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The Role of Institutional Management in Supporting the Achievement of the SDGs at Univa Medan

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Abstract: Islamic universities are well placed to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), because Islamic values such as justice (al-'adl), public welfare (al-maslahah), moderation (wasatiyyah), and human empowerment (tamkin al-insan) align with the principles of sustainability. These values, however, remain value capital: they produce measurable contributions only when converted into management capital, that is, policies, structures, programs, and control mechanisms. This study examines how the planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC) functions of management at Al Washliyah University Medan (UNIVA Medan) support the SDGs, with particular attention to SDG 4. It employs a descriptive qualitative single-case design. Data were gathered through 55 in-depth interviews with the Rector, Vice Rectors, Deans, Associate Deans, faculty, and students, together with observation and analysis of six types of institutional documents, which were coded against indicators for SDGs 4, 5, 10, 16, and 17. The document analysis shows uneven alignment, with scores ranging from 40% for the Work Plan and Budget to 70% for the MBKM Curriculum (mean 55%). [Insert the interview findings once all six themes are coded: the main patterns across the four informant groups and how they confirm or qualify the document results for each POAC function.] On this basis, the study proposes a POAC-SDG framework that links Islamic values (input), the POAC functions (process), and SDG indicators (output). The framework is a proposal derived from a single case and has not yet been validated; its validation is planned for 2027. The study contributes empirical evidence from a private Islamic higher education institution in Southeast Asia, a context scarcely represented in the literature, and offers a diagnostic approach that goes beyond document checklists by locating where in the management cycle SDG integration proceeds or stalls.

Keywords: Institutional Management; SDGs; POAC; Islamic Higher Education; Islamic Values; UNIVA Medan.

INTRODUCTION

The global development agenda set forth in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on Quality Education, positions higher education institutions as central actors in building an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable education system (Sachs et al., 2019). The SDGs were launched by the United Nations (UN) as a shared commitment to achieving, by 2030, a form of sustainable development that is inclusive, equitable, and centered on human well-being (Nations, 2015). Within this framework,

universities can no longer be regarded merely as producers of human resources; they are also expected to act as agents of social transformation. They fulfill this role through the three pillars of higher education, namely teaching, research, and community service (UNESCO, 2017), and their contribution becomes meaningful only when sustainability values are genuinely embedded in institutional policies and practices (Lozano et al., 2015).

Islamic education holds considerable potential for this task. The values of justice (al-'adl), public welfare (al-maslahah), moderation (wasatiyyah), and human empowerment (tamkin al-insan) align closely with the principles of sustainability that underpin the SDGs (A. E. Farouk & Hassan, 2021; Hashim, 2020). Islamic universities therefore have a comparative advantage: sustainable development need not be read solely through Western secular discourse, as it can also be grounded in their own intellectual tradition. However, this advantage remains, for the moment, a form of value capital. To produce tangible contributions, it must be converted into systemic management capital, that is, policies, organizational structures, programs, and control mechanisms that operate consistently (Sallis, 2014). This distinction between value capital and management capital is the theoretical point of departure for the present study.

Al Washliyah University of Medan (UNIVA Medan) is one of the Islamic private universities in North Sumatra. It has the potential to contribute to the SDGs, particularly quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) (Nasional, 2020). Nevertheless, an initial review indicates that institutional management practices at UNIVA Medan have not been integrated with the SDG framework in a systematic and measurable way. As a result, the institution's contributions to the SDGs have not been adequately mapped, which hinders the reporting of its impact in national and global forums.

This problem is not unique to UNIVA Medan. The latest UN report shows that only about 15% of SDG targets are on track, while many other indicators have stagnated or even regressed because of the pandemic, the climate crisis, and unresolved structural inequalities (Nations, 2023). Universities' engagement with SDG implementation has increased considerably since 2015, yet the gap between declared commitments and systemic implementation remains wide, especially in institutions that have not integrated the SDGs into their internal management systems (W. L. Filho et al., 2024). Universities in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, lag behind their counterparts in high-income countries in formalizing SDG policies (Molina et al., 2023). A systematic review by (Serafini et al., 2022) likewise found that religious and private institutions in developing countries show the lowest levels

of SDG integration in formal institutional documents, such as strategic plans, budgets, and performance reports.

In the context of Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, PTKI) in Indonesia, the obstacles are structural rather than merely normative. (Mustafa & Suryadi, 2022) concluded that PTKIs still face fundamental challenges in three dimensions: reform of academic governance, human resource capacity, and the alignment of institutional values with the demands of global development. They also stressed that PTKIs are rich in value-based capital, yet the weakness of their structured management systems is the greatest barrier to turning that capital into measurable contributions. This finding is consistent with the initial conditions observed at UNIVA Medan.

In terms of the literature, research on the SDGs in higher education remains dominated by the context of developed countries, and perspectives from Islamic educational institutions in Southeast Asia are scarcely represented in the international academic literature (Molina et al., 2023). Moreover, most existing studies tend to stop at document review, that is, checking whether the SDGs are mentioned in strategic plans or curricula. Such an approach does not explain at which stage of management SDG integration proceeds or stalls. The difference between universities in high-income and low- and middle-income countries is also not simply a matter of financial capacity, but chiefly of weak management systems that fail to translate global commitments into concrete institutional policies (Molina et al., 2023).

This study addresses these gaps by developing the POAC-SDG diagnostic framework. The framework maps the four management functions, namely planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling, onto specific evidence of SDG alignment for each function. For planning, the study examines the alignment of the strategic plan with SDG 4 and SDG 5. For organizing, it identifies structural gaps visible in the Organization and Work Procedures (Organisasi dan Tata Kerja, OTK). For actuating, it examines the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum as an expression of SDG 4. For controlling, it reviews the available monitoring and evaluation tools. In this way, the SDGs are treated as a framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating institutional programs rather than as global discourse alone.

To understand how the SDGs are perceived and implemented across the organizational hierarchy, the study draws on a multi-level set of informants, ranging from the Rector, Vice Rectors, Deans, and Associate Deans to faculty members and students. This design makes it possible to detect a dissemination

gap, that is, differences in SDG awareness and implementation experience between top leadership and middle management. Findings of this kind matter for institutional management more broadly, not only for UNIVA Medan.

Based on the foregoing, this study aims to map and analyze the extent to which the management functions of UNIVA Medan contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, using the POAC-SDG framework, and to identify the opportunities and challenges of this integration. The study makes three contributions. First, it offers an operational analytical tool that goes beyond the document-checklist approach. Second, it shows how Islamic values can be converted from value capital into systemic management capital. Third, it presents empirical evidence from a private Islamic university in Indonesia that can serve as a model for similar institutions at the national and regional levels.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a single-case study design. The case study design was chosen because it allows an in-depth and holistic examination of how the SDGs are integrated into institutional management within a real setting whose characteristics are specific to Islamic higher education (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). UNIVA Medan was selected as the case because it is an Islamic private university whose management has not yet been aligned with the SDG framework. The study was conducted from January 2026 to September 2026.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling, based on each person's strategic position in the institution's management system and their relevance to SDG implementation at UNIVA Medan. A total of 55 informants took part in in-depth interviews: the Rector (1), Vice Rectors I and II (2), Deans (6), Associate Deans (12), faculty representatives (17), and student representatives (17). Faculty and student informants were chosen from criteria length of service or study and involvement in academic activities, so that all levels of the institutional hierarchy were represented, from top leadership to students as the primary beneficiaries.

Data were collected through interviews, observation, and document analysis (Moleong, 2018). The interviews were semi-structured and guided by questions on SDG awareness and the four management functions. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes, was audio-recorded with the informant's consent, and was transcribed verbatim. Observations covered management practices, leadership meetings, and SDG-oriented academic activities, and were recorded in field notes.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of (Miles et al., 2020), which consists of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Thematic analysis was then used to relate the management functions (planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling) to SDG goals and indicators, with the aim of identifying the roles, patterns, strengths, and weaknesses of management at UNIVA Medan. Interview, observation, and document results were compared across informant levels to examine differences in SDG awareness and implementation experience between top leadership and middle management. The credibility of the data was strengthened through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

UNIVA Medan's Institutional Management Practices Relevant to SDG Indicators

The document review was conducted using an SDG indicator checklist adapted from The Impact Rankings framework (Education, 2024) and (W. L. Filho et al., 2019; W. L. et. a. Filho, 2021), by focusing on the five goals most relevant to the context of Islamic higher education, namely SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The level of alignment for each document was categorized into three tiers: Developing (≥70%), Emerging (50–69%), and Beginning (<50%). The complete mapping results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Alignment Matrix of UNIVA Medan's Institutional Documents with SDG Indicators

Institutional Documents	SDG 4	SDG 5	SDG 10	SDG 16	SDG 17	Skor	Category
UNIVA Strategic Plan 2020–2024	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	62%	Emerging
LAKIP / 2023 Performance Report	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	55%	Emerging
OTK 2022	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	45%	Beginning
MBKM Curriculum 2023	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	70%	Developing
RKA 2024	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	40%	Beginning
2022 Accreditation Report	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	58%	Emerging

Description: ✓ = indicated; ✗ = No indication yet. Category: Developing ≥70%, Emerging 50–69%, Beginning <50%.
Source: Document analysis using an SDG indicator checklist, 2025

To clarify the patterns of comparison between documents, the results in Table 1 are visualized in Figure 1:

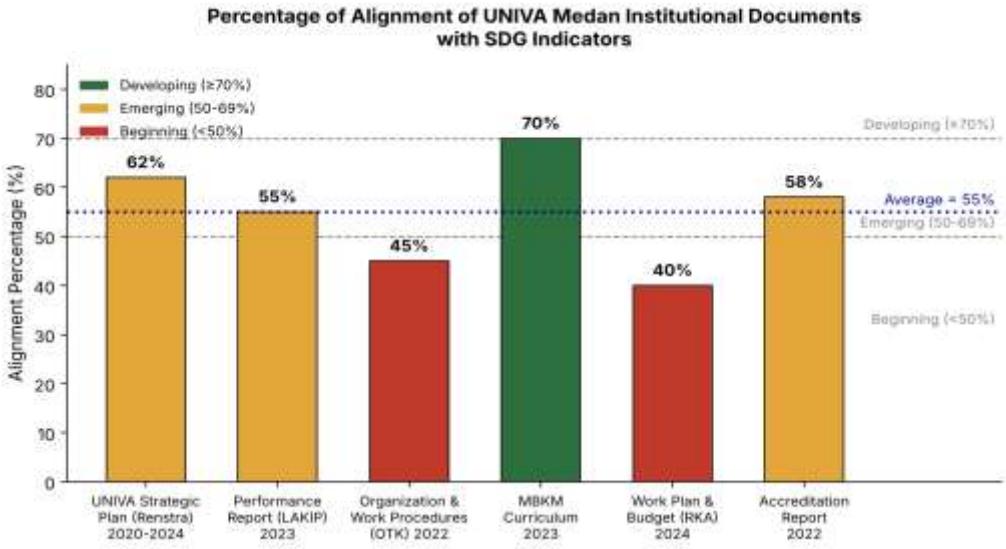


Figure 1. Percentage of Alignment of UNIVA Medan's Institutional Documents with SDG Indicators

Overall, the average alignment score for the six institutional documents was 55% (Emerging category), indicating that the integration of the SDGs into UNIVA Medan's governance has begun but is not yet systematic or comprehensive. This finding is consistent with the global trends reported (W. L. et. a. Filho, 2021) A survey of 1,200 higher education institutions found that only 34% of them have a formally documented SDG strategy. UNIVA Medan's placement in the "Emerging" category indicates that the institutionalization of the SDGs has begun, but has not yet become an explicit framework in all planning documents.

Three key findings can be highlighted from the results of this mapping. First, the 2023 MBKM Curriculum received the highest score (70%, Developing), indicating that awareness of the SDGs is more strongly developed in the academic-curricular sphere than in the managerial-administrative sphere. This finding is consistent with the findings (Education, 2024) that the curriculum tends to be more responsive to the sustainability agenda because it is directly linked to national regulations, such as the Minister of Religious Affairs'

Decree No. 347 of 2022 (RI, 2022), as well as program accreditation requirements. Second, the 2024 RKA received the lowest score (40%, Beginning), indicating that there is no explicit budget allocation for SDG-themed programs. This situation reinforces the argument (Albareda-Tiana et al., 2018) that institutional sustainability is difficult to achieve without the support of a budgeting system that explicitly accommodates sustainability targets; without a link between planning and budgeting documents, the implementation of SDG programs tends to be sporadic and dependent on the initiatives of specific units. Third, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) is the least-addressed indicator, appearing explicitly in only two of the six documents (the MBKM Curriculum and the RKA), making it a blind spot that must be a top priority in the institution's future policy formulation.

The Contribution of Management Functions (POAC) to the Achievement of SDG 4

To gain an understanding that goes beyond the level of formal documents, the analysis was extended to the level of perceptions and experiences of management practitioners in the field through a thematic analysis of in-depth interview transcripts. Using the open coding and axial coding methods as developed (Miles et al., 2020), Six dominant themes were identified that emerged consistently across all groups of informants. These six themes did not appear with equal frequency in every group of informants; in fact, the differences in frequency of occurrence across groups were among the most informative findings, as they revealed the levels at which understanding of and experience with the SDGs were most strongly felt, and the areas where differences in perception among administrators, faculty, and students were most evident.

As of the current stage of analysis (60% progress in thematic coding), two key themes have been consistently identified: T1 (leadership's verbal commitment to the SDGs) and T3 (the perception that the Strategic Plan does not yet explicitly include SDG targets). The patterns of dominance of these two themes across the three groups of informants are presented in Figure 5, while the other four themes (T2, T4, T5, T6), along with the students' perspectives, will be presented in full in the final report once the coding process is complete.

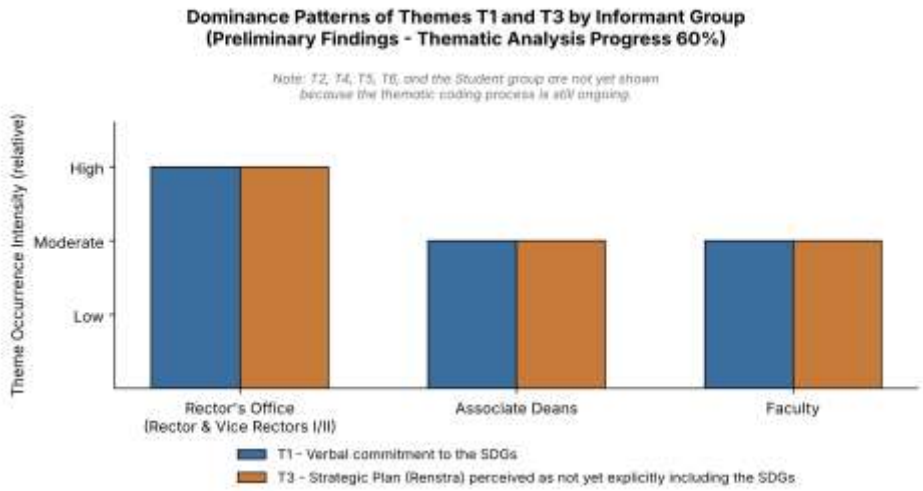


Figure 2. Patterns of Dominance for Themes T1 and T3 by Informant Group

The pattern in Figure 2 reveals an interesting finding: T1 and T3 were actually most prominent in the Rector's Office group, while in the Associate Deans and Faculty groups, both themes appeared at a moderate level. This means that awareness of the importance of the SDGs, along with the acknowledgment that the Strategic Plan does not yet explicitly include SDG targets, is most strongly articulated by top leadership, whereas at the middle and operational levels (Vice Deans and Faculty), this awareness has not yet been fully disseminated with the same intensity. This pattern indicates a dissemination gap from the top to the operational level, consistent with the warning (Filho, W. L., 2019) that policy intentions at the leadership level do not automatically translate into collective awareness at the operational level unless accompanied by adequate mechanisms for policy communication and dissemination.

When considered within the context of the POAC management framework (Robbins & Coulter, 2018; Terry, 2009), These qualitative findings are consistently triangulated with the results of the document review in subsection 4.1. Regarding the planning function, informants' perceptions that the Strategic Plan does not yet explicitly include the SDGs (Theme T3) align with the Strategic Plan's alignment score of only 62% (Emerging). In the organizing function, the low 2022 OTK score (45%, Beginning) indicates the absence of a unit or structural official explicitly mandated to coordinate SDG achievement, as required by the strategic management model for educational institutions outlined (Bush & Coleman, 2018). In the implementation (actuating) function, the strongest contribution is actually seen in the curricular domain (MBKM Curriculum, 70%), whereas in the oversight (controlling) function, no standardized SDG monitoring instruments or performance indicators have been identified that are routinely used by institutional leaders.

From a values perspective, the high level of verbal commitment from leadership (Theme T1) can be understood as a reflection of a deep commitment to Islamic values that are substantially aligned with the spirit of the SDGs, such as al-'adl (justice), al-maslahah (the public good), and wasatiyyah (moderation) (Chapra, 2016). However, as emphasized (U. Farouk, 2018), The potential of Islamic educational institutions as "living laboratories" for sustainability values can only be realized if those values are systematically internalized into the four functions of management, rather than remaining merely at the level of normative commitment. Thus, it can be concluded that among the four POAC functions, the actuating function contributes most significantly to the achievement of the SDGs (particularly SDG 4) through the curriculum, while the planning, organizing, and controlling functions still require strengthening so that leadership's normative commitments can be translated into measurable policies and governance systems.

Challenges and Opportunities for Integrating the SDGs into the Management of UNIVA Medan

Based on the findings in the previous two subsections, a number of challenges and opportunities faced by UNIVA Medan in integrating the SDGs into institutional management can be identified. A synthesis of these challenges and opportunities, mapped against the four POAC functions, is presented in Figure 3.

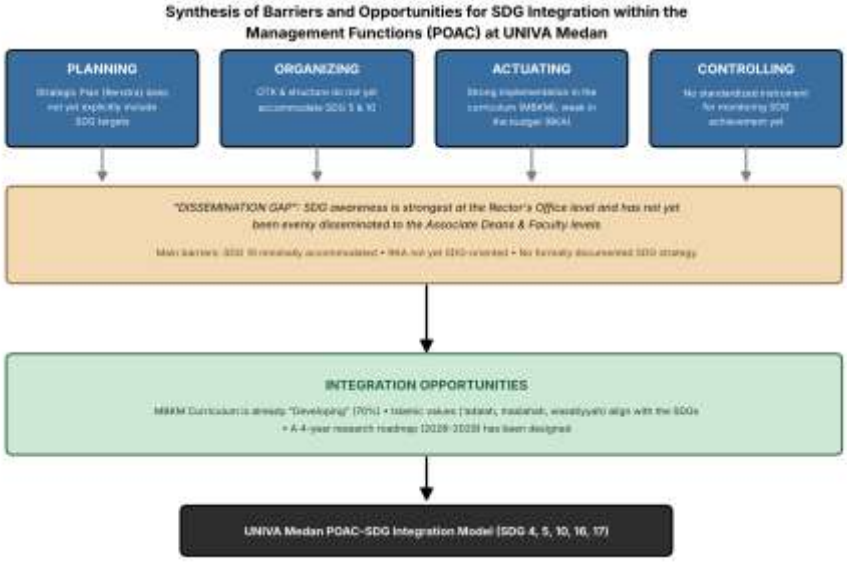


Figure 3. Synthesis of Constraints and Opportunities for Integrating the SDGs into Management Functions (POAC) at UNIVA Medan

Several structural barriers still hinder UNIVA Medan's efforts to mainstream the SDGs into its management system. In terms of documentation, the institution does not yet have a formally and comprehensively articulated roadmap or sustainability strategy, as reflected in the average compliance rate of its institutional documents, which stands at only 55%—placing it at the "Emerging" stage. This issue is exacerbated by the budget planning section in the 2024 RKA, which actually has the lowest score (40%, "Beginning" category), indicating that financial resource allocation has not yet been consciously directed to support the sustainability agenda; as a result, SDG-themed initiatives tend to be unevenly implemented and heavily dependent on the commitment of specific work units.

In terms of the substance of the indicators, the SDG 10 target on reducing inequality is the least frequently included in institutional documents, meaning this issue risks being overlooked in the formulation of future affirmative policies. At the perceptual level, a dissemination gap was also identified: concern regarding the importance of the SDGs—including the awareness that the Strategic Plan has not explicitly incorporated these targets—is voiced more frequently by top leadership than by associate deans and faculty members, suggesting that the dissemination of information and understanding of policies has not yet reached the middle management level of the organization optimally. Another equally fundamental constraint is the lack of standardized measurement tools or performance indicators to monitor SDG achievements, meaning that the "controlling" function within the institution's management cycle cannot yet be carried out in a measurable manner.

Meanwhile, in terms of opportunities, despite these various limitations, UNIVA Medan actually possesses a number of assets that can be leveraged to accelerate the SDG integration process. The 2023 MBKM curriculum (Akmalia et al., 2025), for example, has reached the "Developing" category with a score of 70%; thus, this relatively mature status has the potential to serve as a starting point for disseminating best practices to other institutional documents that are still lagging behind. Furthermore, the Islamic character inherent in the institution's identity serves as a unique added value: principles such as al-'adl (justice), al-maslahah (public interest), wasatiyyah (moderation), and tamkin al-insan (human empowerment) are fundamentally in deep harmony with the spirit of the SDGs, and will become even more meaningful if consistently embedded into daily management practices (Chapra, 2016; U. Farouk, 2018).

The high level of verbal commitment demonstrated by leadership toward the SDGs agenda should also be viewed as a valuable social asset, given that support from top leadership has proven to be one of the key determinants of the success of SDG mainstreaming in higher education institutions, as

indicated by the findings (Albareda-Tiana et al., 2018). Another opportunity stems from external factors, namely the issuance of Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 347 of 2022 (RI, 2022) which directly provides a policy framework for Islamic religious universities, including UNIVA Medan, to accelerate the development of SDG-based Strategic Plans. Furthermore, the availability of a structured multi-year research roadmap for 2026–2029 (as shown in Table 1 and Figure 2) can serve as a tool to gradually institutionalize the SDGs–POAC integration model in the coming years.

Overall, the findings in the three subsections above address the specific objectives of this study: UNIVA Medan has demonstrated management practices that are becoming relevant to SDG indicators, particularly in the curricular domain (4.1), with the "actuating" function making the most significant contribution compared to "planning," "organizing," and "controlling" (4.2), and faces major challenges in policy formalization and budgeting, which, on the other hand, are offset by significant opportunities stemming from an Islamic value base and external regulatory support (4.3). These findings serve as an empirical foundation for the formulation of an SDGs–POAC integration model, which will be developed and validated in the second year of this multi-year research program (2027).

CONCLUSION

This study examined how the planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling functions of management at UNIVA Medan support the achievement of the SDGs, using the POAC-SDG diagnostic framework and evidence from [six types of institutional documents and 55 in-depth interviews across four informant groups]. The findings show a consistent pattern: leadership commitment to the SDGs is strong, but it has not yet been translated into management systems. The Strategic Plan does not state SDG targets explicitly, the organizational structure does not designate a unit responsible for coordinating them, and no standardized instrument exists to monitor progress. At the document level, the curriculum shows the clearest alignment (MBKM Curriculum, 70%), but the Work Plan and Budget remains weakly aligned (40%). [Summarize here whether faculty and students experience the curricular alignment in practice, once the triangulation is complete.] Because a comparison of the functions' contributions can be drawn responsibly only after all six themes and the perspectives of students, faculty, and managers have been integrated, this study does not rank the functions by their contribution. [If the completed triangulation supports a comparison, state it here with evidence from both documents and interviews.] SDG awareness was also stronger among top

leadership than among middle management [and students], indicating a dissemination gap that is relevant to institutional management beyond this case.

These findings can be organized into a proposed framework in which Islamic values serve as inputs, the POAC functions as the process, and SDG indicators as outputs. The framework follows the logic of input–process–output evaluation models used in higher education research (Astin, 1991; Stufflebeam, 1971). It differs in treating Islamic values not as a cultural backdrop but as a source of value capital that must be deliberately converted into management capital through the formal management system. This framework is a proposal derived from a single case and has not been validated. Its validation is planned for the second year of this research program (2027), [through ... method]. Until then, it should be read as a framework to be tested, not as an established model. Should the testing support it, the gaps identified here point to three practical steps for UNIVA Medan: formalizing SDG policies, establishing an SDG unit, and strengthening an indicator-based monitoring system.

Theoretically, this study makes two contributions. First, it addresses a gap in the literature on the SDGs in higher education, which has been dominated by public, secular universities in developed countries, by presenting empirical evidence from a private Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia, a context that remains scarce in the international literature. Second, it indicates that the POAC framework can serve as a diagnostic tool for mapping the strengths and weaknesses of SDG integration, offering a more operational approach than evaluation frameworks that rely mainly on formal documents. The study has limitations: it examines a single institution, and its findings are qualitative and context-bound, so they should not be generalized directly. Future research should test the SDG–POAC model comparatively across multiple institutions, both Islamic and non-Islamic, public and private, to produce broader generalizations and a more adaptive model for higher education management in Indonesia as it works toward the 2030 SDGs.■

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