



# Examining Private Universities' Blue Ocean Leadership

Edi Sumarya <sup>1)</sup>; Brigida Endah Nuraeni <sup>2)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> *Universitas Riau Kepulauan, Batam, Indonesia*

<sup>2)</sup> *STIE Bentara Persada Batam, Indonesia*

Email: <sup>1)</sup> [edisumarya38@gmail.com](mailto:edisumarya38@gmail.com) ; <sup>2)</sup> [nuraeni.endah@yahoo.com](mailto:nuraeni.endah@yahoo.com)

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## ABSTRACT

Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL) is a strategic leadership approach that focuses on creating new market space, redefining the boundaries of competition, and optimizing resources to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Although it has been widely applied in the business sector, empirical studies on BOL in the context of higher education, especially in Indonesian Private Universities (PTS), are still limited. This research aims to explore the implementation of BOL in XYZ University Batam, a large private university that is facing intense competitive pressures and demands for organizational transformation. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research relies on in-depth interviews with university leaders, lecturers, and education staff, as well as a review of the institution's strategic documents. The findings show that the implementation of BOL contributes to driving organizational innovation, improving the efficiency of internal processes, and generating a distinctive value proposition that differentiates the university from its competitors. However, there are a number of challenges in implementation, including organizational cultural resistance, limited resource capacity, and low technical understanding of the operational principles of BOL. This research makes a theoretical contribution to the strengthening of strategic leadership studies in the higher education sector and provides practical recommendations for PTS in adopting more responsive, adaptive and innovative leadership strategies to strengthen the institution's competitive position amid increasingly complex global dynamics.

## INTRODUCTION

Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL) is a strategic approach that focuses on creating untapped market spaces beyond the reach of competitors and optimizing resource utilization through leadership innovation. This approach guides organizations to move away from the overcrowded competitive landscape (red ocean) and enter a more open, less contested market space (blue ocean). In an increasingly dynamic global competition, Private Universities (Perguruan Tinggi Swasta - PTS) in Indonesia are required to continuously enhance their competitiveness and align

their academic programs with market needs. One strategic alternative that can be adopted is the Blue Ocean Leadership approach. Although the BOL concept has been widely applied in the business world, its implementation in the higher education sector especially within Indonesian private universities remains underexplored.

A study conducted by (Angkarini & Hidayat, 2024) found that this approach helps private universities design new academic programs that break away from conventional competitive patterns. (A. Dawoud, 2023) examined the implementation of BOL at Jadara University in Jordan and found that it led to improved institutional service quality. Similarly, research by (Abdulraquib, 2025) revealed that universities in Saudi Arabia have begun to adopt BOL principles to create competitive advantages. Furthermore, (Tilfarligil & Paksoy, 2023) showed that demographic factors also influence the orientation of academic staff toward the adoption of BOL. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of specific studies addressing the implementation of BOL strategies in Indonesian private universities, particularly in Batam a growing industrial area that is also emerging as a hub for higher education. Universitas XYZ, as one of the prominent private institutions in Batam, faces challenges in enhancing its competitive advantage and maintaining the relevance of its educational programs. (Ravindran, 2023), in a study on Malaysian private universities, asserted that the strategic implementation of BOL could improve the quality of education and institutional competitiveness.

In addition, (Hamad & Hussain, 2025) emphasized that innovative leadership is a key determinant in the successful implementation of BOL strategies in higher education settings. Considering this context, this study aims to explore in depth the application of Blue Ocean Leadership at Universitas XYZ, Batam. Using a qualitative approach, the study seeks to uncover how BOL principles can be adapted and operationalized to drive institutional innovation and strengthen the competitive position of private universities. It is expected that the findings of this research will contribute theoretically to the development of strategic leadership literature, while also offering practical insights for higher education institutions seeking to adopt more innovative and responsive leadership models in the face of change.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL) is a strategic leadership framework introduced by (Kim & Mauborgne, 2014). BOL emphasizes the creation of uncontested market space, value innovation, and a shift in focus from intense competition (red ocean) toward untapped growth opportunities (blue ocean). In the organizational context, this approach aims to activate the potential of employees at all levels to drive comprehensive performance transformation, rather than relying solely on hierarchical authority.

Although originally developed in a business context, BOL has begun to be adapted in the higher education sector (Koca & Sağsan, n.d.), 2020; (Asbari & Novitasari, 2024). In the environment of Private Higher Education Institutions (PTS) which often face limited resources and high competitive pressure BOL is seen as a potential approach to enhance service differentiation, develop flagship programs, and create governance systems that are more adaptive to external environmental changes (Raharjo & Jati, 2021).

Effective implementation of BOL is closely associated with transformational leadership styles, characterized by innovative vision, strong communication skills, and the empowerment of human resources (A. Sari & Pertiwi, 2022)(Dewi & Prasetyo, 2023). Leaders who are able to build trust and foster a collaborative work environment are more likely to succeed in applying BOL principles (Ismail et al., 2023). In addition, an organizational culture that embraces innovation is a critical success factor, as innovative strategies like BOL often face resistance and stagnation without the support of a conducive culture (Nasrullah, 2020).

Several key challenges in implementing BOL in the PTS environment include budget constraints, low innovation literacy among management and faculty, and resistance to

operational and structural change (Koca & Sağsan, n.d.), 2020; (Susanti & Fadli, 2021). Moreover, demographic factors and institutional characteristics also influence academic staff's orientation toward new leadership approaches such as BOL (Tilfarligil & Paksoy, 2023).

While international literature has highlighted the various benefits of BOL in the higher education sector (T. N. T. Dawoud, 2023); (Abdulraqib, 2024), contextual research in Indonesia particularly within private universities located in industrial areas such as Batam remains very limited. Most studies have focused on general applications or in foreign settings, without accounting for specific factors such as local regulations, challenges in the education industry, and Indonesia's socio-cultural context. This creates a knowledge gap regarding how BOL principles can be effectively adapted in the institutional context of Indonesian private universities.

Based on the discussion above, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the implementation of BOL in one of the leading private universities in Batam City. This research will thoroughly analyze how BOL values and principles can drive institutional innovation and strengthen the university's competitive edge. Thus, this study not only contributes theoretically to the development of strategic leadership scholarship but also offers practical guidance for PTS leaders in designing innovative, adaptive, and sustainable strategies.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL) at XYZ University, Batam. The qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to capture the meanings, perspectives, and subjective experiences of informants related to the dynamics of strategic leadership within the educational organizational context (Creswell & Poth, 2018); (Yin, 2018).

### **Research Setting**

The study was conducted at XYZ University, Batam, which was purposively selected as it is one of the leading private universities in the Riau Islands Province currently facing challenges related to competitiveness and organizational innovation demands..

### **Data Sources and Informants**

Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, including university leaders (rector, vice rectors, deans), senior lecturers, and administrative staff directly involved in strategic decision-making. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the criterion of having a minimum of three years of involvement and experience within the university's management structure (Patton, 2015).

### **Collection Techniques**

Data were collected using three main methods:

1. In-depth interviews, to explore perceptions, understanding, and the practical implementation of BOL at the university level.
2. Document analysis, including the university's strategic plans, annual performance reports, and internal policy documents.
3. Passive observation of organizational activities to understand the context of leadership implementation in the field.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach based on the model developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which consists of six phases: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) theme identification, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition, and (6)

reporting the findings. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking with the informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## RESULTS

This study identified five key themes related to the implementation of Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL) in Private Universities (Perguruan Tinggi Swasta/PTS) in Batam City. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and participant observation involving seven structural and functional informants over a period of four months. Thematic analysis was conducted using Braun & Clarke's approach, with validity reinforced through triangulation and member checking. The main findings are as follows:

**Strategic Vision:** The PTS's strategic direction is aimed at creating differential advantages through the BOL approach. This is reflected in the university's Master Development Plan (RENIP), which emphasizes the establishment of unique study programs, international collaboration, and the strengthening of applied research. The curriculum has also been adjusted to align with the needs of both local and global industries.

1. **Institutional Governance and Operations:** The governance and operational systems have been reoriented toward greater efficiency and innovation. Key strategies include service digitalization, merit-based performance evaluation, and the decentralization of authority to build an adaptive organizational structure.
2. **Faculty-Level Implementation:** At the faculty and academic levels, BOL is implemented through academic differentiation, enhanced course relevance, and strengthened faculty research. Lecturers are encouraged to move beyond their comfort zones through project-based learning methods and cross-sector collaboration.
3. **Operational Challenges:** Practical challenges arise from gaps in the understanding of the BOL concept at the implementation level. Communication barriers between units and resistance to change hinder effective implementation, highlighting the urgent need for intensive training and reinforcement of a proactive work culture.
4. **Leadership-Support Synergy:** Synergy between leaders and implementers still needs to be strengthened. While top-level commitment to BOL is relatively strong, the internalization of values and capacity-building efforts have yet to be evenly distributed. Member checking confirmed that all informants agreed with the researcher's interpretation of the findings.

**Table 1. Informant Profile**

No	Informant Code	Position	Years of Service	Role in the Research
1	I1	Rector	10 years	Provides strategic insights on the university's vision and policy direction
2	I2	Vice Rector I (Academic)	8 years	Provides information on academic policies and innovations in the learning process
3	I3	Vice Rector II (General Affairs)	7 years	Describes general and operational policies of the university
4	I4	Dean of the Faculty of Economics	6 years	Provides the faculty's perspective on BOL implementation
5	I5	Head of Administrative Bureau	5 years	Provides administrative data and internal policies related to BOL
6	I6	Senior Lecturer	12 years	Shares insights on teaching and research in the context of BOL

7	I7	Administrative Staff	4 years	Provides information on the implementation of policies at the operational level
1	I1	Rector	10 years	Provides strategic insights on the university's vision and policy direction

The informant profile presented in Table 1 outlines the backgrounds and roles of the individuals who participated in this research. These informants were carefully selected based on their positions, years of service, and relevance to the research topic, particularly in relation to the implementation of Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL) in the university setting.

**Table 2. Data Collection**

No	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Instrument	Time Period	Purpose
1	I1	Rector	10 years	Provides strategic insights on the university's vision and policy direction	1
2	I2	Vice Rector I (Academic)	8 years	Provides information on academic policies and innovations in the learning process	2
3	I3	Vice Rector II (General Affairs)	7 years	Describes general and operational policies of the university	3
4	I4	Dean of the Faculty of Economics	6 years	Provides the faculty's perspective on BOL implementation	4

Table 2 presents the methods and sources used for data collection in this study. Four key informants were selected based on their strategic roles within the university and their years of service, which provide valuable insights relevant to the research focus.

**Table 3. Data Analysis Technique**

Step	Phase	Key Activities	Purpose
1	Data Familiarization	Transcribing interviews, reading field notes and documents repeatedly	To become immersed in the data and identify preliminary patterns
2	Generating Initial Codes	Systematically coding interesting features across the data set	To organize data into meaningful groups
3	Searching for Themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering relevant data for each theme	To identify broader patterns and relationships between codes
4	Reviewing Themes	Checking if themes work in relation to coded extracts and the entire dataset	To ensure coherence and internal consistency of themes
5	Defining and Naming Themes	Refining specifics of each theme and generating clear definitions and names	To clearly articulate the scope and meaning of each theme
6	Producing the Report	Final analysis, selection of vivid extracts, linking findings to research questions	

Table 3 outlines the six-step process used in the data analysis technique. Each step represents a critical phase in systematically organizing and interpreting qualitative data.

**Tabel 4. Trustworthiness Strategy**

No	Technique	Application
1	Source Triangulation	Comparing data from interviews, documents, and observations
2	Method Triangulation	Using multiple methods (interview, document review, observation) for validation
3	Member Checking	Confirming data interpretations with informants
4	Criteria of Rigor	Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Table 4 outlines the trustworthiness strategies used in this study. Source Triangulation was applied by comparing data from interviews, documents, and observations. Method Triangulation involved using multiple methods to validate the data. Member Checking was conducted by confirming interpretations with the informants. Lastly, the study followed the Criteria of Rigor Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL) in Private Universities (PTS) in Batam City has progressed gradually and in layers, reflecting the dynamic interplay between the strategic vision of leadership and the operational conditions at the implementation level. In general, the discussion links the field findings with BOL theory, strategic management concepts, and transformative leadership practices in higher education institutions.

### Strategic Vision and Top Leadership

Findings from Informant I1 (Rector): "We are trying to integrate an internationalization vision with local needs" this highlights the crucial role of top leadership in creating new markets and competitive advantages through strategic differentiation, as outlined in the BOL concept by (Kim & Mauborgne, 2014) Kim & Mauborgne (2014). The institution's vision is directed toward value innovation through the development of flagship programs, applied research, and external collaboration. This aligns with a top-down leadership approach in the context of educational organizational transformation.

#### 1. Academic Innovation as a Pillar of Differentiation.

Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL) promotes transformation in higher education environments through instructional and academic service innovations that go beyond conventional approaches. Findings from Informants I2 and I4 emphasize the importance of curriculum development, technological integration, and interdisciplinary collaboration as differentiation strategies. This innovation not only targets products or services but also involves internal process changes and institutional culture shifts. These findings align with (Goglio & Regini, 2017), who stress the importance of differentiation within the internal structure and functions of universities, and (Rymarzak et al., 2023), who point out that campus social and cultural elements play a critical role in institutional transformation.

#### 2. Efficiency and Reorientation of Operational Governance.

Findings from Informants I3 and I5 show that implementing BOL in PTS requires structural reform through administrative digitalization and authority distribution. This transformation

aligns with (S. M. Sari, 2024), who emphasizes digitalization as key to improving bureaucratic effectiveness, and with (Afdila & Adnan, 2023), who consider digitalization as the core of modern bureaucratic reform. This strategy enhances the application of the eliminate-reduce-raise-create principles in BOL in a more efficient and adaptive manner.

### 3. The Role of Lecturers as Innovation Agents.

Findings from Informant I6 highlight that lecturers play a key role in bridging the institution's strategic vision with actual implementation on the ground. This aligns with (Fajariana, 2019), who argues that lecturers are not only educators but also value and character builders, especially in the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. This role requires lecturers to continually innovate, enhance their competencies, and become key actors in fostering an adaptive and collaborative academic culture.

### 4. Implementation Challenges and Organizational Readiness.

Although the BOL strategy has been well-designed, findings from Informant I7 indicate that gaps in understanding and resistance to change remain as major challenges. This supports the notion that strategic changes must be accompanied by effective change management, including training, strategic communication, and the internalization of a new work culture (Mews & Gonzalez, 2024).

### 5. Trustworthiness and Validity of Findings.

The triangulation of sources and methods demonstrates a high level of credibility in the study's results. Validation through member checking indicates that the researcher's interpretation of the data aligns with the experiences and perspectives of the informants. Moreover, applying the criteria by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) Lincoln & Guba (1985) ensures that the findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

### 6. Theoretical Synthesis.

This study supports and extends the theory of Blue Ocean Leadership within the context of higher education institutions, particularly in developing regions such as Batam City. Differentiation strategies driven by an innovative vision and structural transformation can serve as viable alternatives for private universities (PTS) in addressing competition and resource limitations. The findings also imply the need for leadership that is collaborative, adaptive, and values-based in order to foster sustainable change.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL) in private universities in Batam City can drive institutional transformation through the synergy between strategic leadership vision and operational adaptation. The vision of top leadership plays a crucial role in creating strategic differentiation through program innovation, research, and external collaboration. Academic innovation, governance efficiency, and the active role of faculty members as change agents are key factors in generating new value. However, challenges such as resistance to change and internal gaps in understanding require a more systemic and inclusive change management approach.

These findings not only reinforce the BOL theory within the context of higher education but also provide practical contributions to the development of adaptive leadership strategies in resource-constrained regions. Furthermore, this study broadens the applicability of BOL theory to the non-commercial higher education sector in developing countries. The validity of the results has been confirmed through triangulation and member checking, making the findings credible and applicable for institutional policy formulation.

## LIMITATION

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted using a qualitative case study approach at a single private university (PTS) in Batam. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to other higher education institutions with different contexts, particularly those outside industrial areas or with different organizational cultures.

Second, the selection of informants was carried out purposively, which, although it ensures relevance and depth of information, may lead to subjective biases. Some key perspectives, especially from lower-level staff or external stakeholders, may not have been fully represented in the data collection process.

Third, the study focused solely on the internal implementation of Blue Ocean Leadership (BOL), without including comparative analysis with other leadership models or institutions that have not adopted BOL. This limits the ability to assess the relative advantages or effectiveness of BOL as a leadership strategy in higher education.

Fourth, the observation period and data collection were limited to four months, which may not fully capture long-term organizational dynamics or structural changes that occur gradually. Therefore, some aspects of BOL implementation may not have been thoroughly observed or may still be in the early stages.

Finally, although triangulation and member checking were used to ensure data validity, qualitative research inherently involves interpretive analysis, which is influenced by the researcher's subjectivity. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution and used primarily as an exploratory insight rather than as definitive conclusions..

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