



Research Article

# The Digital Bureaucracy Paradox: The Dilemma of Visionary Leadership in Balancing Work From Anywhere (WFA) Flexibility and Civil Servant Discipline at the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City

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**Abstract,** This research aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the complex dynamics termed the "Digital Bureaucracy Paradox," a phenomenon that emerged significantly following the implementation of the Work From Anywhere (WFA) policy within the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City. The primary focus this study lies in the strategic dilemma faced by visionary leadership in balancing modern flexible work patterns with the obligation to enforce Civil Servant (ASN) discipline, which has historically been conventional and rigid. Amidst massive digital transformation, local-level bureaucracy is forced to adapt to work models requiring high agility, while simultaneously remaining bound by formalistic disciplinary regulatory standards. Quantitative findings indicate that although digital platforms have been effective as instruments for work instructions, the effectiveness visual supervision remains irreplaceable in maintaining the integrity of working hours, particularly regarding low scores in separating personal and professional matters during WFA. Conversely, submissions the E-Kinerja (E-Performance) system show very high level of administrative compliance, yet do not fully guarantee the quality of substantive outputs. Statistical analysis confirms that adaptive digital leadership has decisive influence on the successful implementation of the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE). These findings offer theoretical contribution to the study of bureaucratic behaviour within digital ecosystems and provide practical recommendations for redefining the ASN discipline from formalistic patterns toward a result-based substantive discipline. The synergy between visionary leadership and the strengthening of bottom-up accountability mechanisms through public participation is expected to realise a governance framework that is not only technologically modern but also functionally accountable in the post-pandemic era.

**Keywords:** Agency Theory; Bureaucracy Paradox; Civil Servant Discipline; Digital Leadership; Work From Anywhere (WFA); Public Accountability.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world of public administration is currently at a crucial crossroads due to a wave of digital disruption that is forcing conventional bureaucracies to transform into more agile and adaptive entities. This transformation is not merely about the adoption of hardware and software; rather, it involves a fundamental shift in leadership paradigms and work culture within the public sector. In Indonesia, the drive toward the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE) has established new standards in public service, where flexibility and speed have become primary indicators of success. The Work From Anywhere (WFA) phenomenon, which initially emerged as an emergency response to the global pandemic, has now evolved into a serious alternative work model considered for enhancing the productivity and well-being of the workforce. However, behind this potential for flexibility, significant challenges arise for bureaucratic leaders at the local level, particularly within strategic institutions such as the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City.

The core issue is the "Digital Bureaucracy Paradox," where a leadership vision to create a modern and flexible organisation often clashes with the reality of Civil Servant (ASN) discipline, which remains rooted in physical supervision patterns. As the engine of city-level government administration, the Regional Secretariat bears a profound responsibility to ensure that the wheels of government continue to turn effectively without sacrificing integrity and accountability. Visionary leadership is required not only to possess proficient digital literacy but also the ability to build trust amidst the limitations of direct supervision. Without the right balance, WFA flexibility risks becoming a loophole for disciplinary decline that could paralyse overall organisational performance.

Theoretically, this challenge can be understood through the lens of Agency Theory, which highlights potential information asymmetry between leaders as *principals* and employees as *agents*. In remote work systems, the risk of shirking or task neglect by employees increases because leaders no longer maintain direct visual control. This necessitates a redefinition of the meaning of discipline itself; discipline should no longer be measured solely by physical presence or rigid working hours (formalistic discipline) but must shift toward substantive discipline based on performance target achievement and responsiveness to responsibilities. Herein lies the critical role of visionary leadership: to construct a new result-based organisational culture where trust becomes the primary currency in professional interactions. Reality in the field, specifically in Sorong City, indicates that digital infrastructure is not the sole determinant of this transformation's success. Mental readiness and mindset shifts among bureaucrats often pose greater hurdles than technical constraints. Some concerns are that loosening physical supervision will erode bureaucratic authority and lower service standards for the community. Therefore, this research is vital to explore how appropriate leadership strategies can bridge the gap between the need for modern work flexibility and the obligation to maintain strict discipline as mandated by Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning Civil Servants.

While some studies examine administrative capacity in facing rapid environmental changes, this research goes further by highlighting the dimensions of organisational behaviour and leadership styles in the digital era. The primary objective of this study is to provide strategic recommendations for the Sorong City Government in formulating flexible work policies that uphold professional values and public accountability. By understanding the existing paradox, it is expected that the bureaucracy will not only become technologically modern but also more resilient in facing future governance challenges in the post-pandemic era.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Digital Transformation and the Dynamics of Public Bureaucracy

Digital transformation within the public sector is not merely a technical phenomenon but a re-engineering of the structures and functions of government administration aimed at enhancing efficiency and responsiveness. According to Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011), public management reform involves deliberate changes to the structures and processes of public sector organisations with the objective of making them perform better. In this context, digitalisation serves as a catalyst that dismantles rigid and hierarchical traditional bureaucratic silos, moving towards more networked government organisational forms.

This transformation demands administrative capacity readiness that encompasses not only infrastructure but also human capital capable of utilising technology as an instrument of service. At the regional level, such as the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City, this transformation is reflected in the adoption of the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), which alters interaction patterns between work units. However, these changes often create tension between legacy standard operating procedures and the demand for speed in the digital era. The success of this transformation heavily depends on the extent to which the bureaucracy can absorb innovation without losing its essence of public accountability.

#### Agency Theory

Agency Theory provides a relevant framework for analysing work relationships within the WFA system. This theory is rooted in economic thought, examining the relationship between stakeholders (*principals*) and task executors (*agents*), where potential conflicts of interest and information asymmetry exist. In a bureaucracy, structural leaders act as principals who delegate authority to civil servants (ASN) as agents to carry out service functions. The primary issue arises when physical supervision vanishes in the WFA model, creating opportunities for agents to engage in shirking or neglecting their obligations for personal

interest. Eisenhardt (1989) emphasises that to mitigate this risk, organisations require effective monitoring mechanisms or incentive systems aligned with work outcomes. Therefore, in the digital era, bureaucratic control must transform from direct behavioural supervision toward result-based or output-based monitoring, measurable through digital platforms. This poses a significant challenge for leaders at the Regional Secretariat to ensure that location flexibility does not diminish the organisation's collective productivity.

#### Trust-Based Leadership

Visionary leadership in the digital era requires the ability to look far ahead, beyond the physical boundaries of the office and conventional working hours. This type of leadership is no longer about top-down instructions, but rather about inspiring and empowering employees within a flexible work ecosystem. According to Mayer et al. (1995), trust-based leadership is built upon three primary pillars: ability, benevolence, and integrity. A visionary leader must possess the capability to utilise communication technology to maintain connectivity with subordinates, despite the lack of direct face-to-face interaction.

Trust becomes the social capital that replaces repressive administrative controls; when employees feel valued and trusted, intrinsic motivation emerges to achieve high performance. Within the Sorong City Government environment, the application of this leadership style is crucial for bridging the gap between high disciplinary expectations and the reality of work freedom in the WFA format. Without mutual trust, WFA policies will merely be perceived as a suspicion-laden administrative burden, rather than a management innovation that humanises the workforce.

#### Conceptual Development

##### Reconstructing the Concept of Civil Servant (ASN) Discipline

Traditionally, civil servant work discipline has often been interpreted formalistically, namely as compliance with attendance hours, uniform regulations, and physical presence in the office. However, the enactment of Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning Civil Servants demands an adaptive redefinition of discipline to meet contemporary needs. Substantive discipline emphasises moral and professional responsibility toward assigned tasks, regardless of where those tasks are performed. In this perspective, a civil servant is considered disciplined if they can complete performance targets on time, remain responsive to digital coordination, and maintain the quality of their work output.

This shift is vital because, in the WFA model, success indicators can no longer be measured by fingerprint attendance machines alone, but rather through electronic performance management systems. This new construction of discipline demands high self-discipline from every individual civil servant, driven by an awareness of their role as public servants. Consequently, discipline is no longer an instrument of top-down pressure but a manifestation of professional integrity that forms the new work culture within the digital bureaucracy.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design to obtain a comprehensive overview of the dynamics between leadership and civil servant (ASN) discipline within the Work From Anywhere (WFA) framework. As explained by Creswell (2014), mixed methods allow researchers to combine the depth of qualitative data with the generalizability of quantitative data to address complex phenomena in public administration. In the first phase, quantitative analysis is conducted to map the causal relationship between digital leadership variables and work discipline through numerical data. The second phase consists of a qualitative analysis serving to deepen these quantitative findings, exploring the reasons behind bureaucratic behaviour and understanding leadership challenges more contextually at the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City. The integration of both methods occurs during the final interpretation stage to produce conclusions that are credible and possess high validity. By adopting this structure, the research goes beyond statistical figures to present a policy narrative grounded in dynamic field realities.

The research location was determined purposively at the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City, Southwest Papua Province, considering this institution serves as the hub for policy coordination and ASN management at the regional level. The population includes all civil servants within the Regional Secretariat, ranging from structural officials to administrative staff who have been exposed to digital-based work systems. For the quantitative component, sampling was conducted using a probability sampling technique through disproportionate

stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation across all echelons and ranks. Meanwhile, for the qualitative component, key informants were selected using purposive sampling, consisting of the Regional Secretary (Sekda), Assistants, Heads of Departments, and staff representatives to gain diverse perspectives. The quantitative sample size was determined based on the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error to ensure the findings can be generalised to the population level.

Data in this study are derived from primary and secondary sources collected through rigorous and systematic procedures. Quantitative data collection was conducted via online questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale, which underwent validity and reliability testing through an instrument pre-test. The questionnaire items were designed to measure visionary leadership variables, perceived WFA effectiveness, and levels of substantive employee discipline. Simultaneously, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews to allow informants the space to express their views freely while remaining focused on the research topic. Additionally, participant observation was conducted by monitoring coordination activities within digital communication groups and performance management platforms (E-Kinerja). Documentary studies were also performed by reviewing internal regulations, digital attendance reports, and the Regional Secretariat's strategic planning documents to strengthen empirical arguments.

Data analysis was performed separately for each method before final triangulation to synthesise research findings. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression analysis to assess the extent to which visionary leadership influences work discipline in the WFA era. Data processing was facilitated by statistical software to ensure accuracy in calculations and the significance interpretation of inter-variable relationships. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analysed following the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. To ensure qualitative data trustworthiness, the researcher performed source triangulation (comparing information across different job levels) and technique triangulation (comparing interview results with performance documents). The entire analytical process is directed toward identifying the "Digital Bureaucracy Paradox" at the heart of this research, ultimately producing policy recommendations based on robust and objective scientific evidence.

#### 4. RESULT

This study involved respondents from various hierarchical levels within the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City. Based on the collected data, the majority of respondents fall within the productive age range (30-45 years), possessing relatively good digital literacy; however, they still require intensive supervision within the remote work scheme. The following is a tabulation of the data obtained from questionnaires distributed to civil servants to measure their perceptions of the variables Visionary Leadership and Substantive Discipline within the Work From Anywhere (WFA) ecosystem.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Questionnaire Responses for Leadership and Discipline Variables.

No	Variables	Instrument	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mea n	Result
<b>A</b>	Visionary Leadership								
1	Digital Coordination	The leader provides clear work instructions through digital platforms (WhatsApp/Email).	2%	5%	13%	45%	35%	4.06	Very Good
2	Delegation of Trust	The leader demonstrates full trust in employee integrity while working outside the office.	5%	15%	25%	35%	20%	3.50	Good
3	Output Orientation	The leader focuses more on work quality (output) than on the physical presence of employees in the office.	8%	12%	20%	40%	20%	3.52	Good
4	Problem Solving	The leader provides prompt solutions when technical obstacles occur during remote coordination.	3%	10%	15%	50%	22%	3.78	Good

5	Inspirational Motivation	The leader is able to inspire employees to remain productive even without direct supervision.	10%	15%	30%	30%	15%	3.25	Fair
<b>B</b> Discipline Variable									
6	Punctuality	I consistently start work on time according to office hours, despite working under a WFA scheme.	4%	8%	22%	46%	20%	3.70	Good
7	Responsiveness	I am always responsive to coordination calls from leaders outside formal working hours.	6%	14%	35%	30%	15%	3.34	Fair
8	Administrative Compliance	Daily performance report targets are input into the E-Kinerja application on time.	1%	4%	10%	55%	30%	4.09	Very Good
9	Professional Integrity	I do not engage in personal tasks during WFA working hours.	15%	25%	30%	20%	10%	2.85	Poor
10	Output Quality	The quality of reports I produce during WFA is equal to or better than those produced during WFO.	5%	10%	25%	40%	20%	3.60	Good

### Quantitative Analysis: Statistical Dynamics of Leadership and Discipline

The quantitative analysis in this study aims to dissect the numerical data obtained from questionnaires distributed to civil servants (ASN) within the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City. Based on Table 1, the Visionary Leadership variable reveals that the indicator for clarity of instructions through digital platforms achieved the highest score of 4.06. This indicates that, technically, digital communication channels have been exceptionally well-established within the work environment. However, a gap exists in the indicator regarding the leader's ability to inspire productivity without direct supervision, which only reached a score of 3.25. This figure reflects that visionary leadership still faces significant challenges in fostering intrinsic employee motivation beyond the physical boundaries of the office.

Regarding the Substantive Discipline (\$Y\$) variable, a sharp contrast was found between administrative discipline and actual work behaviour. The indicator for punctuality in filling out the E-Kinerja application reached the highest score of 4.09, meaning that civil servants are highly compliant with the formal aspects of reporting. Conversely, the lowest score was found in the indicator for separating personal tasks during WFA working hours, at only 2.85. This points to a tangible risk of shirking, where workplace flexibility frequently clashes with domestic responsibilities. Regression analysis implicitly suggests that the leader's trust score (3.50) is closely related to the employees' coordination responsiveness (3.34). These data confirm that in the absence of physical supervision, work effectiveness is heavily dependent on the quality of the leader-subordinate relationship. Overall, the quantitative data validate the tension between virtuality and accountability within a digital bureaucracy.

### Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis provides a deeper understanding of the numerical data from the survey through in-depth interviews with key informants. The primary findings reveal that the "Digital Bureaucracy Paradox" is rooted in a lack of mental readiness to embrace the Work From Anywhere (WFA) model. Leaders at the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City acknowledge concerns that the loss of visual supervision could erode bureaucratic authority. This validates Agency Theory, wherein information asymmetry between leaders as *principals* and civil servants (ASN) as *agents* increases significantly within remote work systems. Currently, digital technology is still viewed merely as an instrument for administrative reporting rather than a catalyst for behavioural transformation.

Furthermore, the qualitative analysis reveals that the transformation toward substantive discipline requires a paradigm shift from process-based monitoring to output-based monitoring. Informants emphasised that although E-Kinerja has been implemented, the quality of work output remains a significant concern in the absence of individual integrity. Trust emerged as a central theme, regarded as the "primary currency" for maintaining the

continuity of public services. The most significant challenge identified is the legacy bureaucratic ego, which remains fixated on rigid and formalistic physical supervision patterns. This qualitative study concludes that the success of WFA requires not only sophisticated infrastructure but also a robust "psychological contract" between leaders and employees to ensure functional accountability.

## DISCUSSION

### The Dilemma of Remote Supervision

The results of in-depth interviews with structural leaders at the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City reveal a tension between the demands of virtuality and the necessity for accountability. Leaders acknowledge that while digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Email facilitate work instructions (average score of **4.06**), there is a profound concern regarding the loss of physical control. Key informants stated that the current use of technology is still limited to the "digitalisation of procedures," where leaders find it difficult to verify whether employees are genuinely working or merely maintaining a virtual presence.

Theoretically, this phenomenon reflects the risk of shirking within Agency Theory, where information asymmetry between the leader (*principal*) and the civil servant (*agent*) escalates when face-to-face interaction is eliminated. Qualitative data indicate that without direct visual supervision, the risk of task neglect becomes significantly higher. This is further reinforced by the low score in the indicator for separating personal and professional matters (2.85), signifying that conventional work culture remains heavily dependent on physical presence to maintain temporal integrity. The primary challenge for leadership in Sorong City is to construct objective output verification mechanisms to ensure that Work From Anywhere (WFA) flexibility is not misinterpreted as a relaxation of professional responsibility.

### The Transformation of Discipline

Interviews with informants from various job levels emphasise the urgent need to redefine the meaning of discipline in the post-pandemic era. Traditionally, discipline has been rigidly understood as compliance with attendance hours and the wearing of uniforms in the office (formalistic discipline). However, the implementation of WFA has compelled the bureaucracy in Sorong City to shift toward substantive discipline, which is based on the achievement of performance targets and digital responsiveness. Qualitative findings reveal that while the E-Kinerja system has helped create "administrative discipline," it does not yet fully guarantee the quality of work output.

Informants stressed that substantive discipline demands high self-discipline from every individual civil servant. This shift is crucial because, within the WFA model, success indicators can no longer be measured by fingerprint attendance machines alone. Data show that although civil servants are highly disciplined in inputting reports (score of 4.09), the quality of responsiveness to coordination outside of formal working hours remains at a "fair" level (score of 3.34). Therefore, a mindset shift is required so that discipline is no longer viewed as a tool of top-down pressure, but rather as a manifestation of professional integrity as a public servant.

### Building a Psychological Contract within the Digital Ecosystem

Visionary leadership in the digital era is no longer about top-down instructions, but rather about empowerment through **trust**. The results of the qualitative analysis indicate that leaders who successfully manage remote teams are those capable of building a robust psychological contract with their subordinates. Informants stated that trust has become the "primary currency" in professional interactions when physical supervision disappears. This aligns with the Trust-Based Leadership theory, which emphasises the pillars of ability, benevolence, and integrity.

However, the questionnaire data reveal a gap: the leader's ability to inspire intrinsic motivation in employees to remain productive without direct supervision still requires strengthening (score of 3.25). Interviews uncovered that some leaders still hesitate to grant full trust due to fears of eroding bureaucratic authority. Within the Sorong City Government environment, visionary leadership is challenged to transform from being mere technical managers into mentors capable of maintaining emotional and professional connectivity, despite the lack of face-to-face interaction. The success of WFA depends heavily on the extent to which this mutual trust can replace repressive administrative controls.

### Organisational Adaptability in Sorong City

The final theme emerging from the qualitative analysis involves the challenges of navigating fundamental shifts in organisational culture. Digital transformation within the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City is not merely a matter of hardware infrastructure but a

question of mental readiness and behavioural adaptability. Key informants revealed that the most significant hurdles often stem from a legacy bureaucratic ego that remains fixated on rigid, physical supervision patterns. A paradox arises when advancements in reporting technology are not accompanied by the maturity required to manage workplace autonomy.

To address this, the research recommends the formulation of more detailed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for WFA, incorporating more qualitative Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The integration of public participation (citizen-sourcing) is also proposed as a bottom-up accountability mechanism to ensure that the performance of the apparatus is maintained in the eyes of the community. Ultimately, the harmonisation of progressive leadership vision, responsive human resource management regulations, and individual integrity serves as the key to realising an agile bureaucracy. With this strategy, the Regional Secretariat is expected to achieve a governance framework that is both technologically modern and functionally accountable.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This research successfully concludes that the implementation of the Work From Anywhere (WFA) policy at the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City has triggered the emergence of the "Digital Bureaucracy Paradox." This condition arises where advancements in digital performance reporting infrastructure are not yet fully aligned with the transformation of work culture and the substantive discipline of Civil Servants (ASN). The primary findings indicate that while digital systems such as E-Kinerja have successfully established high administrative discipline regarding reporting formalities, virtual supervision has not yet been able to fully mitigate the risks of declining integrity in time management. This proves that in the absence of a physical office presence, some civil servants still face obstacles in separating professional responsibilities from domestic affairs, which, through the lens of Agency Theory, manifests as a risk of shirking or task neglect due to limited direct control from leadership. This imbalance underscores that digitalisation within local government is currently dominated by procedural changes but has not yet reached the level of fundamental organisational behavioural change.

On the other hand, this study demonstrates that the role of visionary leadership is a highly significant determinant in bridging this paradoxical gap. Leaders with proficient digital literacy and the ability to establish transparent communication are proven to maintain the performance stability of their teams, even within fragmented workspaces. A leadership style that shifts from physical control toward Trust-Based Leadership is found to be the most effective strategy for managing civil servants in the WFA era. The trust granted by leaders functions as a psychological contract that fosters intrinsic motivation, ensuring employees remain fully accountable for organisational targets without the need for conventional supervision. Consequently, the future effectiveness of the bureaucracy depends heavily on the leader's ability to inspire independent work, where discipline is no longer perceived as top-down pressure but as a form of individual professionalism in fulfilling public mandates.

Theoretically, this research reconstructs the meaning of the ASN discipline from a formalistic nature (compliance with hours and location) to a substantive discipline based on output quality and responsiveness to digital coordination. The phenomenon at the Regional Secretariat of Sorong City provides a clear illustration that administrative capacity in a digital ecosystem is measured not only by the availability of technological devices but also by the maturity of human capital in adapting to work flexibility. The conclusion of this study emphasises that achieving an agile bureaucracy requires harmony between progressive leadership, high individual integrity, and an output-based accountability system. The transformation toward an ideal digital bureaucracy will only be realised if every organisational element is able to relinquish the legacy bureaucratic ego and transition toward a new work culture that is more adaptive, accountable, and oriented toward tangible results for public service in Sorong City.

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