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Optimizing Institutional Identity: A Strategic Approach through Religious Culture in Higher Education

Engelien Yusniar Permanasari^{1*}, Soebiantoro², Nik Haryanti³

¹Management Department, Universitas Islam Blitar, East Java, Indonesia ²State AdministrationDepartment, Universitas Islam Blitar, East Java, Indonesia ³Islamic Educational Management Department, Universitas Islam Blitar, East Java, Indonesia Email: engelien77@gmail.com¹, soebiantoro9@gmail.com², nikharyanti1983@gmail.com³

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Abstract:

This research aims to determine strategies for strengthening higher education identity through religious culture at UNISBA Blitar. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The data was collected using purposive sampling through interviews, observation and documentation. After the data was obtained, the researcher analyzed the data by carrying out data condensation, display, and concluding. The research results show that the strategy to strengthen the identity of higher education at UNISBA Blitar is carried out by first requiring all students to take Islamic religious education courses and certification to instil Islamic values (the dimensions of creed) in students. Second, the policy is to take the Al-Qur'an Reading Test (TBQ) and tahsinul Qur'an guidance to improve students' reading and understanding of the Islamic holy book (shari'ah dimension). Third, the policy of dressing/dressing in sharia when on campus is to foster student politeness and neatness (moral dimension). Creating student religious culture uses a structural model (top-down). The fundamentals that must be upheld in strengthening religious culture in higher education are as follows: congregational prayer movement, Islamic dress movement, thaharah movement, exemplary movement, Islamic hospitality movement, and quality of life movement.

Keywords: Strategy, Higher Education Identity, Religious Culture

Abstrak:

Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mengetahui strategi memantabkan identitas perguruan tinggi melalui budaya religius di UNISBA Blitar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskripsif. Penggalian datanya menggunakan purposive sampling yang dilakukan melalui kegiatan wawancara, observasi dan dokumentasi. Setelah data peroleh peneliti menganalisis data dengan melakukan data condensation, data display, penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi memantabkan identitas perguruan tinggi di UNISBA Blitar dilakukan melaui; pertama, mewajibkan seluruh mahasiswa untuk menempuh mata kuliah Pendidikan agama Islam dan sertifikasi demi penanaman nilai-nilai Islam (dimensi akidah) dalam diri mahasiswa. Kedua, kebijakan wajib mengikuti Tes Baca al-Qur'an (TBQ) serta bimbingan tahsinul Qur'an, untuk meningkatkan kemampuan mahasiswa dalam membaca dan memahami (dimensi syari'ah). agama Islam Ketiga, kebijakan berpakaian/berbusana syar'i ketika berada dilingkungan kampus untuk menumbuhkan kesopanan dan kerapian mahasiswa (dimensi akhlak). Model penciptaan kultur religius mahasiswa dilakukan dengan model struktural (top-down). Fundamental yang harus

ditegakkkan dalam memantabkan budaya religius di perguruan tinggi sebagai berikut: gerakan shalat berjama'ah, gerakan berbusana islami, gerakan thaharah, gerakan keteladanan, gerakan keramahan islami, gerakan kualitas hidup.

Kata Kunci: Strategi, Identitas Perguruan Tinggi, Budaya Religius

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INTRODUCTION

Universities are organizations or educational institutions that are always required to keep up with changes (Astuti & Saril, 2020). This is because universities themselves are institutions that produce agents of change. These changes were made so universities could keep up with increasingly fast developments without losing their identity.

Higher education identity is an essential characteristic inherent in an institution to create an image and differentiate it from other institutions (Ernawati et al., 2021). These characteristics can be in the form of administrative elements, namely name, logo, institutional symbol, and address, and are substantial, namely religious and cultural values that become the identity or personality of a higher education institution (Saleh et al., 2019). Islamic universities have the opportunity to maintain their Islamic character and ideological and academic quality (Shofiyuddin, 2019) because quite a few universities still need to abandon their character when faced with various government interests and international demands.

Efforts to stabilize the identity of higher education require a policy of internalizing Islamic values in the formation of student religious culture, namely, a set of decisions taken by a rector or several groups of people in an institution, as a process of instilling and developing the values of Islamic religious teachings that are based on faith (Setyaningsih & Subiyantoro, 2017). The policies that will be implemented are to achieve the institution's stated vision and mission. The policy of internalizing Islamic values has been formulated, and the result of this policy is the formation of traditions in behaviour and culture that all students follow.

The policy of internalizing Islamic values aims to form a religious culture in students (Lubis, 2018). The religious culture researchers mean is a complex whole born from thoughts and habits of good morals, which are reflected in the student's personality, which can be seen in his behaviour based on faith in Allah (Amir et al., 2022; Anshori et al., 2022).

The theory that researchers use to look at the methods and policy stages of internalizing Islamic values in the formation of student religious culture is Berger's theory that there are three stages in individual interactions with their institutions, namely the stages of value externalization, objectivation, and value internalization (Woodhead, 2001). The background for formulating policies for the internalization of Islamic values is based on the mission, namely: (a) theological reasons of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa an-nahy 'an al-munkar*; (b) objective sociological reasons that encourage the spread of Islamic da'wah; and (c) reasons for structural responsibility as an Islamic higher education institution, namely apart from having the Tri Dharma Higher Education mission (Almu'tasim, 2016).

Interesting phenomena in strengthening religious culture at Unisba Blitar include intuition, an Islamic character for the souls of students and the academic community and standardization of understanding of the importance of Islamic nuances and culture so that it cannot be a simultaneous and quality activity.

The formation of student religious culture is implemented by looking at the suitability of students' sociocultural activities (Lubis & Pratama, 2021). There are three stages in student sociocultural activities: externalization of values, objectivity, and internalization of values (Cantika Yuli, 2018). At the value externalization stage, the campus management provides essential information regarding the campus Islamization program (Sofiyanto et al., 2023). At the objectivity stage, the campus management collaborates with all lecturers, certifiers, tahsinul-Qur'an activity supervisors, and student organizations to provide Islamic religious knowledge. At the value internalization stage, there are academic and non-academic domains; in the academic domain, the lecturers use lecture methods, question and answer, assignments, problem-solving, discussions, demonstrations, simulations and reference equations. In the non-academic realm, student organizations hold regular studies, training and competitions with Islamic themes.

Creating a religious culture for students at UNISBA Blitar started from a religious vision, mission and objectives of the university; this vision and mission gave birth to several policies, including requiring all students to take Islamic religious education courses and certification to instil values. Islam (aqidah dimension) in students; policy of having to take the Al-Qur'an Reading Test (TBQ) as well as *tahsinul Qur'an* guidance to improve students' ability to read and understand the Islamic holy book (shari'ah dimension); policy to dress/dress in sharia when on campus to foster student politeness and neatness (moral dimension). Creating student religious culture uses a structural model (top-down).

Research (Marzuki, 2020) states that universities aim to establish a culture of noble morals so that students can participate in future development without abandoning noble moral values. Ibrahim & Andriyadi (2022) recommend cultivating religious activities with habits including performing the five daily prayers, midday prayers, midday prayers in congregation, prayers and so on. In his research, Almu'tasim (2016b), the Head of Higher Education and religious teachers jointly held activities with religious nuances such as activities, BTA, Friday prayers at universities, Ramadhan Islamic boarding schools, PHBI and those related to religious values. Pardede (2022) graduates of Islamic Universities become moderate Muslim intellectuals because students can explore Islamic teachings which originate directly from the holy book Al-Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet, which are implemented contextually. Cantika Yuli (2018) Higher education institutions implement Islamic values, including religious traditions and rituals, which are cultural characteristics in higher education.

Unisba Blitar Islamic College must re-establish Islamic values throughout campus life and be implemented by all campus residents. The campus environment and infrastructure must support the educational goals on campus. The campus atmosphere must support education goals on campus with a religious nuance. The university atmosphere must also support Islamic scientific

traditions so that it becomes an Islamic learning society, which has consequences for optimizing its role in being part of the movement to build Islamic civilization. The strategy of cultivating higher education identity through religious culture is an option to start a movement with a science and behaviour reconstruction program based on Islamic values.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this research, researchers used a qualitative approach. According to Cresswell, this qualitative research seeks to interpret or interpret phenomena from the perspective of society's meanings to researchers (Fitri & Haryanti, 2020). The qualitative research approach emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality and the close relationship between the researcher and the subjects studied (Moleong, 2002).

Researchers used a type of research, namely descriptive, in this research. According to Fitri & Haryanti (2020), this descriptive type of research is limited to the researcher's efforts in explaining a problem, situation and event as it is so that it merely presents facts or fact-finding. This type of descriptive research provides systematic, factual, objective, and accurate information about the facts, nature and situation being investigated.

The data collection method uses interviews and documentation methods. The interview method in this research was conducted with foundations and structural officials. In addition, interviews were conducted with additional informants who were students at Unisba Blitar. The documentation method is in the form of written data or documents relating to data on the number of employees, strategic activities to strengthen the identity of higher education through religious culture, and the profile of Unisba Blitar.

The data analysis technique used in this research is based on what was developed by (Miles et al., 2014), namely, data condensation, namely the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming data from field notes, interview transcripts, documents and other findings data, display data is presented in the form of narrative text, then arranged in a form that is easy to understand, conclusion drawing/verification of the research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Strategy for Strengthening Higher Education Identity

Strategy is the process of determining plans by leaders who focus on the organization's long-term goals by arranging efforts to achieve the organization's goals (Fahmi & Hakim, 2020). In determining strategy, imagine and design the organization's future, looking for relevant directions for the organization to succeed. Strategy also requires a pragmatic process of selecting ideas from existing resources (money, human power and organizational capabilities) (Haryanto, 2019).

Based on observations at UNISBA Blitar, there is indeed a policy from the chancellor to require all students to dress or wear Sharia clothing on campus to foster student politeness and neatness. It also encourages students to participate in religious activities at Unisba Blitar, including routine "majlisan" and prayer

activities every Friday morning, which are also attended by educational staff and employees.

Religious culture is built through routine religious activities at UNISBA Blitar. The results of the interview with Vice-Chancellor 3 stated that "religious activities here are carried out to improve religious culture among students by encouraging students to participate in Islamic activities on campus. "Apart from that, the policy is to take the Al-Qur'an Reading Test (TBQ) as well as tahsinul Qur'an guidance" (W-2,10-11-2023).

Culture-building strategies are found in various ways, primarily determined by organizational conditions (Ariyani, 2021). Oktaviani Saragih (2017) see that organizational periodization will show appropriate strategies to build culture. The founder's role in building a culture is decisive for newly founded organizations, usually formed in a small group. In institutions that have been running for a long time, leaders can instil culture and socialize it with subordinates by dividing two mechanisms, namely primary mechanisms and secondary mechanisms. Highlighting steps to build an organizational culture for not charismatic leaders because charismatic leaders' steps are difficult to predict.

Yukl distinguishes two strategies for influencing organizational culture, namely (1) through leader behaviour by supporting values and vision, providing role models and concerns, and reacting to crises that hit the organization; (2) designing programs, systems, structures and cultural forms, including the steps of designing management systems and programs, developing decision criteria about rewards and workforce, designing structures and facilities, and building symbols, rituals and stories (Yukl, 2015).

The strategy to strengthen the identity of higher education at Unisba Blitar is carried out first, requiring all students to take Islamic religious education courses and certification to instil Islamic values (the dimensions of faith) in students. Second, the policy is to take the Al-Qur'an Reading Test (TBQ) and tahsinul Qur'an guidance to improve students' reading and understanding of the Islamic holy book (shari'ah dimension). Third, the policy of wearing Islamic clothing on campus fosters student politeness and neatness (moral dimension). Creating student religious culture uses a structural model (top-down).

Identity is a critical element of subjective reality directly related to society dialectically. Identity is formed by social processes (Musthofa, 2017). Once it acquires its form (identity pattern), it is formed, maintained, modified, and even reshaped by social relationships. Meanwhile, the social processes involved in forming and maintaining identity are also determined by social structure, and social structure is also shaped by human history (culture) itself, which does not deny the identity of each individual with a particular identity. Thus, the author concludes that there is a specific partial identity behind social identity (Berger, 2013).

College identity is an essential element in forming the image of a college. The identity of a university is represented by six elements, namely graduate information, strategies implemented by the university, management and employee capabilities, university values, strategies for educational programs offered, and communication carried out by the university.

The model of strengthening higher education identity to achieve excellence has similarities in the form of (1) The institution benefits because it is based on religious values. The practice of religious values has been evenly carried out in almost all aspects of Unisba Blitar campus life. It has also become the capital for the attitudes and behaviour of its human resources that are displayed daily. The institution where he works represents religious struggle as a symbol of religion (Islam) and a mission. (2) The principal capital for building organizational culture in an institution is recruiting new staff. Institutions pay attention to the essential attitudes of prospective employees and lecturers, whether they have sufficient knowledge and a positive attitude towards the spirit of religious struggle, which is one of the missions of higher education institutions. That is the criteria for selecting new personnel. When in the middle of the journey to grow an institution, some lecturers or employees leave because their external salary is higher or they are no longer comfortable with the mission of struggle, other human resources consider it normal and treat it as a blessing for each person is different, that the colleague who leaves is considered not strong enough to fight (considered have a low fighting spirit). (3) A person's character in the institution in displaying virtuous values that align with the institution's mission and religion to maintain the fighting spirit of employees and lecturers. The characters are not the main thing because they already have characters whose descriptions are apparent. Character is born naturally and naturally, arising from individual capacity. The organization's members have an attitude of mutual control, reminding each other, especially the seniors, towards the young ones. (4) To maintain the spirit of struggle of its members, especially regarding the purpose of life in this world and the hereafter and its relation to work, the leadership of the institution makes this happen in the form of recitations, tausiah (Islamic sermons), spiritual showers for all educational staff at Unisba Blitar.

University leaders assume that society still needs the existence of their institutions because they carry out the mission of religious struggle. Even though they are aware that their group is a minority, they have the fundamental principle that what they are fighting for is universal values (Obama et al., 2015). They believe that their institutional mission, which is based on religious norms, is still supported by some community groups, so it will not dampen enthusiasm if it is still consistent with their mission.

Evaluation of the policy of internalizing Islamic values in higher education in forming student religious culture to evaluate policy formulation using a rational and strategic approach. (Mashudi, 2021) For policy implementation, ask the Chancellor for legitimacy to obtain approval for implementing a policy. To evaluate policy performance, LPAI collaborates with all lecturers, certifiers and supervisors for tahsinul Qur'an activities and student organizations to implement campus Islamization activities. Evaluation of the policy environment that supports the creation of a religious culture for students, with a comfortable place of worship, providing several prayer tools and Al-Qur'an, *infaq* boxes, calligraphy on campus walls, Islamic motivations, and large photos of students in clothing. syar'i. The entire policy process of internalizing LPAI Islamic values in the formation of student religious culture, namely in the criteria of adequacy, where there are still

some students who do not wear syar'i clothing, smoke in the campus environment, and there are those who manipulate the signature of the "tahsinul"-activity supervisor. Qur'an to get a certificate of passing the Qur'an Reading Test.

Building a Religious Culture in Higher Education

Religious culture in higher education consists of strengthening spirituality and strengthening science and technology (Suyono et al., 2022). Strengthening the spirit is the strengthening of faith, worship and morals, which are packaged in a civilizing movement which includes the congregational prayer movement, the Islamic dress movement, the thaharah movement, the exemplary movement, the Islamic hospitality movement and the quality of life movement. (Dewi Kania & Hasib, 2018) Meanwhile, strengthening science and technology consists of the spirit of "Iqra", developing science and technology based on Islamic values, religious culture and appreciation of science and technology.

Education is acculturation and familiarization with values that are believed to be true (Javed et al., 2016). Education on an Islamic campus applies Islamic values throughout campus life and is carried out by all campus residents. The campus environment and infrastructure must support the educational goals on campus. The campus atmosphere must also support Islamic scientific traditions and build a religious culture.

In the future, Islamic education must regain the glory that previous Islamic education achieved (Kasa et al., 2020). To make this happen, it is necessary to build an educational society with a conducive worship and academic atmosphere, namely by building a religious culture (Mutohar & Trisnantari, 2020). Religious culture is a campus community that always strongly supports Islamic values, making Islam a way of life for the entire academic community, a source of inspiration, motivation, and a filter in scientific and cultural activities (Haryanto, 2019). Learning activities colour the campus atmosphere (Fathinnaufal & Hidayati, 2020). Interactions between lecturers and students, between lecturers and lecturers, and between students and students always reflect learning interactions. Ultimately, religious culture results from the solid implementation of Islamic Academic Culture.

The culture of learning that must be developed in Islamic society is a culture of worship because one of the purposes of human creation is to worship Allah SWT, as explained in the word of Allah (Q.S. 51: 56).

Meaning: And I did not create jinn and humans except so that they would serve Me.

The value of worship must frame all aspects of human life and livelihood in all their activities. Likewise, campus life is also decorated and imbued with the values of worship. Departing from this culture, efforts are made to ensure that the learning culture that applies in the higher education environment is kept distinct from the value of worship to maintain its identity as an Islamic higher education institution.

Blitar Islamic University's commitment to becoming a superior university as "The Entrepreneurial University" by upholding Islamic values has consequences for optimizing its role to be part of the movement to build Islamic civilization. In this context, cultivating higher education identity through religious culture is an option to start a movement with a program of reconstruction of knowledge and behaviour based on Islamic values.

The fundamentals that must be upheld in strengthening religious culture at Unisba Blitar are as follows;

Congregational prayer movement

Congregational prayer is a means of building a congregation (community). Congregational prayer accurately represents the congregation gathering themselves in harmony to move towards a common goal. Because human nature is congregational and essential to achieving common goals, Allah requires congregational prayer.

Islamic dress movement

Covering the private parts is human nature, which is actualized when he has awareness. Because according to the private parts, it is human nature; primitive humans always covered what they considered the private parts. Because covering the intimate parts is human nature, to protect them from the temptations of Satan, Allah requires women to wear the hijab, with the provisions explained in other verses.

Thaharah Movement

Islam teaches its people always to maintain purity and cleanliness. Based on the Al-Qur'an, the position of people who purify themselves is important in the eyes of Allah, as stated in Surah Al-Baqarah 222:

"Indeed, Allah loves those who repent and purify themselves."

How important the values of thaharah are in Islam, therefore Muslims are at least required to: first, understand the concepts of thaharah properly and correctly; second, implement them in everyday life because thaharah is the key to faith and worship; third, make it a collective movement in the community and environment because cleanliness is an indicator of the morals of individuals and the congregation/ummah which appears to be a reflection of their Islam.

Consequently, every Muslim must strive for a holy and clean personality, then work together to form a collective personality of the congregation that is holy and clean until ultimately creating a people who decorate society and the world with the beauty of a holy and clean life, through mastering the discipline of the teachings. And the practice of best practice thaharah within Muslims in an istiqomah manner. Relevant efforts and effective processes can be developed through the world of Islamic education, both formally and in the family environment.

Exemplary Movement

Imitation is an effective educational method or method for instilling good values, attitudes and behaviour, known as the exemplary method. As a method, examples, mainly from loved and cherished people, in this case, parents or educators, must be shown more or more often in every educational event or phenomenon or phenomenon, especially at this time when role models are something rare, in the sense of something difficult to find, especially in leaders, parents, even educators.

Among the exemplary methods that can be used in the education process, or the process of instilling and changing values, attitudes and behaviour or the process of cultural transformation, apart from direct educators, is by presenting other exemplary figures who have been recognized and believed to be appropriate and appropriate to Be a role model, like famous figures in all aspects/fields of life. Efforts to make Rasulullah SAW a role model must begin with trying to love and care for him by getting to know his life's character better. As the saying goes, if you do not know, you will not love.

Especially in the context of our efforts to implement an Islamic academic culture, a good understanding of Islam is necessary, a good understanding of Islam is necessary. For this, getting to know better the *Sirah* of the Prophet Muhammad SAW is something that cannot be avoided because, in him, he is the picture of complete Islam, perfect Islam, complete Islam, including all its elements, aqidah, worship and morals, Islamic faith and ihsan.

Islamic Hospitality Movement

Saying Bismillahirrahmanirrahim is the intention and spirit of all actions of Muslims. Without this intention, his deeds have no value in the sight of Allah. By mentioning his name at the beginning, the work has weight and is worth worship. Worship must be based on knowledge. So, after saying "basmalah", one must carry out one's actions with knowledge. With this word, a person's work will retain meaning. Moreover, when you have started work with the proper first steps, you will also start the subsequent success.

In the "basmalah", there are three names: Allah, Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim. According to Ibn Al-Qayyim, these three names summarise all the meanings of Allah's names. The essence of the three series of names teaches us to make Allah the only goal in all activities with the spirit of His names, *Rahman* and *Rahim*. Affection and friendliness are conditions for success in building a household, congregation, community, and country. The country will be strong in the bosom of an angry society. Love and friendliness are also conditions for success in building the world of education and da'wah. Islamic Dictionary is a campus of compassion and friendliness.

Quality of Life Movement

A quality life is the life of the shalihin, the "uswah" is the Prophet Muhammad SAW, and the foundation is the Al-Qur'an and As-Sunnah. Quality, as discussed above, is due to its goodness. The quality of piety means piety in devotion, and the quality of knowledge means piety in empirical rational sciences.

The quality of the congregation is often called social piety, namely *khairu an naas* anfa'uhum li an naas, the most beneficial for the congregation/people.

Quality life means living daily life with piety (Luo et al., 2022; Ardiansyah et al., 2023). Allah has created life in the universe with the rhythm of time. Sometimes, places are suitable or less or unsuitable for human activities to obtain His blessings or, in other words, for success in the world and the hereafter (Yuli, 2018).

By developing a strategy to cultivate higher education identity through religious culture, Islamic values will be implemented throughout campus life and implemented by all campus residents. The environment, atmosphere and infrastructure must support Islamic scientific traditions. It is hoped that UNISBA Blitar can produce ulama/scientists whose knowledge can solve national and world problems. History has proven that during the golden age of Islamic civilization, also known as the century of science. The Islamic University has been able to produce scientists who have become references throughout the world. Contributions to the development of Islamic education management, especially Islamic universities, include students who receive a comprehensive education by the Prophet's SAW education model. They will not only be able to change external things but can also change the human soul so that they become devout servants of Allah.

The results of this research provide an in-depth understanding of how the implementation of religious culture can be a critical factor in strengthening the identity of higher education and how this can contribute to the scientific development of Islamic education management. The implementation of religious culture at UNISBA Blitar is reflected in education management policies. Islamic values, such as justice, responsibility and noble character, are integrated into the management process, contributing to developing an Islamic education management model based on Islamic principles.

The religious culture developed by UNISBA Blitar does not only focus on ritual aspects but also on forming the Islamic character of students and academic staff. Islamic education management here focuses on administrative aspects and moral and spiritual development efforts in the educational context (Muis et al., 2022; Brooks et al., 2022). The religious culture displayed can create an innovative atmosphere in education management (Ariyani et al., 2021; Fuad et al., 2022; Kistyanto et al., 2022). The integration of religious values opens up space for the development of educational management models that are unique and appropriate to the Islamic context, which can make a significant contribution to the science of Islamic educational management (Samier et al., 2021; Rahtikawatie et al., 2021; NAim et al., 2022). The results of this research can be a valuable contribution to the development of Islamic education management concepts and practices in other higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION

The strategy to strengthen the identity of higher education at Unisba Blitar is carried out by first requiring all students to take Islamic religious education courses and certification to instil Islamic values (aqidah dimensions) in students.

Second, the policy is to take the Al-Qur'an Reading Test (TBQ) and tahsinul Qur'an guidance to improve students' reading and understanding of the Islamic holy book (shari'ah dimension). Third, the policy of wearing Islamic clothing on campus fosters student politeness and neatness (moral dimension). Creating student religious culture uses a structural model (top-down). Apart from that, the strategy to strengthen the identity of religious and cultural higher education institutions refers to recruiting new staff. Next, leaders build and maintain organizational culture through primary and secondary mechanisms. Institutional leaders build culture not through specially planned programs but radiate from the performance displayed while carrying out their leadership duties. Good recruitment based on a standardized selection process reduces the risk of errors in empowering human resources. The following strategy is natural, an example shown by leaders or other figures who can display attitudes and behaviours most aligned with religious norms. Building a Religious Culture at Unisba Blitar: congregational prayer movement, Islamic clothing movement, "thaharah" movement, exemplary movement, Islamic hospitality movement, quality of life movement.

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