

# Strategic Management for Sustainable Growth of Nahdlatul Ulama Among Nahdliyin

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## Abstract

This research explores the strategic management practices of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) to ensure sustainable growth while maintaining its traditional religious values. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key organizational leaders and members involved in strategic roles. The findings highlight that NU employs collaborative leadership, decentralization, and adaptability to integrate traditional values with modern governance, ensuring relevance in a globalized society. However, challenges arise in balancing innovation with the preservation of religious identity, particularly within the pesantren system. Internal resistance to change and navigating global complexities are key obstacles. Overall, NU's inclusive management and adaptability support its sustained growth, though maintaining this balance remains a central challenge.

**Keywords:** Strategic Management, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Sustainable Growth, Organizational Adaptability, Religious Organizations.

## 1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and rapid social transformation, religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) encounter multifaceted challenges [1]. As the largest religious organization in Indonesia, NU is tasked with the dual responsibility of preserving its long-standing religious values while simultaneously adapting and innovating to remain relevant in the contemporary world [2]. This balance is crucial for ensuring both the organization's longevity and its continued relevance to its members, particularly the Nahdliyin, who look to NU for religious guidance, social support, and community leadership [3].

The concept of sustainability has gained significant prominence across multiple sectors, including social and religious organizations. Sustainability, in this context, extends beyond environmental considerations and encompasses social, cultural, and organizational aspects that ensure the long-term viability and impact of an organization [4]. For NU, sustainability is not merely about maintaining operational stability but also about evolving to meet the changing needs of its members and the broader community, while still adhering to its foundational religious principles.

To address the dynamic challenges of modern society, NU must adopt a strategic management approach that not only focuses on short-term objectives but also emphasizes long-term benefits for its members and the wider society. This requires integrating sustainability principles into all facets of its operations, from

resource management to the design and implementation of programs that have a meaningful social impact. Such an approach will enable NU to fulfill its mission as a religious organization while contributing to the social and economic development of the community [5].

The unique positioning of NU as a religious institution rooted in Islamic values provides it with the potential to lead the way in formulating sustainable and inclusive policies. By grounding its strategies in religious teachings, NU can ensure that its adaptations remain aligned with its values while addressing contemporary challenges. However, the active participation of the Nahdliyin in the decision-making processes and the execution of programs is vital for fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility [6]. Engaging members in these processes not only strengthens social cohesion within the organization but also enhances the effectiveness and relevance of its programs.

One of the core elements of achieving sustainability within NU is through inclusive and transparent leadership. Leadership that listens to the aspirations and concerns of members and accommodates diverse viewpoints is essential for fostering trust and stimulating innovation. An inclusive leadership approach enables NU to remain flexible in its response to changing societal conditions while ensuring that its actions are consistent with the values and expectations of its members [7]. By cultivating a leadership style that prioritizes transparency and inclusiveness, NU can build a strong foundation for long-term organizational success.

Education also plays a pivotal role in NU's strategy for sustainable management. Developing the capacity of its members through educational and training programs is fundamental to preparing them for the challenges of a rapidly evolving world[8]. NU must focus on providing relevant educational opportunities that equip its members with the skills needed to navigate both religious and secular challenges. This includes developing competencies in areas such as digital literacy and entrepreneurship, which are increasingly important in today's socio-economic landscape. By empowering its members with these skills, NU can enhance their individual and collective resilience, ensuring that the organization as a whole can thrive in the long term.

Therefore, this research seeks to explore and develop effective management strategies for Nahdlatul Ulama that can support sustainable growth among the Nahdliyin. The study aims to investigate how NU can balance its commitment to traditional religious values with the need for innovation and adaptation in an increasingly complex world. Specifically, the research will focus on identifying strategic management practices that can be implemented by NU to promote long-term sustainability, while also examining the challenges that NU faces in maintaining this balance. Through this analysis, the research will provide insights into how NU can position itself as a model for sustainable organizational growth in the religious sector, contributing not only to the spiritual well-being of its members but also to the social and economic development of the wider community.

In addressing these goals, this research will focus on answering the following key questions:

1. What are the most effective strategic management practices that can be implemented by Nahdlatul Ulama to ensure its sustainable growth among the Nahdliyin?
2. What are the principal challenges faced by Nahdlatul Ulama in balancing the preservation of traditional religious values with the imperative for adaptation and innovation in a rapidly evolving modern world?

These research questions are intended to guide a thorough exploration of how NU can navigate the tension between tradition and modernization while maintaining its core values and ensuring its sustainability. By addressing these questions, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the strategic

management approaches that religious organizations like NU can adopt to thrive in the contemporary world. The findings of this research will offer valuable insights into how NU can strengthen its organizational resilience, enhance member engagement, and continue to play a pivotal role in both religious and societal development in Indonesia.

## 2. Literature Review

This section is designed to provide a foundation for understanding the key concepts and principles that underlie the strategic management practices of the organization under study, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). By exploring relevant literature on strategic management, sustainability, and leadership, this review highlights the critical elements that shape the decision-making processes and long-term planning in religious organizations like NU. It examines how traditional values and modern management techniques can coexist to ensure both the preservation of religious identity and the adaptation required in today's rapidly changing socio-political environment.

Strategic management is essential for organizations to adapt, sustain growth, and remain relevant in a rapidly changing environment. Religious organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), face unique challenges in balancing tradition with innovation. Research conducted by Kabeyi[9] emphasizes the necessity of strategic planning in nonprofit and religious organizations, as it helps these entities prepare for future uncertainties while maintaining their mission. Religious organizations often struggle to balance tradition with innovation, and therefore, an effective strategic plan needs to incorporate the unique religious and cultural values that form the core of their identity.

Sustainable development has become a crucial focus for many organizations. According to.. sustainability involves balancing economic, social, and environmental responsibilities. For NU, the focus on sustainability requires not only financial stability but also maintaining social relevance and environmental stewardship. Research[10] emphasizes the need for adaptive leadership and innovative practices to foster long-term growth. This is particularly relevant for organizations like NU, which must ensure its activities align with the needs of its community (Nahdliyin) while remaining true to its foundational values.

A major challenge faced by religious organizations is balancing the preservation of traditional values with the need for adaptation in a modern context. According to Bryson [11], organizations with strong historical and cultural roots often struggle to innovate without compromising their core identity. For NU, this balance is critical in ensuring that it remains relevant to younger generations while upholding the Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah tradition. This tension between tradition and modernity has been discussed in studies that emphasize the importance of strategic leadership, flexibility, and the willingness to embrace new technologies and methodologies while maintaining core religious principles.

Community engagement plays a pivotal role in the success of religious organizations. Studies by [12] suggest that strong community ties and participatory leadership can enhance an organization's capacity for growth and adaptation. NU's leadership model, which relies heavily on its connection to pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) and community members, serves as an example of how deep-rooted community engagement can lead to sustainable growth. Additionally, leaders in NU are often seen as both religious and community leaders, which adds a layer of complexity to their strategic management efforts. Religious organizations are increasingly navigating complex governance structures. Research by [13] demonstrates that governance in religious settings must be flexible enough to accommodate both traditional hierarchies and modern demands for transparency and inclusiveness. NU, with its decentralized yet interconnected structure, must find ways to harmonize its leadership styles with effective governance

practices that allow for adaptation in a globalized world.

While significant research has been done on strategic management, community engagement, and sustainability in organizations, there is a lack of focused studies on how these concepts apply specifically to large religious organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining how NU can implement effective strategic management practices that balance tradition with innovation, ensuring its sustainable growth in the contemporary era. The study also explores how leadership within NU navigates the challenges of modern governance while maintaining strong community ties.

### 3. Methodologies

This research employs a qualitative research approach within ethnography approach, aiming to understand the strategic management practices adopted by the Nahdlatul Ulama to achieve sustainable growth within the community [14]. The study focuses on gaining in-depth insights into the experiences, perspectives, and strategic management practices implemented by organizational leaders. This research is descriptive-qualitative in nature, aiming to provide a detailed account of the phenomenon being studied. Descriptive qualitative research focuses on a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter based on the data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation.

The subjects of the study include organizational members and leaders involved in the planning, decision-making, and strategy implementation processes. The selection of subjects will be purposive, based on their strategic roles within the organization. This methodology provides a solid foundation for exploring how the organization manages and implements strategic management to foster sustainable growth within the community.

#### 3.1. Data Sources and Collection

The main data is collected through in-depth interviews with organizational leaders and key members involved in strategic roles. Informants are selected based on their relevance to the decision-making processes and strategy implementation within the organization. This includes organizational documents, annual reports, previous studies, and literature related to strategic management and the organization.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore the views, experiences, and strategic management practices of the informants. This method allows flexibility to delve deeper into how organizational strategies are developed and implemented. The research will observe relevant organizational activities related to strategic management, such as strategic meetings, planning sessions, or program implementations. The research will review relevant documents, including annual reports, strategic agendas, and internal organizational materials, to complement the information gathered from interviews and observations.

**Table 1: List of Key Informants**

No	Name	Position	Institution/Organization	Field of Expertise/Role	Year
1	KH Miftahul Ahyar	Rois Am of PBNU	Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU)	-	2015-present
2	KH Said Aqil Sirajd	General Chairman of PBNU Tanfidziyah	Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU)	-	2010-2021

3	KH Zuhri Zaini	Rois Syuriah of East Java PWNU	East Java Regional Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PWNU)	-	2010-present
4	Kyai Maksar	Rois Syuriah of Sukapura MWC NU, Probolinggo Regency	Nahdlatul Ulama Branch Representative Council (MWC NU)	-	-
5	Drs. H. Choirul Anam	Chairman of East Java Ansor Regional Board	Gerakan Pemuda Ansor	NU Book Author	2009-present
6	Prof. Akh Muzakki, M.Ag., Ph.D.	Deputy Secretary-General of PBNU, Rector of UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya	UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya	Sociology of Education	2022-present
7	Dr. Wasid Mansyur, M.Ag	Vice Chairman of East Java Ansor Regional Board, Lecturer	UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya	Islamic Cultural History	2010-present
8	Prof. Dr. Achmad Jazidie, M.Eng	Chairman of LPTNU East Java, Rector of Nahdlatul Ulama University	Nahdlatul Ulama University, Surabaya	Technology and Innovation	-
9	Prof. Dr. Amany Burhanuddin Lubis	Rector of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Chair of Indonesian Ulema Council	UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta	Islamic Political History	2018-2023

### 3.2. Observation Topics

These topics guide the exploration of how NU has evolved over time, particularly in relation to its foundational objectives.

**Table 2: Observation Topics**

No	Key Topic	Objective
1	Strategic Planning and Decision-Making	To explore the strategic planning processes within NU, focusing on how decisions are made to align with the organization's foundational goals and respond to external challenges. This includes understanding the role of leadership in shaping strategies that address social, economic, and religious issues.
2	Leadership and Governance	To analyze the leadership structures within NU and how governance practices influence organizational effectiveness. This topic aims to identify the key roles played by leaders and scholars in guiding the organization, as well as the dynamics between local pesantren and NU's central leadership.
3	Implementation of Strategies	To investigate how NU's strategies are implemented across various levels of the organization. This includes assessing the mechanisms used to ensure that strategic objectives are translated into actionable programs and initiatives that benefit the community.



No	Key Topic	Objective
1	Strategic Planning and Decision-Making	To explore the strategic planning processes within NU, focusing on how decisions are made to align with the organization's foundational goals and respond to external challenges. This includes understanding the role of leadership in shaping strategies that address social, economic, and religious issues.
4	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptation	To examine the processes of monitoring and evaluating NU's initiatives, focusing on how feedback is gathered and used to adapt strategies over time. This topic aims to understand how NU maintains relevance and effectiveness in addressing the evolving needs of its members and the broader community.
5	Community Engagement and Participation	To assess the level of community involvement in NU's activities and decision-making processes. This objective seeks to identify how NU fosters participation among its members and local communities, thereby enhancing collective ownership and support for the organization's goals.
6	Sustainability and Growth	To explore the factors that contribute to NU's sustainability and growth as a religious organization. This includes analyzing the strategies employed to ensure long-term viability, financial stability, and the ability to adapt to changes in the socio-political environment.
7	Adaptation and Innovation	To investigate how NU adapts its practices and introduces innovations in response to contemporary challenges and opportunities. This topic aims to identify specific examples of innovative strategies that have been employed to enhance NU's impact and relevance in modern society.

### 3.3. Data analysis Techniques

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, data triangulation will be employed. Data from interviews with various informants holding different positions within the organization will be compared to assess the consistency of the information provided. Data from interviews, observations, and documentation will be cross-checked to identify convergence or divergence among the data sources. Various strategic management theories will be employed to analyze the data, providing a broader perspective in understanding the phenomena under study.

Interview data will be transcribed verbatim, followed by a coding process to identify key themes related to strategic management. Major themes that emerge from the data will be categorized based on significant aspects of strategic management, such as strategy formulation, implementation, evaluation, as well as challenges and opportunities. Conclusions will be drawn based on the identified findings, and verification will be conducted by comparing different data sources to ensure the reliability of the information.

### 4. Result

This section presents the findings from the research conducted on Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) regarding strategic management practices and their implications for sustainable growth within communities. The analysis is structured around the key observation topics identified in previous sections, providing insights drawn from in-depth interviews with key informants and observational data.

**Table 3: Informant Keyfindigs**

No	Topics	Key Findings
1	Strategic Planning and Decision-Making[15]	<p>Prof. Akh Muzakki, M.Ag. (Sociology of Education) emphasized that NU employs a collaborative approach in strategic planning, actively involving community members to ensure alignment with local needs. Triangulated data from stakeholder engagement sessions support the view that this inclusive strategy fosters a strong sense of ownership among participants.</p> <p>Dr. Wasid Mansyur, M.Ag. (Islamic Cultural History) added that establishing clear, measurable objectives is crucial for effective decision-making within NU. Feedback from various workshops confirmed that setting specific goals helps streamline efforts and enhances organizational accountability.</p>
2	Leadership and Governance [16]	<p>KH Miftahul Ahyar (Rois Am PBNU) highlighted the balance between traditional leadership values and modern governance practices, which strengthens trust and transparency within the organization. Triangulated data from governance evaluations illustrated that these practices promote a culture of accountability among community members.</p> <p>KH Zuhri Zaini (Rois Syuriah PWNU Jawa Timur) pointed out the significance of mentorship in cultivating future leaders within NU. His insights were validated by feedback from young leaders who reported substantial benefits from mentorship programs.</p>
3	Implementation of Strategies[17]	<p>Kyai Maksar (Rois Syuriah MWC NU Sukapura) discussed how local pesantren play a vital role in executing NU's strategic initiatives, emphasizing the need for context-specific adaptations. Focus group discussions corroborated that localized implementations significantly enhance the effectiveness of NU's programs.</p> <p>Dr. Choirul Anam (Chairman of PW Ansor Jawa Timur) mentioned the importance of continuous training and support for members to ensure successful strategy execution. Triangulated insights from training assessments showed a clear correlation between training participation and improved program outcomes.</p>
4	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptation[18]	<p>Prof. Dr. Achmad Jazidie, M.Eng. (Technology Innovation) stressed the necessity of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess program effectiveness. He highlighted that community feedback mechanisms are essential for making necessary adjustments, a point validated by program impact assessments that revealed significant improvements following feedback implementation.</p> <p>Dr. Wasid Mansyur, M.Ag. (Islamic Cultural History) also emphasized the importance of adapting strategies based on evaluation findings. His perspective was reinforced by data from community engagement surveys, showing that ongoing assessments help NU pivot its initiatives to better serve emerging community needs.</p>

5	Community Engagement and Participation [19]	<p>KH Miftahul Ahyar (Rois Am PBNU) highlighted that community engagement is fundamental to NU’s mission, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among members. Participation metrics from various programs indicated a notable increase in community involvement in NU-led initiatives.</p> <p>Prof. Akh Muzakki, M.Ag. (Sociology of Education) reiterated the significance of outreach programs in mobilizing community support, supported by triangulated data from evaluations showing strengthened community ties resulting from these initiatives.</p>
6	Sustainability and Growth[20]	<p>KH Zuhri Zaini (Rois Syuriah PWNU Jawa Timur) underscored the importance of diversifying funding sources to ensure sustainability, noting successful partnerships with local businesses and organizations. Financial assessments corroborated this approach, indicating that such collaborations enhance NU’s resource base.</p> <p>Dr. Choirul Anam (Chairman of PW Ansor Jawa Timur) added that strategic investments in community programs are crucial for long-term growth. Data from community project evaluations demonstrated that well-funded initiatives lead to measurable improvements in community welfare.</p>
7	Adaptation and Innovation[21]	<p>Prof. Dr. Achmad Jazidie, M.Eng. (Technology Innovation) discussed the necessity of integrating technology into NU’s programs, particularly through digital platforms, to enhance outreach efforts. Triangulated data from technology adoption surveys indicated that community members respond positively to these innovations.</p> <p>Dr. Wasid Mansyur, M.Ag. (Islamic Cultural History) emphasized fostering a culture of innovation as essential for adapting to changing circumstances. He noted that there is a growing demand for modern solutions within communities, supported by survey data highlighting community interest in innovative approaches.</p>





**Figure 1: Summary of Insights**

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has successfully utilized strategic management to foster sustainable growth among its communities. The organization, deeply rooted in traditional Islamic values, has adapted its leadership, planning, and implementation processes to address contemporary challenges. Informants highlighted NU's ability to blend religious authority with modern organizational strategies, ensuring that both religious and social objectives are met.

The strength of NU's strategic planning lies in its collaborative approach, involving various levels of leadership and community engagement[22]. This approach ensures that decisions are aligned with the needs of the broader NU community, both religiously and socially. Leaders emphasize maintaining the balance between traditional values and modern needs, allowing for a cohesive strategic direction. The role of pesantren, or Islamic boarding schools, is critical, as they serve as both educational centers and administrative hubs, supporting the implementation of NU's strategies at local and national levels.

One of the central themes that emerged is NU's capacity for adaptability and innovation, particularly in the face of globalization. Informants stressed that NU's evolution from a conventional religious organization to a more progressive and populace-oriented one has been essential in maintaining its relevance in Indonesia's changing sociopolitical landscape. This adaptability is visible in how NU approaches new technologies and global challenges, ensuring that its strategies are continuously evaluated and revised to remain effective.

Another crucial aspect discussed by informants is NU's emphasis on grassroots participation. This participatory approach not only strengthens community ties but also ensures that the organization's policies are reflective of the needs of its followers. Informants agreed that this community-driven model

has contributed significantly to NU's longevity and its ability to address pressing national issues, such as education, social justice, and economic empowerment[23].

Finally, sustainability was a recurring theme in the responses from informants. NU has developed a comprehensive framework that focuses on long-term growth through religious, social, and economic development. The organization's efforts to empower local communities and ensure consistent leadership have positioned it as a model for sustainable growth within religious organizations.

In conclusion, the triangulation of data from various informants shows that NU's success stems from its strategic adaptability, robust leadership, and deep-rooted community engagement. These elements form the foundation of NU's ability to sustain growth while maintaining its core religious identity amidst evolving global and national challenges.

## 6. Conclusion

This research highlights the most effective strategic management practices and challenges faced by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in ensuring its sustainable growth. Key practices include collaborative leadership, where decisions are made by engaging leaders at various levels to reflect the needs of the broader Nahdliyin community. NU also effectively blends traditional religious values with modern governance, ensuring its identity remains intact while adapting to contemporary organizational needs. Decentralized implementation, through empowering local leaders and institutions like pesantren, allows NU to tailor its strategies to meet diverse regional needs. Additionally, NU demonstrates strong adaptability through continuous evaluation and updating of its strategies in response to technological advancements and globalization.

However, NU faces significant challenges in balancing tradition with innovation. The preservation of its religious identity remains crucial as it adapts to modern societal demands, particularly within its core pesantren system. There is also internal resistance, as some within the organization view innovation as a threat to its traditional roots. Finally, navigating the complexities of globalization poses a challenge, as NU must embrace change while ensuring alignment with its core religious principles. In summary, NU's inclusive management approach and adaptability are key to its sustained growth, though balancing tradition with the need for innovation continues to be a central challenge.

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