

Value-Bounded Situational Leadership in Muhammadiyah Upper-Secondary Schools: A Multiple-Case Study Across Institutional Conditions

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Abstract

School leadership research shows that effective practice depends on context. Yet two questions remain open in faith-based schools: how principals vary their leadership across the institutional conditions of schools within a single religious organization, and how far the organization's values shape that variation. This study addresses both through an interpretive multiple-case study of five Muhammadiyah upper-secondary schools in Karanganyar Regency, Central Java, selected for maximum variation across three institutional conditions: Pioneering, Expansion, and Institutionalization of Excellence. Data came from interviews with principals, vice-principals, and administrative staff, as well as from school documents, and were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis. A sixth school, first classified as Pioneering, proved to be an established institution and was analyzed as a contrasting case. Principals did not lead through a fixed style. They read each school's condition and moved among service-oriented, developmental, strategic, and directive modes, and a directive or transactional mode appeared in every condition, not only in struggling schools. The balance tracked institutional condition, from service toward staff with directive control of pupils under scarcity, to a relational

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base paired with a transactional apparatus during expansion, to service and strategic direction in established schools. Across all conditions, adaptation stopped at limits set by Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah values. The study proposes the Value-Bounded Situational Leadership model, which extends situational leadership from follower readiness to institutional condition and from value-neutral to value-bounded fit.

Keywords: school leadership; situational leadership; faith-based schools; Muhammadiyah; institutional condition; values-based leadership

Introduction

Two decades of quantitative evidence show that school leadership matters for student outcomes, but also that its influence is far from uniform. A cross-cultural meta-analysis of studies published between 2006 and 2024 estimated a medium overall effect of educational leadership on student achievement, and found that the effect varied with national culture, being larger in collectivist Asian systems.¹ A three-level meta-analysis reached a related conclusion at the level of specific practices, showing that distinct leadership practices relate to student outcomes with different strengths.² Context can also change the direction of an effect. In PISA data across OECD economies, principal leadership explained a larger share of the variance in achievement for disadvantaged students than for advantaged students.³ A comparison of Germany and China found that the leadership profiles associated with higher achievement differed between the two systems,⁴ while a survey of Chilean principals showed that the contingencies they face depend on the school's socio-educational context rather than on the leader's individual characteristics.⁵ A systematic review of the contextual challenges reported by principals reaches the same conclusion: the problems principals face, and the solutions open to them, are shaped by the conditions of the institutions they lead.⁶

¹ Engin Karadağ and Gulsum Sertel, "The Effect of Educational Leadership on Students' Achievement: A Cross-Cultural Meta-Analysis Research on Studies between 2006 and 2024," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 54, no. 4 (July 15, 2026): 1255–90, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432251327645>.

² Cheng Yong Tan, Clive Dimmock, and Allan Walker, "How School Leadership Practices Relate to Student Outcomes: Insights from a Three-Level Meta-Analysis," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 52, no. 1 (January 3, 2024): 6–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211061445>.

³ Cheng Yong Tan, "Examining School Leadership Effects on Student Achievement: The Role of Contextual Challenges and Constraints," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 48, no. 1 (2018): 21–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2016.1221885>.

⁴ Dan Chen, Bo Ning, and Wilfried Bos, "Relationship between Principal Leadership Style and Student Achievement: A Comparative Study between Germany and China," *SAGE Open* 12, no. 2 (2022): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221094601>.

⁵ Gonzalo Muñoz, José Weinstein, and Mauricio Sembler, "Contingency: An Overlooked Factor in Principals' Leadership," *Journal of Educational Administration* 61, no. 1 (2023): 41–59, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-05-2022-0070>.

⁶ Alireza Tamadoni, Rezvan Hosseingholizadeh, and Mehmet Şükrü Bellibaş, "A Systematic Review of Key Contextual Challenges Facing School Principals: Research-Informed Coping Solutions," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 52, no. 1 (January 22, 2024): 116–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211061439>.

This variability is acute in Indonesian private faith-based schools, whose survival depends on attracting students in a crowded market.⁷ Indonesia's school-zoning policy has redistributed enrolment across schools, yet families in private schools report lower perceived equity than other groups.⁸ In a rural setting facing demographic pressure, parents increasingly enroll their children in private or religious schools they regard as academically and technologically stronger.⁹ Muhammadiyah schools illustrate the resulting gap. In Central Java, the organization runs 1.600 schools and madrasahs.¹⁰ These schools share one governance system and one value framework, Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK), yet differ widely in enrolment, resources, and reputation, which makes them a setting in which variation in leadership can be examined. In contrast, the normative framework is held largely constant. The same variation appears in Karanganyar Regency, whose Muhammadiyah upper-secondary schools differ markedly in enrolment, accreditation, and program range.¹¹ Research on school leadership in Indonesia has concentrated on principals' styles, competencies, and effectiveness, and offers little explanation of how leadership practice varies with such institutional differences.¹²

The question of which leadership fits which condition belongs to two theoretical traditions. Contingency theory rejected the search for one best style and proposed that effectiveness depends on the match between leader and situation; in Fiedler's model, the situation is defined by leader-member relations, task structure, and position power.¹³ Situational leadership theory posits a matching dynamic: the same leader varies among

⁷ Viky Nur Vambudi, Mohamad Ali, Triono Ali Mustofa, et al., "Transforming Urban Islamic Education: Principal Strategies for Fulfilling SDGs 4 on Quality Education," *Profetika: Jurnal Studi Islam* 26, no. 03 (December 2025): 883–98, <https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v26i03.13702>.

⁸ Isti Widiharjanti, Peerasit Kamnuansilpa, Panpun Ronghanam, et al., "Aligning School Zoning with Educational Equity: Administrative and Leadership Challenges in Indonesia," *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* 36, no. 2 (2026): 70–97, <https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v36i2.872>.

⁹ Jajang Dede Mulyani, Aisyah Apriliciciliana Aryani, and Kuat Leksono, "Enrollment Decline and the Digital Divide in Rural Elementary Schools: Implications for Equity in Basic Education," *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 27, no. 3 (2026): 51–66, <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v27i3.9277>.

¹⁰ Pimpinan Wilayah Muhammadiyah Jawa Tengah, "Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah," *Muhammadiyah Jateng*, September 2025.

¹¹ Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, "Data Referensi Satuan Pendidikan: Kabupaten Karanganyar," September 2026.

¹² Nasib Tua Lumban Gaol, "School Leadership in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 51, no. 4 (July 23, 2023): 831–48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211010811>.

¹³ Fred E Fiedler, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating according to followers' readiness.¹⁴ Educational administration adopted this logic in the 1970s, arguing that structure and leadership in schools should be analyzed as contingent on environmental demands,¹⁵ and recent work has relocated the contingency to the school's socio-educational context and district characteristics.¹⁶

Two limits of this tradition matter here. First, situational models anchor contingency in follower readiness, an individual attribute, and say little about how the *institutional condition* of the whole organization shapes which leadership is appropriate. Second, the tradition is value-neutral: the situation defines what is effective, and the leader's commitments do not enter the model. This assumption has not held well in religious schools. A retest of Fiedler's model in Islamic schools found that relationship-oriented leadership was treated as necessary regardless of situational control, suggesting that religious norms narrow the range of acceptable responses,¹⁷ and a typological analysis of German schools supported a "values-based contingency" position in which contextual influences varied with principals' value profiles.¹⁸ Neither study examined how an organization-wide value framework, as distinct from individual values, bounds situational adaptation.¹⁹

Organizational life-cycle theory adds a further dimension. Greiner described organizational growth as a sequence of phases punctuated by crises, each calling for a different response,²⁰ and Quinn and Cameron showed that the criteria by which

¹⁴ Paul Hersey and Kenneth H Blanchard, "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership.," *Training & Development Journal*, 1969.

¹⁵ E Mark Hanson, "School Management and Contingency Theory: An Emerging Perspective," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1979): 98–116, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X7901500209>.

¹⁶ Paul V Bredeson, Hans W Klar, and Olof Johansson, "Context-Responsive Leadership: Examining Superintendent Leadership in Context," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 19 (2011): 18, <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v19n18.2011>.

¹⁷ George C Theodory and Mafakhir Hadbai, "Retesting Fiedler's Contingency Theory in Islamic Schools," *Journal of Psychology* 111, no. 1 (1982): 15–18.

¹⁸ Julia Warwas, "Principals' Leadership Behaviour: Values-Based, Contingent or Both?," *Journal of Educational Administration* 53, no. 3 (2015): 310–34, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-03-2014-0035>.

¹⁹ Istanto Istanto, Fakhruddin Fakhruddin, Heri Yanto, et al., "Principal Leadership Model at Muhammadiyah Junior High School of Surakarta City," *Proceeding ISET (2021) Universitas Negeri Semarang International Conference on Science, Education and Technology* 7, no. 1 (2021): 778–87, <https://proceeding.unnes.ac.id/index.php/iset778>.

²⁰ Larry E Greiner, "Evolution and Revolution as Organizations Grow," *Harvard Business Review* 50, no. 4 (1972): 37–46.

organizations are judged effective shift from one stage to the next.²¹ In education, the model has traced the establishment of a leadership college,²² the evolution of international schools,²³ and school-specific staging based on quality, resources, and competitiveness.²⁴ Its limit is the assumption of an ordered sequence: two newly founded Israeli schools passed through the same stages of establishment in opposite orders,²⁵ and an analysis of 981 Virginia schools found ordered declines to be rare.²⁶ Within Muhammadiyah, Ali proposed a normative three-condition model of school development, pioneering, expansion, and institutionalization of excellence.²⁷ The model is prescriptive and sequential; this study borrows its three conditions as a typology for comparing schools at one point in time, not as a sequence schools must pass through.

A third body of research shows that principals rarely lead with a single fixed style. Day, Gu, and Sammons found that successful English principals combined and layered transformational and instructional strategies across phases of improvement, guided by their reading of the school's needs.²⁸ Ukrainian principals in wartime shifted from adaptive to transactional to transformational leadership as their schools moved through emergency, stabilization, and recovery,²⁹ and a qualitative comparative analysis of

²¹ Robert E Quinn and Kim Cameron, "Organizational Life Cycles and Shifting Criteria of Effectiveness: Some Preliminary Evidence," *Management Science* 29, no. 1 (1983): 33–51, <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.29.1.33>.

²² Bill Mulford, "Organizational Life Cycles and the Development of the National College for School Leadership: An Antipodean View," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 32, no. 3 (2004): 309–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143204044418>.

²³ Denry Machin, "The Organisational Evolution of Contemporary International Schools," *Journal of Research in International Education* 18, no. 2 (2019): 109–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240919865033>.

²⁴ Svetlana Mikheeva and E V Potina, "The Life Cycle of an Educational Organization: An Empirical Approach," *Management Sciences* 9, no. 2 (2019): 78–93, <https://doi.org/10.26794/2304-022X-2019-9-2-78-93>.

²⁵ Dorit Tubin, "Establishment of a New School and an Innovative School: Lessons from Two Israeli Case Studies," *International Journal of Educational Management* 22, no. 7 (2008): 651–63, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540810908566>.

²⁶ Craig Hochbein, "Downward Spirals, Boiled Frogs, and Catastrophes: Examining the Rate of School Decline," *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 11, no. 1 (2012): 66–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2011.577927>.

²⁷ D I Sekolah Muhammadiyah, "MENYEMAI GURU MUHAMMADIYAH BERKEMAJUAN," *Ishraqi* 01, no. 01 (2016): 31–39.

²⁸ Christopher Day, Qing Gu, and Pam Sammons, "The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: How Successful School Leaders Use Transformational and Instructional Strategies to Make a Difference," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2016): 221–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15616863>.

²⁹ Liliia Hrynevych and Yevheniia Fadiev, "Hybrid Leadership in Wartime: Adaptive, Transactional and Transformational Practices of Ukrainian School Principals," *Journal of Educational Administration* 64, no. 5 (2026): 525–40, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-09-2025-0391>.

seventy-seven Swedish schools found no single route to turnaround, only several combinations of conditions whose sufficiency depended on local context.³⁰ Quantitative work supports this: transformational leadership moderates the association between instructional leadership and teachers' practice, and latent profile analyses identify integrated leadership profiles associated with more favorable teacher outcomes than single-style profiles³¹. Servant leadership is a distinct orientation within this repertoire, structurally non-redundant with transformational leadership³² and associated with school effectiveness mainly through school culture rather than directly.³³ In faith-based schools serving under-resourced communities, principals describe servant leadership as service and empowerment that places faith at the center of school culture,³⁴ and a review of Islamic-based schools in Southeast Asia found servant leadership predominant in community-driven schools, instructional leadership in accountability-oriented systems, and transformational leadership in reform-oriented schools.³⁵ In Muhammadiyah schools specifically, altruistic leadership has been linked to school culture and teacher integrity,³⁶ and prophetic leadership is characterized as collective-collegial and grounded in *ta'awun*,³⁷ in both, religious values appear as attributes of the leader or predictors of outcomes, not as boundaries on adaptation.

³⁰ Stefan Arora-Jonsson, Ema Kristina Demir, Axel Norgren, et al., "Beyond the Silver Bullet: Unveiling Multiple Pathways to School Turnaround," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 35, no. 2 (2024): 214–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2024.2353626>.

³¹ Ammar Wangyee Abil Fida Muhammad Qois Al Hadi, Muh. Nur Rochim Maksum, Intan Dian Saputri, Syahrul Adam Salleh Ibrahim, "The Transformation of Islamic Educational Leadership in a Multicultural Society: A Theoretical Review Based on Critical Literature," *Multicultural Islamic Education Review* 3, no. 2 (October 2025): 149–60, <https://doi.org/10.23917/mier.v3i2.12098>.

³² Peter Y T Sun, Marc H Anderson, and HeyIn Gang, "Determining the Hierarchical Structure and Nature of Servant Leadership," *Journal of Business and Psychology* 39 (2024): 715–34, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-023-09904-9>.

³³ Muslim Alanoglu and Songül Karabatak, "School Culture as a Mediator in the Link between Leadership and School Effectiveness," *Irish Educational Studies*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2025.2488805>.

³⁴ Melese Shula, "Servant Leadership in Action: Fostering School Culture and Community Engagement in South African Catholic Schools," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 18, no. 1 (2026): 142–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2025.2589439>.

³⁵ Eka Rizki Amalia, "Leadership Dynamics in Islamic-Based Schools: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asia (2015–2025)," *At-Tadzkir: Islamic Education Journal* 5, no. 1 (2026): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.59373/attadzkir.v5i1.231>.

³⁶ I Istanto, F Fakhruddin, H Yanto, et al., "Altruistic Leadership: A Quantitative Analysis of Its Effects on School Culture, Teacher Integrity, and Performance in Muhammadiyah Middle Schools in Indonesia," *International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences* 11, no. 10 (2024): 140–46.

³⁷ Mohammad Hajar Dewantoro and Mohamad Joko Susilo, "Prophetic Values in the Leadership of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta School," *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 19, no. 2 (May 1, 2025): 1042–52, <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v19i2.20732>.

Four gaps motivate the research questions. First, situational and life-cycle theories tie leadership to followers' readiness or developmental stage, and integrated leadership research pairs transformational and instructional leadership in public schools. None explains how principals adapt across institutional conditions within a single faith-based organization, or which leadership modes they use (RQ1).

Second, the evidence on leadership, school culture, capacity, and innovation comes from cross-sectional models of average effects. These cannot show how the processes differ by institutional condition (RQ2). Third, studies of principals' challenges remain general and rarely link constraints to a private faith-based school's institutional conditions or its competition for enrolment (RQ3). Fourth, values are known to shape contingent leadership, but not how an organization-wide value framework bounds it. In Muhammadiyah schools, that framework is Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK) (RQ4).

The study, therefore, asks: RQ1. How do principals vary their leadership across the Pioneering, Expansion, and Institutionalization of Excellence conditions, and which modes do they use? RQ2. How does this variation relate to school culture, organizational capacity, and innovation? RQ3. What challenges shape leadership within each condition? RQ4. How do AIK values bound leadership adaptation, and how do the cross-case patterns form a contextual model?

The study answers these with the Value-Bounded Situational Leadership (VBSL) model. VBSL makes two moves. It places the contingency in the school's institutional condition, not in follower readiness. And it treats adaptation as value-bounded: AIK sets the limits within which principals shift between service-oriented, developmental, strategic, and directive modes.

Research Method

This study used an interpretive qualitative multiple-case design.³⁸ The interpretive stance treats leadership as a practice that principals construct and make sense of in relation to their school's institutional conditions and organizational values, which suits questions

³⁸ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018).

about how leadership is enacted rather than how strongly it affects outcomes³⁹. The multiple-case design supported within-case description and cross-case comparison across three institutional conditions.⁴⁰

The three conditions, Pioneering, Expansion, and Institutionalization of Excellence, were taken from Ali's model of Muhammadiyah school development.⁴¹ In its original form, the model is prescriptive and sequential; here, it was used as a typology of each school's institutional state at the time of data collection, not as a sequence through which schools pass. Because data were collected at a single point in time, the design supports comparisons between conditions but not claims about transitions between them or about the causal order between leadership and organizational processes.

The case population comprised the nine Muhammadiyah upper-secondary schools registered for Karanganyar Regency, Central Java: four general senior high schools (SMA) and five vocational high schools (SMK). Eligibility required Muhammadiyah ownership, active status in 2025/2026, and a location within the regency, which served as the study's geographical boundary. No claim is made about Muhammadiyah schools beyond the regency; the provincial figures in the Introduction describe only the wider setting.⁴²

Schools were profiled on indicators drawn from the national school-reference database and the national accreditation records,⁴³ accreditation grade, and its trajectory across the two most recent cycles, enrolment in 2025/2026, the proportion of permanent teachers, and the condition of facilities, and assigned to a condition using the rules in Table 1, Part A. Because SMA and SMK differ in typical size, enrolment was recorded as a descriptor rather than a threshold; accreditation trajectory, common to both types, was the primary criterion. Program range and external networks were recorded as

³⁹ Nurul Latifatul Inayati, Abil Fida Muhammad Qois Al Hadi, Fadhia Ananda, et al., "Islamic Education Management in Islamic Boarding Schools: Integration of Ecological Values in the Educational Curriculum," *Mapendis: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 1 (2025): 58–76.

⁴⁰ M B Miles, A M Huberman, and J Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 4th ed. (SAGE, 2020).

⁴¹ Tamadoni, Hosseingholizadeh, and Bellibaş, "A Systematic Review of Key Contextual Challenges Facing School Principals: Research-Informed Coping Solutions."

⁴² Pimpinan Wilayah Muhammadiyah Jawa Tengah, "Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah."

⁴³ Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, "Data Referensi Satuan Pendidikan: Kabupaten Karanganyar."

descriptors and not used as criteria, because they overlap with the leadership practices examined in RQ1.

Classification was verified against the field data during analysis. One school initially assigned to the Pioneering condition, SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Karanganyar, proved, on both structural and interview evidence, to be an established, innovative school (A accreditation; about 1,238 students; a Majelis Dikdasmen “Sekolah Unggul Pratama” award; industry-class partnerships; in-house digital systems). It did not meet the Pioneering rule and was therefore removed from the core comparison and retained only as a contrasting case, which illustrates how the classification was tested rather than assumed. Six information-rich schools were selected; after this reclassification, the core comparison rests on five: one Pioneering, two Expansion, and two Institutionalization of Excellence.

Table 1.
Classification rules and case profiles
Part A. Classification rules (accreditation-based)

Condition	Rule
Pioneering	Accreditation C or not yet accredited, with no rise in grade across the two most recent cycles
Expansion	Accreditation B, or a rise in grade in the most recent cycle
Institutionalization of Excellence	Accreditation is sustained across at least two consecutive cycles.

Part B. Case profiles (national reference and accreditation data)

Code	School	Type	Accreditation	Enrolment 2025/26	Condition
P1	SMA Muh. 3 Gondangrejo	SMA	C (2017), C (2022)	58	Pioneering
E1	SMA Muh. Darul Arqom	SMA	C (2018) → B (2023)	188	Expansion
E2	SMK Muh. 1 Gondangrejo	SMK	B (2018/2022)	832	Expansion
I1	SMA Muh. 1 Karanganyar	SMA	A	404	Institutionalization
I2	SMK Muh. 3 Karanganyar	SMK	A (2019), A (2024)	472	Institutionalization
,	SMK Muh. 2 Karanganyar	SMK	A (2021)	-1,238	Contrasting case

For each core school, the principal, one vice-principal, and one administrative staff member were interviewed, together with the principal of the contrasting case. Principals were the primary informants on leadership strategy; vice-principals and administrative staff on implementation and organizational culture. Teachers, students, and parents were

not interviewed, so findings on teachers' commitment and collaboration reflect the accounts of school leaders and staff and are reported accordingly.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and school documents. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed; excerpts in the Results appear in English translation, with Indonesian originals in Appendix C. Each excerpt is labeled by case, role, and source: *INT1*/*INT2* for interview rounds, *DOC* for documents (e.g., "P1-VP/*INT1*"). At present, excerpts from vice-principal and administrative staff are available for P1 and I1; for E1, E2, and I2, the analysis draws on principal interviews and documents, and additional informant interviews are being added.

The guide drew on situational and contingency leadership,⁴⁴ servant leadership (service, empowerment, community building),⁴⁵ transformational leadership (setting direction, developing people),⁴⁶ Ali's framework,⁴⁷ and AIK practice. It covered five domains: (1) reading the school's condition and adapting leadership to it; (2) vision, capacity development, and innovation; (3) deliberation (*musyawarah*), exemplary conduct (*keteladanan*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and religious habituation; (4) strategies for competition between schools; and (5) leadership challenges in the school's current condition. The full guide is in Appendix B.

Data were analyzed with reflexive thematic analysis, within each case and then across cases.⁴⁸ The five interview domains served as sensitizing categories, and codes were generated inductively within and beyond them. Modes of leadership were coded as service-oriented, developmental, strategic, or directive/transactional, and each case was described by the pattern and relative salience of these modes across its institutional condition. A pattern was treated as characteristic of a condition only where the evidence supported it; the single Pioneering case is reported as a rich case rather than a replicated

⁴⁴ Fiedler, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*; Hersey and Blanchard, "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership."

⁴⁵ Robert K Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, 25th anniv (Paulist Press, 2002).

⁴⁶ Mingyu Hou, Jamilah binti Ahmad, and Yi Zhao, "The Practice of Transformational Leadership in K12 Private Schools in China: Strategies and Insights for Driving Educational Innovation," *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership* 10, no. 1 (2025): 89–131, <https://doi.org/10.30828/real.1566630>.

⁴⁷ Muhammadiyah, "MENYEMAI GURU MUHAMMADIYAH BERKEMAJUAN."

⁴⁸ Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*.

pattern. The analysis deliberately sought evidence against emerging readings, service-oriented practice in strong schools, directive practice in weak ones, and reports it.

AIK entered analysis as an a priori sensitizing concept, through domain 3 of the guide and an initial set of value codes; its bounding criteria were developed abductively by comparing coded practices with Muhammadiyah normative guidance⁴⁹. AIK is therefore an a priori framework refined by the data.

After cross-case analysis, the initial VBSL model was reviewed by three experts, in Muhammadiyah education and school development, in educational management and leadership, and in educational development and pedagogy.

Quality was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability,⁵⁰ interpreted in line with reflexive thematic analysis.⁵¹ Credibility was supported by comparing accounts against documents and, for P1 and I1, across the three informant groups; the Results present excerpts from vice-principal and administrative staff alongside the principal’s for those cases. For the remaining cases, corroboration relied on documents, and claims about teachers and staff are framed as leaders’ accounts. Transferability rests on the case profiles (Table 1); dependability on an audit trail of coding versions and memos; and confirmability on reflexive memos and the reporting of disconfirming evidence.

Results

Across the five core cases, principals did not lead with a single fixed style. Each described reading the school’s condition and moving between modes, service-oriented, developmental, strategic, and directive, with the balance differing by institutional condition (Table 2). A directive or transactional mode appeared in every condition, not only in the weakest schools.

Table 2.
Salient leadership modes by case and source

Case	Service-oriented	Developmental	Strategic	Directive transactional	/ AIK-related
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⁴⁹ I S Nabila and M Shobahiya, “Implementation of Artificial Intelligence in Islamic Religious Education at Muhammadiyah Junior High School Kottabarat Surakarta,” *Iseedu: Journal of Islamic Educational Thoughts and Practices* 10, no. 1 (2026): 26–35, <https://doi.org/10.23917/iseedu.v10i1.16379>.

⁵⁰ Yvonna S Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (sage, 1985).

⁵¹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “One Size Fits All? What Counts as Quality Practice in (Reflexive) Thematic Analysis?,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 18, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 328–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>.

P1	Trust and ownership before rules (PR, VP/INT); flexible teacher attendance given low pay (PR/INT)	In-house training; Double-Track vocational pilot (PR/INT)	Positioning against neighboring state schools (PR/INT)	Light physical sanctions; zero-tolerance bullying, returning students (PR/INT)	Daily Qur'an reading; tiered memorization targets (PR/INT)
E1	Personal, "from the heart" approach; teachers as former students (PR/INT)	Weekly meetings; random clinical supervision (PR/INT); IHT with UMS experts (PR/INT)	Year-round admissions; Tahfiz, football, and overseas-prep classes (PR/INT)	Lateness/empty-class fines; verbal "exit" warnings; digital control of Qur'an-study attendance (PR/INT)	Compulsory Muhammadiyah study; <i>uswatun hasanah</i> discipline (PR/INT)
E2	Deliberation; awards	Teacher training; digital learning	Service quality via the boarding program	Fingerprint attendance	Handshaking, <i>duha</i> , and congregational prayer
I1	Serving and empowering staff; two-way communication and empathy (PR/INT); staff rewards (AS/INT)	Data-based decisions; IHT; Canva/AI training (PR, VP/INT)	Clear vision as driver of change (PR/INT)	Transparent reward and punishment; regular supervision (PR/INT)	Balancing modern quality with AIK; <i>uswah hasanah</i> (PR/INT)
I2	Persuasion; staff valued and co-responsible; <i>amarbeni-anduweni-alungkepi</i> (PR/INT)	Teacher apprenticeships in industry (PR/INT)	Industry linkage; competency updating (PR/INT)	Discipline via daily routines and flag ceremonies (PR/INT)	Family study groups; Javanese-Islamic ethic (PR/INT)

RQ1 Situational leadership across institutional conditions

Pioneering (P1). The principal read the school's constraints: 58 students, very low fees, a "sekolah buangan" image, mostly reluctant learners, and calibrated leadership accordingly. Low pay ruled out coercion of staff: "Because this school is small and teachers' honoraria are relatively low, the principal cannot impose overly harsh sanctions or force rigid class arrangements on teachers." (P1-PR/INT1). Trust came before rules: "A school in this condition cannot be led straight away with strict rules. The most important thing is to build trust first, because teachers and the school community must feel that they own this school." (P1-PR/INT1) The vice-principal confirmed this and its source in the school's size (P1-VP/INT1), and added that firmness remained where

responsibilities were at stake: “It is not that everything is done gently. When it comes to rules or responsibilities that must be carried out, the principal still sets clear limits, only they are conveyed through personal communication.” (P1-VP/INT1)

Toward students, however, leadership was openly directive: light, measured physical sanctions for lateness, and a zero-tolerance rule on bullying under which persistent offenders were returned to their parents. The principal judged discipline and pupils’ comfort more valuable than fee income. Service-oriented care toward staff and a directive stance toward pupils thus coexisted, and both were bounded by a daily religious routine of Qur’an reading with tiered memorization targets. The Pioneering case is reported as a rich case rather than a replicated pattern.

Expansion (E1, E2). In E1, the principal named his own model as situational: “A leader cannot use one leadership style for every situation. There are times when a personal approach is needed, but there are times when one must be firm so that the organization keeps running.” (E1-PR/INT1) His pesantren background shaped him when he was soft and when he was hard; he was hardest on matters of organizational principle, such as commitment to Muhammadiyah study. A “from the heart” personal approach and the fact that several teachers were his former students sat alongside an explicit transactional system: fines for lateness and for leaving a class untaught, a bonus for a month of full attendance, and digital monitoring of teachers’ Qur’an-study attendance through a shared drive. Capacity was built through weekly meetings, random clinical classroom supervision, and in-house training with university experts, while the school competed through year-round admissions and specialized classes.

Institutionalization of Excellence (I1, I2). In I1, the principal framed leadership as serving and empowering staff around a clear vision: “The strongest point is the principal’s ability to move and inspire the school community with a clear vision, with an approach focused on serving and empowering teachers and staff, through two-way communication, an emotional approach, and empathy.” (I1-PR/INT1) This service orientation was paired with data-driven decision-making, staff training on new tools, and a transparent reward-and-punishment system. AIK explicitly bounded it: “A leader must be an agent of change and a role model, so that improvements in quality and modern education advance in balance with strong Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah values.” (I1-PR/INT1) The vice-principal and administrative staff corroborated the service-and-empowerment reading,

noting teacher training in Canva and AI and annual staff rewards (I1-VP/INT1; I1-AS/INT1), while both also named a tendency to decide too quickly as a weakness (I1-VP/INT1; I1-AS/INT1), a disconfirming note against an uncritically positive account.

In I2 the principal built the school through persuasion suited to Javanese culture and the ethic of *amarbeni*, *anduweni*, *alungkepi* (feeling ownership, responsibility, and readiness to defend the school): “We built this school with a persuasive approach. Teachers and staff must feel valued, so that they have a sense of ownership and responsibility for the school’s progress.” (I2-PR/INT1) Innovation was tied to the school’s competitive position through teacher apprenticeships in industry and constant competency updating (I2-PR/INT1).

Cross-condition pattern. Service-oriented and directive modes appeared in every condition; what differed was their balance and object. In Pioneering, staff service coexisted with directive control over pupils under tight resource constraints. In Expansion, a relational base was paired with an explicit transactional-disciplinary apparatus to consolidate quality. In Institutionalization, service-and-empowerment and strategic direction dominated, with discipline routinized rather than coercive (Table 3).

Table 3.
Balance of leadership modes by institutional condition

Condition	Dominant modes	Object of directive mode	Principal’s role
Pioneering	Service toward staff; directive toward pupils	Pupil discipline and school image	Institutional stabilizer
Expansion	Relational base plus and developmental transactional	Teacher discipline and quality consolidation	Builder of capacity and order
Institutionalization	Service-and-empowerment plus strategic direction	Routine, systemic discipline	Strategic, value-anchored leader

RQ2 Organizational processes

School culture. In P1, the supporting informants described a familial culture: “It is more like a family. The principal is still the leader, but communication is not too formal, and problems are usually talked through first.” (P1-AS/INT1) Being valued was linked to responsibility and belonging (P1-AS/INT1; P1-VP/INT1). In I1, both supporting informants identified daily school culture as the change most tied to the principal’s leadership (I1-VP/INT1; I1-AS/INT1). In the I2 culture, the Javanese-Islamic ethic was framed and extended to families through compulsory family study groups (I2-PR/INT1).

Organizational capacity. Capacity-building was visible across conditions but differed in form: an in-house training-plus-vocational-pilot effort under severe constraints in P1; weekly meetings, clinical supervision, and university-led training in E1; data-based decision-making and digital-tool training in I1; and industry apprenticeships in I2. Even in P1, administration was shifting to digital systems, with support rather than force (P1-AS/INT1).

Competitive positioning. Positioning ranged from securing community trust and pupil retention against neighboring state schools in P1, through year-round admissions and specialized classes in E1, to industry alignment and reputation in the Institutionalization cases (I1, I2; DOC).

RQ3 Contextual challenges

Resource limits were sharpest in P1, where low fees and reliant PIP funding constrained operations and staff sanctions (P1-PR/INT1). Human-resource challenges shifted from sustaining motivation under scarcity in P1, through moving teachers to modern methods and enforcing discipline in E1, to keeping competence current with industry in I2 (I2-PR/INT1). Competition meant retaining pupils against state and new private schools in P1 and E1, and sustaining reputation in I1 and I2. Technological change meant integrating digital systems in I1 and keeping pace with industrial technology in I2 (Table 4).

Table 4.
Dominant challenges by institutional condition

Condition	Dominant challenge
Pioneering	Sustaining the school and pupil discipline under severe resource limits
Expansion	Consolidating quality; enforcing teacher discipline; retaining pupils
Institutionalization	Sustaining innovation, reputation, and industry relevance

RQ4 AIK and the VBSL model

AIK appeared as routine, daily Qur'an reading in P1, compulsory Muhammadiyah study in E1, prayer routines in E2, and *uswah hasanah* discipline in I1, and as a reference point for judging change. The clearest instance was the I1 principal's insistence that modern quality advance "in balance with strong Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah values" (I1-PR/INT1), reinforced by his view that principals need AIK-based management competence and the Majelis Dikdasmen leadership program (I1-PR/INT1). Here, AIK is not a leadership mode but a limit on which adaptations are acceptable.

The Value-Bounded Situational Leadership (VBSL) model integrates these patterns (Table 5). It relates each institutional condition to a characteristic balance of leadership modes and places AIK as a boundary common to all three. It does not describe a sequence that schools must follow.

Table 5.
The Value-Bounded Situational Leadership (VBSL) model

Condition	Characteristic balance of modes	Object of adaptation	Principal's role
Pioneering	Service toward staff; directive toward pupils	Trust, image, survival	Institutional stabilizer
Expansion	Relational base plus and developmental transactional	Teacher development and discipline	Builder of capacity and order
Institutionalization	Service-and-empowerment plus strategic direction	Innovation and reputation	Strategic, value-anchored leader
Common boundary	AIK values	Sets which adaptations are acceptable	Applies across all three conditions

Contrasting case: an established school misread as Pioneering

SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Karanganyar was initially assigned to Pioneering but proved established on both structural and interview evidence. Its principal, in post for two years, described a declining-then-recovering enrolment turned around by opening a Hospitality program (about 476 new entrants) alongside a flagship Culinary program recognized regionally, industry classes with Luwes Grup and Smart Edupark, in-house digital systems (SIP MENDAR, e-Rapor), and fee waivers of about Rp230 million a year. His self-described model was democratic and accommodating, balanced by a fingerprint-based attendance incentive, again a service-oriented mode paired with a transactional one. The case matters methodologically: it shows the classification being tested against evidence and corrected, and it extends the cross-condition finding that situational adaptation, bounded by AIK, is not confined to struggling schools.

Discussion

This study examined how principals vary their leadership across institutional conditions within a single faith-based organization, how that variation relates to organizational processes and challenges, and how AIK features in this variation. The findings are read against situational and contingency theory, life-cycle theory, and recent empirical work.

From Follower Readiness to Institutional Condition

The central finding is that principals adapted their leadership to the institutional condition of the whole school, not to individual followers' readiness, as situational theory assumes,⁵² and that they combined modes rather than selecting one. This supports the core contingency claim that effectiveness depends on the match between leadership and situation,⁵³ but relocates the situation from the individual to the organization. Bredeson, Klar, and Johansson found the same paradox among superintendents: leaders named nearly identical priorities yet practiced differently once the organizational and community context changed.⁵⁴ The present principals go further than sharing priorities. The Darul Arqom principal stated the logic himself: no single style fits every situation, and a leader must read the real conditions of the workplace. The SMA 1 principal reached the same conclusion from an established school. Reading the condition, not applying a preferred style, is what drove the variation.

This reframes a debate the field often poses as a binary. One position holds that effective leadership rests on generic best practices; the other holds that it is wholly contingent on context. A recent statement of the problem argues that leadership lives in neither camp but in a continuous process of inquiry that starts from problems in context and draws on evidence-based practices as resources.⁵⁵ The VBSL cases are an empirical instance of that argument: each principal began from the school's condition and pulled service-oriented, developmental, strategic, or directive practice into play as the problem required.

The way the modes were combined echoes Day, Gu, and Sammons, who showed that successful English principals fused transformational and instructional practices and layered them across phases of improvement rather than choosing between them.⁵⁶ Two differences mark the present contribution. Those principals combined two change-oriented styles across temporal phases of one school; the present principals combined four

⁵² Hersey and Blanchard, "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership."

⁵³ Fiedler, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*.

⁵⁴ Bredeson, Klar, and Johansson, "Context-Responsive Leadership: Examining Superintendent Leadership in Context."

⁵⁵ Huang Wu, "Leadership Lives in the Middle Ground Between 'Best Practices Fit All' and 'Context Is Everything,'" *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership* 11, no. 2 (2026): 561–74, <https://doi.org/10.30828/real.1964379>.

⁵⁶ Day, Gu, and Sammons, "The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: How Successful School Leaders Use Transformational and Instructional Strategies to Make a Difference."

modes across concurrent institutional conditions within one organization, and one of those modes, service orientation, sits outside the transformational-instructional pairing that the study examined. The Ukrainian principals who shifted among adaptive, transactional, and transformational leadership across crisis phases,⁵⁷ and the seventy-seven Swedish schools whose turnarounds followed several sufficient combinations of conditions rather than a single route, confirm that leadership functions as a context-dependent combination. What VBSL adds is a value-bounded version anchored in institutional conditions.

The Directive Mode Is Not an Anomaly

A directive or transactional mode appeared in every condition, which complicates any purely relational reading. Pioneering used light physical sanctions and returned persistent bullies to their parents; Expansion combined a personal approach with fines for lateness and for leaving a class untaught, plus digital monitoring of teachers' attendance in religious study; Institutionalization routinized discipline through daily ceremonies and transparent reward and punishment. The wartime study of Ukrainian principals reported the same movement, with leaders emphasizing transactional practice during the emergency phase and transformational practice during recovery,⁵⁸ and situational theory itself treats directive behavior as appropriate when followers or conditions require it.⁵⁹

Two points follow. First, labeling these schools' leadership "servant" would misdescribe them. Servant leadership is defined by a follower- and community-oriented orientation, and a chapter examining how to put it into practice concluded that its natural home is informal teacher leadership rather than the principalship, precisely because principals must also direct and enforce.⁶⁰ The VBSL principals confirm this: their service orientation coexisted with fines, sanctions, and dismissals, so the accurate description is situational adaptation among service-oriented, developmental, strategic, and directive modes. Second, reporting the directive mode plainly, rather than folding it into a

⁵⁷ Hrynevych and Fadieieva, "Hybrid Leadership in Wartime: Adaptive, Transactional and Transformational Practices of Ukrainian School Principals."

⁵⁸ Hrynevych and Fadieieva, "Hybrid Leadership in Wartime: Adaptive, Transactional and Transformational Practices of Ukrainian School Principals."

⁵⁹ Hersey and Blanchard, "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership."

⁶⁰ Adrian Jarvis, "Servant Leadership: Operationalising an Oxymoron," in *Educational Leadership: Contemporary Theories, Principles, and Practices*, ed. Donnie Adams (Springer Singapore, 2023), 71–84, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-8494-7_5.

benevolent account, is what the design's disconfirming-evidence logic requires. The Darul Arqom principal's admission that his authoritarian streak may deter even anonymous criticism is the clearest instance of this, and it is retained rather than softened.

Service Orientation as a Persistent Relational Base

Service-oriented practice did not fade as schools grew stronger. The SMA 1 principal described his leadership as serving and empowering staff through two-way communication and empathy, and the SMK 3 principal built his school on persuasion and the Javanese-Islamic ethic of *amarbeni*, *anduweni*, *alungkepi*. This pattern fits the mediation evidence from 471 Turkish teachers, where transformational leadership related to school effectiveness directly, but servant leadership related to it only through school culture.⁶¹ The present accounts show what that indirect path looks like in practice: service-oriented acts such as trust-building, valuing staff, and involving families built the relational ground on which developmental and strategic work then stood. Servant orientation operated as a substrate, not as a driver of outcomes in its own right.

This helps resolve a difficulty in the servant-leadership literature. The construct separates a follower orientation from a community orientation,⁶² yet how a follower-focused stance survives inside a hierarchy has remained unclear. The VBSL cases suggest that principals enact it less as a distinct program than as the manner in which they exercise the other modes, visible in how they framed discipline through relationships and how they tied innovation to a shared sense of ownership. A systematic review of thirty-seven Islamic-based schools in Southeast Asia found servant leadership dominant in community-driven schools and transformational leadership dominant in reform-oriented ones.⁶³ The present study observes both orientations within single schools, weighted by institutional condition rather than distributed across school types, suggesting that the ecology the review identified across schools also operates within them.

⁶¹ Alanoglu and Karabatak, "School Culture as a Mediator in the Link between Leadership and School Effectiveness."

⁶² Sun, Anderson, and Gang, "Determining the Hierarchical Structure and Nature of Servant Leadership."

⁶³ Amalia, "Leadership Dynamics in Islamic-Based Schools: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asia (2015–2025)."

Why The Conditions Are Not Developmental Stages

Because the three conditions derive from a sequential model,⁶⁴ it is important to state what the findings support. Schools in different conditions showed different leadership balances at one point in time; no school was observed moving through the conditions. Life-cycle theory would predict such movement,⁶⁵ But its ordered-sequence assumption has been weakened by evidence that establishment stages can occur in different orders and that ordered decline is rare.⁶⁶ The contrasting case reinforces the caution: a school structurally resembling an excellent institution had been provisionally read as Pioneering, which shows that the condition is not read off a fixed developmental ladder. Treating the three conditions as a cross-sectional typology is therefore the defensible reading.

AIK As a Normative Boundary on Adaptation

The study's distinctive claim is that situational adaptation in these schools ran up against a limit set by an organization-wide value framework. Situational and contingency theories are, in classical form, value-neutral, since the situation alone defines what is effective.⁶⁷ Religious schooling has already exposed this gap. A retest of Fiedler's model in Islamic elementary schools found that relationship-oriented leadership was treated as necessary regardless of situational control, which led the authors to conclude that Islam narrows the range of acceptable leadership.⁶⁸ A study of fifty-six German schools reconciled the two traditions by identifying value profiles that shaped how principals responded to organizational conditions, and named the result values-based contingency.⁶⁹ Both studies located the constraint in the individual leader.

VBSL moves the constraint up a level. AIK is not one principal's value profile but a framework shared across all the schools, carried in governance, recruitment, and daily routine, and it operated as a reference point against which adaptations were judged rather than as a style. The clearest evidence is the SMA 1 principal's insistence that modern

⁶⁴ Muhammadiyah, "MENYEMAI GURU MUHAMMADIYAH BERKEMAJUAN."

⁶⁵ Greiner, "Evolution and Revolution as Organizations Grow."

⁶⁶ Tubin, "Establishment of a New School and an Innovative School: Lessons from Two Israeli Case Studies"; Hochbein, "Downward Spirals, Boiled Frogs, and Catastrophes: Examining the Rate of School Decline."

⁶⁷ Fiedler, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*; Hersey and Blanchard, "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership."

⁶⁸ Theodory and Hadbai, "Retesting Fiedler's Contingency Theory in Islamic Schools."

⁶⁹ Warwas, "Principals' Leadership Behaviour: Values-Based, Contingent or Both?"

quality advance in balance with AIK, backed by his view that principals need AIK-based management competence and the Majelis Dikdasmen leadership program. This reading aligns with work on Indonesian madrasah, showing that value-practice alignment and spiritual authority function as prerequisites for institutional sustainability, enabling or constraining every other resource, and with a study of South African Catholic schools, where servant leadership held faith at the center of school culture under conditions of scarcity and accountability pressure.⁷⁰ On this basis, the study proposes four criteria by which AIK may bound adaptation: that change serves the public benefit; that processes respect deliberation and dignity; that empowerment strengthens competence alongside integrity; and that innovation preserves the mission of da'wah and social service. Because direct evidence rests mainly on the SMA 1 case, these are offered as a framework for testing rather than as established findings.

Contribution Relative to Prior Muhammadiyah Research

Earlier studies treat religious values as attributes of the leader or predictors of outcomes, altruistic leadership related to culture and integrity,⁷¹ prophetic leadership as collective-collegial and grounded in ta'awun.⁷² VBSL reframes them as boundaries of adaptation: values that determine not only what a good Muhammadiyah leader is but also how far and in which direction leadership may adjust to institutional demands, echoing the ecological pattern a Southeast Asian review found across school types but situating it within one organization.⁷³

Implications

Theoretically, VBSL extends situational leadership from follower readiness to institutional condition, and from value-neutral to value-bounded fit: in value-driven organizations, adaptation is constrained by a normative framework, so instrumental effectiveness is necessary but not sufficient. In practice, principal development should be differentiated by condition: trust-building and resource-stretching for foundation-building schools; structured development and fair discipline for expanding ones; strategic

⁷⁰ Shula, "Servant Leadership in Action: Fostering School Culture and Community Engagement in South African Catholic Schools."

⁷¹ Istanto, Fakhruddin, Yanto, et al., "Altruistic Leadership: A Quantitative Analysis of Its Effects on School Culture, Teacher Integrity, and Performance in Muhammadiyah Middle Schools in Indonesia."

⁷² Dewantoro and Susilo, "Prophetic Values in the Leadership of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta School."

⁷³ Amalia, "Leadership Dynamics in Islamic-Based Schools: A Systematic Review of Southeast Asia (2015–2025)."

direction and networking for excellence-oriented ones, within AIK limits. Because the study is small and cross-sectional, these are hypotheses for practice.

Limitations

The core comparison rests on five schools in one regency, with a single Pioneering case, and does not generalize province-wide. The cross-sectional design supports comparison, not claims about transitions or causal order. Vice-principal and administrative staff data are complete for P1 and I1 only; for other cases, claims about teachers and staff are largely leaders' accounts, and additional informant interviews are being added. The removal of SMK Muhammadiyah 2 from the core set left the composition asymmetric.

Conclusion

Leadership in these Muhammadiyah upper-secondary schools was not a fixed style. Principals read each school's institutional condition and moved among service-oriented, developmental, strategic, and directive modes, with the balance shifting depending on the condition. Foundation-building schools paired service toward staff with directive control of pupils under severe scarcity; expanding schools set a relational base against an explicit transactional apparatus of fines, incentives, and monitored discipline; established schools led through service, empowerment, and strategic direction, with discipline routinized rather than coercive. A directive mode ran through every condition, which is why describing this leadership as servant alone would misstate it.

Two claims organize these findings into the Value-Bounded Situational Leadership model. First, the contingency that governs a principal's practice is the institutional condition of the whole school, not the readiness of individual followers that classical situational theory assumes. Second, adaptation is not value-neutral. Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah values set the limits within which principals adjust, functioning as a reference point for judging which changes are acceptable rather than as a style to enact. Instrumental effectiveness is, therefore, necessary but not sufficient in these schools.

The study is small, cross-sectional, and centered on principals' accounts, so the model is offered as a framework for testing rather than a settled result. Its practical value is clearest for principal development, which the findings suggest should be differentiated by institutional conditions and grounded in the organization's value framework rather than delivered as a single program for all schools. Longitudinal research, wider teacher

and student voice, and tests of the four proposed value criteria across more faith-based schools would show how far the model travels.

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Ethical Statement

This research was conducted with institutional permission. A request for research permission was issued by the Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Religion (Fakultas Agama Islam), Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (No.798/C-6-III/FAI/XII/2025), and a research permit was granted by Pimpinan Daerah Muhammadiyah Kabupaten Karanganyar (No.202/III.0/A/2026). All informants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, use of data, and their right to withdraw, and gave written informed consent before participating. The participating schools agreed to be identified by name; individual informants are referred to only by role and case code.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Author Contributions

Istanto: Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Writing – original draft; Project administration. Mutohharun Jinan: Conceptualization; Supervision; Validation; Writing – review and editing. Aflit Nuryulia Praswati: Methodology; Formal analysis; Writing – review and editing. Nurul Latifatul Inayati: Investigation; Data curation; Writing – review and editing. Bella Misbahati Putri: Investigation; Data curation. Abil Fida Muhammad Qois Al Hadi: Investigation; Formal analysis. Fadhia Ananda:

Investigation; Visualization. Siti Rosilawati Ramlan: Validation; Writing – review and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the submitted version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI in Scientific Writing

During the preparation of this work, the authors used generative AI tools to assist with language editing and with structuring and formatting references. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the publication's content.

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