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Leadership Training Policy Implementation at Inap Timor-Leste: Diagnosing Ineffectiveness and Strengthening Bureaucratic Capacity

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Abstract

Leadership training policy is a strategic instrument for developing the competency and professionalism of the civil service apparatus. In Timor-Leste, this mandate is institutionally assigned to the Instituto Nacional da Administração Pública (INAP) under Decree-Law No. 38/2012 and Decreto-Lei n.º 25/2016. Despite a legally sound normative foundation, implementation remains critically ineffective evidenced by only 150 participants trained out of 3,527 officials holding structural positions over three years (2022–2024). This study investigates why legal clarity has not translated into effective implementation, employing a qualitative case study design with data drawn from semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field observation involving ten purposively selected informants. Analysis is framed through the Van Meter and Van Horn model, which reveals that the implementation gap stems from six interconnected failures: unoperationalized policy standards in the curriculum, insufficient human and material resources, unsystematic inter-organizational communication, weak characteristics of implementing agents, volatile socio-political conditions, and inconsistent implementor disposition. The study's specific contribution lies in empirically diagnosing these causal linkages within a nascent post-independence state context, where bureaucratic capacity-building remains structurally constrained. Findings suggest that normative adequacy alone is insufficient; effective implementation requires operationalized standards, strengthened resource capacity, coordinated inter-agency mechanisms, and institutionalized commitment among implementing actors.

KEYWORDS

policy implementation, leadership training, inap, civil service apparatus, timor-leste.

Introduction

Improving the quality of human resources (HR) in the public sector is the main pillar in realizing effective and efficient public governance. In the era of globalization and technological modernization, state apparatuses are required to possess competent and innovative leadership capacities to respond to the increasingly dynamic needs of the community (Hess et al., 2021). For Timor-Leste, the commitment to professional HR development has been legally affirmed in Article 6 of the RDTL Constitution (Government of Timor-Leste (2002) and Law No. 08 of 2004 (Government of Timor-Leste, 2004) concerning the Fundamentals of the Civil Service, which guarantee the right of every civil servant to improve their qualifications through training. In this context, the Instituto Nacional da Administração Pública (INAP) holds a strategic role as the primary organizing institution for leadership training for civil servants (C. da F. Pública, 2024).

The urgency of leadership training is reinforced by two national legal instruments. Government of Timor-Leste (2012) establishes systematic training as a fundamental requirement for a productive civil service, while Decreto-Lei n.º 25/2016 on the Organization of Public Administration (2016) Article 5 paragraph (2) specifically mandates that holding a structural position requires the successful completion of high-level leadership and management training in public

Table 1. The Number of Timor-Leste Civil Servants 2022-2024

No	Category	Number	Information
1	Total Civil Servants	34,673	All civil servants in Timor-Leste.
2	Civil Servants Holding Positions	3,527	Civil servants who hold positions/posts.
3	Leadership Training Participants (2022)	50	Leadership training participants for Department Heads in 2022.
4	Leadership Training Participants (2023)	50	Leadership training participants for Directors General in 2023.
5	Leadership Training Participants (2024)	50	Leadership training participants for National Directors in 2024.
6	Total Participants (2022–2024)	150	Total leadership training participants over three years.

Source: Comissão da Função Pública (CFP) and INAP

administration. Together, these regulations position leadership training not as an optional development activity, but as a legally binding precondition for structural appointment. Despite this unambiguous normative foundation, implementation data reveals a critical gap. According to institutional records from the *Comissão da Função Pública* (CFP) and INAP (Pública, 2024), a total of 3,527 civil servants currently hold structural positions encompassing Director-General, National Director, Municipal Director, Head of Department, and Head of Section across all national ministries and public institutions in Timor-Leste. Yet between 2022 and 2024, INAP trained only 150 participants in leadership training programs, averaging 50 participants per year (see Table 1).

This represents a coverage rate of approximately 4.25 percent of the total eligible officeholders, a figure that is substantively inadequate given that Decreto-Lei n.º 25/2016 makes training completion a mandatory prerequisite for structural office, and that INAP's current annual training capacity addresses less than 1.5 percent of those who legally require certification. The scale of this gap signals not merely an administrative shortfall but a systemic failure in translating a legally mandated policy into operational reality.

Prior research has examined leadership training policy implementation from several angles. Studies such as Amaliasari & Priyadi (2021) and Suharsono (2021) focused on modality-specific challenges particularly the shift to e-learning formats documenting obstacles related to digital literacy and participant engagement. Nekwek (2022) analyzed the influence of implementation variables on competency outcomes using Edwards III's framework, identifying resource constraints and bureaucratic structure as key inhibitors. In the Timor-Leste context, Reis et al. (2021) and Ramos et al. (2023) examined leadership influences on organizational performance, while Rothwell (2012) identified the importance of local relevance in training design. However, these studies share a common limitation: they address either technical delivery failures or structural determinants in isolation, without examining how political-administrative interactions including inconsistent political commitment, weak inter-agency coordination, and the absence of institutionalized incentive mechanisms collectively undermine implementation in post-independence states still constructing their bureaucratic systems. No study has yet specifically diagnosed the causal mechanisms linking legal mandate to implementation failure within INAP's institutional context. This study addresses that gap by applying the Van Meter and Van Horn policy implementation model to empirically map the six variables policy standards and objectives, resources, inter-organizational communication, characteristics of implementing agents, socio-political conditions, and implementor disposition as an integrated system of interdependent constraints rather than isolated factors.

Two theoretical lenses inform the diagnostic framing of implementation failure in this study. Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) is applied not to evaluate leadership style in general, but to assess whether INAP's

curriculum design is calibrated to the varying maturity levels and positional demands of training participants a mismatch that directly affects the relevance variable within the Van Meter and Van Horn framework. Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1980) similarly informs the analysis of curriculum-participant alignment, specifically whether training content is sufficiently grounded in practical, experience-based contexts to generate meaningful behavioral change in senior officials. Both theories are operationalized here as diagnostic tools for evaluating the policy standards and objectives variable, particularly the gap between what the curriculum delivers and what structural officeholders require a gap documented in field observations and confirmed through interviews with both facilitators and participants.

The complexity of this implementation failure is further compounded by structural weaknesses that extend beyond curriculum design. As Ali & Magalhaes (2008) note, when training programs are disconnected from career advancement and performance evaluation systems, they tend to operate as administrative formalities rather than genuine capacity-building instruments. At INAP, this disconnection is visible in the absence of a continuous post-training evaluation mechanism and in the limited enforcement of the mandatory training requirement despite its clear legal basis. Weak inter-institutional coordination between INAP, the Civil Service Commission, and line ministries, combined with the absence of formal certification incentives, further reduces both participant motivation and institutional accountability.

Against this background, this study is specifically focused on two empirically bounded research questions: first, what factors explain why the implementation of the leadership training policy at INAP has failed to achieve effective coverage of eligible structural officeholders; and second, what implementation strategies are appropriate to address those identified constraints within INAP's institutional and resource context. The objective is thus analytical and diagnostic to identify and explain the causal variables of implementation failure at INAP, rather than to evaluate downstream leadership transformation outcomes, which would require a separate longitudinal study design. The contribution of this research lies in providing an empirically grounded, theoretically structured diagnosis of implementation constraints within a nascent post-independence civil service system, and in deriving context-specific strategic recommendations for INAP and relevant policymakers in Timor-Leste.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the implementation of the leadership training policy at INAP Timor-Leste. A qualitative approach was selected because the central research questions why implementation has remained ineffective and what constraints operate within the institutional system – require in-depth exploration of social, organizational, and political dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The

naturalistic inquiry orientation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) enables the researcher to examine implementation processes as they occur within their institutional context, integrating multiple stakeholder perspectives into a coherent analytical account.

The research was conducted at the Directorate General of the Instituto Nacional da Administração Pública (INAP), located in Dili, Timor-Leste. INAP was selected as the research locus for three reasons. First, it is the sole institution legally mandated under Decreto-Lei n.o 25/2012 (2012) and Decreto-Lei n.o 71/2022 (2022) to organize leadership training, public management, and competency certification for the state civil apparatus nationally. Second, the documented gap between its legal mandate and training coverage with only 150 participants trained from a pool of 3,527 eligible structural officeholders between 2022 and 2024 makes it a critical case for studying implementation failure. Third, as a post-independence institution still constructing its bureaucratic systems, INAP represents an underexamined institutional context in the policy implementation literature. INAP operates with a workforce of 87 personnel under the supervision of the Ministry of State Administration, organized under a Directorate General structure comprising one Director General, four National Directors, and twelve Department Heads.

This study used purposive sampling to select ten key informants who collectively represent the three functional perspectives most directly relevant to the Van Meter and Van Horn analytical framework: regulators, implementers, and beneficiaries. The Director General and National Director of Training were selected to provide institutional-level perspectives on policy standards, resource allocation decisions, and inter-organizational coordination corresponding to the policy standards and objectives, resources, and inter-organizational communication variables. The Head of the Career Development Training Department was included for operational-level insight into curriculum execution and implementation procedures. Three permanent lecturers and two guest lecturers were selected to represent the characteristics of implementing agents, particularly regarding facilitator competency backgrounds and their alignment with training content requirements. Two training participants were included to capture beneficiary-level experience of the training's relevance, quality, and practical applicability informing the assessment of curriculum-participant alignment within the policy standards variable. This composition was determined to achieve analytic sufficiency across all six variables of the framework rather than statistical representativeness.

Data were collected through three integrated methods. Semi-structured interviews formed the primary data source, with each interview guided by a protocol organized around the six variables of the Van Meter and Van Horn model. Questions were tailored to each informant's functional role, allowing for flexibility in follow-up while maintaining thematic consistency across interviews.

Document analysis served as a secondary data source and was used to triangulate and contextualize interview data. Four categories of documents were reviewed: Decree-Law No. 38/2012 and Decreto-Lei n.o 25/2016, which provided the normative baseline for evaluating policy standards and legal compliance; INAP training reports (2022–2024), which supplied quantitative data on participation rates and program scope; technical implementation guidelines, which were examined for operational alignment with stated policy objectives; and internal evaluation documents, which were analyzed for evidence of monitoring mechanisms and corrective actions.

Field observation was conducted using two complementary approaches. Participatory observation

enabled the researcher to engage directly in INAP's activities, gaining contextual understanding of day-to-day implementation dynamics consistent with Spradley (1980) framework for understanding social meaning. The methodological strengths and limitations of participant observation as a qualitative data collection technique, including the risk of observer bias and the challenge of maintaining analytical distance, are well documented in the methodological literature (Van Maanen, 1980). Non-participatory observation was applied in specific settings to maintain analytical distance and data objectivity (Nasution, 2006). Observational data were recorded systematically and used to verify or interrogate patterns emerging from interview and documentary sources.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), consisting of three iterative stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. In the data condensation stage, raw interview transcripts, field notes, and document excerpts were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns, before being organized deductively into thematic categories aligned with the six variables of the Van Meter & Van Horn (1975) model. Specifically, codes related to curriculum relevance and legal operationalization were assigned to the policy standards and objectives variable; codes addressing budget, staffing, and facilities were mapped to the resources variable; codes concerning INAP's coordination with the Civil Service Commission and line ministries were allocated to the inter-organizational communication variable; codes pertaining to facilitator competency and institutional capacity were assigned to the characteristics of implementing agents variable; codes capturing political dynamics and socio-structural conditions were linked to the socio-political conditions variable; and codes reflecting attitudes and commitment levels of personnel were categorized under the implementor disposition variable.

In the data display stage, thematic matrices were constructed to present the relationship between each variable and its corresponding empirical evidence across multiple data sources. Conclusion drawing was conducted through iterative interpretation of these matrices, with findings validated through source triangulation cross-checking interview data against documentary evidence and observational records and member checking with selected informants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. This procedure ensures that the analytical conclusions reflect the actual institutional dynamics at INAP rather than researcher inference alone.

Result and Discussion

The findings presented in this section are drawn from semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field observations conducted with ten purposively selected informants at the Directorate General of INAP Timor-Leste between January and February 2025. Data are organized according to the six variables of the Van Meter & Van Horn (1975) analytical framework, with each sub-section presenting empirical evidence first, followed by interpretive analysis. Where the framework's explanatory capacity is limited by the specific institutional context of a post-independence state, contextual extensions are proposed.

Policy Standards and Objectives

Leadership training at INAP rests on a formally established legal foundation. Decree-Law No. 38/2012 mandates systematic training as a requirement for productive civil service, while Decreto-Lei n.o 25/2016 Article 5(2) specifically establishes completion of high-level leadership training as a precondition for holding structural positions. The Director General confirmed this normative basis: *"Regarding policy standards, we are based on the Decree-Law. From the Civil Service Commission, authority is given to INAP to conduct*

leadership training with the goal of developing human resources for civil servants, they include Decree-Law No. 38/2012 and Decreto-Lei nº 25/2016."

The legal mandate is therefore unambiguous. However, findings reveal a critical distinction between the existence of a mandate and its operational enforcement. The National Director of Training stated: *"Every civil servant holding a position must attend leadership training. Regarding that rule, until now our implementation is not yet clear, because sometimes there are political policies that greatly influence training participants, as political policies still look at what party a person is from; so if there is a political change, it greatly affects that Decree-Law."*

This gap is compounded by the absence of standardized operational instruments. Informants 3 and 4 (the Head of the Career Development Training Department and a Permanent Lecturer) both confirmed that training has operated without a formally codified curriculum or structured competency modules, relying instead on presentation materials assembled on an ad hoc basis. The result is a policy that is legally mandatory but operationally indeterminate: standards exist at the regulatory level but have not been translated into measurable performance indicators, structured learning outcomes, or enforceable compliance mechanisms.

Van Meter and Van Horn's framework posits that clarity of standards is a prerequisite for implementation success. The INAP case extends this proposition: clarity at the normative level is insufficient when it is not accompanied by operationalized technical standards. In contexts where institutional capacity is still being constructed and political interference in personnel decisions is structurally embedded, regulatory clarity alone creates a compliance gap rather than implementation coherence. This suggests that in nascent bureaucratic systems, the framework's standards variable needs to be disaggregated into two distinct sub-dimensions normative clarity and operational specificity as the two do not automatically follow from one another.

Resources

Resource constraints represent the most pervasive and consistently reported barrier across all informant categories. Three distinct dimensions of resource inadequacy were identified. First, human resource capacity: INAP's permanent lecturer corps lacks the depth and specialization required to deliver leadership training across all structural levels independently. A Guest Lecturer stated: *"INAP as a Training Institute must have Doctors, must have Masters in specializations, must have experts in existing fields. Guest lecturers only come to supplement if permanent lecturers are not yet available, don't let INAP be a Training Institute but have no permanent lecturers."* Observations confirmed that for Director-General-level training, INAP's own lecturers were not involved in classroom delivery, indicating a structural dependency on external facilitators that undermines institutional sustainability.

Second, physical and technological infrastructure remains below the standard required for quality delivery. The same informant noted that training venues and instructional equipment are still being improved, creating inconsistency in the learning environment across cohorts. Third, the absence of standardized, complete training modules documented through both interviews and document review means that content quality varies by cohort and is not systematically evaluated against competency benchmarks.

Taken together, these resource deficits produce a compound effect: limited human capacity necessitates reliance on guest lecturers whose engagement is inconsistent; infrastructure gaps constrain delivery quality; and the absence of standardized modules prevents cumulative improvement across training cycles. Van Meter

and Van Horn treat resources as a single variable, but the INAP case demonstrates that resource constraints in under-institutionalized settings are multi-layered and mutually reinforcing, requiring differentiated rather than aggregate remediation strategies.

Inter-organizational Communication

Communication between INAP and external agencies principally the *Comissão da Função Pública* (CFP) and line ministries functions at a basic administrative level but lacks the systematic coordination required for effective implementation. The National Director of Training reported: *"For mandatory training, we request approval and the names of participants from the Civil Service Commission; communication has run well and smoothly because for every request we make for participant names, they always provide them."* However, the same informant acknowledged that the evaluation mechanism remains weak: *"Every training we always have an evaluation, only our evaluation is less effective, perhaps because of technology and the understanding of participants, trainers, and the leadership structure at INAP."*

This distinction between transactional communication and substantive coordination is critical. While participant nomination requests are processed, the Director General identified a deeper coordination failure at the ministry level: *"Sometimes we invite them and they don't come, perhaps due to their timing; and sometimes we invite people to attend training with certain requirements but those who arrive do not match what we expected."*

The communication breakdown in this case is not primarily technological or logistical. It is institutional and cultural: ministries do not treat INAP's training requirements as binding obligations, reflecting an absence of enforced accountability between agencies. The CFP issues participant nominations but does not monitor compliance with training prerequisites or follow up on non-attendance. This points to a structural gap in the inter-organizational governance of training policy coordination exists at the initiation stage but dissolves at the enforcement stage a dynamic that the Van Meter and Van Horn framework identifies as a communication variable but does not sufficiently explain in terms of its institutional causes.

Characteristics of the Implementing Agency

INAP's organizational structure contains functional gaps that directly impede implementation quality. The National Director of Training identified the absence of a dedicated curriculum department as a critical structural deficiency: *"There should be a department here that handles the curriculum, but so far there isn't one – the existing structure is still general and not focused. If there were a department to draft modules and a department to draft the curriculum, that doesn't exist yet, so that is one of the factors that hinders us."*

This structural absence means that curriculum development is absorbed by personnel with generalist responsibilities, reducing the quality and consistency of training content. At the coordination level, the Director General noted persistent participation failures from ministries despite pre-fiscal year coordination meetings, indicating that INAP's authority to enforce training requirements is constrained by its position within the broader institutional hierarchy. These two weaknesses internal structural gaps and limited external enforcement authority, combine to create an implementing agency that is institutionally mandated but operationally constrained, a condition that is particularly pronounced in post-independence bureaucracies where institutional architecture is still being built concurrently with its operational demands.

Social, Economic, and Political Conditions

Political dynamics constitute the most disruptive environmental variable affecting implementation consistency.

Table 2. Comparison of Civil Servant Training Policies of Timor-Leste and Indonesia

No	Policy Aspect	Decree-Law No. 38/2012 on Civil Servant Training	Decreto-Lei n.º 25/2016 on the Organization of Public Administration	Government Regulation No. 101 of 2000 on Education and Training for Civil Servant Positions
1	Policy Objective	Improving the professional competence, knowledge, skills and attitudes of civil servants.	Developing institutional capacity and human resources in public administration.	Improve the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professionalism of civil servants in carrying out their official duties.
2	Legal Basis for Training	Training is part of civil servant career development.	The government is responsible for increasing the capacity of civil servants through education and training.	Training is an instrument for developing competencies and requirements in developing civil servant positions.
3	Types of Training	Leadership training and technical training for civil servants.	Emphasizes the development of civil servant competencies in the public administration system.	Pre-service training, leadership training, technical training, and functional training.
4	Implementing Agency	Implemented by government agencies responsible for civil service training, including INAP. The government, through public administration institutions, manages the development of state civil servants.	The government, through public administration institutions, manages civil servant development.	Implemented by government education and training institutions such as LAN and other government agencies.

Source: Adapted from Decree No. 38/2012 on Civil Servant Training; Decreto-Lei n.º 25/2016 on the Organization of Public Administration; and Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 101 of 2000 on Education and Training for Civil Servant Positions ([Government of the Republic of Indonesia, 2000](#))

A Guest Lecturer provided a detailed account of how government transitions undermine training outcomes:

"They have attended training, but after a change in government, training participants holding positions are replaced and pushed out without looking at their certificates. In other countries, people have a fixed bureaucracy and administration; if one politician rises, they don't make changes to technical jobs because they know the people sitting there are technical people. In Timor, not yet when there is a change in government, we haven't seen a single module to anticipate changes in seats or occupying positions."

This testimony identifies a structural contradiction at the heart of the training policy: Decreto-Lei n.º 25/2016 mandates training completion as a precondition for structural appointment, yet post-appointment personnel replacement operates outside this requirement entirely. The result is that training certification is decoupled from career continuity, removing the primary incentive mechanism that would motivate participation. This is not merely a socio-political condition that affects implementation at the margins; it structurally nullifies the enforcement logic of the policy itself. The Van Meter and Van Horn framework positions environmental conditions as a moderating variable, but in this case, political interference functions as an active implementation barrier that overrides normative standards, a dynamic that warrants treatment as a primary rather than peripheral explanatory variable in post-independence institutional contexts.

Disposition of Implementers

Implementor disposition at INAP reflects a pattern of administrative compliance rather than substantive commitment. The National Director of Training described motivational strategies deployed to sustain participant engagement, including verbal recognition and appeals to national ownership while simultaneously acknowledging that personnel decisions within the institution are subject to political override: *"I myself am the Director, but if the decision*

from above is like this or that, I must follow." This statement reveals a disposition that is institutionally constrained rather than individually resistant: implementors do not reject the policy, but their capacity to advocate for its consistent application is circumscribed by hierarchical political dynamics.

Field observations confirmed that while training sessions are conducted with professional intent, the absence of enforced standards, combined with external personnel instability, generates a culture of procedural compliance without outcome accountability. No evidence was found of implementors actively subverting the policy. However, the absence of internalized commitment to policy objectives as distinct from compliance with administrative procedures means that implementation quality is dependent on individual initiative rather than systemic institutional norms. In terms of the Van Meter and Van Horn framework, this finding suggests that disposition should be assessed not only as acceptance or rejection of policy, but as a spectrum of engagement that includes constrained compliance as a distinct and consequential category in contexts of political-administrative interdependence.

Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings of this study reveal that implementation failure at INAP is not attributable to any single variable but to the systemic interaction of six mutually reinforcing constraints within a specific institutional configuration: a legally mandated policy operating in a bureaucratic environment where enforcement mechanisms are weak, institutional architecture is incomplete, and political interference structurally overrides merit-based personnel decisions. This pattern normative adequacy combined with operational collapse constitutes the central analytical contribution of this study and requires explanation beyond what a straightforward application of the Van Meter and Van Horn framework provides.

Van Meter & Van Horn (1975) posit that policy standards, resources, communication, implementing agency characteristics, environmental conditions, and implementor disposition function as interdependent determinants of

implementation success. The INAP case confirms this interdependence but reveals an asymmetry that the original framework does not explicitly theorize: in post-independence bureaucratic contexts, the socio-political conditions variable does not merely moderate implementation, it actively overrides the normative authority of the other five variables. Decreto-Lei n.º 25/2016 establishes training completion as a mandatory precondition for structural appointment, yet post-appointment personnel replacement operates entirely outside this requirement. This means that even where standards are clear, resources are mobilized, and implementors are compliant, the structural decoupling of training certification from career continuity removes the enforcement logic that would make the policy self-sustaining. This finding extends the Van Meter and Van Horn model by identifying political-administrative decoupling as a distinct implementation failure mode that requires dedicated analytical treatment, particularly in states where bureaucratic institutionalization remains incomplete.

Comparison with Previous Studies

This study both confirms and departs from findings in the existing literature in analytically specific ways. Amaliasari & Priyadi (2021) and Suharsono (2021) document implementation challenges associated with the shift to e-learning modalities in Indonesian training institutions, identifying participant disengagement, technology gaps, and weak facilitation as primary obstacles.

This study selectively confirms prior findings on e-learning implementation challenges in Indonesian public training institutions. Amaliasari & Priyadi (2021) and Suharsono (2021) identify participant disengagement, technology gaps, and weak facilitation as recurring obstacles, patterns evident at INAP as well. Where this study departs is in locating those challenges within INAP's specific institutional and regulatory context, as reflected in Table 2.

Nekwek (2022), analyzing civil servant competency development in Papua using the Edwards III framework, found that regulatory limitations, facility constraints, and political dynamics collectively inhibited optimal implementation a pattern closely mirrored in the INAP findings. However, a critical difference emerges: in Nekwek's context, bureaucratic structures were functionally established even if under-resourced, whereas INAP operates with structural gaps specifically the absence of a dedicated curriculum department, that mean institutional capacity is not merely constrained but architecturally incomplete. This distinction matters for remediation: Nekwek's recommendations centre on resource augmentation within an existing structure, while the INAP case requires structural construction prior to optimization.

Haque et al. (2020) examined the integration of adaptive values into leadership training curriculum design in West Java, finding that value-based content was not being systematically embedded due to facilitator initiative gaps and curricular omissions. This finding resonates with the INAP context, where curriculum gaps similarly reflect the absence of an institutional function responsible for content development. However, Jakaria's study operated within an established training system with existing curriculum frameworks; at INAP, the curriculum development function itself does not yet exist as a dedicated organizational unit, representing a more fundamental institutional deficiency.

Internationally, Brinkerhoff & Crosby (2002) argue that policy implementation in developing states fails most persistently not because of technical deficiencies but because of weak institutionalization of accountability relationships between agencies. The INAP findings empirically validate this argument in a specific post-independence context: the breakdown in inter-organizational

communication between INAP, the Civil Service Commission, and line ministries is not primarily technological or logistical but reflects the absence of enforced accountability at each coordination interface. Similarly, Grindle (1980) concept of implementation in developing countries, where political feasibility and administrative capacity interact to determine outcomes is directly applicable here: the INAP case demonstrates that even where political will exists at the regulatory level, its absence at the operational level of personnel management creates a structural contradiction that administrative reform alone cannot resolve.

What this study contributes beyond these existing works is the empirical documentation of how these failure modes interact specifically within a nascent post-independence civil service system, where the state is simultaneously legislating requirements and building the institutional capacity to fulfill them. This dynamic is not confined to the civil-service training sector alone; it reflects a broader pattern of Timor-Leste state-building in which formal institutional mandates were legislated ahead of full operational readiness, as illustrated by the organic law establishing the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL), which similarly formalized the organizational structure and mandate of a new security institution during the same post-independence period (Ialves, 2009). The novelty lies not in applying the Van Meter and Van Horn framework which has been widely used, but in demonstrating that in this institutional configuration, the framework's variables operate with different relative weights than the original model implies: political conditions and implementing agency characteristics function as primary constraints, while communication and disposition function as secondary expressions of those deeper structural failures. This hierarchical interaction among variables, specific to under-institutionalized contexts, represents an analytical refinement that the existing literature has not yet systematically documented in the Timor-Leste context.

Limitations and Cautions

Several limitations qualify the scope and generalizability of these findings. First, the study relies on ten purposively selected informants, providing analytical depth within INAP but not statistical representativeness across the broader civil service system. Perspectives from line ministry officials responsible for nominating and releasing training participants, a group whose coordination failures are central to the findings, were not directly captured, representing a gap that future research should address. Second, data collection was conducted within a bounded observation period between January and February 2025, which may not capture temporal variation in implementation quality across different political administrations or budget cycles. Third, while the study diagnoses implementation constraints, it does not measure downstream outcomes: whether completed training produces measurable changes in leadership behavior or organizational performance remains empirically unaddressed and represents a distinct research question requiring a longitudinal design.

A further methodological caveat concerns the document analysis component. Internal INAP evaluation documents were reviewed, but their analytical utility was limited by the acknowledged weakness of INAP's own evaluation mechanisms, a finding corroborated by informant testimony. Consequently, the absence of robust institutional data on training outcomes means that the coverage gap of 4.25 percent, while empirically important as a process indicator, cannot be directly linked to performance outcomes on the basis of current evidence.

Recommendations for Future Research

Five directions for future research emerge from these limitations and findings. First, a longitudinal impact study tracking INAP alumni across multiple cohorts and government

transitions would assess whether training completion translates into sustained leadership behavioral change, addressing the downstream outcome gap identified above. Second, comparative institutional analysis benchmarking INAP against analogous training institutions in CPLP member states, particularly those with shared post-colonial administrative heritage such as Mozambique or Cape Verde, would generate context-sensitive best practices that are more directly transferable than comparisons with institutionally mature systems such as Indonesia's LAN. Third, a mixed-methods study incorporating structured surveys of ministry-level training coordinators alongside qualitative interviews would allow the inter-organizational communication and coordination failures documented here to be mapped with greater precision and at scale. Fourth, research specifically examining the relationship between political transition cycles and training participation rates, using administrative data from the Civil Service Commission would empirically test the political interference mechanism that emerged as a central finding in this study. Fifth, curriculum development research examining how contextually grounded, competency-based modules can be designed for Timor-Leste's specific administrative environment drawing on Adult Learning Theory and the situational demands documented in this study would directly address the upstream curriculum gap that this research identifies as foundational to implementation failure.

Conclusion

Findings from ten informants across six analytical dimensions suggest that leadership training policy at INAP is legally established but operationally fragile. While the regulatory foundation provides clear normative grounding, it does not appear to translate automatically into operational readiness, as evidenced by the absence of a codified curriculum, resource constraints, weakening inter-agency coordination at enforcement stages, and INAP's limited institutional authority. Political dynamics — particularly personnel replacement following government transitions — appear to further weaken the incentive logic underlying the policy, while implementors tend to display constrained compliance rather than outright resistance.

These patterns collectively suggest that more effective implementation would likely require simultaneous attention to operational standardization, inter-agency accountability, institutional capacity, and the political conditions shaping personnel continuity.

Through analysis of the six variables within the Van Meter and Van Horn framework, two variables emerge as primary constraints governing the entire logic of implementation. First, socio-political conditions, in which recurring government transitions structurally decouple training certification from career continuity, thereby eliminating the principal compliance incentive embedded in Decreto-Lei n.º 25/2016. Second, the characteristics of the implementing agency, in which the absence of a dedicated curriculum unit renders INAP's institutional capacity not merely constrained but architecturally incomplete. The remaining four variables (policy standards, resources, inter-organizational communication, and implementor disposition) operate as secondary expressions of these two deeper structural failures rather than as independent determinants.

Theoretically, these findings refine the Van Meter and Van Horn model by identifying a failure mode not explicitly theorized in the original framework: political-administrative decoupling, whereby political interference actively overrides the normative authority of the remaining five variables rather than merely moderating implementation outcomes. In post-independence state contexts where institutional architecture is being constructed concurrently with operational demands,

the socio-political conditions variable cannot be treated as a peripheral moderating factor but must be repositioned as a primary explanatory variable. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the analytical necessity of disaggregating the policy standards variable into two distinct sub-dimensions normative clarity and operational specificity since in nascent bureaucratic systems, the presence of one does not automatically produce the other.

In practical terms, the findings yield three evidence-based implications for INAP and relevant policymakers in Timor-Leste. The establishment of a dedicated curriculum development unit constitutes a structural prerequisite rather than an incremental capacity enhancement, since without it, all training interventions will continue to rely on ad hoc, non-standardized content regardless of other improvements. Additionally, the enforceability of Decreto-Lei n.º 25/2016 depends on the institutionalization of binding inter-agency accountability mechanisms that genuinely obligate the Civil Service Commission and line ministries, rather than transactional communication limited to participant nomination requests. Critically, the government must establish institutional safeguards that formally insulate training certification requirements from political appointment cycles, so that the policy's enforcement logic is not structurally nullified each time a government transition occurs.

Several limitations qualify the scope of these findings. The study draws on ten purposively selected informants within INAP, meaning that the perspectives of line ministry officials whose coordination failures are central to the findings were not directly captured. Data collection was also bounded within a two-month observation window between January and February 2025, which may not reflect variation in implementation quality across different budget cycles or political administrations. Furthermore, the study diagnoses implementation constraints without measuring downstream outcomes: whether completed training produces measurable changes in leadership behavior remains empirically unaddressed and constitutes a distinct research question. Three priority directions for future research emerge from these limitations. First, a longitudinal impact study tracking INAP alumni across multiple government transition cycles would empirically assess whether training completion translates into sustained behavioral change. Second, comparative institutional analysis benchmarking INAP against training institutions in CPLP member states sharing post-colonial administrative heritage would generate more contextually transferable best practices than comparisons with institutionally mature systems. Third, quantitative research explicitly testing the relationship between political transition cycles and training participation rates using Civil Service Commission administrative data would systematically validate the political interference mechanism that this study identifies as its central finding.

Author contributions

Author 1 led the study and played the primary role in the research process. Author 1 conducted fieldwork, collected data and information, processed the data, and synthesized the findings. Additionally, Author 1 was responsible for drafting the manuscript, including the preparation of tables and figures, ensuring the comprehensive presentation of the research outcomes. Author 2 contributed through supervision and provided methodological guidance. Author 2 analyzed the data, reviewed the research workflow, and ensured the rigor and clarity of the methods and reporting. Furthermore, Author 2 offered critical revisions to strengthen the overall quality of the manuscript.

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