

Corporate Culture, Transformational Charismatic Leadership and Cooperative Performance: Lessons from Indonesia

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Abstract

Cooperatives often suffer from negative perceptions due to low performance. However, the Sawit Makmur Cooperative in Tanah Laut Regency has excelled and improved member welfare through a strong corporate culture and effective leadership. This study explores the corporate culture of Sawit Makmur and analyzes the role of transformative charismatic leadership in its success. Using qualitative methods, research was conducted at the cooperative in Pelaihari City, South Kalimantan Province. Subjects were purposively selected, and data was collected via observation, in-depth interviews, and field notes. The findings indicate that (1) Cooperatives perform well when they have a corporate culture characterized by integrity, professionalism, and a humane approach. (2) This culture is supported by the commitment and collaborative spirit of both management and members, driven by transformative charismatic leadership. This leadership style nurtures and sustains the corporate culture, significantly enhancing cooperative performance. The research highlights that effective cooperatives must develop a corporate culture of integrity, professionalism, and humanity. Future studies should compare cooperatives with and without corporate cultures in macro-finance contexts to further understand the impact of cultural attributes on performance

Keywords: *Cooperative performance; corporate culture; leadership; professionalism; welfare.*

Introduction

Palm oil is a leading commodity for Indonesia in international trade and has the potential to become a new energy source that can support sustainable development that can reduce dependence on mining energy sources. The rapid development of the Indonesian palm oil industry has attracted the attention of the world community, especially the world's main vegetable oil producer. Indonesia has become the world's largest palm oil producer since 2006. In 2016, Indonesia's share of CPO production has reached 53.4% of the world's total CPO. Likewise in the global vegetable oil market, in 2016, the share of world CPO production reached 40% of the world's total main vegetable oil, while soybean oil had a share of 33.18%.⁵

Oil palm plantations, although they have a strategic role for the national economy, still have to deal with several problems, especially for environmental sustainability and the empowerment of oil palm farmers which bringing up various rejections from some groups against its development in Indonesia. In response to these demands, the government has developed sustainable palm oil management so that it does not have a negative impact on the community. Sustainable oil palm plantations are an application of sustainable agriculture concept, namely an agricultural system that is oriented towards economic, social and ecological balance. This demand was responded to through the application of ISPO and RSPO standards in oil palm plantations (Ngadi and Noveria, 2017).

One of the problems in developing sustainable oil palm is the management of independent smallholders, considering that most independent smallholders operate independently – are often without technical support and input from corporate producers and are outside the scope of the state – many of the activities of these smallholders lack regulation and support. As a result, independent smallholders in Indonesia are not only producers with low-productivity of palm oil, but also often operate without proper permits and on legal land that cannot be cultivated. Increasing the productivity of independent smallholders, in particular those improvements that are considered an important way to increase the sector's productivity and incomes of independent smallholders, in combination with other efforts, can significantly reduce ecological pressures on peat and forest landscapes. Furthermore, the legality of independent smallholders must be resolved immediately in order to meet Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO) standards. This

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⁵Data from (United States Department of Agriculture, 2016).

reduces the risk of smallholders being excluded from the formal market, which increasingly requires supplier compliance with public standards like ISPO, as well as other sustainability standards like the Sustainable Palm Oil Bargaining Organization (RSPO) and zero-deforestation commitments.

The Indonesian government has intervened with various smallholder technical assistance programs and is beginning to recognize that a more planned approach is required to address productivity, sustainability, and validity issues due to the very heterogeneous population of independent smallholders. However, a lack of basic comprehensive knowledge about the characteristics of independent smallholders and their unique challenges undermines efforts to establish and scale the effective methodology.

To strengthen this effort, in Pelaihari, Tanah Laut Regency, there is the Sawit Makmur Cooperative which was established in 2008 which was a former sugarcane plasma cooperative and has turned into an oil palm plasma cooperative with its core company of PTPN XIII and at the same time become a cooperative for independent oil palm farmers. This cooperative has succeeded in becoming a cooperative that performs very well and has succeeded in improving the welfare of its members, even in 2021, this cooperative has succeeded in establishing a palm oil processing factory which processes raw material for CPO, the only palm oil cooperative in Indonesia that has a good performance.

Cooperatives in Indonesia on average have an image as a business group that is inefficient and underperforming. Unlike most cooperatives in Indonesia, the Sawit Makmur Cooperative performs very well. The good performance of the the Sawit Makmur Cooperative is because this cooperative has a corporate culture that is properly maintained by its management and members. For this reason, this paper will examine the corporate culture in independent oil palm cooperatives and analyze how the corporate culture can be sustainable in these cooperative so that it can maintain the performance of the cooperatives until recently.

Previous research related to good organizational management includes research on organizational policies in meeting the spiritual needs of employees in supporting organizational policies (Sapta et al., 2021). Researchers (Nosratabadi et al., 2020), discuss the development of intellectual capital in organizational structures. In their research Caniels and Hatak (2019), discuss the ambidextrous approach and emphasizes the transactional nature of leadership. Commitment in the organization is as in Nurjanah et al. (2020), multicultural environment-based organization is as in Nosratabadi et al. (2020). Trust in an organization is determined by the effectiveness of leaders who successfully mediate and engage employees' voices (Gyen., 2019). Meanwhile, our research position is different because it emphasizes more on organizational settings with charismatic leadership.

Good organizational management supported by a corporate culture by cooperative members is a very important factor in realizing a farmer cooperative so that it can increase the empowerment of farmers and even their success in oil palm exploitation and will ultimately improve the welfare of oil palm farmers. For this reason, this study seeks to analyze the corporate culture of the Sawit Makmur Cooperative and analyze how this corporate culture can work well in the cooperative organization so that it can maintain good cooperative performance.

Method

This research uses qualitative research methods to gain a thorough understanding of the Sawit Makmur Cooperative's corporate culture. This examination was carried out at the Sawit Makmur Cooperative in Tanah Laut Regency, South Kalimantan. The subjects of this study were the administrators and members of the the Sawit Makmur Cooperative. The selection of informants in this study was determined using a purposive sampling technique. They consist of 2 (two) cooperative founders as well as cooperative leaders, 2 (two) cooperative administrators, 3 (three) cooperative members.

Data collection was carried out in several ways: First, observations were carried out in July 2021 by looking directly at the cooperative activities, greetings among the management and members of the cooperative as well as various other behaviors of the members and the management of the cooperative related to the activities of the cooperative. Second, in-depth interviews was done with selected informants using an interview guide and assisted with a tape recorder as a recording device. This interview was conducted from

August 2021 to October 2021. Each informant was interviewed for 1-2 hours with a frequency of between 1-3 interviews according to the adequacy of the data.

Transcribing the results of the interview recordings and providing marginal notes in the form of the themes studied, the sequence of events, and conceptual explanations of the written expressions were used to conduct data analysis. The transcripts of several informants' interviews were then classified based on themes related to the research objectives. The classified data is then narrated so that it can describe the phenomenon based on field data and reveal various findings that are discussed with previous theories related to the research theme.

Results and Discussions

The Sawit Makmur Cooperative and the Empowerment of Oil Palm Farmers

Cooperatives are essentially a form of cooperation in the economic field. This collaboration was held because of the similarity of their needs in life. These people together work on their daily needs, needs related to their company or household. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to have ongoing cooperation. Nevertheless, inclusive leadership is able to provide impetus in creating a climate of organizational diversity and facilitating participatory leadership practices (Meng et al., 2021). If in cooperatives that have suppressed the form of cooperation as the basis for leadership, of course, an inclusive leadership model can also be adopted to strengthen leadership in cooperatives.

One of the cooperatives that is committed to developing a joint business with all members of the cooperative is the Sawit Makmur Cooperative located in Pelaihari city, Tanah Laut Regency. This cooperative is a cooperative with very good performance, especially for the standard of a plasma cooperative that is partnered with the nucleus oil palm plantation company of PTPN XIII. This cooperative is a unique oil palm cooperative in Indonesia, because it accommodates two groups of farmers, namely plasma farmers who partner with PTPN XIII and independent smallholders who manage their own plantations. There are 551 plasma farmers who are members of this cooperative, especially former sugarcane plasma farmers who have switched to oil palm plantations. Plasma plantations in Tanah Laut district are spread over 14 villages, 6 sub-districts with a plasma area of 2,235

The Sawit Makmur Cooperative also opens membership for independent oil palm smallholders. As many as 31 people were recorded as representatives of farmer groups that accommodate independent oil palm farmers who are members of this cooperative spreading across several areas in Tanah Laut Regency as shown in the distribution map of independent oil palm smallholders who are members of the the Sawit Makmur Cooperative as shown in Figure 1 below:

A study conducted by Porcu et al. (2020) which shows that corporate culture in the form of collaborative culture and control culture has influenced performance in marketing and makes value as a company's competitive advantage Porcu et al. (2020). Furthermore, Qamruzzaman and Karim S (2020) show a very strong effect of corporate culture, commitment and HRM and JIT management on the company's operational performance (Karim and Qamruzzaman, 2020). A study of corporate culture that adopts national culture that influences on company performance Song et al. (2018) and a study by Huang Ji and Li Ye (2017) about corporate culture in the form of environmental care values that have resulted in green innovation and have improved company performance while preserving the environment (Huang and Li, 2017).

This study also contributes to the study of corporate culture, especially in cooperative economic institutions that operate like companies. This corporate culture has become a joint agreement between the management and members of the Sawit Makmur Cooperative and has become a corporate culture in managing the organization and providing services to various parties related to the cooperative.

The Corporate Culture in the Sawit Makmur Cooperative is: integrity, professional and humane approach as shown in Figure 2 below:

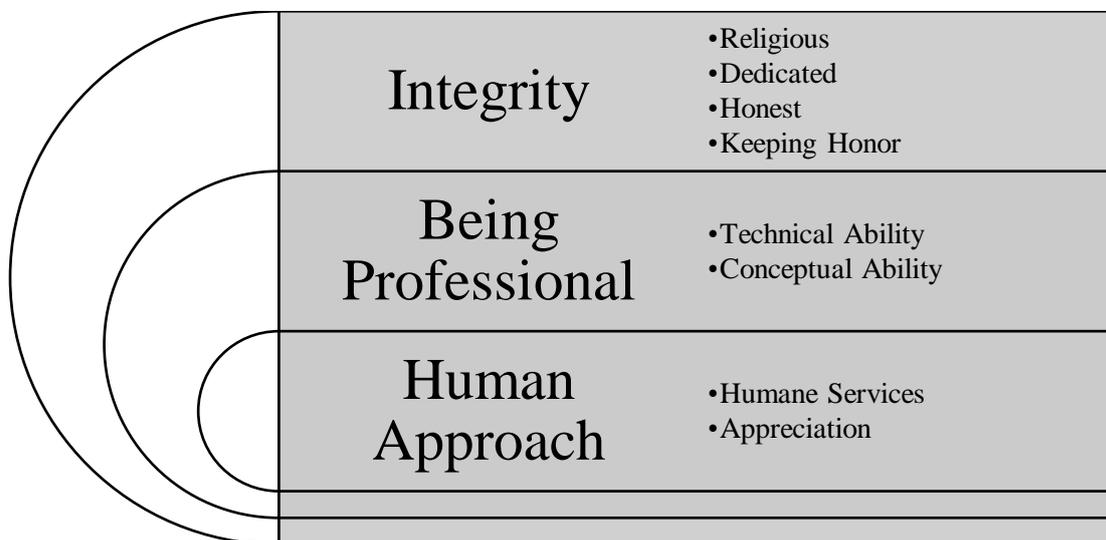


Figure 2. Behavior Forms of Corporate Culture from the Sawit Makmur Cooperative.

Source: taken from the results of interviews with research informants, 2022.

The picture above shows some of the behaviors of the employees, management and members of the cooperatives who are involved in various cooperative charities. This behavior has been well ingrained in them and is manifested in various service activities in cooperatives into organizational culture or corporate culture for cooperatives. Some of these corporate cultures will be described below:

Integrity

Integrity can be defined as pious, dedicated, honest, always maintaining honor and good name, and obeying the code of ethics and applicable regulations. Integrity is matters or aspects that are moral or ethical. The management and members of the cooperative make this integrity a common guideline in working.

In general, people will feel happy doing a collaboration with other people who have integrity, maintaining honor and good name, and obeying the code of ethics and applicable regulations. According to Bai et al., workers have a greater tendency to regard their ethical leaders as ethical role models in the team (Bai et al., 2019). So with this behavior, the leader always acts full of responsibility in carrying out his activities. This can be seen from the services provided to customers in responding to their complaints directly so that the problem is resolved. In this regard, Mr. Sugiono, as the Supervision Manager said:

“As employees, we have to behave well, Sir, because in the future the community will be able to judge whether the cooperative's employees are polite in their behavior. In addition, the dress code must also be appropriate. In order to maintain the good name of this cooperative, we always keep

the secret and cannot leak it out, because it is related to the internal problems of the cooperative itself. So whatever the problem is, it is enough to discuss it internally” (interview, April 28, 2021).

From that expression, it can be seen that the cooperative management tries to maintain the honor and good name of the cooperative by being polite, obeying the code of ethics by keeping company secrets. In addition, the management is responsive in dealing with complaints from customers.

The implementation of the integrity value of the cooperative management is shown by their excellent dedication. They have a high level of discipline and are committed to carrying out their duties well and obeying the rules well. Therefore, the presence of leaders is not a prerequisite for them to carry out their various tasks but solely because of their commitment to work well in order to maintain their integrity in the cooperative environment.

Being Professional

The next corporate culture that is owned by cooperative management is being professional. In this study, the term being professional is the real ability of employees in carrying out their daily tasks.

Mr. Sugiono, as the Supervision Manager explained that:

“Being professional means employees work competently. They have the knowledge and abilities as needed in accordance with the demands of their duties in accordance with their job descriptions” (interview, 28 April 2021).

From Mr. Sugiono's explanation above, it can be seen that the employees described above can be seen as professionals who have abilities in two respects, namely: technical abilities based on the fields they have and conceptual abilities, namely working in accordance with their respective job descriptions. .

Technical ability is the ability of management and employees to carry out their various tasks with their set of knowledge in accordance with the areas of their responsibility and authority. They work skillfully based on the correct rules and procedures in their work so that they can work with a high degree of accuracy and speed.

Conceptual ability in this case is the mental ability to coordinate and integrate all parts and activities of the organization. Conceptual skills are the development of creative and innovative instincts which must also be possessed by employees of the Sawit Makmur Cooperative. In carrying out the work, each employee in each section has his/her respective duties, where in principle the work he/she does leading to the same goal, namely organizational success.

Mr. Suyono, as the Finance Manager stated that:

“I think the employees already know what their duties and responsibilities are, Sir. They are only given special instructions when it is necessary.” (Interview, 29 April 2021)

In general, cooperative employees and management, whether they realize it or not, are able to coordinate and integrate all parts and activities of their work. This is also supported by their long working period. The ability of employees to coordinate and integrate all these parts is important to realize the cooperation between employees and management of the Sawit Makmur Cooperative which really needed in carrying out work in cooperatives. Coordination between employees and leaders or between employees themselves is important to discuss work so as to reduce complaints from customers and obstacles in carrying out their duties.

Humane Approach

The humane approach is the services carried out with the heart by the management and employees of the cooperative, namely services that pay attention to the norms of propriety and are accompanied by full of love. The humane approach is an approach in service that is done by employees to be able to relate to other people both inside and outside the organization. The humane approach is also in the form of respect for

⁷ (Interview, 29 April 2021)

others. The leadership appreciates what the subordinates do and the services provided by the management and employees of the cooperative by prioritizing respect for whoever is served.

Service with a humane approach is very important for employees to have because the main function of cooperatives is to provide services to the community, thus creating good relations with all parties, especially with cooperative members. Good relations between employees and cooperative members will increase the cooperative's good performance in the judgment of the community. In addition, services with a human approach in the form of cooperation and good communication between employees and cooperative members can facilitate the execution of the employees' duties and lead to satisfaction of cooperative members.

Mr. Suyono, as the Finance Manager stated that:

“We have a cooperative relationship with each part, Sir, especially regarding the development of the cooperative itself. We are very concerned about the satisfaction of cooperative members. Cooperative members can directly provide input or perhaps complaints if they feel that we are still lacking in providing services.”⁸(Interview 29 April 2021).

From the information above, it can be seen that the employees of the Sawit Makmur Cooperative have a good relationship with the members where indirectly the relationship will affect the opinion of members of this cooperative. If a good relationship occurs, members will feel comfortable using capital loans from the cooperative, otherwise, if what happens is a bad relationship, it will reduce the credibility and trust of members in the services provided by the Sawit Makmur Cooperative.

Corporate Culture, Transformational Charismatic Leadership Model, and Cooperative Performance

Leadership and organizational culture are the most important elements in an organization so that companies can compete successfully and gain sustainable profits. According to Khuwaja et al, research shows that paternalistic and servant leadership styles have a positive influence on employees' job satisfaction and negative political perceptions (Khuwaja et al., 2020). Furthermore, ethical behavior and entrepreneurial leadership play a role in improving organizational performance (Widyani et al., 2020).

Organization can benefit from their leadership skills, strategic thinking, and risk-taking abilities (Liu and Wang, 2023). Therefore, understanding the relationship between green entrepreneurship and circular economy is crucial for achieving economic growth, social welfare, and environmental sustainability (Yasir et al., 2023). Therefore, banks should consider the social practices they adopt to improve their service delivery and financial performance (Haddad et al., 2023). In summary, promoting the digital economy can promote a culture of business innovation by streamlining channels of human capital and boosting overall output.

Investment in ICT is crucial for improving intellectual capital efficiency and contributing to economic growth (Dong et al., 2023). However the study found that hedonic and utilitarian motivations are both important factors in consumer behavior, with hedonic motivations being more important in high individualism cultures and utilitarian motivations being more important in high uncertainty avoidance cultures (Ribeiro et al., 2023). In addition for this that evidence of the positive influence of these two dimensions of organizational culture in combating bribery practices within organizations (Rahman et al., 2023). At the same time filosofi of culture at bisnis can increase company and manager CSR (Makwara et al., 2023); (Ximenes et al., 2019).

In the study of cooperatives, the performance of cooperative organizations is also determined by organizational culture or corporate culture, similar to the findings above. However, in contrast to the organizations above, cooperatives will be good and become cooperatives that perform well because of a corporate culture that is maintained by the attitude of “commitment” and “helping spirit” carried by the management and members of the cooperative and strengthened through transformative charismatic leadership.

⁸ (Interview 29 April 2021)

The relationship between corporate culture and the two pillars of corporate culture, namely “commitment” and “helping spirit” and transformative charismatic leadership can be seen in Figure 3 below:

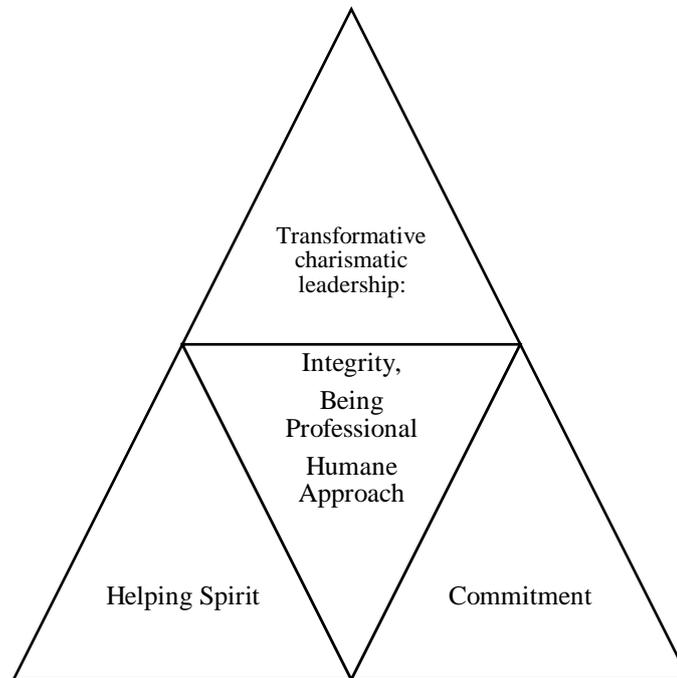


Figure 3. Relationships of Corporate culture, attitude of commitment and helping spirit and also transformative Charismatic Leadership.

Source: results of data analysis from interview with research informants

From the Figure 3, it can be seen that the implementation of corporate culture requires an atmosphere that can strengthen the management and members of the cooperative to continue to behave in accordance with the cooperative corporate culture. This atmosphere will be awakened through two things. First, there are two attitudes possessed by the management and members of cooperatives, namely “commitment” in developing cooperatives, and, in accordance with the nature of cooperatives that seek to improve the welfare of all cooperative members, cooperative management and cooperative members must also have a “helping spirit”.

From Byun, with corporate culture can motivating innovation (Byun, 2022); (Cadden et al., 2020). There for this study have two attitudes guarding the corporate culture so that it is maintained and becomes the guideline that is carried out by all management, employees and members of the cooperative. Cooperative performance will be good when cooperatives have a corporate culture which can make the cooperative performs well. However, considering that a cooperative is a joint business group where the capital that develops is the capital owned by all members of the cooperative and not owned by individuals, cooperatives can build a good corporate culture (as shown in the pyramid), which must be supported by two attitudes that must be owned by the management and members of the cooperative, namely the attitude of “commitment” and the helping spirit that are on the both sides of the pyramid that flank the corporate culture.

Second, the corporate culture and the attitude that supports corporate culture in both the management and members of the cooperative can grow and develop through leadership that can ensure that all components of the cooperative implement the corporate culture well, namely through transformative charismatic leadership.

Transformative charismatic leadership is loved by his subordinates because of the quality of the leader, especially because the leader has integrity and has firmness in decision making and has a clear vision and direction in organizational development and has the courage to realize that vision.

The meaning of integrity carried out by a leader is related to the ethics of the leader. They are able to motivate and set an example for cooperative members, both in the work environment and with lower-line members, in carrying out their duties and functions properly and in accordance with existing instructions and rules. In this regard, Mr. Sarjono, as the General Manager and HRD of the Sawit Makmur Cooperative, said:

“This cooperative provides services to the community in providing capital. As the leader, of course, I must set an example for my subordinates by arriving on time, for example, working optimally in carrying out my duties. While the way to motivate my subordinates is by providing the necessary directions to reward those who excel, I think it can motivate the employees to improve their performance.⁹ (interview, April 28, 2021)

From the interview, it can be seen how the Head of the Cooperative and the Head of the Subscription Relations Section as leaders in each section motivate their subordinates in ways that are applied by the leadership, namely regularly holding coordination meetings every 3 months, which is one effective way of motivating the cooperative management to carry out their respective duties and functions because the coordination meeting will evaluate the performance of existing staff in a particular work area. In addition, it provides an example in terms of discipline in working hours.

Conclusion

Cooperative organization as a joint business organization is an economic organization that involves many members and administrators of cooperatives. However, in order to make good performance, it must be managed like a corporate organization. Cooperatives as a corporation must have a corporate culture. The corporate culture that is owned by cooperatives is integrity, professional and humane approach.

The application of a corporate culture in cooperatives requires a commitment and a helping spirit possessed by the management and members of cooperatives. cooperative. The development and application of corporate culture in cooperatives requires the existence of a person who is strong, can protect and be trusted to bring the cooperative to a better direction and is dedicated to the empowerment of all members of the cooperative. These expectations can be obtained from leaders who have a transformational charismatic leadership model.

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