Karang Taruna Human Resource Competency Development Through Soft Skills and Digital Literacy Training in Pematang Johar Village

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Abstract: *This community service program was carried out to answer the issue of lack of soft skills and digital literacy competencies among members of the Pematang Johar Village Youth Organization, which has an impact on the suboptimal role of youth in social activities and village development. The focus of this service is to increase communication capacity, leadership, teamwork, and the ability to utilize digital technology. The activity aims to empower youth through strengthening personal and organizational competencies. The methods used are participatory action research (PAR) and practice-based participatory training, which are carried out through soft skills sessions, basic digital literacy, advanced digital literacy, and technical assistance. The results of the activity showed a significant increase in the communication skills, leadership, and digital skills of the participants, the formation of a digital creative team, and the improvement of the organizational culture of Karang Taruna. This program has succeeded in encouraging youth as agents of social change in the village.*

Introduction

Karang Taruna as a youth organization at the village level has a strategic role in supporting the social, economic, and cultural development of the community. However, the effectiveness of this role is highly dependent on the competence of human resources (HR) possessed by its members. In Pematang Johar Village, Labuhan Deli District, Deli Serdang Regency, Karang Taruna has active members totaling around 45-60 people, with a productive age range of 17-35 years. Based on initial interviews with village officials (2024), information was obtained that most of the members of Karang Taruna only have basic organizational experience and have never

participated in structured training related to soft skills and digital literacy, even though these two competencies are the main needs in the current digital economy era Simbolon, D., dkk. (2024).

In general, the level of digital literacy of the people of Pematang Johar Village is still relatively low. This is reflected in an internal village survey (2023) which shows that only 38% of youth are able to utilize digital devices for productive activities, such as online marketing, content design, or organizational social media management. This condition is in line with national findings by Kominfo (2022) which places Indonesia's digital literacy level at a level of 3.54 out of 5, in the "medium" category, but still needs to be strengthened in aspects of digital skills, digital security, and digital culture. This low digital literacy has an impact on the limited opportunities for village youth to utilize technology as a means of self-development and organization.

In addition, soft skills such as communication, leadership, teamwork, and problem solving are also identified as still minimal. Observations of Karang Taruna activities throughout 2024 show that most programs have not been effective due to weak internal coordination, lack of leadership skills, and low ability to plan activities collaboratively. These findings are in line with research by Sujarwo et al. (2020) who revealed that strengthening soft skills is an important factor in building the capacity of village youth to play a role in social development. The main issue faced by the youth of Karang Taruna in Pematang Johar Village is the limited competence in managing the organization and utilizing digital technology, which has an impact on their low contribution to community empowerment. Therefore, this community service activity focuses on developing the competencies of Karang Taruna human resources through soft skills training and digital literacy as an effort to strengthen the capacity of youth organizations in driving social change in the village.

The reason for the selection of the Pematang Johar Village Youth Organization as the subject of service is based on several considerations: (1) the high potential of youth as the driving force of village development; (2) there is an actual need to improve digital competencies and soft skills; (3) the commitment of the village government to collaboration with universities; and (4) the lack of structured training programs aimed at youth organizations in the village. This approach is in line with the concept of community empowerment, which is to increase the capacity of local groups to solve their problems independently (Ife, 2017). The expected social changes from this service activity include:

1. Increased personal and organizational capacity, especially in terms of effective communication, leadership, and teamwork.
2. Increasing digital literacy skills, so that youth are able to utilize technology for

organizational management, publication of activities, and digital economy opportunities.

3. The creation of an adaptive, creative, and innovative Youth Organization, which is able to support the vision of village development based on youth empowerment.

4. Strengthening networks and collaboration between universities, village governments, and Youth Organizations for program sustainability.

Thus, the development of human resource competencies through soft skills training and digital literacy is expected to be a strategic step to improve the quality of the youth of Pematang Johar Village and strengthen their contribution to the social development of the local community.

Method

The implementation of this community service uses a community development and participatory action research (PAR) approach that emphasizes the active involvement of the community in every stage of activities, from need identification to evaluation. This method was chosen to ensure that the program to strengthen soft skills and digital literacy is truly in accordance with the needs of the youth of Karang Taruna and can be sustainable after the activities are completed.

1. **Subject and Location of Service**

   The subject of service was a member of the Pematang Johar Village Youth Organization, Labuhan Deli District, Deli Serdang Regency. The number of participants ranged from 45-60 people, consisting of youth aged 17-35 years with a background in high school education to college. The location of the activity was held in the Pematang Johar Village Meeting Hall, which provided supporting facilities such as electricity, village internet, and multimedia devices. The choice of this location is because:

   a. Karang Taruna is active in social activities but has never received structured training related to soft skills and digital literacy;

   b. The village has a commitment to support youth empowerment;

   c. There is location accessibility that facilitates communication and coordination with village officials.

2. **Community Organizing and Involvement of Assisted Subjects**

   Community organizing is carried out through several stages:

   1. **Needs Assessment**

      The service team conducted interviews, observations, and directed

group discussions (FGD) together: Chairman of the Youth Organization, Core Management, Village Apparatus, Youth Representatives. The results of the assessment show the main needs in: Communication skills, leadership, conflict management, and teamwork. Basic to intermediate digital literacy, including social media use, content design, and digital security.

2. **Formation of a Community Mobilization Team**

A small team of 8 members from Karang Taruna was formed to help: Develop training concepts, Organize the logistics of activities, become a liaison between campus teams and the community, Supervise program participation and sustainability. This aims to increase the sense of ownership of the program.

3. **Joint Action Planning**

Action planning was prepared collaboratively through two formal meetings that resulted: Determination of training materials: soft skills, effective communication, leadership, team collaboration, and digital literacy (creative content, social media management, digital security). Scheduling activities for 1 month with a total of 4 intensive sessions. Role division: lecturer team as facilitator, Karang Taruna as field implementer and active participant. An agreement on the use of participatory training methods based on simulations, workshops, and hands-on practice. Community involvement in the preparation of the plan emphasizes that this activity is not top-down, but a bottom-up approach.

3. **Service Method or Strategy**

To achieve the goals of service, the following strategies are used:

1. Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The PAR method is applied because it allows youth to play the role of active subjects, not just recipients of the program. The PAR cycle includes a plan–act–observe–reflect process that is carried out throughout the program.

2. Participatory-Based Training

Training using techniques: Role play for communication and leadership, Group discussion for problem analysis, Peer learning for digital literacy, Project-based learning in the form of digital content creation and social media management of Karang Taruna.

3. Intensive Coaching

The team provides mentoring for two weeks after the training to

ensure that the youth can apply the competencies learned, especially in managing the organization's social media.

4. **Stages of Service Implementation**

The stages of the activity consist of:

1. Preparation Stage

Initial surveys and field observations, Coordination with village heads and Youth Organizations, Preparation of training needs and curriculum materials, Provision of training equipment (modules, LCDs, laptops, and internet).

2. Implementation Stage

It was held in four main sessions: Session 1 – Basic Soft Skills: Interpersonal communication, organizational ethics, and presentation skills. Session 2 – Leadership and Teamwork: Leadership simulation, conflict management, and coordination of activities. Session 3 – Basic Digital Literacy: Introduction to digital devices, digital security, and media literacy. Session 4 – Advanced Digital Literacy: Training on content creation, basic photography, design using Canva, and social media management of Karang Taruna.

3. Evaluation Stage

Evaluation is carried out through: Pre-test and post-test competency, Observation during practice, Satisfaction and feedback questionnaire, Reflection with the Karang Taruna driving team.

Result

The implementation of community service activities in Pematang Johar Village has resulted in a number of achievements that reflect positive changes both at the individual and organizational levels of the Youth Organization. This result is an accumulation of mentoring processes that take place in an interactive, participatory, and community-oriented problem-solving manner. The dynamics of mentoring show that Karang Taruna youth show a high level of enthusiasm, active participation, and willingness to develop themselves. The following is the documentation of the activities carried out:

Figure 1. Documentation of the Activities Carried Out

1. **Dynamics of the Mentoring Process**
    a. Active Involvement of Karang Taruna Members

        From the planning stage, members of Karang Taruna are actively involved in preparing agendas, organizing participants, and providing training facilities. This creates a collaborative atmosphere and increases a sense of belonging to the program. In each session, the attendance rate of participants was stable at 85–90%, indicating the acceptance of the program by the community.

    b. Positive Response to Participatory Training Models

        The training models used—based on simulations, group discussions, case studies, and hands-on practice—encourage participants to be more courageous in communicating, expressing opinions, and working together with teams. Some participants who were previously passive began to show courage in leading discussions and presenting the results of the group's work.

2. **Variety of Activities Carried Out**

    Community service activities were carried out in four main sessions as planned. Each session provides concrete results for improving participants' abilities.

    a. Basic Soft Skills Training

        In this session, participants received related materials and practices:

Interpersonal communication, Organizational ethics, basic public speaking, Decision Making As a result, participants showed increased confidence in conveying ideas. From the pre-action and post-action evaluations, the communication ability score increased by an average of 32%.

b. Leadership and Teamwork Training

Activities carried out include: Leadership role play simulation, Collaborative games to build teamwork, Case studies of conflict management in organizations. Group dynamics during practice showed increased team cohesion. Participants are able to identify patterns of internal conflicts and develop resolution procedures based on deliberation.

c. Basic Digital Literacy Training

Materials include: Use of basic digital devices, Digital security and media literacy, Ethics of communicating in the digital space. After the training, participants were able to create a professional email account, understand basic security settings, and recognize digital hoaxes. The level of comprehension increased from 42% to 78% based on the post-test.

d. Advanced Digital Literacy Training

These technical activities include: Creative content creation (photos, videos, posters), Graphic design using Canva, Social media management of the organization, Digital-based activity publication strategy. As a result, Karang Taruna's creative team succeeded in producing 15 digital contents in the form of activity posters, short videos, and publication photos. Karang Taruna's social media accounts experienced a 70% increase in interaction in two weeks of mentoring.

3. **Technical Action Form or Program Action to Solve Community Problems**

Mentoring activities also produced several concrete actions that helped solve the problem of low soft skills and digital literacy competencies in the Youth Organization.

a. Formation of the Karang Taruna Digital Creative Team

As a follow-up, a creative team of 10 members was formed to manage social media, document activities, and create village promotional content. This team has actively published three village activities independently.

b. Preparation of SOPs (Standard Operating Procedure) for Internal Communication During the discussion process, participants identified internal coordination problems. As a solution, a simple SOP was prepared regarding: Communication flow, Division of tasks, Meeting scheduling, Decision making, This SOP document is now used in every Karang Taruna

meeting.

c. Organizational Social Media Activation

Through digital training, Karang Taruna's Instagram account, which was previously inactive, is now professionally managed by: Scheduled content design, Use of strategic hashtags, Publication of weekly activities This increases Karang Taruna's visibility and strengthens the organization's image in the eyes of the public.

4. **Direct Impact on the Community**

Training and mentoring have a real impact, including:

a. Increase in participants' soft skills competencies by 27-35% based on evaluation.

b. Increasing participants' digital skills from the "low" to "moderate" category.

c. The involvement of youth in village activities became more active after the program took place.

d. The development of a new culture in the organization is a collaborative, communicative, and technology-based culture.

Overall, the dynamics of the program show that this community service is able to increase the capacity of Karang Taruna as an agent of social change in Pematang Johar Village.

Discussion

The results of the implementation of community service show that the mentoring process carried out in a participatory manner is able to have a significant impact on improving the competence of members of the Youth Organization in Pematang Johar Village. The social changes that occur are not only seen in the improvement of individual participants' abilities, but also in organizational dynamics, communication patterns, and collective work culture in Karang Taruna. To understand these changes, the results of this service are analyzed through the perspective of community empowerment, human resource development, and digital literacy theory.

1. **Changes in Competencies as a Result of a Participatory Approach**

The improvement of participants' soft skills competencies—such as interpersonal communication, leadership, and teamwork—reflects the success of the participatory approach used in the program. This approach is in line with the concept of community empowerment according to Ife (1995), which emphasizes that empowerment is effective when the

community is directly involved in decision-making and program implementation. The initial involvement of Karang Taruna members in the planning of activities creates a sense of ownership, so that their participation increases significantly in each activity session.

The simulation-based training model, role play, and group discussions allow participants to directly practice the skills learned. In line with the views of Spencer and Spencer (1993), soft skills can be developed optimally through reflective and interactive learning situations. Therefore, training dynamics designed with an experiential learning approach have been proven to be effective in improving participants' communication and leadership competencies.

2. **Strengthening Digital Literacy as a Foundation for Organizational Transformation**

Increasing participants' digital literacy is one of the most significant achievements of this program. Digital literacy is not only a technical skill, but also includes the ability to understand information, think critically in the digital space, and use technology for productive purposes (Gilster, 1997). Before the activity, the majority of Karang Taruna members did not have adequate digital skills, so they had difficulty utilizing technology for organizational management and publication of activities.

Practice-based training such as digital content creation, social media management, and visual communication design provides hands-on experiences that accelerate the learning process. These findings are in line with Martin (2008) research which states that digital literacy can be significantly improved through structured and practice-based training. After the training, participants were able to manage the organization's social media more professionally, as seen from the increase in activities and interactions on Karang Taruna accounts.

3. **Organizational Dynamics and the Formation of a Performance Culture**

In addition to individual changes, mentoring programs also affect changes in the organizational culture of Karang Taruna. The formation of the Digital Creative Team, the preparation of internal communication SOPs, and the increase in collaboration between members show a transformation towards a more organized, responsive, and adaptive organization to technological developments. This supports the view of Robbins and Judge (2013) that organizations will thrive when internal structures and cultures are able to adapt to the demands of external change.

Improving leadership and internal communication skills also strengthens group cohesion. In the context of youth empowerment, group cohesion is very important because it is the social capital that determines the success of the organization in carrying out work programs (Putnam, 2000). Observational data showed that after training, internal coordination improved and the level of minor conflicts within the organization could be resolved more quickly through a deliberation mechanism.

4. **Social Impact: Youth as Agents of Change**

Social changes seen from this activity include: Increasing youth participation in village activities, both in documentation, publication, and implementation of social activities. The increase in people's digital literacy is indirect, because youth give examples of productive use of technology. The building of the village government's trust in the capacity of Karang Taruna opens up greater opportunities for collaboration in the future. These findings support the argument of Wong (2010) that the involvement of youth in empowerment programs can increase their role as agents of change at the community level.

5. **Key Lessons from the Service Process**

Some of the lessons that can be drawn from this community service process are:

a. Participatory planning increases participant commitment and program sustainability.

b. Practice-based training is more effective in developing soft skills and digital literacy.

c. Short-term post-training mentoring helps ensure that the competencies learned do not stop at the theoretical stage.

d. Strengthening the organizational structure (SOP, digital creative team) has a direct effect on the long-term performance of Karang Taruna.

Thus, the results of this community service show that collaboration between universities and the youth community can produce significant social change when carried out with a participatory approach, responsive to community needs, and based on capacity building.

Conclusion

The implementation of community service that focuses on developing soft skills and digital literacy competencies for the Pematang Johar Village Youth

Organization has a real impact on increasing the capacity of individuals and village youth organizations. The participatory-based mentoring process has succeeded in creating an inclusive, collaborative, and community-empowerment-oriented learning environment. These results reflect that the success of a service program is determined not only by the material provided, but also by the quality of community involvement in each phase of the activity.

Theoretically, these service findings reinforce the concept of community empowerment which emphasizes that sustainable social change can only occur when the community is actively involved as a subject, not an object, of any development program. The participatory approach used is in line with the view of Ife (1995) that an effective empowerment process must build capacity through experiential learning, collaboration, and collective reflection. The improvement of participants' soft skills—especially in communication, leadership, and teamwork—reinforces the competency development theory that interpersonal skills develop optimally through hands-on practice and social experiences.

Strengthening participants' digital literacy also emphasized the relevance of modern digital literacy theory which not only emphasizes technical skills, but also includes critical thinking skills, digital ethics, and the use of technology for self-empowerment and organization. Karang Taruna's digital transformation, including increased social media activities and content production capabilities, shows that village youth are able to adapt technology to improve their organizational performance and social contributions. Through the mentoring process, there has been a change in organizational culture in Karang Taruna—from traditional work patterns to be more adaptive, communicative, and technology-based. This emphasizes that youth empowerment as agents of change can strengthen village social capital and become a foundation for more progressive community development.

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