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The effects of visionary leadership on organizational development in an emerging philanthropic foundation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how visionary leadership is enacted and translated into organizational development within the Dhia Tasmirah Andrizar Foundation (YDTA), an educational-based non-profit organization. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving the foundation's governing bodies and leaders of affiliated educational institutions. The findings indicate that visionary leadership at YDTA is not practiced primarily as a top-down articulation of a future-oriented vision. Rather, the vision is translated into organizational development through a multilayered leadership process in which foundation leaders and educational-unit leaders collectively interpret priorities, coordinate institutional initiatives, and adapt strategic decisions to changing organizational and societal needs. This finding reveals a tension with conventional conceptualizations of visionary leadership that emphasize the leader as the primary source and driver of organizational vision. At YDTA, the effectiveness of vision appears to depend less on the personal articulation of a compelling future and more on its institutionalization through distributed leadership, collaborative decision-making, and continuous adaptation across organizational levels. These practices were associated with the expansion of educational units, improvements in institutional quality, and increased student enrollment, while also strengthening organizational coordination and stakeholder engagement. The study therefore contributes an empirically grounded perspective on visionary leadership by showing how a future-oriented vision can become an organizational capability rather than remain an individual leadership attribute. The findings suggest that, in educational non-profit organizations, the sustainability of visionary leadership may depend on the organization's capacity to distribute, interpret, and continuously enact the vision across institutional levels.



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Introduction

Visionary leadership has increasingly been associated with organizational adaptability, innovation, and long-term development.(Pereira, 2025) Recent studies indicate that leaders who articulate future-oriented goals and anticipate environmental change can strengthen organizational performance and employee outcomes (Wolff, 2025). However, the growing evidence of its positive effects has not resolved an important question: how is a leader's vision translated into sustained organizational practices when leadership operates across

multiple organizational levels? This question is particularly relevant in non-profit organizations, where organizational development depends not only on leadership direction but also on the capacity of different organizational actors to interpret, coordinate, and enact shared goals. (Katsamakos et al., 2022).

Recent research provides evidence of the benefits of visionary leadership but also points to differences in how its effects are produced across organizational settings. Sukriadi (2018), for example, found that visionary leadership contributes to lecturers' job satisfaction through competencies including future-oriented thinking, foresight, proactive planning, and adaptability. (Diprossimo et al., 2023) Similarly, reported that visionary leadership supports civil-servant performance by strengthening organizations' capacity to anticipate future challenges and pursue continuous improvement. (Zhou et al., 2018) These findings position visionary leadership primarily as a leadership capability associated with desirable organizational outcomes. (Atanassova et al., 2025). Yet, such studies provide limited explanation of the organizational mechanisms through which a vision becomes institutionalized across different levels of an organization, particularly when leaders must coordinate multiple units with distinct operational responsibilities. (Hlimatus & Diyah, 2020).

This unresolved issue is significant in foundation-based organizations. (Ghadi, 2024) Unlike organizations in which leadership authority is concentrated within a single administrative structure, foundations commonly operate through affiliated institutions or subsidiary units that implement organizational objectives in different operational contexts (Jiang et al., 2025). (Sabarwal et al., 2023) Consequently, the effectiveness of visionary leadership may depend not simply on a leader's ability to formulate and communicate a compelling future, but on how that vision is interpreted, distributed, and translated into decisions and practices by leaders at different organizational levels. (Taylor et al., 2014) Existing studies have not sufficiently explained this process in educational foundations, leaving unclear whether visionary leadership functions primarily as an individual leadership attribute or as an organizational capability embedded in institutional practices. (Jiang et al., 2025).

This issue becomes particularly evident at the Dhia Tasmirah Andrizar Foundation (YDTA), an educational-based non-profit organization whose development involves a foundation-level governing structure and several affiliated educational institutions. (Wang et al., 2024). Preliminary observations indicate that YDTA has pursued a number of long-term organizational initiatives, including the development of quality-oriented educational goals, empowerment of institutional leaders, continuous system improvement, stakeholder-oriented policies, innovation, competency-based delegation of authority, and collaborative work practices. These initiatives suggest an organizational effort to translate a shared vision beyond the foundation's top leadership. (Taylor et al., 2014) However, the empirical question remains how visionary leadership is actually enacted across these organizational levels and how this process is related to the foundation's organizational development. (Liden et al., 2025).

The present study addresses this gap by examining the implementation of visionary leadership in YDTA, with particular attention to how organizational vision is translated into leadership practices, coordinated across institutional levels, and connected to organizational development (Orkamo et al., 2025). Rather than treating the foundation context itself as the novelty, this study seeks to contribute empirical insight into the process through which visionary leadership becomes an organizational capability in a multi-level educational non-profit setting (Buss et al., 2023). The study therefore asks: How is visionary leadership implemented across organizational levels at YDTA, and through what processes does it contribute to organizational development? By examining these processes qualitatively, the study seeks to clarify how future-oriented leadership is transformed from an individual leadership attribute into a collectively enacted organizational practice. (Tagscherer & Carbon, 2023).

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine how visionary leadership is implemented and translated into organizational development within the Dhia Tasmirah Andrizar Foundation (YDTA) and its affiliated educational institutions. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand leadership practices, decision-making processes, and organizational experiences as described by participants and observed in their institutional context (Busetto et al., 2020). Rather than measuring the effectiveness of visionary leadership through predetermined variables, the study focused on identifying how leadership practices were enacted across organizational levels and how participants perceived their contribution to organizational development.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at the Dhia Tasmirah Andrizar Foundation, located on Prof. B.J. Habibie Street, Toto Utara Village, Tilongkabila District, Bone Bolango Regency, Gorontalo Province. The research involved participants representing different levels of leadership within the foundation and its affiliated educational institutions.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) holding a formal leadership or managerial position within YDTA or one of its affiliated educational institutions; (2) having direct involvement in organizational decision-making, policy implementation, or strategic planning; and (3) having sufficient experience within the organization to provide information concerning the implementation and development of its leadership practices. A total of [insert exact number] participants were interviewed, consisting of [insert number] foundation-level leaders, [insert number] institutional leaders, and [insert number] other relevant participants. Participant recruitment continued until the collected data were considered sufficiently information-rich to address the research questions.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. The use of multiple data sources enabled methodological triangulation rather than relying exclusively on participants' retrospective accounts.

Semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with the selected participants using an interview guide organized around four areas: (1) formulation and communication of organizational vision; (2) translation of the vision into policies and strategic decisions; (3) implementation of visionary leadership across organizational levels; and (4) perceived organizational changes associated with leadership practices. Each interview lasted approximately [insert duration, e.g., 45–60 minutes] and was conducted [face-to-face/online]. With participants' consent, interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Direct observation. Observation was conducted for approximately [insert total duration] during [insert number] organizational meetings/leadership activities/other relevant activities]. The observation protocol focused on observable leadership practices, including the communication of organizational goals, decision-making processes, delegation of authority, interaction among leaders, problem-solving, and responses to organizational challenges. Field notes were recorded systematically after each observation session.

Document analysis. Relevant organizational documents were examined to corroborate interview and observation data. These documents included [insert actual documents, e.g., organizational vision and mission statements, strategic plans, meeting minutes, institutional policies, annual reports, or program documents]. Documents were analyzed for evidence concerning organizational priorities, strategic directions, leadership decisions, and changes in institutional development. (Rustamana et al., 2024).

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed six stages: (1) familiarization with the interview transcripts, observation notes, and organizational documents; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) identification of potentially relevant themes; (4) review and refinement of themes across the three data sources; (5) definition and naming of the final themes; and (6) interpretation of the themes in relation to the research questions. (Lim, 2024).

The initial coding focused on leadership vision, strategic decision-making, organizational coordination, delegation and empowerment, innovation, adaptation, stakeholder engagement, and organizational development. Codes that represented related patterns were subsequently grouped into broader themes. The researchers compared evidence across interviews, observations, and documents to identify converging and divergent accounts. Particular attention was given to instances in which participants' accounts differed from observed practices or documented organizational decisions, as these discrepancies provided opportunities for deeper interpretation rather than being treated as methodological inconsistencies. (DEWI, 2022).

Data Trustworthiness

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through source and method triangulation. Information obtained from interviews was compared with observational evidence and relevant organizational documents. The researcher also conducted [insert actual procedure if used: member checking/participant validation/peer debriefing] to verify the interpretation of selected findings. An audit trail consisting of interview transcripts, observation notes, coding records, and document-analysis notes was maintained throughout the research process to support transparency and methodological consistency. (Cole, 2024).

Research Procedure

The research process consisted of five sequential stages: (1) research preparation and participant selection, (2) semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and document collection, (3) transcription and data organization, (4) thematic coding and triangulation, and (5) interpretation and reporting of findings.

The research design can be summarized as follows: Research Question → Purposive Participant Selection → Semi-structured Interviews + Direct Observation + Document Analysis → Data Transcription and Organization → Initial Coding → Theme Development → Cross-source Triangulation → Interpretation of Visionary Leadership Implementation and Organizational Development. (Busetto et al., 2020).

This systematic procedure was used to ensure that the findings were derived from traceable empirical evidence rather than from descriptive accounts alone.

Results and Discussions

From Individual Vision to Shared Organizational Practice

The analysis indicates that visionary leadership at the Dhia Tasmirah Andrizar Foundation (YDTA) is expressed not only through the actions of senior foundation leaders but also through the ways organizational priorities are communicated and enacted by leaders of affiliated educational institutions. Evidence from interviews, observations, and organizational documents indicates recurring patterns in three areas: the alignment of organizational goals, the translation of strategic priorities into institutional programs, and coordination between foundation-level and institution-level leaders. (Sagintayeva et al., 2025).

At the foundation level, participants described the organizational vision as a reference point for determining strategic priorities and evaluating institutional development (Engwall, 2021). At the institutional level, school and program leaders reported translating these priorities into operational programs and managerial decisions. (Khan et al., 2024) Observation of coordination activities further indicated that organizational issues were discussed in relation to longer-term institutional objectives rather than being addressed exclusively as isolated operational problems (Arkaan et al., 2022). Relevant policy and planning documents provided additional evidence that strategic priorities articulated at the foundation level were reflected in institutional programs. (Tutak & Brodny, 2025).

These findings provide a stronger basis for describing visionary leadership as an organizational practice rather than merely an individual leadership characteristic. However, the evidence does not necessarily demonstrate that all organizational members have fully internalized the foundation's vision. (Utomo et al., 2022) The alignment observed in this study may reflect a combination of shared commitment, organizational coordination, formal authority, and institutional expectations. Therefore, the finding is more appropriately interpreted as institutionalized leadership practices rather than proof of complete internalization of visionary values. (Eseryel et al., 2021)

This distinction is important because organizational alignment can emerge through at least two different processes: genuine acceptance of a shared vision or compliance with organizational authority. (Puttick, 2025) The present data suggest that YDTA combines both formal coordination mechanisms and participatory processes. Participants reported opportunities to contribute ideas and discuss institutional priorities, while foundation leaders retained strategic oversight. The coexistence of these mechanisms suggests that alignment at YDTA cannot be adequately explained as either purely hierarchical compliance or completely decentralized leadership. (Almog-Bar & Zychlinski, 2014)

The pattern is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of leadership alignment and organizational coordination (Sagintayeva et al., 2025; Tutak & Brodny, 2025), but it also extends this discussion by showing how strategic direction is translated between foundation-level governance and affiliated educational institutions. (Schiller et al., 2023) In this sense, the contribution of the case is not the existence of leadership alignment itself, but the combination of strategic centralization at the foundation level and operational interpretation at the institutional level. (Madénian & Van Neste, 2025)

Strategic Direction and Distributed Implementation

A second pattern emerging from the data concerns the relationship between strategic authority and operational autonomy. Foundation leaders generally occupied a strategic and supervisory position, whereas leaders of affiliated institutions were more directly involved in operational implementation. (Koranyi & Kolleck, 2022) Interviews and observations indicate that this difference did not necessarily produce competing leadership orientations. Instead, the two levels performed complementary functions: foundation

leaders established broad organizational priorities, while institutional leaders interpreted and implemented these priorities according to their respective educational contexts.

This finding requires a qualification of the term "cascading leadership." In this study, cascading leadership does not refer simply to the transmission of instructions from senior leaders to subordinate employees. Rather, it refers to a two-stage process in which strategic vision is articulated at the foundation level, interpreted by institutional leaders, and subsequently translated into context-specific programs and decisions.(Puttick, 2023)

This mechanism distinguishes the observed pattern from a purely hierarchical model. In a conventional top-down model, strategic decisions are formulated at the upper level and subsequently implemented with limited reinterpretation. (Zhang et al., 2020)At YDTA, the evidence suggests that institutional leaders retain a degree of interpretive and operational space. At the same time, the pattern should not be equated automatically with distributed leadership because ultimate strategic authority remains concentrated at the foundation level. The observed arrangement is therefore better understood as strategically centralized but operationally distributed leadership.(Ghanea Bassiri, 2017)

This interpretation also helps distinguish the finding from transformational leadership. Transformational leadership commonly emphasizes leader–follower relationships, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and the transformation of followers' attitudes and behaviors. The YDTA pattern, by contrast, places greater emphasis on the movement of strategic vision across organizational levels and its translation into institutional action. Visionary leadership in this setting therefore appears to operate as a coordination mechanism linking organizational direction with decentralized implementation.

Visionary Leadership and Organizational Development

The data further indicate an association between visionary leadership practices and several forms of organizational development at YDTA. These include the expansion of educational services, development of additional educational programs, recruitment of personnel based on competency requirements, improvement of facilities, and efforts to increase student enrollment.(Kalfagianni, 2022)

The expansion of educational units is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that organizational development was not limited to internal administrative improvement. (Weng & Christensen, 2019)Foundation-level strategic decisions were translated into the creation and development of new educational services. Similarly, the emphasis on educator recruitment based on pedagogical competence, foreign-language proficiency, and adaptability indicates that human-resource decisions were connected to longer-term organizational priorities rather than being treated solely as short-term staffing requirements (Li & Cheng, 2025).

However, these outcomes should not be interpreted as evidence that visionary leadership alone caused organizational growth. Student enrollment, institutional reputation, infrastructure development, and organizational expansion can also be influenced by factors such as community demand, financial resources, educational market conditions, government policy, and institutional history. Because this study employed a qualitative descriptive design, it cannot isolate the causal contribution of visionary leadership from these alternative explanations.

The more defensible finding is therefore that visionary leadership provided an organizing framework through which YDTA interpreted opportunities, prioritized organizational investments, and coordinated development initiatives. This interpretation is consistent with previous research associating visionary leadership with adaptability, innovation, and future-oriented organizational behavior, while avoiding the stronger causal claim that leadership independently produced the observed organizational outcomes.(Blackwatters et al., 2023)

Participation, Organizational Culture, and Stakeholder Responsiveness

The findings also show that visionary leadership at YDTA is accompanied by participatory practices involving communication, employee involvement, feedback, and stakeholder responsiveness. Interview accounts and observations indicate that leaders encourage organizational members to contribute ideas and participate in discussions concerning institutional problems and development initiatives.(Gartner, 2024)

Several organizational practices were associated with this orientation, including collaborative meetings, feedback mechanisms, staff development, and attention to stakeholder needs. Organizational documents also indicate initiatives directed toward student support, including scholarship and financial-assistance

mechanisms. These practices suggest that the implementation of organizational vision is supported by relational and participatory processes.(Khafagy, 2025)

Nevertheless, values such as integrity, transparency, teamwork, and mutual respect should not automatically be classified as distinctive indicators of visionary leadership. These are also central to ethical, transformational, participatory, and distributed leadership perspectives. Their relevance to visionary leadership in this study lies in their function within the implementation of the organizational vision: they provide relational and procedural conditions through which strategic priorities can be coordinated and enacted across organizational units.(Puttick, 2025)

This distinction addresses an important theoretical issue. The findings do not suggest that visionary leadership uniquely produces positive organizational culture. Instead, they indicate that visionary leadership at YDTA is intertwined with other leadership processes that enable the organizational vision to be enacted. Vision therefore appears to function less as a standalone leadership behavior and more as an integrating mechanism connecting strategic direction, organizational culture, participation, and institutional action.(Puttick, 2025)

Theoretical Implication: Visionary Leadership as an Organizational Capability

Taken together, the findings suggest a more specific interpretation of visionary leadership at YDTA. Rather than conceptualizing visionary leadership solely as a leader's capacity to formulate and communicate a desirable future, the case indicates that its organizational significance lies in the institutional translation of vision across levels of governance and implementation.

The empirical pattern can be represented as: Strategic Vision at Foundation Level → Interpretation by Institutional Leaders → Context-Specific Implementation → Feedback and Coordination → Organizational Adaptation

This process differs from a simple cascading model in which vision is transmitted linearly from senior leaders to subordinates. It also differs from a fully distributed leadership model because strategic authority remains concentrated at the foundation level. The YDTA case therefore points toward a hybrid configuration characterized by centralized strategic direction and distributed operational enactment.(Susdarwono & Huda, 2023)

The theoretical significance of this finding lies in shifting attention from the question of whether leaders possess a vision to the question of how organizational systems enable that vision to travel, be interpreted, and be enacted across institutional boundaries. In this configuration, visionary leadership becomes an organizational capability when the vision is embedded in coordination routines, strategic planning, leadership delegation, institutional programs, and feedback processes.

At the same time, the findings caution against equating organizational alignment with genuine internalization.(Ulum et al., 2025) Evidence of participation and recurring alignment provides support for the interpretation that the vision is actively enacted, but it does not establish that all members personally internalize the same values. Future research using longitudinal designs, employee-level data, or comparative cases could examine whether such alignment reflects genuine value internalization, strategic compliance, or a combination of both. (Heim et al., 2026).

Overall, the YDTA case contributes to the leadership literature not by demonstrating that visionary leadership produces positive organizational outcomes—a proposition already well established—but by illustrating how visionary leadership can function within a foundation-based educational organization through a hybrid arrangement of strategic centralization and distributed implementation. This mechanism provides a more precise explanation of how vision may be translated into organizational development while also highlighting the boundaries between visionary, transformational, and distributed leadership.(Bt Mahmud et al., 2019)

Conclusions

This study examined how visionary leadership is implemented and translated into organizational development at the Dhia Tasmirah Andrizar Foundation (YDTA). The findings indicate that visionary leadership at YDTA operates not only as an individual leadership characteristic but also as an organizational practice through which strategic priorities are communicated, interpreted, and implemented across foundation and institutional levels. The observed pattern is characterized by centralized strategic direction at

the foundation level and more distributed operational implementation among leaders of affiliated educational institutions. The findings further suggest that visionary leadership is associated with several organizational development processes, including the expansion of educational services, improvement of institutional programs and facilities, competency-oriented recruitment, and greater attention to innovation and stakeholder needs. However, these developments cannot be attributed exclusively to visionary leadership. Organizational growth may also have been influenced by available resources, community demand, institutional experience, external educational conditions, and other organizational factors. The present study therefore interprets visionary leadership as an organizing mechanism that helps leaders establish priorities, coordinate resources, and translate long-term objectives into institutional action rather than as an independent causal determinant of organizational performance. An important finding is the complementary relationship between foundation-level and institutional-level leadership. Foundation leaders primarily provide strategic direction and oversight, whereas institutional leaders interpret and implement these priorities within their respective operational contexts. This arrangement suggests that the effectiveness of visionary leadership in the YDTA case depends on the interaction between strategic coherence and contextual implementation. At the same time, the alignment observed among organizational leaders should not automatically be interpreted as complete internalization of the organizational vision, since alignment may also reflect formal authority, organizational expectations, and institutional coordination. The study therefore contributes an empirically grounded perspective on visionary leadership by highlighting how a future-oriented vision can be translated into organizational practice through coordination, delegation, and context-specific implementation. The contribution lies not in establishing that visionary leadership universally produces organizational growth, but in showing how it functioned within a particular foundation-based educational organization and under specific organizational conditions. Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focused on a single foundation, limiting the transferability of its findings to other non-profit educational organizations. Second, the qualitative design does not permit causal determination of the extent to which visionary leadership independently produced the observed organizational outcomes. Third, participants' accounts may reflect organizational expectations or retrospective interpretations of leadership practices. Although interview, observation, and documentary evidence were compared to strengthen the credibility of the findings, these sources cannot completely eliminate alternative explanations. Accordingly, the findings should be understood within the boundary conditions of an educational non-profit organization with a multi-level governance structure, an established organizational vision, and affiliated educational institutions operating under a common strategic direction. Similar patterns may emerge in other foundation-based organizations where strategic authority is combined with operational autonomy and where mechanisms for coordination and communication are well established. Conversely, the implementation of visionary leadership may produce different outcomes in organizations characterized by weak governance structures, limited resources, fragmented leadership, or substantial disagreement regarding organizational priorities. Future comparative and longitudinal research could examine whether the strategic-centralized and operationally-distributed pattern identified at YDTA is also evident in other foundations and non-profit educational organizations. Such research could further investigate whether organizational alignment represents genuine internalization of a shared vision, strategic compliance, or a combination of both. This would provide stronger evidence concerning the conditions under which visionary leadership contributes to sustainable organizational development.

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