

Employee Empowerment Strategies to Reduce Dependence on Business Owners: At Wedhang Uwuh MSMEs in Wukirsari Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta

Abdillah Fikriyah Istinaroh^{1*}, Qristin Violinda²

¹ Abdillah Fikriyah Istinaroh: Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, PGRI University Semarang, Indonesia

² Qristin Violinda: Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, PGRI University Semarang, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author: abdillahfikriyah@gmail.com

Abstract

The high level of employee dependence on business owners remains a major issue in the management of MSMEs, particularly in terms of efficiency and business sustainability. This community service program was implemented at the Wedhang Uwuh MSME in Wukirsari Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta, with the aim of empowering employees to be more independent in carrying out production processes and operational decision-making. The methods applied include field observations, informal interviews, and documentation focused on improving work skills and employees' active roles in business activities. The results of this activity indicate that employee involvement in management can enhance initiative, responsibility, and loyalty toward the company. Even without the physical presence of the owner, production sustainability remains intact. These findings highlight the importance of shifting the work culture in SMEs from a centralized leadership approach to a more collaborative one. This study recommends the development of a participatory management system as a strategic step to strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of SMEs.

Keywords: Employee Empowerment, Owner Dependency, SMEs, Wedhang Uwuh, Human Resource Management

I. INTRODUCTION

The Yogyakarta region is known as a cultural and tourism hub rich in traditional heritage and unique products that reflect the local wisdom of its people. One village in Wukirsari Village, specifically the Pundung hamlet in Imogiri Subdistrict, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, plays a role in preserving this culture through the presence of SMEs that produce wedang uwuh, a traditional herbal drink from Jogja made from various natural spices. Who hasn't heard of wedang uwuh? This traditional herbal drink from Yogyakarta was once overlooked, but over time, it has gained a significant following, leading many housewives to try their hand at becoming artisans or blenders of wedang uwuh. The UMKM in Wukirsari Village, specifically HerbaFit wedang uwuh, not only preserves this healthy beverage tradition but also contributes to the local economy by developing wedang uwuh products that are increasingly popular among the general public. More than just an economic endeavor, the Wedang Uwuh SME also plays a crucial role as an educational and research tool. Through these activities, it is hoped that the Indonesian people will come to better understand, appreciate, and not forget the cultural heritage passed down by their ancestors.

One of the main problems that tends to be encountered in the field is the high operational dependence on business owners. In practice, decision-making, production control, and product distribution are often centralized in one person, namely the owner. When the owner is absent or unable to attend, business activities are disrupted or even stopped. In addition to hampering business

continuity, this situation reduces the participation and potential of employees.

Observations and interviews conducted during community service activities showed that business management is still heavily dependent on the owner. Based on interviews with several employees, it was found that they only perform technical tasks such as cleaning materials, packaging products, and assisting in the production process. Employees are not yet involved in decision-making, business planning, or product innovation. Even in simple matters such as scheduling work hours, most decisions are still entirely determined by the owner (Field Observation, 2025). The current work patterns have led to unstable production processes and ineffective time management. Additionally, there is a lack of business management knowledge, and the development and management of human resources remain severely limited.

Based on this, to support business continuity and reduce employee dependence on the owner of Wedhang Uwuh MSME, a change in mindset is essential. Employees are expected to not only wait for instructions but also become more active and responsible. Human resource development is a key component of this process, which can be achieved through basic management training, fostering work discipline, and promoting a comprehensive understanding of business processes. This article aims to explain the employee empowerment strategies implemented in the community service program and evaluate their impact on changes in employees' attitudes and work methods at the Wedhang Uwuh SME in Wukirsari Village.

II. METHODS

The community service activity at the HerbaFit Wedang Uwuh SME was held on Tuesday, May 20, 2025. This SME was chosen as a partner because it actively produces traditional herbal drinks called Wedhang Uwuh and has great potential in empowering local workers. The primary objective of this activity is to shift employees' work mindset toward greater independence in the production process, reducing reliance on direct instructions from the business owner. The methods employed emphasize enhancing employees' capabilities and roles in daily production management. The community service activity began with on-site observations and informal interviews with several employees at the HerbaFit Wedang Uwuh SME.

Interviews, Observations, and Documentation

This community service activity was carried out using observation and direct interviews with the owners and employees of Wedhang Uwuh, and was reinforced by documentation of the activity. In the field, the community service team observed business behavior and gathered information about the employee empowerment strategies that had been implemented:

1. **Interviews:** A direct communication method between two or more parties, involving a question-and-answer process conducted verbally to obtain data or information directly from the source. The case study method and interviews are used to uncover the truth of a case based on the knowledge/clarity of the informant's information (Kristina, 2024). The interviews were conducted with the aim of obtaining direct and in-depth information from informants through face-to-face meetings, so that it was possible to interact personally and observe the informants' circumstances directly.
2. **Observations:** Recording and describing the results of structured observations of an object, based on what can be seen, heard, or felt, either directly or indirectly (Nasution, 2021). In this community service activity, participatory observation techniques were used, in which the community service implementers acted as direct observers without actively participating in the activities carried out by the subjects being observed.
3. **Documentation:** In this study, documentation was used as an additional technique to collect data by recording various written and visual sources relevant to the focus. Documentation data can be in the form of recordings, photographs, or other forms of archives that support the research needs. Documentation aims to strengthen the data obtained through interviews and observations, as well as provide a more concrete picture of the situation and conditions in the field.



III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The community service activities carried out at Mr. Yusuf's Wedhang Uwuh MSME in Wukirsari Village, Bantul, produced several important findings regarding the working relationship between owners and employees, obstacles in human resource empowerment efforts, and opportunities to form a more independent and sustainable work structure.

Based on observations and interviews regarding community service activities, a clear picture emerges of the workings and dynamics of a business that is still heavily dependent on its owner. The business is managed by around seven employees, most of whom are housewives from the surrounding area. Their daily tasks involve packaging wedhang uwuh ingredients according to the sizes and standards set by Mr. Yusuf.

Generally, the production process begins with the selection of raw materials such as secang wood, ginger, clove leaves, cinnamon, and other spices. These ingredients are then dried using a special method in an oven at a specific temperature to preserve their aroma and properties. This drying process is one of the key strengths of Mr. Yusuf's Wedang Uwuh product, as not all Wedang Uwuh SMEs employ this technique. After the drying process, the ingredients are packaged in two sizes: a small package containing 5 sachets sold for Rp20,000, and a large package containing 10 sachets priced at Rp40,000.



Observations show that all management processes, from production and finance to marketing, are still entirely controlled by Mr. Yusuf. Employees only carry out tasks as directed, without being involved in strategic decision-making. There has been no specific training or ongoing mentoring for them, except for a basic explanation of packaging and measurements per container.

Even so, the relationship between Mr. Yusuf and his employees is very close, like family. There are no noticeable social differences, and even during the interview, the employees appeared open, informative, and enthusiastic. Some of them demonstrated a good understanding of information about raw materials, the benefits of each component, and were able to explain the contents of a product package with confidence. This indicates there is potential for further development through structured empowerment programs that align with their time and social conditions.

On the other hand, the marketing aspect of this MSME product is quite extensive. Pak Yusuf's wedhang uwuh products have been marketed to several cities in Central Java and are also available on an online shopping platform that he manages himself. This is a positive step, but it also presents challenges, because the entire promotion and distribution process is still handled by the owner himself, without involving employees or an organized work system.

This experience shows that there is a real need to strengthen employee empowerment, not only to reduce the burden on owners, but also to create a more independent and sustainable work pattern. Moreover, with plans to expand into international markets, internal improvements are essential if these MSMEs are to be ready to face even greater challenges.



IV. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that this business has enormous potential for further growth, both in terms of product quality and marketing network. However, this potential is still lacking in terms of a solid management system, especially in terms of human resource management.

During the activity, it was revealed that business management still relied entirely on the owner, including in aspects of marketing and finance. Employees only functioned as implementers without being involved in decision-making or idea development. However, observations showed that some employees had abilities and potential that could be improved, such as their understanding of raw materials and their ability to explain products.

The good relationship that has been established between owners and employees in a family-like manner can be an important basis for starting the empowerment process. With the right approach, such as training that is not too demanding in terms of employee time or clearer explanations of tasks, there is a great opportunity to create a more independent and sustainable work system.

Going forward, this SME can begin to improve its internal management, particularly in human resource management, so that it does not rely solely on the owner. With a more structured and participatory work structure, the Wedang Uwuh SME will be better prepared to tackle broader market challenges, including the international market expansion plans already outlined by Mr. Yusuf. As a student who has previously been involved in fieldwork, I sincerely hope to contribute further through ongoing mentoring or collaboration with the university, ensuring that this empowerment process is truly sustainable and yields tangible results.

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The author hopes that the results of this community service activity will have a positive impact, both for MSME partners in developing a more participatory work structure and for educational institutions in strengthening sustainable partnerships with local businesses.



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