

AL-ISLAM AND KEMUHAMMADIYAHAN FACULTY MANAGEMENT AS DISCRETIONARY TALENT

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Abstract

This study examines the management of Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) faculty at Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah higher education institutions (PTMA), focusing on how frontline discretion emerges, the institutional factors underlying convergence and divergence across institutions, and the role of organizational affiliation in shaping such variation. The study employed a qualitative comparative multiple-case design involving four PTMAs in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta, anonymized as PTMA A, B, C, and D. Cases were purposively selected, and data were collected during 2025–2026 through twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven informants across structural levels. Secondary data included official institutional documents related to recruitment, AIK management, cadre formation, organizational structures, evaluation, curriculum, and mentoring. Data were analyzed using a layered multiple-case approach combined with Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis, supported by cross-source and cross-site triangulation. The findings reveal convergence in areas shaped by national structural constraints, particularly the limited involvement of AIK faculty in thesis supervision due to functional-position linearity regulations. In contrast, substantial divergence occurs in areas where institutional policy discretion is greater, particularly recruitment systems and the structural positioning of AIK units. Organizational affiliation explains variation primarily in recruitment and staffing practices. Frontline discretion becomes most visible when AIK faculty encounter situations not covered by formal regulations or policy voids. Based on these findings, the study proposes the concept of **discretionary talent**, referring to institutional talent whose strategic value derives from its capacity for autonomous, value-aligned judgment. The study theoretically connects strategic talent management with street-level discretion and offers a discretionary talent management model for strengthening AIK faculty management in PTMA.

Keywords

Discretionary Talent, Talent Management, Street-Level Bureaucracy, AIK Faculty, Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah Higher Education, Multi-Site Study.



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INTRODUCTION

Human resource (HR) management in higher education is generally understood as a relatively linear administrative process (Hendri et al., 2023). Qualification-based recruitment, development through training and further study, and evaluation based on three lecturer's responsibility of generally known in Indonesia as *Tri Dharma* (teaching, research, and community service) achievements form the standard workflow in HR management (As et al., 2020). Talent management in higher education institutions encompasses institutional strategies for creating mechanisms to develop and strategically deploy talent (Pikuła, 2024). Integrated talent management in higher education is understood as a mechanism linking talent management with the creation of institutional value and excellence (Abiwu & Martins, 2024). This picture applies broadly to Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah higher education institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Muhammadiyah dan 'Aisyiyah, hereafter PTMA). PTMA employs a distinctive category of faculty who serve as guardians of Muhammadiyah ideology, known as Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (hereafter AIK) faculty (Dewi et al., 2023). As ideological guardians, AIK faculty are recruited, developed, and evaluated in line with an ideological-organizational logic that demands cadre-formation capacity and Islamic integrity (Habibi et al., 2021; Majelis Diktilitbang PP Muhammadiyah, 2020). The presence of AIK faculty at PTMA requires a distinct governance arrangement, different from that of other higher education institutions.

The governance of AIK faculty management touches on something fundamental. The diversity of students' Islamic backgrounds means that the reception of AIK material is not uniform; students with a Nahdlatul Ulama background respond to AIK instruction differently from students with a Muhammadiyah background (Habibi et al., 2021). The strengthening discourse of religious moderation, shifting learning preferences among digital-generation students, and the demand that graduates' Islamic competence remain relevant to the workplace and to plural social life add further complexity to the role of AIK faculty. These demands extend beyond teaching to balancing formal academic research with the institution's *da'wah* (religious outreach) mission.

Preliminary observations across the four sites indicate that this tension is real. AIK faculty frequently make decisions in areas not covered by written regulation, even as they remain bound by national functional-position regulations that limit formal recognition of their role. This governance issue is precisely what makes the present study relevant, as PTMA leadership needs a management model that accommodates this reality.

AIK faculty are, in effect, exercising considerable discretion. In public administration literature, this phenomenon has long been recognized as a hallmark of frontline organizational work (Barnes & Henly, 2018). Lipsky introduced the term street-level bureaucracy to describe frontline workers who operate under heavy workloads and ambiguous organizational goals, yet effectively function as policymakers in practice (Lipsky, 1980). This article positions street-level bureaucracy as the foundational theory underlying the concept of street-level discretion about the use of situational judgment by frontline actors when formal rules cannot fully guide action.

PTMA formally encompasses higher education institutions under both the Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah lines (Majelis Diktilitbang PP Muhammadiyah, 2016). 'Aisyiyah, as an autonomous organization of Muhammadiyah, carries a distinct historical mission emphasis rooted in the women's empowerment and social welfare movement (Kraus & Nakamura, 1986). This distinction means that a single case study is insufficient to address how AIK faculty management operates across institutional contexts. This study compares four PTMAs, three under the Muhammadiyah line and one under 'Aisyiyah, to identify convergent and divergent patterns across sites and the factors that explain them.

Prior research can be grouped into three clusters. The first cluster concerns studies of talent management in higher education. Ramaditya et al. (2022) showed that talent management implementation quantitatively improved employee performance at a single general research university, without addressing ideological dimensions or cross-institutional comparison (Ramaditya et al., 2022). McCarthy et al. (2024) analyzed talent management in public science-funding organizations across three countries, finding professional logic to be the dominant balancing force among competing institutional logics in a secular-bureaucratic context (McCarthy et al., 2024). The second cluster concerns studies of institutional logics. Cai and Mountford (2022) mapped 59 studies on institutional logics in higher education and found that this framework is rarely integrated with strategic HR management (Cai & Mountford, 2022). Zwierżdżyński and Szklarczyk (2026) identified four organizational identity configurations among Polish Catholic universities, showing that the weight given to religious logic varies even among institutions that share the same religious identity; their study focused on strategic documents rather than frontline HR management practice (Zwierżdżyński & Szklarczyk, 2026). The third cluster concerns studies of street-level bureaucracy. Alsharefeen (2025) found that faculty develop discretionary coping strategies when confronting the ambiguity of generative-AI policy, in a secular, single-site context

(Alsharefeen, 2025). Research on street-level bureaucracy in higher education has also developed in the areas of administrative ethics (Lovell, 2024) and the frontline role of non-academic staff (Bulut-Sahin, 2023). However, a recent systematic review confirms that its integration with strategic talent management remains rare (Chang & Brewer, 2023).

These three clusters reveal a consistent gap. Talent management studies rarely engage comparatively with faith-based institutions, while studies of institutional logics and street-level bureaucracy in religious contexts have developed separately from the strategic talent management framework (Razali et al., 2024; Smagina & Stich, 2026). The single-site designs of the five studies above are insufficient to capture how mission-based HR management patterns can be systematically compared across institutions. To the extent of the literature reviewed, no study has yet explicitly integrated strategic talent management and street-level discretion with institutional logics as a contextual lens (rather than an equivalent third theory) to analyze multi-site faculty management in Islamic higher education. This study fills the comparative, theoretical-integrative, and religious-context gap that has not previously been addressed.

Literature on talent management in higher education shows increasingly strong development, particularly regarding strategies to attract, develop, retain, and deploy talent as a source of institutional advantage (Razali et al., 2024). At least four fundamental questions guide this study: (1) How is AIK faculty management carried out across the four PTMA sites? (2) How does the AIK faculty's frontline discretion emerge and manifest within that management practice? (3) What institutional factors produce patterns of convergence and divergence across sites? And (4) How does organizing affiliation (Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah) contribute to the variation found?

Theoretically, this study contributes an explicit bridging of strategic talent management and street-level discretion, with institutional logics positioned as an explanatory mechanism. From this bridging, the study proposes discretionary talent as a new category of institutional talent. Practically, the resulting findings and model are expected to serve as a reference for PTMA leadership in designing AIK faculty management policy that cultivates good discretion. How PTMA manage their talent, and its discretion ultimately shapes how Islamic higher education governance carries out its mission.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of a comparative multiple-case study with purposive case selection (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017). Four PTMA sites were purposively selected to represent variation in organizational affiliation while maintaining contextual comparability. The study applied a qualitative anonymity protocol that disguised institutional and informant identities (Patton, 2015). Primary data consist of twelve in-depth, semi-structured interview sessions with seven informants across structural levels, collected throughout 2025–2026. Sampling employed purposive and criterion sampling techniques (Patton, 2015). Secondary data comprises official institutional documents from the four sites. Each document type provided data at a different level: recruitment guidelines (selection criteria and decision-makers), AIK management decrees (authority structure and the position of the AIK unit within the institutional hierarchy), cadre-formation guidelines (design of, and persons responsible for, student mentoring programs), organizational structures (changes in the AIK unit's structural position over time), evaluation documents (AIK faculty performance-assessment indicators), curriculum documents (design of AIK courses and/or certification), and mentoring guidelines (student mentoring mechanisms). Triangulation was achieved through systematic comparison between interview findings and institutional documents, as well as through cross-site pattern comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data analysis followed the layered logic characteristic of multiple-case study, beginning with within-case analysis at each site and followed by cross-case thematic comparison to map patterns of convergence and divergence across sites (Yin, 2017). Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis technique was applied at each level to identify, sort, and name themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2018). Theoretical dialogue proceeded in three steps. First, themes derived from within-case analysis were examined for fit with strategic talent management propositions (Collings & Mellahi, 2009) to identify how AIK faculty talent is strategically managed. Second, AIK faculty actions in situations lacking written regulatory cover were examined through the lens of street-level discretion (Lipsky, 1980) to identify the forms and triggers of discretion. Third, the patterns of convergence and divergence emerging from cross-site comparison were explained by reference to institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012) at the cross-case stage, by examining how religious, professional-academic, and bureaucratic-managerial logics interacted differently across sites. The results of the

analysis were juxtaposed with previously mapped related studies to affirm the article's positioning and novelty.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study found patterns of AIK faculty management across five HR management arenas at the four PTMA, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Management of Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah Faculty at Four Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah Higher Education Institutions

Site	Recruitment System	Mentoring and Cadre Formation	Competency Development and AIK Curriculum	Performance Evaluation and Role Recognition	Managerial Capacity and Structural Position
PTMA A	Dual pathway. Formal: centralized selection (psychological test, academic test, Islamic-knowledge test, microteaching) for permanent faculty. A separate adjunct pathway is managed at the faculty level.	Cadre formation became an explicit formal mandate for AIK faculty, set out in a written institutional decree.	Uneven AIK curriculum transition across faculty members, with no binding implementation mandate.	AIK faculty performance evaluation remains largely formalistic; faculty are not involved as thesis supervisors/examiners in their home study programs.	The AIK institute shifted from being under the top leadership to being placed under a deputy leader.
PTMA B	No special adjunct pathway for AIK; study-program faculty are given a mandate to teach AIK courses.	Formal cadre formation is not a structural responsibility of AIK faculty; their role is limited to teaching and serving as resource persons.	Tiered implementation of AIK courses is uneven across study programs, with no standard conversion policy.	Pattern similar to PTMA A; thesis supervision depends on the study program's disciplinary integration.	The AIK unit was upgraded from an institute into an AIK Directorate placed directly under the Vice-Rector.
PTMA C	Emphasizes a combination of academic and Islamic competence.	Collaborative model; AIK faculty serve as the first ring, reinforced by non-AIK faculty from Muhammadiyah activist circles.	Eleven integrated thematic certification pathways linked to community service (hereafter KKN), accommodating student diversity.	Structural evaluation up to the university level; AIK faculty are encouraged to develop research and community service through a dedicated funding scheme.	The AIK institute is given scope to develop research and to oversee disciplinary integration.

PTMA D	Cumulative standard: academic competence, cadre formation, organizational membership, and status as a national cadre-formation instructor.	Cadre formation expands into a personal pastoral role, handled centrally by the AIK unit's management.	AIK faculty are encouraged to integrate their teaching with students' home study programs.	Dual formal/informal evaluation pathway, differentiated by employment status.	The AIK unit is described as exercising relatively strong control.
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Source: in-depth interviews and institutional documents at the four research sites (2025–2026)

The table 1 above shows that, in the recruitment arena, PTMA A applies a dual pathway: the Permanent AIK Faculty pathway and the adjunct AIK faculty pathway. Recruitment of Permanent AIK Faculty proceeds through a series of selection stages: document screening, psychological testing, academic ability testing, AIK testing (Qur'an recitation, religious-text reading, and Kemuhmadiyah knowledge), microteaching, and interview. Recruitment of Non-Permanent/Adjunct AIK Faculty takes place at the faculty level when the need for permanent faculty in a study program has not been met. Adjunct AIK faculty are recruited through long-standing partnerships with faculties at nearby state Islamic universities; some are recruited on the recommendation of the AIK Institute, and others on the recommendation of the local Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership. PTMA B, C, and D do not offer an adjunct AIK pathway. PTMA B instead relies on assigning AIK teaching mandates to study-program faculty deemed competent; such mandates are granted on the basis of activity within the organization and prior educational linearity affiliated with Muhammadiyah, although the initial mechanism for granting this mandate is not fully documented. PTMA C emphasizes dual competence (academic and Islamic), with AIK faculty positioned as study-program faculty within the Faculty of Islamic Studies; its recruitment pathway parallels PTMA A's Permanent Faculty pathway. PTMA D applies the strictest selection gate among the four sites, using a cumulative standard comprising academic competence, cadre formation, organizational membership, and status as a national cadre-formation instructor.

The four sites display four distinct models in the mentoring and cadre-formation arena. PTMA A applies a centralized formal mandate at the university level. AIK faculty hold the same rights and obligations as other faculty, but the AIK Institute receives a special allocation to send AIK faculty to external cadre-formation and training programs; student cadre-formation activities remain the AIK Institute's task, managed separately from the faculty/staff track. PTMA B separates

the cadre-formation function from teaching: AIK faculty at PTMA B are responsible solely for classroom teaching, while all cadre-formation and Kemuhammadiyah mentoring activities are carried out by a dedicated team of cadre-formation staff together with student cadres. PTMA C applies a cross-faculty collaborative model and is the most advanced of the four sites in integrating AIK across all study programs; nearly all study-program faculty are equipped to perform cadre-formation and mentoring functions within their own programs. PTMA D extends the AIK faculty role to personal pastoral mentoring; its mentoring program is designed as a space for student cadre formation and guidance, and it is through this personal pastoral mentoring that AIK faculty instill Muhammadiyah religious views in students.

PTMA A and B experienced uneven AIK curriculum transitions across units in the competency development arena. Permanent AIK faculty at PTMA A are coordinated directly under the AIK Institute, a structure that facilitates the standardization of integrated materials and curricula; the curriculum obstacle at PTMA A occurs among adjunct AIK faculty recruited by the faculties, over whom the AIK Institute lacks strong authority for supervision and evaluation. Non-uniformity at PTMA B arises from differing AIK course conversion policies across study programs. PTMA C has developed the most innovative approach, opening eleven thematic AIK certification pathways as alternative options; students are required to choose four as a prerequisite for KKN. These certifications include Qur'an-recitation refinement (*tahsinul Qur'an*), pilgrimage (*umrah*), inheritance law (*mawaris*), and qibla direction, with AIK faculty serving as examiners in each certification program. PTMA D encourages AIK faculty to integrate AIK knowledge with students' home study programs, so that students' disciplinary competence is directly integrated with Islamic values rather than developing along secular lines.

In the performance evaluation and role recognition arena, PTMA A and B show a convergent pattern. AIK faculty at both sites face limited involvement in thesis supervision, a situation that arises in STEM study programs epistemologically distant from AIK scholarship. As a result, AIK faculty performance evaluation at both sites remains largely formalistic and does not fully recognize their substantive contributions beyond teaching. PTMA C evaluates AIK faculty structurally up to the university level; university leadership directs them to develop research and community service through a dedicated internal funding scheme, integrating recognition of the AIK faculty role more closely with the regular academic career track. PTMA D applies a dual evaluation pathway — formal

and informal: faculty are evaluated through the regular academic track, while their pastoral and mentoring roles are evaluated informally through reporting to the AIK Institute's management.

This study found an opposing pattern in the managerial capacity and structural position arena. The position of the AIK Institute at PTMA A shifted further away from the university's top leadership to being placed under a deputy leader, whereas the AIK Institute at PTMA B was instead strengthened into an AIK Directorate placed directly under the Vice-Rector. PTMA C was given scope to develop research and oversee disciplinary integration, while the unit at PTMA D is described as exercising relatively strong control.

In summary, Table 1 shows that AIK faculty management across the four PTMAs does not follow a single pattern. In the recruitment and mentoring/cadre-formation arenas, the four sites pursue different architectures, although all foreground academic and Islamic competence as the basis for selection. In the competency development and performance evaluation arenas, PTMA A and B show similar obstacles despite differing root causes, while PTMA C and D pursue pathways more distinctive to their own institutions. In the managerial capacity arena, the structural position of the AIK unit moves in opposite directions between PTMA A and B, despite both being affiliated with Muhammadiyah. This finding provides an initial indication that organizational affiliation alone is insufficient to explain the variation found.

Beyond the patterns across the five HR management arenas above, this study also traced a logic chain to map how AIK faculty's frontline discretion emerges and manifests in practice. Table 2 maps this chain against empirical evidence from the four sites.

Table 2. Evidence Matrix: AIK Faculty as Discretionary Talent

No	Logic Chain Stage	Conceptual Description	Empirical Evidence from the Findings
1.	Ambiguous Situation	AIK faculty encounter issues not covered by the written regulation.	Response to a niqab-wearing student and consultation on an unregistered ("siri") marriage case, without formal regulatory cover (a policy void), at PTMA D.
2.	Use of Judgment	AIK faculty use autonomous judgment to respond to the situation.	Case-by-case weighing of academic and ideological competence during recruitment at PTMA A; design of eleven thematic certification pathways responding to the limited number of dedicated AIK faculty at PTMA C.
3.	Strategic Value for the Organization	That judgment produces benefits recognized by the organization.	Certification flexibility expands the reach of the AIK mission without overburdening faculty at PTMA C;

		pastoral mentoring sustains student-institution relations on sensitive issues at PTMA D.
4.	Bounded by Value and Accountability	Judgment continues to refer to institutional values and remains open to accountability.
		A dual formal/informal evaluation pathway is applied at PTMA D; a structured evaluation up to the university level is applied at PTMA C.

Source: in-depth interviews and institutional documents at the four research sites (2025–2026).

AIK faculty's frontline discretion is most clearly evident at PTMA D when dealing with a niqab-wearing student or a student consulting about an unregistered (“siri”) marriage.

“There is no official written rule, because it could backfire. But we explain in AIK classes that wearing a niqab is not in line with the Muhammadiyah view. We explain this using images in class. When an AIK lecturer encounters a student or staff member wearing a niqab, we explain that there are two types: the ideological niqab and the accessory, or fashion, niqab. Our greatest concern is the ideological niqab, because it can lead toward affiliation with a particular group.” (Ust. Faisal, PTMA D, interview, 2025) *“An unregistered (“siri”) marriage disadvantages women. There was once a student who wanted to enter into a siri marriage; we immediately called the student in and explained that it is prohibited and disadvantages the woman.” (Ust. Faisal, PTMA D, interview, 2025)*

Both cases were handled by AIK faculty without any written regulatory cover. PTMA D's leadership deliberately refrained from issuing formal rules in order to avoid institutional-political risk. Another case, concerning the limited number of AIK faculty at PTMA C, was addressed by developing eleven thematic certification pathways integrated with KKN.

“Right now, certain courses or certifications are quite popular. One of them is a pre-marriage certification, offered as an elective course, which students find very appealing. Within the curriculum, there are eleven certification programs; of these, students must choose four as a requirement for KKN. One mandatory certification is Tahsinul Qur'an, and other options include pilgrimage (umrah) certification, inheritance law (mawaris), qibla direction, and others. All of this is intended so that Muhammadiyah's tarjih (religious ruling) decisions can be conveyed to students in language better suited to millennials or Gen Z, so that they can more easily understand and internalize these values.” (Ust. Ramzi, PTMA C, interview, 2025)

The recruitment process for AIK faculty at PTMA A likewise demands similar judgment. Applicants' academic competence and ideological capacity are not assessed mechanically but are weighed, case by case, by HR management.

“There have been several experiences, actually. In terms of academic competence, this person was good, but somewhat lacking in Muhammadiyah ideological grounding... At the time, we still took the person on. But we went through a contract process first, because the status then was instructor, not faculty, since at the time our need was oriented toward the issue of integration. Among the applicants, this person had a reasonably good understanding of that. But we did it while feeling a bit anxious.” (Usth. Asti, PTMA A, interview, 2026)

Discussion

The findings of this study show that AIK faculty management across the four PTMAs does not follow a single pattern. Across the five HR management arenas, sharp convergence emerges in arenas rooted in national regulation, marked by limited AIK faculty involvement in final-project supervision due to functional-position linearity regulation, while significant divergence emerges in arenas that allow room for institutional policy choice, namely the recruitment system, the allocation of cadre-formation responsibility, and the structural position of the AIK unit. Organizing affiliation (Muhammadiyah-'Aisyiyah) proved explanatory only in the recruitment and staffing arena, while AIK faculty's frontline discretion, as mapped in Table 2, manifests most clearly when they confront situations without written regulatory cover (a policy void).

Convergence and Divergence in AIK Faculty Management

This variation is not as simple as a Muhammadiyah-'Aisyiyah affiliation difference. The limited involvement of AIK faculty in final-project supervision at PTMA A and B is rooted in national-level faculty functional-position regulations that require disciplinary linearity; the epistemological distance between Islamic studies and the exact sciences creates a structural gap that is difficult to bridge without institutional policy intervention. This phenomenon can be understood as a convergent policy silence across sites, confirming that the issue of AIK faculty management does not lie entirely at the level of institutional policy but is partly rooted in the broader structure of higher education—at the intersection of institutional mandates, study-program structures, functional-position systems, and ideological-organizational demands. Purely internal policy standardization, therefore, has structural limits, confirming the complexity of institutional logics in higher education, where the professional-academic logic of study programs often diverges from the institution's religious mission logic (Cai & Mountford, 2022). The institutional logics framework itself is rooted in the idea that individuals and organizations are shaped by competing systems of meaning and material practice (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012).

Greater divergence instead appears in arenas that allow room for choice, such as the recruitment system, the allocation of cadre-formation responsibility, and the structural position of the AIK unit. This pattern demonstrates the principle of theoretical replication (Yin, 2017). The structural position of the unit managing the religious mission is not a fixed arrangement but a dynamic variable determined by institutional leadership priorities. This finding aligns with Harris (1995), who argued that faith-based organizations perpetually exist in tension between charismatic-

religious authority and bureaucratic-managerial authority (Harris, 1995) while also extending strategic talent management (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). The strategic value of AIK faculty is not sufficiently determined by meeting administrative indicators but also by their ability to bridge academic and ideological mandates in concrete situations. Talent management for AIK faculty requires a clear distinction between what can be standardized and what must remain open to professional judgment. Not every difference among PTMA is a problem to be eliminated; some represent organizational adaptation to student context, study-program structure, AIK unit capacity, and each institution's leadership philosophy.

Organizing Affiliation as a Contingent Factor

Including PTMA D as a comparator to the three Muhammadiyah PTMA provides an empirical basis for answering the question of how organizing affiliation contributes to the variation found. Organizing affiliation proved most explanatory in the recruitment and staffing arena. PTMA D's stricter, more structured, and more stratified selection gate reflects 'Aisyiyah's character as an organization built on structured cadre formation that emphasizes graduated ideological qualification. This pattern, however, appears inconsistent in other arenas. PTMA D, which centralizes personal pastoral handling, instead clusters with PTMA A in mentoring and cadre formation, while a different system appears at PTMA B, which separates the cadre-formation function from AIK faculty. Internal variation among PTMA A, B, and C proved as large as the variation between Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah PTMA. This pattern is consistent with the concept of selective coupling (Pache & Santos, 2013) and with hybrid governance models that emphasize relational mechanisms for containing conflict between competing logics (Pache et al., 2024).

This finding cautions against a deterministic reading of organizational identity. If affiliation were the primary explanatory variable, PTMA D should display a systematically different pattern from all Muhammadiyah PTMA, but the data do not support this. Affiliation is better understood as an arena-specific institutional condition rather than a single determinant. In the recruitment arena, cadre-formation structure and organizational membership translate into explicit selection criteria. In the allocation of cadre-formation responsibility, decisions are more strongly influenced by institutional scale, student composition, division-of-labor philosophy, and leadership preference. This finding is consistent with Zwierżdżyński and Szklarczyk (2026) on Polish Catholic universities, which display different identity configurations under a shared faith umbrella (Zwierżdżyński & Szklarczyk, 2026). Institutional logics function here as an explanatory lens rather than as a theory

standing alongside strategic talent management and street-level discretion. This framework explains why configurations differ across sites when institutional scale, the religious-background composition of students, managers' managerial philosophy, and local resource capacity interact differently with organizational affiliation. The literature on PTMA needs to stop treating "PTM" and "PTA" as two homogeneous categories; homogeneity of ideological identity does not produce homogeneity of management practice.

Frontline Discretion as Strategic Value

This study traced a logic chain to answer, and empirically demonstrate, whether AIK faculty are talent or merely field implementers. AIK faculty at PTMA D exercise value-aligned autonomous judgment when handling niqab-wearing students and unregistered-marriage consultations without written regulatory cover. The judgment exercised is an action consciously connected to institutional values and an awareness of the boundaries of authority. At PTMA C, evidence of the strategic value of judgment appears in the decision to develop eleven thematic certification pathways in response to the limited number of dedicated AIK faculty. Both cases illustrate a structural judgment born of contextual reading rather than standard procedure.

Findings at PTMA A show that the recruitment process itself already demands discretion from HR management. Case-by-case consideration of applicants is evidence that discretion is exercised even before AIK faculty begin functioning as frontline actors. This finding shows that discretion does not arise only at the policy-implementation stage but is present from the moment the organization determines who is deemed capable of carrying out the value mandate. This differs from the classical formulation of street-level bureaucracy, which views discretion primarily as a consequence of an ambiguous, resource-constrained frontline position (Lipsky, 1980). Discretion among AIK faculty is not merely a consequence of the job but part of the reason the job is strategically valuable. The evidence chain in Table 2 shows that AIK faculty fulfill all elements of discretionary talent: a strategically valuable role, high situational ambiguity, value-aligned judgment capacity, and institutional accountability.

These findings extend the understanding that discretion in AIK faculty management is a phenomenon rooted in PTMA's governance configuration. This configuration shows that autonomy within PTMA is not unbounded freedom but a decision space shaped by organizational structure, values, and control mechanisms (Hidayah & Ma'arif, 2023). This explains why discretion cannot be

positioned solely as individual freedom but as a capacity that operates within particular institutional bounds.

This article's theoretical position can be affirmed through comparison with the three prior research streams mapped in the Introduction. Ramaditya et al. (2022), in a quantitative talent management study at a general research university, did not address discretion at all, focusing instead on measurable performance improvement and formal administrative processes under an assumption of neutral, secular performance indicators. This article fills that gap by incorporating an ideological-mission dimension not captured by ordinary quantitative criteria. McCarthy et al. (2024) view discretion as an arena of response to competing institutional logics in a public science-funding organization, with professional logic as the dominant balancing force in a public-secular context. This article extends that view to a religious context, positioning institutional logics not merely as a balancing force but as a lens explaining variation in configuration across sites. Alsharefeen (2025) views faculty discretion as a coping strategy for the ambiguity of generative-AI policy, motivated by workload reduction or the resolution of technical learning problems. This article redefines discretion not as a defensive coping mechanism but as a strategic, value-adding (generative-value) capacity. These three comparisons underscore the novelty of this article: discretion is positioned as the substance of talent's strategic value itself, rather than as a deviation or mere coping mechanism.

Dialogue with the PTMA governance literature further reinforces this position. Jaenudin and Victorynie (2026) show that Muhammadiyah higher education governance operates through a multipolar distribution of authority: the Daily Supervisory Board (Badan Pembina Harian, BPH) holds strategic influence, the Senate exercises limited academic authority, and the Rector acts as a liaison between academic demands and organizational direction (Jaenudin & Victorynie, 2026). This study aligns with and extends that configuration. Whereas Jaenudin and Victorynie (2026) mapped multipolar authority at the level of institutional governance, this study shows that a similar multipolarity operates at the level of AIK faculty management, where the space for discretion is shaped by the intersection of organizational structure, values, and control mechanisms.

The Concept of Discretionary Talent

The preceding findings show a constitutive relationship between talent and discretion. The more strategic a value-based role, the more important an individual's capacity to translate that value into contextual decisions. This article proposes discretionary talent as a category of institutional talent, found in mission-based organizations, whose primary strategic value is constituted by the

capacity to exercise autonomous judgment aligned with the organization's core values. This concept represents an explicit bridging of strategic talent management and street-level discretion, with institutional logics functioning as the lens explaining why management configurations differ across PTMA.

Lipsky's (1980) framework often associates discretion with deviation or implementation inefficiency. The present extension aligns with post-Lipsky shifts in the street-level bureaucracy literature that view discretion as a moral domain rather than mere administrative deviation (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; Nothdurfter & Hermans, 2018; Zacka, 2017). AIK faculty's capacity to exercise independent judgment aligned with Kemuhammadiyah values is precisely why they are regarded as strategic talent, not despite their exercise of discretion. This concept shifts the paradigm of HR management from a control-oriented approach that seeks to minimize discretion toward a cultivation-oriented approach that nurtures and directs discretion so that it remains accountable and mission-aligned.

Four Boundary Conditions

The findings allow the two elements above to be formulated as explicit propositions rather than mere conceptual jargon. First, discretionary talent is constituted by four elements: Strategic Role, Contextual Judgment, Value Alignment, and Institutional Accountability. A strategically valuable role is evidenced by the fact that PTMA A–D all position AIK faculty as translators of the institutional mission rather than as mere instructors. Contextual judgment, value alignment, and institutional accountability must all be present together; if any one of these four elements is absent, discretion becomes mere deviation or mechanical compliance.

Second, this study formulates discretion as bounded, so that it does not become unlimited freedom. Discretion is bounded by four boundary conditions: Competence, Value Boundary, Institutional Mandate, and Accountability. All four are patterns emerging from the data. Competence is evident in PTMA D's layered selection gate, which ensures that only competent individuals hold discretionary space. Value boundary is evident in AIK faculty's judgment at PTMA D in the niqab and unregistered-marriage cases, which continued to refer to Kemuhammadiyah values. Institutional mandate is evident in the contrast between PTMA A and B: when the AIK Institute lost structural standing, its capacity to guide and bound discretion weakened correspondingly, whereas when the AIK Institute was strengthened into a directorate, its mandate to direct discretion became clearer. Accountability is evident in the dual evaluation pathway at

PTMA D and in the structured, university-level evaluation at PTMA C. The absence of any one boundary condition produces lopsided outcomes, as seen in the AIK Institute's limited oversight of adjunct AIK faculty at PTMA A. This formulation of bounded discretion offers a testable finding for application at other sites

Structural Capacity as Infrastructure for Discretionary Talent

The contrasting structural position of the AIK unit at PTMA A and B is the strongest evidence that individual discretion cannot be separated from organizational capacity. Discretionary talent does not grow simply because individuals are competent and committed; discretion requires institutional infrastructure that confers legitimacy, support, and organizational consequence on the decisions taken. The AIK unit needs to be positioned not as a scheduling administrator but as a talent architect that integrates recruitment, mentoring, competency development, evaluation, and structural placement of AIK faculty. This study identifies a hierarchical relationship among talent, discretion, and structural capacity: talent provides individual capacity, discretion is the way that capacity is used in ambiguous situations, and structural capacity provides the environment that allows discretion to be directed and held accountable. If any one element is missing, the model becomes unbalanced—talent without authority produces professional frustration, discretion without value boundaries produces inconsistency, and structure without talent produces a strong but unresponsive bureaucracy. Synthesizing all the findings leads to a single proposition: AIK faculty HR management should not be designed to minimize discretion but to produce good discretion. This article formulates a management model through four interrelated principles.

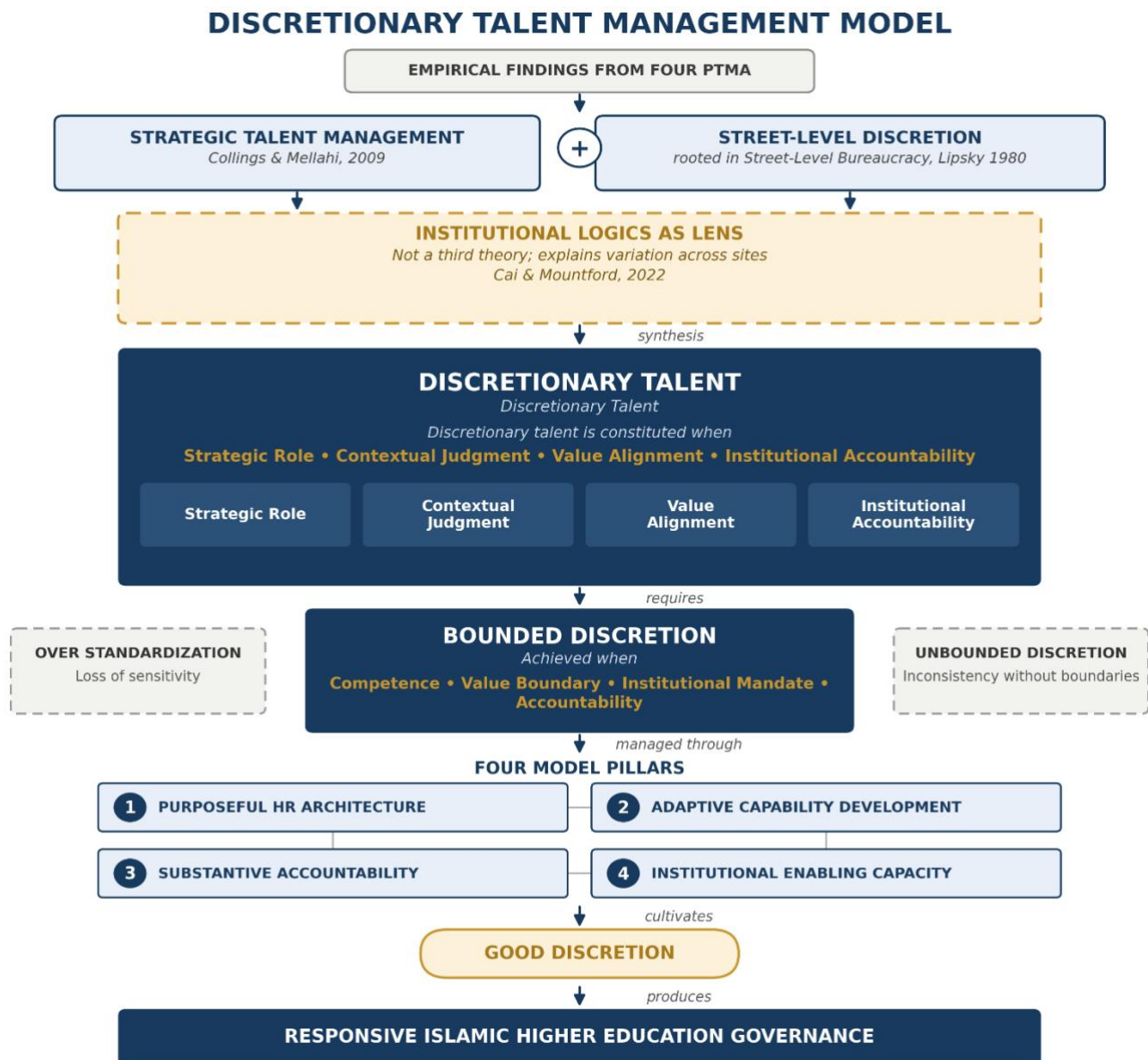


Figure 1. Discretionary Talent Management Model

Purposeful HR architecture means that the institution deliberately designs an HR architecture, determining who may carry out the AIK mandate, and through which pathway. No single staffing design need be identical across sites, but every pathway must be accompanied by a uniform substantive quality standard, particularly in Islamic competence and cadre formation. Adaptive capability development means that competency development must include the ability to read context, mentor students, and make decisions in situations not fully covered by regulation, as shown by PTMA C's collaborative model and thematic certification, which expand cadre-formation capacity without overburdening AIK faculty, and by PTMA D's pastoral approach, which demonstrates the importance of personal-contextual capability. Substantive accountability means

that evaluation needs to shift from mere administrative compliance toward measuring the quality and impact of decisions; evaluation should also include indicators measuring pastoral mentoring, character strengthening, and contribution to the institutional mission (As et al., 2020; Darodjat & Wahyudiana, 2015). The finding of limited thesis-supervision involvement indicates that PTMA collectively, through the Majelis Diktilitbang PP Muhammadiyah, needs to advocate for revising linearity regulations for faculty who teach institutionally distinctive courses. Institutional enabling capacity means that the preceding three principles are not sustainable without an AIK managing unit possessing legitimacy, authority, and technical capacity; the strengthened structural position at PTMA B represents a concrete policy choice, not merely a normative ideal.

This model simultaneously corrects two extremes: over-standardization, which reduces all faculty behavior to measurable indicators and procedures, and unbounded discretion, which grants freedom without value boundaries or accountability mechanisms. Even so, the model still requires bounded discretion as formulated in the preceding section. The main contribution of this study is not merely a new model but a shift in the HR management question from “how can faculty discretion be controlled?” to “how does the organization select, shape, facilitate, and hold faculty discretion accountable?”

Discretionary Talent as a Model for Islamic Education Management

This model becomes more meaningful when read as a model of Islamic higher education governance. AIK faculty are frontline translators of PTMA's Islamic education mission; each of their decisions ultimately shapes how students experience Islamic education on a daily basis. When PTMA treats AIK faculty merely as a structural position, the implementation of the educational *da'wah* mission risks being reduced to procedural compliance that loses sensitivity to student diversity. Discretionary talent becomes the conceptual meeting point between strategic talent management and street-level discretion, and a practical answer to how PTMA can cultivate good discretion in carrying out its Islamic education mission.

Limitations of the Study

This study has limitations worth noting. The multiple-case study design is cross-sectional, covering 2025–2026, and does not capture historical-longitudinal data on how management patterns and the structural position of the AIK unit at each site have evolved over time. Further research tracing historical-longitudinal data across leadership periods would strengthen causal claims about the factors driving the strengthening or weakening of that structural capacity. A further limitation

is that the scope of the four sites may limit generalization to PTMA in other regions with different demographic-religious contexts.

CONCLUSION

AIK faculty management at the four PTMA is carried out through different patterns across five HR arenas. Frontline discretion emerges most clearly when AIK faculty confront situations not covered by written regulation, such as mentoring a niqab-wearing student or providing pastoral guidance in an unregistered marriage case. Convergence occurs in arenas rooted in national regulation, while divergence occurs in arenas that allow room for institutional policy choice. Organizing affiliation explains variation in the recruitment and staffing arena, but is not a sole determinant in other arenas.

This study formulates discretionary talent as an explicit bridging of strategic talent management and street-level discretion, with institutional logics as the lens explaining divergence across sites. Its main conceptual contribution is to show that the strategic value of talent in mission-based organizations is constituted by bounded discretionary capacity across four boundary conditions, rather than by its elimination. Practically, the resulting four-pillar model offers a reference for PTMA leadership to manage AIK faculty as strategic talent and as frontline translators of the Islamic education mission, so that the discretion that develops remains accountable and aligned with institutional values.

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