

The Internalization of Javanese Leadership Values Through Wayang: A Cultural Historiography Analysis at The Wikasatrian

Priyanto Priyanto* & A Hanief Saha Ghafur

Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: priyanto15@ui.ac.id

Abstract. This study is grounded in the contemporary crisis of leadership, which increasingly tends toward individualistic orientations while neglecting moral dimensions and local cultural values. Within this context, Javanese culture, particularly wayang kulit purwa (classical Javanese shadow puppetry), offers leadership values that merit examination as an alternative model of leadership that is more humanistic and collective in nature. This study aims to analyze the process of internalizing Javanese leadership values through wayang kulit purwa from the perspective of cultural historiography at the Wikasatrian Institute. The study employed a qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm and a cultural historiography perspective. Data were collected through participants' written reflections, in-depth interviews, and documentation of training activities based on wayang performance and gamelan music. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning and processes of leadership value internalization. The findings indicate that the internalization of leadership values occurs through four principal dimensions. First, the symbolic dimension of wayang generates processes of self-reflection. Second, the practical dimension of gamelan performance fosters collective harmony. Third, the psychological dimension encourages a transformation from individualistic orientations toward collective consciousness. Fourth, the cultural dimension, represented through the Javanese concept of *rasa*, shapes contextual leadership intuition. The study further reveals that wayang and gamelan function not merely as cultural representations, but also as experiential learning media that cultivate leadership awareness grounded in local values. Accordingly, this research affirms that Javanese culture may serve as a source of alternative leadership epistemology and practice that remains relevant to contemporary organizational contexts and leadership development.

Keywords: javanese leadership; wayang kulit purwa; cultural historiography; value internalization

INTRODUCTION

In Contemporary leadership faces increasingly complex organizational and societal challenges, accompanied by growing individualism, declining integrity, and weakening social responsibility. Dominant leadership models remain largely rooted in instrumental rationality and technocratic approaches that prioritize efficiency and short-term performance. Although effective in improving organizational outcomes, these models have been criticized for overlooking ethical responsibility, humanistic values, and social sustainability (Maak & Pless, 2016, pp. 463–468; Miska & Mendenhall, 2018, pp. 117–120). Consequently, scholars have increasingly called for leadership approaches that are more contextual, value-oriented, and culturally grounded.

Within Indonesia, local wisdom provides an important foundation for developing culturally relevant leadership models. Javanese culture, in

particular, emphasizes harmony (*rukun*), balance, collectivism, and *rasa* as a form of intuitive and relational social intelligence that guides ethical leadership and social equilibrium (Magnis-Suseno, 2018, pp. 87–90; Mulder, 2019, pp. 112–115). These values offer an alternative to leadership paradigms dominated by individualistic and rationalistic perspectives.

A prominent expression of these values is wayang kulit purwa, which functions not only as a traditional performing art but also as a symbolic system transmitting philosophical, ethical, and historical knowledge. Recognized by UNESCO (2021) as Intangible Cultural Heritage, wayang embodies diverse leadership ideals through characters such as Arjuna, Bima, and Kresna, while figures including Karna and Rahwana illustrate moral dilemmas surrounding power and responsibility. From the perspective of cultural historiography, wayang represents a form of living historiography through which historical values continue to shape contemporary social practice

(Hidayat & Supendi, 2025, pp. 3–5).

Previous studies have highlighted the educational value of wayang and gamelan in leadership development. Wayang has been shown to effectively transmit ethical and leadership values (Hidayat & Supendi, 2025, p. 6), while gamelan reflects a collective organizational model emphasizing coordination, harmony, and complementary roles (Priyanto, 2023, pp. 2–4). Likewise, culturally grounded leadership studies demonstrate that collectivism and balance contribute to adaptive and sustainable leadership (Miska et al., 2020, pp. 3–6; Dorfman et al., 2017, pp. 505–507). However, existing research remains predominantly descriptive, focusing on symbolic interpretation rather than examining how these values are internalized through lived experience. Empirical studies integrating wayang, gamelan, and leadership transformation are still limited, reflecting the predominance of representational approaches within cultural historiography over analyses of value internalization in social practice (Burke, 2019, pp. 45–48).

This gap underscores the need to investigate how Javanese leadership values are interpreted, internalized, and transformed through direct cultural experience. The Wikasatrian Institute, which integrates wayang and gamelan into experiential leadership training, provides an appropriate context for examining this process. Participants not only learn leadership concepts cognitively but also internalize them through reflection and collective practice, fostering a transition from individualistic leadership toward collective consciousness characterized by harmony, self-control, and *rasa*.

Theoretically, this study integrates cultural historiography, symbolic interactionism, and experiential learning theory. Cultural historiography explains how historical meanings are reproduced through contemporary social practice; symbolic interactionism examines how individuals construct meaning through cultural symbols; and experiential learning theory emphasizes reflection upon direct experience as the basis of transformative learning (Kolb, 2015, pp. 49–52; Mezirow, 2018, pp. 114–118). Accordingly, this study aims to examine how Javanese leadership values are represented through wayang, internalized by participants, and transformed into a culturally grounded collective leadership model. Its principal novelty lies in integrating symbolic, practical, and experiential

dimensions to explain leadership value internalization within a single conceptual framework.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative interpretive design to investigate the internalization of Javanese leadership values through wayang kulit purwa in contemporary social practice. Rather than measuring variables quantitatively, the study focused on participants' lived experiences, reflective interpretations, and socially constructed meanings derived from cultural interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 24–26). It was informed by cultural historiography, which conceptualizes history as a living process reproduced through social practice and individual experience rather than merely a reconstruction of the past (Burke, 2019, pp. 45–48).

The research was conducted at the Wikasatrian Institute, where wayang and gamelan are incorporated into an experiential leadership development program. Primary data were obtained from participants' written reflections, semi-structured interviews, and limited observations, while secondary data consisted of scholarly literature on wayang, Javanese leadership, cultural historiography, and experiential learning. Participants' reflections were treated as non-conventional historical sources, consistent with the perspective of cultural historiography (Burke, 2019).

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking, comparing evidence from reflections, interviews, observations, and documentation while allowing participants to verify the researchers' interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017, pp. 3–5). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), involving familiarization, coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation within the frameworks of cultural historiography, symbolic interactionism, and experiential learning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). These procedures enabled the systematic identification of patterns explaining how Javanese leadership values were represented, interpreted, and internalized.

Table 1. Reflection on Wayang Characters in the Internalization of Leadership Values

Wayang Character	Leadership Values	Meaning for Participants
Arjuna	Reflective, wise, thoughtful	Self-awareness and prudence in decision-making
Bima	Firm, honest, consistent	Integrity and courage in taking a stand
Karna	Loyalty, sacrifice	Moral dilemmas and awareness of the consequences of choices
Semar	Humble, wise, guiding	Leadership grounded in wisdom and service

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reflection on Wayang Characters as a Medium for the Internalization of Leadership Values

The findings indicate that wayang characters function as symbolic media through which participants internalize Javanese leadership values by engaging in reflective meaning-making. Rather than perceiving wayang merely as a cultural performance, participants interpreted characters such as Arjuna, Bima, Karna, and Semar as representations of leadership qualities closely connected to their own experiences. For example, one participant identified with Arjuna, acknowledging personal strengths while recognizing hesitation in decision-making. This illustrates how symbolic identification stimulates self-awareness by connecting cultural narratives with individual leadership experiences.

These findings are consistent with symbolic interactionism, which explains that meanings emerge through individuals' interactions with social symbols rather than from the symbols themselves (Blumer, 2017). Accordingly, wayang characters become interpretive resources through which participants actively construct leadership meanings instead of passively receiving cultural values. This interpretation is further supported by Meyer et al. (2018, pp. 115–117), who argue that cultural narratives shape identity and moral values by enabling individuals to engage in reflective dialogue with symbolic representations.

Participants also associated different characters with distinct leadership attributes. Arjuna represented reflection and prudent decision-making, Bima symbolized integrity and determination, Karna reflected loyalty and moral dilemmas, whereas Semar embodied wisdom, humility, and service. These findings reinforce previous studies demonstrating that wayang constitutes a symbolic system containing diverse and contextual leadership values (Hidayat & Supendi, 2025) and functions as a pedagogical

medium for ethical learning through character representation (Cohen, 2017).

From the perspective of cultural historiography, wayang operates not only as a representation of historical traditions but also as a form of living historiography through which cultural values are continuously reinterpreted in contemporary social practice. Traditional cultural performances therefore become effective mechanisms for transmitting values when integrated into direct experience (Smith & Akagawa, 2019). Consequently, participants' reflections generated not only cognitive understanding but also contextual historical consciousness that connected cultural heritage with present-day leadership practice.

Compared with previous research, this study extends the understanding of wayang beyond its role as a cultural symbol or moral education medium. Rather than treating leadership values as abstract concepts, it demonstrates that internalization occurs through subjective processes of symbolic identification and self-reflection, transforming cultural narratives into leadership consciousness. This finding directly addresses the research question by showing that Javanese leadership values are represented through symbolic characters and internalized through participants' interpretive engagement with those symbols (Hidayat & Supendi, 2025, pp. 3–5). Theoretically, these findings reaffirm symbolic interactionism by demonstrating that leadership meaning is socially and culturally constructed through continuous interaction between individuals and cultural symbols (Blumer, 2017; Meyer et al., 2018, pp. 115–117).

Participants' identification with wayang characters demonstrates the existence of diverse and contextual mappings of leadership values. Each character was understood not merely as a figure within a narrative, but as a representation of values internalized at a personal level. This phenomenon is illustrated in Table 1, which

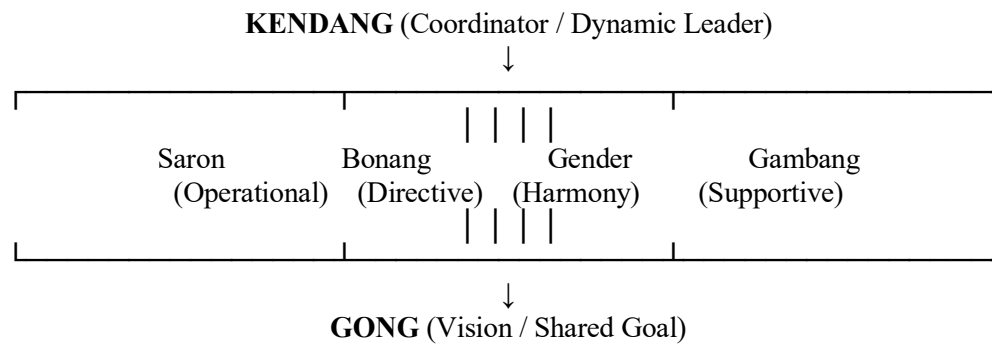


Figure 2. Analogy of Gamelan Structure as a Collective Leadership Organization Model
Source: Constructed by the researcher

summarizes the relationship between wayang characters, leadership values, and the meanings constructed by participants.

Gamelan as a Model of Collective Leadership

The findings indicate that gamelan practice at the Wikasatrian Institute functions as an experiential medium for internalizing Javanese leadership values through active participation and collective interaction. Unlike conventional leadership training, participants learn by coordinating, adapting, and performing complementary roles within the ensemble, where harmony depends on balanced contributions rather than individual dominance. As one participant observed, “If one becomes too dominant, it disrupts the whole performance,” illustrating that collective success is achieved through cooperation and mutual responsibility rather than personal authority. These experiences demonstrate that leadership values are embodied through social practice instead of being acquired solely through conceptual instruction.

Participation in gamelan also strengthens awareness of individual roles within a collaborative system, redefining leadership as the ability to maintain harmony, facilitate coordination, and support collective goals. This finding is consistent with Priyanto (2023, pp. 2–4), who describes gamelan as a non-hierarchical organizational model characterized by balanced role distribution, and with Miska et al. (2020, pp. 3–6), who argue that collectivist leadership enhances organizational sustainability and team cohesion.

These findings support experiential learning theory, which emphasizes reflection upon direct experience as the basis of meaningful learning (Kolb, 2015), and align with Yardley et al. (2018,

pp. 161–163), who highlight experiential learning as an effective means of developing leadership competencies. From the perspective of practice-based leadership, leadership emerges through repeated collective interaction rather than individual attributes (Raelin, 2016), fostering adaptability and innovation through shared practice (Denis et al., 2012; Raelin, 2016). Compared with Western leadership models emphasizing hierarchy and leader-centered decision-making (Maak & Pless, 2016, pp. 463–468), gamelan represents a relational and culturally grounded model in which leadership develops through coordinated participation. Accordingly, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that gamelan is not merely a cultural symbol but an experiential mechanism for cultivating collective leadership in contemporary organizations (Miska et al., 2020, pp. 3–6).

The diagram above illustrates that the structure of gamelan may be analogized as a model of collective leadership organization. Within the gamelan system, the kendang functions as a tempo regulator whose role is coordinative rather than dominant; thus, it may be understood as a leader who guides without exercising authoritarian control. Other instruments, such as the saron, bonang, and gender, represent organizational functions that possess distinct yet complementary roles. Meanwhile, the gong symbolizes the shared objective that serves as the collective orientation of all members.

This model demonstrates that leadership within the gamelan context is not hierarchical, but relational and harmony-based. Each element contributes an essential function; however, these functions must operate in alignment to produce an integrated whole. Accordingly, the gamelan structure represents a form of organization

Table 3. Leadership Transformation of Participants: From Individualistic to Collective Orientation

Dimension	Before Training (Individualistic)	After Training (Collective)
Leadership Orientation	Individual-centered (<i>leader-centric</i>)	Team-based (<i>collective-oriented</i>)
Leadership Style	Controlling, instructive	Collaborative, participatory
Interaction Pattern	Top-down, one-way	Dialogical, two-way
Decision-Making	Centralized in the leader	Shared decision-making
Leader's Role	Primary controller	Facilitator and coordinator
Social Relations	Competitive	Cooperative
Dominant Values	Ego, authority	Harmony, empathy
Role Awareness	Self-centered focus	Collective awareness
Objective	Individual achievement	Shared success

emphasizing coordination, role awareness, and collective purpose as the essence of leadership.

Transformation of Leadership: From Individualistic to Collective Orientation

The findings indicate that participation in the Wikasatrian leadership program transformed participants' understanding of leadership from an individual-centered to a collective orientation. Before the program, leadership was commonly perceived as authority exercised through control and centralized decision-making. Engagement with wayang and gamelan-based experiential learning reshaped this perspective, leading participants to view leadership as a collaborative process grounded in relationships, coordination, and collective harmony. This transformation demonstrates that Javanese leadership values were internalized not merely as concepts but through reflective cultural experiences that influenced both leadership perspectives and practices.

Participants' reflections revealed a shift from ego-oriented leadership toward facilitative and participatory approaches characterized by empathy, openness, and shared responsibility. These findings support studies showing that values-based and relational leadership strengthens organizational sustainability (Miska et al., 2020, pp. 3–6), while shared leadership enhances team performance through distributed responsibility (Wu et al., 2020, pp. 521–523). They also align with the broader transition from leader-centric to process-based leadership, in which leadership emerges through social interaction rather than individual authority (Day et al., 2014). Unlike previous research, however, this study demonstrates that wayang and gamelan function

as experiential mechanisms for cultivating collective leadership consciousness.

The findings further suggest that leadership transformation is dynamic rather than linear, as some participants continued to revert to hierarchical behaviors in situations demanding rapid decision-making. This indicates that value internalization is shaped by organizational context and prior experience. Theoretically, the study extends transformative learning theory by showing that perspective transformation emerges through shared cultural experience as well as individual reflection (Mezirow, 2018, pp. 114–118). It also challenges leader-centered assumptions in transformational leadership (Hoch et al., 2018, pp. 501–503) by presenting Javanese leadership as a relational practice grounded in harmony (*rukun*), empathy (*tepa selira*), and balance (*selaras*), thereby offering a culturally grounded alternative to universalistic Western leadership models (Miska et al., 2020, pp. 3–6). From the perspective of cultural historiography, wayang and gamelan function as living cultural practices through which historical values are continuously reproduced in contemporary leadership (Burke, 2019, pp. 45–48).

Rasa as an Epistemology of Leadership

The leadership transformation experienced by participants may be understood more systematically through a comparison between conditions before and after the training program. This transformation reflects a fundamental shift from an individualistically oriented leadership paradigm toward a collective orientation, as illustrated in Table 3.

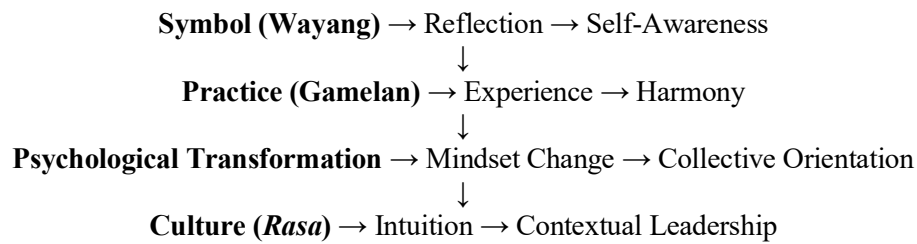


Figure 3. Model of Culturally Based Javanese Leadership Internalization
Source: Researcher's analytical construction

***Rasa* as the Foundation of Javanese Leadership**

The findings demonstrate that *rasa* constitutes a fundamental epistemological foundation in the internalization of Javanese leadership values. Participants consistently referred to *rasa*, feeling, and empathy when describing leadership, indicating that effective leadership extends beyond rational analysis to include intuitive understanding of social relationships and contextual sensitivity. As one participant remarked, "Logic alone is insufficient," emphasizing that sound leadership decisions require empathy, relational awareness, and responsiveness to social contexts. Thus, *rasa* functions as a culturally grounded way of knowing that integrates cognition, emotion, and lived experience.

From an epistemological perspective, *rasa* represents an embodied and relational form of knowledge that differs from dominant Western traditions emphasizing objectivity and instrumental rationality. Instead of relying exclusively on logical reasoning, Javanese leadership incorporates intuition and emotional sensitivity in interpreting complex social situations. This interpretation is consistent with studies showing that effective leadership depends not only on cognitive competence but also on emotional intelligence and empathy (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2017). Likewise, organizational sensemaking involves emotional and social dimensions in addition to rational analysis (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Within this context, *rasa* may be understood as a culturally embedded process of sensemaking that integrates experience, emotion, and interpersonal relationships.

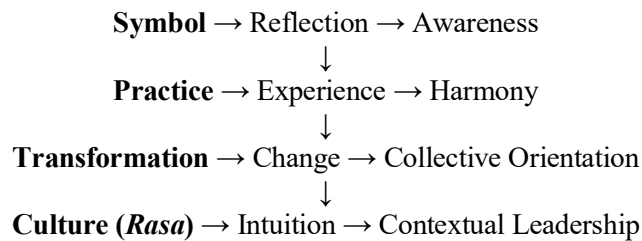
These findings extend previous studies on indigenous leadership by positioning *rasa* as an autonomous epistemological concept rather than merely a local equivalent of emotional

intelligence. While earlier research highlights the importance of empathy, harmony, and relationality in contextual leadership (Miska et al., 2020, pp. 3–6), the present study demonstrates that *rasa* constitutes a distinctive cultural knowledge system through which leadership values are interpreted and enacted. This perspective is reinforced by embodied cognition, which argues that knowledge develops through bodily experience and social interaction rather than cognition alone (Varela et al., 2016). Through *wayang* reflection and *gamelan* practice, participants experienced leadership directly, enabling *rasa* to become internalized as practical leadership knowledge.

From the perspective of cultural historiography, *rasa* functions as a living medium through which historical values are continuously reproduced in contemporary social practice rather than preserved only as cultural heritage (Burke, 2019, pp. 45–48). Unlike Western leadership models grounded in instrumental rationality and individual decision-making (Maak & Pless, 2016, pp. 463–468), Javanese leadership emphasizes harmony, empathy, and relational balance, offering a culturally contextual alternative to universalistic paradigms (Jackson, 2020, pp. 45–47). This interpretation is further supported by studies demonstrating that leadership rooted in local values is more adaptive in culturally diverse contexts (Miska et al., 2020; Rockstuhl et al., 2012). Viewed through the framework of indigenous knowledge, *rasa* represents a legitimate epistemology integrating experience, emotion, and social relations in shaping sustainable leadership (Battiste, 2016; Chilisa, 2019). Consequently, this study positions *rasa* as both the epistemological foundation of Javanese leadership and a significant contribution to culturally grounded leadership theory.

Table 4. Summary of Research Findings

Theme	Principal Findings
Symbol (Wayang)	Reflection on leadership values
Practice (Gamelan)	Harmony and collectivism
Transformation	Mindset change
Culture (<i>Rasa</i>)	Intuition and empathy

**Figure 4.** Culturally Based Leadership Model

Source: Researcher's analytical construction

Leadership Internalization Model

The principal contribution of this study is the development of an integrative model of Javanese leadership value internalization that conceptualizes leadership as a culturally grounded and experiential process. The model comprises four interconnected dimensions: symbolic (wayang), practical (gamelan), psychological (leadership transformation), and cultural (*rasa*). Together, these dimensions explain leadership development through the interaction of cultural symbols, collective experience, psychological transformation, and local epistemology.

The symbolic dimension initiates self-reflection through participants' identification with wayang characters, supporting the role of cultural narratives in shaping identity and values (Meyer et al., 2018, pp. 115–117). The practical dimension, represented by gamelan, reinforces value internalization through collective experience, consistent with experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2015). The psychological dimension reflects participants' transformation from individualistic to collective leadership, extending transformative learning theory by demonstrating that perspective change emerges through shared cultural interaction rather than individual reflection alone (Mezirow, 2018). The cultural dimension, embodied in *rasa*, represents the model's distinctive contribution by integrating cognitive, affective, and relational capacities beyond conventional emotional intelligence (Goleman et al., 2017).

Unlike transformational and servant leadership, which emphasize individual leaders (Hoch et al., 2018), this model views leadership as a relational process shaped by culture and social practice. It also extends shared leadership by incorporating cultural dimensions (Wu et al., 2020). From a cultural historiography perspective, wayang and gamelan function as living practices through which historical values are continuously reproduced in contemporary leadership (Burke, 2019, pp. 45–48), providing a holistic framework that bridges leadership studies, cultural historiography, and indigenous knowledge.

This study advances culturally grounded leadership theory by proposing an integrative model of leadership value internalization encompassing four interrelated dimensions: symbolic (wayang), practical (gamelan), psychological (leadership transformation), and cultural (*rasa*). Unlike conventional leadership models that emphasize cognitive or behavioral competencies, this framework conceptualizes leadership as a multidimensional process shaped by the interaction of cultural symbols, collective experience, reflective transformation, and local epistemology. The findings demonstrate that Javanese leadership values are internalized through experiential cultural practice, extending values-based leadership (Miska et al., 2020, pp. 3–6) and experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2015), while showing that leadership transformation emerges through collective cultural engagement rather than solely individual influence, as

emphasized in transformational leadership (Hoch et al., 2018).

The study is limited by its single-case setting at the Wikasatrian Institute, the contextual nature of qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and its cross-sectional design, which precludes assessment of the long-term sustainability of leadership transformation. Future research should adopt longitudinal, cross-cultural, and mixed-method designs to examine the transferability of culturally grounded leadership values and investigate how the principles of gamelan and rasa can inform leadership, teamwork, and organizational decision-making across diverse contexts (Jackson, 2020).

This study demonstrates that culturally grounded leadership possesses significant potential for developing leadership models that are more contextual and humanistic. By integrating symbols, practice, and cultural experience, this study contributes not only empirical findings, but also expands the theoretical framework within leadership studies and cultural historiography.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the internalization of Javanese leadership values through wayang kulit purwa at the Wikasatrian Institute is a multidimensional process integrating cultural symbols, collective practice, reflection, and experiential learning. Leadership values are represented through wayang, reinforced through gamelan practice that promotes harmony and role awareness, and transformed into collective leadership orientations. The findings further identify rasa as a culturally grounded epistemological mechanism integrating cognition, emotion, intuition, and relational awareness in leadership decision-making. A key contribution of this study is the development of an integrative leadership internalization model comprising four interconnected dimensions: symbolic (wayang), practical (gamelan), psychological (leadership transformation), and cultural (rasa). Together, these dimensions explain leadership development as an interactive process shaped by cultural meaning, collective experience, and psychological transformation. Theoretically, this study advances culturally grounded leadership by reconceptualizing leadership as a collective socio-cultural process and extending cultural historiography through the understanding of wayang and gamelan as living cultural practices that continuously reproduce leadership values. By

positioning rasa as a local epistemology, the study offers an alternative to dominant Western rationalist perspectives. Practically, the findings demonstrate the potential of indigenous cultural traditions as valuable resources for developing contextual, humanistic, and sustainable leadership models for contemporary organizations.

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