

Implementation of Human Resources Management at Autism Café Project Malaysia to Improve the Performance of Student With Autism

Sarwani¹, Subarto²

Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

dosen00005@unpam.ac.id¹, dosen00363@unpam.ac.id²

Submitted: 19th March 2024 | **Edited:** 02nd June 2024 | **Issued:** 01st July 2024

Cited on: Sarwani, S., & Subarto, S. (2024). Implementation of Human Resources Management at Autism Café Project Malaysia to Improve the Performance of Student With Autism. *Jurnal PKM Manajemen Bisnis*, 4(2), 176-184.

ABSTRACT

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects communication ability, social interaction, and behavior. The Autism Café Project Malaysia is a social initiative aimed at empowering individuals with autism through training and employment opportunities. Effective Human Resource Management (HRM) is crucial to enhancing the performance of autistic students in the workplace. This initiative aims to implement HRM at the Autism Café Project Malaysia to improve the performance of autistic students. Additionally, it aims to provide practical experience for students and faculty in applying HRM concepts in real-world contexts. The activity took place at Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic, Selangor, Malaysia, involving 80 participants including autistic students, students, and faculty members. Methods included preparation, training implementation, practice and simulation, as well as evaluation and monitoring. Training covered personal and social skills development, HRM application, job skills, and entrepreneurship. Through this initiative, autistic students demonstrated improved performance in various tasks at the Autism Café Project. Students gained a better understanding of applying HRM in real situations, while faculty successfully guided and provided constructive feedback. This activity also fostered a more inclusive and supportive community.

Keywords: Autism, Human Resource Management, Performance of Autistic Students, Training and Development

INTRODUCTION

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior of individuals involved (Ayuningtyas, et al., 2020). In Malaysia, the prevalence of autism continues to rise, posing challenges for families, educators, and the broader community. One prominent initiative supporting individuals with autism is the Autism Café Project Malaysia, a social project aimed at providing job opportunities and training for individuals with autism. In efforts to enhance the effectiveness and performance of autistic students in employment or entrepreneurship, the application of Human Resource Management (HRM) is crucial (Suwinardi, 2019).

This community service activity was conducted at Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz

Shah Polytechnic, Selangor, Malaysia, renowned as a leading vocational higher education institution in Malaysia. The polytechnic, in collaboration with Universitas Pamulang, is committed to inclusivity and community empowerment, including support for individuals with special needs such as autistic students.

Participants in this activity included autistic students, students, and faculty. Active participation from all three groups was crucial to achieving the primary goal of community service, which is to enhance the performance of autistic students through effective HRM implementation. Below are some key reasons why this activity was undertaken:

1. Empowerment of Autistic Students. Autistic students have great potential that can be developed through a supportive and structured work environment (Paramansyah & Parojai, 2024). Proper HRM application can help them overcome challenges and maximize their abilities in daily work at the Autism Café Project (Kristiana & Widayanti, 2021).
2. Enhancement of Student Skills. Students involved in this activity gained practical experience in applying HRM concepts in real-world contexts. They learned how to handle various challenges in managing individuals with special needs, developing interpersonal and managerial skills (Nurani & Hartati, 2020).
3. Role of Faculty as Mentors. Faculty played a crucial role in providing guidance and supervision during this community service activity. With their knowledge and experience, faculty helped design and implement effective HRM strategies, as well as provide constructive feedback to students and autistic students (Ainie, et al., 2020).
4. Development of an Inclusive Community. This activity also contributed to the development of a more inclusive community at Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic. By involving various stakeholders in supporting autistic students, we can create an environment that understands and values the diversity of individual capabilities.

Through the proper implementation of HRM at the Autism Café Project, it is hoped that autistic students will experience significant performance improvement in employment or entrepreneurship. This program also serves as a model for other institutions in implementing inclusive and effective HRM strategies. Thus, this

community service activity not only provides direct benefits to participants but also contributes to the overall well-being enhancement of the broader community.

METHOD

The community service project titled "Implementation of Human Resource Management at Autism Café Project Malaysia to Enhance the Performance of Autistic Students" involved several key stages. This activity was conducted at Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic, Selangor, Malaysia, and engaged 80 participants including autistic students, students, and faculty members. The project was led by faculty members from Universitas Pamulang in collaboration with Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic. The training aimed to develop human resources for autistic individuals to become independent and capable of working or entrepreneuring like any other members of society.

The preparation stage began with coordination and planning between Universitas Pamulang faculty and Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic. Coordination meetings were held to outline the activity plan, including scheduling, training materials, and task allocation. Participant recruitment and selection followed specific criteria to ensure alignment with program goals. Additionally, provisions were made for training facilities, equipment, and necessary materials.

The training phase commenced with an opening ceremony attended by all participants and relevant stakeholders. The program introduction, objectives, and agenda were presented during an orientation session. The training consisted of multiple sessions covering personal and social skills development, human resource management application, as well as job skills and entrepreneurship. Training materials included effective communication, self-management, time management, and the fundamentals of business ideas and entrepreneurship.

To ensure deep understanding, practical exercises and simulations were conducted after training sessions. Participants were given the opportunity to simulate the tasks they would encounter at the Autism Café Project. These hands-on practices were supported by faculty and students, allowing participants to experience a real work environment. During these practical sessions, participants received guidance and supervision to ensure effective and efficient implementation.

The evaluation and monitoring stage was implemented to assess participant performance. Various evaluation methods such as observation, interviews, and task assessments were used to provide constructive feedback. Regular monitoring was also conducted to track participant progress and compile activity reports. The closing ceremony included the distribution of certificates to participants and awards to those who demonstrated outstanding performance and progress. Follow-up actions were planned to ensure program sustainability, including building networks between participants, Autism Café Project, and educational institutions for ongoing support. Through this structured approach, it is expected that autistic students can develop into independent individuals capable of successful employment or entrepreneurship.

DISCUSSION

Profil Autism Café Project

The Autism Café Project (ACP) in Malaysia is a social enterprise founded by Mohd Adli Yahya, inspired by his autistic son, Luqman. The project aims to empower autistic youths by providing them with meaningful employment opportunities and teaching them entrepreneurial skills. The café, located at Komuniti Kantin in Shah Alam, operates as a regular dining venue with a daily changing menu, emphasizing natural and healthy ingredients. The core idea is to focus on what these youths can do best and enjoy, thus promoting their independence and confidence. Besides running the café, ACP engages in catering and various activities like soap making and tote bag painting, which are sold to raise funds.

ACP stands out by ensuring that its employees, affectionately called "the boys," are given tasks suited to their abilities and preferences. This approach minimizes stress and helps in their skill development. The café also functions as a supportive community where autistic youths can learn to interact with others and gain practical experience in various aspects of running a business, from cooking to customer service. ACP's ultimate goal is not just to provide jobs but to nurture these youths into entrepreneurs, enabling them to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Participants

This activity represents a harmonious collaboration among various parties, providing valuable experiences not only for autistic participants from Autism Café

Project Malaysia but also for students and faculty from Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic and Universitas Pamulang. Through this initiative, it is expected that closer cooperation and deeper understanding regarding inclusion and support for individuals with autism can be fostered. The community service activity included:

1. Participants:
 - a. The activity was attended by 30 autistic individuals from Autism Café Project Malaysia. These participants showed high enthusiasm in participating in various specially designed activities.
 - b. A total of 50 students from Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic took part in this activity. These students actively assisted and supported participants from Autism Café Project Malaysia.
2. Faculty Attendance: This activity was also attended by 40 faculty members from Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic and Universitas Pamulang. These faculty members served as facilitators and supervisors during the activity, ensuring smooth operations and providing necessary guidance.
3. Participant Composition: The majority of participants were female, indicating a high interest and participation of women in this community service activity compared to men.
4. Participant Age: The average age of participants was 20 years old, reflecting the enthusiasm and eagerness of young adults in participating in community service activities.

Opening Session

The community service activity began with an opening session that included:

1. Welcoming remarks from representatives of Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic, Universitas Pamulang, and Autism Café Project Malaysia.
2. A brief explanation of the objectives and agenda of the activity to all participants.

Human Resource Management (HRM) Training Session: Business Skills Training for Autistics: The business skills training module for autistic individuals in this community service activity was designed to equip ASD individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to start and run their own businesses (Sofiati, et al., 2021). The training will be tailored to the needs and abilities of the individuals, focusing on the following areas:

Development of Basic Business Skills

1. Business planning: Topics include identifying business opportunities, defining target markets, developing marketing strategies, and creating financial projections.
2. Financial management: Topics include managing business finances, including income and expenditure tracking, budgeting, and loan application.
3. Marketing and sales: Topics include marketing businesses to potential customers, developing sales strategies, and providing good customer service.
4. Communication skills: Topics include effective communication with customers, coworkers, and business partners (Syamsi, 2010).

Development of Independent Living Skills

1. Social skills: Topics include building and maintaining relationships, teamwork, and conflict resolution (Yuliana, et al., 2019).
2. Problem-solving skills: Topics include identifying problems, developing solutions, and making decisions.
3. Time management skills: Topics include effective time management, meeting deadlines, and prioritizing tasks.
4. Stress management skills: Topics include managing stress, anxiety, and depression.

This training will be delivered through a combination of lectures, discussions, practical activities, and individual mentoring. Participants will also have the opportunity to meet successful autistic entrepreneurs and learn from their experiences.

Business Interaction and Communication Training for Autistics

The business interaction and communication training module for autistic individuals in this community service activity was designed to equip ASD individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to interact effectively with customers, coworkers, and business partners. The training will be tailored to the needs and abilities of the individuals, focusing on the following areas:

Understanding Nonverbal Behavior and Communication

1. Body language: Topics include reading and understanding others' body language, such as facial expressions, body movements, and eye contact.
2. Tone of voice: Topics include identifying and understanding others' tone of voice, such as speech tone, volume, and tempo.
3. Contextual cues: Topics include using contextual cues to understand the meaning of

nonverbal communication.

Improving Verbal Communication Skills

1. Clarity and accuracy: Topics include communicating clearly and accurately, avoiding ambiguity and jargon.
2. Active listening: Topics include actively listening and showing interest in what others are saying.
3. Asking questions: Topics include asking appropriate questions to obtain needed information.
4. Providing feedback: Topics include providing constructive and positive feedback.

This training will be delivered through a combination of lectures, discussions, practical activities, and individual mentoring. Participants will also have the opportunity to practice communicating with successful autistic entrepreneurs and learn from their experiences.

In addition to the above training modules, this community service activity will also provide mentoring and support services to participants after the training sessions. This is to help them apply what they have learned and improve their business interaction and communication skills.

Case Study

Students alongside participants from Autism Café Project Malaysia analyzed a case study on HRM implementation in the workplace. Group discussions were held to find solutions and strategies to improve performance.

Direct Practice at the Café

1. Work Simulation: Autistic participants underwent work simulations at Autism Café Project Malaysia under the guidance of students and faculty. This included daily operational tasks at the café such as serving customers, managing orders, and working in the kitchen.
2. Mentoring and Evaluation: Each participant received personal mentoring from students to help them perform their tasks effectively. Performance evaluations were conducted to provide constructive feedback.

Motivation and Self-Development Session

This session focused on soft skills development such as communication, teamwork, and time management. It was delivered by experienced motivators who have

worked with autistic individuals.

Activity Closing

1. Reflection: A reflection session was held where participants, students, and faculty shared experiences and lessons learned during the activity.
2. Certificate Presentation: Certificates of appreciation were awarded to all participants in recognition of their active participation.
3. Group Photo and Networking: The event concluded with a group photo session and networking to strengthen relationships among participants.

Through this activity, it is expected that there will be an increase in understanding and skills among autistic participants in HRM that can be applied at Autism Café Project Malaysia, as well as providing valuable experiences for students and faculty involved in this community service activity.

CONCLUSION

On March 4 - 6 2024, at the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic Activities Building, Selangor Malaysia, community service activities were carried out with the theme "Implementation of Human Resources Management At Autism Café Project Malaysia To Improve The Performance Of Students With Autism". This activity was attended by autistic students, lecturers and participants from the Autism Café Project Malaysia.

This activity aims to equip individuals with ASD with the knowledge and skills they need to start and run their own business or work in an organization, as well as improve interaction and communication skills.

Through lecture methods, discussions, practical activities, and individual mentoring, participants gain various valuable knowledge. They learn how to create a business plan, manage finances, market products, and build effective communications.

As a result, participants demonstrated significant improvements in business knowledge and skills. They are also more confident in interacting and communicating with other people. This activity is not only beneficial for the participants, but also for the students and lecturers involved. They get the opportunity to learn more about ASD and how to interact with autistic people effectively.

Public awareness about ASD is increasing. The stigma against people with ASD is starting to break down, and society is becoming more open to accepting and

interacting with them. This community service activity is a small step that is expected to have a positive impact on individuals with ASD and the wider community. It is hoped that similar activities can continue to be carried out in the future with wider coverage and greater benefits.

With a spirit of collaboration and care, we can open up opportunities for individuals with ASD to achieve a brighter future. Let's continue to support them and give them the opportunity to work and show their potential to the world.

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