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Breaking the Hierarchy: Integrating Agile Leadership with Indonesian Cultural Values for Startup Resilience

Mendobrak Hierarki: Mengintegrasikan Kepemimpinan yang Tangkas dengan Nilai-nilai Budaya Indonesia untuk Ketahanan Startup

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation and the VUCA business environment have created a demand for adaptive leadership models among Indonesian startups. While research on agile leadership has developed significantly globally, there remains a lack of integrated models that accommodate local cultural values in the context of early-stage startups in developing countries. This study aims to develop a contextual agile leadership integration model for Indonesian startups through a systematic literature review. Using the SPAR-4-SLR approach, we analyzed 82 high-quality articles from the Scopus database (2018-2025) through a combination of bibliometric and thematic methods. Results indicate a significant increase in post-pandemic publications with a terminological shift from adaptive leadership to agile leadership. Relational (41%) and execution agility (33%) emerged as dominant components, while implementation was most prevalent in technology and education sectors. Significant research gaps were identified, including minimal contextual models for Indonesian startups (only 6.7% of articles) and insufficient integration of local cultural values. The developed model provides a multi-dimensional framework that accommodates early-stage startup characteristics, Indonesian cultural values such as musyawarah and gotong royong, and phased implementation pathways. Theoretically, this model contributes to the development of leadership contingency theory in developing economy contexts. Practically, it offers concrete guidance for startup founders to adapt agile leadership practices according to business development stages, facilitating more effective product-market validation and adaptive strategic pivoting.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business environment, characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), has transformed leadership requirements for organizational effectiveness and sustainability (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Leadership contingency theory emphasizes that leadership effectiveness depends on the interaction between leader characteristics, followers, and situational context (Fiedler, 1967; Vroom & Jago, 2007). This approach provides a relevant theoretical framework for analyzing agile leadership as an adaptive response to VUCA environments. In the Indonesian context, with high collectivist orientation, large power distance, and moderate uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede Insights, 2023), implementing agile leadership developed in Western contexts presents complex adaptive challenges.

Agile leadership has emerged as a significant paradigm offering adaptive, responsive, and collaborative approaches to addressing organizational complexity and change (Denning, 2018). In this research, agile leadership is defined as the capacity to lead effectively amid rapid change and uncertainty through flexibility, collaboration, and continuous adaptation, integrating transformational, relational, and execution dimensions (Joiner & Josephs, 2019). Originally rooted in software development methodologies, this concept has evolved into a broader leadership paradigm emphasizing rapid iteration, experimentation, and collaborative decision-making processes (Rigby et al., 2020). To comprehensively analyze agile leadership evolution, this research also integrates institutional theory, which emphasizes how organizations are influenced by social norms, regulations, and isomorphic mechanisms in their operating environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In developing economy contexts like Indonesia, "institutional voids" challenges create additional complexity in adopting global management practices (Khanna & Palepu, 2010), making contextual adaptation of agile leadership models increasingly crucial.

Indonesia, as Southeast Asia's largest economy with a rapidly developing digital ecosystem, presents an intriguing context for examining agile leadership implementation (Das et al., 2019). With over 2,350 active startups and ranking fifth globally in startup development, Indonesia's entrepreneurial landscape offers rich opportunities for adaptive leadership research (Startup Ranking, 2023). For this research, early-stage startups are defined as entrepreneurial ventures less than five years old, with incompletely formed organizational structures, primary focus on product/market validation, and funding typically at pre-seed to Series A stages (Salamzadeh & Kawamorita, 2015). Early-stage startups in Indonesia face unique challenges ranging from resource constraints and market uncertainty to regulatory barriers and specific cultural contexts (Wijaya et al., 2021).

Indonesia possesses several dominant cultural values that influence leadership practices with significant implications for agile leadership implementation. The values of "gotong royong" (communal cooperation) and "musyawarah mufakat" (deliberative consensus) are cultural principles supporting collaborative aspects of agile leadership, yet concepts of "bapakisme" (paternalism) and "rukun" (social harmony) may conflict with transparency and constructive confrontation values required in agile practices (Irawanto, 2009; Suryani et al., 2012). Empirical studies show that effective leaders in Indonesia are expected to demonstrate "kebapakan" (paternalistic) characteristics with personal attention to team member welfare while maintaining clear authority (House et al., 2004; Irawanto, 2009).

Despite increasing interest in agile leadership, preliminary literature review reveals substantial gaps in research specifically examining agile leadership application in Indonesian startup contexts (Abukalusa & Oosthuizen, 2022). Existing studies often fail to account for specific contextual factors affecting agile leadership practice effectiveness, such as cultural values, organizational development stages, and local ecosystem characteristics (Dulay, 2022). Specifically, this research has three main objectives. First, to analyze conceptual evolution and key dimensions of agile leadership in academic literature from 2018-2025, and its relevance to early-stage startup contexts. Second, to identify research gaps related to agile leadership in Indonesian startup contexts and explore the role of local cultural values in agile leadership practice implementation. Third, to develop a contextual agile leadership integration model accommodating early-stage startup characteristics in Indonesia and local cultural values.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This research applies a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method using the SPAR-4-SLR approach (Search, Planning, Analysis, Reporting) to analyze agile leadership concept development and its application in startup contexts. SPAR-4-SLR is a structured methodology developed to ensure systematization and transparency in literature review processes (Nolan & Garavan, 2016). This research adopts a pragmatism paradigm enabling integration of positivist and interpretivist perspectives, facilitating comprehensive analysis of complex agile leadership phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

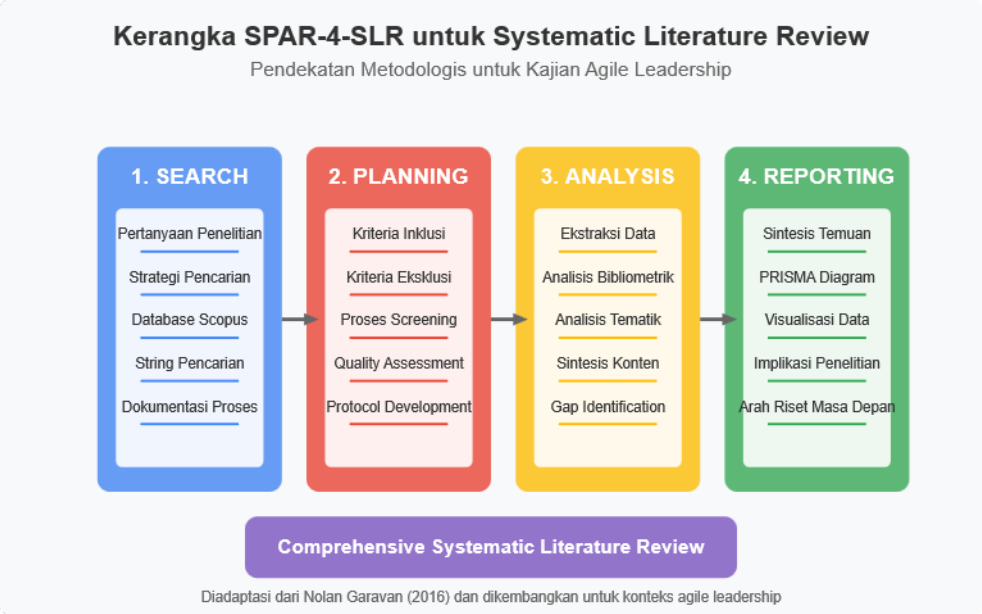

Figure 1. SPAR-4-SLR Framework

SPAR-4-SLR Procedures

The search phase began with formulating specific research questions to guide the review process. A comprehensive search strategy was implemented using the Scopus database with the main search string:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("agile leadership" OR "leadership agility" OR "adaptive leadership") AND PUBYEAR > 2017 AND PUBYEAR < 2026

The search was conducted in March 2025, yielding 239 articles for further analysis. Scopus selection was based on its broad coverage of international peer-reviewed journals in management, leadership, and entrepreneurship fields, as well as bibliometric analysis features facilitating trend and pattern identification in literature (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016).

Planning

The planning phase included developing article selection protocols and quality assessment frameworks according to PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The screening process was conducted in two stages, with title and abstract review yielding 134 articles, followed by full-text review identifying 116 articles meeting inclusion criteria.

A quality assessment framework was developed adapting from CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) with criteria including research objective clarity, methodological appropriateness, research design strength, data analysis quality, findings presentation clarity, and knowledge contribution. Only articles with minimum total scores of 18 (out of 30) were included in in-depth analysis, resulting in 82 articles for final analysis.

Analysis

The analysis phase included systematic data extraction combining bibliometric and thematic approaches. Bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer to identify publication trends, geographical distribution, citation patterns, and research focus evolution. Thematic analysis was performed using NVivo 14 with inductive-deductive approaches, following six stages developed by Braun and Clarke (2006): data familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report production.

To ensure validity and reliability, the coding process was conducted by two researchers independently with regular reconciliation meetings. Interrater reliability was evaluated using Cohen's kappa, with a value of 0.84 indicating high inter-rater agreement.

Reporting

The reporting phase focused on findings synthesis and comprehensive report compilation. Results were organized thematically based on research questions, using tables, diagrams, and visualizations to clarify findings. The reporting format followed PRISMA recommendations for transparency and reproducibility (Moher et al., 2009).

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Article Selection Process

The article selection process followed the PRISMA diagram as shown in Figure 2. From 239 initial articles, title and abstract screening yielded 134 articles (56.1%) focusing on agile leadership. Full-text review and quality assessment resulted in 82 articles (70.7% of 116 articles) for final analysis. The majority of articles (64.6%) were empirical studies, 25.6% focused on conceptual development, and 9.8% were literature reviews.

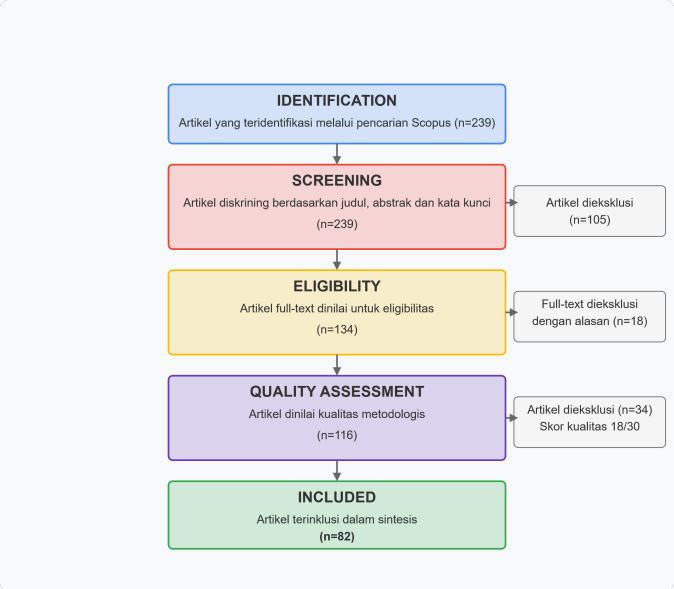

Figure 2. PRISMA Diagram

Bibliometric and Thematic Analysis

Publication Trends and Conceptual Evolution

Publication trend analysis shows significant increases in agile leadership research during 2018-2025, with publication surges after 2021. There was a 93.8% increase from 2021 (16 articles) to 2022 (31 articles), with publication peaks in 2024 (77 articles). This trend demonstrates significant temporal relationships with the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified needs for adaptive leadership models in uncertainty contexts.

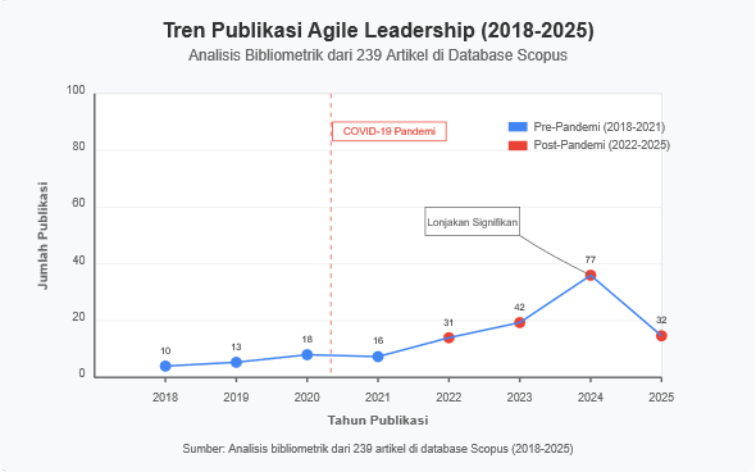

Figure 3. Agile Leadership Publication Trends (2018-2025)

Keyword analysis shows research focus evolution with terminological shifts from "adaptive leadership" dominance (52.94%) in 2018-2021 to "agile leadership" (38.00%) in 2022-2025. Emerging keywords include "COVID-19" (+5.62%), "digital transformation" (+4.84%), and "employee performance" (+3.30%). Keyword network mapping identified three main clusters: (1) agile leadership and organizational transformation, (2) adaptive leadership and crisis management, and (3) leadership agility and organizational performance.

Geographical distribution based on author affiliations shows United States dominance (31.3%), followed by Indonesia (12.6%), Canada (10.3%), India (7.1%), and United Kingdom (6.8%). Indonesia's significant representation indicates this topic's local relevance and growing academic interest from Indonesian researchers.

Agile Leadership Dimensions and Implementation Contexts

Thematic analysis identified four main agile leadership dimensions and their implementation context distribution, illustrated in Figure 4.

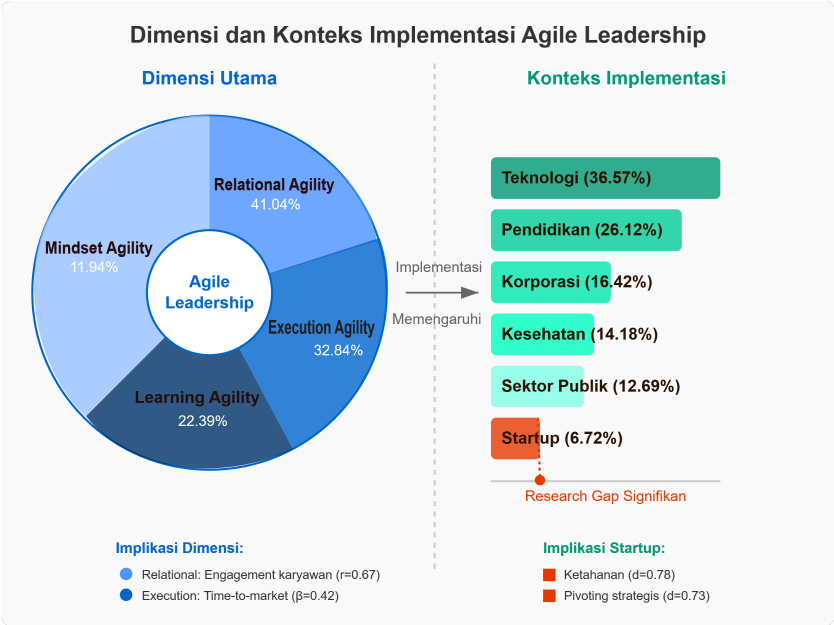

Figure 4. Main Dimensions and Implementation Contexts of Agile Leadership

Thematic analysis identified four main agile leadership dimensions. Relational Agility (41.04% of articles) represents the ability to build collaborative relationships, create psychological safety, and communicate effectively. Empirical studies show relational agility positively correlates with employee engagement ($r=0.67$, $p<0.01$) and collective efficacy ($r=0.59$, $p<0.01$) (Wijaya et al., 2024). Execution Agility (32.84% of articles) encompasses rapid implementation capabilities, data-driven decision-making, and flexible execution. Longitudinal studies show execution agility predicts time-to-market speed ($\beta=0.42$, $p<0.01$) and product adaptation ($\beta=0.38$, $p<0.01$) in startup settings (Li et al., 2023). Learning Agility (22.39% of articles) represents the ability to learn from experience, adapt, and drive continuous learning. Meta-analysis shows moderate to strong effects of learning agility on organizational innovation ($d=0.68$, 95% CI [0.52, 0.84]) (Westerman et al., 2022). Mindset Agility (11.94% of articles) encompasses cognitive capacity for ambiguity tolerance, systemic thinking, and growth mindset. Qualitative studies identified mindset agility as a critical enabler for other agility dimensions (Geffers et al., 2024).

Implementation context analysis shows uneven distribution across sectors, with technology sector dominance (36.57%), education (26.12%), corporate (16.42%), healthcare (14.18%), public sector (12.69%), and startups (6.72%). These findings reveal significant research gaps regarding agile leadership implementation in startup contexts, despite this concept's high relevance to dynamic startup environment characteristics.

Of the 82 analyzed articles, only 6.72% (5 articles) focused on startup contexts, and only 3 articles (3.66%) specifically discussed agile leadership implementation in Indonesian startups. This limitation indicates the need for further research exploring how cultural and institutional contexts affect agile leadership implementation effectiveness, especially in developing economies like Indonesia.

Agile Leadership Outcomes and Frameworks

Literature analysis identified five main outcome categories associated with agile leadership implementation: performance (26.87%), change success (23.88%), resilience (20.90%), engagement (20.15%), and innovation (17.91%). Meta-analysis shows positive agile leadership effects on various outcomes with effect sizes (d) ranging from 0.49 for employee engagement to 0.72 for change success.

For specific startup contexts, analysis of 5 articles shows agile leadership most strongly influences resilience (d=0.78) and strategic pivoting success (d=0.73), indicating this leadership approach's special relevance for early-stage phases characterized by high uncertainty and product-market validation needs (Wijaya et al., 2021).

Analysis of agile leadership frameworks and models identified 34 models in literature, with three most influential models: (1) Nexus Leadership-Agility-Strategy Model (Westerman et al., 2022), (2) Business Resilience Framework for Startups (Wijaya et al., 2021), and (3) Leadership Agility for Organizational Agility Framework (Joiner & Josephs, 2019). Of 34 identified models, 88.2% discuss frameworks in global or Western contexts, and only 11.8% specifically develop models for non-Western contexts, including 1 model specific to Indonesia.

Identified Research Gaps

Thematic analysis identified five main research gaps related to agile leadership, particularly in startup contexts, as illustrated in Figure 5.

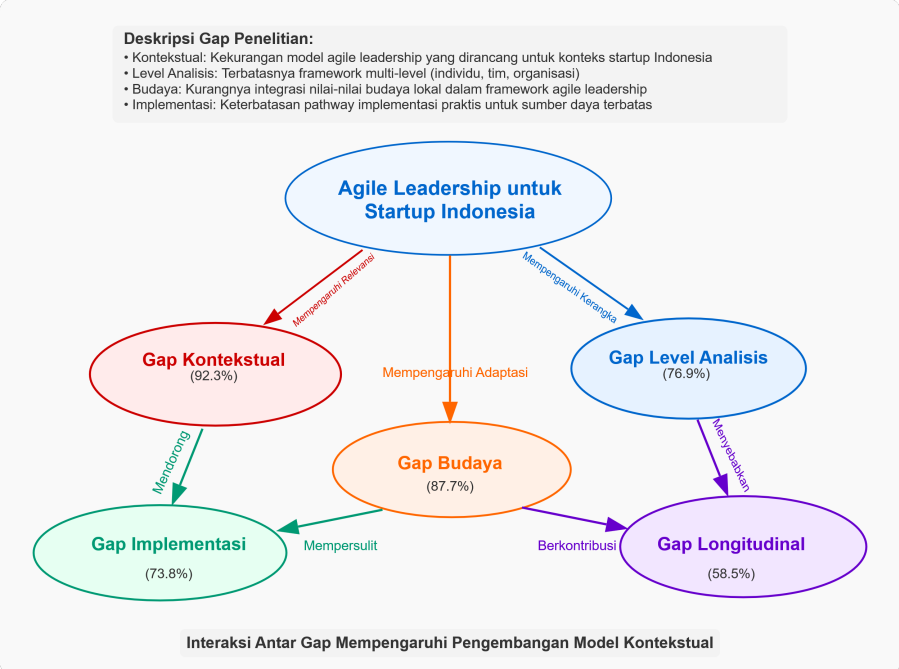

Figure 5. Research Gap Diagram

Thematic analysis identified five main research gaps related to agile leadership. Contextual Gap (92.3% of articles identifying gaps) shows insufficient agile leadership models designed specifically for Indonesian startup and developing country contexts. Cultural Gap (87.7%) indicates lacking integration of cultural contexts and local values in agile leadership frameworks. Analysis Level Gap (76.9%) shows limited multi-level frameworks integrating individual, team, and organizational dynamics. Implementation Gap (73.8%) relates to limited practical and measurable agile leadership implementation pathways for resource-constrained organizations. Longitudinal Gap (58.5%) refers to still limited long-term research on agile leadership impacts on startup performance and sustainability.

These gaps provide clear directions for future research and justification for developing more contextual agile leadership models for Indonesian startups.

DISCUSSION

Integrated Model: Agile Leadership for Indonesian Startups

Based on findings synthesis, we propose an integrated model for agile leadership in Indonesian startup contexts, as illustrated in Figure 6.

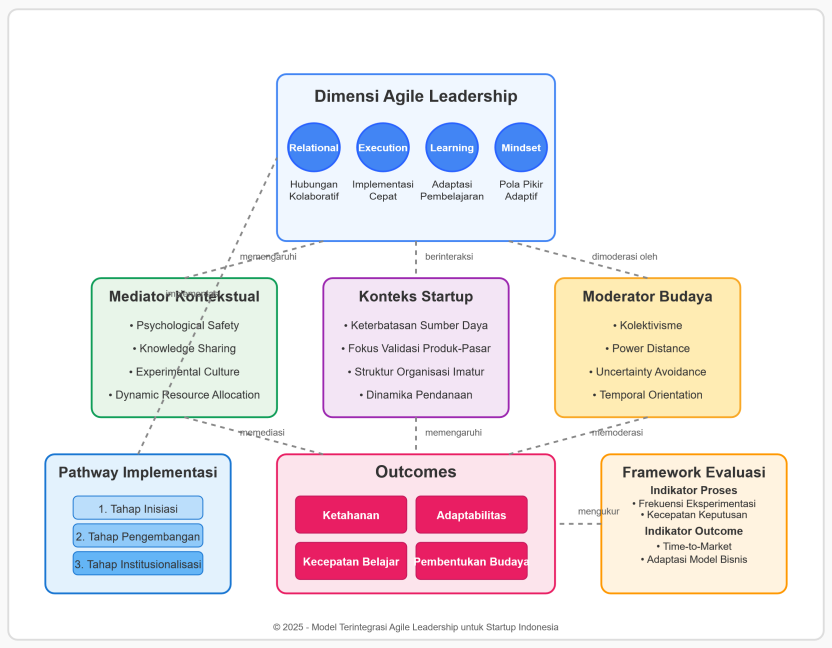

Figure 6. Integrated Agile Leadership Model for Indonesian Startups

This model integrates insights from leadership contingency theory, institutional theory, and cultural value studies, creating a multi-dimensional framework considering dynamic interactions between leadership competencies, organizational contexts, and environmental factors. The model includes five main components:

The model encompasses five main components. First, agile leadership dimensions consisting of four core dimensions (relational, execution, learning, and mindset agility) with specific adaptations based on Indonesian cultural values and early-stage startup characteristics. Second, contextual mediators comprising factors mediating relationships between agile leadership practices and outcomes, including psychological safety, knowledge sharing, experimental culture, and dynamic resource allocation. Third, cultural moderators consisting of Indonesian cultural values moderating agile leadership practice effectiveness, encompassing collectivism, power distance, uncertainty

avoidance, and temporal orientation. Fourth, startup context including unique early-stage startup characteristics affecting agile leadership implementation, including resource constraints, product-market validation focus, immature organizational structure, and funding dynamics. Fifth, outcomes representing organizational results targeted by agile leadership, emphasizing resilience, business model adaptability, learning speed, and culture formation.

The proposed model differentiates itself from existing frameworks in three main aspects. First, this model explicitly integrates Indonesian cultural values as moderators affecting agile leadership practice effectiveness. Second, this model adopts a contingency perspective recognizing how startup development stages affect agile leadership operationalization. Third, this model proposes phased implementation mechanisms considering startup resource constraints.

Theoretical Implications

Findings from this SLR have three main theoretical implications:

Findings from this SLR have three main theoretical implications. First, the proposed model extends leadership contingency theory by identifying specific contextual factors (cultural values, development stages, ecosystem characteristics) moderating agile leadership effectiveness in Indonesian startup contexts. This shows that agile leadership is not a universal approach but needs adaptation to specific contextual characteristics (Supandi et al., 2023). Second, review results show agile leadership concept evolution from approaches focusing on individual adaptability (2018-2021) to systemic leadership frameworks integrated with digital transformation and organizational resilience (2022-2025). This evolution enriches theoretical understanding of how leadership concepts develop in response to external environmental changes (Salvetti & Bertagni, 2020). Third, conceptualizing agile leadership as a multi-level phenomenon develops understanding of how leadership processes operate simultaneously at individual, team, and organizational levels (Wanasida et al., 2021). This perspective enables more nuanced analysis of transmission mechanisms through which individual-level agile leadership practices affect organizational outcomes.

Practical Implication

From practical perspectives, this review's findings provide three important implications:

From practical perspectives, this review's findings provide three important implications. First, identifying relevant Indonesian cultural values highlights specific mechanisms for adapting agile leadership principles. Practical approaches include integrating musyawarah in agile decision-making processes, applying gotong royong in cross-functional team formation, and maintaining certain hierarchical relationships while encouraging open communication and experimentation (Irawanto, 2009). Second, identifying key agile leadership dimensions helps startup leaders understand priority competency areas needing development based on startup growth stages. Development focus can be adjusted to execution and learning agility in product-market validation phases, and increasing relational agility as organizations develop (Wijaya et al., 2021).

Third, the integrated model provides phased implementation pathways accommodating startup resource constraints, with specific success indicators at each development stage. The Initiation Stage suitable for pre-seed to seed startups focuses on developing founder mindset agility, experimenting with simple agile practices, and forming adaptive work rhythms. Success indicators at this stage include experiment frequency of at least twice monthly, customer feedback cycles at least every two weeks, and decision-making time under 48 hours. The Development Stage suitable for

seed to Series A startups includes expanding agile practices to team levels, formalizing agile processes, and strengthening learning mechanisms. Success indicators include implementing 1-2 week sprint cycles, regular retrospectives, at least weekly knowledge sharing, and product adaptation rates under one month. The Institutionalization Stage for Series A and beyond startups involves integrating agile leadership into organizational culture and developing sustainable agility capabilities. Success indicators include psychological safety scores above 80%, time-to-market 30-60% faster than industry benchmarks, and employee engagement above 80%.

Future Research Directions

Based on identified research gaps, three priority research directions are recommended:

Based on identified research gaps, three priority research directions are recommended. First, mixed-methods research is needed to validate the proposed integrated model in Indonesian startup contexts, testing relationships between agile leadership dimensions, contextual mediators, cultural moderators, and organizational outcomes (Supandi et al., 2023). Second, ethnographic studies exploring in-depth how Indonesian cultural values interact with agile leadership implementation, focusing on developing concrete cultural adaptation pathways (Irawanto, 2009). Third, longitudinal research analyzing agile leadership dynamics at various levels (individual, team, organizational) during startup development from pre-seed to series A phases and beyond, identifying factors affecting agile leadership practice sustainability and evolution as organizations grow (Wanasida et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This Systematic Literature Review analyzed 82 high-quality articles to develop comprehensive understanding of agile leadership and its application in Indonesian startup contexts. Review results identified significant increases in agile leadership research during 2018-2025, with conceptual shifts from early focus on individual adaptability toward systemic perspectives integrated with digital transformation and organizational resilience.

Four main agile leadership dimensions were identified: relational agility, execution agility, learning agility, and mindset agility, with relational and execution dimensions emerging as most dominant components. Implementation context analysis revealed significant gaps in startup-focused research, particularly in developing countries like Indonesia, with only 6.72% of articles discussing startup contexts.

The integrated model developed in this research provides conceptual and practical frameworks for agile leadership implementation in Indonesian startups, considering unique early-stage startup characteristics, Indonesian cultural values, and needs for phased implementation pathways. Integrating values like musyawarah and gotong royong with global agile principles creates more contextual and relevant leadership approaches for Indonesian startup ecosystems.

Theoretically, this research contributes to leadership contingency theory development in developing economy contexts and provides multi-level frameworks for understanding agile leadership. Practically, the proposed model offers concrete guidance for startup founders to adapt agile leadership practices according to business development stages, facilitating more effective product-market validation and adaptive strategic pivoting. In the era of digital transformation and VUCA business environments, agile leadership becomes a critical capability for Indonesian startups to build long-term resilience and sustainability.

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