

Agile Leadership in Islamic Boarding School: An Exploratory Study of Team Iteration and Collaboration Practices in Times of Disruption (Case Study at Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School, Sumenep, Madura)

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Abstract: This exploratory qualitative study investigates agile leadership practices in Islamic boarding school leadership, focusing on iteration and team collaboration in an era of disruption. The case study was conducted at Al-Amien Prenduan Madura Islamic Boarding School, selected for its long history and adaptive capacity. Data were collected over six months (January–June 2023), a post-COVID-19 transition phase during which Islamic boarding schools were intensifying digital adaptation and organizational restructuring. Collection methods included triangulation through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies involving *kiai*, senior *ustadz*, *administrators*, and senior *santri*. Data analysis followed reduction, presentation, and conclusion-drawing procedures, with validity assessed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The results show that this *pesantren* applies agile leadership through a collective system, with the *Majlis Kiai* (Council of Clerics) serving as a participatory strategic decision-making body. Iterative practices are reflected in continuous planning and evaluation cycles, while team collaboration involves a multi-level decision-making structure. The *pesantren* demonstrates flexibility in integrating digital technology while preserving its traditional identity through gradual adaptation, supported by an adaptive organizational culture, integrated management, and dialogical communication distinguishing it from traditional *salaf pesantren*. Theoretically, this study integrates agile leadership concepts into traditional *pesantren* leadership; practically, it offers an adaptive leadership model for Islamic educational institutions facing disruption. The findings affirm that agile leadership emphasizing iteration and team collaboration can be implemented in Islamic boarding schools without eroding spiritual and traditional values. By balancing Islamic identity with digital adaptation through distributed leadership, this approach enhances learning effectiveness, organizational capacity, and responsiveness to external change.

Keywords: Agile Leadership, Islamic Boarding School, Team Iteration, Collaboration Practices, Times of Disruption, Pesantren, Case Study.

INTRODUCTION

Agile leadership theory originates from software development, formally initiated with the publication of the *Agile Manifesto* by Beck et al. (2001). (Eilers et al., 2022) The Manifesto emphasizes four core values: individuals and interactions over processes and tools, working software over comprehensive documentation, customer collaboration over contract negotiation, and responding to change over following a plan (Eilers et al., 2022). These values gave rise to principles such as continuous iteration, self-organizing teams, and rapid adaptation to change.

Over the past two decades, agile principles have been adopted into general organizational leadership contexts, including the education sector. Eilers et al. define agile leadership as the leader's ability to navigate organizations to remain adaptive, productive, and superior in complex, uncertain, and rapidly changing environments (Eilers et al., 2022). Research by Rialti and Filieri shows that agile leadership in educational institutions enables more decentralized decision-making, short evaluation cycles, and enhanced cross-functional collaboration (Rialti & Filieri, 2024). Meanwhile, Arfin et al. (Arfin et al., 2024a) and Rakhmadi et al. (Rakhmadi et al. 2025) extend the application of agile leadership to religious education and leadership in the era of disruption, emphasizing the importance of team iteration and continuous feedback. Recent studies also indicate that agile leadership in educational institutions increases innovation efficiency, employee performance, and overall team effectiveness (Porkodi, 2024). At the higher education level, agile leadership has been shown to reduce bureaucracy and encourage flexible, proactive, technology-based management approaches (Barrett-Maitland et al., 2025).

Thus, agile leadership is no longer limited to the domain of information technology but has become a leadership framework relevant to various types of organizations, including traditional educational institutions facing rapid external changes.

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), as the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, have a distinctive leadership model. Traditionally, pesantren leadership is *kiai-centric*, where the kiai (religious leader) holds charismatic, spiritual, and managerial authority centrally (Qomar, 2005). In this model, the kiai acts as founder, owner, caretaker, and supreme leader, whose decisions are difficult to challenge. Although this model is effective in maintaining traditional values and student loyalty, it faces challenges in responding to rapid and complex external changes.

Alongside demands for modernization and the era of disruption, more collective and collaborative pesantren leadership models have begun to emerge.

Prasetyo notes a shift from single kiai leadership toward a *council of kiai* or *majelis kiai* model, where several senior kiai or ustadz share leadership responsibilities (Prasetyo, 2022). Purwanto et al. refer to this phenomenon as *collegiate governance* in pesantren leadership, where decision-making no longer depends on a single figure but occurs through deliberation and clear role distribution (Purwanto et al., 2025). This model enables pesantren to be more adaptive, as authority is distributed, innovation can emerge from various parties, and policy iteration cycles become faster. Pramitha, in her study of collective leadership at three large pesantren in Jombang, affirms that contemporary pesantren leadership no longer applies a single leadership pattern but tends toward a collective model aligned with the foundation's organizational hierarchy, without diminishing the kiai's role as the supreme leader (Pramitha, 2018).

Recent research by Muis et al. finds a gradual but significant shift from charismatic, centralized leadership models toward more collaborative and distributed governance structures, with decision-making processes increasingly involving administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders (Muis et al., 2025). In the era of disruption 5.0, the kiai's transformational leadership also becomes key in keeping pesantren adaptive without abandoning their Islamic identity (Fathiyyah & Khusna, 2024). However, most pesantren in Indonesia still maintain hierarchical and centralized leadership structures. Studies on the application of modern leadership principles emphasizing team autonomy and collaboration such as agile leadership remain very limited in the pesantren context.

Based on the two reviews above, there is a significant research gap: no prior empirical study has systematically applied agile leadership theory to pesantren governance. Although agile leadership has been tested in various educational institutions (Eilers et al., 2022; Rialti & Filieri, 2024), and collective leadership models have been identified in some pesantren (Muis et al., 2025; Pramitha, 2018), no research has explicitly linked agile principles especially team iteration and collaboration practices with the dynamics of pesantren leadership in the era of disruption.

This study aims to fill that gap by taking a case study at the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School in Sumenep, Madura. The selection of this location is not only based on its long history and ability to adapt to change but also on a strong theoretical justification. Al-Amien Prenduan was founded on November 10, 1952, by KH. Achmad Djauhari Chotib. Since its inception, this pesantren has had a modern vision as stated in the founder's will that the pesantren be established "as Gontor" referring to the Modern Gontor Boarding School, known for its collective leadership system and professional management. Currently, Al-Amien Prenduan manages 4 educational centers

with a total of 13 educational institutions (“Periode Pengembangan,” n.d.; Prasetyo, 2022).

This pesantren has a collective governance system known as the *Majelis Kiai*, where a group of kiai and senior caretakers jointly make strategic decisions, share leadership roles, and conduct regular evaluations of pesantren programs. This system inherently reflects agile leadership principles: distributed authority, team-based decision-making, and cycles of iteration and feedback. Therefore, Al-Amien Prenduan is a theoretically appropriate site to examine the extent to which existing leadership practices align with the agile leadership framework, and to explore how principles of iteration and team collaboration are implemented in a pesantren context facing disruption.

Thus, this study contributes theoretically by bridging the literature on agile leadership and pesantren leadership, and practically by providing an adaptive leadership model for other pesantren in an era of rapid change.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study employed an exploratory qualitative approach to examine agile leadership practices in Islamic boarding schools, particularly phenomena that have not been widely explored in previous studies. This approach was selected because it allows flexible, inductive, and in-depth inquiry into social processes, meanings, and practices within their natural context.

Research Design

The study used an exploratory case study design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of agile leadership practices in a specific institutional setting. This design was appropriate because it enabled intensive examination of leadership processes, collaboration patterns, and iterative practices as they occurred in the pesantren environment.

Research Location and Time

The study was conducted at Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School in Madura, East Java. The site was selected because of its long historical development and its demonstrated ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The research was carried out over a six-month period, from January 2023 to June 2023. This period was deliberately chosen as it represents the post-pandemic transition phase, during which educational institutions, including pesantren, were actively navigating the residual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in terms of digital transformation and organizational

flexibility. Data collection, analysis, and reporting were carried out within this timeframe, with additional time allocated when needed to reach data saturation.

Research Subjects

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The informants consisted of kiai, deputy leaders, senior ustadz, administrators, and senior santri. The selection criteria included direct involvement in pesantren governance, a minimum of three years of experience, relevance to the issue under study, and willingness to participate.

A total of 20 informants were involved in this study, consisting of:

1. 5 kiai (members of Majelis Kiai and senior leadership)
2. 6 ustadz (senior teachers actively involved in educational management)
3. 4 administrators (structural and managerial staff)
4. 5 senior santri (students with organizational roles and leadership experience)

All participants had a minimum of three years of involvement in the pesantren and were directly engaged in decision-making processes, program implementation, or organizational activities relevant to agile leadership practices.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through triangulation of methods to strengthen the depth and credibility of the findings. The techniques used were:

1. In-depth interviews to explore experiences, perceptions, and practices related to iteration, collaboration, and adaptation. Total duration of observation sessions was approximately 1 wee.
2. Participatory observation to observe meetings, decision-making processes, and daily interactions, supported by field notes.
3. Documentation study to analyze institutional documents such as pesantren profiles, annual reports, curriculum documents, and Majelis Kiai meeting minutes.

Research Instruments

The researcher as the main instrument (human instrument) for focus, informant selection, and analysis. Supporting instruments: interview guidelines, observation sheets, audio recorders, cameras, and field notes.

Data Analysis Techniques

Using the Miles & Huberman interactive model:

1. Data Reduction: Selection, coding, and simplification of raw data.
2. Data Presentation: Systematic narration of interview, observation, and document results.
3. Drawing Conclusions and Verification: Based on findings, with verification through member checking and triangulation.

Data Validity

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

1. Credibility

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking. Member checking was conducted with 10 selected key informants, consisting of:

- a. 3 kiai
- b. 3 ustadz
- c. 2 administrators
- d. 2 senior santri

These participants were chosen because they represented key perspectives in leadership and organizational processes within the pesantren.

The member checking process was carried out in two stages:

- 1) First, preliminary findings and thematic interpretations were summarized and shared with participants in the form of concise narrative reports.
- 2) Second, follow-up discussions (either face-to-face or via online communication) were conducted to obtain confirmation, clarification, and additional insights.

Participants were asked to verify:

- 1) The accuracy of the transcribed statements,
- 2) The appropriateness of interpretations, and
- 3) The relevance of identified themes to their lived experiences.

Incorporation into Final Analysis:

Feedback obtained from participants was systematically incorporated into the final analysis through:

- 1) Revision of thematic categories where misinterpretations were identified,

- 2) Refinement of narrative descriptions to better reflect participants' meanings, and
- 3) Addition of supporting evidence where participants provided further clarification or examples.

This iterative validation process ensured that the findings accurately represented participants' perspectives and minimized researcher bias.

2. Transferability

Transferability was achieved through thick description of the research context, allowing readers to determine the applicability of findings to other settings.

3. Dependability

Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting all stages of the research process, including data collection, coding, and analysis.

4. Confirmability

Confirmability was established through reflexivity and the use of triangulated data sources, ensuring that findings were grounded in empirical evidence rather than researcher subjectivity.

Research Ethics

This study upheld ethical principles of respect, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Before data collection, all participants were given informed consent that explained the purpose of the study, procedures, expected roles, potential risks, and their rights as participants. Confidentiality was maintained by using codes or initials instead of real names and by storing data securely. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline or withdraw at any time without penalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Leadership Practices at Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School

This study reveals unique leadership practices at Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School in Madura, which demonstrate the implementation of *agile leadership* principles in the context of traditional Islamic boarding school leadership. Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School, founded on November 10, 1952, by KH. Ahmad Djauhari Chotib, has developed a collective leadership system that integrates traditional Islamic boarding school

values with a modern management approach (Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Prenduan, 2023).

The organizational structure of the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School demonstrates the implementation of decentralized and collaborative leadership. The management system is collectively managed by several management bodies that are structured according to their respective fields of duty, with modern, effective, and efficient management principles, while still adhering to the framework of the pesantren's vision and mission (Nawawi, 2012; Qomar, 2005).

Empirical Findings on Iterative Practices in Leadership

Continuous Planning and Evaluation Cycle

The results of the study indicate that iterative practices in leadership at the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School are realized through a continuous planning and evaluation cycle. The Majelis Kiai, as the highest authority in the pesantren, periodically plans the pesantren program to ensure that students can use Arabic and English and are able to read classical Islamic texts (Anwar et al., 2025; Qomar, 2005; Sari et al., 2024). This iterative process is carried out through a systematic decision-making mechanism, including problem identification, problem analysis, creating alternative solutions, comparing and selecting the best alternatives, making decisions, implementing decisions, and providing control, evaluation, and follow-up (Nursalim, 2024; Qomar, 2005). This iterative approach allows Islamic boarding schools to continue to adapt to changes and developments of the times.

The continuous cycle of planning and evaluation was consistently emphasized by informants. As one kiai explained:

"No program here is ever considered final. After it is implemented, we evaluate it again in the Majelis Kiai forum to see what needs to be improved."(KI-1).

Similarly, an ustadz highlighted:

Its means: *"We are used to making gradual improvements. We don't make big changes all at once, but little by little while observing the results."* (US-2)

These accounts confirm that iteration at Al-Amien Prenduan is not an abstract concept but a structured, deliberative practice embedded in the weekly and monthly rhythm of the pesantren's governance.

Adaptation to the Digital Age and Disruption

Research reveals that the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School has implemented iterative practices in facing the challenges of the digital age.

The pesantren has undergone a transformation by integrating technology into the learning process, such as utilizing online platforms for distance learning and developing interactive educational content (Prasetyo, 2022). This adaptation process is carried out gradually and continuously, where the pesantren does not immediately change the entire learning system, but rather integrates technology gradually while maintaining the traditional values of the pesantren (Nursalim, 2024; Purwanto et al., 2025). This iterative practice allows the Islamic boarding school to evaluate the effectiveness of each innovation implemented and make continuous improvements without compromising its core identity.

The gradual adaptation to digital technology was also reflected in participants' experiences. An administrator described the post-pandemic hybrid approach as a direct result of iterative evaluation: *"During the pandemic, we started using online platforms. But after that, we did not immediately abandon the old system—we combined them."* (ADM-1)

This sentiment was echoed by a senior santri who benefited from the flexible learning environment, *"Learning is more flexible now; sometimes online, sometimes face-to-face. It helps us adapt."* (ADM-1)

These accounts demonstrate that the iteration process is not merely a top-down institutional policy but a lived experience that enhances the resilience and agility of both the leadership and the student body in navigating digital disruption.

Empirical Findings of Team Collaboration Practices

Collective Leadership Structure

The results of the study show the implementation of strong collective leadership at the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School. The pesantren's organizational structure consists of three main levels: the Majelis Kiai (Majlis Riasah al-Mahad) as the highest body, the Majelis A'wan ar-Riasah as the supporting body, and the Al-Amien Prenduan Foundation as the daily administrator (Nawawi, 2012; Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Prenduan, 2023; Qomar, 2005). The Majelis Kiai, which consists of 7 to 11 senior clerics, functions as a strategic decision-maker, while its members also serve as directors in existing education centers (Qomar, 2005). This collective leadership system allows for an even distribution of power and responsibility, so that it is not centered on a single leader (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021).

The collaborative nature of the leadership structure was strongly confirmed by participants. One kiai emphasized the deliberative foundation of decision-making within the institution: *"Decisions here are not made alone. They always go through deliberation in the Majelis Kiai and involve many parties."* (KI-2).

This sentiment was further reinforced by an administrator who described the sense of ownership generated by the collective process: *"We feel involved in the decision-making process, so we are more responsible in its implementation."* (ADM-3).

These accounts underscore that collective leadership at Al-Amien Prenduan is not merely a structural formality but a deeply embedded cultural practice that fosters shared accountability and strengthens the pesantren's organizational agility.

Participatory Decision-Making Mechanism

Research reveals that decision-making at the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School is carried out through a participatory mechanism involving various stakeholders. Kiai Al-Amien uses *Legitimate Power and Authority* in every decision-making process through concept development, soliciting opinions from other kiai, holding Majlis Risalah meetings, disseminating information to subordinates, reformulating, and then finalizing and disseminating the decision (Business, n.d.). This decision-making process demonstrates the characteristics of democratic and participatory leadership, in which various parties are given the opportunity to provide input and be involved in the policy formulation process (Qomar, 2005). This is in line with the principle of collaboration in agile leadership, which emphasizes team involvement in decision-making.

The participatory mechanism was also evident in the lived experiences of those involved in the day-to-day operations of the pesantren. A senior ustadz described the consultative culture that permeates the institution's governance: *"Usually we are asked for our opinions before a decision is made. So it is not just about receiving orders, but we also contribute input."* (US-4

This account confirms that the formal decision-making structure described in the literature is actively practiced at the operational level, reinforcing a culture of shared ownership and collaborative problem-solving that is essential to the pesantren's adaptive capacity.

Multi-Level Involvement in Collaboration

Research findings show that team collaboration at the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School involves various levels of leadership, ranging from kiai, ustadz, administrators, to santri (Nawawi, 2012; Qomar, 2005; Sari et al., 2024). For the management of female students, the Majlis Kiai formed a Dewan Pengasuh Putri (Female Caretaker Council) consisting of elderly nyai (female religious teachers) and wives of Majlis Kiai members ((Nawawi, 2012; Qomar, 2005; Sari et al., 2024). This collaboration also extends to institutions

and business units formed to support the maximum implementation of pesantren programs (Qomar, 2005). This multi-level collaboration system enables effective coordination between various components of the pesantren in achieving common goals.

Implementation of Agile Leadership Principles in the Context of Pesantren

Communication and Transparency

The results of the study show that communication is an important foundation in leadership practices at the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School. The boarding school leaders establish dialogical communication with the teachers (ustadz-ustadzah) and even with the students, which allows them to provide feedback and share information. This communication model differs from the traditional salaf pesantren, which tends to use monologue and dogmatic communication patterns. This open and dialogical communication enables the creation of a collaborative environment that supports the implementation of agile leadership principles (Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Prenduan, 2023).

Open and dialogical communication emerged as a key element in the daily interactions within the pesantren. A senior ustadz described the accessible and non-hierarchical nature of communication between leadership and teaching staff: "*Communication between the leadership and teachers is quite open. We can express opinions without feeling afraid.*" (US-1)

This account illustrates that the communicative culture at Al-Amien Prenduan transcends formal hierarchies, fostering an atmosphere of psychological safety wherein subordinates feel empowered to voice their perspectives. Such an environment is conducive to the iterative feedback loops and collaborative ethos that characterize agile leadership.

Flexibility and Adaptation

Research reveals that the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School shows high flexibility in facing changing times (Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Prenduan, 2023). The pesantren is able to integrate digital technology into its learning system while maintaining its identity as a traditional Islamic educational institution ((Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Prenduan, 2023). This flexibility is reflected in the pesantren's ability to adopt various educational innovations, such as online learning, the use of digital platforms, and the development of a curriculum that is adaptive to the demands of the digital era. This approach demonstrates the implementation of the principle of agility in pesantren leadership.

Empowerment and Capacity Building

Research findings show that leadership at Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School emphasizes the empowerment and capacity building of all components of the pesantren. The cadre system is carried out scientifically and through a long process, in which the kiai prepares the next generation by equipping them with scientific competence, experience, and morals. This empowerment is also reflected in the role of the Islamic boarding school administrators, who have active, passive, and participatory roles in various aspects of boarding school management (Anwar et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2024). This empowerment approach is in line with the principle of empowerment in agile leadership, which emphasizes the continuous development of team capabilities.

The empowerment process was clearly reflected in cadre development practices. A senior santri described how leadership skills are cultivated from an early stage within the pesantren ecosystem: "*Santri are trained to lead from an early age, through organizations and activities within the pesantren.*" (ST-2).

This observation was reinforced by a kiai who underscored the deliberate and patient nature of succession planning: "*Regeneration is important; therefore, we prepare cadres through a long process, not an instant one.*" (KI-3).

These accounts illustrate that empowerment at Al-Amien Prenduan is not an incidental outcome but a strategic, long-term investment in human capital that ensures the continuity and resilience of the institution's leadership pipeline.

Factors Supporting the Implementation of Agile Leadership

Adaptive Organizational Culture

The results of the study show that the organizational culture of the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School supports the implementation of the principles of agile leadership. A strong culture of teamwork in the pesantren allows all elements of the pesantren to work together to complete tasks by focusing on their talents and abilities. This adaptive organizational culture is also reflected in the pesantren's ability to combine local wisdom with modern technology, creating holistic and highly competitive education without losing the traditional values of the pesantren.

Integrated Management System

Research reveals that the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School has developed an integrated and modern management system. The management functions of the pesantren include leadership, decision-making, regeneration,

and conflict management, which are carried out systematically. This management system enables effective coordination between various institutions and units within the pesantren, thereby supporting the implementation of iterative practices and collaboration in leadership. The integration of this management system is a key factor in the success of the pesantren's transformation in the face of an era of disruption.

Challenges in Implementing Agile Leadership

Balancing Tradition and Modernization: Empirical Tensions

The findings reveal that balancing tradition and modernization is not merely a conceptual challenge, but a practical and ongoing tension experienced by actors within the pesantren. This tension emerges particularly when new practices especially those related to digitalization and flexible decision-making

One kiai emphasized the need for caution in adopting change:

"We can't immediately accept all the new things. It must be seen first whether it is in accordance with the values of the pesantren or not." (KI-4)

This reflects a selective adaptation process, where innovation is filtered through normative and theological considerations.

Episodes of Resistance and Cultural Friction

The study also identified episodes of resistance, particularly during the initial implementation of digital learning and organizational changes following the COVID-19 pandemic.

An ustadz explained:

"At first there was resistance, especially from teachers who had been teaching for a long time. They feel that the old method is enough and does not need to be changed." (US-3)

Similarly, an administrator noted:

"Switching to a digital system is not always easy. Some feel burdened because they have to learn new things." (ADM-2)

These findings indicate that resistance was not ideological, but rather rooted in habitual practices, comfort zones, and gaps in digital competence.

Difficulties in Transforming Established Cultural Practices

Beyond technical adaptation, the study reveals deeper challenges related to transforming long-standing cultural practices within the pesantren.

A senior santri observed:

“The culture in Islamic boarding schools has been formed for a long time, so the change cannot be fast. You have to take it easy so that everyone can accept it..” (ST-4)

Another informant added:

“Sometimes the difficult thing is not the system, but the way of thinking. Changing that mindset takes time.” (US-5)

These statements highlight that the main barrier to agile leadership is not structural, but cultural and cognitive, requiring gradual internalization rather than immediate implementation.

Human Resource Capacity Constraints

The challenge of human resource capacity building also emerged as a significant issue, particularly in relation to digital literacy and adaptive competencies.

An administrator explained:

“Not all educators are ready for rapid change, especially in the use of technology.” (ADM-1)

This indicates that agility is closely tied to the readiness of human capital, and without sufficient capacity building, the implementation of agile leadership may remain partial.

These findings suggest that the challenges in implementing agile leadership within the pesantren context are multi-layered, encompassing structural, cultural, and cognitive dimensions.

Rather than representing failure, these tensions reflect a process of negotiated adaptation, where innovation is gradually aligned with tradition. This results in a contextual form of agility that is incremental, selective, and culturally embedded, rather than disruptive or radical.

Impact of Agile Leadership Implementation

Increased Learning Effectiveness

Research results show that the implementation of *agile leadership* principles has increased learning effectiveness at the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School (Nursalim, 2024). The use of digital technology in learning allows for wider access to learning materials and facilitates more interactive learning (Nursalim, 2024). This increase in effectiveness is also reflected in the pesantren's ability to provide education that is relevant to the demands of the times, while maintaining the quality of religious education that is characteristic

of pesantren (Complexity Leadership - FourWeekMBA, 2024)(*Complexity Leadership - FourWeekMBA*, n.d.).

Strengthening Organizational Capacity

Research reveals that iterative and collaborative leadership practices have strengthened the organizational capacity of the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021; Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Prenduan, 2023; Qomar, 2005).

The collective leadership system and participatory decision-making have increased the involvement of all components of the pesantren in achieving organizational goals (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021; Qomar, 2005). This strengthening of organizational capacity is also reflected in the pesantren's ability to face various external challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, by adapting learning and managing the pesantren effectively (Purwanto et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION

This discussion focuses on the interpretation of research findings, integration with literature related to agile leadership and Islamic boarding school leadership, as well as the theoretical and practical implications of iterative practices and team collaboration at the Al-Amien Prenduan Madura Islamic Boarding School.

Interpretation of Findings

Findings regarding the cycle of continuous planning and evaluation illustrate iterative practices that are in line with the principles of the *Agile Manifesto*, which emphasizes continuous feedback for product and organizational process improvement (*Manifesto for Agile Software Development*, n.d.). Gradual adaptation to digital technology demonstrates the application of the principle of incremental delivery, where changes are implemented on a small scale so that their impact can be evaluated quickly (Purwanto et al., 2025). The participatory decision-making mechanism in the Majelis Kiai demonstrates the application of distributed leadership, where authority is dispersed and member commitment is increased through direct involvement in the process (Qomar, 2005). Multi-level collaboration between kiai, ustadz, and santri indicates the practice of empowered teams that utilize the expertise of each layer of the organization to achieve common goals (Qomar, 2005).

Beyond these agile-aligned practices, the findings indicate that decision-making at the Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School also embodies a structured yet participatory process, where authority is exercised through a

combination of formal legitimacy and collective deliberation. The *kiai*, as the central figure, plays a decisive role in guiding the process while still incorporating input from other members of the *Majlis Kiai*.

This pattern can be understood through the lens of legitimate power, as conceptualized by French and Raven, wherein authority derives from formal position and recognized institutional roles (French & Raven, 1959). In the context of *pesantren*, the *kiai*'s authority is not only structurally defined but also socially and culturally legitimized within the boarding school environment. Simultaneously, the leadership structure exhibits elements of traditional and charismatic authority, as described by Weber, where leadership legitimacy is rooted in religious authority, personal influence, and long-standing institutional traditions (Weber et al., 1978).

Empirically, this hybrid authority is reflected in a decision-making process that involves sequential stages: problem identification, consultation, deliberation within the *Majlis Kiai*, and final endorsement of the decision. One informant articulated this dynamic as follows:

"Decisions remain through deliberation, but in the end the kiai has an important role in determining the final direction." (US-5)

This statement indicates that while participatory mechanisms are present, decision-making remains anchored in a hybrid authority structure one that combines consultative processes with centralized legitimacy. Such a model aligns with the concept of distributed yet bounded leadership, where authority is shared across multiple actors but ultimately consolidated within a recognized leadership hierarchy.

Integration with Literature

Several previous studies have confirmed the effectiveness of agile leadership in the context of higher education, particularly in improving decision-making efficiency and responsiveness to external challenges (Purwanto et al., 2025). The *digital adaptive leadership* model developed by Chen & Wong emphasizes the importance of iteration and continuous learning, which is reflected in the practice of periodic evaluation in this Islamic boarding school (Chen & Wong, 2019; Nursalim, 2024). According to Rialty, complexity leadership theory supports collaborative practices in complex organizations (Rialty & Filieri, 2024), similar to the collective structure in the *Majlis Kiai* that facilitates innovation arising from interactions between members (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021; Hammad, n.d.). Lee et al. show that integrating the principles of transformational leadership and agile leadership can strengthen team

commitment to the organizational vision, as seen in the spirit of scientific regeneration at this pesantren (Lee et al., 2020; Sentika et al., 2024).

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study add to the theoretical discourse on pesantren leadership by showing that the concept of agile leadership can be translated into the traditional Islamic context without reducing spiritual values (Qomar, 2005). The iterative and collaborative approach to the pesantren management system reinforces the argument that distributed and agile leadership can coexist with the hierarchical structure of religious institutions (Qomar, 2005). In addition, these findings suggest that participatory mechanisms in religious environments can be a concrete form of servant leadership within an agile framework, namely leaders who empower and serve their members while encouraging innovation (Agile Alliance, 2001).

Practical Implications

The implementation of iterative cycles and continuous evaluation can be used as a guide for other Islamic boarding schools to design learning programs that are more adaptive to the changing times and the needs of students (Arfin et al., 2024b). Participatory decision-making mechanisms can be adopted to increase transparency and accountability in institutional management, thereby minimizing cultural resistance to innovation (Prasetyo, 2022). Scientific cadre training that combines scientific competence and digital leadership needs to be developed as part of a human resource capacity building strategy in Islamic boarding schools (Purwanto et al., 2025).

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study is limited to one case of a traditional Islamic boarding school, so the findings may not be generalized to all types of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia (*Complexity Leadership - FourWeekMBA*, n.d.). Further studies are recommended to conduct cross-comparisons of Islamic boarding schools with various geographical characteristics and institutional sizes to test the reliability of the agile leadership model in a broader religious context (Fellow.app, 2024). In addition, quantitative research measuring the direct impact of iterative and collaborative practices on educational performance and student satisfaction could provide stronger empirical evidence (Purwanto et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study reflects the theoretical and practical implications that arise from the findings regarding iterative practices and team collaboration in the leadership of the Al-Amien Prenduan Madura Islamic

Boarding School. *Agile leadership theory* is confirmed: the iterative planning-evaluation cycle demonstrates that the Agile Manifesto's core principle applies beyond software development. The study extends this theory by showing iteration functions within a hierarchical religious structure without undermining authority, challenging assumptions that agility requires flat structures. Iteration is embedded in culturally legitimate forums like the *Majlis Kiai*. *Distributed leadership theory* is confirmed: participatory mechanisms are systematically institutionalized. The study extends this theory by demonstrating that distributed authority coexists with and is reinforced by charismatic religious authority through culturally sanctioned deliberation (*musyawarah*). The emergent concept is *distributed yet bounded leadership* authority shared across actors yet consolidated within a recognized spiritual hierarchy. The study contributes the *Iterative Stewardship* model, wherein agile and servant leadership function complementarily. Kiai simultaneously stewards tradition and facilitate adaptive iteration. The model features: 1) deliberative decision-making combining consultation with centralized legitimacy; 2) incremental innovation filtered through normative and theological considerations; and 3) long-term cadre development empowering juniors while ensuring institutional continuity. Spiritual-moral authority creates psychological safety for experimentation, enabling agility without eroding foundational identity. Agile leadership applicability to religious organizations requires: 1) a structural precondition a collective governance body (e.g., *majlis*) to institutionalize iterative feedback; 2) a cultural precondition a deliberative, dialogical leadership culture differentiating *pesantren khalaf* from centralized *salaf* traditions; and 3) a historical precondition demonstrated openness to pedagogical and managerial adaptation. Findings may not transfer to *pesantren* with strictly patriarchal authority, highly centralized *decision-making*, or limited exposure to external innovation. Practically, the results of this study offer concrete guidance for *pesantren* administrators and other educational institutions: (1). Adaptive Program Design: Integrate iteration and evaluation cycles into curriculum and development programs through regular review mechanisms to enable rapid, mission-aligned responsiveness (Purwanto et al., 2025). (2). Strengthening Participatory Mechanisms: Involve diverse stakeholders in decision-making to enhance transparency, accountability, ownership, and minimize resistance to innovation (Shofwani et al., 2025). (3). Human Resource Capacity Building: Design long-term training programs integrating scholarly competence, digital literacy, and collaboration skills to prepare future *pesantren* leaders (Blanka et al., 2022; Nastase et al., 2025; Purwanto et al., 2025). (4). Gradual Technology Integration: Adopt technology incrementally via pilot projects with continuous evaluation to assess impact, optimize resources, build readiness, and reduce resistance (Khan et al., 2025; Purwanto et al., 2025). Thus, Islamic boarding schools can preserve

spiritual-cultural values while achieving organizational agility through distributed yet bounded leadership, iterative stewardship, and culturally grounded collaboration (Capozza, 2021).■

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