

Book Review



The Missing Ingredient in the Energy Transition: Leadership Beyond Technology

A Review of *Harmoni: Kepemimpinan dalam Transformasi Sektor Energi* by Luky A. Yusciantoro

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Introduction: Why Leadership Matters in the Energy Transition

The energy transition is usually told as a story of technology. Solar panels become cheaper, batteries more powerful, artificial intelligence smarter, and hydrogen more promising. Governments debate carbon pricing, industries compete for critical minerals, and investors search for the next breakthrough that could redefine the global energy landscape. Yet beneath these technological and economic transformations lies a less visible—but equally decisive—factor: leadership.



Energy systems are among the most complex institutions modern societies have created. They connect engineering with economics, geopolitics with environmental stewardship, and national security with social welfare. Every significant policy decision involves difficult trade-offs. Expanding renewable energy may accelerate decarbonization while raising concerns about affordability and grid stability. Developing domestic fossil fuel resources may strengthen energy security but complicate climate commitments. No technology, however sophisticated, can resolve these competing priorities on its own. Their reconciliation depends on institutions—and on the quality of the people who lead them.

Despite the growing literature on energy transition, surprisingly little attention has been paid to leadership itself. Much of the discussion has centred on technology, markets, finance, or public policy, while the human and institutional capacities required to steer complex change have received far less scrutiny. Yet history suggests that transformative technologies rarely succeed through innovation alone. They succeed because leaders can build trust, align competing interests, sustain institutional learning, and maintain strategic direction amid uncertainty.

It is precisely this overlooked dimension that Luky A. Yusciantoro explores in *Harmoni: Kepemimpinan dalam Transformasi Sektor Energi*. Rather than offering another analysis of Indonesia's energy policies or technological



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options, the book asks a more fundamental question: what kind of leadership is required to guide the energy sector through one of the most profound transformations of the twenty-first century?

Yusgiantoro's answer is encapsulated in a single word: *harmoni* (harmony). Harmony, as he conceives it, is neither the absence of conflict nor the pursuit of consensus at all costs. It is the capacity to reconcile competing interests while preserving institutional integrity, public trust, and long-term strategic purpose. In a world shaped by climate change, geopolitical rivalry, technological disruption, and growing demands for sustainability, this conception of leadership is both timely and thought-provoking.

This review argues that *Harmoni* is more than a leadership manual for Indonesia's energy sector. It offers a broader reflection on how complex institutions can navigate uncertainty without losing coherence or public legitimacy. While the book is firmly rooted in Indonesia's experience, its central insight—that enduring transformation depends as much on leadership as on technology—speaks to challenges faced by governments, businesses, and societies around the world.

Leadership as the Missing Dimension

Books on the energy transition tend to follow familiar paths. Some focus on technology, examining advances in renewable energy, batteries, hydrogen, or carbon capture. Others emphasize economics, exploring markets, investment, and industrial competitiveness. A third group concentrates on geopolitics, where energy is viewed through the lenses of security, diplomacy, and strategic rivalry. Leadership, by contrast, rarely takes centre stage.

This relative neglect is surprising. The transition to a low-carbon energy system is not simply a technological shift; it is an institutional transformation. New technologies may provide the tools for change, but people and organizations determine whether those tools are adopted effectively, integrated into public policy, and accepted by society. Successful transitions therefore depend as much on leadership as on engineering.

It is this overlooked dimension that gives *Harmoni* its originality. Luky A. Yusgiantoro does not attempt to write another textbook on energy policy or management. Instead, he asks how leaders can navigate an environment where technological innovation, political expectations, environmental responsibility, and economic development increasingly intersect. His central argument is that the defining challenge of leadership today is not maximizing a single objective but balancing several legitimate ones simultaneously.

The argument carries particular weight because it reflects the perspective of a practitioner-scholar. Yusgiantoro combines academic training with extensive experience in Indonesia's energy sector, allowing him to move comfortably between conceptual reflection and practical observation. Throughout the book, leadership is presented not as an abstract theory but as something shaped by everyday decisions, institutional constraints, and the realities of governing large and complex organizations.

This practical grounding distinguishes *Harmoni* from much of the leadership literature, which often celebrates charismatic individuals or universal management formulas. Yusgiantoro adopts a quieter and, in many ways, more durable view of leadership. Effective leaders are not heroic figures who eliminate uncertainty. They are institution-builders who create the conditions under which diverse actors can work together despite uncertainty.

That perspective is especially relevant to the energy sector. Unlike many industries, energy operates across exceptionally long-time horizons. Decisions made today—whether to develop a gas field, construct a transmission network, or invest in renewable generation—will shape economies and societies for decades. Leadership, therefore, cannot be judged only by short-term results. It must also be measured by the resilience of the institutions left behind.

Read in this light, *Harmoni* is not simply a book about managing the energy sector. It is a reflection on governing complexity itself. Its audience extends well beyond engineers and policymakers to anyone interested in how institutions can remain effective in a world of accelerating technological change and growing political uncertainty.

Harmony Is Not Consensus

The most original contribution of *Harmoni* lies in its reinterpretation of a familiar word. In everyday usage, harmony often implies agreement, tranquillity, or the absence of conflict. Yusgiantoro gives the term a more demanding meaning. Harmony, in his account, is not about eliminating differences but about managing them. It is the capacity to hold together competing objectives without allowing any single one to overwhelm the others.

This distinction matters because the energy transition is defined by competing priorities rather than straightforward solutions. Governments seek cleaner energy while keeping electricity affordable. Industries demand reliable supplies even as they face pressure to reduce emissions. Communities expect economic opportunities but also environmental protection. Investors require regulatory certainty, whereas policymakers must remain flexible in responding to technological change and geopolitical shocks. None of these objectives is inherently incompatible, yet none can be fully maximized at the same time.

Yusgiantoro argues that leadership begins where these tensions meet. The task of a leader is not to search for perfect solutions but to make balanced judgments under conditions of uncertainty. Harmony therefore becomes less a destination than a continuous process of adjustment. It is an exercise in maintaining equilibrium within a system that is constantly evolving.

This perspective resonates with the growing recognition that energy systems are complex adaptive systems rather than machines that can be optimized through technical calculation alone. Infrastructure, markets, regulations, technologies, and public expectations evolve together, often in unpredictable ways. A policy intended to accelerate renewable energy deployment may affect electricity prices; measures designed to improve energy security may influence investment decisions or diplomatic relations. Cause and effect are rarely linear. Leadership in such circumstances requires an ability to understand relationships rather than isolated problems.

One of the book's most valuable insights is that trust forms part of the energy system itself. Discussions of energy transition typically focus on physical infrastructure—power plants, transmission networks, pipelines, storage facilities, and digital technologies. Yet these assets function effectively only when supported by institutions that enjoy public confidence. Without trust between governments, regulators, investors, businesses, and communities, technically sound projects can stall for years. Delays in permitting, public resistance to infrastructure, and uncertainty over policy direction often reflect failures of governance rather than failures of engineering.

For this reason, *Harmoni* broadens the meaning of energy leadership. Success is measured not only by the number of projects completed or the speed of policy implementation, but also by the ability to preserve institutional legitimacy while pursuing long-term transformation. This is a demanding standard, requiring leaders to communicate clearly, reconcile competing interests, and maintain credibility even when every available option involves difficult trade-offs.

The book is equally persuasive in challenging the popular image of leadership as the domain of exceptional individuals. Contemporary management literature often celebrates charismatic personalities capable of delivering rapid change. Yusgiantoro offers a quieter philosophy. Leadership is less about commanding institutions than about enabling them to function well over time. The most successful leaders are those who leave behind organizations that continue to learn, adapt, and perform after they themselves have departed.

Seen from this perspective, harmony is not a soft concept at all. It is a framework for governing complexity. In an era marked by climate uncertainty, technological disruption, and geopolitical fragmentation, it offers a reminder that sustainable progress depends not only on innovation, but also on institutions capable of balancing competing interests without losing strategic direction.

Beyond Engineering: Leadership in a Changing Energy World

One of the book's greatest strengths is its insistence that technical expertise, while indispensable, is no longer sufficient for leading the energy sector. For much of the twentieth century, energy leadership was closely associated with engineering excellence. Building power plants, expanding transmission networks, developing oil and gas fields, and improving operational efficiency were primarily technical challenges. Today's energy transition presents a different



landscape. The questions confronting leaders are no longer simply *Can this be built?* but *Should it be built, under what conditions, and with whose support?*

The shift reflects the changing nature of energy itself. Energy systems now sit at the intersection of climate policy, industrial strategy, international trade, technological innovation, and national security. Decisions about electricity generation influence economic competitiveness; investments in critical minerals affect geopolitics; renewable energy projects reshape local communities and landscapes. Leadership has therefore become an exercise in navigating interconnected systems rather than managing isolated projects.

In this respect, *Harmoni* complements rather than competes with Daniel Yergin's *The New Map*. Yergin masterfully explains how technological innovation, geopolitical rivalry, and the global pursuit of decarbonization are redrawing the world's energy map. Yusgiantoro begins where that analysis ends. His concern is not primarily how the external environment is changing, but how institutions and their leaders should respond to those changes. If Yergin describes the forces reshaping the energy world, Yusgiantoro asks what qualities leaders need to navigate it.

The answer is neither greater technical specialization nor stronger hierarchical control. Instead, the book argues for broader institutional capabilities: the ability to learn continuously, communicate across disciplines, and build cooperation among actors whose interests only partially overlap. Energy governance increasingly requires ministries to coordinate with regulators, state-owned enterprises with private investors, scientists with local communities, and national governments with international partners. Technical expertise remains essential, but it must be complemented by political judgement, institutional sensitivity, and strategic communication.

This broader conception of leadership is particularly relevant for Indonesia. The country's energy transition must reconcile ambitious economic growth with climate commitments, expand electricity access across a vast archipelago, develop downstream industries while remaining globally competitive, and strengthen energy security in an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment. None of these objectives can be pursued independently. Progress in one area inevitably affects another. Leadership therefore becomes less about choosing between competing priorities than about finding durable ways to balance them.

One of the most compelling features of *Harmoni* is that it never portrays complexity as an excuse for indecision. On the contrary, the book suggests that complexity demands better leadership rather than simpler solutions. Leaders cannot eliminate uncertainty, but they can create institutions capable of responding to it with consistency, transparency, and adaptability. In this sense, the book offers a quiet yet persuasive rebuttal to the enduring belief that energy transitions are driven primarily by technology. Technologies may alter the possibilities available to society, but it is leadership that determines how—and whether—those possibilities are transformed into lasting public value.

Institutions Matter More Than Heroes

Perhaps the book's most enduring contribution is its shift in focus from individual leaders to the institutions they leave behind. Leadership literature often celebrates visionaries whose personal qualities transform organizations. *Harmoni* adopts a more measured perspective. It suggests that the ultimate test of leadership is not what a leader accomplishes during a particular term of office, but whether the organization continues to learn, adapt, and perform after that leader has gone.

This is an especially important insight for the energy sector. Power plants, transmission networks, gas infrastructure, and renewable energy projects are designed to operate for decades, often outlasting the governments and executives who initiated them. Long-term success therefore depends less on charismatic leadership than on institutions capable of preserving strategic direction while adapting to changing technologies, markets, and public expectations.

In this sense, the book advances a philosophy of stewardship rather than heroism. Leaders are portrayed not as problem-solvers with all the answers, but as architects of institutions that encourage collaboration, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous learning. Such institutions are inherently more resilient because they are designed to withstand political transitions, technological disruption, and external shocks. This emphasis on institutional

resilience may ultimately prove to be the book's most valuable lesson—not only for the energy sector but also for public governance more broadly.

A Few Reservations

No ambitious book can cover every dimension of leadership, and *Harmoni* is no exception. Its principal strength lies in presenting a coherent and accessible philosophy of leadership rather than an exhaustive analytical framework. Readers seeking detailed guidance on measuring or evaluating "harmony" within organizations may therefore wish for a more operational discussion. Developing practical indicators of institutional trust, collaboration, or organizational learning would make the concept even more useful for practitioners.

The book could also engage more directly with several emerging challenges. The digitalization of energy systems—including artificial intelligence, smart grids, cybersecurity, and advanced data analytics—is reshaping not only technology but also organizational leadership. Likewise, the political economy of energy transition deserves greater attention. Leadership often involves negotiating competing interests, managing resistance to reform, and balancing short-term political pressures against long-term strategic goals. These issues do not diminish the book's contribution, but they offer promising directions for future editions or complementary research.

Conclusion

The global energy transition is frequently described through the language of technology, finance, and climate policy. Yet *Harmoni* reminds us that these transformations ultimately succeed or fail through institutions and the people who lead them. Technologies create opportunities, but leadership determines whether those opportunities become durable public achievements.

Luky A. Yusciantoro's greatest contribution is not the introduction of a new management technique or a novel theory of governance. It is the simple but profound proposition that harmony—the continuous balancing of competing interests while preserving institutional integrity—should stand at the centre of leadership in complex systems. In doing so, the book shifts the conversation from technological optimism to institutional capability, from heroic personalities to resilient organizations, and from short-term decisions to long-term stewardship.

That message extends well beyond Indonesia's energy sector. Around the world, governments are grappling with the intertwined challenges of decarbonization, energy security, industrial transformation, and geopolitical uncertainty. These are not problems that technology alone can solve. They require leaders who can build trust, reconcile competing priorities, and sustain institutions through periods of profound change.

History often remembers great energy transitions by the technologies they produced—the steam engine, electricity, nuclear power, or renewable energy. Yet those technologies became transformative only because institutions were able to harness them effectively. *Harmoni* is a timely reminder that the next chapter of the global energy transition will be written not only by engineers and innovators, but also by leaders capable of guiding societies through complexity with wisdom, balance, and purpose. For that reason, this thoughtful and engaging book deserves to be read by policymakers, business leaders, scholars, and anyone interested in how the energy transition will ultimately be governed.