received the lowest score (4.292) among the, although it was still very good, indicating the need for increased support for the expression of creative ideas. Overall, organizational performance was optimal with a collaborative, ethical, and reward-oriented work culture.

Structural Equation Model-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) Analysis

This study involved five latent variables with a total of 76 indicators. The analysis was conducted through outer model and inner model testing to assess the relationship between

variables in the Structural Equation Model (SEM) using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method to obtain comprehensive and valid results.

Outer Model Test

Using PLS software, convergent validity was evaluated based on the factor loading values for each construct indicator. A construct is considered to have good validity if the factor loading value exceeds 0.70. In addition, additional criteria used include the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and communality values, both of which must have a value above 0.50 to ensure the reliability of the measured construct (Setiadi et al., 2025).

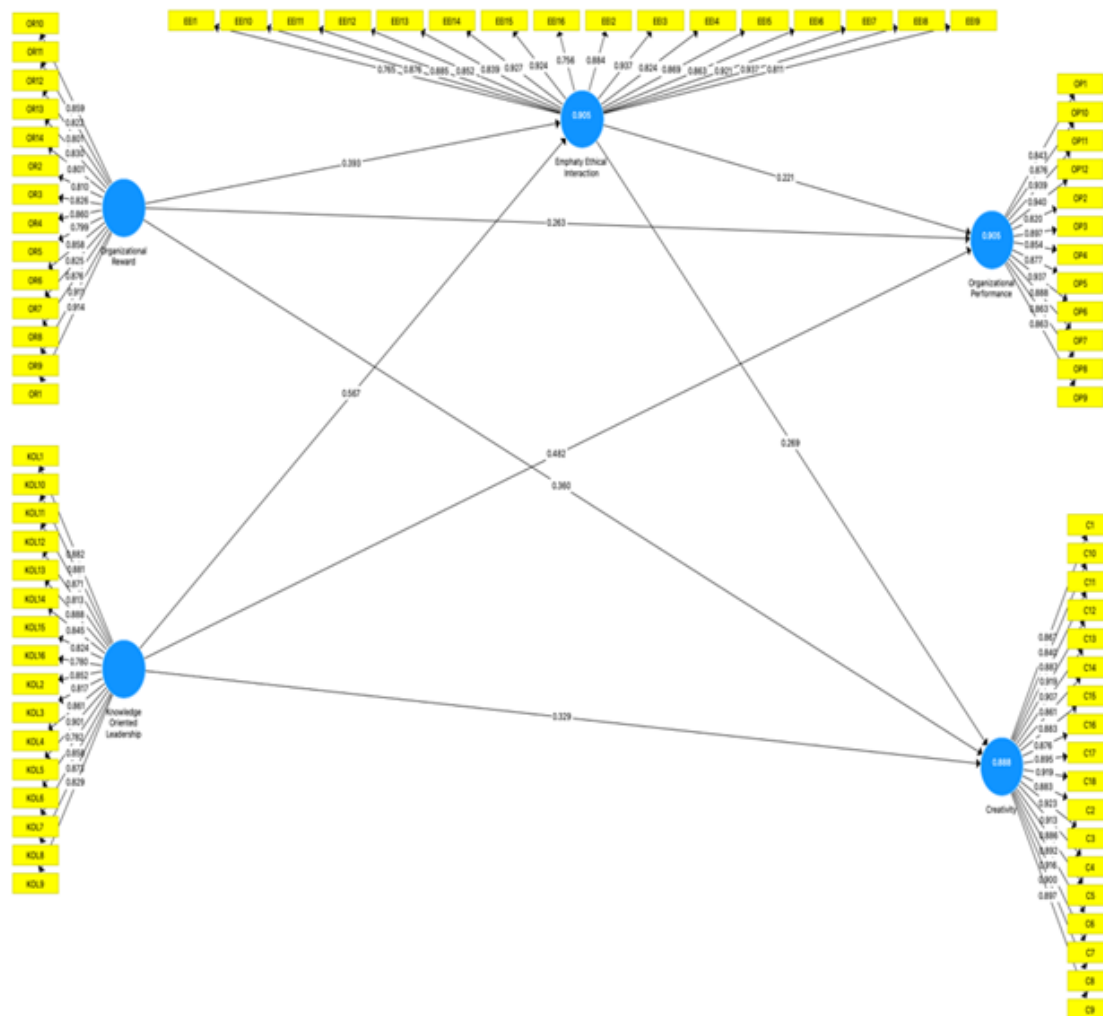


Figure 2. Final Loading Factor

Figure 2 shows the loading factor values of each manifest variable. If all indicators show a loading factor value for the latent variable above 0.70, then the indicator is considered valid and can represent the construct measured well in accordance with the convergent validity criteria in PLS analysis.

Table 4. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Organizational Reward	0.711
Knowledge-Oriented Leadership	0.719
Empathy Ethical Interaction	0.754
Organizational Performance	0.781
Creativity	0.797

The AVE values for all variables are above 0.50, indicating that each construct has strong convergent validity. This means that the indicators in each variable are able to explain more than 70% of the variance in the construct, giving the model excellent measurement reliability.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing factor loading values between constructs as well as AVE values and latent variable correlations. If an indicator shows the highest correlation with its main construct compared to other constructs, then that indicator is considered to meet the criteria for good discriminant validity.

Table 5. Cross Loading Factor

Indicator	Creativity	Empathetic Ethical Interaction	Knowledge-Oriented Leadership	Organizational Performance	Organizational Reward
C1	0.867	0.789	0.812	0.762	0.797
C2	0.883	0.813	0.829	0.783	0.843
C3	0.923	0.831	0.854	0.783	0.860
C4	0.913	0.825	0.858	0.774	0.861
C5	0.886	0.777	0.775	0.688	0.803
C6	0.892	0.767	0.801	0.732	0.807
C7	0.916	0.808	0.842	0.766	0.839
C8	0.900	0.858	0.872	0.826	0.861
C9	0.897	0.805	0.811	0.752	0.806
C10	0.840	0.763	0.780	0.723	0.787
C11	0.887	0.848	0.843	0.795	0.853
C12	0.919	0.825	0.813	0.801	0.814
C13	0.907	0.856	0.851	0.818	0.863
C14	0.861	0.845	0.834	0.815	0.816
C15	0.883	0.830	0.829	0.816	0.807
C16	0.876	0.837	0.853	0.832	0.837
C17	0.895	0.844	0.867	0.829	0.864
C18	0.919	0.822	0.811	0.787	0.809
EEI1	0.750	0.792	0.745	0.785	0.740
EEI2	0.840	0.884	0.868	0.834	0.872
EEI3	0.824	0.937	0.838	0.819	0.839
EEI4	0.765	0.841	0.834	0.788	0.826
EEI5	0.792	0.869	0.818	0.805	0.817
EEI6	0.763	0.863	0.808	0.782	0.784
EEI7	0.822	0.921	0.822	0.798	0.829
EEI8	0.818	0.937	0.830	0.808	0.830
EEI9	0.812	0.824	0.776	0.742	0.772
EEI10	0.813	0.876	0.831	0.823	0.837
EEI11	0.803	0.885	0.833	0.806	0.815

Indicator	Creativity	Empathetic Ethical Interaction	Knowledge-Oriented Leadership	Organizational Performance	Organizational Reward
EEI12	0.760	0.852	0.813	0.792	0.821
EEI13	0.812	0.862	0.849	0.819	0.842
EEI14	0.800	0.927	0.826	0.805	0.816
EEI15	0.817	0.924	0.833	0.818	0.827
EEI16	0.753	0.805	0.794	0.793	0.758
KOL1	0.801	0.857	0.882	0.832	0.853
KOL2	0.802	0.834	0.852	0.814	0.824
KOL3	0.783	0.774	0.817	0.790	0.770
KOL4	0.770	0.815	0.861	0.814	0.830
KOL5	0.833	0.824	0.901	0.840	0.855
KOL6	0.744	0.734	0.782	0.743	0.751
KOL7	0.847	0.815	0.858	0.798	0.831
KOL8	0.804	0.830	0.873	0.806	0.841
KOL9	0.821	0.767	0.829	0.730	0.835
KOL10	0.841	0.828	0.881	0.806	0.865
KOL11	0.785	0.812	0.871	0.819	0.842
KOL12	0.736	0.779	0.813	0.786	0.792
KOL13	0.818	0.818	0.888	0.837	0.845
KOL14	0.789	0.806	0.845	0.800	0.789
KOL15	0.707	0.777	0.824	0.818	0.795
KOL16	0.732	0.751	0.780	0.774	0.737
OP1	0.778	0.806	0.843	0.856	0.846
OP2	0.694	0.761	0.785	0.820	0.796
OP3	0.752	0.828	0.854	0.897	0.854
OP4	0.798	0.820	0.823	0.854	0.843
OP5	0.764	0.814	0.839	0.877	0.842
OP6	0.825	0.848	0.852	0.937	0.841
OP7	0.780	0.825	0.850	0.888	0.843
OP8	0.738	0.793	0.814	0.863	0.773
OP9	0.761	0.787	0.811	0.863	0.775
OP10	0.778	0.797	0.820	0.876	0.796
OP11	0.818	0.861	0.857	0.939	0.849
OP12	0.811	0.849	0.858	0.940	0.847
OR1	0.826	0.837	0.882	0.842	0.914
OR2	0.804	0.790	0.774	0.730	0.810
OR3	0.735	0.785	0.780	0.804	0.826
OR4	0.818	0.782	0.837	0.776	0.860
OR5	0.738	0.777	0.765	0.766	0.799
OR6	0.839	0.813	0.853	0.822	0.858
OR7	0.779	0.784	0.781	0.777	0.825
OR8	0.798	0.840	0.866	0.840	0.876
OR9	0.827	0.845	0.873	0.840	0.911
OR10	0.786	0.814	0.831	0.811	0.859
OR11	0.722	0.759	0.811	0.794	0.822
OR12	0.772	0.765	0.774	0.786	0.801
OR13	0.758	0.750	0.770	0.718	0.830
OR14	0.760	0.733	0.752	0.709	0.801

All indicators used to measure latent variables have met the criteria for discriminant validity, because the cross-loading values of each indicator are greater in the construct it represents than in other latent constructs, thus demonstrating good discriminative ability between variables in the model.

Reliability Test

Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha (CA) were used as the two main methods for measuring the level of internal consistency or construct reliability in Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis, to ensure the stability and reliability of the indicators that form the latent variables.

Table 6. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
Organizational Reward	0.968	0.972	Reliable
Knowledge-Oriented Leadership	0.974	0.976	Reliable
Empathy Ethical Interaction	0.978	0.980	Reliable
Organizational Performance	0.974	0.977	Reliable
Creativity	0.985	0.986	Reliable

The test results show that the data has good reliability, as indicated by a Composite Reliability (CR) value above 0.7 and a Cronbach's Alpha (CA) exceeding 0.6, meaning that all indicators consistently measure their respective constructs.

Inner Model Test

Structural model analysis was conducted to test the relationship between latent variables through path coefficient assessment and statistical significance testing. The t-statistic value was obtained using the bootstrapping technique, as shown in the following figure, which illustrates the estimated results of the relationship between variables in the research model.

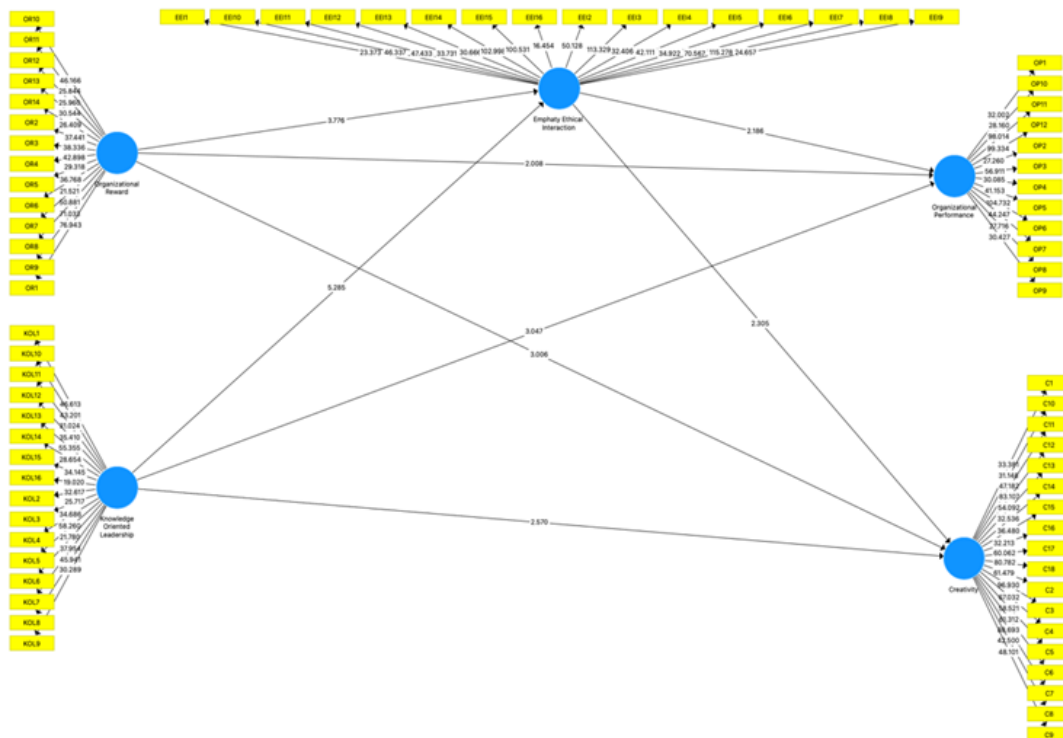


Figure 3. Bootstrapping Result

Hypothesis

The significance of the hypothesis was assessed through path coefficient analysis, t-statistic values, p-values, and parameter coefficients. The test results show the direction and magnitude of the influence between latent variables in the research model, which are summarized in the following table as a basis for interpreting structural relationships.

Table 7. Hypothesis Test Matrix

Hypothesis	Variable	Correlation	t-Statistic	t-Table	Description
H1	Organizational Reward -> Empathy Ethical Interaction	0.393	3.776	1.96	Influential
H2	Knowledge-Oriented Leadership -> Empathy Ethical Interaction	0.567	5.285	1.96	Influential
H3	Organizational Reward -> Creativity	0.360	3.006	1.96	Influential
H4	Knowledge-Oriented Leadership -> Creativity	0.329	2.570	1.96	Influential
H5	Organizational Reward -> Organizational Performance	0.263	2.008	1.96	Influential
H6	Knowledge-Oriented Leadership -> Organizational Performance	0.482	3.047	1.96	Influential
H7	Empathy Ethical Interaction -> Creativity	0.269	2.305	1.96	Influential
H8	Empathy Ethical Interaction -> Organizational Performance	0.221	2,186	1.96	Significant

Based on the results of hypothesis testing using Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis, all paths between variables showed t-statistic values greater than the t-table (1.96), which means that all hypotheses were accepted and had a significant effect. These findings indicate that organizational reward and knowledge-oriented leadership play an important role in shaping emphatic ethical interaction, creativity, and organizational performance.

Specifically, knowledge-oriented leadership has the strongest influence on empathy ethical interaction (t = 5.285) and organizational performance (t = 3.047), indicating that knowledge-based leadership is a dominant factor in encouraging ethical behavior and improving organizational performance. In addition, empathic ethical interaction was found to mediate the positive influence on creativity (t = 2.305) and organizational performance (t = 2.186), confirming that ethical and empathic interactions in the workplace can strengthen innovation and overall organizational effectiveness.

R-Square Test

The R Square value describes the degree of influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable, with the results shown in the following table.

Table 8. R Square Result

Variable	R Square
<i>Organization Reward, Knowledge Oriented Leadership -> Empathy Ethical Interaction</i>	0.905
Organizational Reward, Knowledge-Oriented Leadership, Empathy Ethical Interaction → Creativity	0.888
Organizational Rewards, Knowledge-Oriented Leadership, Empathetic Ethical Interaction -> Organizational Performance	0.905

The R Square value indicates the strength of the model in explaining the variability between variables. The analysis results show that Organizational Reward and Knowledge-Oriented Leadership explain 90.5% of the variation in Empathetic Ethical Interaction, indicating a very strong contribution to the ethical and empathetic behavior of employees. These three variables also explain 88.8% of the variation in Creativity, showing that creativity emerges through knowledge-based leadership support and organizational rewards. In addition, the same combination explains 90.5% of the variation in Organizational Performance, indicating that the model has a very high predictive ability. Overall, an R² value above 0.75 indicates that the model is substantive and reliable.

Predictive Relevance (Q2)

A model is considered to have relevant predictive value if the Q-square value is greater than 0 (> 0). Predictive relevance is obtained using the following formula:

$$Q2 = 1 - (1 - R12) (1 - R22) (1 - R32) \dots (1 - Rn)$$

$$Q2 = 1 - (1 - 0.905) (1 - 0.888) (1 - 0.905)$$

$$Q2 = 1 - (0.095) (0.112) (0.095) 0.0010108$$

$$Q2 = 0.998$$

A Q² value of 0.998 indicates that the model has very strong predictive relevance and is able to explain almost all of the observed data variation. In the context of Partial Least Squares (PLS), a Q² value above zero indicates that the model has predictive ability, while a value close to 1 confirms that the model has a very high level of predictive relevance. This means that the combination of the variables Organizational Reward, Knowledge Oriented Leadership, Empathetic Ethical Interaction, Creativity, and Organizational Performance can collectively predict the phenomenon under study with an almost perfect level of accuracy, reflecting a stable, robust, and empirically valid model.

Direct and Indirect Effects

The following is a summary of the analysis results regarding the direct and indirect effects of the variables Organizational Reward, Knowledge Oriented Leadership, and Empathy Ethical Interaction on Creativity and Organizational Performance in the research model.

Table 9. Direct and Indirect Influence

Direct Influence		Indirect Influence		Total
<i>Organizational Reward on Empathetic Ethical Interaction</i>	0.393			0.393
Knowledge-Oriented Leadership Towards <i>Empathy Ethical Interaction</i>	0.567			0.567
<i>Empathy Ethical Interaction Towards Creativity</i>	0.269			0.269
<i>Empathy Ethical Interaction Towards Organizational Performance</i>	0.221			0.221
<i>Organizational Reward on Creativity</i>	0.36	<i>Organizational Reward → Empathy Ethical Interaction → Creativity</i> (0.393 x 0.269)	0.105	0
<i>Knowledge-Oriented Leadership on Creativity</i>	0.329	<i>Knowledge-Oriented Leadership → Empathy Ethical Interaction → Creativity</i> (0.567 x 0.269)	0.152	0
<i>Organizational Reward on Organizational Performance</i>	0.263	<i>Organizational Reward → Empathy Ethical Interaction → Organizational Performance</i> (0.393 x 0.221)	0.086	0
<i>Knowledge-Oriented Leadership on Organizational Performance</i>	0.482	<i>Knowledge-Oriented Leadership → Empathy Ethical Interaction → Organizational Performance</i> (0.567 x 0.221)	0.125	0.607

The analysis results show that all variables have a direct and indirect positive influence on Creativity and Organizational Performance. The Knowledge Oriented Leadership variable shows the strongest total influence on Organizational Performance (0.607) and Creativity (0.481), indicating that knowledge-based leadership plays an important role in improving organizational performance and employee creativity. Meanwhile, Empathetic Ethical Interaction functions as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between organizational rewards and leadership with overall organizational outcomes.

This discussion examines key findings from research on the role of Empathy-Based Ethical Interaction as a catalyst for Creativity and Organizational Performance in local government institutions in West Java. Public sector organizations play a vital

role in implementing community-oriented governance, providing public goods and services, and ensuring transparency and accountability in the use of public funds.

Performance in the context of local government organizations is measured based on public satisfaction and welfare, not profit. However, conditions on the ground indicate serious challenges, with the Ombudsman's 2022 Annual Report placing West Java among the top three provinces with the highest number of public service complaints (21 reports), after East Java and Central Java. The results of a 2023 pre-survey of 54 respondents from 27 districts/cities in West Java further confirm public dissatisfaction, particularly in terms of service completion time, staff behavior, complaint handling mechanisms, and the ability to accommodate aspirations. This phenomenon underscores the urgent need to improve service ethics, empathy, and creativity in the delivery of public services.

This study aims to fill the gap in public sector leadership studies by integrating Knowledge-Oriented Leadership (KOL), Organizational Reward (OR), Empathy Ethical Interaction (EEI), and Creativity as determinants of organizational performance. The population studied was the heads of agencies in 27 districts/cities in West Java Province, with a sample size of 262 respondents.

Based on descriptive statistical analysis of data from 262 respondents, all five research variables, namely Organizational Reward, Knowledge-Oriented Leadership, Empathy Ethical Interaction, Creativity, and Organizational Performance, showed a "very good" category with an average score above 4.29. The Knowledge-Oriented Leadership (KOL) variable obtained the highest average (4.404), indicating that respondents had a positive perception of the importance of knowledge-based leadership in driving performance and innovation. Meanwhile, the Creativity variable recorded the lowest score (4.292), although it was still in the very good category, which can be interpreted as a signal of the need to increase support for the expression of creative ideas. In general, respondents' perceptions indicate that organizational performance in West Java is optimal, with a collaborative, ethical, and reward-oriented work culture.

The results of structural model testing (SEM-PLS) show that this research model has high explanatory power. The R Square value indicates that the variables of Organizational Reward and Knowledge-Oriented Leadership together explain 90.5% of the variation in Empathy Ethical Interaction. The combination of the three variables (OR, KOL, and EEI) explains 88.8% of the variation in Creativity and 90.5% of the variation in Organizational Performance. An R^2 value above 0.75 confirms that this model is substantive and reliable. The model's

predictive ability is also very strong, as indicated by a Q Square value of 0.998, which means that the model is able to explain almost all of the observed data variation.

Testing of eight hypotheses (H1 to H8) proved that all paths of inter-variable relationships were significant and accepted, with t-statistic values greater than t-table (1.96). Specifically, Knowledge-Oriented Leadership (KOL) was identified as the dominant factor, having the strongest direct influence on Empathy Ethical Interaction ($t = 5.285$) and also on Organizational Performance ($t = 3.047$). In terms of total influence, KOL shows the strongest influence on Organizational Performance (0.607) and Creativity (0.481). This confirms that leadership that focuses on the creation, sharing, and application of knowledge (KOL) is key in encouraging ethical behavior and improving performance.

The Organizational Reward variable also has a positive and significant effect on EEI ($t = 3.776$), Creativity ($t = 3.006$), and Organizational Performance ($t = 2.008$). Fair rewards can increase employee loyalty and motivation. Furthermore, the core concept of this study, Empathy Ethical Interaction (EEI), which involves the ability to understand other people's feelings (empathy) and morally guided interactions, has been proven to have a positive and significant effect on Creativity ($t = 2.305$) and Organizational Performance ($t = 2.186$). EEI functions as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between organizational rewards and leadership with overall organizational outcomes.

In the context of West Java, which has a high level of cultural and social diversity, the ability of leaders to interact ethically and empathetically is very important for creating harmony and improving the quality of public services. Empathetic leaders create a safe psychological environment, allowing employees to dare to voice new ideas without fear of being blamed, which in turn encourages bureaucratic creativity and innovation.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of an integrative model based on humanist values and the local culture of West Java, which positions empathy and ethics as catalysts for bureaucratic creativity towards innovative public performance. The practical implication is that improving performance requires good governance, a strong internal control system, and leadership capable of mobilizing all elements of the organization to be oriented towards public service.

Leaders need to internalize the values of empathy in decision-making, while ethics serve as moral guidelines. Bureaucratic creativity must be directed towards responding to community needs in an adaptive manner, such as through the development of inclusive digital services or the acceleration of

public complaint resolution based on transparency. An empathy- and ethics-based leadership approach is expected to build a creative and collaborative work culture, which will ultimately strengthen public trust in local government and accelerate the realization of good governance in West Java Province.

CONCLUSION

This study stems from the urgent need to improve the quality of public services in West Java regional government institutions, given that public complaints have placed this province in the highest category. The pre-survey results indicate public dissatisfaction, particularly with regard to the behavior of officials, the time taken to complete services, and the lack of accommodation of public aspirations, which confirms the need to improve ethics, empathy, and creativity in public services. The performance of public organizations is assessed based on public satisfaction and welfare.

The findings show that all variables studied, including organizational recognition, knowledge-oriented leadership, empathy-based ethical interaction, creativity, and organizational performance, received very good perceptions from respondents, although creativity has room for improvement. Knowledge-Oriented Leadership (KOL) emerged as the main and strongest driving factor. KOL, which focuses on the creation, sharing, and application of knowledge, is very powerful in shaping Empathy-Based Ethical Interaction (EEI) and directly influences Organizational Performance. This shows that leaders who act as facilitators of learning and innovation are the key to improving performance.

The core concept of the study, Empathy-Based Ethical Interaction (EEI), has been proven to play a significant role in promoting creativity and overall organizational performance. EEI serves as a connecting factor that strengthens the relationship between organizational recognition and leadership with organizational outcomes. Amidst the cultural diversity in West Java, the ability of leaders and officials to interact ethically and empathetically is essential for creating social harmony and improving service quality. Leaders who show empathy create a psychologically safe environment, encouraging employees to boldly express new ideas without fear, which ultimately advances bureaucratic creativity.

In conclusion, improving the performance of local governments requires good governance and leadership that can mobilize all elements of the organization to focus on public service. A leadership approach that internalizes the values of empathy and makes ethics a moral guide is essential for building a creative and collaborative work culture, which in the

long term will strengthen public trust and accelerate the realization of good governance in West Java Province.

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