

Construction Workers Phenomenon and Java Traditional Leadership of Modern Construction Management In Indonesia

Kukuh Lukiyanto¹, Margono Setiawan², Eka Afna Troena², Noermijati²

¹ Doctoral Program of Economics and Business Faculty, Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia

² Economics and Business Faculty, Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT : Worker in modern construction project management is part of company's internal systems. However, most of construction company in Indonesia still use traditional workforce management. Workers does not become part of internal company and not bound to any contract with company. Contract is only made between company and worker group leader. Management give authority completely to him. Group leader commonly called "foreman". Foreman has role as leader and also a representative of workers in connection with construction company. Leadership ability is indispensable, especially foreman status as an informal leader, while the foreman bound by formal situations. Foreman leadership phenomenons in Indonesia adopt Javanese culture for a long time, have been passed down to next generation and are still exist today. Foremen success relate to Java leadership philosophy held by foreman. This paper examines the phenomenon of foreman traditional Javanese leadership in modern construction management. This study aim is to determine the role of foreman as the traditional informal leaders that still survive in era of modern construction management. This research is useful to deepen the understanding of traditional Javanese leadership role in modern construction management. It is expected become a reference to improve construction management success in Indonesia. In addition, Javanese culture in its various aspects became interesting to study and assessed to introduce the Indonesia advantages to international world. By exploring Java traditional management in construction, it is expected traditional management cultural heritage of Indonesian society can be known and aligned with management theories of western culture.

KEYWORDS: Java leadership, foreman, construction

I. INTRODUCTION

Construction projects management in Indonesia always follow theory development of construction project management available today. Large projects typically use modern construction project management. It is defined as the art of directing and coordinating human and material resources throughout the life of a project, using modern management techniques to achieve the objectives set within scope of cost, time, quality and participation (Gray & Larson, 2006). Small projects still use a simple project management even tends to use traditional way. In practice, management of large projects in Indonesia does not fully use modern construction project management. Most companies still combine modern construction project management with traditional construction project management. Traditional construction project management uses the cultural heritage of Indonesia, and is specific to be applied in Indonesia. This concept has been developed in various countries, due to fact that success of a business can not be separated from the culture in which the business is run (Kreiser, Marino, & Weaver, 2005). Traditional management that developed from cultural heritage of a nation is defined as heritage management that is spread from mouth to mouth, taught to next generation, growing from generation to generation, refers to products relations between society, values, knowledge, institutions and practices, local and national scope (Jackson, 2013). One traditional management used at construction project in Indonesia is human resource management at a lower level or unskilled worker. They are the largest number in any construction project, and is often called the informal worker, because they hired briefly or temporarily without any bond or contract between the worker and company (Jha, 2002; Jason, 2007; Saxena, 2009). Generally, construction workers in developing countries, including Indonesia, are not pure construction workers, but traditional and hereditary, derived from the agricultural sector (Saxena, 2009; Sjahrir, K., 1995). Foreman as the worker group management search jobs and signed work of a construction project. Furthermore, group members follow all instructions given by foreman, both technical and non-technical. Foreman is also obliged to provide all the workers needs, depart from their origin until the completion of construction project (Sjahrir, K., 1995). This condition requires the management ability and foreman leadership in order to succeed in workplace.

II. RELATIONS OF WORKERS AND FOREMEN IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Workforce management is one of main parts to obtain performance effective and efficient projects in construction industry of 21st century (Tabassi & Burn, 2009), human resource management in construction projects are considered essential in order to meet the challenges of increasing management (Soemardi, et al. 2011). In modern construction project management, worker is part of company's internal systems, but in developing countries, including Indonesia, it is not so. Company only has a bond or agreement with the leader of a group of workers and worker management fully devolved to leader of group. Leadership group of construction workers like this in Indonesia called the "foreman". Traditionally, foreman serves as a supplier of worker for construction projects (Sjahir, 1991). Foreman guarantee the availability of manpower needed a project both in terms of number and qualifications required. Foreman is also responsible for managing and supervising a group of construction workers, therefore, be a key timeliness foreman work on a project (Soemardi, et al., 2011). Foreman often described as informal leaders, because it is not formed in a formal organization and not officially appointed as leader (Koencaraningrat, 1984).

Working without a contract creates great risk to workers, certainty of payment of foreman no guarantee, all just a verbal agreement. Oral bond does not have the force of law in event of a dispute; however no attempt was made between the foreman and workers to legalize their cooperation. Frequent workers are not paid in accordance with the initial agreement as foreman fraudulent, or foreman suffered losses due to a miscalculation. Workers were forced to go home with no results, and for the cost of return must borrow from a fellow worker from another foreman. Under these conditions the workers are not trying to chase the foreman because of their limitations, there appeared an attitude "*nrimo*" the hope "*in bales sing Mengko Kuoso*", meaning there will be another windfall of God, and certainly there are penalties for those who do evil. *Nrimo* attitude and patience is the key for them to be able to accept the situation in order to avoid conflict (Suseno, 1993).

The positive side of relationship foremen and workers are interdependencies among them. Foreman requires workers to complete the work is obtained, of course, foreman would benefit from such work. Workers benefit from the presence of foreman, workers does not need to find you a job and all the needs of workers have been provided by foreman. Workers also do not need to spend any capital, although at end of project is calculated as a deduction from the salary of workers, in this case the foreman as a leader who plays the waiter (Parris & Peachey, 2012). Workers also do not worry about his family because the foreman can give loans to workers to be given as family living expenses while he has not received the money. Even if the worker has to earn money to send to their families, remittances also are foreman. Strong family ties in Javanese culture, and mutual keep morally more important than jobs (Irawanto, 2009). Characteristics of Indonesian construction workers are specific, adjusting to local culture, causing the foreman in construction industry is difficult replaced by western methods (Irawanto, 2009). The difficulty of this pattern is replaced create leaders of multinational companies operating in Indonesia must anticipate certain rules that can be combined with the foreman pattern in Indonesia. One example is application of skills certification rules for workers in modern construction management. Due to high worker turnover, company usually already has a certificate of particular person who stored as archives that will be used time when needed. Many construction workers actually do not have any skills within certificate (Adi & Ni'am, 2012), when certified workers is needed, workers were told to confess the name as stated in certificate.

Foreman position is not easy, as informal leader he does not have a written bond or work contract, but he is under contract with the construction company to provide worker on companies demand. As a leader, foreman must able to influence his followers to do the work according to what he wants (Northouse, 2013). Supervisors should also be able to serve and maintain workers feeling to avoid cancellation of an oral agreement between them. It often happens, plan has been established but the workers number is less because there are some who cancel for any reason, or for no reason, even when they have arrived at work, they permit for several days because her brother died, a family illness, or have a family celebration. It relates to Javanese culture that upholds the values of collectivism, such as family interaction (Suseno, 1993; Hofstede, 2005). Strong family ties in Javanese culture, and keep moral mutually is more important than jobs (Irawanto, 2009). As a leader foreman is required to *ngemong* (care) workers Gani (2004) in Irawanto (2009) stated that a leader in Indonesia organization has a role as a father who is expected to behave wisely and honestly. Leader role of Java has a paternalistic patron to protect, to build a harmonious relationship, example, humanist. Therefore, foreman as a leader should as parents (Justice et al., 2013). Foreman must also *ngemong* (care) and *ngalah* (relent) to avoid conflict (Suseno, 1993). *Ngalah* in context of Java teaching is positive, foreman should maintain relationships with employees, although sometimes harmed. To lead workers, foremen also should concern qualitative aspects that very important. We often encounter in everyday language is *oyo rumongso biso ning biso romongso* (don't feel able but only feeling).

This means that more clever we should more relent to makes relationship between group members become harmonious because every employee understand function and role without mutual boasting and feel most important (Daryono, 2006).

FOREMAN PHENOMENON AS A LEADER IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY : Foreman is most important agent in construction work operation. As main liaison between management and worker, foreman must be set up work and worker to achieve project objectives at operational level, such as increase productivity, as well as the safety and quality of work. Foreman traditionally is regarded as informal leaders who have strong social and emotional ties fellow workers. As a unique position, foreman plays an important role to reshape worker attitudes towards work (Soemardi et al., 2011). Higher quality and quantity of construction projects makes construction project management shift from traditional to more modern management. It has an impact on foreman performance. Although the capacity and capabilities are very limited, many people believe that foreman that construction industry can utilize foreman as a key role to improve construction industry productivity.

Human resources have a strategic role to improve organization productivity in order superior in industry competition. Workers are a large part of construction cost and quantity of work hours in carrying out tasks in construction is more susceptible to influence by management rather than material or capital (Khoramshahi et al., 2006). Higher productivity and human resources management in construction industry is considered urgent to meet the higher challenge (Soekiman et al., 2010). Therefore, to increase the productivity of construction workers, foremen will certainly become key. Company also assign foreman as part of a safety officer to responsible for workers safety. Foremen become a temporary partner that can effectively deploy company's policy regarding construction safety (Soemardi et al., 2011; Budiwibowo, 2009). Therefore, ideally foreman must have competence in specific areas such as verbal communication, technical knowledge, and control stress, planning and decision-making ability. Competence is a combination of cognitive, functional and social competence, competence of a person is not only determined by knowledge, skills and experience, but there is the other side of someone that affect a person's competence (Soemardi, et al., 2011).

Foreman success measurement is foreman ability to satisfy the employer (Soemardi et al., 2011). Components to measure foreman success are related to work finishing at specified construction project management (Suharto, 1997; Meredith & Mantel, 1989; Gray & Larson, 2006), namely:

- ability to meet the target date to complete work
- jobs quality that meet the standard
- ability to save material, it means a decrease in production costs
- ability to avoid occupational accidents (Soemardi et al., 2011; Cheng, E., W., L., Ryan, N., & Kelly, S., 2012)

As a leader with philosophy of Javanese culture, foreman said to be successful if they meet several criteria, among others are:

- can create harmony in group, there is no conflict within group (Daryono, 2006; Koentjaraningrat, 1984);
- good communication between supervisors and workers, does not apply arbitrary (Rahman & Mas'ud, 2012);
- can meet all obligations to serve employers and employees, either in relation to cost, quality, time, and facilities as well as the workers wages (Parris & Peachey, 2012);

Description above shows clearly important role of foreman as the leader to determine the success of a construction project (Kashiwagi, et al. (2004). This is true in all countries, both developing and developed countries. According to Pendleton (2011), effective leadership style in construction industry is a formal leadership. This opinion is very different from the phenomenon occurred in Indonesia, especially for the construction industry leaders at lower levels. cultural factors, seasonal workers group, employment contract system and environmental conditions of construction industry in Indonesia as developing countries generally shows the informal leadership is more effectively applied in construction industry (Jha, 2002; Sahrir, 1991; Husson, 1997; Soemardi et al., 2011). Informal leaders are not included in structure of company, but they have important role for a project success. They drive the project workers, responsible for the timeliness, cost and quality in completion of a project. Therefore, foreman must have some standard of competence in order to become successful in leading and doing his job (Soemardi et al., 2011). One important competency in construction industry are communication skills. Laufer, Shapira and Telem (2008) say that construction project leader will communicate orally approximately 76% at work Leadership type that is suitable for application in construction industry according to research Toor and Ofori (2008; 2012) is an authentic leadership. Leader promotes positive values, lead with soul, promoting ethics and morality without personal interest.

Referring to Indonesian culture, these findings will be the same when applied in Indonesia, but different results was obtained in study Justice et al. (2013). In his research, Indonesia workers prefer the transformational leadership type where leaders can encourage workers to achieve the goals set. But still there are other demands that can not be categorized as pure transformational. Workers demand leader reward in form of a gift, as an appreciation for those who work well. It come from transactional leader and follower relationships. In fact this is the preferred form of transactional workers in Indonesia. Transactional leadership is contrary to philosophy of Javanese culture that is often used in relation of foreman and workers. Keeping harmonization is the duty of every member of organization, *ngalah* (relent) attitudes did not require reciprocal done in order to maintain harmony (Daryono, 2006). It is functional structural philosophy where each member of group and leader has to understand duties and responsibilities without remind to reinforce the notion that transactional leadership patterns are not used in construction industry in Indonesia (Suseno, 1993; Daryono, 2006). Different leadership style in Indonesia construction in both studies above demonstrate that leadership style are not most suitable to be applied in construction industry in Indonesia.

IV. CONCLUSION

Project management shift from traditional to modern construction project management at glance will abolish all traditional management. But construction industry in Indonesia is different. Traditional management in worker management is precisely maintained. Culture is the key success factors management of construction workers in Indonesia (Kreiser, Marino, & Weaver, 2005). Foreman leadership with Java philosophy actually brings success in construction industry. Competence demand and ability to perform various leadership roles must makes foreman to keep harmony relationships between group members. Foreman must assume servant leadership style (Parris & Peachey, 2012), parents leadership style (Justice et al., 2013), authentic (Ofori & Toor, 2012) and transactional transformation leadership style (Justice et al., 2013). Despite the fact all the facts are not based on theory but adopting Java philosophy, foreman can still adjust with modern construction project management.

V. SUGGESTION

Many questions remain unanswered in this paper because it is literature study. It is more interesting to empirically investigate about how relevant the foreman role in modern construction industry. It need to find the fundamental reason why the contractor still retain traditional construction management, whereas demands of current construction project management is a modern construction project management. It should be also understood better on why Indonesian workers prefer transactional leadership. It is very different from the habits of construction industry to use the services of a foreman. Foreman itself tend to use Javanese philosophy to do all activities, sincere, relent and did not demand are some philosophy to make transactional leadership questionable in Indonesia

REFERENCES

- [1] Adi, H. P., & Ni'am, N. F. 2012. Improving skill's strategies of Indonesian construction labours to have global competitiveness INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CIVIL AND STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING Volume 3, No 1 © Copyright by the authors - Licensee IPA- Under Creative Commons license 3.0 Research article ISSN 0976 – 4399 doi: 10.6088/ijcser.201203013014
- [2] Budiwibowo, A., Trigunaryyah, B., Abidin, I. S., & Soeparto, H. G. 2009. Competitiveness of the Indonesian Construction Industry. Journal of Construction in Developing Countries, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2009 PENERBIT UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA I51.
- [3] Cheng, E., W.,L., Ryan, N., & Kelly, S., 2012. Exploring the perceived influence of safety management practices on project performance in the construction industry. *Safety Science* 50 (2012) 363–369, Journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ssci
- [4] Daryono. 2006. Etos Dagang Jawa : Studi Terhadap Pemikiran SRI MANGKUNEGARA IV. Thesis Progran Pasca Sarjana Institut Agama Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang.
- [5] Gray, C. F. & Larson, E. W. 2006. Project Management : The Managerial Process, The Mac Grow Hill Companies, Inc. 3th edition.
- [6] Husson, L. 1997. Eight Centuries of Madurese Migration to East Java. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1.
- [7] Hofstede, Geert. 1980. Culture's Consequenses: International Differences in Work-Related Values. California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- [8] Irawanto, D. W. 2009. An Analysis Of National Culture And Leadership Practices In Indonesia. *Journal of Diversity Management – Second Quarter 2009 Volume 4, Number 2.*
- [9] Jackson, T. 2013. Reconstructing the Indigenous in African Management Research. *Management International Review*, 53(1), 13-38. doi: 10.1007/s11575-012-0161-0
- [10] Jason, A. 2007. Informal Construction Worker in DARS Sallam, Tanzania. ILO Publication, International Labor Office, Ch-1221 Geneva 22, Switzerland. Email: bvante@ilo.org. website: www.ilo.org/publns
- [11] Justice, O.B., Adison, R., Ade, F. S. 2013. Effective Leadership in the Eyes of Followers: An empirical study in Indonesia. *Journal of Transformative Entrepreneurship* ISSN: 2289-3075 Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp: 14-24 (2013)
- [12] Jha, K. K. 2002. Informal Labour in the Construction Industry Nepal. INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION Sectoral Activities Programme, Working Paper 187(Sept.).
- [13] Kashiwagi, D., Egbu, C., Kovel, J., & Badger, W. W. 2004. Leadership vs Management in The Construction Industry, Khosrowshahi, F (Ed.), 20th Annual ARCOM Conference, 1-3 September, Heriot Watt University. Association of Researchers in Construction Management, Vol. 2, 1005-15.
- [14] Khoramshahi, F., Dehghan, R., & Mortaheb, M. M. 2006. Factors Influencing Construction Productivity. The 10th East Asia-Pacific Conference on Structural Engineering and Construction, Bangkok, Thailand, August 3-5,

- [15] Kreiser, P., Marino, L., & Weaver, K. M. 2005. Correlates of Entrepreneurship: The Impact of National Culture on Risk-Taking and Proactiveness in SMEsC. University of Alabam, Department of Management and Marketing, Tuscaloosa.
- [16] Koentjaraningrat. 1984. Kebudayaan Jawa. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka.
- [17] Laufer, A., Shapira, A. and Telem, D. (2008), "Communication in dynamic conditions: how do on-site construction project managers do it?", *Journal of Management in Engineering*, Vol. 24 No.2, pp. 75-86.
- [18] Meredith, J. R. & Mantel, S.J. 1989. *Project Management : A Managerial Approach*. 2th, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Canada
- [19] Northouse, P. G. 2013. *Leadership : Theory and Practice*, Sixth Edition, SAGE Publication, Thousand Oaks, California.
- [20] Ofori, G., & Toor, S. R. (2012). Leadership and Construction Industry Development in Developing Countries. *Journal of Construction in Developing Countries*, Supp. 1, 1–21 © Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2012
- [21] Rahman, D., R. & Mas'ud, F. 2012. Peran kepemimpinan Jawa (Studi Eksplorasi pada CV Batik Indah Rara Djonggrang Yogyakarta) *Diponegoro Journal of Management* Volume 1, Nomor 1.
- [22] Saxena, S. 2009. Problem Of Labours On Costruction : A Qualitative Reasearch. *International Reasearch Journal* ISSN-0974-2832 Vol. II, Issue-7, August.
- [23] Sjahrir, K. 1991. Workers in the Indonesian Construction Industry. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text.
- [24] Soeharto, I. 1997. *Manajemen Proyek : Dari Konseptual Sampai Operasional*. Penerbit Erlangga Jakarta, cetakan ke 3
- [25] Soekiman, A., Pribadi, K.S., Soemardi, B. W., Wirahadikusumah, R.D. 2011. Study on factors affecting project level productivity in Indonesia. *Annals of Faculty Egeineering Hunedoara-International Journal of Engineering*. Tome, IX Fascicule 3. Issn: 1584-2673
- [26] Soemardi, B. W., Soenaryo, I., & Wahyudi, E. 2011. The Role and Function of Mandor in Construction Project Organization in Indonesia *ScienceDirect, Procedia Engineering* 14 859–864.
- [27] Suseno, F. M. 1993. *Etika Jawa : Sebuah Artikel Falsafah Tentang Kebijaksanaan Hidup Jawa*. Edisi ke 5, PT. Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Jakarta
- [28] Tabassi, A. A., & Bakar, A. H. A. 2009. Training, motivation, and performance: The case of human resource management in construction projects in Mashhad, Iran. *International Journal of Project Management* 27. 471–480.
- [29] Toor, S. R., & Ofori, G. (2008). Leadership for future construction industry: Agenda for authentic leadership. *International Journal of Project Management*, 26(6), 620-630. doi: 10.1016/j.ijproman.2007.09.010