Communication patterns and adaptation in maintaining academic culture among women leaders: a study of symbols and rituals at the University of Lampung (2023–2024)

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The communication pattern of the University of Lampung's rector for 2023–2024 is noteworthy, portraying a distinct knowledge framework. Two critical issues arise, namely, (1) the recurrent decline in institutional performance during leadership transitions at Unila, and (2) corruption scandals encompassing university leaders in 2022. To address these issues, the current work adopted a cultural communication perspective. Peters suggested that communication can be identified through various messages, events, and behaviors. Data were collected using a constructive research method, primarily through intensive interviews. Study identified three key communication patterns. First, the rector introduced the slogan "Be Strong," initially launched without adequate socialization, symbolizing resilience and institutional recovery amidst challenges. Second, drawing from Carey's ritual communication perspective, the focus was on internal dynamics to foster a strong academic community. Third, while leadership communication lacks a robust application of symbols and rituals, it demonstrates efforts to preserve academic culture. These patterns highlight the leader's adaptive strategies in navigating challenges and fostering acceptance and trust within the academic community.

KEYWORDS

academic culture, adaptation, "Be Strong", resilience, University of Lampung

Introduction

For a female leader, assuming office typically entails navigating two significant challenges: (1) gaining acceptance in a masculine environment that prioritizes speed and strength; and (2) successfully fulfilling her leadership responsibilities, even within a university context. Consequently, the present research on communication and academic culture aims at exploring the perspectives of the rector and leadership officials at the University of Lampung (Unila) Indonesia during their tenure from 2023 to 2024. The rationale for this research stems from Unila's vision and mission to secure a position among Indonesia's top 10 universities by 2025. Nonetheless, several obstacles persist: (a) a consistent decline in Unila's ranking with each leadership transition (Trenggono, Karomani, Wardhani, and Sulistyarini, 2021), and (b) a corruption case encompassing Unila's leaders in 2022, which significantly damaged the university's reputation (theconversation.com, 2022).

The academic culture at Unila has evolved since 1998 through three leadership periods: 1998–2007, 2007–2015, and 2015–2019. These eras established Unila as either a research university or a

teaching university, both contributing positively to its ranking (Trenggono, Karomani, Wardhani, and Sulistyarini, 2021). During the 2019–2023 period, Unila achieved significant milestones, ranking among Indonesia's top 10 universities. Nevertheless, the 2022 corruption scandal severely impacted its performance and rankings (Profil Unila, 2024). On January 18, 2023, a new rector was appointed and initiated a recovery process under the slogan "Be Strong." This work specifically examines the rector's communication patterns in preserving academic culture during her first year in office, from 2023 to 2024.

The Minister of Education has emphasized that university rankings are designed to encourage Indonesian universities to attain global standards. To support this goal, the Ministry offers endowment funds for research at Indonesia's leading universities. According to Webometrics 2020.1.1, which evaluates universities based on presence, impact, openness, and excellence, Unila ranked 28th nationally and 3438th globally. Nonetheless, the July 2023 Webometrics report exhibits a decline, with Unila slipping to the 34th position among Indonesian universities (Profil Unila, 2024).

Other ranking data also reflect a downward trend:

- World University Rankings 2021 (14th), 2022 (20th), 2023 (14th), and 2024 (16th);
- Webometrics Rankings 2021 (10th), 2022 (10th), 2023 (13th), and 2024 (17th); and
- Scimago Institutions Rankings 2021 (10th), 2022 (16th), 2023 (9th), and 2024 (15th).

In light of these challenges, this research addresses the following questions:

1. How did Unila's rector build communication strategies to restore the university's reputation during her first year in office?
2. How did the rector's communication patterns contribute to preserving the academic culture during this period?

This research seeks to achieve understanding by interpreting the meanings surrounding events from the perspectives of the individuals involved. The approach assumes that every social situation is underpinned by a network of meanings created through communication. The research does not aim to track institutional developments but rather to comprehend how communication addresses institutional challenges. Insights from this study are anticipated to inform strategies for institutional growth and the achievement shared objectives.

Perspective

According to Edgar H. Schein, organizational culture is defined as follows: "A pattern of shared basic assumptions developed by a group as it addressed challenges of external adaptation and internal integration proven effective, enough to be considered valid and, thus taught to new members as the appropriate way to perceive, think, and respond to those challenges."

This definition encompasses three cultural levels:

- Surface level (artifacts): This includes tangible elements such as technological designs, language, artistic products, and visible behaviors or rituals.

- Standardized values (espoused values): These represent leaders' proposed solutions to organizational challenges, encompassing ideas, attitudes, and actions.
- Deepest level (basic assumptions): These are, espoused values that value become unconsciously accepted as truths within the organization (Schein, 1992).

Kotter and Hesket (1992) distinguished between visible and invisible organizational culture (Kotter and Hesket, 1992). Similarly, Stephen W. Littlejohn explained that both the visible and invisible aspects of culture can be observed through symbols (Littlejohn, 1996; Natalya, 2018). Research on basic assumptions and visible values has been conducted in the Strategic Industry Management Agency (Trenggono, 1995). Additionally, Irena and Rusfian (2019), and Herminingsih (2011), explored the positive influence of transformational leadership on performance, engagement, adaptability, and organizational mission achievement.

Concerning leadership communication, the current research employs the existential feminism perspective initiated by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir described the position of women and the challenges they face in attaining self-identity. She also proposed four strategies for women to equalize themselves with men. (1) working outside the home to establish themselves as subjects; (2) becoming intellectuals to attain equality with men; (3) working toward societal transformation to exert broad influence; and (4) rejecting the perception of women as "the other," highlighting women as subjects, Aizid, (2024). Research on forms of women's existence commonly involves activities such as working, pursuing intellectual roles, rejecting subordination, and becoming influential figures (Azzahra, 2022). The existential view of women is supported by the philosophical horizons of Sartre, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus, and de Beauvoir (Patel and Sharma, 2022). Current studies have highlighted that women worldwide still suffer from male dominance and economic dependence (Albtoush, 2020).

The initial step of this research employs James W. Carey's ritual communication approach. The ritual perspective predates the transmission model of communication. In ritual communication, terms such as sharing, participation, fellowship, association, and collective belief replace the notion of transmitting information. This perspective is not aimed at overwhelming the public space with information but at maintaining societal cohesion over time. Moreover, it emphasizes not the act of conveying information but the representation of shared beliefs. The essence of the ritual perspective lies not in the transmission of information but in the construction and preservation of order, cultural meaning, and social norms, which serve as mechanisms for control and frameworks for human behavior (Carey, 1989).

Carey affirmed that, communication processes represent, maintain, adapt, and share the beliefs of a society during its time. In this context, communication serves as a process that cultivates societal transformation, encompassing sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and the cultivation of mutual trust. The concept of rituals involves two key aspects: meaning and religious connotations. The connection to religion highlights activities such as ceremonies and the processes that shape shared beliefs (Carey, 1989).

The theoretical framework for this research develops by incorporating the existential feminist perspective previously discussed

and subsequently utilizing the resilience communication approach. The application of resilience communication theory is particularly relevant, considering that Unila faced the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and leadership corruption in 2022. According to Wikipedia, resilience refers to the ability to adapt and remain steadfast during challenging situations (Reivich and Shatte, 2002; Resiliensi, 2025).

The Editor of the *Harvard Business Review* (Ovans, 2015) defines resilience as the capacity to recover from setbacks, adapt effectively to change, and persist through adversity (Gusfa, 2023). Resilience theory provides an essential framework for understanding how individuals, small groups, organizations, and communities collectively find meaning, resolve uncertainties, and respond to crises. When addressing organizational crises, three primary objectives are pursued: (1) prioritizing the restoration of balance; (2) establishing a new equilibrium through revised processes and policies; and (3) integrating both approaches (Seeger et al., 2024). Research on resilience theory, particularly in the context of communication activities, examines the adaptive capacities of nonprofit networks. The findings confirm that formal structures offer conditions conducive to organizing informal and adaptive activities (Doerfel et al., 2022).

Research on the role of emotions in female leadership can be classified into two perspectives: emotions as strength and emotions as weakness. Singh examined the relationship between gender, leadership, and emotions using bibliometric analysis and the Theory Context Characteristics Methods. Their findings identified two key themes: the emotional expression and emotional competence of women in leadership and career development (Singh et al., 2023). This study aligns with Karl Weick's notion that organizations are ongoing processes of organizing, where structures is shaped by interrelated communication behaviors (Pace and Faules, 2000).

Method

The current work is constructive or interpretative in nature. The Hegel method underscores understanding individuals, institutions, actions, or individual work styles as documents, manifestations, or expressions of a larger morphological unit (meaning) underlying the data. Meanwhile, Max Weber viewed individuals as carriers of meaningful behavior. Concepts such as values, institutions, symbols, rituals, and others represent distinct categories of human interaction and communication. Drawing on Weber's perspective, this study aims at translating these concepts into actions or communication that can be understood. Weber referred to his perspective as interpretative or understanding sociology (Weber, 2006). Therefore, this research method is in accordance with Charmaz's approach, namely constructivist grounded theory. In this case, researchers and informants mutually construct meaning (co-construction) during data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014: 32–34).

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews. The questionnaire employed in this work was semi-structured, meaning that the questions were organized according to general categories created beforehand. Nonetheless, in practice, during in-depth interviews, questions within each category could be freely developed to obtain abundant and varied data (Johnson, 2002).

The in-depth interviews seek to undertake the following: (a) to seek deeper information and understanding; (b) to offer insights beyond general explanations; (c) to uncover deeper assumptions,

practices, and interests of the individuals being examined; and (d) to allow for capturing and articulating various perspectives, views, and meanings of distinct activities, events, and specific cultural objects (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

This research began by analyzing the slogan "Be Strong," not from a cognitive dimension, but as a study of *verstehen* (Weber), seeking to understand experiences, capture interlevel or inner life (Dilthey), immerse in the mental world, and position the researcher within the subjects' perspective. The interviews targeted Unila's leaders and officials, who are also academics fulfilling the *Tri Dharma* functions of teaching, research, and community service. The research activities were assisted by eight interviewers tasked with conducting in-depth interviews with 16 key informants. These informants encompassed university leaders (five informants), deans (eight informants), heads of institutions (two informants), and heads of technical implementation units (one informant).

The key informants interviewed involved the following: the Rector for the 2023–2027 period, inaugurated on January 18, 2023; four Vice Rectors for the 2023–2027 period; the Head of the Institute for Research and Community Service; The Head of the Institute for Learning Development and Quality Assurance; eight Faculty Deans; and six Head of the Technical Implementation Unit for Information and Communication Technology. Considering the busy schedules and availability of the key informants, the in-depth interviews were conducted in two stages. The first stage took place from August 15 to August 30, 2024, while the second stage occurred from September 1 to September 15, 2024.

Results and discussion

Time utilization

The current study initially focuses on time management for completing daily tasks. Although holding leadership roles within the university, faculties, or institutions, individuals retain their status as lecturers with full responsibility for fulfilling the Tridharma of higher education: teaching, research, and community service. Academics who hold structural roles such as Rector, Vice Rector, Dean, Chair/Head of Institutions, and Heads of Technical Implementing Units (UPT) fundamentally remain lecturers, educators, researchers, and community servants. These structural roles are essentially supplementary duties.

Nonetheless, in practice, these additional roles demand additional time, focus, and performance. Consequently, much of their daily work time is allocated to these supplementary tasks, generally referred to as administrative or leadership duties. Most of their time is spent on these additional responsibilities. Despite these obligations, structural officials must still perform their Tridharma duties. They are required to teach, conduct research, and offer community services. This results in additional time being spent on structural roles while reducing time for academic functions. As per regulations, work hours are from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Nevertheless, time dedicated to Tridharma activities may decrease due to additional responsibilities that come with holding structural positions. Consequently, officials commonly extend their work hours until 6:00 or 7:00 PM daily.

Lecturers with extensive experience in leadership roles or a progression of structural positions tend to manage their time more

efficiently. They are familiar with the scope of work and the tasks at hand. For instance, a lecturer appointed as Dean previously served as Vice Dean. Thus, when taking on the role of Dean, they already understand the nature of the job, its challenges, and problem-solving strategies, and the planning and budgeting processes. As faculty leaders, they primarily coordinate the responsibilities of the Vice Dean and delegate tasks to the faculty staff.

As lecturers, the use of time differs before and after taking on additional duties. The workload is broader compared with prior roles, encompassing technical and administrative issues. University officials must sign performance agreements with the Rector, report monthly, and coordinate all activities. In addition to their mandatory responsibilities, they also participate in university events such as new student admissions, anniversary celebrations, and graduation ceremonies.

Structural tasks within the university are not new. The initial focus is on reviewing the planning set by previous officials, strategic plans, and organizational work guidelines. Discussions with staff regarding planned activities and program execution follow. Learning from predecessors' practices and identifying ineffective measures for improvement are crucial. Communication plays a crucial role in, ensuring a clear understanding of priorities.

In fulfilling core duties as lecturers, such as teaching, seminars, and supervising student final projects, schedules can be organized efficiently. The Rector emphasizes that leadership roles are supplementary tasks assigned to lecturers, with primary teaching duties remaining the priority. Balancing teaching and leadership responsibilities enables tasks to be completed effectively, encompassing team teaching and supervising students. Clear agreements and organized schedules facilitate task completion. Post-pandemic, in-person interactions are preferred, for both meetings and teaching, with online tools like Zoom employed only when necessary. While technology aids in overcoming obstacles, face-to-face interactions are prioritized. For teaching or meetings that encounter scheduling conflicts, adjustments are made, and online tools are utilized as a last resort.

Communication with leaders is primarily conducted in-person, through direct meetings or coordination sessions. Zoom meetings are employed when direct meetings are impossible. Familiarity with such technology facilitates communication. Additionally, the corruption case has led to increased caution in organizational operations, creating a tense atmosphere. This, combined with the pressures of responsibilities and workloads, underscores the significance of synergy, collaboration, and teamwork to streamline work processes and attain desired outcomes.

The assertion made by the rector on various formal and informal occasions that officials in the university environment are basically a lecturer who is given additional duties, is a "low profile" attitude in contrast to previous university officials who were "high profile" in terms of scientific fields. However, communication performance is an organizational politics behavior created to strengthen the understanding of the current leadership that prioritizes "simplicity," which also justifies the new leadership adaptation pattern to the university environment which is mostly senior officials. Officials in the university environment displaying a "humble" attitude together is an improvisation that runs within the organization, strengthening the fellowship, not owned by the leaders as individuals.

This perspective of communication performance as culture was proposed by Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (2009). Communication performance is interactional, contextual, occurs in episodes, and is improvisational, a process that happens as it happens, happens according to its composition and is always undergoing improvement. There is flexibility in how a communication episode occurs, and although the same communication performance will occur again, it is never repeated in exactly the same way and runs continuously (Littlejohn, 1989). This is in accordance with Weick's organizational studies approach, that organizations as organizing, structures as communication activities, or structures are more determined by interlocking behaviors (Pace and Faules, 2000).

Symbolic communication

The initial concept for "Be Strong" as a slogan or symbol originated during the rector election process. A team was formed to design the vision, mission, and programs for Lusmeilia Afriani, a candidate for the position of Rector at the University of Lampung (Unila). During internal discussions, it was highlighted that from 2020 to 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted normal activities due to the widespread virus and its fatal consequences. Consequently, work-from-home policies were implemented for lecturers and administrative staff, with university services being conducted online. This encompassed lectures, thesis consultations, and academic administrative services.

After the pandemic subsided, Unila faced turbulence on August 20, 2022, when the Rector, Vice Rector I, and the Senate Chair were arrested on corruption charges related to illegal monetary solicitations from the parents of prospective medical students through independent selection channels. This incident significantly damaged Unila's reputation nationally, especially within the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Directorate General of Higher Education. Consequently, Unila found itself in a state of disarray, struggling to regain its standing.

On Indonesia's Independence Day, August 17, 2022, the government introduced the slogan "Recover Faster, Rise Stronger" to address the impact of the pandemic. Inspired by this, Unila adopted the phrase "Be Strong" to signify recovery and resilience. An informant remarked, "We must be strong, unyielding, and resilient; we must rise and truly become strong."

The team agreed that "Be Strong" is not solely a slogan but a representation of Unila's vision, mission, and programs encompassing essential values that must be implemented. The breakdown of the acronym is as follows: The letter "B" stands for business, finance, investment, and assets. Unila has the potential to advance its status as a state-owned legal entity university, becoming independent. The university's financial strength is not solely dependent on tuition fees; it also involves owning enterprises, developing investments, utilizing assets, and fostering effective financial management. The letter "E" represents the empowerment of human resources. As of 2024, Unila has a significant workforce comprising 1,405 lecturers, 1,136 administrative staff—encompassing 392 civil servants, 731 non-civil servants, and 13 government employees under contract—and a student population of 48,720. These resources are continuously being enhanced in quality.

The letter "S" stands for services for community, underscoring the spirit of service and community dedication. The letter "T" signifies teaching, aligning with the university's Tridharma principles. Additionally, the letter "R" is for research; and the letter "O" represents

organizational partnership. Here, the rector emphasizes the concept of helix collaboration. The letter "N" refers to network infrastructure, emphasizing Internet-based technological networks. Lastly, the letter "G" stands for governance, risk management, and compliance.

Under the rector's leadership, the use of time indirectly encourages the leadership team to work beyond the standard working hours. Time management is adjusted according to the type of work and tasks being performed. This reflects the expression of the slogan "Be Strong." The emergence of the "Be Strong" text is not merely a slogan, but a way to become stronger after the corruption event involving previous leaders. During its formulation, the founders felt that it would be a waste if "Be Strong" were to remain only as a symbol. Thus, an acronym was created for each letter of "Be Strong," aligning with the university's vision, mission, and programs, and reflecting the desire to rebuild and restore the institution's integrity after the challenging events.

"Be Strong" represents the rector or the mindset imparted by the rector. All the values are outlined in the strategic plan. The values of "Be Strong" have been implemented since and have been running throughout 2023–2024. Naturally, these values continue to be refined, thereby becoming a binding force, as "Be Strong" acts as a binding template that builds emotions and a shared mindset. Moreover, "Be Strong" is internalized into the entire academic community. The strength referred to here is the ability to adapt in various situations. Integrity is upheld, as an institution with strong integrity gains the trust various groups, facilitating the development of partnerships. In the implementation of Tridharma, "Be Strong" serves as a foundation that cannot be easily influenced or pressured by external parties.

Currently, the leadership team is fostering a penthelix collaboration between the university, government, and industry. This collaboration pattern also refutes the external perception that Unila's leadership is more focused on internal matters. While internal communication is indeed strengthened, it is carried out done in stages by under the rector's guidance. The rector actively promotes open communication as widely as possible. This is implemented through making frequent visits to faculties to listen to complaints, suggestions, and feedback. Both formal and informal communication methods are employed ensuring that there are no barriers to conveying aspirations.

In vision 2025, Unila aims to become one of the top 10 universities in Indonesia, serving as a driving force continuous quality improvement. According to the rector, the "top 10" vision is just a number utilized as a benchmark. She also emphasized that the most significant aspects to optimize quality and achievements. A vision is a goal to be achieved strive for and it to make it work, a big dream is needed. A big dream requires big hopes and, strong spirit, and it cannot move forward without significant actions.

The values embedded in "Be Strong" were transformed into guidelines for the rector, vice rectors, deans, and other structural elements leaders implement. In life, the recovery process through "Be Strong" necessitates thoughtful planning. Thus, over the course of a year, the rector has consistently led meetings, coordination sessions, or limited leadership meetings to implement "Be Strong." Hence, working hours often extend beyond the scheduled time, and Saturdays are frequently used to completing outstanding tasks. The meetings and communication between the vice rectors are intense.

"Be Strong" embodies core values to prepare Unila to become a world-class university. The initiative began by integrating "Be Strong" into the Unila logo. This requires that every work unit, form administration to smaller entities like faculties and technical service units, display the logo prominently. It is featured in the rectorate building, open spaces, workrooms, uniforms, official work attire, and all areas associated with university activities. "Be Strong" becomes a symbol that directs Unila toward becoming an independent university. "Be Strong" is derived from English, but it also represents the rector's vision, mission, and work programs. Its values stem from the capacities already possessed and are reinforced to build a more independent university based on the power of scientific knowledge and innovation. Previous incidents, such as corruption, were attributed to individual errors, rather than systemic flaws, through the principle of "Be Strong," measures are in place to ensure such mistakes are not repeated, as an individual mistake can disrupt the institution's existence.

The rector has invariably emphasized that the university must keep moving forward toward improvement, because to become better, strength is required. "Be Strong" has two meanings: first, as the English phrase meaning strong, and second, as an acronym for the vision, mission, and programs, meaning that the campus must have self-sustaining income, with financial sources not solely dependent on student tuition fees. The university's business should have the characteristics of a university, such as research results, collaborations among lecturers, and student innovations. All these should be integrated into the university's business. If the business grows, then Unila can elevate its status to become an independent university. The rector's perspective prioritizes focuses on more advanced programs; and university trends must always show exhibit progress. "Be Strong," which signifies constant strength, must also be flexible to change, as change is the only constant. The strength of the entire academic community is necessary to become a better higher education institution. Unila must practice cooperation, loyalty, and work together to become greater in the present and future.

A motto reflects the unique character of a university, shaped through its faculties and academic culture. Unila is on its way toward being on par with major universities in Indonesia or entering the world-class level. Progress is already visible, with gradual improvements at the national and international levels. The "Be Strong" symbol has a meaning that aligns with the changing times. The slogan "Be Strong" is written and expressed to mark a distinguishing feature. Just as Universitas Gadjah Mada is represented by the elephant, (symbolyzing the source of knowledge), Unila is defined by "Be Strong." This slogan elaborates its values with measurable parameters.

It is hoped that at least in Sumatra, Unila will become a respected university, achieving the same level of success as major universities in Java. Interest in enrolling Unila is currently high attracting applicants from Java, Sumatra, and Lampung. Unila is essentially a national university institution in Lampung, a promising public university for the future. Thus, the academic community—lecturers, students, and staff—should not only recognize the meaning of "Be Strong" but also manifest its values in their daily activities. "Be Strong" should be displayed in the implementation of Tridharma, making it better, stronger, more advanced, and superior to previous standards.

The "Be Strong" text is prominently displayed in the second-floor meeting room of the rectorate as a background. The "Be Strong" symbol is presented in various locations around the university in, outdoor media, and is promoted with distinctive lettering. Additionally, when posing for group photos, the "Be Strong" symbol is marked by clenched fists. Previously, the "Be Strong" style was not

recognized; and the formal style was more common. However, the "Be Strong" style has now become customary.

The "Be Strong" slogan serves as a source of spirit and motivation. It can now be felt collectively. In this environment, the academic community strengthens and motivates each other to enhance performance. There is a spirit to encourage oneself and colleagues. This spirit is also present in Tridharma activities—teaching, research, and community services—where the "Be Strong" spirit should be embedded. Research activities are framed around the "Be Strong" theme. Research assignment schemes and results reinforce the "Be Strong" goal. While the interpretation of "Be Strong" may differ across faculties or fields of study, they all lead toward the same goal. Research and community service activities are inspired by the values of "Be Strong." In teaching, the values of "Be Strong" are considered to inspire learning and teaching practices. Thus, the values contained in "Be Strong" truly permeate Unila's Tridharma activities.

From all the explanations in the symbol communication section, it can be further elaborated that the presence of female candidates in the competition for the election of the Rector of Unila for the 2023–2027 period confirms the validity of the existential feminism perspective. In terms of the four strategies carried out so that women have equal bargaining value with a male-dominated environment, namely (1) working outside the home so that women become subjects; (2) becoming intellectuals so that women are equal to men; (3) working for the purpose of transforming society to have a broad influence on their environment; and (4) rejecting the perception that women are "the other," but women are subjects (de Beauvoir in Nafila, 2022; Rizem, 2024). The communication strategy of the Rector of Unila to reject the perception of women as "the other" is interesting, because it is done symbolically and is not directly related to her position or interests as rector.

The slogan "Be Strong" is directly introduced as a new ritual in every activity held at Unila. Usually after an activity is completed, a group photo session is opened and all participants make a fist with their right hand as a symbol of strength. The meaning instilled and understood by the members of the organization, that the photo or video scene together was carried out symbolically marking the emergence of revival, recovery, strength, and optimism after experiencing the COVID-19 virus pandemic (2020–2022) and corruption committed by the old rector (2022).

Do not stop at the slogan "Be Strong," the rector spurred the improvement of all rectorate building spaces, institutions, faculties, technical implementation units, student affairs, and beautifying the university environment such as auditoriums, parks, roads, and lakes marked by the slogan "Be Strong". Thus, all academicians and employees of Unila can feel the changes and comfort in their working environment. All elements of university leaders and officials who carry out activities outside the university must be stated as representing the interests of the institution, not representing the rector. The rector's communication strategy expressed in three communication patterns, namely the slogan "Be Strong," the construction of building spaces, parks, roads and the environment, as well as all outside activities as a representation of the interests of the institution; in a long time process is actually part of the communication strategy of creating a new balance under the leadership of the rector (Seeger et al., 2024). The rector embodies patterns of adaptation so as to create resilience of organizational sustainability and stable leadership legitimacy.

Ritual communication

In terms of rituals, each leadership period typically has its own policies or ritual practices. The way to recover is a ritual performed to restore dignity and honor that may have been diminished and this ritual is not difficult. The practices conducted can be consistent if supported by a team, trust, empowerment, goals, measurable outcomes, and support. In various rituals, the rector tends to emphasize togetherness, the family spirit, and mutual reminders to maintain commitment and integrity. This is repeatedly stressed to the leadership team. It is also emphasized that officials are lecturers who receive supplementary responsibilities. Hence, emerging issues are addressed through deliberation, discussion, and collective consideration, with the issues viewed from a broader perspective to find the best solution for each issue that arises.

In terms of ritual, the rector has a distinctive practice in leadership. One practice is making various visits across all faculties at Unila. Surprise visits are conducted intensively to build rapport with lecturers, educational staff, and students. This approach is crucial because it makes problem-solving easier when issues merge. These visits are not confined to lecture days; they extend to religious holidays, such as Halal bi Halal (an event for mutual forgiveness during Islamic holidays), during which rector visits various faculties. Beyond regular meetings with all faculties, the rector also visits external campuses, encompassing the Panglima Polim campus, the Metro campus, and the Way Kanan campus. These visits are part of the rector's efforts to emotionally connect with and foster a sense of togetherness among all members of the university.

In addition to formal approaches, informal communication is conducted, as formal communication is conducted by existing norms. Informal communication is considered effective in creating emotional connections within leadership team. Another ritual involves development. The visible outcomes of development are seen in campus improvements, such as building renovations, enhanced garden, flower pots, sidewalk ornaments, and the refreshed of office spaces. These enhancements also encompass the maintenance of facilities to create a better, more beautiful, and comfortable campus environment. Development is implemented in stages, with various rules in place. Improvements are made to boost work enthusiasm and public service.

Unila maintains external relationships and collaborations. External communication is consistently conducted, particularly with stakeholders, encompassing the provincial, city, and district governments, as well as the private sector. Unila has obtained a land grant of 150 hectares in the Kota Baru area. The rector's main resource for conducting out activities and planning initiatives is communication. Any obstacles are communicated through purposeful messages, both internally and externally. The rector's emotional competence is demonstrated through his decisiveness in removing one of the vice rectors who was deemed to have committed a fundamental violation, as well as a personal failure in understanding the nature of their leadership role as a lecturer with supplementary duties.

In internal communication, it has been underscored from the beginning that when dealing with campus issues or agenda, there should be no miscommunication or failure in delivering necessary information. A sincere effort must be made to communicate essential information. Likewise, communication is not limited to verbal discussions alone. All methods of communication must

be implemented, including encompassing correspondence and the use of media, all of which must be carried out proportionally. The fundamental nature of communication is essential, therefore every organizational structure should foster communication to ensure effectiveness.

Messages must be delivered to their intended recipients. To prevent any obstacles. To create consensus, everyone must position themselves within the appropriate communication framework. A professional attitude is reflected through proportional communication. Proportionality does not mean identical treatment for everyone, but rather an approach that is appropriate and meets mutual agreement. Thus, individuals should avoid excessive or insufficient behavior, striving for a balanced approach. Similarly, external communication tends to follow the same principle. The rector invariably represents Unila in maintaining communication, particularly with stakeholders, and the public, which typically becomes an arena for public opinion. Advocacy, education, and other related sectors are handled with the utmost professionalism. Universities or faculties have many relationships, and numerous require communication, leading to collaboration. Collaboration must be facilitated through communication. The rector's principle is to sustain a continuous upward trend in performance, focusing on ongoing improvement rather than merely aiming focusing for higher rankings for the university.

Both internal and external communication, are essential. Prioritizing only internal communication would hinder the institution's ability strengthen itself. Hence, internal communication is crucial because it optimizes the internal environment, unifies the vision, and outlines how the next steps will be developed, such as how the faculties will be formatted. To support internal communication, external communication is also significant. Neither aspect should be neglected and both are essential to communication. Hence, the slogan "Be Strong" can be defined as synergy and collaboration toward outstanding innovation. Synergy within and collaboration outside. Synergy facilities communication within the campus, while collaboration focusses on communication and cooperation with external parties. Hence, synergy and collaboration cannot be separated.

Symbols are necessary to strengthen the institution. "Be Strong" is an acronym that represents academic performance. While the points of value are not meant to be memorized, the spirit behind them is felt and can be developed into solutions to attain the institution's great ambitious only about strength. Hence, the slogan is not only about strength, but also a symbol that is applied to make Unila better than before. The values contained in it are very remarkably if they are translated into actions at lower levels, becoming activities that integrate into the academic community, encompassing students, in maintaining the academic culture.

The values of "Be Strong" have already been ingrained in campus life, but they have not been clearly defined. It contains new things, primarily in terms of emerging terminology. The values contained in the Tridharma have been practiced before. Its governance starts with regulations derived from laws, government regulations, presidential regulations, ministerial regulations, and finally rector regulations. Campus life grows and develops in line with the basic assumptions and the values of "Be Strong."

Currently, there are innovations. First, there are more opportunities to actualize oneself. This does not mean that there were none before, but now numerous young generations are beginning to take leadership positions in faculties, institutions, and work units. Second, the international atmosphere that has been dreamed of is being actively realized. The leadership has initiated international collaborations, creating an atmosphere of international cooperation. Student mobility activities have been realized. There are opportunities for both faculty and students to go abroad and study the dynamics of education. The leadership has actively participated in several international forums, encompassing faculties and institutions, so that the international atmosphere continues to grow. International accreditation certificates are attained through the synchronization of local values. Building renovations have not eliminated ethnic touches. Facilities are built with international acceptability. Faculty buildings, such as classrooms, are now on par with those in foreign universities, yet local ethnic ornaments are still displayed.

Communication between the dean and rector is progressing well. This is because the dean's programs are a translation of the programs developed by the university, and their alignment has been significant. Several forms of communication are conducted, such as university leadership meetings attended by the dean and vice deans. Additionally, there are coordination meetings and reports that are periodically requested by the university, both from the rectorate and from institutions. Thus, the communication is felt, even though not everything is optimal yet. Nonetheless, the communication is meaningful and beneficial, and it already meets the necessary standards. It continuous to evolve and improve over time.

Unila is a large university, a large organization, and as such a coordinating activities can be challenging. Coordination is focused on key points that help solve problems effectively. For instance, if an issue must be resolved at the faculty level, it is concretely solved at the faculty level. If there are issues that should be coordinated at the university level, they will definitely be addressed. Policies to be implemented by the university leadership: including the rector and vice rectors, are guided by an established chain of command. This structure flows from the rector to the dean, from the dean to the vice dean, and from the vice rector to the vice dean. Furthermore, internal communication is intended to build organizational solidarity. External communication must be conducted for institutional development, as the institution cannot develop on its own. At the city level, coordination with the city government is required and at the provincial level, communication with the provincial government is essential, as well as communication with other institutions. Internal consolidation is significant, as is external communication. After the internal organizational development is completed, communication with external parties is developed, highlighting the message that Unila wants to become a world-class campus. Thus, things that cannot be implemented alone will gain support from external parties.

Over the past year, the "Be Strong" campaign has been attempted to reinforce these values. Whenever activities are held, it is invariably expressed, mentioned, and exhibited so the faculty and work unit staff understand it. Likewise, from the leadership's perspective, these values are not something new. It is just that now the scope must be applied more broadly. The rector's leadership pattern as a female leader has its own strengths, with more attention to detail. In terms of values, there is more sensitivity and the campus infrastructure is also more vibrant. At the next level, positions are also filled by women, such as the vice rector, deans, and other institutions.

Internal communication has become more intensive. This is intended to build togetherness, in addition to communication through technological applications. Direct meetings are more frequently conducted through meetings. External communication by the rector is already running, particularly in building closer relations with provincial and local governments. Unila is always invariably invited to attend provincial or city events and Unila has obtained land grants from the provincial government. Several grants have also been provided to faculties from both the city and provincial governments.

Organizational management has been enhanced previously, there was no term such as integrity zone or corruption-free area. Now, this is being promoted. Previously, only one faculty was given responsibility now, all faculties are involved. This is a significant improvement in governance. Additionally, services have also been optimized. Higher education services are not only academic services but also services related to promotions or promotions for lecturers, which have also become better. In terms of communication patterns, it is now much better. In addition to direct communication, through meetings or invitations to meetings, technology is also employed. Quick coordination is facilitated utilizing applications between the university leadership and faculties. Moreover, it can employed for broader purposes, such as socialization activities.

At the leadership level, the dominant communication pattern is not dominated by one person but is collective and collegial. When something must to be decided, the leadership and the relevant work units are involved. Decisions are not made by one person alone, but through collegiality. The consequence is that all members of the organization or institution must also participate in providing their opinions and understanding. All resources must understand must to be done or decided. The strength lies in collegiality and togetherness. When the collective collegial culture runs well, everyone has an understanding based on agreement. If only one person makes the decision, while others do not fully comprehend the issues, then the internalization of that decision's understanding will not reach the lowest levels.

As the leader of the university, the rector, has demonstrated strong communication skills. While the rector holds the highest position in the structure, she not only acts as a leader but also as a lecturer who fosters communication the academic staff. The rector has practiced building relationships and communication. Furthermore, as a lecturer, she is diligent in responding to invitations from anyone, not only from the leadership but also from other lecturers or anyone else who extends an invitation. The rector also takes the time to attend meetings and forums, truly dedicating time to creating communication and togetherness. This is one way to convey messages, particularly encouraging everyone to work together to build the institution. The rector typically attends meetings because she understands that communication and the frequency of interactions are key to the success of the work. If there is no face-to-face meeting, discussion, or sharing of thoughts, then misunderstandings or miscommunication could arise.

The rector's leadership style encompasses the entire leadership team, officials, lecturers, and staff in the activities and daily operations. While the process is implemented out in stages within the organizational structure, particularly in decision-making, communication is conducted by encouraging feedback. The rector maintains a balanced relationship and ensures that her presence is felt. Her activities are arranged in such a way that she is invariably occupied with external events, hence communication with subordinates is preserved.

Leadership meetings have become one of the key intensive rituals practiced by the rector at Unila. These meetings also include coordination meetings. In a hierarchical manner, the rector and the vice rectors coordinate with institutions and technical implementing units. Consequently, structured communication flows within the hierarchy. Overall, leadership meetings are an essential ritual that is regularly conducted every month. If any urgent matters arise that need coordination or resolution, a leadership meeting will be held immediately. The involvement of lecturers in then leadership meetings emerges not only in forums but also through internet technology applications. Thus, both formal and informal communication are practiced consistently. The leadership meetings follow patterns: limited and expanded. Nonetheless, the expanded leadership meeting, encompassing departments, deans, vice deans, institutions, and technical units, is the employed model. This pattern is like how corporate failures and scandals in the UK are addressed using compassionate leadership by developing a dynamic meeting culture in large companies (Villiers, 2019: 253–278).

The rector's leadership style does not favor particular individuals. Anyone with an interest, whether for discussion, conversation, or share their thoughts, is always invariably weel-supported. The rector is willing to listen, although the final decision remains at her discretion. Nonetheless, it is understood that decisions should be made collectively with other leaders, so hence the decision-making process, the rector is open to listening and considering other's perspectives. This is a pattern of open communication demonstrated as a leader. This communication style is evident in the relationship between the rector and the lecturers. In her relationship with the administrative staff, the rector is typically seen on Fridays, touring the campus, observing the situation and environment, and visiting places that need enhancement, such as gardens or walkways. Thus, she is not confined to her desk but actively engages in the field, assessing the need to elevate the campus environment. Furthermore, the rector's communication lies in her willingness to get directly involved, engage in conversation, and listen firsthand, rather than merely accepting information based on reports and trusting them. The rector verifies the accuracy of the information in reports by checking things in the field herself. If there are certain issues, the makes tries to personally observe and ensure everything is functioning properly. If negative issues arise, then she investigates the truth behind them, searching for and identifying the root causes. This approach prevents misunderstandings and quickly leads to solutions.

The description of ritual activities during the one-year leadership of the rector of Unila further strengthens the truth of the resilience theory of leaders who are shown to be different from previous university leaders. Resilience is interpreted as the ability to rise from setbacks, adapt well to change, and keep moving in difficult situations (Gusfa, 2023). Studies on resilience theory are based on communication activities that test the adaptive capacity of nonprofit networks, showing the results that formal structures create conditions for organizing informal activities that are adaptive (Doerfel et al., 2022). In this case, unlike the previous rectors who tended to use masculine power through rhetoric, speeches, and words; the existence of the rector as a female leader emphasizes her "presence" in various ritual activities, both in official and unofficial meeting forums.

Leadership meetings are expanded to solve daily problems openly and run objectively, as it is.

Unila Rector, after being inaugurated (January 18, 2023), the first activity carried out was a friendly meeting with retirees, namely lecturers and employees who had served at the university. Shortly thereafter, a friendly meeting was held with journalists of the Unila network. The Rector made official and unofficial visits to all faculties in Unila, as well as institutions and technical implementation units. Every flag ceremony requires all participants to wear traditional clothes. Every commemoration of Indonesia's independence on August 17, a long red and white flag parade is held around the campus area. In the holy month of Ramadan, a joint breakfasting is held in each faculty. The rector develops leadership meetings not limited to the rectorate leadership, but expanded with deans, heads of institutions, and technical implementation units. The rector often visits Unila campuses outside the city. The Rector collaborates to make Unila a University of Nationality in instilling national values and the unitary state. It has been two years running that in January an awarding event was held for all academicians, employees, and parties who have contributed to developing Unila. And, the rector is always present when a member of the Unila family dies or is hit by a disaster. And, important university agendas always present former rectors and old rectors who are familiar with the nickname "senior rectors."

Communication in achieving vision

Unila's vision for 2025 is "to be one of the top 10 best universities in Indonesia." In this context, the rectors leadership over the period 1998–2019 (last revision) are prioritizing internationalization, where international accreditation becomes a crucial measure for achieving the "top 10" vision. Internationalization encompasses collaborations with foreign institutions and the achievement of globally recognized quality standards. The focus on international accreditation reflects the university's efforts to align with ever-evolving global educational standards. It also signifies that the university has reached world-class standards, allowing its graduates to be more competitive in the international job market. In comparison, in Russia, the effort to elevate universities to world-class status is part of a national program (Pusbnykh et al., 2021).

The objective in the "top 10" has been declared at both the university and faculty levels. This demonstrates that, at the very least, attaining the vision requires maximum performance. To attain such remarkable achievements, collaboration is key. Each unit and faculty is committed to realizing the collaboration necessary to achieve the institution's vision. There is a belief that the vision can be achieved. While the realization of collaboration and expectations has not been fully met, it is at least moving closer to the "top 10" vision. Currently, there have been many accomplishments, and international recognition programs have already taken place, such as students participating in competitions held by universities in the United States and winning first place. Achievements and progress toward the "top 10" ranking continue to be made and enhanced.

To achieve the "top 10" status, there must be an awareness of performance gaps. Solutions must be found to address shortcomings or boost the components of the organization that are still weak. The primary business of higher education institutions is academic activity or building an academic culture. Thus, academic achievements and culture must stand out. Students must maintain their intellectual attitudes and thinking. When participating in competitions, it should be in line with strengthening intellectual capacity and academic performance. International programs should prioritize intellectual activities. Unlike other organizations, the academic community—comprising students, faculty, or the campus—should have intellectual excellence that can be a source of pride. This kind of optimism is certainly achievable.

In terms of academic culture, positive practices have already emerged. The rector actively provides motivation while also attaining key performance indicators. Achieving these indicators represents a new practice and simultaneously implements the "Be Strong" values related to accreditation assessments. Thus, accreditation, as a new practice, will offer appreciation and success for institutions that achieve outstanding accreditation. International competitions attended by faculty and students are valuable recognition for the university and faculties. Likewise, student mobility programs and various international activities encompassing faculty and students are part of this new cultural practice. In this regard, the university and faculties allocate budgets to participate in international activities. Unila continues to race toward achieving national and international rankings.

As a public university, Unila operates under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, Technology, and Higher Education, which sets performance targets through performance contracts. These targets primarily prioritize key performance indicators (KPIs), which guide the work of structural leadership. A specific additional target that has been set is the international accreditation. To maintain the performance required to reach this goal, supplementary time and effort are required, although the process is carefully planned and managed. Achieving the KPIs and attaining excellent international accreditation require extra work hours or overtime.

The vision of being in the "top 10" ranking stimulates all elements—students, academic staff, faculty, and structural leaders—to highlight efforts to achieve this goal. When examining rankings like Web of Science and Webometrics, Unila's position has declined. This is due to various variables that must be enhanced to reach a higher rank. Despite this, in other rankings, Unila has performed well, although it has not yet reached the "top ten" ranking. Regionally, in Sumatra, it ranks as the third-best university, with excellent governance ratings, which is a significant achievement.

At the national level, in the Ministry's rankings, Unila has not yet broken into the top10 ranking. Nevertheless, when considering various factors, the top 10 can be seen differently. While Unila has not made the national top 10 overall, it is already in the top 10 among state universities with public service agency status. Universities are categorized into clusters, with those being independent legal entities at the highest level, followed by public service agencies and working units. In its strategic plan, Unila aims at achieving the "top 10" status by 2025. Several indicators are employed to measure progress toward this goal. While some indicators have already been met, others will be realized by 2025. The global ranking may have declined, but specific KPIs are already in the "top 10," which indicates success. Unila has obtained recognition as a "National University" alongside five other public universities. Nevertheless, some indicators are still being worked on to meet the full target, and these areas will require continued effort to strengthen and improve.

A new indicator has emerged—the maturity index, which measures the level of maturity of a university. Unila has earned positive points in several key areas, such as human resources, information and communication technology, and planning. These factors collectively demonstrate the university's maturity. Unila is now recognized as a mature university. Additionally, its maturity index has significantly increased, with its capabilities in information technology and communication standing out, as well as its service delivery. Unila has a comprehensive data center that stores all the necessary indicators for attaining recognition both nationally and internationally. All activities within the university are mature, beginning from planning documents, through implementation, control, and evaluation. According to these criteria, Unila deserves the label of maturity, as all aspects necessary for assessment have been implemented. Nationally, it is fair to consider Unila as a "mature" institution.

In terms of communication, the successful programs that have been built must be maintained and further enhanced. Their achievements should be disseminated to the public. Furthermore, a culture of good communication has been established through routine meetings and coordination sessions, where success stories are shared. Faculty forums are also employed to continue this dialog. Additionally, programs aimed at optimizing human resources and competencies for the academic community are regularly developed. This ensures that the successful points, encompassing excellent performance, are communicated to the entire academic community, thereby boosting the university's reputation and taking it to the next level of maturity. In reality, Unila has already achieved "top ten" status in certain areas. Nevertheless, there are still aspects that need enhancement. Hence, it is essential to collectively identify the root causes of the issues and find solutions to strengthen the areas that are lagging behind, so that Unila can continue advancing toward the full realization of its vision.

According to the results of previous research on Unila's academic culture during the three leadership of the rector 1998–2019 which has been published under the title "Leaders in Communicating and Maintaining Sustainable Academic Culture towards the Top Ten Universities in Indonesia," *Journal of Ecohumanism* Vol. 3 No. 4 (2024), pp. 695–708, found leadership legacy in the formation of academic culture, namely Unila as a university of research and university of teaching (Trenggono, et al., 2024). These two main values can encourage an increase in Unila's ranking among universities in Indonesia. Thus, the structures in the university have stored provisions in carrying out the maintenance and care activities of academic culture.

In practice, for one year 2023–2024, the rector, vice rectors, deans, heads or heads of institutions, and technical implementation units have carried out daily activities, namely the learning and teaching process, research activities, and community service. In addition, increasing international accreditation for departments and study programs in Unila. International cooperation in the exchange of lecturers and students between universities with various countries. In fact, the rector built a leadership meeting mechanism that included university-wide structures to boost the university's performance index and achievements in global rankings. However, compared to the previous rectors, the rector's priority in achieving rankings as an institutional achievement can be seen from the diction chosen when delivering messages in speeches, meetings and conversations, namely the rector prefers "we must have the spirit to always work better." Almost never the discourse "Unila becomes the top ten universities in Indonesia (top 10)." The rector tends to emphasize togetherness,

communication must be honest and productive, in solving problems, among each other remind and help each other. In this case, the rector aims to create a new balance with new processes, leadership styles, and policies that are all done together (Seeger et al., 2024). The latest Webometrics ranking data in January 2025 places Unila in 15th position among the best universities in Indonesia and ranked 1,588 universities on a world scale.

Conclusion

According to the results of the analysis and discussion that have been presented, four conclusions can be formulated from this research. First, the rector as a female leader openly faces problems as a continued impact of the Covid-19 virus pandemic that lasted for two years, followed by an organizational shock as a consequence of corruption committed by the old rector and other university leaders, as well as other problems, namely the organizational climate dominated by old leaders who became senior officials at the university. The dominance of seniority faced by the new rector is characterized by the call "senior rector" to the former rectors in daily life, in university meeting forums, or social media conversations. This "senior rector" nickname is applied to both those who have retired and those who are still actively working in the university environment.

Second, the communication strategy carried out by the rector as a female leader becomes a communication pattern in her leadership, different from her predecessor leaders. The rector does not emphasize the power of speech communication, rhetoric, speeches, and words. However, the rector chose to carry out activities directly, through the approach of presence and attention to solving daily problems. This is done either symbolically, rituals, activities to achieve the organization's vision, or informal activities that create balance and new energy for the continuous organizing process. The slogan "Be Strong" was initially presented as a symbol of "passion" for recovery, revival, and optimism in the campus environment, after a long time it became a communication performance both personally, socially, and organizationally. "Be Strong" became specialized vocabulary (jargon), growing into sociality to thicken the new identity.

Third, the process of achieving organizational vision, especially in order to achieve superior rankings among universities in Indonesia and enter world-class universities, is not done through accelerated messages, attitudes, actions, and policies. However, the rector as a female leader consistently continues to maintain a balance between the achievement of university achievements in education, research, and community service through forms of maintaining academic culture and maintaining patterns of adaptation symbolically and collectively, as well as various rituals both formal and informal. Over time, the process of meaning formation runs at the individual, group and community levels. Collective understanding is built, so that the continuity of the organization is graphically stable and the leadership of the rector is accepted, and gains public trust.

Fourth, the rector's leadership displayed through giving unique meaning to positions in the university, symbol communication, ritual activities, and maintenance of academic culture, is not done through planning but is carried out through ignorance that publishes insight, mistakes that are corrected on the way, and continuous learning. Communication patterns that are carried out in dense intersections with adaptation patterns have had multiple impacts, namely academic

culture is maintained, organizational sustainability is stable, and leadership resilience bloom continuously. This unique pattern of communication and adaptation of women leaders can be an alternative model in co-creating future social services.

The recommendations from this research are as follows: first, a program of activities should be designed with clear scheduling and adequate intensity to instill the values of "Be Strong." Second, in line with the first recommendation, a branding effort for "Be Strong" should be established, comprising values that become the university's identity. Third, there should be a transformation of the Tri Dharma activities, particularly in research and community services, that are truly concrete and help maintain the balance between government and community interests and social services.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this study can be found in online repositories. The names of the repository/repositories and accession number(s) can be found in the article/supplementary material.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the University of Lampung Institutional Review Board. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

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