

ADDRESSING REMOTE HR MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES IN COMMUNITIES: HRD RESPONSES THROUGH COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Remote work introduces complex challenges for employees and HRD, especially in communities driven by voluntary participation and superficial interest. Unlike other formal organizations, which have clear, measurable, and definite objectives, communities depend heavily on individual motivation, which is prone to fluctuation. Miscommunication, fluctuations in participation, and digital fatigue threaten individual productivity, requiring proactive HRD responses. This study explores the challenges of managing remote human resources in communities and how HRD responds to maintain engagement and performance. Conducted on Novo Club Batch 2, the study uses a qualitative case study approach. Data were gathered through observation, in-depth interviews with eight informants, and document analysis. The results show that Novo faces structural, participatory, and communication challenges with HRD responses ranging from reactive to adaptive. Viewed through Buhman's communication strategy cycle, these insights underscore the importance of continuous adaptation in community-based HR management. Additionally, the principles of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the 7C of communication serve as supporting lenses to understand how HRD responses can be aligned and delivered effectively. This study sheds light on HRD responses in this context and calls for further investigation into adaptive strategies that can strengthen remote management practices.

Keywords: Remote HR Management; Multidimensional Challenges; HRD Response; Community Communication.

INTRODUCTION

Remote working has often been a shortcut to keeping the economy going during the Covid-19 pandemic. Amidst limitations, remote working has become a promising option for workers. Efficiency and flexibility in managing work styles are considered to provide psychological comfort, such as a more organised work environment (DeClercq, 2020) and easier personal control (Galanti et al., 2021). Additionally, economically, remote work can save on operational and transportation costs (Tavares et al., 2021). Given these various benefits, it is no surprise that many workers continue to choose to maintain their remote work arrangements. This is supported by percentage evidence, such as in 2023, when 52% of workers in the Netherlands were recorded as maintaining their remote work (Huizenga, 2024). The same thing happened in Indonesia, where Goodstats (2023) stated that 23% of Indonesian workers had remote work, 68% had hybrid work, and only 9% wanted to work in an office. Jakpat (2024) complements this data by adding that Gen Z's work preferences also lean towards remote work.

Unfortunately, the long-term nature of remote work presents its own challenges. This is because remote work is not just about completing tasks outside the office, but also about how workers need to stay aligned with the organisation's vision. Long-term remote work has the potential to make members feel bored, lose motivation, decrease consistency, and result in suboptimal performance output due to a loss of sense of belonging to the organisation's vision. This is especially true in remote control situations where workers and management, in this case at the managerial and executive levels, do not meet face-to-face and build real physical engagement. Not to mention the limited social interaction between colleagues, which increases the possibility of social isolation (Battisti et al., 2022). In fact, workers also face limitations in obtaining continuous guidance (DeFilippis et al., 2020).

Furthermore, communication is a key aspect of this scheme. This is because communication plays a central role in connecting all management activities. Without communication, interactions cannot take place, and messages cannot be conveyed. Yang et al. (2022) mention that remote working causes a decrease in the quantity of synchronous communication, which ultimately leads to weak collaboration accompanied by communication isolation. If this continues, work productivity is likely to decline (McPhail et al., 2023). Not to mention the various distractions that have the potential to break members' focus and distract them by pursuing other interests (Yarberry & Sims, 2021). Not only that, other challenges also include differences in members' backgrounds, difficulties in building trust for open communication access, and obstacles in persuading and encouraging members to be more active. These suboptimal communication conditions can lead to a loss of social connection between members (Brussevich et al., 2020). Furthermore, when viewed from the perspective of communication media usage, members tend to experience digital fatigue due to overly intense media adoption (Shoshan & Wehrt, 2022). In fact, communication is important for encouraging participation and contribution within an organisation. Therefore, communication can be the starting point for organisational transformation, both in terms of change and improvement. This is in line with Klein's (1996) statement that organisational transformation cannot rely solely on HR management skills. Instead, organisations need the role of communication (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Thus, the urgency of communication, especially in its strategic form, is vital for remote work schemes.

Based on the negative perspectives described earlier, remote work appears to be full of challenges. This is not only for workers but also for management, which in this case is often referred to as Human Resource Development (HRD). These challenges become even more apparent when faced by communities, given that community members rely only on superficial aspects, such as a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and a shared vision that needs to be achieved together (Chatterjee & Koleski, 1970). Similarly, the control system tends to be based on external factors, such as prevailing social values and norms. Therefore, remote work in communities is not only confronted with technical and applicative challenges, but also with the challenge of ensuring that member participation can continue. This condition then requires the presence of adaptive communication responses to help maintain the integrity of the community in a remote scheme.

Reflecting on this complexity, the role of HRD becomes very important. As a personnel line, the HRD function has undergone significant development. HRD is not limited to functional tasks, such as recruitment, training, compensation, and performance appraisal, but is also responsible for ensuring the alignment of organisational activities with the existing vision and mission (Wright & Snell, 1998). In fact, according to Gilmer (1960), HRD needs to ensure that the characteristics of members are in line with those of the organisation (in Ferris et al., 1999). Furthermore, HRD also

plays a role in ensuring that the productivity, commitment, and innovation of workers can be sustained (Sulej, 2021). Then, on an ongoing basis, HRD needs to ensure that the organisation's strategic steps in human resource management are acceptable amid various dynamics and issues faced (Putro, 2024). Cassidy and Rockburne (2021) add that in a remote context, it is difficult to maintain, supervise, and ensure that work is completed properly, so the role of HRD as the driving force behind organisational empowerment is increasingly necessary, primarily through the implementation of appropriate communication. Strategic communication can serve as a bridge for HRD to respond to existing challenges through relevant adjustments and approaches. HRD is expected to not only take reactive steps, but also adaptive ones so that communication can continue and community cohesion can be maintained. This is in line with the opinion of Suh & Battaglio (2022), who state that communication is the main bridge for maintaining the continuity of interaction, relationships, and information exchange so that a sense of responsibility, attachment, and continuous involvement is formed.

Previous studies have highlighted remote communication in professional fields such as health (Sundstrom et al., 2020), work (Obembe et al., 2020), government, and education, while discussions related to the community sphere are still limited. In fact, communication challenges in remote work schemes can be more complex than in other formal organisations. Furthermore, the lack of discussion on HRD responses in remotely managed communities may hinder the development of effective HRD practices in the future. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the research gap by highlighting communication challenges amid the complexity of remote work. The focus is directed at challenges and HRD responses as critical points for the emergence of communication strategies. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to developing new perspectives for the field of remote communication strategies.

This research was conducted on a community that is very popular among students, namely Novo Club. Novo Club is under the auspices of Paragon Corp with a large mass reach in the management of batch 2 in 2023. At that time, Novo Club successfully obtained a MURI record in its welcoming party event in the category of 'Simultaneous Student Leadership Programme Opening Seminar with the Most Participants', reaching more than 30,000 active students throughout Indonesia. Human resource management at Novo is carried out in a hybrid manner with more online empowerment given its wide geographical spread, reaching 11 regions. Novo was chosen because it has a unique and relevant situation to address existing research gaps. Unlike most communities, Novo entrusts its HR management to HRD, whose functions are not only administrative but also support the psychological well-being of its members. This research is a fresh start to explore the existence of HRD communication strategies as a response to the challenges of remote HR management in communities. Through this direction, the research questions and objectives are mapped into two points, namely:

1. What are the challenges of remote empowerment managed by HRD in the community?
2. How does HRD respond in the communication landscape when facing these challenges?

This study's analysis uses the concept of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) with adaptive stages as the key. Buhman's (2018) theoretical framework related to the communication strategy cycle can be one reference for finding how challenges and responses can go hand in hand amid the existing dynamics. In terms of communication challenges, the use of communication elements accompanied by the 7C concept by Cutlip & Center (1952) can help to understand the communication process more holistically. To emphasise, this research is not intended to test theory, but rather to understand the phenomena that occur with the help of theory as a guide.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilises a qualitative approach with a case study method. Qualitative research was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Zarestky, 2023). Sugiyono (2022) states that qualitative research is capable of interpreting individual experiences through the construction and meaning of life that is formed. Qualitative research is also capable of offering a critical perspective in real time (Alam, 2020). Furthermore, the case study method was chosen because it is capable of dissecting complex phenomena that are limited by a specific context through the use of various data sources (Yin, in Creswell, 1998). Through the use of case studies, data collection can be accessed through various methods (Priya, 2020), in this case, data was obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and document studies. This case study falls into the

category of a single case, namely HRD's remote communication response, with the location limited to the Novo club community and the time limited to the management period of batch 2.

A total of 8 key informants were selected purposively. The purposive selection was of the maximum purposive type with the aim of obtaining as much information as possible (Sugiyono, 2022). The consideration for this purposive selection was that in this study, the author intended to find specific social phenomena carried out by human resource development from different regions. Therefore, the 8 HRD informants from Star were able to represent the empowerment of all existing regions, considering that HRD Star oversees regional HRD and even acts as the PIC for each regional HRD. Informants were selected based on specific criteria, namely informants who not only carried out activities but also understood the meaning of their activities at Novo Club; informants who served in batch 2; informants who had the time and relevant information to share; informants who were not making things up; and informants whose experiences could be explored in depth (Spradley in Sugiyono, 2022).

The data collection process will be obtained through active participation observation, interviews and document studies. The author deliberately chose the observation stage as the first stage of the research with the intention of enabling the author to recognise, understand and highlight specific topics that can be explored in more depth in the interviews. Active participatory observation was conducted from October 2023, where the researcher joined the members of Novo Club batch 2 in a series of processes and stages, starting from general member recruitment, completion of group project missions as a requirement for membership, to participating in the selection process and joining the empowerment programme there. Next, the author will conduct in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview system. The interviews will be conducted virtually (online) via the Zoom platform, considering the location of the informants who are scattered across different regions. This choice is reinforced by the view that digital conferencing platforms such as Zoom are capable of facilitating real-time dialogue from cross-geographical interactions (Olliffe et al., 2021). Not only that, online interviews are also considered more flexible and capable of building comfortable interactions (Labinjo, 2021).

Furthermore, the data obtained will be analysed according to the Miles & Huberman (1994) mode, where the process is divided into three stages, namely anticipation, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion. The data obtained will be coded, categorised, and themed, which will ultimately guide the discussion. Not to forget, data validity is obtained through source triangulation, namely from various informants; and data triangulation, namely from the three data collection methods that the author has chosen. As a complement, the process of member checking and confirmation with expert informants is also carried out to help provide confirmation and clarity of data. All of these processes will be carried out in accordance with research ethics as outlined by Priya, based on consent, privacy, and honesty (Priya, 2020).

More specifically, the author will begin by issuing a research consent form from the institution, obtaining the informants' signatures, and determining a mutual agreement regarding the interview schedule. Prior to the interviews, the author provided interview guidelines to give an initial overview of the interviews. The interviews lasted 30-60 minutes with questions that could develop at any time. All information obtained was based on permission from the relevant parties without any coercion. In addition, data collection and analysis were carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines applicable at the university. Then, data processing was assisted by the Atlas T.i application to facilitate coding. The data and information obtained at the end will be linked by the researcher to concepts, theories, previous research, and the author's personal views. In an effort to obtain valid data, the author supplemented this process by conducting triangulation with one relevant expert informant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the entire data collection and processing process was carried out at HRD in the Novo community, this study successfully identified seven main themes. The seven themes are divided into two categories, namely three main themes that describe the communication strategy process, and four supporting themes that influence each other. The HRD's response to communication challenges falls under the supporting themes, which consist of the dynamics, challenges, aspirations, and urgency of the HRD's role. Through these supporting themes, the HRD can map out a much more relevant adaptive communication response. The challenges were discovered during the implementation stage of the communication strategy, while the responses were obtained from the

aspirations that emerged during the evaluation stage. This study focuses on two main lines, namely challenges and responses. This focus was determined considering that both are closely related to the reality of remote HRM practices. Therefore, the presentation of results and further discussion can highlight the challenges and responses reviewed from the HRD perspective.

Communication Challenges in Remote HRM

This study can help provide references related to challenges in remote HRM practices. Understanding the variety of challenges can be an asset for HRD to map out anticipatory measures early on, especially in a context that is in line with the direction of this study. This research was conducted on the Novo Club community with key informants sourced from HRD as the main manager of existing human resource management. The challenges found in remote human resource management in the Novo community include structural and coordination challenges, as well as member participation challenges. The identified challenges are categorised into three areas, namely structural, participation and communication challenges. Structurally, challenges arise due to blurred boundaries between the roles and authorisation of HRD. This occurs because the direction of HR management is not intended to be rigid and filled with forced autonomy. Unfortunately, in certain situations, this backfires, leading to HRD tending to be less valued. Furthermore, communication flows need to go through a layered structure. This then has an impact on the suboptimal delivery of information. This statement is in line with the statement from Informant 3, who said: *“So the dissemination of information, especially in the Star team at our headquarters, cannot ensure that the information we provide actually reaches members in their respective regions. That is the first challenge.”* [I3_K466].

This situation is further compounded by the inability of the centre to respond instantly and the uneven distribution of information. Both of these factors have the potential to cause miscommunication and weaken cross-structural coordination. Observing these challenges from an SHRM perspective, there is a gap between expectations and plans, and the actual execution in the field. Human resources, from an SHRM perspective, are considered very valuable given their considerable potential for innovation and contribution to organisational development. Therefore, HRD should be able to act as a facilitator that supports cross-structural coordination schemes.

Next is the challenge of participation. The study found that there were issues of fluctuating interest and contribution among members, which tended to change easily due to voluntary motivation. Some members were found to experience loss of motivation, neglect of responsibilities and tasks, selfish attitudes in their contributions, and loss of concentration due to digital fatigue. This is in line with the statement by Informant 8, who said that it is difficult to maintain the concentration of members: *“The main problem is the concentration of members in every communication.”* [I8_K962]. To overcome this, the SHRM perspective needs to be revisited, given that engagement and commitment are determining factors in organisational resilience. SHRM assesses that HR management needs to continuously understand existing needs, trends, and technological developments. Additionally, SHRM also pays attention to the psychological aspects of members solely to maintain their involvement.

Finally, there are communication challenges arising from cultural and individual background variations. This includes differences in communication preferences among members. Some members tend to prefer straightforward communication. In contrast, there are also members who are hesitant to express their opinions. Another challenge involves communication topics. Some regions prefer educational topics, while others prefer social topics. Adjusting to the topic can be useful for building a relevant approach. This is in line with what Informant 6 said:

“When it comes to Region 2, our approach is more in line with theirs, which is to discuss education or academic matters and how they can be aligned with Novo Club [K569]. Region 5 is different; we discuss the key aspects of chemistry that you want to cover, which is really different from Region 5.” [I6_K570].

The use of the 7C framework can be very useful in addressing a variety of communication preferences. As an introduction, 7C was coined by Cutlip and Brom (1952) with elements that include Clarity, Conciseness, Concreteness, Correctness, Coherence, Completeness and Courteousness (Karmarkar, 2022). This is intended so that communication can continue with the main focus being that the communicant receives the message in accordance with the communicator's intent. Some points among the 7Cs encompass consideration (including tolerance and empathy in communication) and credibility (including trust and integrity) to help maintain member connections.

Based on these three categories of challenges, it can be seen that the challenges of remote HR management at Novo are quite varied.

HRD Responses in Navigating HR Management Communication Challenges

Knowing these three challenges, the responses provided by HRD can be categorised into two types: reactive responses and adaptive responses. Reactive responses can quickly quell conflicts that arise, but they are unable to address the root causes of the problems, which ultimately leads to uncertainty in the future. In contrast, adaptive responses take into account various factors that contribute to the emergence of problems, such as HR characteristics and region. Through adaptive responses, conflicts can gradually subside and conditions can be improved in the long term.

In addressing structural challenges, HRD strives to implement flexible HR management by taking into account various existing needs, both from individuals and regions. Flexibility is considered to be helpful in the implementation of communication, work system design, and the development of existing members (Waples & Baskin, 2021). In addition, HRD also strives to improve connections between members through cross-structural bonding. This is in line with Informant 1's statement: *"After that, we don't just focus on job descriptions, we also try to bond with everyday things."* [I1_K279]. Then, to help distribute information more evenly, the chairperson or other central actors are involved so that trust and message reach can be improved.

Next is the response to participation challenges. Through the SHRM perspective, HRD strives to implement some steps to realise the psychological well-being of members through non-directive supportive communication. HRD also strives to build a comfortable and safe communication environment. Additionally, follow-up mechanisms serve as reminders for strategic responses that have a positive impact. This is in line with what Informant 7 said, *"For example, "oh, there's a miscommunication like this, okay, let's discuss it. Then what is the solution if there is another miscommunication? Oh, maybe follow up, follow up three times if it's h-week, h-day and h-hour, so there won't be much miscommunication."* [I7_K491- 492]. In addition, considering the specific conditions of individuals or regions, setting deadlines can help organisations continue to meet their targets. Instead of focusing on deterrent sanctions, the response to participation challenges should remain flexible and sensitive to the psychological stimuli of members. This is intended so that improvements can occur in a situation that is comfortable for all parties. Comfort in a communication environment created from communication ethics is believed to encourage member participation (Suortti & Sivunen, 2024).

Finally, responding to communication challenges. HRD strives to continuously adapt to the different communication preferences of members. HRD accepts input and grants members' wishes for more relaxed communication. In addition, HRD also strives to facilitate communication through inclusive argumentative media. This is in line with the 7Cs concept in communication.

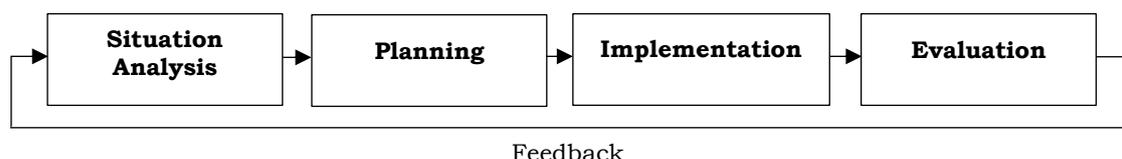


Figure 1. Buhman Evaluation Flowchart

Source: Buhman, 2018

In the communication strategy cycle framework outlined by Buhmann, it is stated that the communication strategy cycle begins with a situation analysis and ends with feedback to improve the communication strategy. This is highly relevant to this study, considering that all challenges are not necessarily addressed instantly. HRD strives to consider many factors before deciding on a course of action. Consideration of human resource characteristics can contribute significantly to developing targeted communication strategies. Furthermore, the use of feedback from members can lead to a transformation of the strategy. Feedback serves as an evaluator of success as well as a determinant of future improvements. This is in line with the statement made by Informant 1: *"What is certain is that I prioritise that they can follow everything, that they can listen and communicate."* [I1_K276].

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the presentation of the results and discussion above, it can be seen that Novo's remote HR management faces multidimensional challenges, namely structural, participation, and communication challenges. HRD then strives to adaptively address these challenges through flexible communication responses. Consideration of the psychological aspects of members is an additional point that helps improve communication responses that are acceptable to members in the future. All communication schemes that occur also indirectly take into account the 7C concept. This helps HRD in providing responses that contribute to the good of all parties. This study only discusses challenges and responses. Further research is expected to be able to explore all aspects of communication responses from start to finish in the same domain, the community domain. Exploration of communication platforms can help map improvements in communication strategies in the future. Furthermore, other studies are expected to be able to find other communication responses that will later serve as a reference for mapping strategies for remote HR management. Long-term strategic communication responses with relevant comparisons will also help enrich knowledge and prepare for more capable empowerment practices. In addition, this case study can also be a real reference for remote HR management practices in the future.

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