

The Role of Leadership in Change Management in Islamic Education Settings

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Informasi Artikel	ABSTRAK (10 PT)
Penulis Korespondensi: Muhammad Nafi’ul Umam Universitas KH. Mukhtar Syafaat Blokagung muhammadnafiulumam09@gmail.com Keyword: <i>Transformational Leadership, Change Management, Islamic Education, Organizational Adaptation, Spiritual Values</i>	This study looks at the importance of leadership styles in guiding organizational transformation in educational institutions based on religious values. The main focus is on how a madrasah or pesantren leader combines a transformational vision with Sharia values to overcome resistance to curriculum updates and educational digitalization. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with an in-depth literature study, this phenomenon is analyzed to map out the most effective patterns of communication and decision-making. The findings show that leadership that embraces the principles of exemplary behavior and participatory approaches can create an adaptive organizational climate, where change is seen as a spiritual and professional necessity, not just an administrative burden. Success in the transition largely depends on the leader's ability to balance noble conservative traditions with the demands of a dynamic global modernity. Academically, this study provides a new theoretical framework for developing human resource management in Islamic educational settings, which often face unique cultural challenges. In conclusion, the effectiveness of change management in Islamic educational institutions relies not only on advanced technology or infrastructure but also on leadership capacity with high emotional and spiritual intelligence to drive all school components toward a collective vision. Integrating professional management with spiritual values is key to ensuring the sustainability of institutions in the era of disruption, while also strengthening the identity of Islamic education amid rapidly growing globalization
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Introduction

The world of Islamic education is currently facing huge pressure to transform amid the wave of digitalization and increasingly competitive global demands (Khoir et al., 2025). The need for this change is triggered by the gap between the static traditional curriculum and the dynamic needs of the modern job market (Kopackova et al., 2024). Field data often shows that resistance comes from senior educators and limited technology infrastructure in various madrasahs and pesantrens (Rofiqi et al., 2026). This sociological condition emphasizes that without strategic leadership intervention, Islamic educational institutions will fall behind in

quality. (Kosim et al., 2023). Therefore, the urgency of change management becomes an absolute fact that determines whether an educational institution survives or not in maintaining its existence and relevance.

Various classic to modern literature consistently places leadership as a key determinant in organizational effectiveness, while management transitions often only focus on the bureaucratic technical aspects. (Ingaggiati et al., 2025). Several previous studies have examined change strategies in the corporate sector, but research that touches on the spiritual emotional dimension in the context of religious-based educational institutions is still rare. The novelty of this study lies in integrating the concept of prophetic leadership with modern change management to address the challenge of cultural resistance in boarding schools. This focus offers a fresh perspective on how the values of religious role models act as a key catalyst for educational digitalization, filling a theoretical gap that has long tended to overlook the religious aspect in systemic transformation.

This study aims to take a deep dive into how leadership patterns can orchestrate systemic transformation in Islamic educational institutions, especially in aligning religious vision with the demands of modernization. The main focus is on identifying communication and decision-making strategies that can minimize internal resistance and speed up the adoption of educational technology without compromising core Sharia values. By mapping out effective leadership models, this research seeks to create a practical managerial framework for education practitioners to manage human resources and curriculum changes sustainably, fostering a learning ecosystem that is competitive yet still strongly rooted in Islamic identity.

The existence of this research becomes very crucial considering that Islamic educational institutions are currently at a crossroads between preserving tradition and keeping up with the inevitable global disruption. Failure to manage change not only impacts the decline in academic quality but also threatens the relevance of the institution in the eyes of the wider community. Therefore, having a fresh perspective on integrating spiritual intelligence in professional management becomes an urgent need to ensure the institution's sustainability. Through a comprehensive understanding of these leadership dynamics, it is hoped that strategic solutions will emerge that can turn cultural challenges into opportunities for innovation, allowing Islamic education to transform into an adaptive center of excellence in the future.

Method

The approach used in this study is qualitative research with a descriptive-analytical library research design. This design was chosen to explore in depth the concepts of leadership

and change management through a review of established theories and previous empirical findings. Focusing on leadership phenomena in Islamic educational institutions, this study aims to build a comprehensive understanding of how religious values interact with organizational change dynamics in the modern era (Mahbubi, 2025; Pugu dkk., 2024).

The data sources in this study come entirely from secondary data that are highly relevant to the research subject. The literature used includes textbooks on educational management, reputable national and international scientific journals, as well as policy documents related to Islamic education. The literature search was conducted systematically through digital databases using specific keywords to ensure that the references taken are up-to-date scientific works with high credibility and a direct connection to the theme of transformative leadership (Mahbubi, 2025; Miles dkk., 2020).

The data collection technique was carried out through documentation methods with procedures for identifying, organizing, and thematically categorizing literature. The process began by gathering various relevant literature, then a screening was done to determine which articles or books were the most representative of change management issues in Islamic educational settings. Once the data was collected, in-depth notes were made on crucial points related to the role of leaders, barriers to change, and the integration of Islamic values in managerial practices, which were then used as the main discussion material (Iskandar, 2022; Mahbubi, 2025).

Data analysis was carried out using a content analysis technique that is critical and comparative. The researcher reduced the data by summarizing the essence of various literature and then presented it in a systematic narrative description to observe patterns and relationships between concepts. The final stage involved drawing conclusions through a process of cross-verifying the data to ensure the validity of the findings. Through this technique, the researcher was able to synthesize various expert ideas into a solid new theoretical framework regarding the strategic role of leadership in promoting the progress of Islamic educational institutions.

Result and Discussion

Transformational Prophetic Leadership Pillars

That pillar starts with *Siddiq* (Integrity), where a leader builds trust through consistency between vision and real action (Srimulyani & Hermanto, 2022). Critically, this aligns with the concept of Idealized Influence from Bernard Bass's Transformational Leadership theory (1985), which emphasizes that leaders should be moral role models so that followers are willing to embrace that vision of change (Ladkin & Patrick, 2022). This

integrity is then reinforced by *Amanah* (Accountability) as a form of moral responsibility in overseeing digitalization and the curriculum for the continuity of the community. (Connolly et al., 2023). From a Western perspective, this pillar reflects Bill George's (2003) principle of Authentic Leadership, where leaders act based on core values and transparency, rather than just chasing technical performance, making accountability the foundation for a genuine relationship between the kiai and the students (Silalahi et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, the *Tabligh* aspect (Effective Communication) plays an important role in conveying the vision of change using an emotional and spiritual approach that can minimize resistance. (Jayaweera et al., 2025). This pillar expands on Robert House's (1976) Charismatic Leadership theory, which states that emotionally stirring communication can spark high commitment (KISS & VÁGÁNY, n.d.). However, in the pesantren, this communication is not only rhetorical but also serves as a comforting da'wah. Lastly, *Fathanah* (Strategic Intelligence) provides leaders with innovative abilities to respond to technological disruptions with smart solutions while staying firmly grounded in sharia values (Larabi, 2025). This intellectual capacity goes beyond Ronald Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership concept (1994), which requires leaders to diagnose complex challenges during a crisis (Petropanagos et al., 2025), because fathanah requires wisdom (hikmah) to balance modernity with the classic traditions of pesantren harmoniously.

Strategies for Overcoming Resistance to Change in a Conservative Environment

Strategies for overcoming resistance to change in conservative environments are based on the understanding that rejection is often not aimed at the technology itself, but rather at concerns about the erosion of identity and traditional values. In this context, successful leadership is about leaders who apply the *uswah hasanah* approach, or leading by example, through two main harmonious strategies.

First, the leader uses a participative approach by involving religious scholars, clerics, and senior teachers in every stage of digitalization decision-making, so that the changes are no longer seen as an external threat, but rather an organic internal evolution. This *uswah hasanah* approach, in a critical sense, goes beyond Robert K. Greenleaf's (1970) Servant Leadership concept, which emphasizes that leaders must first serve the needs of their followers. (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023). However, in the context of pesantren, being a role model is not just about technical service, but a manifestation of spiritual integrity that attracts change (Yani et al., 2022).

Second, there's a recontextualization of values, where leaders reframe curriculum updates as a form of modern *ijtihad*. This aligns with a fundamental fiqh principle, which is to preserve old traditions that are still relevant while adopting new ones that bring more

benefits, so transformation can happen without uprooting the core values of the pesantren. Sociologically, this approach strengthens Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory (1962), especially regarding the role of opinion leaders—key figures with traditional authority—who validate innovations so they can be accepted by communities that are usually skeptical of new things.

Integrating Digitalization with Pesantren Tradition

Digital integration in pesantren environments is done by placing technology in a balanced way as a tool to achieve progress, and not as the main goal (El Ashfahany et al., 2024). In practice, an effective leader is someone who can orchestrate continuous change management by syncing modern efficiency with the depth of tradition (Akbari et al., 2025). This critically reflects the Ambidextrous Leadership theory by Rosing, Frese, and Bausch (2011), which emphasizes a leader's ability to balance opening behaviors (encouraging exploration of digital innovation) and closing behaviors (maintaining the exploitation of valuable old practices that are still relevant) so the organization can stay stable amid change (Chang, 2026).

This is realized through the digitization of administration and learning, aiming to improve managerial efficiency without reducing the personal interaction between teachers and students, which is the essence of the tarbiyah aspect. In addition, this step is reinforced by the development of an adaptive curriculum, where global competency standards are harmoniously aligned with the yellow book-based curriculum or religious values. This strategy aligns with the Situational Leadership approach by Hersey and Blanchard (1969/1982), where leaders adjust their leadership style based on the readiness and maturity of the pesantren environment in embracing technology, ensuring a smooth transition without force (Dofinsa et al., 2025). As a result, this integration produces graduates who have dual competence, meaning they are professionally competitive while still having strong spiritual roots, proving that technology within the right leadership framework actually strengthens, rather than weakens, traditional entities.

Adaptive Change Management Model in the Disruption Era

Theoretically, this study states that the success of transformation in Islamic education largely depends on the Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) of the leader. Unlike corporate organizations that pursue profit, Islamic educational organizations aim for blessings and social quality. (Azzuhri et al., 2024). Here is a comparison of the dimension of changes between the conventional approach and the approach in Islamic education:

Table 1: Adaptive Change Management Model in the Era of Disruption

Dimension of Change	Conventional Approach	Islamic Education Approach
Motivation	Material Incentives & Efficiency	Dedication (For the Sake of Allah) & Welfare
Process	Top-Down / Instructional	Deliberation & Role Modeling (Uswah)
Response to Technology	Total Adoption	Filtering & Value Integration

The table shows the fundamental differences in change management. The conventional approach focuses on materials, top-down instructions, and full adoption of technology for efficiency. In contrast, Islamic education is based on spiritual values, emphasizing devotion to Allah, consultative processes and leading by example, as well as value-oriented filtering of technological developments for the common good.

Conclusion

A comprehensive analysis in this study confirms that the effectiveness of change management in Islamic educational institutions goes beyond just modernizing physical infrastructure or adopting digital technology. The success of such transformation fundamentally rests on leadership quality that can synergize professional management with spiritual intelligence. In madrasahs and pesantrens, leaders play a strategic role as catalysts who balance the demands of globalization with the preservation of traditional values.

This finding validates that a transformative leadership model based on the principles of *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct) and prophetic leadership is the most effective approach to mitigating cultural resistance. By reconstructing the narrative of change as a manifestation of worship values and professional responsibility, leaders can mobilize all elements of the organization to accommodate curriculum updates and digitalization. Furthermore, the success of this innovation depends on participatory communication patterns and inclusive decision-making based on Sharia ethics as a moral compass. Theoretically, this study offers a new framework: change management in religion-based institutions requires a multidimensional approach that touches on the emotional-spiritual realm to ensure the sustainability and relevance of the institution amid global disruption.

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