

## The Performance and Soft Skills: Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

*The challenge of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Indonesia plays a crucial role and requires enhancement. The pivotal role of HEIs in Indonesia is multifaceted. These institutions play a crucial part in shaping the country's cultural and religious identity, while also providing education that aligns with contemporary demands. This study explored the performance and soft skills among lecturers and administration staff in Islamic HEIs. The study emphasizes performance and soft skills based on managerial effectiveness in Islamic HEIs in Indonesia. The performance and soft skills explored from critical analyses of global literature. The study was conducted in Lombok, Indonesia, among 3 Islamic HEIs. Methods used were literature review, observation, and in-depth interviews. The software used was NVIVO 14 with the relative thematic analysis of the study. Findings on the HEIs model soft skills proposed to address enhancing administration staff performance and lecturer performance. By nurturing these soft skills, organizations thrive when they cultivate alignment, creativity, adaptability, and effective management and avoid mushroom management. Mushroom management in the context of organizational management and leadership styles represents a management style that is characterized by secrecy, lack of transparency, and limited employee involvement in decision-making processes. The results proposed the model to address enhancing administration staff performance through alignment value, change management, and Islamic leadership. The model addresses enhancing lecturer performance through alignment value, change management, Islamic leadership, and divergent thinking. By nurturing these soft skills, organizations thrive when they cultivate alignment, creativity, adaptability, and effective performance management. Administration staff performance impacts the lecturer's performance besides the lecturer's performance itself. Research suggests that organizations can benefit greatly from nurturing soft skills and adopting more transparent and inclusive leadership practices to avoid mushroom management. The practical implication of this research proposed model for enhancing administration staff and lecturer performance in Islamic higher education institutions (HEIs) includes administration staff performance enhancement through aligning individual roles with organizational objectives, implementing change management strategies, monitoring performance through key indicators, and applying Islamic leadership principles. Lecturer Performance enhancement through aligning course objectives with institutional goals encouraging research alignment, promoting pedagogical innovations, and fostering visionary leadership.*

**Keywords:** *Higher Education Institutions; soft skills; Islamic leadership; effective management; mushroom management*

### INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Indonesia play a crucial role and require enhancement for several reasons. Indonesia boasts a significant number of HEIs, lecturers, and students, emphasizing the need to improve these institutions to meet the educational

demands of a large student population (Kautsar et al. 2016), Furthermore, the concentration of HEIs in Java Island underscores the necessity to strengthen institutions in other regions to ensure equal access to quality education nationwide (Maulani et al. 2021). Prioritizing the integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in HEIs can significantly contribute to national development agendas and societal well-being (Handayani et al. 2024; Pratolo et al. 2023).

The pivotal role of Islamic HEIs in Indonesia is essential for shaping the country's cultural and religious identity and providing education that aligns with contemporary needs (Sumanti et al. 2024). Enhancing the quality of HEIs is paramount for attaining the SDGs and fostering sustainability in education. Additionally, the evolution of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia reflects the dynamic nature of educational progress in the country (Sumanti et al. 2024). As enrollments in Islamic HEIs and programs continue to grow, graduates will need skills relevant to both the private and non-Islamic-related labor market.

Given the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, evaluating and improving virtual learning platforms in HEIs are critical to ensuring educational continuity and adapting to evolving circumstances (Aditya et al., 2019). Addressing contemporary issues in governance, access, and quality in higher education is vital for enhancing the overall educational landscape in Indonesia (Logli 2016). Lastly, preventing and managing concerns like sexual violence in HEIs necessitate institutional support and proactive measures to establish safe learning environments (Soenarto-Putri et al. 2024).

In HEIs, the soft skills of lecturers and administration staff are crucial for effective management and performance. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership abilities are essential for fostering a positive learning environment and preparing students for the challenges of the future (Mwita et al. 2023). The alignment of values, capacity for change, leadership, and creativity are paramount in ensuring effective management, fostering innovation, and enhancing institutional success (Sukoco et al. 2022).

The alignment of values within HEIs is essential for establishing a shared vision, mission, and ethical framework that guides decision-making and actions within the institution (Waheeda et al. 2023). Capacity for change is crucial for adapting to evolving educational landscapes, technological advancements, and societal needs, ensuring that HEIs remain relevant and responsive to change (Naseem 2023). Leadership qualities such as transformational leadership, shared leadership, and authentic leadership are instrumental in inspiring and motivating staff, fostering innovation, and driving organizational performance (Angelou 2021; Bilal et al. 2019).

Moreover, creativity plays a significant role in promoting innovation, problem-solving, and adaptability within HEIs, contributing to enhanced performance and competitiveness (Lokaj et al. 2021). By nurturing a culture of creativity and encouraging innovative practices, HEIs can stay ahead of the curve and meet the evolving needs of students and stakeholders. Overall, the alignment of values, change, leadership, and creativity are essential components for governance and performance in HEIs, shaping their success and impact on the educational landscape.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To address the performance and soft skill gap in HEIs, a comprehensive approach encompassing various aspects of administration staff performance, lecturer performance, and soft skills. The performance of lecturers in Islamic higher education institutions plays a crucial role in the accountability and management of these institutions (Fitria 2022). Visionary leadership, lecturer performance, and academic culture are interconnected factors that significantly impact the competitiveness of Islamic higher education institutions (Mutohar et al. 2020). Transformations within these institutions, including curriculum changes and application in real-life contexts, are vital for enhancing educational quality and relevance (Lubis et al. 2023).

Soft skills play crucial roles in the effectiveness and success of HEIs. Soft skills, including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and lifelong learning skills, are essential for navigating the complexities of the modern educational landscape and preparing individuals for the workforce (Asror et al. 2023; Ilyasin and Zamroni 2017; Ping et al. 2023).

Leadership within Islamic educational institutions is paramount, requiring leaders with strong traits, problem-solving abilities, social skills, and professional knowledge to navigate the complexities of governance and administration effectively (Qurnia and Rindaningsih 2024). The urgency of leadership management in these institutions underscores the need for competent leaders who can steer the institutions towards excellence and adaptability (Qurnia and Rindaningsih 2024). Furthermore, the implementation of transformational leadership can lead to quality development and progress in Islamic educational institutions (Syamsuddin and Maunah 2020). Effective leadership planning, as a form of worship, scholarship, and sincerity, is crucial for the success of educational institutions (Syihabudin et al. 2023).

In terms of lecturer performance, factors such as the impact of COVID-19 on management functions and the planning of lecturer procurement based on Islamic principles are significant considerations. The unequal management function due to the challenges posed by the pandemic can disrupt the educational process, highlighting the importance of adaptability and resilience in the face of such crises (Yusaini et al. 2024). Planning lecturer procurement based on Islamic principles ensures that educators possess the necessary skills, attitudes, and expertise to compete nationally and internationally (Widiansyah et al. 2019).

The alignment of values with educational goals and societal needs is crucial for ensuring that graduates are equipped to contribute meaningfully to their communities (Asril and Hanafi 2021). Capacity for change is essential in adapting to evolving educational landscapes and global challenges, emphasizing the importance of innovation and flexibility within these institutions (Asril and Hanafi 2021).

Organizational culture has been shown to influence IT-business alignment and business performance in large manufacturing companies (Sabaruddin et al. 2024).

Additionally, organizational culture has been found to impact employee attitudes and organizational outcomes (Gregory et al. 2009). Studies have also indicated that organizational culture and cultural strength significantly influence school effectiveness (Cardona et al. 2023). Organizational culture has been shown to have a primary influence on knowledge creation processes and knowledge exchange in a public university setting (Adeinat and Abdulfatah 2019; Himawan et al. 2016). Organizational culture has been found to positively influence the alignment of business strategy and information technology in the context of Indonesia's Computer Higher Education (Himawan et al. 2016).

Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving are essential for lecturers and administrators to effectively engage with students, colleagues, and stakeholders, contributing to a positive learning environment and organizational culture (Pacheco et al. 2022). The alignment of values within HEIs ensures that all members share common goals and principles, promoting unity and coherence in decision-making processes and institutional strategies (Macheka 2024).

Visionary leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing lecturer performance and fostering a conducive academic culture, ultimately improving institutional competitiveness (Mutohar et al. 2020). Transformational leadership, characterized by strong problem-solving abilities and social skills, is essential for effective leadership management in Islamic educational institutions (Qurnia and Rindaningsih 2024). Additionally, the implementation of organizational motivation can significantly impact the management of private Islamic education institutions in the era of Industry 4.0, enhancing satisfaction among human resources and improving educational outcomes (Suhada et al. 2021).

Developing leadership profiling systems can help identify competency gaps and ensure leadership excellence in higher education institutions (Jais et al. 2021). Furthermore, integrating transformational leadership can lead to quality development and improved educational outcomes in Islamic educational institutions (Syamsuddin and Maunah 2020). The role of heads of departments in fostering a positive work climate and organizational commitment can enhance lecturer performance, highlighting the importance of leadership styles in educational settings (Zamin and Hussin 2021).

Administrators must demonstrate flexibility, resilience, and a willingness to embrace innovation to drive positive change and enhance institutional performance (Sukoco et al. 2022). Effective leadership is critical for guiding HEIs toward their goals, fostering collaboration, and inspiring a culture of excellence and continuous improvement (Waheeda et al. 2023).

The urgency of leadership planning in Islamic boarding schools underscores the significance of organizing institutions based on values of worship, scholarship, and sincerity (Syihabudin et al. 2023). Democratic leadership models have proven effective in countering religious radicalism movements in student boarding schools, emphasizing the importance of leadership in shaping institutional culture and values (Zaman et al. 2024). Multicultural education in Islamic education plays a pivotal role in preventing religious radicalism,

showcasing the impact of educational approaches on societal outcomes (Marzuki, et al.2020).

Moreover, creativity plays a significant role in driving innovation, problem-solving, and adaptability within HEIs. Encouraging creativity among lecturers and administrators can lead to the development of new teaching methods, research initiatives, and administrative practices that enhance institutional performance and competitiveness (Ram 2019)(Ram, 2018). By nurturing creativity and embracing change, HEIs can stay relevant, responsive, and effective in meeting the needs of students and society (Sukoco et al. 2022).

Widiansyah et al. (2019) focused on the implementation planning of procurement lecturers based on Islamic boarding schools. s study sheds light on the recruitment and development of lecturers in Islamic educational institutions, addressing the soft skill gap and enhancing governance and performance (Asror et al. 2023)(Asror et al. 2023).

The study by Jasni and Sharip (2022) examines the effectiveness of Islamic leadership in Islamic-based institutions, emphasizing the connection between Islamic leadership, spiritual leadership, paternalistic leadership, and ethical leadership. This study lays the groundwork for understanding how different Islamic leadership styles impact organizational performance and the development of soft skills.

(Kessi et al. 2022) explore the impact of Islamic leadership, emotional intelligence, and spiritual intelligence on work passion and performance. Their findings indicate a positive relationship between Islamic leadership and employee morale, emotional intelligence, and spiritual intelligence, highlighting the significance of these factors in improving performance outcomes.

Moreover, (Zaim et al. 2021) focus on ethical leadership from an Islamic perspective and its influence o leadership effectiveness and team performance. Their research reveals a positive correlation between ethical leadership grounded in Islamic ethics and organizational performance, underscoring the importance of ethical governance in driving performance and soft skills development.

Sarnoto and Rahmawati (2022) provide insights into the Quranic perspective on leadership in educational institutions, emphasizing how Islamic leadership aligns organizational behavior with Islamic teachings and ethics. This study illuminates how Islamic principles can shape governance practices and impact performance outcomes in educational settings.

Furthermore, the study by Febrianto et al. (2019) investigates the influence of psychological empowerment and Islamic spiritual leadership on organizational commitment and intrinsic motivation. Their research underscores the importance of soft skills development, such as psychological empowerment and spiritual leadership, in fostering organizational commitment and enhancing performance.

The synthesis of these studies underscores by integrating Islamic values into governance practices and soft skill approaches, institutions can improve performance outcomes and cultivate a culture of excellence rooted in Islamic teachings.

By examining these references and similar studies, HEIs in Indonesia can gain valuable insights into enhancing governance practices, improving performance evaluation mechanisms, and developing soft skills among lecturers and administration staff. This holistic approach can contribute to addressing challenges, enhancing the quality of education, and achieving national development objectives in Islamic HEIs.

## METHODOLOGY

This study explored the performance and soft skills among lecturers and administration staff in Islamic HEIs. The study emphasizes performance and soft skills based on managerial effectiveness in Islamic HEIs in Indonesia. The performance and soft skills explored from critical analyses of global literature. The study was conducted in Lombok, Indonesia, among three (3) Islamic HEIs. Methods used were literature review, observation, and in-depth interviews. The software NVIVO 14 identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns or themes within a dataset through reflective thematic analysis of the study. Research questions investigating people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences, and values.

Reflective thematic analysis involves a process where researchers not only identify themes within the data but also consider their reflections, positionality, and the research context during the analysis (Eutsler 2021). This approach emphasizes the interactive nature of the analysis, incorporating the researcher's subjective insights into the interpretation of themes.

On the other hand, thematic analysis, as a broader method, focuses on identifying patterns or themes within the data without necessarily incorporating the researcher's reflections or positionality (Read et al. 2014). The thematic analysis involves steps such as familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, coding themes, and producing a final report (Filia et al. 2018) This method allows for a structured and systematic approach to identifying and analyzing prominent themes within the data set.

Reflective thematic analysis, by integrating the researcher's reflections and context into the analysis process, offers a more nuanced understanding of the data and can provide deeper insights into the underlying meanings and implications of the identified themes. In contrast, thematic analysis, while also effective in identifying key patterns within the data, may not delve as deeply into the researcher's subjective interpretations and reflections during the analysis process.

Reflective thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that focuses on researchers employing this approach to make sense of large volumes of text-based information, such as interview transcripts, survey responses, or social media posts. There are six phases of reflective thematic analysis (Byrne 2022):

(1) Phase One: Process overview

Reading Through Data: Researchers immerse themselves in the data, carefully examining the content.

- (2) Phase Two: Generating initial code  
Identifying Patterns: Common themes, topics, and recurring ideas emerge during this exploration.
- (3) Phase Three: Generating themes  
Deriving Themes: Researchers systematically organize by coding these patterns into meaningful groups.
- (4) Phase Four: Reviewing potential themes  
Some of the constituent and/ or code data items may need revision including a two-step review. The first review is a review relationship between data items and codes that inform themes. Second review candidate themes in the relation to dataset.
- (5) Phase Five: Defining and naming the theme  
Presenting detailed analysis of the thematic framework while the researcher aims to produce more literature by relating other literature.
- (6) Phase Six: Producing the report  
Reflective thematic analysis and thematic analysis are both valuable qualitative research methods for analyzing textual data, with the former emphasizing the researcher's reflections and context in the analysis process, while the latter focuses on identifying and interpreting themes within the data in a structured manner. Researchers can choose between these methods based on the depth of analysis and the level of researcher subjectivity they aim to incorporate into their research findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Effective Management Vs Mushroom Management

Findings come from the researcher's reflection on HEIs Mushroom Management in the context of organizational management and leadership styles. This management concept refers to a management approach where employees are kept in the dark about important decisions and are only provided with information on a need-to-know basis. The term draws an analogy to how mushrooms are kept in the dark and fed manure, symbolizing how employees are often left uninformed and fed only what the management deems necessary. The child codes for this are Ideas Not Supported, Misunderstanding, Rumour, Not Flexible, and Not Enough Information.

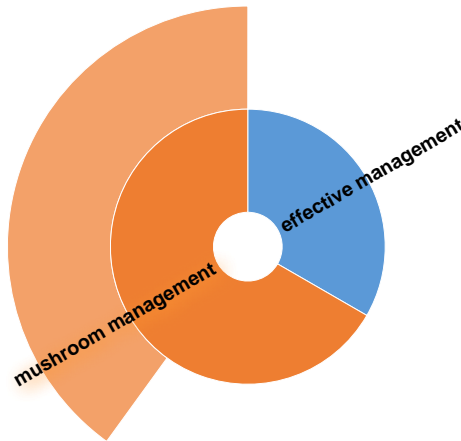


FIGURE 1. Effective Management vs Mushroom Management

The origins of the term "mushroom management" can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s when it was first used to describe a management style characterized by a lack of transparency, communication, and employee involvement in decision-making processes. This approach can lead to feelings of disempowerment, lack of trust, and decreased morale among employees.

To counteract the negative effects of mushroom management, organizations are encouraged to adopt more transparent and inclusive leadership styles. Open communication, sharing of information, and involving employees in decision-making processes can help foster a culture of trust, collaboration, and empowerment within the organization. Management style can lead to decreased openness, support, and cooperation within the organization, ultimately affecting employee performance, motivation, and commitment (Habib et al. 2022). By keeping employees uninformed and excluded from decision-making processes, organizations risk stifling innovation, creativity, and employee engagement. Lack of transparency can also lead to misunderstandings, rumors, and a breakdown in communication within the organization.

Furthermore, mushroom management has been linked to increased work stress, intention to leave, organizational cynicism, and deviant behavior among employees (Özbozkurt et al. 2020). Employees in organizations managed with a mushroom management approach may experience weakened organizational commitment due to being deprived of information and excluded from administrative processes (Ulun et al. 2022).

Organizations can create a more positive work environment that fosters innovation, trust, and employee engagement by promoting open communication, sharing information, and involving employees in decision-making.

The coding explores soft skills that contribute to organizational success, emphasizing soft skills, divergent thinking, change management, and Islamic leadership. Additionally, the code performance among lecturer and administration staff and management emphasizes effective management, and mushroom management is also determined.

TABLE 1. Code and Child Code

Theme	Code	Child code
Soft skills	Alignment value (alignment goals and communication)	Knowledge Sharing, Culture Organization, Better Workspace Environment, Shared Mindset
Soft skills	Divergent thinking	Problem Solving Skills, Lateral Thinking, Knowledge Base
Soft skills	Change Management	Idea, Innovation, Collaboration
Soft skills	Islamic Leadership	Visioner, Excellent, Ability on Handling Crisis, Flexibility, Spiritual Leadership, Persistent
Performance	Lecturer Performance	Ability to Produce Research, Ability to Do Community Service, Knowledge Base, Willing to Communicate, Initiative
Performance	Administration Staff Performance	Capability, Speed, Responsive, Coordination, Communication, Assessment
Management	Effective Management	Alignment value, Divergent Thinking, Change Management, Islamic Leadership

Management	Mushroom Management	Ideas Not Supported, Misunderstanding, Rumour, Not Flexible, and Not Enough Information
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Source: Processed by researcher (2024)

Furthermore, HEIs thrive when they cultivate alignment, creativity, adaptability, and effective performance management by nurturing these soft skill competencies, they can navigate challenges and achieve sustainable success.

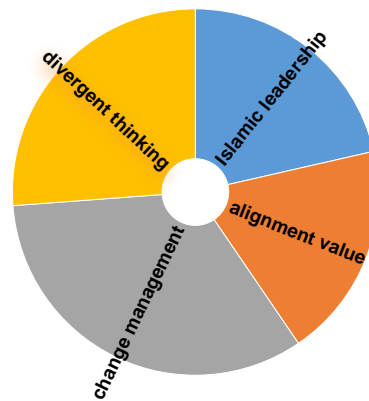


FIGURE 2. Soft Skills Code

In today's dynamic and competitive landscape, organizations strive to achieve excellence by optimizing their internal capabilities and enhancing overall performance, including:

(1) Alignment Value

Soft skills play a pivotal role in fostering collaboration, productivity, and employee satisfaction. Alignment Goals is aligning individual and team objectives with organizational vision. Alignment value encompasses several child code:

- a) Effective Communication: Clear, transparent communication channels facilitate understanding and alignment.
- b) Knowledge Sharing: Encouraging employees to share expertise and insights.

- c) Culture Organization: Cultivating a positive work environment that aligns with organizational values.
  - d) Workspace Environment: Creating conducive spaces that enhance productivity and well-being.
  - e) Shared Mindset: Ensuring a common understanding and approach across the organization.
- (2) Divergent Thinking
- Divergent thinking: Divergent thinking, a key component of creativity and problem-solving, involves the generation of multiple unique solutions or ideas in response to a specific challenge. This cognitive process is characterized by traits such as fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration, as described by (Talib and Mytra 2023). Divergent thinking is essential for creative production as it allows for ideational exploration without predefined boundaries (Gangi 2018). Divergent thinking fuels creativity and problem-solving. It includes child code:
- a) Problem-solving Skills: approaching challenges from various angles.
  - b) Lateral Thinking: Exploring Unconventional Solutions.
  - c) Leveraging Knowledge Base: drawing upon existing expertise.
- (3) Change Management
- Change management as adapting to change is essential for organizational growth and has a big percentage in the code. Key components include:
- a) Idea and Innovation: Encouraging novel ideas and creative solutions.
  - b) Collaboration: Cross-functional teamwork to drive positive change.
- (4) Islamic Leadership
- Islamic leadership principles offer valuable insights for all leaders:
- a) Visionary Leadership: Having a clear vision for the organization's future.
  - b) Handling Crises: Demonstrating excellence during challenging times.
  - c) Flexibility: Adapting to evolving circumstances.
  - d) Spiritual Leadership: Integrating spiritual values into decision-making.
  - e) Leadership in Effective Management is the ability to persistently execute strategies and goals.

## Lecturer Performance VS Administration Staff Performance

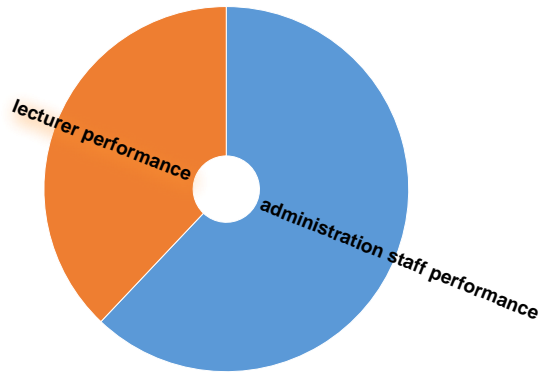


FIGURE 2. Lecturer Performance vs Administration Staff Performance

Above visualize the comparison, of lecturer performance and administration staff management. The impact of mushroom management on a lecturer's performance is both effects from mushroom management in administration staff and mushroom management in lecturers themselves. The administration staff's performance supports the lecturer's performance. According to matrix coding results, the administration staff requires soft skills more than the lecturer for better results by emphasizing soft skills, change management, and Islamic leadership. The lecturer's performance emphasized soft skills, change management, Islamic leadership, and divergent thinking.

Assessing performance ensures continuous improvement for performance evaluation on lecturer performance:

- (1) Research Contribution: Producing valuable research.
- (2) Community Service: Engaging with the community.
- (3) Knowledge Base: Demonstrating expertise.
- (4) Effective Communication: Open dialogue.
- (5) Initiative: Proactive problem-solving.

Assessing performance ensures continuous improvement for performance evaluation on administration staff performance:

- (1) Capability: Competency in administrative tasks.
- (2) Speed and Responsiveness: Timeliness.
- (3) Coordination: Effective teamwork.

- (4) Communication: Clear and efficient.
- (5) Assessment: Informs instruction, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and ensures effective educational outcomes

The study's results put forth a comprehensive framework model to tackle the challenges associated with improving administration staff performance and lecturer performance. The model to improve Administration Staff Performance to enhance Effective Management strategically by leveraging alignment value, change management, and Islamic leadership. Additionally, The model to improve Lecturer Performance to enhance Effective Management strategically by leveraging alignment value, change management, divergent thinking, and Islamic leadership. According to matrix coding results, the administration staff requires soft skills more than the lecturer for better results by emphasizing soft skills, change management, and Islamic leadership. The lecturer's performance emphasized soft skills, change management, Islamic leadership, and divergent thinking.

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