

Change Management and Organizational Culture in the Port Management: Pelindo Post Merger

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Abstract

The 2021 merger of PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero), which integrated Pelindo I, II, III, and IV, represented a large-scale organizational transformation involving not only the consolidation of organizational structures and business processes but also systematic change management and organizational culture harmonization. This study aimed to analyze the change management strategies, organizational culture formation process, and effects of both factors on the post-merger organizational performance of PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero). The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and company document analysis involving five key informants holding positions at the director, group head, and department head levels. The data were analyzed using narrative analysis through transcription, coding, theme identification, and systematic interpretation. The results showed that Pelindo's successful transformation was supported by structured change management based on Kotter's eight-step change model, inclusive leadership, transparent communication, employee involvement, and organizational culture harmonization. The internalization of AKHLAK values, strengthened cross-entity collaboration, and various transformation programs helped reduce resistance and establish a more cohesive organizational identity. The study concluded that merger success depended not only on structural and business process changes but also on the organization's ability to manage human factors, organizational culture, leadership, government policy support, and an integrated combination of transformational and transactional leadership.



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INTRODUCTION

Ports are strategic components of the global supply chain and fundamental drivers of economic competitiveness in the era of globalization. Increasing international trade, digital transformation, and sustainability requirements have compelled port operators worldwide to improve their operational efficiency, technological capabilities, and organizational adaptability. Major Asian ports, such as Singapore, Shanghai, Busan, and Jebel Ali, have demonstrated significant improvements through integrated management systems and digitalization initiatives. In contrast, Indonesian ports have historically faced challenges related to operational efficiency and logistics competitiveness, necessitating substantial organizational transformation to strengthen their position within regional and global maritime networks (Allam et al., 2024).

The challenges faced by Indonesian ports have been reflected in several operational indicators. Before the integration of PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero), Indonesian ports recorded longer vessel turnaround and dwelling times than international benchmarks. The average vessel turnaround time in Indonesia was approximately 3–4 days, whereas Singapore achieved a turnaround time of less than 24 hours. Furthermore, the dwelling time at Tanjung

Priok Port ranged from 3.2 to 3.7 days, while those at Belawan and Tanjung Perak reached approximately 6–7 days. These conditions contributed to Indonesia's relatively weak position in the Logistics Performance Index (LPI), indicating the need for structural improvements in logistics management and port governance.

To address these challenges, the Indonesian government initiated a major transformation by merging four state-owned port enterprises—Pelindo I, Pelindo II, Pelindo III, and Pelindo IV—into a single entity, PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero), on October 1, 2021, pursuant to Government Regulation No. 101 of 2021. The merger formed part of the state-owned enterprise transformation agenda aimed at improving efficiency, strengthening integration, and enhancing the global competitiveness of Indonesian ports. However, organizational mergers involve more than structural consolidation because they require the alignment of systems, work processes, leadership approaches, and organizational cultures that previously developed independently.

Post-merger organizational transformation often presents complex challenges, particularly those related to change management and cultural integration. Differences in organizational values, employee behaviors, technological systems, and operational procedures may generate resistance and diminish the anticipated synergies of a merger. Previous research has emphasized that successful organizational change depends on effective leadership, communication, employee involvement, and the establishment of a shared vision. (Errida & Lotfi, 2021) highlighted leadership and systematic change management practices as important determinants of successful organizational transformation. Similarly, (Covic & Planinic, 2020) emphasized that organizational culture plays a key role in supporting the sustainable implementation of change.

Previous studies on mergers and acquisitions have primarily focused on financial performance, strategic synergies, and structural integration, while the human and cultural dimensions of post-merger transformation have received comparatively less attention. (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2019) demonstrated that managing people-related factors is critical during mergers because employee perceptions and cultural differences influence integration outcomes. Furthermore, research on organizational culture has shown that cultural alignment contributes to employee commitment and organizational performance. However, empirical studies examining the interaction between change management strategies and organizational culture in large-scale mergers of state-owned enterprises, particularly in Indonesia's port sector, remain limited.

In the context of PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero), the merger involved integrating four entities with different operational backgrounds, corporate values, and management systems. The transformation required not only the standardization of business processes but also the development of a unified organizational identity. One major initiative was the internalization of AKHLAK values as the foundation of the post-merger corporate culture. However, securing employee acceptance, reducing resistance, and ensuring sustainable cultural integration remain critical to determining whether the organizational transformation can achieve its intended objectives.

The urgency of this research arose from the increasing need to understand how large-scale organizational transformations can be effectively managed in strategic infrastructure sectors. Port management directly influences national logistics efficiency, trade competitiveness, and economic development. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms

through which change management and organizational culture contribute to post-merger performance is essential for organizational practitioners and policymakers. Previous studies have not sufficiently explained how government policy support, leadership approaches, cultural harmonization, and employee adaptation collectively influence transformation outcomes in state-owned enterprises.

This study offers novelty by examining the post-merger transformation of PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero) from an integrated perspective encompassing change management, organizational culture, and organizational performance. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined merger outcomes from financial or structural perspectives, this study explored the organizational processes underlying successful integration. Furthermore, it extended existing change management perspectives by identifying contextual factors arising from Indonesia's state-owned enterprise environment, including government policy support, the combination of transformational and transactional leadership, competency standardization, organizational agility, and meritocracy as factors influencing post-merger adaptation.

Based on these considerations, this study aimed to analyze the change management strategies implemented during the Pelindo merger, examine the formation and transformation of organizational culture, and identify how these factors influenced post-merger organizational performance. Specifically, the study investigated how leadership, communication, employee involvement, cultural internalization, and transformation programs contributed to reducing resistance and strengthening organizational effectiveness. It adopted a qualitative case study approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of stakeholder experiences and organizational transformation processes.

This study provided both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriched the literature on organizational change and merger integration by providing empirical evidence from a large-scale state-owned port enterprise in Indonesia. Practically, the findings offered insights for corporate leaders, government institutions, and policymakers into strategies for managing organizational transformation, strengthening cultural alignment, and improving post-merger performance. The study may also serve as a reference for future organizational transformation initiatives, particularly in industries characterized by complex structures, multiple stakeholders, and substantial operational integration requirements.

METHOD

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to examine change management, organizational culture, and their effects on organizational performance following the merger of PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero). The case study design facilitated an in-depth examination of stakeholders' experiences and the factors influencing the implementation of post-merger organizational change (Wahyuni, 2022).

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data were collected through three main methods: semi-structured interviews, observation, and analysis of company documents such as annual reports and internal documents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Directors and Managers regarding their experiences, perceptions, and views on change management, organizational culture, and Pelindo's performance after the merger, with a duration of approximately 40-120 minutes per participant. All interview questions were designed to directly correspond to the research questions and refer

to a case study protocol developed around three main variables: the change management process, the challenges to change, and organizational culture (Table 3). Data were analyzed using a narrative analysis approach through the stages of transcription, coding, identification of key themes, and the construction of a coherent and comprehensive narrative (Josselson & Hammack, 2021).

Table 1. Case Study Protocol

Variable	Code	Central Question
Climate for Change	CC1-CC3	Communication of the urgency of change, the process of selecting the change management team, and the change vision developed for the port transformation.
Engaging & Enabling the Organization	EE1-EE3	Understanding of the change vision at all employee levels, management of resistance, and measurement of short-term target achievement.
Implementing & Sustaining for Change	IS1-IS2	Evaluation and adjustment of the change strategy, and embedding of change into the organizational culture.
Challenges to Change (Technology, Organization, Leadership, Resistance)	TC, OC1-OC2, LC, R	Challenges in adopting new technology, planning and strategy for managing resistance to organizational change, and the role of leadership in shaping a culture that supports change.
Organizational Culture (Employee Behaviour, Creativity, Environment Adaptability)	EB, C, EA1-EA2	Cultural change after the merger, freedom to explore new ideas, and employees' ability to adapt to the new organizational culture.

Source: data processed by the authors (2025)

Data validity was tested through triangulation of data sources (interviews, observation, and documents), member checking with informants, and consistency of thematic coding by the researcher. Through this testing, the research instrument used was assessed as having adequate data validity so that the research results can be scientifically accounted for.

Location, Time, and Research Subjects

The research was conducted at PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero) over a three-month period, from early March to the end of May 2025. Informants were selected based on three main criteria: position, division/work unit, and tenure period, in order to obtain a diverse and comprehensive perspective on the impact of change management on organizational performance. The informants interviewed are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Profile of Research Informants

Informant	Position	Interview Date	Duration
Prasetyo	Director of Strategy	27 March 2025	120 minutes
Ihsanuddin Usman	Director of Human Resources and General Affairs	14 May 2025	90 minutes
Mona Yudika	Group Head of Corporate Transformation and Program Management	9 May 2025	90 minutes
Ardiansyah	Department Head of Strategic Planning	27 March 2025	120 minutes
David Rumeser	Department Head of Strategic Initiative Monitoring	9 May 2025	90 minutes

Source: data processed by the authors (2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Research Object

PT Pelabuhan Indonesia I, II, III, and IV (Persero) were non-listed state-owned enterprises wholly owned by the Ministry of SOEs on behalf of the Republic of Indonesia. On 1 October 2021, the four companies were officially merged into PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero), or Pelindo, in accordance with Government Regulation No. 101 of 2021 and Letter of the Minister of SOEs No. S-756/MBU/10/2021. Pelindo's vision is "To Become the Leader of an Integrated and World-Class Maritime Ecosystem," with a mission of realizing a national maritime ecosystem network through improved connectivity and integrated port services. In the second half of 2022, Pelindo carried out a strategic culture-management initiative through the development of a Corporate Culture Policy and the internalization of AKHLAK values (Trustworthy, Competent, Harmonious, Loyal, Adaptive, and Collaborative) as the foundation of the new corporate identity after the merger.

Pelindo's Performance Achievements After the Merger

Consolidated data from Pelindo's annual reports for 2021-2024 show a consistent growth trend in financial and operational performance after the merger, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Pelindo's Financial and Operational Performance Achievements, 2021-2024

Indicator	2021	2022	2023	2024
Assets	IDR 116.23 trillion	IDR 118.35 trillion (+1.83%)	IDR 118.34 trillion (-0.01%)	IDR 127.63 trillion (+7.85%)
Equity	IDR 42.05 trillion	IDR 42.80 trillion (+1.79%)	IDR 46.84 trillion (+9%)	IDR 50.19 trillion (+7.14%)
Operating Revenue	IDR 28.81 trillion	IDR 29.70 trillion (+3.07%)	IDR 31.02 trillion (+4.44%)	IDR 34.83 trillion (+2.71%)
Net Profit for the Year	IDR 3.18 trillion	IDR 3.91 trillion (+23.06%)	IDR 4.01 trillion (+2.66%)	IDR 3.80 trillion (-5.22%)
Vessel Traffic (units)	254,669	290,970 (+14%)	303,221 (+4.21%)	317,146 (+5%)
Container Traffic (box/TEUs)	13,234,256 box	13,292,102 box (+0.44%)	17,657,327 TEUs (+33%)	18,807,089 TEUs (+7%)
Non-Container Cargo Traffic (tons)	146,200,809	159,727,836 (+9%)	169,853,408 (+6.34%)	201,182,095 (+18%)
Non-Container Cargo Traffic (MMBTU)	7,820,960	8,800,934 (+12.53%)	13,188,848 (+49.86%)	13,971,183 (+49.86%)
Passenger Traffic (persons)	8,056,905	15,028,884 (+86.53%)	18,050,932 (+20.11%)	19,443,897 (+8%)

Source: Consolidated Pelindo Annual Reports 2021-2024

The data in Table 3 show a consistent upward trend in almost all of Pelindo's performance indicators after the merger. The small decline in asset value in 2023 and in profitability in 2024 did not significantly affect overall earnings, indicating the resilience of the organization's strategic integration. Informants explained that the main objective of the merger was focused on reducing the duration of port stay and cargo stay through the principle of "think simple, simplify thing," namely simplifying business processes that were previously lengthy and differed between entities. As an illustration, the loading and unloading process at Sorong Port, which previously took five days, was cut to one day after the integration of Pelindo I, II,

III, and IV, while the occupancy ratio at several ports such as Yorn and Perawang decreased from above 60-80% to below 40-50% following the reconfiguration and cross-regional modernization of equipment that had previously been impossible due to the entities being separate companies.

Challenges to Change

Thematic analysis of the interview results identified four main themes of change challenges faced by Pelindo during the integration process, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Themes and Findings on Challenges to Change

Theme	Findings
Technology Change	Each of the former Pelindo entities used a different system (SAP at Pelindo I, III, IV; Oracle at Pelindo II), causing operational inefficiency. Standardization was carried out through the implementation of a Single ERP, digitalization of the loading and unloading process, and a phased training approach together with a "body system" scheme to accelerate the adoption of the new system across all branches.
Organization Change	Merging four entities into a single corporation required an intensive communication strategy, the formation of an integration management team, the development of a corporate master plan, and the adjustment of employee placement to reduce role confusion after the merger.
Leadership Change	A clear shared vision among top management and consistency in leadership direction were important prerequisites for creating a conducive climate for change and reducing differences in priorities between entities.
Resistance	Resistance was managed through guarantees of no workforce reduction or salary cuts during the merger process, as well as policy consistency as social capital to build employee trust during the transition period.

Source: data processed by the authors (2025) based on interview results

Human Resource Competency Development

In line with the strengthening of culture, Pelindo held tiered competency-development programs based on job level. The participation rate and achievements of the 2024 competency-development program are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Competency Development Program Achievements by Job Level, 2024

Job Level	Number of Employees	Training Participants	Achievement per Level	Achievement per Training Type
BOD-1	73	1,854	100%	100%
BOD-2	75	2,066	100%	100%
BOD-3	2,403	85,938	99%	99%
BOD-4	2,206	56,830	99.6%	99.6%
BOD-5	3,253	121,108	98.4%	98.4%

Source: Pelindo Annual Report (2025)

All job levels took part in online, offline, and hybrid training, certification, and seminars, with a participation rate above 98% at every level. This program was complemented by other HR-development initiatives such as the Portaverse program for self-paced online learning, the establishment of a Research and Innovation Department that had not previously existed in any Pelindo entity, the implementation of an Innovation KPI, and the Pulpny Pelindo program to

spark employee creativity in the port sector. The emphasis on developing people as the primary enabler of transformation - ahead of process and technology - confirms that the success of post-merger integration rests on the organization's ability to manage and empower its human resources.

The Change Management Process: Government Policy and Leadership

Beyond internal challenges, the success of Pelindo's change management process was also determined by government policy support and the leadership patterns applied at each stage. Findings on this theme are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Themes and Findings on the Change Management Process

Theme	Findings
Government Policy	The Pelindo merger was part of the government's strategic policy for national logistics efficiency, designated as a National Strategic Project and driven by Presidential instruction and full support from the Ministry of SOEs, which accelerated the creation of a sense of urgency within the organization.
Climate for Change & Transformational Leadership	Alignment of vision among top management and a transformational leadership approach were central factors in conveying the urgency and strategic objectives of change to the entire organization.
Transactional Leadership	At the implementation and consolidation stage, a transactional leadership approach was applied through guarantees of stable working conditions (no workforce reduction or salary cuts) and policy consistency to maintain employee trust and suppress resistance.
Implementing & Sustaining for Change	The development of a five-year master plan, periodic evaluation of strategic-initiative achievements, and the placement of Change Agents in every unit served as mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of change and the adoption of the new culture at the operational level.

Source: data processed by the authors (2025) based on interview results

These findings confirm that the success of each stage of change was strongly determined by a strategic combination of transformational leadership, which built vision and inspiration in the early stage, with transactional leadership, which maintained implementation discipline and compliance at the consolidation stage. The combination of these two leadership styles proved able to minimize resistance and maintain organizational stability during the transition period, in line with the emphasis of (Errida & Lotfi, 2021) on the central role of leadership in creating urgency, building a coalition, and clearly communicating the change vision.

Conceptual Model Based on Research Findings

Based on the overall thematic analysis, this study produced a new conceptual model that extends the initial framework (Table 2) by incorporating specific elements that emerged from the context of the Indonesian state-owned port merger, as presented in Table .

Table 7. Conceptual Framework Based on Research Findings

Component	Elements Identified
Challenges to Change	Technology change; organization change; leadership change; resistance
Change Management Process	Government policy; climate for change & transformational leadership; engaging & enabling the organization; transactional leadership; implementing & sustaining for change
Organizational Culture	Employee behavior; creativity; environment adaptability; agile in competition; competency standardization; meritocracy
Outcome	Effect of change management and organizational culture on organizational performance

Source: data processed by the authors (2025)

Compared with the initial model, the research findings add government policy as the initial trigger for the sense of urgency, divide leadership into transformational and transactional stages, and add three new cultural elements on the organizational-culture side, namely agile in competition, competency standardization, and meritocracy, which emerged in response to the demands of competency standardization and performance-based HR management after the merger.

Application of Kotter's Model: Before and After the Merger

A comparison of the application of Kotter's eight steps under pre-merger and post-merger conditions is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Comparison of the Application of Kotter's Model Before and After the Merger

Kotter's Step	Before the Merger	After the Merger
1. Create a Sense of Urgency	Urgency was external in nature and had not yet been built internally within each entity.	Reinforced by government policy support (National Strategic Project) as the main foundation.
2. Form a Guiding Coalition	No strong cross-entity leadership coalition existed; each entity operated autonomously.	Built through a transformational leadership approach in the early stage of integration.
3. Create a Vision	A shared change vision had not yet been agreed upon across entities.	A shared vision was formulated and consistently communicated by top management.
4. Communicate the Vision	Communication of the vision was limited and uneven.	Carried out through town halls, internal campaigns, and cross-entity workshops.
5. Empower Action by Removing Barriers	Not yet optimal; cultural, system, and structural barriers had not been systematically addressed.	Strengthened through the establishment of Change Agents and a transformational leadership approach.
6. Create Quick Wins	No measurable short-term achievements existed.	The reduction in port stay and cargo stay served as tangible quick wins that increased employee confidence.
7. Build on the Change	Did not take place, as the initial foundation had not been established.	Achievements were consolidated through a transactional leadership approach and periodic evaluation.
8. Embed the Change into Culture	Not achieved.	Internalization of AKHLAK values, competency standardization, and the

Before the merger, the Create a Sense of Urgency step had not been effective internally, no cross-entity leadership coalition had been formed, and efforts to remove barriers (empower action) had not run optimally due to differences in culture, systems, and structure among the former Pelindo entities. This condition increased resistance and hindered the optimization of port services. After the merger, all eight of Kotter's steps could be implemented more systematically, with the addition of government policy as an external catalyst and a strategic combination of transformational leadership in the early stage (steps 2-4) and transactional leadership at the consolidation stage (steps 7-8). These findings reinforce the argument that applying Kotter's framework in a bureaucratic, geographically dispersed state-owned enterprise context requires adaptation to national policy support and a combinative leadership dynamic, in line with Covic and Planinic (2020), who emphasize the importance of external signals in driving organizational readiness for change.

General Discussion

Overall, the Pelindo case study reinforces the main theories in change management and organizational culture. These findings support Kotter's model, particularly the central role of leadership in creating urgency, building a coalition, and communicating a clear vision, while also showing that in the context of Indonesian state-owned enterprises, the role of government and political direction has high significance in supporting large-scale integration and transformation. This reinforces Schein's (1985) argument regarding the role of leaders in shaping and changing organizational culture. Initiatives such as the Pulpny Pelindo program also offer a new perspective on how an organization can integrate learning and innovation into the change management process, extending the concept of a learning organization within the context of SOE transformation.

This study also reveals a socio-political risk that is characteristic of state-owned enterprise mergers, namely the risk associated with meritocracy. A shift toward a more merit-based system has the potential to create tension among groups of employees accustomed to work relationships based on formal hierarchy and informal closeness, so its implementation requires fair, transparent, and consistent mechanisms in job placement, rewards, and career management. This research demonstrates that a strong and aligned organizational culture is a key pillar in reducing resistance and creating a collaborative work environment after the merger, in which the AKHLAK values, once merely symbolic, are now consistently internalized into the performance appraisal, training, and HR development systems across all of Pelindo's business units.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the success of Pelindo's post-merger transformation depended substantially on structured change management based on Kotter's eight-step change model and effective organizational culture management, with their interaction serving as a crucial determinant of merger success. Inclusive leadership, strategically combining transformational and transactional approaches, transparent communication, employee involvement, government policy support through the designation of the merger as a National Strategic Project, and cross-entity cultural harmonization through the internalization of AKHLAK values were instrumental

in reducing resistance and strengthening a cohesive organizational identity. Tangible outcomes included improved operational efficiency, reflected in a reduction in average vessel turnaround time from approximately four days to 2.5–3 days and decreased cargo dwell time through digitalization and process standardization. These improvements were accompanied by consistent growth in assets, equity, revenue, and vessel and container traffic from 2021 to 2024. Beyond Kotter’s framework, competency standardization, competitive agility, and meritocracy emerged as additional cultural elements that supported successful integration. Based on these findings, Pelindo’s management should continue strengthening strategic communication, translating AKHLAK values into concrete human resource policies—including performance appraisal, recruitment, and promotion—and expanding digital system integration and terminal service standardization across regions. The government and regulatory authorities, particularly the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises and the Ministry of Transportation, should accelerate policies to streamline port bureaucracy, establish national standards for vessel turnaround and cargo dwell times, and create a cross-entity collaboration forum for state-owned port enterprises. Future studies should examine the relationships among organizational culture, change management, and operational performance in other state-owned enterprise mergers. Longitudinal and comparative research is also recommended because this single-case study covered a relatively short post-merger period and could not capture the long-term effects of organizational culture transformation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that this study was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be interpreted as a potential conflict of interest.

AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

Meidya Rahayu Chandra: research conceptualization, methodology design, experiment execution, data collection, data analysis, manuscript drafting, and manuscript revision. Sari Wahyuni: research supervision, validation of research results, provision of scientific input, and manuscript review and revision. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (AI) was used in the preparation of this manuscript to help improve linguistic clarity, correct grammar, and refine the writing structure. Generative AI was not used to generate, manipulate, or analyze research data. The entire content of the manuscript has been reviewed and verified by the author(s). The author(s) are fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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