What Makes an Ideal Chairperson? Organisational Members' Perspectives on Leadership Attitude

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Abstract

Leadership plays a vital role in shaping the effectiveness of student organisations as platforms for developing future leaders. However, limited attention has been given to the specific leadership attitudes expected by members toward their organisational chairperson in non-formal educational settings. This study aims to identify the ideal leadership attitudes perceived by members of student organisations at the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with sixteen participants from six organisations and were analysed thematically. The findings reveal five key attitudes: communicativeness, critical thinking, assertiveness, inclusiveness, responsibility, and motivation as essential elements of ideal leadership. These results suggest that effective leadership in student organisations requires not only managerial competence but also empathy, emotional intelligence, and consistency. The study recommends integrating these attitudes into leadership development programs to foster inclusive, reflective, and empowering leadership behaviours that enhance organisational harmony and member motivation.
Keywords: attitude chairperson, leadership, organisational,

Abstrak

Kepemimpinan memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk efektivitas organisasi mahasiswa sebagai platform untuk mengembangkan pemimpin masa depan. Namun, perhatian yang terbatas telah diberikan pada sikap kepemimpinan spesifik yang diharapkan oleh anggota terhadap ketua organisasi mereka dalam lingkungan pendidikan non-formal. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi sikap kepemimpinan ideal yang dipersepsikan oleh anggota organisasi mahasiswa di Fakultas Pendidikan dan Pelatihan Guru, UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan enam belas peserta dari enam organisasi dan dianalisis secara tematis. Temuan menunjukkan lima sikap kunci komunikatif, berpikir kritis, asertif, inklusif dan bertanggung jawab, serta motivasi sebagai unsur esensial kepemimpinan ideal. Hasil ini menyarankan bahwa kepemimpinan efektif dalam organisasi mahasiswa memerlukan tidak hanya kompetensi manajerial tetapi juga empati, kecerdasan emosional, dan konsistensi. Studi ini merekomendasikan integrasi sikap-sikap ini ke dalam program pengembangan kepemimpinan untuk menumbuhkan perilaku kepemimpinan yang inklusif, reflektif, dan memberdayakan, yang meningkatkan harmoni organisasi dan motivasi anggota.

Keywords: ideal chairperson, leadership attitude, organisation, members' perspectives.

1. Introduction

Leadership is essential to the success of an organisation, as a chairperson guides program coordination and shapes direction, atmosphere, and relationships within the group (Asrar-ul-Haq & Kuchinke, 2016). Leadership influences interdisciplinary phenomena (Banks et al., 2022). The chairperson's qualities significantly affect members' comfort, loyalty, and performance. Members naturally hold expectations regarding the attitudes leaders should possess, as these traits motivate them to achieve goals (Alheet et al., 2021). The attitudes demonstrated by a chairperson serve as

role models for members, affecting their behaviours and ultimately contributing to organisational success (Alheet et al., 2021). Prior studies further show that transformational leadership strengthens members' commitment through mechanisms such as self-efficacy (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2020), while effective leadership, characterised by proactive communication, empathy, and visible role-modelling, fosters safer, more collaborative environments (Montminy, 2022). Classical perspectives define leadership styles as authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire (Lewin et al., 1939), with the democratic style often aligning with members' expectations due to its participatory nature.

The Attitude–Behaviour (AB) Theory proposed by Aithal and Aithal (2019)This further emphasises that a leader's behaviour is determined by their underlying attitudes, which are influenced by feelings, emotions, belief structures, and their surrounding environment. Because attitude shapes decision-making and behavioural responses toward organisational challenges, AB Theory stresses that leadership effectiveness depends on how well internal values, such as empathy, integrity, and motivation, are translated into observable actions. This viewpoint highlights the importance of value-based leadership attitudes in shaping members' perceptions and the quality of leader-follower relationships.

However, there is often a gap between members' expectations and the actual attitudes displayed by the organisational chairperson. This can lead to dissatisfaction, decreased motivation, and even internal conflict. Such behaviours can cause stress among subordinates (Dyrbye et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to analyse more deeply the types of leadership attitudes desired by members, so that the chairperson can reflect on and improve their leadership style. This gap becomes more apparent in student organisations' platforms for leadership development, where limited research has examined which attitudes members regard as ideal and how these expectations shape organisational dynamics. Accordingly, further investigation is needed to identify members' expectations of an ideal chairperson's attitudes within student organisations.

Although previous studies have discussed the importance of leadership and its influence on organisational culture, productivity, and interpersonal relationships, most of these studies have primarily focused on the role of the leader and general leadership styles, without specifically exploring members' expectations of the ideal attitudes of a chairperson (Baquero, 2023; Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Montminy, 2022; Saputra, 2021). Furthermore, non-formal contexts such as student organisations have rarely been the main focus in leadership research, even though these settings are highly relevant as platforms for shaping leadership character among the younger generation. The gap between the chairperson's actual behavior and members' expectations has also received limited attention as a potential source of decreased motivation, internal conflict, or psychological stress within the organization. Therefore, this study offers a novel contribution by focusing on members' expectations regarding the leadership attitudes of a chairperson and by integrating the Attitude-Behaviour (AB) Theory, which emphasises the importance of alignment between internal attitudes and real actions in leadership practice. This study is expected to provide practical insights for developing a leadership style that is more reflective, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of organisational members. This study has a research question: What leadership attitudes do student organisation members expect an ideal chairperson to possess?.

2. Method

This study applies a descriptive qualitative approach (Yuliani, 2018) to explore student organisation members' expectations regarding the ideal leadership attitudes of a chairperson. Participants were active members of six student organisations within the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training at UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan during the 2025 period (see Table

1). All participants were informed of the research purpose and voluntarily took part in the study. To ensure confidentiality, participant identities were anonymised in line with ethical considerations, emphasising the protection of individuals' real-world identities (Fox et al., 2015).

Data were collected through semi-structured online interviews conducted via WhatsApp chat on 23-25 July 2025. This platform was chosen due to its accessibility and convenience, enabling flexible communication within participants' schedules. The textual format allowed participants to provide reflective responses, while the researcher asked follow-up questions when clarification or elaboration was needed, maintaining the exploratory character appropriate for qualitative inquiry (Eppich et al., 2019; Kvale, 2007). To ensure data credibility, this study employed source triangulation by: (1) comparing responses across participants within the same organisation, (2) comparing responses across different organisations, and (3) cross-checking recurring patterns during thematic interpretation (Noble & Heale, 2019). Findings that repeatedly emerged across multiple organisations were treated as more credible and representative.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006) Six steps: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining/naming themes, and reporting. The analysis revealed five key thematic categories reflecting members' expectations of an ideal chairperson: communicative, critical thinking, assertiveness, inclusiveness and responsibility, and motivating attitude. These themes offer a structured overview of the essential leadership attitudes considered important within student organisations.

Table 1. Data of participants

Name	Semester	Sex	Student association
Bella	3	Female	English Language Education
Ayla	5	Female	English Language Education
Ashen	3	Male	English Language Education
Blaze	5	Male	English Language Education
Niel	3	Male	Arabic Language Education
Zulmi	3	Male	Arabic Language Education
Fifi	3	Female	Arabic Language Education
Lyra	7	Female	Faculty Executive Board
Fay	7	Male	Faculty Student Senate
Ihwan	5	Male	Faculty Student Senate
Fita	7	Female	Faculty Student Senate
Ines	7	Female	Faculty Student Senate
Zane	5	Female	Elementary School Teacher Education
Arlo	5	Male	Elementary School Teacher Education
Thea	5	Female	Early Childhood Islamic Education
Dara	5	Female	Early Childhood Islamic Education

3. Result and Discussion

Thematic analysis revealed five key leadership attitudes expected by student organization members. Communicative ability was the most frequently mentioned ten participants, indicating that members highly value leaders who communicate clearly and openly, consistent with prior studies emphasizing communication as a central leadership attribute (Montminy, 2022). This was followed by critical thinking in nine participants, highlighting expectations for leaders capable of analyzing situations and making informed decisions, supporting findings that leaders must demonstrate sound judgment in guiding their organizations (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2020).

Assertiveness appeared in eight responses, showing that members expect leaders who can express opinions confidently and make firm, responsible decisions when needed. Inclusiveness and responsibility were noted by five participants, reflecting expectations for leaders who encourage participation, welcome diverse ideas, and remain accountable for organisational duties, aligning with literature emphasising the collaborative nature of democratic leadership (Lewin et al., 1939). Lastly, a motivating attitude was mentioned by four participants, demonstrating the expectation that leaders encourage and inspire members to achieve shared goals, a quality often associated with transformational leadership (Ali, 2012). Overall, the findings reflect a strong emphasis on communicative, analytical, and decisive attitudes, complemented by inclusive and motivational qualities. These results are aligned with the Attitude–Behaviour (AB) Theory (Aithal & Aithal, 2019), which argues that effective leadership is determined by the consistency between internal values, such as empathy, integrity, and motivation, and outward behaviours; thus, the attitudes identified here illustrate members' expectations of leaders whose inner values are reflected in real actions.
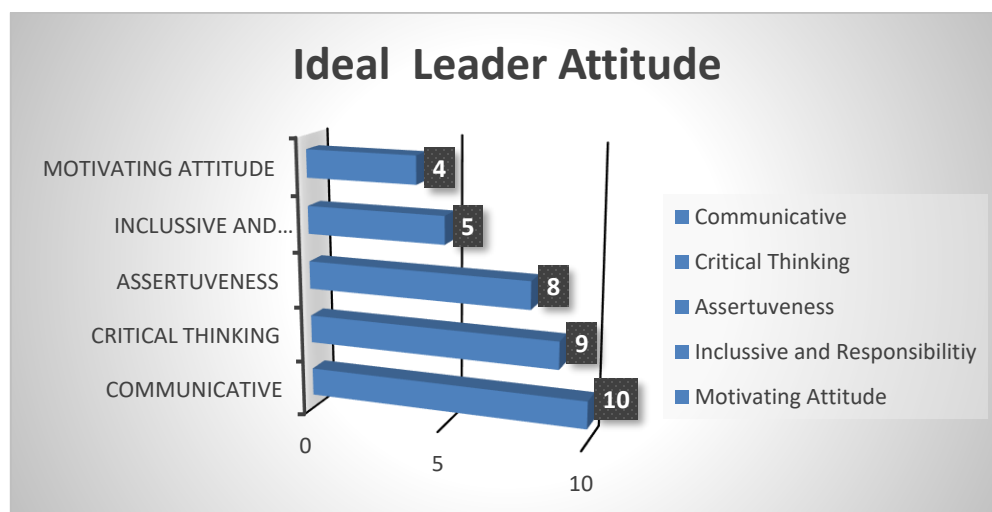

Figure 1. Leader Ideal Attitude by Participants in Percentage

3.1. Communicative

The communicative attitude is the primary ideal attitude chosen by ten out of sixteen participants, emphasizing that communication is essential for openness among members and accessibility. Communication skills can build bridges and ensure alignment with shared goals while preventing misunderstandings. This aligns with the Communication Leadership Theory, which sees a leader's communication as a force for envisioning the future, setting goals, and inspiring expectations (Rachmad, 2022). This is reflected in several participants' statements as follows:

> *"The attitude that a chairperson should have is good communication without discriminating based on gender or age, not limiting themselves from interacting with members, and being able to guide, teach, help, and motivate their members." (Bella, Interview)*

> *"For me, an ideal chairperson is someone who is firm, responsible, and willing to work directly with the members. They should be nurturing and close to the members, have good (open) communication, be fair in making decisions, possess a*

clear vision, be able to inspire members with a positive spirit, and know when to lead directly and when to entrust the team. The balance between leadership and member empowerment is essential for maintaining a healthy work rhythm in the organisation." (Fifi, Interview)

This attitude shows that members not only need a leader who can convey information but also one who is willing to listen, absorb aspirations, and create a safe and comfortable space for dialogue. The emphasis on the importance of communication can be further understood through the Attitude–Behaviour (AB) Theory developed by Aithal & Aithal (2019). The communicative attitude emerged as the most prominent expectation, mentioned by ten of sixteen participants, showing that student organisation members highly value leaders who are open, approachable, and able to build mutual understanding. Participants described communicative leaders as individuals who clearly convey information, listen attentively to members' aspirations, and foster safe spaces for discussion. This finding is consistent with the Attitude–Behaviour (AB) Theory (Aithal & Aithal, 2019), which explains that communicative behaviour reflects internal attitudes shaped by beliefs, emotions, and environmental influences; therefore, effective leader–member communication mirrors the leader's deeply rooted personal values. Previous studies also show that communication styles are strongly linked to leadership effectiveness, knowledge sharing, and positive performance outcomes (de Vries et al., 2010).

Similarly, communication-based leadership practices in higher-education contexts have been found to increase trust and strengthen organisational performance (Maheshwari et al., 2024). In addition, a communicative attitude closely aligns with the democratic leadership style proposed by Lewin et al. (1939), which emphasises participation, shared decision-making, and collaboration. These findings collectively suggest that communication is not merely a managerial tool but a behavioural expression of internal values, making it a fundamental leadership quality for maintaining group cohesion, shared purpose, and psychological comfort within student organisations. According to Widyaningrum (2021)The main goal of communication within an organisation is to create interpersonal connections and reduce uncertainty in the work environment.

3.2. Critical Thinking

Critical thinking ability is the second most frequently mentioned theme by the participants, with a total of nine respondents stating that an ideal chairperson is someone who can analyse situations deeply, consider various decision alternatives, and project their long-term impacts. The participants expressed:

"The ideal attitude a leader should have is the ability to integrate various leadership styles during their tenure. There are times when a chairperson must adopt an authoritarian approach for urgent policies that bring benefits to the members. However, when a decision concerns the interests of all members, both positively and negatively, the leader must shift toward a democratic style. In such cases, they cannot make non-urgent decisions alone, but rather involve all members in discussion. The hope is that through this collective dialogue, the decision will bring good for everyone. A good leader must also be able to guide members toward meaningful and positive change through communication among members, building chemistry among them, and so on. The leader must also remain firm yet courteous to be respected and have their policies followed." (Lyra, Interview)

This opinion reflects that critical thinking is also related to the ability to adapt leadership styles to the context of the problem, as well as to manage decision-making through dialogue and consideration of shared values and benefits. Critical thinking is a process of evaluating and reasoning through available information before reaching a decision (Ay et al., 2015). *"A leader can think about things that have not yet happened, and respond more enthusiastically to things that have already happened" (Ashen, Interview).* As Ines, *"the chairperson must be able to provide a solution among the many solutions available".* It reflects the internal attitudes of a leader, shaped by emotional experiences, beliefs, and a cognitive environment conducive to deep thinking, in line with the AB Theory (Aithal & Aithal, 2019).

From the Attitude–Behaviour (AB) Theory framework, critical thinking is an internal attitude that is shaped by emotional experiences, belief systems, and cognitive environments that encourage extensive reflection (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). From this viewpoint, critical thinking is not merely a cognitive process but a manifestation of inward values on a behavioural level that signifies how leaders respond to complex issues. Empirical evidence supports this perspective. Mumford et al. (2017) point out that leaders need to be very analytical in handling rich information, predicting future occurrences, and developing strategic solutions in organisational environments. Overall, these results suggest that critical thinking is a fundamental leadership quality enabling student organisation leaders to respond to a variety of issues, make fair-minded decisions, and foster group decision-making (Indrašienė et al., 2021).

3.3. Assertiveness

Assertiveness is another frequently mentioned quality among participants as a defining trait of an ideal leader. Eight respondents stated that a chairperson must have the courage to make decisions and uphold the organisation's authority. Assertiveness is considered important to ensure that a leader is not swayed by pressure, is not hesitant in taking action, and remains consistent in maintaining the organisation's direction.

> *"First of all, a chairperson must be assertive so that their authority is not undermined by the members. In addition to being firm, a chairperson must also possess basic leadership qualities, as these are essential for running the organisation properly." (Ayla, Interview)*

> *"The ideal attitude of a chairperson is: assertive, but still respectful of members' opinions. Able to make decisions in critical situations. Willing to listen to members' aspirations. Not authoritarian, but also not too lenient, so that the organisation remains on track."(Arlo, Interview)*

Assertiveness reflects an internal attitude that is stable, committed, and courageous in taking responsibility. An assertive leader has a strong belief in their values, making their behaviour consistent and capable of providing clear direction for the organisation. Blaze, in an interview, mentioned *"the ideal attitude that a leader should have is to be decisive, intelligent, cooperative, and prioritise the common good."* As Dara, *"the chairman is gentle, firm but soft-spoken, and always provides good solutions."* Assertiveness is an important part of a healthy democratic leadership style. The ability to lead with firmness enhances a leader's effectiveness (Kerns, 2016). While participative, a leader still needs to be assertive so that decisions are not delayed or weakened by internal dynamics. In this context, assertiveness does not mean being authoritarian, but rather having the courage to set direction without closing off participatory space. As mentioned by Ihwan

in an interview, *"ideally, be wise in making decisions and assigning tasks to members."* Thus, assertiveness becomes the bridge between principles and flexibility, and a key element in ensuring that the organisation stays on a clear path.

These findings are congruent with research showing assertiveness as a major attribute of successful and moral leadership. According to Kerns (2016)Assertiveness enables leaders to guide the company and assume responsibility without being autocratic. Wehabe et al. (2018)A study proves that high assertiveness is positively correlated with transformational leadership style and effective leadership outcomes, corroborating the claim that assertive leaders are more inspiring and proficient in decision-making. Similarly, that leader assertiveness efficacy is highly effective in promoting leaders' rational decision-making and member motivation capabilities, thereby making it a key indicator of developmental leadership competence (Bergman et al., 2021). Theoretically, such a finding confirms the idea of reflective leadership that binds assertiveness and empathy with each other. Practically, these findings highlight the need for leadership training that develops assertiveness as a communication and moral ability.

3.4. Inclusiveness and Responsibility

The attitude of inclusiveness and responsibility was expressed by five participants as part of the ideal character of a chairperson. They believe that a leader should be able to foster closeness, remove barriers between themselves and members, and be present in a collective and inclusive atmosphere. Such a leader does not keep a distance, but rather becomes emotionally and relationally involved with their members.

> *"In my opinion, the most important ideal attitude of a chairperson is making wise and quick decisions, but it must also be accompanied by the attitude of being a role model/uswah khasanah."(Niel, Interview)*

> *"The ideal attitude should be firm and open so that decisions can be made when needed, but also still able to listen to input from members. In addition, the chairperson must also be fair, inclusive, and maintain good communication with members."(Thea, Interview)*

These statements show that a good leader is someone who is fully present not only in decision-making, but also as a role model, in maintaining communication, and in shouldering responsibility. Responsible leadership and stakeholder-based leadership are closely related, with responsible leadership offering a strong perspective in bridging leadership concepts with stakeholder theory (Frangieh et al., 2017). Fay, in an interview, mentioned *"authoritative and responsible, and most importantly, able to embrace its members".* As Zulmi, *"the chairman is the one who compromises and prioritises the welfare of his members over his own interests."* Such a leader does not position themselves above the members but sees themselves as part of the team, not just a top-down director. This attitude stems from the internal belief that leadership is a form of social responsibility. Leaders who regularly interact with empathy and care are more likely to build open relationships and be ready to bear the burdens of the organisation.

The findings of this study are in line with recent research confirming that inclusive and responsible leadership plays an important role in building trust and member engagement. Leaders' orientation towards responsibility and sustainability improves organisational performance and stakeholder well-being (Wang et al., 2017). Participatory leadership creates an ethical climate that encourages responsible innovation (Lythreatis et al., 2022). Merlini et al. (2025) prove that

inclusive leadership behaviour strengthens a sense of togetherness and appreciation for the uniqueness of members. Theoretically, this study expands the concept of leadership by combining ethical, participatory, and inclusive dimensions. Practically, these results emphasise the need for leadership training that fosters empathy, fairness, and social responsibility. Responsible leaders face a variety of stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and cultures, within an interconnected and complex business environment, often resulting in communication challenges that are not simple (Szczepańska-Woszczyna et al., 2015). This sense of closeness and responsibility forms the foundation for creating a healthy, supportive, and progress-oriented organisational climate.

3.5. Motivating Attitude

The motivating attitude was expressed by four participants as an important part of the ideal character of a chairperson. They believe that a good leader is not only someone who can give instructions, but also someone who can inspire enthusiasm, raise motivation, and encourage members to grow collectively. This kind of leader is not distant, but present and actively drives change from within.

> *"In my opinion, the ideal attitude of a chairperson is being able to remain firm while still communicative. They should be a good listener, able to make wise decisions, and capable of nurturing all members. Additionally, an ideal leader should be able to balance professionalism and empathy in managing the organisation." (Fita, Interview)*

These results support the perspective that motivational dispositions are pivotal to empowering-oriented effective leadership. Such leaders share the ability to create enthusiasm and unleash members' potential, exemplifying empathy, harmony, and excellent communication skills. Theorises that empowering leadership affects intrinsic motivation in a positive manner by psychological empowerment, since leadership direction, support, and autonomy are capable of strengthening members' sense of meaning, competence, and confidence (Syahrul, 2020). In line with this, Saputra (2021) explains that work motivation built through empathy and shared purposes fosters organisational commitment as well as group performance. Theoretically, these findings extend motivational leadership theory as it establishes a link with psychological empowerment theory. Practically, these findings indicate that there is a need to develop leadership aimed at inspiring capability, providing emotional support, and giving members autonomy to grow together with the firm.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the ideal leadership attitudes expected by members of student organisations are characterised by interpersonal sensitivity, value-based decision-making, and the ability to foster collective growth. The five key attitudes—communicativeness, critical thinking, assertiveness, inclusiveness and responsibility, and motivational ability—highlight that effective leadership extends beyond managerial tasks toward emotional intelligence and ethical engagement. Leaders who embody these attitudes are perceived as capable of guiding, inspiring, and connecting with members to build an empowering organisational climate.

The findings also emphasise that leadership effectiveness depends on the alignment between inner values and outward behaviour. A chairperson's empathy, integrity, and motivation shape how they communicate, make decisions, and respond to challenges. This reflection-based leadership approach supports a more democratic and participatory organisational culture, where collaboration and mutual respect become the foundation of collective success.

This study is limited in several aspects. First, it was conducted within a single faculty and a relatively small number of student organisations, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader institutional or cultural contexts. Second, the data were collected through online text-based interviews, which, while effective for accessibility, may have limited the depth of emotional expression compared to face-to-face interactions. Third, the research focuses on perceived attitudes rather than actual behavioural observation; future studies could employ mixed methods or longitudinal designs to explore how these leadership attitudes are enacted in practice. Expanding participant diversity and including comparative contexts could also enhance the robustness and transferability of future findings.

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