THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN DESIGN MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF JEPARA CARVING FURNITURE INDUSTRY

Maitri Widya Mutiara^{1*}, Hetty Karunia Tunjungsari²

Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, Universitas Tarumanagara, Jakarta, Indonesia*
 Email: maitrim@fsrd.untar.ac.id

 Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Tarumanagara, Jakarta, Indonesia
 Email: hetty@fe.untar.ac.id

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in design management plays a crucial role in the furniture industry, especially in Jepara, which is known for its unique traditional carving art. This study examines how leadership roles at various levels of management contribute to the successful implementation of design management in the carved furniture industry. Through a case study approach with a qualitative method, this study analyses leadership practices in design management in several Jepara furniture companies, with the focus on PT Els Artsindo as an example of effective implementation. The results show that effective leadership in design management requires an integration between strategic vision, coordination skills, and a deep understanding of local values. At the top management level, leaders play a role in determining the strategic direction and ensuring alignment between design and business goals. At the intermediate level, design managers serve as a bridge between strategic vision and implementation, coordinating various divisions and ensuring design quality. While at the operational level, leadership focuses on product execution and quality control. Case studies show that the success of design management in the Jepara furniture industry depends on the ability of leaders to balance the demands of the modern market with the preservation of traditional carving values. Effective leaders can integrate designers, carving craftsmen, and production teams into creating products that have added value and competitiveness. This research contributes to understanding how leadership in design management can support the development of the traditional furniture industry in the modern era, while providing practical implications for the development of leadership models in the creative industry.

Keywords: leadership, design management, furniture industry, carving, Jepara

1. INTRODUCTION

Design management has become an increasingly important business discipline in the development of the creative industry, using various management techniques to control the creative process, support a culture of creativity, and build an organizational structure for the design business (Sukmanegara, 2020). In this context, leadership holds a vital role in directing and coordinating various aspects of design management to achieve organizational goals (Borja De Mozota, 2003). The furniture industry in Jepara, known for its unique traditional carving art, faces challenges in integrating traditional values with the demands of the modern market. According to Gustami (2000), carved furniture used daily is the result of a mixture of styles that are inseparable from the basic function of furniture design, namely the form follow function. However, recent research shows that the Jepara furniture industry faces difficulties in efforts to increase marketing, production, and increase the level of welfare of business actors (Indrahti, 2022). Leadership in design management is crucial when the Jepara furniture industry must adapt to changes in the global market. Best (2010) emphasizes that design management refers to the people and processes involved in managing, organizing, controlling, and managing a business. In the context of Jepara, leaders must be able to manage the complexity between the preservation of carving traditions and design innovations for the contemporary market. This study examines the role of leadership in the

implementation of design management in the Jepara furniture industry, with a special focus on PT EAS that based in Jepada as a case study. The company has demonstrated success in integrating contemporary design with traditional carved values through effective leadership at various levels of management (Mutiara et al., 2023). The purpose of this study is to: (1). Analyze the structure and leadership role in design management in the Jepara furniture industry; (2). Identify effective leadership practices in integrating traditional values with modern market demands; (3). Formulate a leadership model that supports the development of design management in the furniture industry. This study makes an important contribution to the development of leadership theory and practice in design management, especially in the context of tradition-based creative industries.

Leadership in Design Management

The concept of leadership in design management has undergone significant evolution in recent decades. Design management emerged as a discipline that integrates management principles with the creative process of design to achieve organizational goals. Best, defines design management as the successful management of the people, projects, processes and procedures that are behind the design of products, services, environments and experiences (Best, 2010).

State of the Art

Recent research on leadership in design management can be seen from several key perspectives:

- 1) Strategic Integration Mutiara et al. (2023) show that design management is a strategic process that integrates design functions into a business to achieve competitive advantage. This research emphasizes the importance of leadership in aligning design with organizational strategic goals.
- 2) The Collaborative Model De Mozota & Wolff (2019) developed a design management model that emphasizes the importance of collaboration between design leaders and other stakeholders. This model shows how effective leadership can facilitate the integration of design into business processes.
- 3) The Mutiara Value-Based Approach et al. (2024) proposes a design management model that integrates local values with the needs of the global market, especially in the context of the Jepara furniture industry (Mutiara, Irawan, & Supriyatna-Mz, 2024). This model emphasizes the role of leaders in bridging tradition and innovation.
- 4) Supriyatna et al. (2022) propose that creative management is a synergy between management and creativity that aims to increase business competitiveness. Although these two disciplines are often considered to be at odds because they have different goals and outputs, research shows that they can synergize in entrepreneurship practices. This is in line with the view of Borja de Mozota (2003), who emphasizes the importance of integrating design into business strategy.
- 5) The leadership model in creative management proposed by Supriyatna et al. (2022) consists of five main processes: (1) Performing understanding the vision and mission, (2) Programming formulation and conception, (3) Designing visualization of creative ideas, (4) Implementing realization of ideas, and (5) Marketing commercialization. This model describes how leadership can bridge the creative and managerial aspects of an organization.

Davis and McIntosh (2005) cited by Supriyatna et al. (2022) identify two main currents in business: artistic streams and economic streams (Marizar et al., 2022). The strength of

economic flows is highly dependent on management strategies, while the strength of artistic streams rests on creative strategies. In the context of design management leadership, these two streams need to be integrated effectively. Economic streams tend to be rational using logic, while artistic streams prioritize emotional, taste, imagination, and aesthetic factors that are sometimes irrational. Supriyatna et al. (2022) propose that leadership in design management must be able to balance these two streams to create competitive value. This is in line with Best's (2006) view of design management as a bridge between creativity and business.

Research Gap

Although there has been significant progress in understanding leadership in design management, some research gaps are still identified:

- 1) Industry-Specific Contexts There is still limited research examining how leadership in design management is applied in the context of traditional industries such as carved furniture.
- 2) Integration of Local Values The lack of a model that specifically explains how leaders can integrate traditional values with the demands of the global market in the context of design management.
- 3) Capability Development There is no comprehensive framework on how to develop leadership capabilities in design management, especially in the context of a transforming industry.
- 4) There is still a gap in understanding how to systematically integrate between creative processes that tend to be flexible and more structured management processes. Supriyatna et al. (2022) highlights that this integration requires a leadership approach that can understand and balance these two aspects.
- 5) Cultural Context There is a need for further exploration of how cultural factors affect the effectiveness of leadership in design management, especially in the context of a blend of traditional and modern values.

These gaps point to the need for further research on how leadership in design management can be applied effectively in the context of traditional industries facing the challenges of modernization and globalization.

Integrative Leadership Model for Design Management

Based on a comprehensive analysis of previous research and identified gaps, this study proposes an Integrative Leadership Model for Design Management that is specifically designed for the context of the traditional furniture industry, particularly in Jepara. This model is a theoretical response to previously identified research gaps, namely: (1). Limited research on the application of design management leadership in traditional industries; (2). Lack of models that explain the integration of local values with global market demands; (3). There is no comprehensive framework for leadership capability development in transforming industries.

The proposed Integrative Leadership Model is built on four main dimensions: (1). Strategic Dimensions: Transformative Vision This dimension emphasizes the ability of leaders to articulate strategies that simultaneously respect tradition and open space for innovation. This is in line with the findings of Mutiara et al. (2024) about the importance of a value-based approach in design management. The focus is to integrate local cultural values with a contemporary design perspective, with an orientation towards economic and cultural

sustainability; (2). The Dimension of Creativity: Facilitating Innovation Adopting the approach of De Mozota and Wolff (2019). This dimension focuses on the creation of an ecosystem that encourages design experimentation. It facilitates collaboration between traditional artisans and modern designers and encourages an exploratory approach in product development. Supriyatna et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of synergy between management and creativity in this context; (3). Operational Dimensions: Resource Management This dimension integrates Cooper and Press's (2021) perspective on design resource management. The focus is on optimizing design talents and craftsmen, managing resources that pay attention to economic and artistic aspects, and standardizing the production process while maintaining the uniqueness of the design; (4). Development Dimension: Adaptive Capabilities Referring to Eshima, et. Al. (2019) concept of design-based leadership, this dimension emphasizes continuous development (Eshima & Anderson, 2017). It includes ongoing training, digital and managerial skill development, and building organizational resilience in the face of market changes.

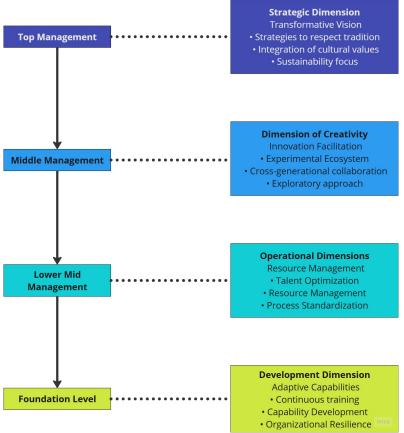


Figure 1. Integrated Leadership Model for Furniture Design Management Source: Mutiara et.al, 2025

Model Supporting Principles:

- 1) Flexibility in management approach
- 2) Commitment to the preservation of cultural heritage
- 3) Openness to technological innovation
- 4) Cross-generational and disciplinary collaboration

Theoretically, this leadership model made a significant contribution to the development of design management theory. The model offers a comprehensive conceptual framework for integrating tradition and innovation in an industry context, while presenting a holistic approach to design leadership. Furthermore, this model enriches design management

literature by providing a new perspective, especially in the context of traditional industries that are facing transformation in the modern era. This theoretical contribution is important given the limited leadership model that specifically addresses the integration of traditional values with the demands of innovation in design management.

In practical terms, this model provides a strategic roadmap for furniture industry leaders in executing various important aspects of the organization. This model assists leaders in managing organizational transformation while preserving the cultural heritage that is at the root of the industry's identity. In addition, this model also provides guidance in developing the innovation capabilities needed to increase competitiveness in the global market. This practical framework is important because it provides concrete guidance for furniture industry leaders in facing the challenges of modernization without losing the traditional values that are their competitive advantage.

Integrative Leadership Model

Based on an analysis of the creative industry, Supriyatna et al. (2022) developed a "five process" leadership model that integrates a strategic management approach with a creative process: (1). Performing: Leadership in understanding and framing the business vision; (2). Programming: Leadership in formulation and planning; (3). Designing: Leadership in the visualization and creation process; (4). Implementing: Leadership in the realization of creative ideas; (5). Marketing: Leadership in product comercialization (Marizar et al., 2022). This model offers a framework for leaders to manage the tension between artistic and economic demands in design management. This reinforces the argument of De Mozota and Wolff (2019) about the importance of design integration in business strategy. These findings have several important implications for leadership practices in design management: (1). Leaders need to develop the ability to manage dual focus — on the creative and managerial aspects simultaneously; (2). Adaptive Flexibility Leadership must be adaptive, able to switch between rational and intuitive approaches according to the needs of the situation; (3) Cross-Disciplinary Communication Leaders must be able to facilitate effective communication between the creative team and the management team.

The Evolution of Leadership in Design Management

The understanding of leadership in design management has grown significantly in the last decade. Turner and Topalian (2002) identified that leadership in design management operates at two levels: strategic and operational. At the strategic level, leaders are responsible for integrating design into the organization's vision, while at the operational level they manage the day-to-day design process.

The Dual Role of Design Leaders: Integrating Creativity and Business Strategy

Cooper and Press (2021) identify a fundamental transformation in design leadership through the "dual capability" concept – the complex ability to simultaneously understand and integrate business and creative aspects, moving beyond traditional views to present leaders capable of crossing disciplinary boundaries with deep expertise. Design leaders perform three interconnected roles that create this transformative profile. The first role is Strategic Translator, where design leaders bridge business vision and creative ecosystems by translating business strategy into concrete design frameworks, communicating design values to stakeholders, and ensuring design initiatives align with organizational goals (De Mozota & Wolff, 2019). As Innovation Facilitators, they create organizational creativity ecosystems by fostering environments that encourage experimentation, learning, and cross-departmental collaboration, breaking down bureaucratic barriers and building cultures where innovative

ideas can thrive (Brown & Martin, 2015). The third dimension is Resource Manager, demanding advanced managerial skills to optimize design talent, manage project budgets and schedules, and ensure design process efficiency – functioning as strategic resource allocation rather than mere administration (Eshima & Anderson, 2017). Cooper et.al. (2017) emphasizes that integrating these three roles creates a transformative design leadership profile where modern leaders become strategic architects orchestrating the convergence of creativity and business goals (Cooper et al., 2017). This dual role model demands leadership profiles with intellectual flexibility to navigate strategic and creative realms simultaneously, speak both business and design languages, and possess vision to transform organizations through design.

Transformational Leadership in Design: A Revolution in the Organizational Paradigm

Eshima (2019) introduced the revolutionary concept of "design-driven leadership" that transcends traditional design management by positioning leadership as a transformational force capable of fundamentally changing how organizations understand, use, and appreciate design. Within this transformational leadership framework, design leaders function as strategic architects of organizational change rather than mere creative process managers (De Mozota & Wolff, 2019). They serve as transformation agents who deconstruct old paradigms and build new perspectives on design value in the business ecosystem, transforming organizational culture to be more innovative, adaptive, and responsive to changing market dynamics. Brown and Martin (2015) offer a collaborative leadership model built on four interconnected dimensions that create a comprehensive framework for effective design leadership. The first dimension, Shared Vision, emphasizes creating an organizational narrative that inspires and unites team members, providing a collective roadmap that gives meaning to every design initiative. Participatory Decision Making encourages active involvement of all team members in decision-making processes, breaking down rigid traditional hierarchies and valuing every perspective (Cooper et al., 2017). Open Communication facilitates the unhindered flow of ideas and information, creating an environment of openness and transparency that encourages cross-divisional idea exchange and builds trust. The final dimension, Continuous Learning, affirms the organization's commitment to constant growth and adaptation, viewing each project, success, and failure as opportunities for reflection and improvement (Gusakov, 2020). The implications of this transformational leadership approach are profound, revolutionizing not only design practices but transforming how organizations think, innovate, and respond to complex challenges in an ever-changing global business landscape.

Implementation Challenges in Design Leadership

In contemporary design management, leaders face significant complexities in implementing effective strategies. Critical challenges requiring attention from creative industry leaders, with the competency gap emerging as the first fundamental challenge where design leaders struggle to balance technical and managerial competencies, creating internal tensions (Hakatie & Ryynänen, 2007). Most design leaders from creative backgrounds face substantial obstacles in handling financial and strategic management aspects (Gruber et al., 2015). Organizational resistance presents the second crucial challenge as identified that traditional organizations often resist experimental and risky design approaches, creating structural barriers to innovation implementation. Lockwood and Smith (2023) offer a comprehensive solution through the "Design Leadership Matrix" model featuring four strategic dimensions: integration strategy focusing on aligning design vision with business strategy, process management including design process standardization and workflow optimization, capability development encompassing team training and talent management, and innovation culture emphasizing creative environments and intelligent risk management. Cooper and Press (2021)

support this approach, emphasizing that design leadership transformation requires a dynamic and adaptive organizational ecosystem. These challenges necessitate a more flexible, integrative, and responsive design leadership model. Design leaders must become transformation agents bridging the gap between creativity and management, between tradition and innovation, requiring cross-disciplinary skills that balance artistic ability with sharp managerial prowess.

Leadership in the Digital Age: Key Competencies in Design Management

The fundamental transformation in design management leadership in an increasingly complex digital era, uncovering three critical competencies as prerequisites for design leaders' success in contemporary technology environments. The first competency is Digital Literacy, which demands deep understanding of digital design technology, the ability to effectively manage virtual design processes, and integrate various digital tools into creative workflows (Li et al., 2017).

The second competency is Data-Driven Decision Making, where design leaders no longer rely solely on intuition but use analytics as a strategic compass. They need to develop the ability to comprehensively understand user insights and optimize designs based on empirical data (Cooper et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017). The final competency is Agile Leadership, which reflects the need for dynamic flexibility in design project management, requiring leaders to adapt quickly to technological and market changes while executing continuous iterative processes (BUSHUYEVA et al., 2019). The integration of these three competencies creates a design leadership profile that is not only technological but also strategic and adaptive. Successful leaders will serve as the bridge between human creativity, advanced technology, and ever-evolving market needs (Ka, 2023).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research on leadership in design management in the Jepara furniture industry uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of leadership in the context of design management (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The case study method allows for a comprehensive exploration of the complexity of leadership in the natural setting of the furniture industry (Yin, 2018).

Data collection was carried out through three main methods: in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with business owners, design managers, and craftsmen, with a duration of 60-90 minutes per respondent. Field observations were conducted in workshops and showrooms to observe the interaction between leaders and the design team and document the design decision-making process. Document analysis includes a review of the company's strategic documents, design portfolios, and project reports.

The selection of samples uses a purposive sampling technique with specific criteria: a furniture company that has been operating for at least 5 years, has an internal design division, is involved in export activities, and has a formal management structure. This criterion ensures that the data collected comes from relevant sources and has substantial experience in design management.

Data analysis uses an interactive model developed by Miles et al. (2019), which includes data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawn (Huberman, 2019). The process of data condensation involves thematic coding and categorization to identify patterns in the data. The data is then presented in the form of thematic matrices and flowcharts to facilitate comprehensive analysis. Conclusions are drawn through the process of verifying findings and triangulating data.

To ensure the validity of the research, several validation strategies were used as recommended by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), including triangulation of methods, member checking, peer debriefing, and trail audits (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Triangulation methods help verify findings through various data sources, while member checking allows participants to check the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research on leadership in design management in the Jepara furniture industry yielded several important findings that can be grouped under several main themes:

Characteristics of Leadership in Design Management

The results of the study show that leadership in design management in the Jepara furniture industry has unique characteristics that are different from conventional leadership. Leaders must be able to balance the demands of creativity and business efficiency (Mutiara et al., 2023). This is in line with the findings of Supriyatna et al. (2022) who identified the importance of integration between artistic and economic streams in creative leadership (Marizar et al., 2022).

The case study on PT EAS shows how effective leadership in design management involves active collaboration between business owners, design managers, and carvers. This supports the collaborative leadership model proposed by Brown and Martin (2015), in which the leader acts as a facilitator in the creative process while maintaining the strategic direction of the company (Brown & Martin, 2015).

The research identifies some of the key challenges that leaders face in the implementation of design management in Jepara: (1). The gap between tradition and innovation; (2). Limited human resources who understand both design and management; (3). Resistance to changes in traditional production processes. To address these challenges, leaders are developing a variety of adaptive strategies. One successful strategy is the "hybrid leadership" approach that combines modern management practices with traditional values in the Jepara furniture industry (De Mozota & Wolff, 2019).

Effective Leadership Model

Based on the analysis of research data, an effective leadership model in design management was identified that has three key dimensions that are closely interrelated. This model is not just a theoretical approach, but a practical framework to lead the creative industry, especially in the context of the Jepara carved furniture industry.

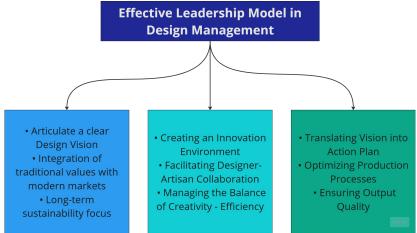


Figure 2. Effective Leadesrhip Model in Design Management Source: Mutiara et.al, 2025

First Dimension: Strategic vision is the main foundation of this leadership model. Leaders are required to have the ability to articulate a clear and comprehensive design vision. This includes the ability to harmoniously integrate traditional values with the demands of the modern market. Focus on long-term sustainability is a key principle, where leaders do not just think about short-term profits, but are sustainable and sustainable (Mutiara et al., 2023).

Second Dimension: Facilitating the Creative Process. The creative process facilitation dimension emphasizes the role of leaders as innovation facilitators. Its main task is to create an environment that is conducive and supports creativity. This involves the ability to facilitate effective collaboration between designers and craftsmen, creating a space for dialogue and exchange of ideas. In addition, leaders must be able to manage a delicate balance between creativity and efficiency, so that the creative process is not hampered by bureaucratic limitations but remains productive. Brown and Martin (2015) in their research emphasize the importance of collaborative leadership in this context.

Third Dimension: Operational Implementation. The final dimension is operational implementation, which transforms a creative vision into a concrete reality. Leaders play a role in translating strategic visions into measurable and realistic action plans. Optimization of the production process is the focus, paying attention to efficiency and innovation. Certainty of output quality is the spearhead of this dimension, where every product produced must reflect both traditional values and modern quality standards. Cooper and Press (2021) in their study emphasized the importance of leaders who can bridge the gap between design concepts and practical implementation.

The Significance of the Leadership Model Model is not just theoretical but has significant practical implications. It offers a comprehensive framework for creative industry leaders to navigate the complexities between tradition preservation and innovation demands. In the context of the Jepara carved furniture industry, this model can be a strategic guide to maintain cultural heritage while remaining competitive in the global arena.

The findings of this study have several important implications for leadership practices in design management: (1). The need for the development of specialized training programs that integrate management and design aspects; (2). The importance of building a support system

for collaboration between designers and craftsmen; (3). The need for an evaluation framework that can measure the success of design management holistically

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This research reveals the complexity of leadership in design management in the Jepara carved furniture industry, which requires a unique integrative approach. As identified by Mutiara et al. (2023), effective leadership in this context is characterized by the ability to strike a balance between the preservation of traditional values and the demands of modern market innovation (Mutiara, Irawan, & Marizar, 2024). A successful leadership model has proven to require three key dimensions: a strategic vision that aligns tradition with modernity, the facilitation of a creative process that encourages collaboration between designers and craftsmen, and operational implementation that is able to translate the vision into a concrete product (De Mozota & Wolff, 2019). The main challenges faced include the gap between tradition and innovation, the limitation of human resources who deeply understand both design and management aspects, and resistance to change in traditional production processes.

To face these challenges, a comprehensive and collaborative approach is needed. First, capacity building is key, with a focus on training programs that integrate design management and understanding of traditional carving values, as well as establishing collaborative forums between educational institutions, industry, and craftsmen (Marizar et al., 2022). Second, the strengthening of management systems through the development of knowledge documentation that maintains traditional techniques while adopting modern innovations. The government is expected to play an active role by developing policies that support the development of leadership in the creative industry and establishing a design development center that facilitates collaboration between modern designers and traditional craftsmen. Further research needs to be conducted, including longitudinal studies to evaluate the effectiveness of the leadership models that have been identified and explore the role of digital technologies in supporting design management in traditional industries. Finally, the development of a sustainable business model that integrates traditional values with modern innovations as well as the strengthening of collaboration networks between industry players will be the key to the successful transformation of leadership in design management, which in turn will ensure the sustainability of Jepara's carved furniture industry in the global era.

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