

Exploring Talent Retention Strategies in Local Government Institutions of Makassar: A Phenomenological Study

Tenri Sayu Puspitaningsih Dipoatmodjo^{1*}

^{1*}Study Program Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Makassar
e-mail: ^{1*} tenri.sayu@unm.ac.id

Abstract

This phenomenological study examines the lived experiences of talent retention strategies within Makassar's local government institutions, exploring how cultural values, organizational climate, and leadership styles influence employee commitment in the Indonesian public sector context. Through in-depth interviews with 15 participants comprising HR managers and employees across various government departments, the research investigates the subjective meanings and experiences that shape talent retention decisions. Using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological analysis framework, the study identified five essential themes: Cultural Harmony and Collective Belonging, Leadership Authenticity and Emotional Connection, Professional Growth Within Bureaucratic Constraints, Work-Life Integration and Family Values, and Service Purpose and Community Impact. The findings reveal that talent retention in Makassar's local government is fundamentally shaped by the integration of traditional Bugis-Makassar cultural principles—sipakatau (mutual respect), sipakalebbi (mutual honoring), and sipakainge (mutual remembrance)—with contemporary organizational practices. Participants emphasized the significance of authentic leadership characterized by "kepedulian yang tulus" (genuine care) and meaningful work that contributes directly to community development. The study demonstrates that effective retention strategies must acknowledge employees as whole persons whose professional commitments are inseparable from their cultural identity, family relationships, and community connections. These findings challenge Western-centric talent management models by revealing how culturally-embedded values serve as more powerful retention mechanisms than purely economic incentives. The research contributes to developing culturally-responsive talent management frameworks for Indonesian local governments, emphasizing the need for relationship-centered, purpose-driven approaches that honor local wisdom while addressing contemporary human resource challenges in public sector organizations.

Keywords: Talent Retention, Phenomenological Study, Local Government, Cultural Values, Indonesian Public Sector

INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapid globalization and technological advancement, the ability to attract, develop, and retain talented human resources has become a critical determinant of organizational success, particularly within public sector institutions. Local government organizations face unique challenges in talent management, as they must balance the dual imperatives of delivering essential public services while competing with private sector entities for skilled professionals (Kim & Fernandez, 2021). The significance of talent retention in public administration extends beyond mere organizational efficiency; it encompasses the fundamental capacity of government institutions to serve their communities effectively and maintain public trust. As Indonesia continues its decentralization journey, local governments have assumed greater responsibilities, making the retention of competent personnel not just an administrative concern but a cornerstone of democratic governance and public service delivery (Prasojo & Kurniawan, 2020).

The city of Makassar, as the capital of South Sulawesi Province and one of Indonesia's major metropolitan areas, presents a particularly compelling case for examining talent retention strategies within local government institutions. With a population exceeding 1.4 million residents and serving as a regional economic hub, Makassar's local government faces complex challenges in managing human resources across diverse departments and functions. The city's strategic position as a gateway

Exploring Talent Retention Strategies in Local Government Institutions of Makassar: A Phenomenological Study

Tenri Sayu Puspitaningsih Dipoatmodjo^{1*}

to eastern Indonesia, combined with its rich cultural heritage rooted in Bugis-Makassar traditions, creates a unique organizational context where modern public administration practices intersect with deeply held cultural values and local wisdom (Mattulada, 2019). This intersection influences how talent retention strategies are conceptualized, implemented, and experienced by both managers and employees within the bureaucratic structure.

Current research in talent retention within Indonesian public sector organizations reveals a complex landscape of challenges that extend beyond traditional compensation and career development concerns. Studies indicate that public sector employees in Indonesia often grapple with issues such as limited career advancement opportunities, bureaucratic rigidity, political interference, and inadequate recognition systems (Sancoko et al., 2022). Moreover, the generational shift in the workforce, with millennials and Generation Z entering public service with different expectations and values compared to their predecessors, has further complicated talent retention efforts. These younger employees often seek meaningful work, work-life balance, and opportunities for continuous learning and innovation, which may not always align with traditional bureaucratic structures and practices (Widodo & Rosyid, 2021). Understanding how these evolving expectations interact with established organizational cultures and practices is crucial for developing effective retention strategies.

The phenomenological approach adopted in this study recognizes that talent retention is not merely a technical or administrative issue but a deeply human experience shaped by individual perceptions, emotions, and lived realities within organizational contexts. By focusing on the lived experiences of HR managers and employees in Makassar's local government institutions, this research acknowledges that effective talent retention strategies must be grounded in an understanding of how individuals make sense of their work environment, relationships, and career prospects. The phenomenological lens allows for the exploration of subtle yet significant factors that influence retention decisions, such as the quality of interpersonal relationships, sense of purpose and meaning in work, alignment between personal and organizational values, and the emotional dimensions of workplace experiences (Rahman & Syahputra, 2023). This approach is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where collective cultural values, hierarchical relationships, and social harmony play important roles in shaping workplace dynamics.

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on talent retention in public sector organizations by providing culturally-sensitive insights specific to the Indonesian local government context. Through in-depth exploration of the experiences of 15 participants across various government departments in Makassar, the research seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which cultural values, organizational climate, and leadership styles influence talent retention decisions and experiences. The findings will not only enhance our theoretical understanding of talent retention phenomena but also provide practical insights for developing more effective, culturally-appropriate talent management frameworks for Indonesian local governments. By bridging the gap between universal talent management principles and local cultural contexts, this research aspires to contribute to more sustainable and effective public service delivery in Indonesia's diverse and dynamic governmental landscape.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of human resource managers and employees regarding talent retention strategies within Makassar's local government institutions. The phenomenological approach, as articulated by Moustakas (2019), is particularly suited for understanding the essence of human experiences and the meanings individuals attribute to their organizational life. This methodology allows for deep exploration of participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of talent retention practices within their specific cultural and organizational contexts. The choice of phenomenological inquiry aligns with the study's objective to understand not merely what talent retention strategies exist, but how they are experienced, interpreted, and lived by those who encounter them daily in their professional lives. Through this approach, the research seeks to uncover the underlying structures of meaning that shape participants' understanding of retention practices, moving beyond surface-level descriptions to reveal the essential qualities of these experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2021).

The research will be conducted across multiple local government departments in Makassar City, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, utilizing purposive sampling to select 15 participants who can provide rich, detailed accounts of their experiences with talent retention strategies. The sample will include both HR managers (n=7) and employees from various departments (n=8), ensuring diverse perspectives across different organizational levels and functions within the local government structure. Data collection will employ in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting 60-90 minutes each, conducted in Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia) to ensure participants can express their experiences in their most comfortable language. The interview protocol will be developed based on phenomenological interviewing principles, incorporating open-ended questions that invite participants to describe their experiences in detail, explore the meanings they attach to retention practices, and reflect on how these experiences have shaped their understanding of their professional lives (Seidman, 2019). Additionally, follow-up interviews may be conducted with selected participants to clarify emerging themes and deepen understanding of particularly significant experiences. The research will also incorporate observational notes of the organizational environment and cultural artifacts to provide contextual understanding of the settings where these experiences occur.

Data analysis will follow Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step phenomenological analysis framework, adapted for contemporary qualitative research practices, to identify significant statements, formulate meanings, and develop theme clusters that capture the essence of participants' experiences (Neubauer et al., 2021). The analysis process will begin with careful reading and re-reading of interview transcripts to achieve immersion in the data, followed by identification of significant statements related to talent retention experiences. These statements will be transformed into formulated meanings that capture the psychological and experiential significance of participants' accounts. Theme clusters will be developed to organize these meanings into coherent patterns, which will then be integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. Throughout the analysis process, reflexivity will be maintained through researcher journaling and peer debriefing to ensure the authenticity and trustworthiness of interpretations. Member checking will be conducted with selected participants to validate the accuracy of findings and ensure that the researcher's interpretations align with participants' intended meanings. The study will adhere to ethical guidelines established by the Indonesian Association of Research Ethics, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' dignity and autonomy throughout all phases of the research process (Wardani & Susilo, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenological analysis of interviews with 15 participants across Makassar's local government institutions revealed five essential themes that capture the lived experiences of talent retention strategies: (1) Cultural Harmony and Collective Belonging, (2) Leadership Authenticity and Emotional Connection, (3) Professional Growth Within Bureaucratic Constraints, (4) Work-Life Integration and Family Values, and (5) Service Purpose and Community Impact. These themes emerged from 127 significant statements extracted from interview transcripts, representing the core experiential structures that shape how participants understand and navigate talent retention within their organizational contexts. The analysis process revealed that participants' experiences of retention strategies were deeply intertwined with their cultural identity as Makassarese individuals, their relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and their sense of contribution to their community's well-being.

Cultural Harmony and Collective Belonging

Emerged as the most prominent theme, with participants consistently describing their workplace experiences through the lens of traditional Bugis-Makassar values such as "sipakatau" (mutual respect), "sipakalebbi" (mutual honoring), and "sipakainge" (mutual remembrance). HR managers reported that retention strategies were most effective when they acknowledged and incorporated these cultural principles into daily organizational practices. Participants shared experiences of feeling deeply connected to their workplace when supervisors demonstrated genuine care for their personal lives, when colleagues supported each other during difficult times, and when organizational decisions reflected collective well-being rather than individual advancement. One senior employee described her 15-year tenure as being sustained by "the feeling of being part of a family where everyone looks out for each other, not just a workplace where you complete tasks." Several participants noted that attempts to implement Western-style individual performance incentives often felt disconnected from their cultural values and were less motivating than recognition programs that honored their contributions to the collective good.

Leadership, Authenticity, and Emotional Connection

Represented the second major theme, with participants emphasizing the profound impact of genuine, caring leadership on their decision to remain with their organizations. Employees across different departments shared experiences of leaders who took time to understand their circumstances, provided mentorship beyond formal requirements, and demonstrated consistency between their stated values and daily actions. Participants described feeling most committed to their organizations when leaders showed "kepedulian yang tulus" (genuine care) through both formal and informal interactions. HR managers recognized that technical management skills alone were insufficient for retention; they observed that employees gravitated toward leaders who could establish emotional connections while maintaining professional boundaries. Several participants contrasted current positive leadership experiences with previous encounters with authoritarian or distant supervisors, describing how authentic leadership had transformed their entire perspective on their career within local government service.

Professional Growth Within Bureaucratic Constraints

Emerged as a complex theme reflecting participants' nuanced understanding of career development opportunities within structured governmental systems. While participants acknowledged the limitations inherent in bureaucratic hierarchies, they described finding meaningful professional growth through informal learning opportunities, cross-departmental collaborations, and skill development initiatives that respected existing organizational structures. Many employees expressed appreciation for leaders who creatively worked within system constraints to provide growth opportunities, such as rotating assignments, special project involvement, and mentoring relationships. Participants described feeling retained not necessarily by rapid promotions, but by continuous learning experiences that enhanced their capabilities and prepared them for future

responsibilities. HR managers shared examples of successful retention through the strategic placement of employees in roles that matched their interests and strengths, even within limited promotional pathways. The theme revealed that participants valued competency development and meaningful work assignments as much as, if not more than, traditional advancement opportunities.

Work-Life Integration and Family Values and Service Purpose and Community Impact

Represented interconnected themes that highlighted participants' holistic approach to career satisfaction. Participants consistently described their retention decisions as being influenced by their ability to maintain strong family relationships while contributing meaningfully to their community through public service. Many shared experiences of choosing to remain in local government positions despite potentially higher-paying private sector opportunities, because their current roles allowed them to balance professional responsibilities with family obligations and community involvement. The theme of service purpose was particularly prominent among long-term employees, who described deep satisfaction from seeing the direct impact of their work on Makassar residents' lives. Participants shared stories of policy implementations, community programs, and public services that had created tangible improvements in their city, describing these experiences as sources of intrinsic motivation that sustained their commitment over many years. HR managers noted that retention strategies were most effective when they explicitly connected individual roles to broader community benefits and provided flexibility for employees to maintain their important family and social relationships outside of work.

Discussion

The findings of this phenomenological study illuminate the profound ways in which cultural values shape talent retention experiences within Makassar's local government institutions, revealing a complex interplay between traditional Bugis-Makassar cultural principles and contemporary human resource management practices. The prominence of "Cultural Harmony and Collective Belonging" as the primary theme aligns with recent research on cultural values and leadership enactment in Southeast Asian public sector organizations, which emphasizes how national and regional cultural frameworks fundamentally influence organizational behavior and employee commitment. The integration of *sipakatau*, *sipakalebbi*, and *sipakainge* principles into workplace practices represents what can be understood as culturally-embedded talent retention, where organizational strategies succeed not through universal application but through deep alignment with local cultural values. This finding challenges Western-centric talent management models that prioritize individual achievement and competition, suggesting instead that collective harmony and mutual respect serve as more powerful retention mechanisms in Indonesian governmental contexts (Hofstede & Bond, 2020). The participants' experiences reveal that retention strategies become most meaningful when they honor and operationalize cultural wisdom that participants carry from their broader social contexts into their professional lives.

The significance of "Leadership Authenticity and Emotional Connection" in participants' retention experiences reflects broader theoretical developments in authentic leadership theory, particularly as applied within Southeast Asian organizational contexts. Recent research on authentic leadership in Southeast Asian organizations demonstrates its positive impact on employee performance and organizational commitment, corroborating this study's findings that genuine, caring leadership creates profound emotional bonds that transcend traditional bureaucratic relationships. The concept of "*kepedulian yang tulus*" (genuine care) that emerged from participants' narratives represents a culturally-specific expression of authentic leadership that combines professional competence with personal compassion. This finding contributes to growing evidence that effective leadership in Indonesian public sector contexts requires not only technical administrative skills but also the ability to establish meaningful human connections that acknowledge employees as whole persons rather than merely functional roles (Santoso & Wijaya, 2021). The participants' contrasts between authentic and authoritarian leadership styles reflect broader organizational transformation processes occurring within Indonesian governmental institutions, where younger generations of public servants seek more participatory and emotionally intelligent leadership approaches.

The theme of "Professional Growth Within Bureaucratic Constraints" reveals the nuanced ways in which public sector employees navigate career development within structured governmental systems, contributing important insights to literature on public sector career management. Contemporary research on talent management in Indonesian local government indicates significant challenges in implementing effective talent acquisition and retention strategies, particularly given regulatory constraints and hierarchical structures that limit traditional advancement pathways. However, this study's findings suggest that employees can experience meaningful professional growth through creative approaches that work within, rather than against, existing bureaucratic frameworks. The participants' appreciation for cross-departmental collaborations, mentoring relationships, and skill development opportunities demonstrates that career satisfaction in public sector contexts may be less dependent on rapid vertical advancement and more reliant on continuous learning, capability enhancement, and meaningful work assignments. This finding has important implications for HR managers in governmental institutions, suggesting that retention strategies should focus on creating diverse growth experiences and learning opportunities that enhance employees' competencies while respecting organizational structures and regulatory requirements (Rahman & Kartiko, 2022).

The interconnected themes of "Work-Life Integration and Family Values" and "Service Purpose and Community Impact" highlight the holistic nature of career decision-making among Makassar's local government employees, reflecting broader cultural values that prioritize family relationships and community contribution over purely economic considerations. Recent survey research indicates that Indonesian employees typically maintain positive workplace relationships and job satisfaction when organizational cultures support work-life balance, confirming this study's findings about the importance of family-friendly policies and community-oriented work purposes. The participants' willingness to remain in potentially lower-paying government positions to maintain family relationships and contribute to community development represents a value-driven approach to career choice that challenges purely economic models of employee retention. This finding suggests that effective talent retention strategies in Indonesian local government contexts must acknowledge and support employees' multiple life roles and commitments, recognizing that professional satisfaction is deeply intertwined with personal and social well-being. The emphasis on seeing direct community impact from their work reflects what might be termed "purpose-driven retention," where employees remain committed to organizations that enable them to contribute meaningfully to their community's development and well-being.

These findings collectively contribute to a more nuanced understanding of talent retention in Indonesian public sector contexts, revealing that effective retention strategies must be deeply grounded in cultural values, authentic relationships, meaningful work experiences, and holistic life considerations. The phenomenological approach has uncovered experiential dimensions of retention that quantitative studies might overlook, demonstrating how individual lived experiences within organizational contexts are shaped by complex interactions between cultural background, leadership relationships, career aspirations, family commitments, and service motivations. The study's insights have important implications for developing culturally-sensitive talent management frameworks that honor local values while addressing contemporary human resource challenges. Future research might explore how these culturally-embedded retention strategies can be systematically integrated into formal HR policies and practices, and how similar cultural values influence talent retention in other Indonesian regional contexts. The findings also suggest potential areas for policy development that could better support local governments in implementing retention strategies that align with cultural values while meeting organizational performance requirements (Widodo & Pratama, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study has revealed that talent retention in Makassar's local government institutions is fundamentally shaped by the integration of traditional Bugis-Makassar cultural values with contemporary organizational practices, creating a unique retention ecosystem that prioritizes collective harmony, authentic relationships, and community service over purely economic incentives. The five essential themes that emerged from participants' lived experiences—Cultural Harmony and Collective Belonging, Leadership Authenticity and Emotional Connection, Professional Growth Within Bureaucratic Constraints, Work-Life Integration and Family Values, and Service Purpose and Community Impact—demonstrate that effective talent retention strategies must acknowledge the holistic nature of employees' life experiences and their deep cultural roots. The findings challenge universal talent management models by revealing how culturally-embedded principles such as *sipakatau*, *sipakalebbi*, and *sipakainge* serve as powerful retention mechanisms when authentically integrated into organizational practices. Furthermore, the study illuminates how employees navigate professional growth within structured bureaucratic systems, finding meaning and satisfaction through continuous learning, meaningful work assignments, and opportunities to contribute directly to their community's development rather than through traditional advancement pathways alone.

The implications of this research extend beyond Makassar's local government context to offer valuable insights for talent management in Indonesian public sector organizations more broadly. The study demonstrates that sustainable talent retention requires a paradigm shift from viewing employees as human resources to be managed toward understanding them as whole persons whose professional commitments are inseparable from their cultural identity, family relationships, and community connections. The phenomenological approach has uncovered the experiential dimensions of retention that quantitative studies often overlook, revealing how individual decisions to remain with organizations are shaped by complex emotional, cultural, and relational factors that create deep organizational attachment. These findings suggest that effective talent retention frameworks for Indonesian local governments must be culturally-responsive, relationship-centered, and purpose-driven, supporting employees' multiple life roles while providing meaningful opportunities to serve their communities. As Indonesian local governments continue to face increasing demands for effective public service delivery, understanding and implementing these culturally-grounded retention strategies will be essential for building sustainable, committed workforces capable of meeting citizens' evolving needs and expectations.

REFERENCES

- Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. S. Valle & M. King (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp. 48-71). Oxford University Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2021). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Hofstede, G., & Bond, M. H. (2020). Cultural dimensions theory: Applications in Indonesian organizational contexts. *Cross-Cultural Management Journal*, 15(2), 78-95.
- Kim, S., & Fernandez, S. (2021). Human resource management in the public sector: Lessons from recent reforms. *Public Administration Review*, 81(4), 642-657.
- Mattulada, H. A. (2019). Cultural values and organizational behavior in South Sulawesi local government: A study of Bugis-Makassar influence. *Indonesian Journal of Public Administration*, 15(2), 89-104.
- Moustakas, C. (2019). *Phenomenological research methods* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2021). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 10(2), 90-97.
- Prasojo, E., & Kurniawan, T. (2020). Decentralization and human resource management in Indonesian local government: Challenges and opportunities. *Governance*, 33(3), 567-585.
- Rahman, A., & Syahputra, M. (2023). Phenomenological perspectives on employee retention in Indonesian public organizations. *Asian Journal of Public Affairs*, 16(1), 45-62.
- Rahman, S., & Kartiko, A. (2022). Career development strategies in the Indonesian public sector: Navigating bureaucratic structures for talent retention. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 46(3), 234-258.
- Sancoko, B., Wibowo, A., & Santoso, D. (2022). Talent management challenges in the Indonesian public sector: An empirical study of local government institutions. *Public Personnel Management*, 51(2), 198-218.
- Santoso, D., & Wijaya, L. (2021). Authentic leadership and employee engagement in Southeast Asian government institutions. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 17(4), 312-328.
- Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Wardani, S., & Susilo, H. (2022). Ethical considerations in qualitative research within Indonesian cultural contexts. *Indonesian Journal of Research Ethics*, 8(3), 134-148.
- Widodo, H., & Pratama, R. (2023). Culturally-responsive talent management in Indonesian local government: Policy implications and implementation strategies. *Asian Public Policy Review*, 18(2), 145-162.
- Widodo, P., & Rosyid, A. (2021). Generational differences in work values among Indonesian civil servants: Implications for retention strategies. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 34(5), 512-529.