

Leading Through Facilitation: Transforming Collaboration, Trust, and Change Readiness in Maldivian Institutions

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ABSTRACT: In today's rapidly evolving organizational landscape, facilitation has emerged as a critical leadership competency that moves beyond traditional command-and-control models toward participatory decision-making, shared ownership, and reflective dialogue. This conceptual paper explores how facilitative leadership enhances collaboration, trust, and organizational adaptability within Maldivian institutions. Drawing on transformational leadership, relational coordination, and organizational readiness for change theories, it synthesizes recent literature (2020–2025) to highlight facilitation's growing relevance across the civil service, education sector, local councils, and NGOs. In the Maldives, leadership remains shaped by hierarchical traditions; however, ongoing decentralization and governance reforms provide fertile ground for facilitative approaches to flourish. The paper argues that facilitative leadership strengthens coordination, deepens trust, and builds institutional resilience. It concludes that integrating facilitation into leadership development and capacity-building programs can foster a more inclusive, adaptive, and trust-based organizational culture across Maldivian institutions.

KEYWORDS: Facilitative Leadership, Collaboration, Trust and Change Management

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership in contemporary organizations increasingly demands adaptability, participation, and collaboration. Traditional hierarchical models rooted in authority and control; are no longer sufficient in addressing rapid technological, social, and institutional change. Scholars highlight a paradigm shift toward participatory and process-oriented leadership that enables rather than directs others (McKie & Willis, 2023; Edmondson & Lei, 2022). Facilitative leadership represents this evolution, emphasizing dialogue, trust, shared ownership, and empowerment (Schmidt-Huber et al., 2024). More than a communication tool, facilitation is a leadership competency that enables teams to collaborate effectively, manage conflict constructively, and sustain a culture of collective learning.

Globally, facilitation has gained recognition as a vital leadership capability that enhances psychological safety, engagement, and innovation (Reitz et al., 2021; Carmeli & Dutton, 2023). Facilitative leaders serve as catalysts for collaboration; connecting diverse perspectives and fostering trust through transparency and empathy. Within transformational leadership and relational coordination frameworks, facilitation functions as a behavioral bridge linking interpersonal relationships with organizational outcomes. In this sense, leaders act as enablers of collective intelligence, guiding institutions to adapt and thrive amid uncertainty and change.

In the Maldivian context, the relevance of facilitative leadership is amplified by the nation's unique characteristics as a small island developing state (SIDS). The Maldives faces distinct governance challenges, including geographic dispersion, limited resources, and the need for robust inter-agency collaboration. Leaders across ministries, schools, and councils must coordinate development programs that span multiple islands and sectors. Facilitative leadership is particularly suited to this environment, aligning with cultural traditions of shura (consultation) and collective decision-making. Recent research highlights a growing shift from hierarchical to participatory models within education and civil service sectors (Waheeda, 2024; Sudha & Azam, 2023), suggesting that facilitation could play a transformative role in strengthening institutional effectiveness and change readiness.

Despite global recognition of facilitative leadership, its practice within Maldivian institutions remains underexplored. Current leadership development programs continue to prioritize administrative and managerial competencies over relational and facilitative skills. As a result, many organizations face challenges related to coordination, innovation, and employee engagement. Addressing these gaps requires a clearer conceptual understanding of facilitation and its interconnected roles in fostering trust, collaboration, and organizational readiness for change.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although leadership development has gained attention in the Maldives, most institutional frameworks continue to emphasize hierarchical and directive approaches. Such models restrict participation, stifle innovation, and weaken trust among employees. Empirical studies in Maldivian education and public administration reveal that leadership effectiveness is constrained by limited collaboration and rigid communication structures (Ismail, 2022; Waheeda, 2024). Centralized decision-making and entrenched hierarchies often suppress participatory dialogue, creating a disconnect between leadership vision and organizational practice. The absence of structured facilitative processes further contributes to fragmented coordination and low readiness for reform initiatives. Globally, leadership research underscores facilitation as a mechanism that enhances collaboration, builds trust, and strengthens organizational adaptability. Edmondson and Lei (2022) highlight that facilitative behaviors foster psychological safety as the foundation for learning and change while McKie and Willis (2023) describe facilitation as the communicative process that transforms leadership into collective co-creation. Rafferty and Jimmieson (2023) also demonstrate its pivotal role in promoting organizational readiness for change. Despite this growing body of evidence, these frameworks remain largely unexamined in Maldivian institutions, where leadership culture continues to be shaped by bureaucratic control.

Existing Maldivian studies referencing participatory or democratic leadership emphasize the importance of relational and reflective competencies (Nasir, 2023; Abdulla, 2016). However, no integrated conceptual or empirical models link facilitative leadership with collaboration, trust, and readiness for change within the local context. This gap limits the development of effective leadership training and reform initiatives across ministries, schools, and NGOs.

Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is the limited theoretical and practical understanding of facilitation as a leadership competency within Maldivian institutions. Exploring facilitative leadership as a pathway to enhance collaboration, build trust, and strengthen organizational readiness will not only enrich leadership scholarship but also support national reforms focused on decentralization, inclusive governance, and institutional capacity-building.

Although global studies link facilitative leadership to collaboration and readiness, there remains limited understanding of how these dynamics operate in small-island governance contexts. No empirical or conceptual model yet situates facilitation within the interdependence of trust, collaboration, and institutional readiness in the Maldives. This paper therefore contributes by synthesizing these dimensions into a contextualized theoretical model.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore facilitation as a core leadership competency within the framework of contemporary organizational leadership theories.
2. To discuss how facilitative leadership supports collaboration and trust across teams and institutions.
3. To discuss the conceptual relationship between facilitative leadership and organizational readiness for change in Maldivian institutions.
4. To highlight the relevance of facilitative leadership for leadership development within the Maldivian public, educational, and non-governmental sectors.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to direct major investigations, the following research questions are followed;

1. How is the term "facilitative leadership" operationalized by leaders in the context of contemporary leadership in the Maldives?
2. How does facilitative leadership influence the quality and effectiveness of inter-departmental or cross-functional collaboration within institutions in the Maldives?
3. How does facilitative leadership strengthen trust within institutions in the context of centralized governance?
4. How do employees in institutions perceive the role of their leaders in facilitating change and mitigating resistance?

5. STATEMENT OF JUSTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

This study is of great significance for theory, practice, and national development in the Maldives. The study will test facilitative leadership theory and place the responses in a rather unique SIDS context, adding to the global literature of leadership. Most leadership models are derived from Western, industrialized settings. In this respect, the present research will be in a position to provide insights on how cultural nuances, such as those in the Maldivian socio-political environment, influence the application and effectiveness of facilitative practices. These may, in turn, allow for more nuanced, globally relevant theory development (Hofstede, 2001).

This research will provide policymakers, senior civil servants, and organizational heads in the Maldives with an evidence-based framework for leadership development. Enhance organizational capacity for managing complex transitions, such as fiscal decentralization or climate adaptation projects. Design targeted training programs to develop facilitative competencies among current and emerging leaders. At the macro level, successful adoption of facilitative leadership serves as a cornerstone for good

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governance and sustainable national development. Democratic values are nurtured at the grassroots level when decision-making is inclusive. Collaborative and agile institutions are more capable of harnessing innovation and managing economic change. Clearly, the Maldives has very ambitious climate resilience plans; their implementation requires coordination and trustful collaboration.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of the key concepts;

Concept	Author (Year)	Definition
Facilitation	Schmidt-Huber et al., (2024) & Cropper (2011)	A leadership process that enables individuals or groups to work collaboratively toward shared goals through guided dialogue, reflection, and participatory decision-making.
Facilitative Leadership	Day et al., (2020) and McKie & Willis (2023)	A relational and process-oriented leadership style in which leaders act as guides, coaches, and enablers rather than directors. It emphasizes empowerment, dialogue, and trust to align teams toward collective success.
Collaboration	Yoon & Lee (2022) and Shaw et al., (2024)	The process of individuals or groups working together to achieve a common goal through shared responsibility, open communication, and coordinated action.
Trust	Li, Liu & Luo (2024) and Reitz et al., 2021)	The belief in a leader's integrity, competence, and fairness, forming a foundation for open communication, risk-taking, and cooperative behavior. In facilitative contexts, trust is built through authenticity, transparency, and consistency.
Psychological Safety	Edmondson & Lei (2022)	The shared belief that individuals can express ideas, ask questions, or admit mistakes without fear of negative consequences; an essential outcome of facilitative leadership.
Organizational Readiness for Change	Caci et al., (2025) and Rafferty & Jimmieson (2023)	The collective psychological and behavioral preparedness of members to implement and sustain change. It depends on motivation, capability, confidence, and commitment.
Empowerment	Schmidt-Huber et al., (2024) and Oreg et al., (2022)	Delegating authority and fostering autonomy among employees to make meaningful contributions and decisions. Facilitative leaders create empowerment by developing competence and providing feedback.
Relational Coordination	Day et al., (2020)	The mutual process of communicating and relating for task integration, characterized by shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect.
Reflective Practice	Schmidt-Huber et al., (2024)	The habit of critically analyzing experiences and actions to improve professional judgment and learning, enabling self-awareness and adaptability.
Participatory Decision-Making	Harvey et al., (2023) and Waheeda (2024)	A collective approach to problem-solving in which stakeholders contribute to defining issues, generating solutions, and selecting actions. Facilitation ensures equitable participation and consensus-building.

6.1 Conceptual Foundations: Facilitation and Leadership

Facilitation has evolved from a set of group-management techniques into a core leadership competency central to contemporary organizational effectiveness. In complex, interdependent systems, leaders are increasingly valued for their ability to coordinate dialogue, build shared understanding, and guide adaptive learning rather than exerting unilateral control (McKie & Willis, 2023;

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Edmondson & Lei, 2022). Facilitation thus represents a shift in leadership logic from directing action to designing the conditions under which collective intelligence can thrive.

Conceptualizing Facilitation within Leadership Theory

Facilitation is defined as the process of helping groups navigate dialogue, decision-making, and conflict in structured yet flexible ways, emphasizing how issues are addressed rather than prescribing outcomes (PON / Harvard, 2025). Core facilitative behaviors include active listening, constructive questioning, summarizing shared meaning, drawing out diverse perspectives, and creating safe spaces for reflection (The Systems Thinker, 2025). Such practices are central to fostering psychological safety; the shared belief that team members can express ideas or mistakes without fear (Edmondson & Lei, 2022).

In organizational leadership research, facilitation is no longer viewed as an interpersonal soft skill but as a systemic capacity that enables teams to manage complexity and ambiguity (Schmidt-Huber et al., 2024). Abson et al. (2024) show that shared and facilitative leadership behaviors enhance trust within leadership teams, demonstrating that facilitation strengthens collaboration not only vertically (leaders–followers) but also laterally among peers. This supports the idea that facilitative leadership is a collective capability, embedded in relationships and structures rather than the authority of a single individual.

Facilitative Leadership as an Enabling Process

Facilitative leadership extends facilitation into a continuous, organizational practice of enabling rather than directing. Facilitative leaders design processes that promote dialogue and reflective learning; they ask powerful questions, balance process with content, and build shared responsibility (Brandt & Rees, 2024; IDEAS/RePEc, 2018). The goal is not consensus for its own sake but collective ownership of decisions and learning.

Historically, educational-leadership research identified facilitation as a cornerstone of effective school leadership. Early models of facilitative principals emphasized three domains creating meaning (vision), guiding group processes, and situating actions within institutional contexts which continue to inform current frameworks for collaborative school improvement (Nasir, 2023; Waheeda, 2024). In corporate and public-sector environments, the same facilitative principles are now recognized as drivers of innovation and team learning (Reitz et al., 2021; Carmeli & Dutton, 2023).

Linking Facilitation to Contemporary Leadership Theories

From a theoretical standpoint, facilitation operationalizes key principles across multiple modern leadership paradigms:

- Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) emphasizes vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration. Facilitation translates these abstract elements into *behavioral processes*—dialogue, empowerment, and reflection—that transform vision into participatory action. Mekonnen et al. (2023) demonstrate that transformational behaviors significantly predict organizational readiness for change, underscoring how facilitation, as a transformative micro-process, bridges motivation and implementation.
- Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006) frames leadership as shared among multiple actors depending on expertise and context. Facilitation provides the coordination mechanism that makes distributed leadership functional, as it structures participation and clarifies roles within collaborative systems (Ginsburg et al., 2024).
- Shared Leadership and Relational Leadership perspectives emphasize the interdependence of relationships and collective efficacy. Abson et al. (2024) found that shared leadership flourishes when trust and facilitation are present within teams, confirming that facilitative behaviors enhance relational coordination (Gittell, 2002).

Thus, facilitative leadership can be seen as the *behavioral expression* of these relational and participatory theories, integrating interpersonal communication with systemic coordination.

Facilitation as a Dynamic and Context-Responsive Competency

Modern leadership contexts characterized by hybrid work, cross-sectoral collaboration, and continuous change require leaders to navigate fluid boundaries. Facilitation enables leaders to oscillate between directive and participatory modes as circumstances demand (Leadership in Implementation of Change, 2021). This flexibility reflects what Schmidt-Huber et al. (2024) call a “dynamic leadership orientation,” where leaders act as both participants and designers of collective processes.

Christensen (2024) adds that facilitation interacts with institutional design: starting conditions, incentive structures, and communication norms either enable or constrain facilitative behaviors. Hence, facilitation is not only a personal competency but also an organizational capability embedded in systems and culture. In public governance settings such as ministries or councils in the Maldives; this suggests that leadership reform must address both skill development and institutional redesign to sustain facilitative practices.

Empirical Support for Facilitative Competencies

Recent organizational studies reinforce the effectiveness of facilitative leadership across domains. Caci et al. (2025) and Köhler et al. (2024) link facilitative communication and psychological readiness to stronger change efficacy. Ginsburg et al. (2024) show qualitatively that leaders who use internal facilitation empower frontline staff and enhance implementation success, bridging the gap between strategic intent and operational reality. Similarly, Reitz et al. (2021) demonstrate that authenticity and mindfulness; key facilitative attributes predict higher trust and collaboration in teams.

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These findings substantiate facilitation as an empirically grounded leadership behavior with measurable organizational outcomes, complementing its conceptual roots in participation and reflection.

Facilitation as a Meta-Skill for Modern Organizations

In increasingly complex institutions, facilitation functions as a meta-skill that integrates emotional intelligence, communication, and systems thinking (Schmidt-Huber et al., 2024). It reframes leadership as an enabling architecture; a process that structures relationships, communication, and reflection to generate collective insight. In this sense, facilitation provides the connective tissue between visionary intent and collective execution, translating abstract leadership ideals into tangible, collaborative action.

For small-island contexts such as the Maldives, where geographic dispersion and interdependence define governance, facilitation offers a pragmatic means of sustaining participation and coherence. Leaders who master facilitative competencies can bridge cultural traditions of *shura* (consultation) with modern governance demands, ensuring that leadership becomes both contextually grounded and future-ready.

Building on this conceptual foundation, the next section explores how facilitation directly shapes collaboration and trust, two relational outcomes fundamental to institutional effectiveness.

6.2 Facilitation, Collaboration, and Trust

Collaboration and trust form the relational foundation of effective organizations. In increasingly interdependent workplaces, leadership is less about unilateral decision-making and more about creating the conditions under which collaboration can occur (Carmeli & Dutton, 2023). Facilitative leadership plays a central role in this process by coordinating dialogue, enabling reflection, and aligning diverse stakeholders toward shared outcomes. Through facilitation, leaders convert structural interdependence into purposeful cooperation built on psychological safety and mutual respect.

6.2.1 Facilitation and Relational Coordination in Collaboration

Collaboration extends beyond simple cooperation; it embodies shared accountability, collective learning, and joint problem-solving (Yoon & Lee, 2022). According to Relational Coordination Theory, high-performing systems depend on the reciprocal relationship between communication quality and relationship quality (Gittell, 2002; Day et al., 2020). Communication that is timely, accurate, and problem-solving sustains coordination, while relationships characterized by shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect strengthen trust.

Facilitative leadership aligns directly with this framework. By structuring dialogue, clarifying shared objectives, and modelling respect, facilitative leaders generate the relational energy that sustains collaboration across teams. Empirical work reinforces this link: a 2024 multisite study in primary healthcare found that facilitative leadership predicted stronger relational coordination among teams ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$), even after controlling for participation culture and team solidarity (Ginsburg et al., 2024). The finding confirms that facilitation is not merely correlated with teamwork; it acts as a causal social process that binds interdependent actors through trustful communication.

In organizational and public-sector contexts, facilitative leadership enables boundary-spanning collaboration, where different departments or stakeholders co-create solutions. Christensen (2024) found that facilitative leadership, combined with appropriate institutional design, produced higher-quality collaboration outcomes in cross-agency networks. This insight is particularly relevant for Maldivian civil-service and council systems, where ministries and local authorities must coordinate under decentralization reforms. Facilitation provides the process discipline needed to align ministries' policy objectives with local implementation, bridging structural silos through relational coordination.

6.2.2 Facilitation as a Trust-Building Mechanism

Trust is the emotional and cognitive belief that others will act with integrity, competence, and fairness (Li, Liu, & Luo, 2024). In facilitative environments, trust is both an antecedent and an outcome of effective collaboration. Facilitative leaders build trust through authentic engagement, transparency, and empathy; behaviors that invite participation while reducing fear of judgment (Reitz et al., 2021).

Research by Abson et al. (2024) demonstrated that in shared-leadership teams, mutual trust mediates the relationship between facilitative behaviors and collective performance. Teams led by facilitative leaders reported higher psychological safety and willingness to share expertise. Similarly, Schmidt-Huber et al. (2024) showed that facilitative leaders foster trust by encouraging reflective dialogue and feedback, which enhance team adaptability and learning. These findings converge on a central premise: facilitation transforms interpersonal trust into an organizational resource that sustains engagement and readiness for change.

In the Maldivian context where organizational hierarchies remain culturally embedded trust assumes even greater importance. Studies of school and civil-service leadership reveal that employees often hesitate to voice opinions or challenge superiors (Ismail, 2022; Waheeda, 2024). Facilitative leadership counters this pattern by institutionalizing listening, feedback, and participatory dialogue. Leaders who facilitate rather than command signal respect for others' perspectives, fostering *vertical and horizontal trust* that improves morale and innovation.

6.2.3 Facilitation, Collective Learning, and Collaboration Quality

Collaboration flourishes in environments that support collective learning the capacity of groups to reflect, share insights, and adapt practices (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2023). Facilitative leadership cultivates this learning orientation by guiding teams through structured reflection and co-analysis. Caci et al. (2025) and Köhler et al. (2024) highlight that organizational readiness for change is strongly influenced by perceived trust and communication quality; two relational conditions created through facilitation.

Moreover, facilitative leaders act as learning architects, designing feedback loops that convert dialogue into knowledge. Reitz et al. (2021) linked mindful and authentic facilitation to stronger organizational learning and resilience. In schools, facilitation enhances professional learning communities (PLCs), enabling teachers to co-design pedagogical strategies and share reflective practices (Nasir, 2023). Within NGOs and councils, facilitation helps community groups translate local insights into collective action plans.

6.2.4 Facilitation in Multi-Stakeholder and Networked Settings

Modern governance and organizational ecosystems rely on multi-stakeholder networks; coalitions of ministries, agencies, private actors, and citizens. In such systems, overlapping responsibilities and competing interests demand process leadership more than positional authority. Facilitative leadership serves as the “social glue” that aligns diverse actors by fostering dialogue norms, negotiation skills, and mutual understanding (Christensen, 2024).

A 2023 study on cross-sectoral partnerships found that facilitative leaders increased trust and collaboration between government and community actors by promoting transparency and shared learning sessions (Mekonnen et al., 2023). These insights are directly applicable to the Maldives, where public-sector modernization, disaster-risk governance, and educational reforms all require multi-agency cooperation. Facilitation can thus transform fragmented bureaucratic interactions into integrated learning partnerships.

6.2.5 Implications for Organizational Trust and Culture

Trust generated through facilitative processes transcends interpersonal relationships—it becomes embedded in organizational culture. Once employees experience equitable participation and fair treatment, they internalize facilitation as a norm. Over time, this develops into a culture of openness, constructive dissent, and shared responsibility (Edmondson & Lei, 2022).

For Maldivian institutions striving toward Vision 2030’s participatory-governance goals, such cultural transformation is vital. Facilitative leadership helps replace compliance-based cultures with trust-based collaboration, allowing organizations to respond to change with agility. In educational institutions, this shift manifests as teacher empowerment and school-level innovation. In councils and NGOs, it manifests as citizen engagement and co-governance.

Across theoretical and empirical traditions, facilitative leadership emerges as both a catalyst for collaboration and a generator of trust. Through the mechanisms of relational coordination, reflective dialogue, and psychological safety, facilitation converts interdependence into synergy. In the Maldivian context, where institutional success depends on coordination across dispersed islands and diverse agencies, facilitative leadership offers a culturally congruent model of collective action. By embedding facilitation into leadership development and governance reform, organizations can institutionalize collaboration and trust as enduring capabilities rather than temporary outcomes.

6.3 Facilitative Leadership and Organizational Readiness for Change

Facilitative leadership enhances a key dimension of organizational resilience; readiness for change, defined as the shared psychological and behavioral capacity of members to embrace, enact, and sustain transformation. Contemporary studies conceptualize readiness not merely as a static attitude but as a *collective orchestration* of motivation, confidence, and contextual support that determines the success of any reform process (Weiner, 2009; Caci et al., 2025).

6.3.1 Conceptualizing Readiness: Psychological and Structural Orchestration

Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) encompasses three interdependent sub-dimensions; commitment (willingness to change), efficacy (belief in capability), and contextual support (resources and climate) (Caci et al., 2025). A recent systematic review spanning 2015–2024 confirmed that these dimensions operate synergistically: change succeeds when leaders cultivate both emotional readiness and structural enablers. Yet the predictive value of readiness remains inconsistent across sectors, largely due to variations in leadership style and organizational culture.

To refine this construct, Köhler et al. (2024) propose a typology identifying latent readiness profiles; Enthusiasts, Pragmatists, and Skeptics; distinguished by valence (perceived benefit), affect (collective emotion), and behavioral engagement. This typology underscores that readiness is not homogeneous but context-sensitive, requiring adaptive leadership interventions to shift attitudes and energy toward change.

Facilitative leadership directly influences these readiness dimensions through multiple mechanisms:

- **Valence (Perceived Value):** By engaging employees in sense-making and participatory planning, facilitative leaders help staff internalize the purpose and benefits of change, increasing perceived worth.
- **Efficacy (Capability):** Through reflective dialogue, capacity-building, and coaching, facilitative leaders enhance individuals’ and teams’ confidence to act effectively.
- **Behavioral Engagement:** Facilitation structures ownership as an encouraging initiative, experimentation, and shared accountability throughout the change process.

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Empirical support for these mechanisms is growing. Ginsburg et al. (2024), studying implementation across healthcare systems, found that leaders who adopted facilitative behaviors empowered frontline teams and converted resistance into constructive participation. Their qualitative evidence suggests that when leaders act as thinking partners rather than directors, reform efforts sustain momentum and morale.

Complementary studies echo this dynamic. Research in African public organizations demonstrated that transformational and facilitative leadership styles fostered readiness when coupled with supportive cultures (Mekonnen et al., 2023). Similarly, a 2024 study by Christensen highlighted that facilitative leadership interacts with institutional design: trust, clarity of roles, and process transparency amplify change commitment across departments. These findings confirm that facilitation cannot operate in isolation—it thrives within climates of trust, justice, and shared responsibility.

Ethical-leadership research further supports this logic. A meta-analysis by Oreg et al. (2022) and follow-up studies in 2023 found that ethical leaders promote readiness indirectly by shaping just and supportive climates. Ethical and facilitative leaders share behavioral commonalities; empathy, dialogue, and inclusion which build psychological safety and thus readiness for transformation. In the Maldivian context, such insights are particularly salient. Hierarchical structures and centralized authority often limit employees' confidence to participate in change. Facilitative leadership provides a culturally aligned remedy: by institutionalizing consultation (*shura*) and reflection, leaders can increase both commitment and efficacy in reform programs; vital under the nation's decentralization and Vision 2030 initiatives.

6.3.2 Empirical Bridges: From Facilitation to Readiness and Performance

Direct quantitative evidence linking facilitative leadership to ORC remains emergent, yet adjacent findings across leadership and change literature provide credible support for the theoretical pathway. Studies show that trust and relational coordination, both facilitated by participatory leadership, are robust predictors of readiness. For instance, Organizational Trust and Readiness (2025) reported that employees' trust in leadership explained over 40% of variance in change commitment and performance outcomes in service organizations.

If facilitation strengthens trust; as demonstrated by Abson et al. (2024) and Schmidt-Huber et al. (2024); then facilitative leadership indirectly boosts readiness through this relational channel. Furthermore, the relational coordination findings summarized in Section 4.2 reinforce that facilitation enhances communication quality, which, in turn, predicts collective efficacy, a core element of readiness.

A 2024 cross-sectoral study by Caci et al. confirmed that organizations with high relational coordination and leader accessibility reported superior readiness scores and smoother implementation. Similarly, Köhler et al. (2024) found that employees perceiving participatory leadership climates were 27% more likely to belong to the "Enthusiast" readiness class. These results empirically anchor facilitation as a bridge between interpersonal trust and collective change commitment.

Synthesizing across studies yields a conceptual pathway:

Facilitative Leadership → Relational Trust & Coordination → Collective Efficacy → Organizational Readiness for Change.

This sequential mechanism aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which holds that environments supporting autonomy and relatedness enhance intrinsic motivation precisely the conditions created by facilitative leaders. In practical terms, when employees feel heard, competent, and connected, readiness becomes a shared organizational state rather than a managerial directive.

In Maldivian ministries, schools, and NGOs, this pathway suggests that building facilitative competencies among leaders could significantly improve reform uptake, cross-agency collaboration, and long-term policy sustainability. Facilitation thus becomes both a *psychological* and *structural* lever for national modernization and resilience.

6.4 Integrating Maldivian Context and Global Insights

The final sub-section synthesizes the enriched literature with Maldivian realities. The goal is to ensure that global theory and evidence are meaningfully adapted to small-island institutional settings.

6.4.1 Maldivian Evidence in Leadership, Trust, and Change

While direct studies on facilitation in Maldivian institutions are absent, several relevant works offer indirect support:

- Participatory and Democratic Leadership Trends: Studies of Maldivian higher education and civil service (Waheeda, 2024; Sudha & Azam, 2023) document a shift toward more inclusive leadership styles, which align with facilitative behaviors.
- Teacher Collaboration / Professional Learning Communities: Research in Maldivian schools (Ismail, 2022; Nasir, 2023) shows a positive correlation between collaborative school cultures and teacher performance. These collaborative cultures often operate through facilitative structures.
- Leadership & Trust in Institutions: Investigations into school climate, leadership communication, and institutional trust (Abdulla, 2016; Majid et al., 2018) show that transparent communication and participatory decision-making lead to higher institutional satisfaction and trust.

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Because existing Maldivian leadership programs emphasize managerial and administrative skills, there's a gap in relational, facilitative training. Integrating facilitation as a competency could fill this gap, improving coordination across fragmented islands, enhancing trust among staff and communities, and boosting change readiness.

6.4.2 Cultural Fit and Institutional Design Conditions

Not all leadership models transfer seamlessly across contexts; adaptive translation is crucial. Two conditions are particularly important for facilitative leadership in the Maldivian context:

Cultural Norms and the Shura Tradition: Maldivian culture places high value on shura (consultation). Facilitation aligns naturally with this cultural practice; it represents not an imported model, but a contemporary operationalization of consultation and collective decision-making. This cultural congruence enhances the legitimacy and receptivity of facilitative approaches in governance and institutional settings.

Institutional Design and Structural Support: Facilitation flourishes within enabling systems that provide participatory decision forums, transparent feedback mechanisms, and delegated authority structures. As Christensen (2024) emphasizes, facilitative leadership achieves maximum effectiveness when complemented by institutional design elements such as clear rules, incentive systems, and accountability frameworks.

Therefore, while facilitation-driven leadership holds significant promise, it must be institutionalized through governance reforms, feedback mandates, and capacity-building structures to achieve lasting impact.

6.4.3 Policy Translation for Small-Island Systems

Small-island systems such as the Maldives face scale-related limitations that amplify coordination challenges and constrain institutional reach (Asia Foundation, 2025). Facilitative leadership mitigates these challenges by promoting distributed problem-solving, empowering local decision-makers, and leveraging social capital across dispersed island communities. Its emphasis on participatory dialogue aligns with both the Vision 2030 agenda and the National Resilience Framework, making it a practical and scalable approach to multi-level governance in geographically fragmented contexts.

Thus, facilitative leadership provides a culturally congruent and structurally adaptable pathway for the Maldives to strengthen decentralized governance, institutional trust, and participatory reform across ministries, councils, educational institutions, and civil organizations.

6.5 Theoretical Framework

This conceptual study draws upon three complementary theoretical perspectives; Transformational Leadership Theory, Relational Coordination Theory, and Organizational Readiness for Change Theory; to explain how facilitation functions as a leadership competency that influences collaboration, trust, and adaptability within organizations. Together, these theories form an integrative framework connecting leadership behavior with organizational outcomes, particularly in the context of Maldivian institutions.

6.5.1 Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994)

Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, inspiration, and individualized support to motivate followers toward higher performance. Facilitative leadership extends this framework by translating inspirational vision into participatory action. Rather than relying on authority, facilitative leaders empower employees through dialogue, reflection, and shared problem-solving—creating psychological ownership and intrinsic motivation (McKie & Willis, 2023; Schmidt-Huber et al., 2024). In the Maldivian context, where hierarchical systems often limit innovation and participation, facilitation redefines leadership as a shared process of learning and empowerment. It encourages civil servants, educators, and council leaders to co-create solutions and build mutual accountability (Sudha & Azam, 2023; Waheeda, 2024).

6.5.2 Relational Coordination Theory (Gittell, 2002)

Relational Coordination Theory posits that performance in interdependent work systems depends on high-quality communication and relationships built on shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect. Facilitative leadership strengthens these relational dynamics by fostering open dialogue, trust, and cross-boundary communication (Day et al., 2020). This perspective explains how facilitation enhances coordination in multi-level or geographically dispersed systems such as those common in the Maldives—where collaboration depends on trust-based communication between ministries, schools, NGOs, and local councils. Facilitation, therefore, acts as a relational bridge connecting diverse stakeholders, enabling more coherent and inclusive governance.

6.5.3 Organizational Readiness for Change (Weiner, 2009)

The Organizational Readiness for Change framework defines readiness as the shared commitment and collective confidence to implement change successfully. Facilitation nurtures readiness through participatory planning, reflective dialogue, and shared ownership, which strengthen commitment and belief in the organization's capacity for change (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2023; Caci et al., 2025). Facilitative leaders create psychological safety and trust—key precursors to change acceptance—by engaging employees and communities in decision-making. In Maldivian public and educational institutions, this process helps align national reform objectives with institutional and community-level readiness, ensuring that change initiatives are sustainable and contextually grounded.

6.5.4 Integrated Theoretical View

Together, these frameworks demonstrate that facilitative leadership bridges the gap between leadership vision and organizational action. It motivates and empowers individuals (Transformational Leadership), cultivates trust and collaboration (Relational Coordination), and strengthens adaptability and resilience (Organizational Readiness for Change). This synthesis positions facilitation as a holistic leadership competency essential for participatory, trust-based, and adaptive organizations; particularly within decentralized and collaborative governance systems such as those evolving in the Maldives.

6.6 Integrated Theoretical Framework of Facilitative Leadership



Figure 1: Integrated Theoretical Framework of Facilitative Leadership

Source: Adapted from Bass & Avolio (1994); Gittell (2002); Weiner (2009); McKie & Willis (2023); Schmidt-Huber et al. (2024); Caci et al. (2025).

The Integrated Theoretical Framework in **Figure 1** combines three foundational theories such as Transformational Leadership Theory, Relational Coordination Theory, and Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) to conceptualize facilitative leadership as a core mechanism that enables collaboration, trust, and adaptability across institutions.

1. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994)
This theory provides the motivational base. It highlights how leaders inspire and empower others through shared vision, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Facilitation extends these principles by translating inspirational vision into practical, participatory action.
2. Facilitative Leadership (McKie & Willis, 2023; Schmidt-Huber et al., 2024)
At the center of the framework, facilitation functions as the *behavioral bridge* connecting motivation with collective execution. It operationalizes leadership through dialogue, reflection, and co-creation, empowering teams to take shared ownership of outcomes and building psychological safety.
3. Relational Coordination Theory (Gittell, 2002)
This theory explains how effective collaboration depends on high-quality communication and relationships grounded in shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect. Facilitative leadership reinforces these relational dynamics, especially across interdependent teams or decentralized institutions such as ministries and local councils.
4. Organizational Readiness for Change (Weiner, 2009; Caci et al., 2025)
Readiness emerges when members collectively believe in their ability and commitment to implement change. Facilitative leadership cultivates this readiness by encouraging participation, reflection, and trust, ensuring that change is understood, embraced, and sustained.
5. Institutional Adaptability and Effectiveness (Maldivian Context)
The outcome of these interconnected processes is an adaptable, trust-based institutional culture as an essential for small island contexts like the Maldives, where collaboration across ministries, councils, schools, and NGOs is vital. Facilitation supports decentralized governance by promoting shared accountability, inclusive participation, and sustainable leadership.

The framework positions facilitation as the dynamic process that connects leadership inspiration (Transformational Theory) with collaboration (Relational Coordination) and change capability (Organizational Readiness), leading to institutional effectiveness in the Maldivian governance and education context.

7. RESEARCH DESIGN (METHODOLOGY)

This is conceptual analytical design grounded with a comprehensive synthesis of relevant existing literature. Therefore, major investigations are carried out using secondary sources of information that focuses on theoretical exploration, comparative analysis, and contextual application to the Maldivian institutional settings. This study interprets facilitation as a leadership competency and to integrate findings across leadership, organizational behavior, and change management research.

7.1 Research Approach

Qualitative approach was employed to synthesize global and regional context of facilitative leadership, collaboration, trust, and change readiness. It enables integration of theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to a cohesive framework relevant to Maldivian contexts. The study builds upon secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, policy reports, and institutional case studies published between 2011 and 2025, with a focus on research conducted from 2020 onwards to ensure relevance to current leadership paradigms.

7.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The literature was selected based on four criteria: (1) relevance to facilitative or participatory leadership; (2) focus on collaboration, trust, or organizational readiness for change; (3) empirical or conceptual rigor in methodology; and (4) applicability to education, governance, or civil service sectors. Databases such as Scopus, Science Direct, Springer Link, and Google Scholar were utilized. Maldivian studies were prioritized to ensure contextual alignment, including works from Maldives National University, Villa College, and relevant public-sector publications.

7.3 Analytical Approach

The thematic synthesis is followed as a strategy, identifying recurring patterns, relationships, and theoretical linkages. Three major conceptual themes are (1) facilitation as a leadership competency, (2) facilitation's influence on collaboration and trust, and (3) facilitation's role in organizational readiness for change. Literature across these themes was critically analyzed and triangulated with established theories such as Transformational Leadership, Relational Coordination, and Organizational Readiness for Change (Weiner, 2009). Through this integration, the study developed a contextualized conceptual model relevant to Maldivian institutions.

7.4 Contextual Adaptation to the Maldives

To enhance practical relevance, this analytical synthesis incorporates Maldivian studies on leadership in education, civil service, and community governance (Waheeda, 2024; Ismail, 2022; Sudha & Azam, 2023). These studies provide evidence of participatory tendencies and reform readiness within local institutions. The methodology, therefore, not only reviews global literature but also contextualizes it to local governance realities such as geographic dispersion, limited resources, and cultural collectivism. This dual focus of this study is an important contribution to both theory and practice.

7.5 Ethical Considerations

This study is exclusively based on secondary literature; no human participants were involved. It ensures all its investigations and analyses are carried out in a responsible, respectful manner with integrity, authenticity, validity and credibility of the findings. The research adheres to academic integrity and citation standards under APA 7th edition guidelines. All referenced works have been credited appropriately to their original authors.

7.6 Theoretical Contribution

This conceptual paper advances leadership theory by positioning facilitation as a *core meta-competency* that integrates the behavioral, relational, and adaptive dimensions of leadership. It extends Transformational Leadership Theory by demonstrating how inspirational vision can be operationalized through participatory action and reflective dialogue. By embedding Relational Coordination Theory, it identifies facilitation as the mechanism through which trust and collaboration emerge across interdependent teams and institutions. Furthermore, by linking facilitation to Organizational Readiness for Change, the study contributes a novel conceptual pathway, that is, *Facilitation → Trust and Relational Coordination → Organizational Readiness and Adaptability*. This study, therefore, adds to leadership in small island developing states (SIDS) by proposing a culturally congruent model rooted in inclusivity, shared governance, and community engagement.

7.7 Limitations

This nature of a study might constrain empirical validation of the identified relationships and their impact on each other. The analysis relies on existing secondary literature, which may not fully capture the nuances of leadership practices within Maldivian institutions or emerging informal facilitative behaviors. Similarly, contextual and cultural variations may limit the generalizability of global studies to the Maldivian governance and education sectors. Future research should employ qualitative case studies, action research, or mixed-method approaches to empirically test and refine the conceptual framework presented. Despite these limitations, this paper provides a strong theoretical foundation for advancing facilitative leadership as a transformative competency within Maldivian governance, education, and community-based organizations.

8. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Facilitation redefines leadership from a hierarchical model into an enabling process that promotes empowerment, dialogue, and shared accountability. Instead of controlling outcomes, facilitative leaders engage teams in co-creating solutions, nurturing collaboration, and sustaining motivation. Schmidt-Huber et al. (2024) emphasize that facilitation enhances organizational capability through reflection, feedback, and participatory problem-solving. This approach aligns with the global shift toward inclusive governance and adaptive institutions that value agility, trust, and stakeholder engagement (McKie & Willis, 2023).

In the Maldivian context, facilitative leadership resonates with national values of community participation (*shura*), inclusivity, and shared responsibility. The Maldives' Vision 2030 and decentralization policies emphasize participatory reform and capacity building at local levels (Asia Foundation, 2025). Thus, institutionalizing facilitation represents both an organizational reform and a cultural alignment with Maldivian governance traditions.

8.1 Theme (1): Facilitation in the Maldivian Civil Service Sector and Government Ministries

The Maldivian civil service remains largely hierarchical, characterized by centralized decision-making and limited horizontal coordination. As decentralization expands, ministries and agencies must collaborate on cross-sectoral priorities such as education, climate adaptation, and disaster management. Facilitative leadership provides the framework for this transition by fostering dialogue, trust, and shared vision across departments.

When leaders facilitate rather than dictate, communication becomes multidirectional, encouraging ministries to co-develop policy solutions and share accountability. Waheeda (2024) and Sudha and Azam (2023) find that participatory and transformational approaches lead to higher innovation and job satisfaction in Maldivian organizations. Facilitation builds on these principles by operationalizing dialogue, empowerment, and reflection—the mechanisms that sustain cross-sector collaboration.

Moreover, facilitative leadership enhances transparency and public trust. Structured consultations allow ministries to integrate citizen perspectives into policymaking, aligning with international best practices in participatory governance (Carmeli & Dutton, 2023). Institutionalizing facilitative methods could therefore strengthen both administrative performance and democratic legitimacy in Maldivian ministries.

8.2 Theme (2): Facilitative Leadership in the Education Sector

Education depends on leadership that cultivates collaboration, reflection, and innovation. Facilitative leadership encourages distributed decision-making, where teachers actively shape curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. This fosters Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that promote peer mentoring and collaborative inquiry (Nasir, 2023; Abdulla, 2016).

Within the Maldivian context, this approach aligns with the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2024–2028), which emphasizes inclusive governance, capacity building, and school autonomy. School leaders practicing facilitation—through reflective dialogue, consensus-building, and joint problem-solving—enhance teacher engagement and professional growth. Ismail (2022) found that schools with democratic leadership cultures show improved teaching quality and student outcomes.

Facilitative leadership also mitigates geographic isolation by enabling virtual collaboration and shared learning among educators across dispersed islands. These practices reinforce global evidence linking facilitation to teacher efficacy, engagement, and collective responsibility (Reitz et al., 2021; Schmidt-Huber et al., 2024).

8.3 Theme (3): Facilitative Leadership in NGOs and Local Councils

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local councils are central to community development and service delivery in the Maldives. Their effectiveness depends on citizen participation and mutual trust between leaders and communities. Facilitative leadership offers a participatory governance model where stakeholders co-design, implement, and evaluate initiatives collaboratively.

In practice, facilitative leaders act as mediators, balancing donor requirements, community expectations, and local realities. This participatory engagement fosters collective ownership, enhancing project sustainability and accountability (Asia Foundation, 2025). Similarly, councils that adopt facilitative practices—open forums, consultation meetings, and participatory planning—report stronger citizen trust and community-led outcomes.

With the national shift toward decentralization and local autonomy, facilitation becomes essential for improving coordination among councils, NGOs, and central agencies. By promoting relational coordination, facilitative leadership strengthens local governance, inclusivity, and development equity.

8.4 Implications for Leadership Development

Integrating facilitation into leadership development is a strategic reform priority for Maldivian institutions. Training programs across ministries, schools, and NGOs should include modules on dialogue facilitation, reflective practice, emotional intelligence, and consensus-building. These competencies are vital for fostering trust-based collaboration and strengthening readiness for change.

Current civil service training emphasizes compliance and managerial efficiency. By embedding facilitative competencies, programs can shift focus toward participatory problem-solving and inter-agency collaboration. The Civil Service Commission (CSC) and Institute of Local Governance (ILG) can play pivotal roles in embedding these frameworks into professional development curricula.

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Similarly, universities and teacher education colleges can integrate facilitative leadership into their management courses, preparing future leaders to guide teams through participatory and adaptive approaches. Over time, this could drive a generational shift in Maldivian organizational culture—from authority-driven to collaborative and reflective.

8.5 Broader Organizational and Policy Implications

At the systemic level, facilitative leadership fosters cultures of trust, innovation, and adaptability. It operationalizes the principles of good governance, transparency, participation, and accountability across public and private sectors. Facilitative practices strengthen relational trust (Li et al., 2024), promote learning agility (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2023), and build psychological safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2022).

For private organizations, facilitation enhances creativity and employee commitment by encouraging ownership and collaboration. In the civil service, it builds resilience and inter-ministerial cooperation. In schools, it creates environments conducive to professional learning. Across sectors, facilitative leadership bridges individual motivation and collective performance, translating leadership vision into actionable results.

From a policy perspective, embedding facilitative principles into national governance frameworks supports Vision 2030's goals for participatory reform and institutional modernization. Facilitation thus emerges not merely as a leadership technique but as a national capacity-building strategy; strengthening governance, civic participation, and the Maldives' overall institutional maturity.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Facilitation as a core leadership competency redefines the essence of leadership in contemporary organizations. Unlike hierarchical models focused on control and compliance, facilitative leadership emphasizes participation, reflection, and empowerment. It integrates three interdependent dimensions—collaboration, trust, and organizational readiness for change—that collectively determine institutional resilience and adaptability (Schmidt-Huber et al., 2024; Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2023).

This study conceptualizes facilitation as a transformative leadership competency that bridges intention with organizational action. Drawing on Transformational Leadership Theory, facilitation energizes individuals through shared purpose and empowerment. Relational Coordination Theory explains how facilitative communication and trust strengthen collaboration across interdependent teams. Finally, Organizational Readiness for Change Theory demonstrates how facilitation fosters collective efficacy, enabling institutions to navigate reform and uncertainty effectively.

In the Maldivian context, where leadership systems are evolving under decentralization and modernization reforms, facilitative leadership offers both cultural resonance and practical relevance. Maldivian institutions—ministries, schools, local councils, and NGOs—operate within a social environment that values *shura* (consultation), community cooperation, and relational trust. These traditions align naturally with facilitative principles, making facilitation an ideal model for inclusive, adaptive, and participatory governance.

Moreover, the Maldives dispersed geography demands innovative leadership practices capable of connecting and motivating distributed teams. Facilitation; both in-person and virtual, serves as the connective framework for collaboration across institutions and islands. By cultivating psychological safety, mutual respect, and empowerment, facilitative leaders enhance decision-making and problem-solving processes essential to governance, education, and community development.

9.1 Integrate Facilitation into Leadership Frameworks

National leadership frameworks should formally recognize facilitation as a strategic competency. The Civil Service Commission (CSC), ministries, and educational institutions can embed facilitation modules within leadership development programs focusing on reflective dialogue, active listening, consensus-building, and systems thinking. Institutionalizing facilitation across professional training will create consistency and scalability in participatory leadership practices.

9.2 Promote a Facilitative Organizational Culture

Embedding facilitation in leadership practice requires a corresponding cultural shift toward transparency, empathy, and shared accountability. Leaders should foster open communication and participatory planning, using regular reflection sessions, collaborative meetings, and structured feedback loops. Such practices can embed a culture of trust and co-ownership across Maldivian institutions.

9.3 Leverage Virtual Facilitation for Decentralized Governance

Given the Maldives' geographic dispersion, virtual facilitation is critical for sustaining collaboration across islands. Leadership programs should include digital facilitation training; covering online consensus-building, virtual teamwork, and remote dialogue management to maintain engagement in distributed governance structures. These skills will strengthen coordination between central agencies and island councils, improving responsiveness and service delivery.

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9.4 Embed Facilitation in Policy and Reform Processes

Facilitative methods should be systematically integrated into national policy frameworks such as the National Resilience Framework, Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2024–2028), and Vision 2030. Structured facilitation during policy design and implementation can ensure broader participation, better alignment of stakeholder interests, and more sustainable outcomes. Facilitation transforms policymaking from consultation to genuine co-creation.

9.5 Strengthen Cross-Sectoral Collaboration and Trust

Facilitative coordination is vital for inter-ministerial task forces, public–private partnerships, and community initiatives. Leaders trained in facilitation can align diverse actors around shared goals, ensure mutual accountability and reduce duplication. This is particularly relevant in addressing complex, cross-cutting issues such as education reform, disaster management, and climate resilience; where collaboration across sectors and levels of governance is essential.

9.6 Future Research Directions

While this study is conceptual, future empirical research should investigate facilitation's influence on organizational performance, innovation, employee engagement, and change readiness within Maldivian institutions. Mixed-method designs, in-depth case studies, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) could quantitatively validate the conceptual pathways proposed. Comparative studies across Small Island Developing States (SIDS) would also help position the Maldives as a regional exemplar for facilitative governance and leadership reform.

In conclusion, facilitation represents the next frontier in leadership evolution—a paradigm shift from authority to authenticity, hierarchy to collaboration, and instruction to inclusion. For the Maldives, embracing facilitative leadership is both a strategic necessity and a reflection of its cultural ethos of unity, cooperation, and mutual respect. By institutionalizing facilitation as a national leadership competency, the Maldives can nurture leaders equipped to navigate complexity through empathy, dialogue, and shared vision; driving resilience, innovation, and sustainable development across sectors.

By institutionalizing facilitation as a national leadership competency, the Maldives can nurture a new generation of leaders capable of managing complexity through collaboration, trust, and shared vision. Facilitative leadership not only strengthens governance and policy coherence but also embodies the nation's commitment to participatory reform and collective progress.

10. FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP AS A CATALYST FOR STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND POLICY IN THE MALDIVES

Facilitative leadership holds transformative potential for enhancing governance and policy effectiveness in the Maldives. As the nation deepens decentralization and empowers local councils, leadership approaches that prioritize participation, dialogue, and shared accountability become essential. Facilitative leadership directly aligns with these priorities by shifting governance culture from hierarchical control to collaborative, transparent, and trust-based systems (Waheeda, 2024; Asia Foundation, 2025).

10.1 Strengthening Institutional Governance

Maldivian governance traditionally operates within a centralized bureaucratic framework that limits inter-agency coordination and citizen participation. Facilitative leadership provides both the behavioral and structural tools to overcome these barriers. By fostering inclusive dialogue among ministries, councils, and communities, leaders can co-create policy solutions grounded in local realities. This participatory approach ensures that decisions are not only technically sound but also socially legitimate, enhancing ownership and long-term sustainability.

Within ministries and state agencies, facilitative leaders improve communication, align strategic objectives, and close the policy–implementation gap. This reflects Relational Coordination Theory, which emphasizes shared goals, mutual respect, and frequent communication as drivers of institutional performance (Day et al., 2020). Through facilitation, policy processes become learning systems; allowing ministries to adapt to emerging challenges and integrate stakeholder feedback effectively.

10.2 Enhancing Local Council Leadership

The Maldives' decentralized framework assigns local councils a vital role in community planning, service delivery, and accountability. Yet, many councils face capacity limitations and fragmented coordination with central agencies. Facilitative leadership transforms these dynamics by positioning councils as conveners of dialogue rather than top-down administrators. Councils practicing facilitation engage citizens, women's development committees, and NGOs in co-designing and monitoring local initiatives. This participatory process strengthens trust, transparency, and responsiveness, while enhancing conflict resolution through consensus-building—crucial in socially diverse island communities. Facilitation thus enables councils to bridge local knowledge with national policy priorities.

10.3 Integrating Facilitation into National Policy Processes

Facilitative leadership also strengthens national policy coherence by embedding structured dialogue into every stage of the policy cycle—from consultation to implementation and evaluation. Applying facilitative approaches within frameworks like the National

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Resilience Framework and Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) can align ministries, councils, and communities under unified reform goals.

Facilitation operationalizes good governance principles—transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, and responsiveness by ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making (Edmondson & Lei, 2022; Carmeli & Dutton, 2023). Policies co-developed through facilitative processes are more adaptive, contextually grounded, and capable of mobilizing citizen trust; qualities essential for addressing cross-cutting national challenges such as climate resilience, education reform, and disaster risk reduction.

10.4 Advancing Policy Innovation and Learning Governance

In an era of rapid environmental and social transformation, policy innovation depends on continuous learning and adaptive reflection. Facilitative leadership fosters learning-oriented governance, where dialogue, feedback, and experimentation are central to policymaking. Leaders trained in facilitation are more likely to adopt reflective practices that encourage innovation, collective problem-solving, and institutional agility.

By cultivating psychological safety, facilitative leaders empower civil servants to share ideas, challenge norms, and learn from failure (Edmondson & Lei, 2022). Over time, this fosters a governance culture where collaboration replaces compliance, dialogue replaces directives, and shared accountability replaces rigid control.

10.5 Long-Term Vision for National Leadership Development

To sustain this transformation, facilitative leadership must be embedded in national leadership development systems. The Civil Service Commission (CSC), Institute for Local Governance (ILG), and Maldives National University (MNU) should collaborate to design facilitation-centered capacity-building programs for ministry officials, council leaders, and NGO managers.

Embedding facilitation in governance curricula will cultivate a generation of leaders who view leadership not as authority, but as the ability to convene, connect, and collaborate. Aligning facilitative leadership with Vision 2030, decentralization, and public-sector modernization will strengthen institutional coherence, citizen trust, and adaptive governance capacity. Facilitation thus emerges not merely as a leadership skill but as a strategic pillar of democratic resilience and sustainable development in the Maldives.

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