

Transformational Leadership as a Catalyst for Professional Work Culture in Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract:

This research aims to examine in depth how transformational leadership is carried out by Islamic boarding school principals in forming a professional work culture in a traditional Islamic education environment. Using a qualitative approach of a case study, this study explores the strategies, dynamics, and impact of leadership on institutional change. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and analysis of institutional documents. The results of the study show that the head of the pesantren plays a key role as an agent of change through three main approaches: (1) digitalization-based structure and management, (2) strengthening human resources through the ustaz regeneration system and continuous evaluation, and (3) internalizing the Islamic values of Aswaja into the professional work practices of students and staff. These three aspects encourage the formation of a collaborative, accountable, and quality-oriented work culture. This research confirms that transformational leadership is not only effective in the context of modern management, but also able to adapt to the religious values of Islamic boarding schools. The practical implication of this research is the need to develop a value-based and innovative leadership model in Islamic educational institutions, which emphasizes not only spiritual attainment but also institutional effectiveness professionally.

Key Words: Transformational Leadership, Professional Work Culture, Islamic Boarding School, Institutional Innovation

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools as religious institutions and Islamic education have a dual function: educating students in religious aspects while organizing effective institutional management (Ali et al., 2021; El Widdah, 2022; Jamilah, 2021). In the last decade, public demands for the quality of Islamic education have increased, including demands for transparency, accountability, and professionalism (Jaradat & Oudat, 2025; Posangi, 2024; Succarie, 2024). However, in reality, some Islamic boarding schools are still shackled by informal

bureaucratic traditions, unsystematic work practices, and a lack of institutional innovation. On the other hand, the literature on educational organisations indicates that leadership style plays a significant role in shaping organisational culture (Givens, 2008). The findings of the review on higher education institutions show that transformational leadership has the potential to strengthen innovation and performance in educational institutions (Al-Husseini et al., 2021; Meng, 2022; Owusu-Agyeman, 2021). Other research has also found that transformational leadership and work culture contribute significantly to teacher performance (Alzoraiki et al., 2023; Li & Liu, 2022; Mansor et al., 2021). Thus, the relevance of the theme of transformational leadership in the context of Islamic boarding schools seeking to modernize their institutions is very high.

Several previous studies have demonstrated a significant impact of transformational leadership on organizational culture and institutional performance. Alessa (2021) conducted a systematic review of public universities in Saudi Arabia, finding that transformational leadership operates through four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The study also highlights its impact on organizational commitment, knowledge management practices, job satisfaction, and organizational civic behavior. Virgiawan et al. (2021) examined employees of the Ministry of PUPR. They found that transformational leadership, mediated by work culture, has a significant effect on employee performance, especially in managing working time effectively and efficiently.

Meanwhile, Belhaj (2024), in the context of Yemen's public sector, proves that all dimensions of transformational leadership have a direct positive influence on organizational culture. These findings confirm that this leadership style can shape values, norms, and organisational behaviour systematically. The three studies emphasize that transformational leadership is a key variable in shaping work culture. However, studies on the mechanism within the context of religious institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools, are still relatively limited.

This research offers conceptual and contextual novelty in understanding transformational leadership in the pesantren environment. First, this research not only positions transformational leadership as an effective leadership style, but also as a strategic mechanism to encourage sustainable work culture change. Second, pesantren, as an educational space based on Islamic values and collective traditions, is rarely studied through modern managerial approaches; therefore, this study provides a new perspective on the study of leadership and organisational culture. Third, this study emphasizes that professional work culture is not only shaped by formal rules and systems, but also through the process of internalizing spiritual values that are integrated into institutional structures and practices. Fourth, the qualitative approach employed enables an in-depth exploration of the experiences and narratives of key actors in Islamic boarding schools, particularly in the design, implementation, and assessment of value-based institutional transformation and innovation.

This research aims to explore in depth how transformational leadership is carried out by the head of the pesantren in driving changes in the professional work culture in the pesantren environment. His primary focus is to uncover the strategies, processes, and dynamics that emerge when traditional values and modern institutional systems are integrated through visionary leadership styles. This research is important because it addresses the urgent need to understand how transformational leadership can be operationalized in the context of traditional Islamic educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools, which have been largely untouched by modern managerial approaches. Islamic boarding schools face the challenge of adhering to Islamic values while adapting to the demands of professionalism, accountability, and institutional efficiency. The results of this study show that Islamic boarding school principals who adopt transformational leadership can drive systemic change through digital innovation, cross-field participatory forums, and sustainable cadre systems.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an intrinsic case study design with a qualitative approach to investigate how the transformational leadership of Islamic boarding school principals influences the professional work culture at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. Intrinsic case studies were chosen because the focus of the research lies in an in-depth understanding of the internal dynamics of one specific institution that is considered unique in its leadership models and organisational culture formation. This type of research is relevant because it can explain the complexity of phenomena in a contextual and integrated manner (Alonso et al., 2023; Janis, 2022; Liu et al., 2024). The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables researchers to interpret the meaning of social actions and leadership strategies within an environment characterised by diverse religious and cultural values (Mulisa, 2022; Thompson Burdine et al., 2021; Younas et al., 2023). The research context encompasses the entire institutional system of the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School in Probolinggo, serving as a representation of value-based modernization in pesantren.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation of Islamic boarding school institutional activities. In-depth interviews were used to explore the perceptions, experiences, and leadership practices of Islamic boarding school principals and their impact on work culture. Participatory observation allows researchers to directly observe the practice of professionalism in the context of the daily life of the pesantren. Documentation is used to study official SOPs of the pesantren, such as organizational structure, institutional SOPs, and digital platforms developed. The researcher acted as a moderate participant, involved in limited pesantren activities to maintain objectivity and access to data. Informants are selected purposively, consisting of the head of the Islamic boarding school, leaders of institutional units, senior teachers, and students who are actively involved in internal organizations. The research was conducted at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School in Probolinggo.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which comprised three main components: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification (Antony et al., 2023; Futaqi & Mashuri, 2022; Maxwell, 2020). Data reduction involves the selection, categorisation, and thematic coding of results from interviews, observations, and documents. Data presentation was carried out in a narrative and a categorization Table to identify relationships between themes. Conclusions are drawn inductively, based on the triangulation of sources and the consistency of findings, which are then confirmed with informants through member checking techniques (Khoa et al., 2023; Spiteri, 2023; Sridharan, 2021). This model was chosen because it can describe the dynamics of social processes systematically and flexibly. Each stage of analysis is designed to produce an in-depth interpretation that not only describes what happened but also explains why and how the process unfolded. The credibility of the data is maintained through procedural transparency, trial audits, and the reflective involvement of researchers during the analysis process, ensuring that the research results have a high level of Trust and transferability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Structure and Management

Transformational leadership refers to a leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and direct significant change in an organization. In the context of pesantren, the head of the pesantren who embodies this leadership model not only acts as an administrator but also as an agent of change, encouraging institutional innovation. This leadership is characterized by a clear vision, the ability to build collective commitment, and encouragement for the development of the professionalism of educators and pesantren staff. This theme explores how the head of the Islamic boarding school at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School fulfils his role in creating an adaptive and modern institutional structure that upholds Islamic values. The primary focus is on the strategy, approach, and impact of the leadership style on the work culture and institutional dynamics in the pesantren environment.

The head of the pesantren plays a crucial role in shaping the new direction of the institution. As conveyed by the Deputy Head of Islamic Boarding School for Institutional Affairs: "He (the head of the Islamic boarding school) often invites cross-disciplinary meetings to evaluate programs. Sometimes we are asked to propose new things that were previously unthinkable." This is in line with the statement of one of the senior ustaz: "In the past, the reporting system was manual and sometimes ineffective. Now it has started to go digital, and it is the idea of the head of the Islamic boarding school directly."

Through the results of the interview above, the head of the Islamic boarding school in Nurul Jadid plays an active role in creating participatory and collaborative spaces. Cross-disciplinary meetings involving various structural elements of pesantren are a form of horizontal approach that strengthens internal accountability. In addition, the courage to encourage the digitalization of the reporting system shows the commitment of Islamic boarding school principals to efficiency and professionalism. These two things are strong indicators that the leadership carried out is not only instructive but also transformational. By integrating a vision for the future and supporting practical innovation, the head of the pesantren succeeded in shifting the conventional work paradigm towards a more dynamic and adaptive system, which indirectly strengthened the professional work culture within the pesantren environment. Departing from this, the form of institutional innovation driven by transformational leadership is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Institutional Innovation as the Implementation of Transformational Leadership of Islamic Boarding School Heads

Forms of Institutional Innovation		Main Platforms	Key Impact Areas
Multiplatform development of digital information centers		Nurul Jadid's official website and social media (YouTube, Instagram, etc.) through nuruljadid.net	External and internal communication of pesantren
e-Bekal Application	Santri	Electronic card system for payment, attendance, and licensing via nuruljadid.net	Student services and dormitory operations
Internal Boarding Platform	Motorcycle School	The basic data management system (students, dormitories, guardianships) is integrated through nuruljadid.net	Data management and unit coordination
Sambang Reservation	Santri	Special website for registration of sambang wali santri (effective from January 1, 2023) through nuruljadid.net	Guardian and student services
Online PSB System		Registration of new students is digital-based by uploading online files through nuruljadid.net	Student recruitment and administration
Internal intranet and hotspot network of pesantren		Automatic access for officials and administrators of the pesantren through the internal network	Internal communication and work access

Table 1 presents various institutional innovations implemented by the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, reflecting the transformational leadership approach adopted by the school's head. Each innovation focuses on modernizing the system and improving the quality of services through digital technology. The development of multiplatform information centres, the e-Bekal Santri application, and the NJ Pedatren platform are important instruments for creating transparency, professionalism, and efficiency in internal management. Innovations such as the sambang santri reservation system and online PSB show

an accountability and accessible public service orientation. Meanwhile, intranets and hotspot networks foster a collaborative work culture within the internal environment. This pattern indicates that transformational leadership drives a shift in work culture from traditional to digital, enhances accountability, and accelerates information flow and decision-making.

Strengthening human resources

Professional work culture is a set of values, attitudes, and work behaviors that reflect responsibility, discipline, and quality orientation in carrying out institutional duties. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this culture extends not only to the classroom but also permeates the entire educational process, encompassing nurturing and student support. To strengthen this kind of work culture, a systematic system is needed, one of which is through the regeneration of ustaz and periodic performance evaluation. At the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, the regeneration system is implemented through educational institutions such as Madrasah Diniyah and Formal Diniyah Education (FDE), as well as other formal education units that offer a specialised curriculum and coaching for potential students. This process aims to form ustaz who possess knowledge of society, nation, and organisation, and are based on the Islamic values of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja).

One of the informants, namely the Head of Parenting and Regeneration, explained: "We usually accompany new ustaz for the first three months. Every month, there is an evaluation, starting from teaching readiness, interaction with students, and academic reporting." In line with that, a young ustaz said: "Here, it is not only required to teach, but also discipline of time, active deliberation, and weekly reports must be precise. Otherwise, it will be immediately evaluated by the head of the unit."

The results of the interview illustrate that the regeneration process at Nurul Jadid relies not only on initial debriefing but also includes education, character development, and continuous evaluation. Ustaz was formed among students through the Madrasah Diniyah, PDF, and the involvement of Islamic boarding school organizations. Performance evaluations are conducted periodically as part of establishing a value-based work culture. This process reflects the synergy between the formal education system, Aswaja's spiritual values, and strategic institutional leadership practices. Professional culture is formed through strengthening awareness of the five central values: religion, knowledge, community, nation, and organization.

The Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School has a structured ustaz cadre regeneration system, which begins during the students' educational period. Institutions such as Madrasah Diniyah and the PDF are the primary spaces for the formation of character and the science of students who have the potential to become ustaz. In addition to gaining religious and general knowledge, they are also involved in organizational activities and internal leadership training. The

five values of consciousness serve as the primary guidelines in this coaching process. After being declared eligible, students will undergo the adaptation stage as new ustaz with assistance for three months, accompanied by a monthly evaluation that includes assessment of teaching readiness, administrative discipline, and social interaction.

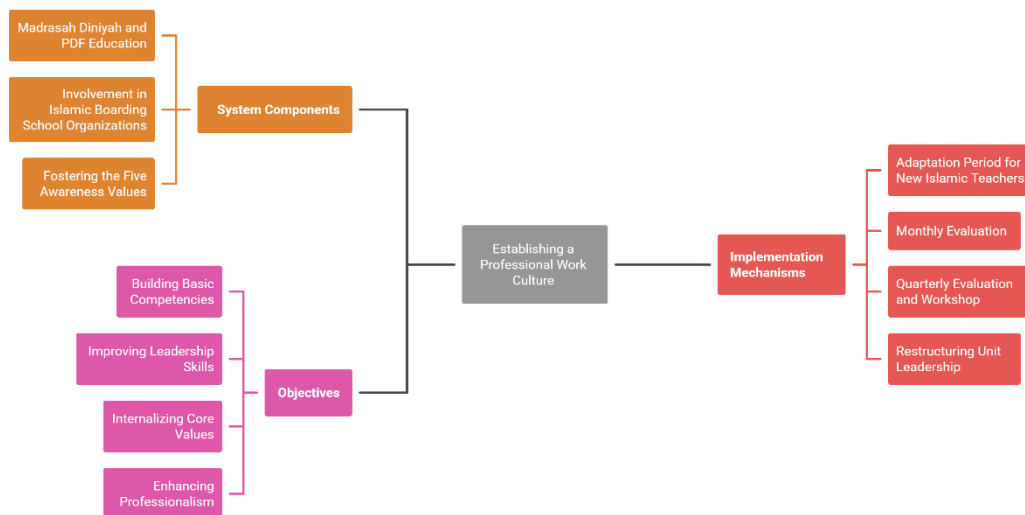


Figure 1. Establishing a Professional Work Culture in Islamic Education

Figure 1. Explaining the strategic framework for building a professional work culture in Islamic education. Three main components are interconnected. First, the system component, which includes madrasah diniyah and PDF education, involvement in pesantren organisations, and the cultivation of the five values of awareness. This component serves as the foundation for establishing a strong work culture. Second, objectives include strengthening basic competencies, improving leadership skills, internalizing core values, and increasing professionalism. This aspect demonstrates a long-term orientation in developing superior human resources for Islamic boarding schools. Third, the implementation mechanism includes an adaptation period for new teachers, monthly and quarterly evaluations, workshops, and unit leadership restructuring. This mechanism ensures that the process runs systematically and measurably.

The system of regeneration and evaluation of ustaz performance at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is an integrative, layered process, spanning from early education to professional training and evaluation. This process involves formal education, character development, organizational training, and structured performance evaluation. The five values of consciousness are the spirit that forms a professional work culture rooted in the Aswaja tradition. Thus, Nurul Jadid not only produces scientifically capable ustaz, but also has a high work ethic, leadership ability, and strong social responsibility.

Internalizing the Values and Culture of Students

The ethos of professionalism in the context of pesantren is not only concerned with work skills and formal responsibilities, but also closely related to Islamic values that are the spirit of pesantren education. The integration of Islamic values, such as Trust, discipline, seriousness, and responsibility, with professional work principles forms the character of a complete student, not only intellectually intelligent but also spiritually and socially resilient. The Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School instills this value through an integrative approach between religious activities, formal education, and organizational training. This theme examines how the fundamental values of Islam, as espoused by Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja), serve as a foundation in shaping the ethos of professionalism among students, making their lives in pesantren a place of habituation for responsible, measurable, and worship-worthy work behavior. The primary focus of this theme is the integration between spirituality and professionalism in the daily lives of students, serving as a form of leadership regeneration among the people.

Based on information obtained from several administrators and teachers at the Islamic boarding school, the integration of Islamic values into the students' professional practice is achieved through various consistent daily habits. Students are routinely directed to associate their intentions and daily activities, such as picketing, studying, and organisational activities, with the values of worship and responsibility. The coaches said that students were taught to be disciplined, maintain Trust, and stick to the schedule with the awareness that all these activities are part of character building. In line with this, information from the supervisor of the student organisation stated that students involved in management are targeted not only to understand administrative tasks but also to demonstrate an accountable attitude, work effectively in a team, and complete the program systematically. Values such as sincerity, thoroughness, and honesty are emphasised in the organisation's training and evaluation process.

The integration of Islamic values and professionalism among students is implemented through a structured daily routine and various organisations. The schedule of students has been designed to familiarise them with discipline, starting from waking up early, praying in congregation, studying, daily picketing, and evening deliberations. In the activities of student organizations, such as the Student Council, OPPNJ, and the dormitory, members are tasked with creating activity reports, compiling work programs, and carrying out tasks according to specified deadlines. All of this is done under the guidance of coaches with clear accountability standards. Assessments of organisational performance are conducted periodically, encompassing aspects of honesty, responsibility, and cooperation. Students are also involved in internal and external youth forums as a form of value-based leadership training. From a religious perspective, the value of Aswaja is internalized through recitation, bahtsul masail, and book discussions, which are synergized with self-development activities. Therefore, the integration of values, activity systems, and professional achievements of students at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Integration of Values, Activity Systems, and Achievement of Professionalism of Students at Nurul Jadid

Habituation of Santri	Coaching Pattern	Islamic Values	Professional Competencies
Daily Discipline	Wake-up schedule: early, praying, studying, picketing, sleeping regularly	Self-Discipline, Self-Discipline, Self-Discipline	Time management, work order
Organizational Responsibilities	Management of OPPNJ, Student Council, and the dormitory activities section	Sincerity, Honesty, Cooperation, Deliberation	Program preparation, activity execution, collective leadership
Scientific Development	Aswaja Study, Bahtsul Masail, Book Discussion	Scientific manners, Trust of knowledge, Tawasuth	Critical thinking, systematic argumentation, and reasoning
Service and Service	Cleanliness, security, guest service, and social forum tasks	Devotion, Social Empathy, Generosity	Service ethos, public responsiveness, polite communication

Table 2 illustrates that the development of professionalism in students at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is facilitated through the integration of Islamic values, a structured daily activity system, and the formation of concrete habits. Daily discipline is the primary foundation, where students are accustomed to regular routines that instill the value of *istiqamah* and time management, thus forming skills in both areas. The organisation's responsibility, through the management of OPPNJ, Student Council, and dormitory activities, is to train in honesty, cooperation, and deliberation, which then develop into collective leadership competencies and managerial abilities. Scientific development through the study of *Aswaja* and *Bahtsul Masail* instills scientific manners and the ability to think critically and systematically.

Discussion

This research reveals three main pillars in building a professional work culture at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School: transformational leadership of the head of the Islamic boarding school, a systematic *ustaz* regeneration system, and the internalization of Islamic values in the daily lives of students. The head of the *pesantren* applies a leadership style that encourages digital-based institutional innovation by building a modern management and communication system. Strengthening of *ustaz* human resources is carried out through early education, involvement in organizations, and routine evaluations based on the value of the five awareness. *Santri* is formed through a system of daily habituation that integrates Islamic values such as Trust, honesty, and solemnity into professional practice. These three findings show that *pesantren* leadership is not only symbolic, but also actively builds an accountable and

collaborative work system. This emphasizes the role of pesantren as an educational entity that can adapt to the challenges of modernity without losing its Islamic spirit.

The results of this study reinforce the concept of transformational leadership, which can guide organizations toward significant change through vision, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation. The results of this study are also in line with the research by Badrun (2024), which emphasises the importance of integrating Islamic values in the institutional management of Islamic boarding schools. However, the results of this study make a new contribution by showing how digital transformation—through the use of multiplatform information and electronic reporting systems—can be integrated within the Aswaja value framework. In addition, the process of regeneration of ustaz and internalization of student values shows a continuity between structural and cultural approaches. In contrast to the results of previous research, which emphasized traditional aspects of pesantren (Anshari et al., 2023; Islamic et al., 2024; Zahraini et al., 2022), this study features progressive dynamics based on systems and technology. This fills a gap in the literature that often separates the modernization of the system from the spiritual values of the pesantren.

This research employs a theoretical framework of transformational leadership, combined with an institutional sensemaking approach, to examine the dynamics of institutional change in Islamic boarding schools (Deepa et al., 2025; El-Hage & Sidani, 2023; Raby et al., 2023). The leadership of Islamic boarding school principals who encourage digital innovation, new accountability systems, and cross-disciplinary participation reflects the four main dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Hilton et al., 2023; Njaramba, 2024; Teoh et al., 2022). In the context of pesantren, this process is not only technocratic but also infused with religious values that are collectively interpreted. The process of regeneration of ustaz and internalisation of student values demonstrates how pesantren actors actively interpret changes within a spiritual framework, not just an administrative one. The results of this study support the view that sensemaking in religious organizations involves a process of interpretation that is moral and symbolic. When the values of professionalism are associated with religious activities, changes in work culture do not elicit resistance; instead, they are accepted as part of devotion. Thus, this research makes a theoretical contribution by integrating transformational leadership approaches with Islamic values-based sensemaking.

This research confirms that the application of transformational leadership in Islamic educational institutions can serve as a strategic foundation for forming a professional work culture rooted in Islamic values. At the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, the head of the pesantren successfully drove institutional transformation through a collaborative approach and the strategic use of digital technology, while maintaining the continuity of the pesantren's spiritual values.

The ustaz cadre system and the formation of students' character through the integration of Islamic values demonstrate that professionalism and religiosity are not mutually exclusive, but can actually complement each other. The primary contribution of this research lies in the formulation of an integrative model for Islamic educational institutions to develop superior human resources academically, spiritually, and socially. This finding provides a practical reference for Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and similar institutions to design a coaching system that aligns with the principles of Aswaja, while also being adaptable to the demands of the times. Thus, this research enriches the discourse on contemporary Islamic education, while also paving the way for the development of institutional practices that are value-based, data-driven, and benefit-oriented.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that transformational leadership at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is the primary driver in forming an adaptive and quality-oriented professional work culture. The head of the pesantren plays the role of an agent of change who not only builds a modern managerial system through digital innovation but also drives collective participation in the decision-making process. These efforts have a direct impact on improving institutional efficiency and strengthening internal accountability. On the other hand, the layered ustaz cadre system and the habituation of Islamic values in the lives of students form a work ethic that is consistent, responsible, and spiritually valuable. This synergy between structures, values, and systems strengthens the sustainable transformation of Aswaja-based institutions. Thus, transformational leadership not only encourages structural innovation but also forms a culture of professionalism that is integrated with the Islamic character of Islamic boarding schools. This research creates an opportunity for the development of similar leadership models within the broader context of Islamic education.

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