

CHARACTER-BASED LEADERSHIP IN STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FROM A BUSINESS AND PARTNERSHIP BUREAU

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ABSTRACT

Leadership plays a crucial role in determining organizational success, particularly in fostering a supportive and productive work environment. This study aims to analyze the implementation of *character-based leadership* in enhancing organizational performance within the Business and Partnership Bureau of the Student Executive Board. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore leadership practices in context. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that *character-based leadership*, reflected in openness, motivation, appreciation, communication, and humility, contributes to a collaborative and supportive work environment. These practices enhance member engagement, creativity, and organizational performance, as shown by successful program implementation and business outcomes. This study provides empirical evidence on the importance of *character-based leadership* in improving student organization performance.

Keywords: Character-based leadership, Organization, Performance, Leadership

ABSTRAK

Kepemimpinan memiliki peran penting dalam menentukan keberhasilan organisasi, khususnya dalam menciptakan lingkungan kerja yang kondusif dan produktif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi *character-based leadership* dalam meningkatkan kinerja organisasi pada Biro Bisnis dan Kemitraan Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif untuk memahami praktik kepemimpinan dalam konteks organisasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, serta dianalisis melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *character-based leadership* yang tercermin dalam keterbukaan, motivasi, apresiasi, komunikasi, dan kerendahan hati berperan dalam menciptakan lingkungan kerja yang kolaboratif. Praktik tersebut meningkatkan keterlibatan anggota, kreativitas, dan kinerja organisasi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi empiris mengenai pentingnya kepemimpinan berkarakter dalam meningkatkan kinerja organisasi mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan berkarakter, Organisasi, Kinerja, Kepemimpinan

INTRODUCTION

Along with the rapid development of science and technology, organizational dynamics have also undergone significant changes. In this context, leadership is a key factor determining the success and sustainability of an organization. Various studies show that the strength or weakness of an organization, as well as the success or failure of achieving its goals, is greatly influenced by the quality of leadership (Aung & Hallinger, 2022). Leadership is not understood solely as a managerial function, but also as a strategic process capable of directing, motivating, and empowering organizational members to achieve common goals. However, the primary challenge facing organizations today lies not only in the need for leaders, but also in the character of the leadership itself. Effective leadership in the modern era requires not only technical competence but also strong character values (Nurabadi et al., 2021). The concept of character-based leadership is increasingly relevant in addressing this need, emphasizing the importance of integrity, responsibility, empathy, and the ability to build healthy interpersonal relationships within the organization. Character-based leadership is expected to create a comfortable, safe, and productive work environment for all organizational members.

In practice, character-based leadership has broad implications for organizational dynamics. Leaders serve not only as decision-makers but also as driving forces, motivators, and role models for their members. Leaders with character can create a sense of belonging, enhance teamwork, and encourage active member participation in all organizational activities (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Conversely, weak leadership character is often the main cause of organizational failure and can even hinder the achievement of established goals. Therefore, the existence of leadership with character is a fundamental requirement in every organization, including student organizations.

Leadership is also inseparable from moral values, which serve as the primary foundation for developing a leader's character (National College for Teaching & Leadership, 2021). Good morals are formed through social interactions and daily life experiences, which then shape an individual's personality. However, in recent decades, various social issues have shown signs of a character crisis, marked by an increase in deviant behavior such as low integrity, a lack of responsibility, and weak ethical behavior in interactions (Kretzschmar, 2020). This phenomenon demonstrates that character building, particularly in leadership, is an increasingly important issue to address in various contexts, including higher education.

Student organizations, as part of the higher education system, play a strategic role in shaping the character and leadership competencies of the younger generation (Oviyanti, 2016). The Student Executive Board (BEM), particularly the Business and Partnership Bureau, is one of the units responsible for managing entrepreneurial activities and organizational collaboration. In carrying out its functions, this bureau is not only required to achieve organizational performance targets but also to build a collaborative and values-oriented work culture. Therefore, the practice of character-based leadership is crucial in supporting the effectiveness and sustainability of student organization activities.

However, studies on character-based leadership in the context of student organizations, particularly in business and partnership units, are still relatively limited. Most previous research has focused on leadership in formal organizations or the corporate sector, resulting in little study of how character-based leadership is implemented in student organizations, which have distinct dynamics and characteristics (Ferine et al., 2021; Srivastava et al., 2020). This indicates a research gap that needs to be filled through more contextual empirical studies. This research is expected to contribute both theoretically to the development of character-based leadership studies and practically as a reference for more effective and sustainable student organization management. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the practice of character-based leadership in improving student organizational performance, specifically in the Business

and Partnership Bureau of the Student Executive Board of the Economics and Administration Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Jakarta.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership is a fundamental concept in management and organizational studies that continues to evolve in line with the dynamics of the social and economic environment. Generally, leadership is understood as an individual's ability to influence, direct, and motivate organizational members to achieve common goals (Forrester, 2011). In the context of modern organizations, leadership no longer focuses solely on formal power or authority, but also on the values underlying the leader's behavior (Sliwka et al., 2023). Therefore, the concept of character-based leadership is becoming increasingly relevant in addressing the need for organizations that are not only effective but also ethical and sustainable.

Character-based leadership emphasizes the importance of moral values and integrity as the primary foundation of leadership. According to Ličkona et al. (2015), a leader's character encompasses moral dimensions such as honesty, responsibility, caring, and fairness, which are reflected in daily actions. Meanwhile, Bishop (2013) suggest that character-based leadership relates not only to who the leader is but also to how these character values are implemented in decision-making and interactions with organizational members. Therefore, character-based leadership plays a role in building trust, increasing member commitment, and creating a positive organizational culture. From an organizational behavior perspective, character-based leadership is closely linked to improved individual and organizational performance. Leaders who demonstrate integrity and empathy tend to create a supportive work environment, thereby encouraging employee engagement and productivity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Furthermore, participatory and democratic leadership practices have been shown to enhance employee creativity and innovation by providing space for individuals to actively contribute to the decision-making process (Yukl, 2012). This suggests that a leader's character impacts not only interpersonal relationships but also overall organizational performance.

Furthermore, the concept of character-based leadership is also linked to transformational leadership theory. Bass and Riggio (2006) state that transformational leaders have the ability to inspire and motivate members through a clear vision and demonstrate attention to individual needs. Values such as integrity, empathy, and responsibility are essential elements in building strong relationships between leaders and members. Thus, character-based leadership can be viewed as a foundation that strengthens transformational leadership practices in organizations. In the context of student organizations, character-based leadership plays an equally important role. Student organizations are learning platforms that enable individuals to develop leadership skills, teamwork, and social skills. Research shows that organizational experiences on campus can shape students' character and leadership competencies, which in turn impact their preparedness for the world of work (Hero & Lindfors, 2019). Therefore, implementing character-based leadership in student organizations not only contributes to organizational success but also to the development of individual character as future leaders.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. Qualitative descriptive research aims to understand the phenomena that occur in depth by describing the conditions or circumstances studied systematically and factually. Creswell (2018) states that qualitative methods are used to explore and understand the meaning derived from social and humanitarian problems. Through this approach, researchers attempt to interpret data obtained from the field to then be analyzed and presented narratively and in detail in the form of a research report. Data collection techniques in this study were carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted in

depth using recording and note-taking techniques to obtain accurate and detailed information from informants. Informants in this study consisted of the Head of the Business and Partnership Bureau as the main informant, and the Deputy Head and staff of the Business and Partnership Bureau of the Student Executive Board of the Economics and Administration Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) as supporting informants. Informants were selected purposively by considering their roles, experiences, and direct involvement in organizational activities. The data analysis technique in this study used an interactive analysis model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction was performed by selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data obtained from the field. The reduced data was then presented in descriptive narrative form, making it easier for researchers to understand patterns and relationships between the data. The final stage was drawing conclusions, which was carried out gradually and continuously throughout the research process. To ensure data credibility, this study employed triangulation techniques. Triangulation was performed by comparing and combining data obtained from various sources and data collection techniques, namely interviews, observation, and documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the research results, it was found that the leaders of the Business and Partnership Bureau demonstrated character-based leadership practices, reflected in an open, participatory, and empowering attitude toward members. This leadership demonstrated focus not only on achieving organizational targets but also on creating a work environment conducive to individual development. Leaders actively provided members with the freedom to express their creativity and ideas, thus creating an inclusive and supportive work environment. This was reinforced by the statement of one informant, who stated, "We are given the freedom to express our ideas, and are often asked to express our opinions in every activity." Within approximately one month, the leadership style implemented increased the members' comfort in carrying out their organizational duties and responsibilities.

The leadership practiced tended to be democratic, where leaders provided equal opportunities for all members to participate in the decision-making process. This approach reflected character values such as fairness, respect for individuals, and shared responsibility in achieving organizational goals. One member stated that "there is no difference between the leader and members in expressing opinions; everyone is heard." This finding was further reinforced by observations that showed that in every meeting, leaders actively provided opportunities for all members to speak and share their ideas. With this equality, members feel valued and have a vital role in the organization, fostering a sense of belonging and sparking creativity and innovation in contributing ideas and solutions.

Furthermore, leaders demonstrate a development-oriented character through motivation and appreciation for members' performance. Strengthening work motivation is crucial for maintaining consistent performance, especially when members face various obstacles in carrying out their duties. One informant stated that "the leader often encourages and appreciates our work, even if it's small." Observations also show that leaders consistently provide positive feedback on members' work, both directly and in evaluation forums. This practice has been proven to increase morale, self-confidence, and members' commitment to carrying out their responsibilities. Thus, leadership functions not only as a director but also as a facilitator, encouraging the growth of individual potential within the organization.

The implementation of character-based leadership is also evident in the organization's performance. One indicator of this success is the members' ability to generate a net profit of approximately Rp700,000 per month through their business activities. This achievement is

inseparable from the leadership's strategy of providing space for members to develop innovations based on ideas and creativity. One informant stated that "we were given the opportunity to try out our own business ideas, and the chairman fully supported this." Furthermore, interpersonal relationships between leaders and members are harmonious and familial. This is reinforced by a member's statement that "our relationship is more like a family, so it's more comfortable to work together." This emotional closeness is a crucial strength in creating solid and productive teamwork.

In the context of organizational capacity development, the Business and Partnership Bureau also successfully conducted Sponsorship Training aimed at improving students' competency in establishing collaborations and securing funding. Based on observations, this activity was structured, with a clear division of tasks and effective coordination among members. One informant stated that "this training really helped us understand how to find sponsors and collaborate with external parties." The success of this activity demonstrates the strategic role of leaders in directing, coordinating, and ensuring the achievement of organizational goals through a values- and character-based approach. Leaders are able to integrate the organization's vision with the development needs of their members, resulting in work programs that have a real and sustainable impact.

One important dimension of character-based leadership, reflected in leadership practices at the Business and Partnership Bureau, is humility. This attitude is demonstrated through leaders' openness to evaluations, criticism, and suggestions from members without rigid hierarchical boundaries. One informant stated that "we can also provide criticism to the chairman, and it is received well without any offense." The routine evaluation practices conducted periodically not only focus on member performance but also include assessments of the leader's performance. Based on observations, the evaluation sessions are open and participatory, with members actively providing input on the organization's operations. This attitude reflects a reflective awareness and a commitment by leaders to continuous learning and self-improvement. This humility also contributes to building member trust and creating more egalitarian and collaborative working relationships.

Furthermore, open communication is a key element in the implementation of character-based leadership. Leaders consistently establish effective two-way communication to ensure smooth coordination and avoid miscommunication in carrying out tasks. This is reinforced by an informant's statement that "communication always runs smoothly, so there are no miscommunications at work." Observations also show that interactions between leaders and members are intense, both in formal forums such as meetings and in everyday informal interactions. This communication skill serves not only as a means of conveying information but also as a manifestation of concern for members' well-being, thereby strengthening team cohesion and increasing organizational effectiveness.

Furthermore, this practice of character-based leadership also contributes to the formation of a positive organizational culture. Values such as openness, participation, mutual respect, and shared responsibility are gradually internalized by all members of the organization. The resulting organizational culture not only supports the achievement of short-term goals but also strengthens the foundation for long-term organizational sustainability. With alignment between leadership values and member behavior, the organization is able to adapt to various challenges and continue to develop dynamically according to environmental needs. Overall, the research results indicate that character-based leadership plays a significant role in creating a comfortable work environment, improving member performance, and encouraging the achievement of organizational goals. Leadership based on character values such as fairness, empathy, responsibility, openness, and humility has proven to be key to building a productive and sustainable student organization. The application of character-based leadership is not only relevant in the context of formal organizations, but is also very important in the management

of student organizations as a forum for the formation of character, competence, and leadership of the younger generation in the future.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that character-based leadership practices implemented by the leaders of the Business and Partnership Bureau play a significant role in creating a comfortable work environment, increasing member participation, and boosting student organization performance. This finding aligns with Bafadal et al. (2021) study, which states that leadership functions not only as a process of influence but also as an effort to build effective relationships between leaders and members. In the context of this study, open and participatory relationships have been shown to increase member engagement in organizational activities. Furthermore, the democratic and participatory leadership practices in this study align with the participatory leadership theory proposed by Yokuş (2022), which states that member involvement in decision-making can improve decision quality and commitment to its implementation. Providing opportunities for members to express ideas and thoughts not only increases a sense of appreciation but also fosters creativity and innovation. This finding is also supported by previous research showing that an inclusive and open work environment can improve employee engagement and individual performance (Gaol, 2021).

Furthermore, the findings of this study emphasize the important role of motivation and appreciation in character-based leadership. Leaders who consistently encourage and reward their members' performance have been shown to increase their morale and commitment. This aligns with the transformational leadership theory proposed by Bass and Riggio (2006), which emphasizes the importance of individualized consideration in addressing members' needs and development. By providing attention and appreciation, leaders not only improve performance but also build positive emotional relationships with organizational members.

In the context of organizational performance, this study shows that character-based leadership contributes to the achievement of tangible results, such as generating profits from business activities and implementing impactful work programs, such as training sponsorships. These findings support the research of Avissar et al. (2018), which states that character-based leadership has direct implications for organizational effectiveness through value-based and integrity-based decision-making. Thus, character values play a role not only in moral aspects but also have a strategic contribution to improving organizational performance. One important finding in this study is the practice of humility demonstrated through leaders' openness to criticism and evaluation from team members. This finding aligns with research by Quick (2010), which states that humble leaders tend to be more open to feedback, thereby creating a work environment that supports mutual learning and development. In this study, the practice of two-way evaluation involving leaders and team members is a strong indicator of reflective and adaptive leadership. This demonstrates that humility is not a weakness, but rather a strength in building more egalitarian and collaborative working relationships.

Furthermore, open communication practiced by leaders is also a key factor in the successful implementation of character-based leadership. This finding is consistent with previous research that suggests effective communication is a crucial element in improving coordination, reducing conflict, and strengthening team cohesion (Robbins & Judge, 2014). In this study, intensive two-way communication serves not only as a means of conveying information but also as a medium for building trust and emotional closeness between leaders and team members. Open communication also promotes members to voice their ideas, concerns and feedback with more confidence in the organisation (Lay et al., 2024). Consequently, members experience increased appreciation and are more engaged in organisational processes and decision-making. Eventually, this condition creates a more collaborative, supportive and productive organisational environment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the character-based leadership practices implemented in the Business and Partnership Bureau of the Student Executive Board of the Economics and Administration Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, University Negeri Jakarta, play a significant role in improving student organization performance. Leadership demonstrated through openness, participation, and member empowerment fosters a comfortable, inclusive, and collaborative work environment. Character values such as fairness, responsibility, empathy, and humility are reflected in democratic decision-making practices, motivation and appreciation, and effective communication between leaders and members. This not only increases member engagement and creativity but also impacts organizational performance, such as successful program implementation and improved business results. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the study of character-based leadership in the relatively limited context of student organizations, while also strengthening the relevance of character values in enhancing organizational effectiveness. Practically, these findings can serve as a reference for student organization managers in developing a leadership style oriented toward values and interpersonal relationships.

However, this study has limitations, including the limited number of informants and the focus on a single organizational unit, which makes the results difficult to generalize broadly. Furthermore, this study employed a qualitative approach that emphasizes data depth, thus failing to quantitatively measure the relationship between character-based leadership variables and organizational performance. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the number and variety of informants, and combine qualitative and quantitative approaches (mixed methods) to obtain more comprehensive results. Future research could also examine other relevant variables, such as employee engagement, organizational culture, or sustainable performance, to strengthen understanding of the role of character-based leadership in various organizational contexts. Thus, research development in this area is expected to provide broader contributions both theoretically and practically.

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