# Ideal Leadership in the Tunjuk Ajar Melayu of Riau

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| | This study explores the concept of leadership within the Tunjuk Ajar Melayu of Riau, a cultural heritage that encompasses advice, counsel, and noble values to guide the lives of the Malay community. Tunjuk Ajar Melayu emphasizes the importance of leadership based on syara' law, or Islamic law. Leaders are selected based on strict criteria, including the qualities of shiddiq (truthfulness), amanah (trustworthiness), fatonah (intelligence), and tabligh (communication), with the aim of establishing order and welfare within society. This research adopts an ethnographic approach, involving six experts on Riau Malay culture as respondents. Data were analyzed using Nvivo software to understand perspectives on leadership in the context of Malay customs and traditions. The findings reveal that leadership in Tunjuk Ajar Melayu emphasizes resilience, patience, and dedication, yet its application in both government and private institutions is increasingly rare. This study recommends stronger efforts to integrate the values of Tunjuk Ajar Melayu into local regulations and policies, in order to maintain the relevance of traditional values in the modern context.<br><br>**Keywords:** Malay Leadership: Tunjuk Ajar Melayu, Local Wisdom, Leadership Models, and Value Integration. |

## Introduction

The term "Malay" carries multiple definitions; it can be understood as a race or an ethnicity. In addition to the word "Malay," there is also the term "Malayness," which refers to everything connected to the Malay community, such as Malay identity, the Malay language, its social aspects, values, and other elements that characterize the Malay people. Within the concept of Malayness, customs also apply. For the Malays of Riau, customs are categorized into three types: *adat yang sebenar adat* (customs in their true form), *adat yang diadatkan* (customs that have been adapted), and *adat yang teradatkan* (customs that have been gradually established).

The Malay people are renowned for their excellence in creating literary works that serve as life guidance. The body of literature produced by the Malay community is a valuable heritage for knowledge and continues to be a significant source of literature to this day. The literary achievements of the Malay people have contributed to a rich legacy that is passed down through generations, serving not only as knowledge but also as a source of noble values that are preserved and respected. One of the legacies left behind by Malay civilization is the concept of *Tunjuk Ajar*. *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is understood as advice, counsel, trust, teachings, and exemplary guidance beneficial to the lives of the Malay people (Effendy, 2013). Among the various forms of *Tunjuk Ajar* is the guidance on leadership. For the Malay community, leadership is of great importance. This is evident in how they regard leaders, as reflected in a saying passed down through generations: "When a land has no king, when a village has no chief, when a house has no master, the passing wind will bring misfortune; blessings will disappear, dignity will be lost, and life will descend into chaos and conflict." This saying illustrates that the Malay community places great emphasis on leadership, as the presence of a leader ensures that the community remains free from threats and divisions that could disrupt the social order.

With the shifting of civilization, the values of *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* have begun to erode across various aspects of life. This presents a significant challenge in preserving a legacy that has long served as a pillar of wisdom and social harmony within the Malay community. The erosion of *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* values is also evident in the realm of

leadership. Observations conducted within Malay cultural institutions and communities have led to the conclusion that the implementation of leadership principles from *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is becoming increasingly difficult to find. According to leaders of Malay cultural institutions, several *datuk* (elders) expressed that leadership values from *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* are no longer evident in government or private sector institutions. However, the datuk believe there is still potential for these leadership values to be preserved within traditional communities

Leaders of the Riau Malay cultural institution also noted that the Indonesian government, along with regional authorities, is currently working to revitalize the values of *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* in all aspects of life, including leadership. Given the discussions outlined above, research on leadership within *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is crucial, particularly considering the limited studies and literature available on this subject. The lack of research raises concerns that the leadership values inherent in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* may further diminish and become unfamiliar to future generations.

## Literature Review

### Leadership

Leadership can be defined as the ability to inspire others to achieve specific goals. According to Schein, (2010) leadership is about building, instilling, and developing a culture within an organization. Leaders act as cultural architects, creating and embedding the values and beliefs that form the foundation of organizational culture. Leadership also involves the capacity to address dysfunctional cultures and implement necessary changes. Meanwhile, Bratton & Gold, (2017) define leadership as a process in which individuals influence the interpretation of events, goal selection, and the organization of work activities within the organization. Leadership is seen as a power-based reality construction process, where leaders shape and maintain power structures. In line with this theory, leadership is also defined by researchers as the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how to do it, as well as facilitating individual and collective efforts to achieve common goals. Leadership is a crucial function of management that helps maximize efficiency and achieve organizational objectives (Hollander et al., 1973; Luo et al., 2023; Toylan & Semerciöz, 2012; Xu, 2017). Additionally, Robbins &Judge, (2010) add that leadership is the ability to influence a group in the pursuit of a vision or set of desired goals. Northouse, (2016) defines leadership as an interaction process where a leader influences a group or individual to achieve a common goal, focusing on the dynamic relationship between the leader and followers. Based on these expert definitions, leadership can be understood as a multifaceted concept that encompasses the ability to inspire, influence, and direct others to achieve specific objectives, whether in an individual or organizational contex.

### *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*

refers to all forms of advice, trust, exemplary conduct, and counsel that guide individuals towards the righteous path blessed by Allah, whose blessings ensure human salvation in both this world and the hereafter (Effendy, 2005, 2013b; Samad, 2024). This wisdom has been passed down by ancestors with the aim of inspiring human intellect and conscience to fulfill the duties entrusted by Allah, the Lord of all beings, as part of their responsibilities to family, society, nation, and state (Effendy, 2013c, 2013a). For the Malay people, *Tunjuk Ajar* must embody the noble values of Islam and align with the culture and social norms upheld by society. As expressed in the saying, "Within *Tunjuk Ajar* lies the radiance of religion," the teachings of *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* are imbued with Islamic principles grounded in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. Tunjuk Ajar provides many pieces of advice that consistently remind individuals of their duties to God and how to behave according to Islamic teachings. It outlines guidance on maintaining devotion to God, obedience to parents, respect for leadership, appropriate social conduct, and other principles rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Samad, 2024). Essentially, *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is a collection of moral advice, guidance, and exemplary teachings designed to lead people towards the righteous path approved by Allah. It was passed down to inspire human reasoning and conscience in fulfilling their obligations as family members, citizens, and members of the global community. For the Malay community, *Tunjuk Ajar* must reflect Islamic virtues while harmonizing with cultural and social norms, firmly grounded in the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, guiding obedience to God, parents, leaders, and societal conduct

### Leadership in Tunjuk Ajar Melayu

Leadership is inherent in a leader. For the Malay people, a leader is someone who is "elevated a branch higher, and steps ahead," typically selected from members of the community who meet certain criteria. A leader in

the Malay community is someone to be emulated, a person whose words carry weight and whose requests are granted, and who is believed to be capable of bringing peace, order, and welfare to the community (Effendy, 2013). Leadership, as outlined in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*, is a type of leadership that benefits the greater good, particularly those who are led. Malay leadership is viewed as strong and resilient, providing value both in this world and in the hereafter. Moreover, leadership within the Malay community is bound by *syara'* law (Islamic law). For the Malay people, norms and customs serve to reinforce one another, shaping personality, ethics, and social interactions (Juswandi, 2012).

## Research Methodology

This study employs an ethnographic approach to deeply explore leadership within Tunjuk Ajar Melayu of Riau, using Nvivo14 software for data processing. The research was conducted at the Riau Malay Cultural Center, specifically at the Lembaga Adat Melayu Riau, with a sample of six individuals, comprising experts in Riau Malay culture and officials from the Lembaga Adat Melayu Riau, located in the city of Pekanbaru. There were nine questions posed, which are discussed in the instrument measurement section. All notes, responses, and interview results were recorded and then transcribed into Microsoft Word before being imported into Nvivo for analysis.

The primary data for this research were collected directly through structured interviews with the experts and officials of the *Lembaga Adat Melayu* Riau, who possess the capability to explain the culture of Riau Malays as well as Tunjuk Ajar and leadership within the *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* of Riau. From the six respondents, the most frequently used words were visually represented, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Nvivo 14 was used to analyze open-ended responses. The methodology, including measurement and instruments, as well as data analysis techniques, is discussed in the following section:

### Instrument Measurement

To collect primary data, individual and independent interviews were conducted with selected experts who served as the sample for this research. The demographic profile of the sample consists of six male respondents. The statements and answers provided by the experts, as respondents in this study, were analyzed using Nvivo software, utilizing thematic analysis, word frequency analysis, and tree map analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Ishak & Bakar, 2012; Richards, 1999; Woolf & Silver, 2017).

### Analysis and Findings

Frequently Used Words in Interview Responses

The most commonly used words in the responses to the semi-structured interview questions posed to the selected sample include Melayu, leader, community, values, leadership, law, concept, trust, culture, Islam, advice, and syara'.

Table 1

The most frequently used words in the semi-structured interviews

| Word | Length | Count | Weighted Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Melayu | 6 | 35 | 5,87 |
| leader | 8 | 20 | 3,36 |
| public | 10 | 13 | 2,18 |
| mark | 5 | 13 | 2,18 |
| leadership | 12 | 8 | 1,34 |
| law | 5 | 5 | 0,84 |
| draft | 6 | 4 | 0,67 |
| trustworthy | 6 | 3 | 0,50 |
| culture | 6 | 3 | 0,50 |
| Islam | 5 | 3 | 0,50 |
| advice | 6 | 3 | 0,50 |
| sharia' | 6 | 3 | 0,50 |

Figure 1 Word frequency analysis illustrating the most commonly used words in the interviews.

**Exploring Leadership in Tunjuk Ajar Melayu**

This research utilized participant observation to explore respondents' views on leadership within *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*. The author summarized the respondents' perspectives as follows.

During the interviews, it was revealed that leadership in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is grounded in syara' law, or Islamic law. According to the respondents, leadership in the Malay community is governed by strict criteria. Leaders are appointed by the datuk pucuk or tribal elders within the Malay community. In a Malay village or kingdom, various tribes exist, and these tribes are passed down through the maternal line, or matrilineal descent (Sastra, 2018; Thamrin et al., 2006). Leaders are often selected from outside the tribe in a given community or village. According to the interviews, many leaders chosen come from the ranks of religious scholars (alim ulama) from distant regions who spread Islamic teachings throughout the Nusantara. The appointment of leaders is determined by the datuk pucuk, and they must be intelligent, honest, trustworthy, and able to convey messages in line with Islamic teachings.

Based on the interviews, it was also explained that the Malay community is highly open to outsiders beyond their group, as evidenced by the fact that the leaders chosen by the Malay people are often not from within their own community. This practice is intended to avoid social jealousy, as the tribes within the community or village regard themselves as having equal standing. Therefore, selecting a leader from outside the village ensures that the leader can serve as an independent mediator, uninfluenced by any local background.

Furthermore, leadership in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* emphasizes how leaders must fulfill their duties as expected. The interview results reveal that leadership in the Malay community serves as an exemplary model, benefiting not only the community led by the leader but also others, as the leadership is aligned with Islamic principles. In *Tunjuk Ajar*, leaders are expected to demonstrate resilience, patience, and endurance in facing various challenges and difficulties. Leadership is not merely about leading in comfortable circumstances but also about the ability to persevere through hardships, work diligently, and not give up when encountering failure or pressure. Leaders must be prepared to make sacrifices, be patient in times of difficulty, and remain steadfast even in the midst of conflict. In every situation, the ideal leader is one who can bear the burdens and remain dedicated to the interests of those they lead. This concept is further reflected in the saying from *Tunjuk Ajar*: "A leader must be willing to endure challenges, ready to suffer in hardship, steadfast in adversity, and remain resolute in the face of difficulty. Whether in tight spaces or in wide-open challenges, a leader must be resilient, patient, and unwavering." This traditional expression underscores the essence of strong leadership, emphasizing endurance, sacrifice, and commitment.

Research Findings

The results of the interview analysis, processed using NVivo, reveal that leadership within Tunjuk Ajar Melayu is oriented towards the welfare of the community and adheres to syara' law, or Islamic law. This leadership

is also grounded in norms and cultural values that reinforce one another, both in shaping the character of the leader and in motivating and mobilizing the people being led. The findings highlight that Tunjuk Ajar leadership emphasizes not only individual excellence but also a broader commitment to the well-being of society in a manner that aligns with religious and cultural traditions.

This study found that leadership in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is grounded in syara' law or Islamic law, where leaders are chosen based on strict criteria, including the qualities of *shiddiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *fatonah* (intelligence), and *tabligh* (communication). The selection of leaders is conducted by the datuk pucuk, the tribal elders within the Malay community, using a matrilineal system that selects leaders from outside the tribe to avoid social jealousy. Additionally, the interview results emphasize that leadership in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* stresses the importance of resilience, patience, and endurance in facing challenges. Leadership here is not merely about leading in comfortable conditions, but it also involves sacrifice, hard work, and steadfastness in difficult situations for the benefit of those being led

This study also reveals that the application of leadership values from *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is currently difficult to find in both government and private institutions. This is due to regulations and laws in the government sector that often do not align with the values of *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*, while in the private sector, the universal standards imposed by companies limit the application of these traditional values. Nevertheless, the leadership values from *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* are still possible to implement in traditional villages that continue to uphold these long-standing traditions

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reveals that leadership in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is a leadership model based on syara' law, or Islamic law, with very strict criteria. These criteria include core qualities such as shiddiq (truthfulness), amanah (trustworthiness), fatonah (intelligence), and tabligh (communication), which form the foundation for the selection of leaders. In the Malay community, leaders are chosen by the datuk pucuk, with leaders often selected from outside the tribe to avoid social jealousy among the community. These leadership values emphasize resilience, patience, and perseverance in facing various challenges and difficulties. Additionally, leadership in this context requires sacrifice, hard work, and determination in fulfilling one's duties. However, the application of leadership based on Tunjuk Ajar Melayu is currently difficult to find in both government and private institutions. In the government sector, regulations and laws often do not align with these traditional values, while in the private sector, the universal standards applied by companies hinder the implementation of Tunjuk Ajar Melayu values

The government needs to make stronger efforts to integrate the values of Tunjuk Ajar Melayu into local regulations and policies, particularly in regions with deep Malay cultural roots. This step is crucial to ensure that the noble leadership values of the Malay tradition can be preserved and applied in modern contexts. Strengthening these cultural values can help maintain the relevance of Tunjuk Ajar Melayu in contemporary societal structures.

Further research is recommended to deepen the study of leadership within Tunjuk Ajar Melayu across various sectors. Such research is expected to provide deeper insights and identify more effective ways to preserve the relevance of Tunjuk Ajar Melayu values in the context of modern life

## Acknowledgement

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