



A BUDDHIST SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE: INSIGHTS FROM THE INDONESIA BUDDHAYANA COUNCIL IN LAMPUNG PROVINCE

IMPLEMENTASI KEPEMIMPINAN SPIRITUAL BUDDHA: PENGALAMAN DARI MAJELIS BUDDHAYANA INDONESIA DI PROVINSI LAMPUNG

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of Buddhist spiritual leadership in the Indonesian Buddhayana Council (MBI) of Lampung Province. Spiritual leadership in Buddhist teachings emphasizes the values of compassion, wisdom, exemplary behavior, and selfless service. The research method employed a qualitative approach, phenomenology, with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies. This research was conducted with the leadership of the MBI of Lampung Province. The results indicate that leadership in the MBI of Lampung Province, through an understanding of Buddhayana values and humanistic Buddhism, maintains internal organizational harmony, increases congregation participation, and strengthens the socio-religious role. However, challenges arise in the form of limited in-depth understanding of spiritual values and administrative pressures that can shift the focus of leadership. In conclusion, Buddhist spiritual leadership in the MBI of Lampung Province is relevant for adaptation as an organizational management model that combines spiritual values and managerial effectiveness.

Keywords: Leadership, spiritual leadership, Buddhist spiritual leadership, Buddhayana, Indonesian Buddhayana Council.



Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi kepemimpinan spiritual Buddha dalam Majelis Buddhayāna Indonesia (MBI) Provinsi Lampung. Kepemimpinan spiritual dalam ajaran Buddha mengedepankan nilai-nilai welas asih, kebijaksanaan, keteladanan, dan pelayanan tanpa pamrih. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggunakan metode fenomenologi dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi. Penelitian ini dilakukan pada pimpinan MBI Provinsi Lampung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan di MBI Provinsi Lampung melalui pemahaman nilai-nilai Buddhayāna, dan Buddhisme humanistik, yang mampu menjaga harmoni internal organisasi, meningkatkan partisipasi umat, dan memperkuat peran sosial keagamaan. Namun, terdapat tantangan berupa keterbatasan pemahaman mendalam atas nilai-nilai spiritual dan tekanan administratif yang dapat menggeser fokus kepemimpinan. Kesimpulannya, kepemimpinan spiritual Buddha di MBI Provinsi Lampung relevan untuk diadaptasi sebagai model pengelolaan organisasi yang memadukan nilai spiritual dan efektivitas manajerial.

Kata Kunci : Kepemimpinan, kepemimpinan spiritual, kepemimpinan spiritual Buddha, buddhayāna, majelis buddhayana indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a key element in determining the direction and success of an organization, including in religious organizations (Jahroni et al., 2024). In Buddhism, leadership is understood not only as the ability to govern and direct, but also as a spiritual practice that reflects the values of Buddhism. Buddhist spiritual leadership emphasizes example, service, compassion, wisdom, and virtue as the basis of a leader's behavior (Acharya, 2020). These values are becoming increasingly relevant in the face of the complexity of modern life's moral, social, and cultural challenges.

Religious organizations are one of the world's oldest and most influential institutions, formed by community groups to advance an interest in religious life in the spiritual society, nation, and state (Fulton, 2022). The Indonesian Buddhayana Council (MBI), one of the Buddhist religious organizations that plays a critical role in the ummah, especially in Lampung Province, faces organizational dynamics that demand an effective and practical leadership role. However, the extent to which the Buddhist spiritual leadership values are implemented in MBI's leadership practice at the regional level remains an open question.

As the core of the Buddhist movement in Indonesia, in its work to develop Indonesian Buddhism, the Sanggha Agung Indonesia (Association of Buddhist Monks and Nuns) is fully supported by the Indonesian Buddhist Assembly, a national network of upasaka/upasika with a Buddhist perspective (Dharmavimala, 2012). In carrying out its function as the leading supporter of the Maha Sangha of Indonesia, MBI not only serves as the implementer of religious activities but also as the driving force of Buddhist values in the social life of the people. Therefore, the leadership role in MBI has become very central, not only in administrative terms, but also as a moral and spiritual representation for the community. In this context, spiritual leadership is expected to prioritize organizational efficiency and manifest Buddhism realistically through attitudes, decisions, and individual relationships (Chirinang et al., 2025).



Spiritual leadership focuses on the values, attitudes, and actions of a leader who can awaken motivation from within, both in himself and in his followers, through an approach that emphasizes spiritual well-being, the calling of life, and a deep sense of connectedness (Azevedo et al., 2024). Nevertheless, although ideally the values of Buddhist spiritual leadership have become the basis of teachings and moral guidelines in religious organizations, it is not always easy to manifest them completely and consistently (Jiwattanasuk, 2025). The main challenge in the implementation of spiritual leadership is the limited depth of leaders' understanding of the essence of spiritual values themselves, as well as structural and administrative pressures that make leaders focus more on achieving operational goals than moral and spiritual transformation (Carter, 2021; Fry & Egel, 2021).

The context of Lampung Province as a region with religious, cultural, and social diversity requires MBI leaders to balance their roles as formal leaders and spiritual guides who are role models for the people and the wider community. This phenomenon is relevant to be studied qualitatively with a phenomenological approach, to understand the experiences, views, and meanings built by MBI Lampung leaders in carrying out their spiritual leadership. The research results are expected to contribute to the leadership practices within MBI and serve as a reference for other religious organizations that want to integrate spiritual values with effective organizational governance.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologi. Metode penelitian kualitatif digunakan untuk mendeskripsikan, mengeksplorasi, dan memahami bagaimana individu atau kelompok tertentu memaknai suatu masalah sosial atau kemanusiaan (Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, 2018). In this study, a phenomenological approach was chosen to explore in depth the subject's experience of a phenomenon experienced, using the Colaizzi data analysis procedure (Gumarang Jr. et al., 2021). The procedure consists of seven steps, namely:

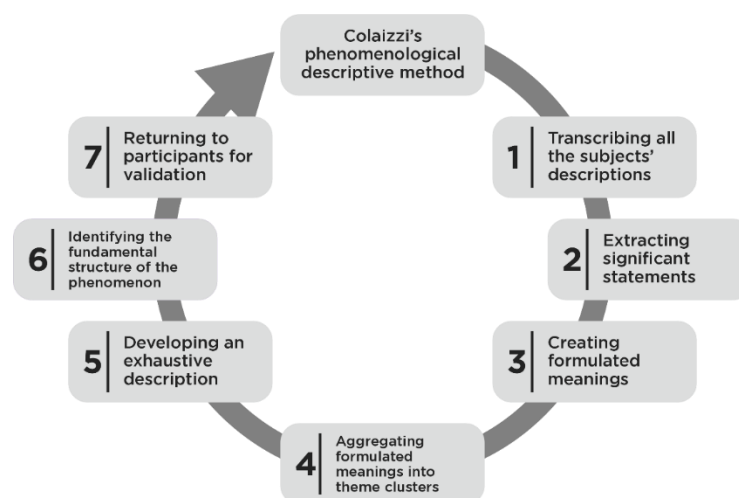


Figure 1. Flowchart of Colaizzi's Phenomenological Qualitative Research Procedures



This research was carried out within the Indonesian Buddhayana Council of Lampung Province as a research location. The data collection technique was carried out with a triangulation approach, namely through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. Triangulation aims to increase the validity and reliability of the data obtained (Yin, 2009). To obtain information, the researcher determined the informant as the target of the research, which was conducted according to the quality and characteristics of the informant. In collecting data, this study involved researchers who interviewed MBI leaders of Lampung Province.

Table 1. Research Informants

No.	Status	Kode Informan
1	Chairman of MBI Lampung	3-PLTW-I3-IH-KMBI
2	Vice Chairman 2 MBI Lampung	1-PLTW-I1-RMH-WK2MBI
3	Vice Chairman III of MBI Lampung	2-PLTW-I2-HB-WKIIISMBI
4	Secretary of MBI Lampung	4-PLTW-I4-TA-SMBI
5	Chairman of the MBI Lampung Leadership Board	5-PLTW-I5-TTS-KLKMBI
6	Chairman of the Human Resources Development Institute, MBI Lampung	6-PLTW-I6-CS-KLPDSMMBI
7	Chairman of the Legal Institution of MBI Lampung	7-PLTW-I7-D-KLHMBI
8	Chairman of the MBI Lampung Communication Institute	8-PLTW-I8-C-KLKMBI

Source: Research Data Management

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Leadership at the Indonesian Buddhist Council in Understanding the Concept of Buddhist Leadership

The leaders in the Indonesian Buddhist Assembly have a deep understanding of the concept of leadership in Buddhism, which emphasizes not only the formal aspects of power, but service, example, and spiritual formation. They see leadership as a form of devotion (*dasa raja dhamma*) that demands self-awareness, wisdom, and compassion in every action. Principles such as *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom) became the primary foundation in the way they led, both in decision-making and in fostering relationships between people.

The Buddhayāna leadership we receive today teaches us how to be a leader who uses our conscience and mind wisely, leading with commands and taking humane and empathetic approaches (1-PLTW-I1-RMH-WK2MBI).

Leadership in the Indonesian Buddhist Assembly's context is understood as an ancient process, not just giving orders or structural mastery. The informant 2-PLTW-I2-HB-WKIIISMBI declares spiritual leadership in Buddhayāna lies in the spirit of sincere devotion and wholehearted service.



For us, being a leader is not about position or power, but about how we can serve the people wholeheartedly. Spiritual leadership in Buddhayāna teaches that a leader must be present to guide, listen, and be an example in dhamma practice. Serving is not a burden, but part of our daily spiritual practice (2-PLTW-I2-HB-WKIIISMBI).

The same thing was also expressed by informant 3-PLTW-I3-IH-KMBI, namely:

The Buddhist values are wisdom, kindness, and courage. The third thing that is done is that we see that the existing conditions greatly affect a person's leadership, and then this is what we then implement: that a leader must be wise, to be able to make the right and fair decisions for everyone. Then, a leader must have kindness, love, and care for others (3-PLTW-I3-IH-KMBI).

Leadership in the Indonesian Buddhist Assembly's context is understood as a spirit guide, not just giving orders or structural mastery. To create a more inclusive and compassionate leadership pattern, leaders seek to emulate the Buddha's noble qualities, such as patience, humility, and non-attachment to power. Buddhayāna leadership teaches the importance of using conscience and mind wisely and upholding humane and empathetic approaches.

Buddhist Leaders Ensure Fairness and Impartiality in Policy Making

Buddhist leaders strive to ensure fairness and impartiality in policy-making by prioritizing the principle of wisdom, listening to all parties in a balanced manner, and being grounded in dhamma values that emphasize balance, morality, and shared interests. According to the informant who affirmed that the principles of the Dhamma, such as wisdom and equanimity, were applied by Buddhist leaders in maintaining fairness and impartiality in every policy-making, this was revealed by informant 2-PLTW-I2-HB-WKIIISMBI that:

Buddhist leaders apply the principle of *upekkhā* (equanimity) in the decision-making process so as not to be affected by emotional pressures or the interests of specific groups (2-PLTW-I2-HB-WKIIISMBI).

The informant said that the Buddhayāna leader does not make decisions reactively or emotionally, but through a calm and transparent deliberation process. This shows that leaders consider not only the practical aspect but also the inner and ethical aspects so that the decisions truly reflect justice and the common interest. Furthermore, informant 6-PLTW-I6-CS-KLPDMMBI stated:

Buddhayāna leaders ensure fairness and impartiality through mindfulness, full awareness of thoughts, feelings, and ongoing situations. By being fully present in every decision-making process, leaders can see problems clearly and not be carried away by emotions or personal interests (6-PLTW-I6-CS-KLPDMMBI).

This informant's statement confirms that mindfulness is one of the main approaches in Buddhayāna leadership. Mindfulness in the context of leadership means the ability of a leader to be consciously present in every process, both physically, mentally, and emotionally. Practicing mindfulness also helps leaders consider a broader point of view and avoid decisions that only benefit certain groups. This aligns with the Dhamma, which emphasizes justice,



compassion, and freedom from attachment or partiality. Therefore, mindfulness-based leadership is reflective and transformative, as it can create space for decisions based on true virtue and wisdom.

Therefore, mindfulness-based leadership is reflective and transformative, as it can create space for decisions based on true virtue and wisdom. Furthermore, informant 8-PLTW-I8-C-KLKMBI stated that:

That every decision must be made with full awareness and moral responsibility. A leader should not be in a hurry or listen to only one party. So, before making a policy, we usually listen to input from all parties involved, be it the people, administrators, or the surrounding community. We also try to apply mindfulness, so that decision-making is conscious, explicit, and not influenced by emotions or personal interests. That way, decisions can be fair, balanced, and bring mutual benefits, not just for one group (8-PLTW-I8-C-KLKMB).

This statement illustrates that in Buddhayāna leadership, the decision-making process is carried out with great care, openness, and moral awareness. A leader should not be hasty or rely on one-sided information, but should involve the views of various stakeholders.

Buddhayāna's Leadership Attitude in Dealing with Internal and External Conflicts

In the context of the Buddhayāna organization, the leadership attitude that one possesses shows the ability to deal with internal and external conflicts with great calmness, wisdom, and commitment. The leadership is oriented towards solving problems quickly and efficiently and instills deep ethical and moral values to create a harmonious and conducive atmosphere for organizational development. Therefore, Buddhayāna's leadership attitude is an inspiring example in maintaining stability and strengthening solidarity amid various challenges. Respect, patience, and goodwill are the main principles in easing tension. This shows they maintain good organizational relations and strive to build harmony with outsiders. Meanwhile, informant 3-PLTW-I3-IH-KMBI argued that:

When facing conflicts, patience is the most important thing. Patience in clear thinking means first understanding what the causes and problems are, then finding the right and wise solution, if necessary, through consultation with people who understand the conditions and situations (3-PLTW-I3-IH-KMBI).

With a calm mind and not rushing to conclusions, leaders can look at problems objectively and thoroughly. This process encourages the birth of solutions that are not only fast but also precise and thoughtful. In the case of the informant 6-PLTW-I6-CS-KLPDMMBI, opinion:

In the face of internal and external conflicts, Buddhayāna's leadership attitude must be through an approach full of wisdom, patience, and open communication. We strive to understand the root of the problem in depth, prioritizing dialogue and deliberation as the primary step to find peaceful and constructive solutions. In addition, we must put forward ethical principles and Buddhist values, such as care, understanding, and harmony, to maintain organizational stability and strengthen solidarity among members. With a responsible and exemplary attitude, we present a conducive atmosphere and maintain a



sense of mutual understanding amid various challenges faced (6-PLTW-I6-CS-KLPSDMMBI).

The approach emphasizes wisdom, patience, and open communication as the primary foundation in conflict resolution. This attitude reflects a leader's meticulousness in acting and demonstrates the integration of Buddhist values into daily leadership practice. This is in harmony with the spirit of sangha or togetherness in Buddhism, which upholds collective values. This is supported by the statement of informant 7-PLTW-I7-D-KLHMBI, which states:

Leadership's attitude in dealing with conflicts, both inside and outside the organization, always prioritizes peace and compassion. It is impossible to make decisions directly emotionally, but rather to listen to all parties first. They try to understand the problem's background, find its root, and mediate fairly (7-PLTW-I7-D-KLHMBI).

The attitude of not making decisions directly emotionally reflects a leader's maturity and spiritual maturity. This shows that in the face of pressure or tension, leaders keep their minds clear and avoid unilateral actions that have the potential to muddy the atmosphere. The decision-making process begins with listening to all parties in a balanced manner, without prejudice or partisanship. This action reinforces trust and creates an inclusive atmosphere where every voice is considered.

Buddhayāna Leaders Manage Emotions in the Face of Leadership Challenges

Understanding the root of the problem in depth is an essential step in resolving conflicts. This shows that Buddhayāna leadership is not reactive, but reflective, by first analyzing the causes of conflict before taking steps to fix them. Dialogue and deliberation are the primary means in this process, underscoring the importance of all parties' active and equal involvement. Another opinion was also expressed by informant 7-PLTW-I7-D-KLHMBI, who emphasized the importance of maintaining inner peace and managing emotions with full awareness when facing challenges in leadership:

I learned always to be calm and not get carried away by emotions, especially when facing problems or challenges. When difficult situations arise, I try to take a breath, ponder momentarily, and look at the problem. I didn't react immediately, but tried to understand the situation with a patient and an open heart. Buddhism teaches the importance of self-awareness and compassion, so I try to control negative emotions such as anger or disappointment, so as not to hurt others (7-PLTW-I7-D-KLHMBI).

The statement from informant 7-PLTW-I7-D-KLHMBI illustrates how emotional management is an integral part of Buddhayāna's leadership, especially in the face of challenges and difficult situations. The informant emphasized that maintaining calm and not getting carried away by emotions results from learning and inner practice. When faced with a problem, he does not react immediately, but chooses to pause, take a breath, and look at the situation. This indicates a conscious effort to avoid impulsive reactions that can worsen things. This is in line with the opinion of informant 8-PLTW-I8-C-KLKMBI, who stated:

Try to manage his emotions by staying calm and not rushing. I prefer to be quiet and calm down if I'm angry or disappointed. I believe that uncontrolled emotions can lead to wrong



decisions. Therefore, I often use self-awareness exercises such as meditation or sitting quietly to help maintain inner peace. This way, I can think more clearly, be more patient, and still be kind to others, even under pressure (8-PLTW-I8-C-KLKMBI).

This statement describes a Buddhist leader's emotional maturity and spiritual intelligence in the face of pressure and challenges. By remaining calm and not rushing, leaders show awareness that negative emotions such as anger and disappointment can interfere with clarity of thought and risk producing inappropriate decisions. Therefore, being silent for a while and calming down is a wise first step before responding to challenging situations

The Biggest Challenges Faced in Applying Buddhist Spiritual Leadership Values in Leading

Challenges often arise from internal and external situations, such as differences in individual character, conflicts of interest, emotional pressure, and differences in understanding Buddhism. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend Buddhist leaders' most significant obstacles in realizing spiritual leadership so that efforts to implement these values remain relevant, effective, and positively impact the organization's life. Things like ego, self-interest, differences of opinion, and limited resources, both in terms of finances and human resources, are often obstacles in implementing ideal leadership values. The following is an informant's statement describing the condition. As stated by the informant 3-PLTW-I3-IH-KMBI, who said:

Challenges are ego and personal interests, conflicts or differences of opinion in the organization, and limited resources, such as finance and human resources (3-PLTW-I3-IH-KMBI).

In addition, informant 4-PLTW-I4-TA-SMBI stated that one of the most challenging things in applying the values of Buddhist spiritual leadership is to keep attitudes and actions in harmony with the teachings believed, especially when facing pressure or conflict.

The biggest challenge in applying the Buddhist spiritual leadership values is maintaining consistency between teachings and practice, especially when faced with stressful or conflicting situations. In such conditions, it is very easy to get carried away with emotions or make quick decisions without considering the aspects of wisdom and compassion (4-PLTW-I4-TA-SMBI).

Furthermore, informant 8-PLTW-I8-C-KLKMBI stated:

One of the biggest challenges in practicing the Buddhist spiritual leadership values is maintaining a calm and patient attitude when facing complex problems or people. Not everyone can cooperate easily; sometimes, situations make us want to react emotionally immediately (8-PLTW-I8-C-KLKMBI).

The main challenge in applying the values of Buddhist spiritual leadership lies in the leader's consistency in maintaining wisdom, patience, and compassion amid complex situations. Buddhayāna leadership not only faces technical problems such as limited human



resources and funds, but also inner challenges, such as restraining the ego and managing emotions when facing conflicts, differences of views, and the dynamics of cooperation across individuals and institutions. In this context, the interview reveals the importance of the spiritual maturity of the leader as a foundation in dealing with pressure. Observations of the activities of the Indonesian Buddhist Council show a real commitment to instill the values of tolerance and harmony through cadre training, inter-faith dialogue, and strategic forums. The documentation of the activity proves that strengthening leadership capacity through cross-sectoral cooperation and continuous training is a key strategy in responding to these challenges. Thus, Buddhist spiritual leadership is not only a matter of administrative leadership but requires spiritual fortitude, inner sensitivity, and exemplary behavior in the face of various tests.

Discussion

The leadership practice in the Indonesian Buddhist Council of Lampung Province has characteristics that are in harmony with Buddhist leadership values, but remain adaptive to the challenges of modern organizations. Phenomenological analysis using the Colaizzi method reveals that leaders interpret their role not only as formal office holders but as facilitators of the spiritual and social growth of the community. This view is consistent with leadership as a dynamic process emphasizing social interaction, empowerment, and collaboration. Leadership concerns individual interactions and evolving social dynamics (Liden et al., 2025). Thus, leadership is not static, but its main challenge lies in its ability to initiate change and facilitate growth sustainably (Grøn et al., 2020).

These findings also strengthen the relevance of the five leadership model levels: position, permission, production, people development, and pinnacle (Maxwell, 2018). This is shown by MBI's leadership, which shows success at the permission and production levels, where strong personal relationships with members result in consistent organizational performance. Meanwhile, leaders at the people development level and pinnacle can transform the vision of Buddhayāna into real action through cadre coaching, religious education, and social activities.

From a Buddhist perspective, the observed leadership behavior reflects most of the *Dasa Rāja Dhamma principles*, in particular *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (morality), *maddava* (humility), and *khanti* (patience). This aligns with previous research, which states Buddhist spiritual leadership is a form of leadership rooted in ethical, contemplative, and compassionate Buddhist teachings (Fry & Vu, 2024). If the characteristics of organizational leadership and spiritual leadership are associated with spiritual leadership in Buddhism, it is related to the principles of leadership taught by Gautama Buddha (Vu & Gill, 2022). Buddhist spiritual leadership aims to guide people to achieve enlightenment and happiness through meditation, wisdom, and kindness. Buddhist spiritual leadership contains principles such as generosity, compassion, simplicity, insight, and example (Doney, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the openness and inclusivism held by the leaders align with the Buddhist vision of rejecting sectarianism and emphasizing cross-cultural harmony. This is also based on one vision, which is to apply the universal core of Buddhism in the context of today's Indonesian culture (Dharmawimala, 2012). Buddhayāna was created to bring a nonsectarian spirit and avoid being a Buddhist follower with a narrow-minded, radical, and rigid approach to applying Buddhism in all aspects of daily life. Buddhayāna is defined as unity in the diversity of Buddhism (Kimura, 2003; Mukti, 2004). Buddhayāna in Indonesia carries out the mission of practicing and sharing the essence of Buddhism contextually through personal and social



transformation by adhering to the values of non-sectarianism, inclusivism, pluralism, universalism, and belief in *Dharmakaya - Sang Hyang Adi Buddhaya* (Buddhayana, 2021). Buddhayāna is an idea and view of bringing and applying the Dharma into daily life in society. Humanistic Buddhism is in line with the ideas and opinions of the Buddhist spirit, and it is about how to be more contextual to benefit all beings (Burmansah, Juni Suryanadi, 2023).

Methodologically, data triangulation (Yin, 2009) through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies provides a complete picture of leadership dynamics in this organization. The triangulation results reinforce the validity of the finding that integrating spiritual vision, effective organizational management, and adaptability to social change greatly influences the success of Buddhist leadership in Lampung. Thus, if implemented contextually and adaptively, this study confirms that Buddhism-based spiritual leadership can be a relevant leadership model for religious communities and social and educational organizations in Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

Spiritual leadership in the Indonesian Buddhist Assembly of Lampung Province is rooted in Buddhist teachings, specifically the principles of *Dasa Rāja Dhamma*, Buddhist values, and the spirit of humanistic Buddhism that emphasizes wisdom, generosity, compassion, and example. Leaders in these organizations do not view leadership as just a formal position, but as a dynamic process that involves social interaction, personal integrity, and a commitment to self-and community transformation. The findings of this study confirm that Buddhist spiritual leadership can integrate moral and ethical values with modern managerial skills, thereby creating a leadership pattern that is adaptive, sustainable, and relevant to Indonesia's socio-cultural context. This kind of leadership has proven to be a guide in fostering people, developing the organization, and maintaining harmony amid diversity.

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