



Socialization of Empowerment Strategies and Optimization of Employee Engagement in Azizah Crackers MSME

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ABSTRACT

This community service activity aimed to increase the understanding of business owners and employees regarding employee empowerment and employee engagement, as well as to strengthen employee participation in supporting business development. The activity was conducted at Azizah Crackers MSME in Indarung, Lubuk Kilangan District, Padang City. The main issues identified were the limited involvement of employees in business development activities and their lack of understanding of the strategic role of human resources in organizational sustainability. The program was implemented through preparation, lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and mentoring activities. The outcomes of the activity were evaluated through direct observation and participant responses during the implementation process. The findings showed that participants actively engaged in discussions, shared experiences related to workplace challenges, and demonstrated a better understanding of employee empowerment and employee engagement concepts. The activity also facilitated more open communication between the business owner and employees regarding their roles and contributions to business development. These findings suggest that empowerment-based socialization activities can serve as an initial step in fostering employee participation, collaboration, and awareness of the importance of human resources in supporting MSME sustainability and competitiveness.

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Introduction

Micro, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play an undeniably strategic role in the Indonesian economy, serving as a primary engine for job creation, income distribution, and local economic development. Their resilience during periods of economic turbulence underscores their role as a key pillar of the national economy (Tambunan, 2019), making a significant contribution to poverty alleviation and community welfare (Sedyastuti,



2018). While extensive research highlights the macroeconomic importance of MSMEs, a critical gap remains in understanding and addressing the specific human resource (HR) challenges at the micro-level, particularly the integration of employee empowerment and engagement strategies within the unique context of small-scale food production enterprises. This community service activity aims to bridge that gap by directly intervening in an MSME to foster these interconnected HR practices.

While the strategic value of MSMEs is well-documented, individual businesses often struggle with internal operational effectiveness. One such enterprise is Azizah Crackers, a food-production MSME based in Indarung, Lubuk Kilangan District, Padang City. The business provides essential employment for the local community and contributes to the area's economic vitality (Rahmana et al., 2022). However, despite its local importance, preliminary observations at Azizah Crackers reveal significant HR-related challenges. Employees exhibit a limited understanding of their specific duties and responsibilities, leading to inconsistent product quality and operational inefficiencies. Furthermore, employee participation in operational decision-making and process innovation is at a critically low level. This disengagement is manifested in a lack of initiative, minimal concern for work quality, and a weak sense of collective ownership over the business's success. These specific, on-the-ground problems are common in MSMEs but are rarely the focus of systematic intervention, creating a clear need for targeted capacity-building efforts.

Human resources are the most vital asset of any organization, and business success is inextricably linked to employee participation, competence, and commitment (Dessler, 2020). Two interconnected concepts are central to unlocking this potential: employee empowerment and employee engagement. Employee empowerment involves providing employees with the authority, trust, and opportunity to perform their work effectively (Conger & Kanungo, 1988), which fosters a sense of value and ownership (Spreitzer, 1995). Employee engagement refers to the emotional and cognitive attachment employees have to their work, driving them to contribute optimally to organizational goals (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged employees demonstrate enthusiasm, dedication, and responsibility (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). While studies have separately confirmed the positive influence of these concepts on organizational commitment and performance (Andalas et al., 2023; Robbins & Judge, 2019), there is a distinct lack of practical, community-based research that simultaneously applies and tests the integration of both empowerment and engagement strategies within the dynamic environment of an Indonesian MSME. This activity directly addresses that gap by



implementing a joint intervention.

The primary objective of this community service program is to strengthen the capacity and participation of employees at Azizah Crackers MSME through a comprehensive socialization initiative focused on both employee empowerment and engagement. Specifically, the program aims to:

1. Enhance the understanding and practical knowledge of the business owner and employees regarding empowerment and engagement, and their importance in daily operations.
2. Foster improved communication and collaboration between the owner and employees to create a more participative and supportive work environment.
3. Develop a practical roadmap for implementing empowerment strategies that increase employee responsibility and ownership.

The expected contributions of this program are threefold. First, the Azizah Crackers MSME is expected to lead to tangible improvements in work motivation, product quality, and overall productivity. Second, for the local community, the program serves as a model for sustainable MSME development, demonstrating how internal HR strengthening can enhance a business's viability and its role as a stable employer. Third, for the broader field of community service and HR management, this activity offers a replicable framework for integrating employee empowerment and engagement interventions tailored to the MSME sector, providing valuable insights for similar initiatives across Indonesia.

Methods

This community service activity was conducted at the Azizah Crackers MSME business location in Indarung, Lubuk Kilangan District, Padang City. The targets of the activity were the business owner and all employees involved in production and business management, for a total of 12 participants. This consisted of 1 business owner (male, aged 45) who manages overall business operations, and 11 production employees (8 females and 3 males, aged between 22 and 50 years). The employees' educational backgrounds varied, with 2 holding senior high school diplomas, 6 holding junior high school certificates, and 3 holding elementary school diplomas. Their length of employment ranged from 1 to 10 years, with an average of 5 years of experience in cracker production. The activity employed a participatory approach, in which implementers and partners actively collaborated from preparation through evaluation. A participatory approach is considered effective in community empowerment activities because it encourages active involvement, shared responsibility, and



sustainable problem-solving among participants (Mikkelsen, 2011). In addition, community service activities that emphasize participation and empowerment have been shown to improve community understanding, motivation, and organizational effectiveness (Fauhatun et al., 2022). Three implementation methods were used: preparation, activity implementation, and evaluation. The stages of implementation were as follows:

Preparation Stage: An initial observation was conducted to understand the business's general condition, the number of employees, and problems related to human resource management. Coordination with the business owner was conducted to determine the implementation schedule, the materials to be delivered, and the facilities and infrastructure needed for the activity. Socialization materials were developed based on the identified problems, focusing on employee empowerment concepts and the importance of active employee engagement. During this stage, research instruments were also prepared, including pre-test and post-test questionnaires and participant feedback survey forms. According to Noe et al. (2021), employee empowerment activities are important for improving employee participation, responsibility, and work effectiveness within organizations.

Implementation Stage: The main socialization activity employed several delivery methods to facilitate participants' understanding and encourage active participation. Educational activities combined lectures, discussions, and mentoring methods because interactive learning approaches are more effective at improving participants' understanding and engagement (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Before the material delivery began, participants were given a pre-test to assess their initial understanding of employee empowerment and engagement concepts. Materials were delivered orally regarding the basic concepts of employee empowerment, employee roles and responsibilities, and the benefits of active engagement in improving product quality and business development. The materials were presented in simple, easy-to-understand language, with visual aids such as posters and handouts, to ensure that all participants could follow the session effectively. After completing the material delivery and discussion session, a post-test was administered to measure improvements in participants' understanding. Participants were given opportunities to express opinions, share work experiences, and discuss obstacles encountered during production and business activities. This method aimed to build effective communication between the business owner and employees while encouraging collaborative problem-solving. Open communication and employee involvement are considered important factors in strengthening employee engagement and organizational commitment (Schaufeli et al., 2002).



Direct guidance was provided regarding how employees could take more active roles in maintaining production quality, improving work discipline, and supporting daily business sustainability. Mentoring activities also encouraged employees to develop a stronger sense of responsibility and ownership toward the business.

Evaluation Stage: This stage aimed to assess the activity's success and measure participants' understanding of the materials delivered. Evaluation was conducted using three systematic approaches:

1. **Pre-test and Post-test Analysis:** A simple questionnaire consisting of 10 closed-ended questions was administered to all 12 participants before and after the socialization activity. The questions assessed understanding of: (a) basic concepts of employee empowerment, (b) the importance of employee engagement, (c) employee roles and responsibilities, and (d) strategies for active participation in business development. Each question was scored on a 0-1 scale (correct/incorrect), with a maximum total score of 10. The pre-test and post-test scores were compared to measure the increase in participants' knowledge.
2. **Participant Feedback Survey:** A structured feedback questionnaire using a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was distributed to all participants at the end of the activity. The survey assessed: (a) clarity and relevance of the material presented, (b) effectiveness of the delivery methods, (c) usefulness of the activity for daily work, and (d) participants' motivation to implement the lessons learned. Open-ended questions were also included to gather qualitative feedback and suggestions for improvement.
3. **Direct Observation and Group Discussion:** During the activity, implementers conducted direct observation of participants' enthusiasm, involvement in discussions, and responsiveness to the material. At the end of the session, a group discussion was facilitated to explore participants' perceptions and reach mutual agreement among owners and employees on implementing the positive lessons discussed during the activity.

Indicators of success were defined as follows: (a) an average increase of at least 30% in participants' pre-test to post-test scores, indicating improved understanding; (b) an average Likert scale score of ≥ 4.0 on the participant feedback survey, indicating high satisfaction and perceived usefulness; (c) active participation of at least 80% of employees in discussion sessions; and (d) mutual agreement among owners and employees to continue implementing



the discussed strategies in daily business operations. Evaluation is an important component in community service activities because it helps determine whether the objectives of empowerment and educational programs have been achieved effectively (Sudjana, 2010).

Results And Discussion

Profile of Azizah Crackers MSME

Azizah Crackers was established in 2009, originating from a gathering of mothers at a social event where the idea for a small business first emerged. Initially, the business was designed as a group enterprise; however, difficulties aligning the vision and commitment of multiple members made the initiative ineffective. As a result, the business later became a privately managed MSME aimed at empowering local women, particularly housewives, through productive economic activities. This development aligns with Tambunan, who stated that MSMEs in Indonesia play a crucial role not only in strengthening the economy but also in creating employment opportunities and empowering local communities (Tambunan, 2019).

Over time, Azizah Crackers experienced significant growth in both production and marketing. Currently, the MSME produces ten varieties of snack products, including original savory crackers, spicy savory crackers, traditional savory crackers, potato sticks, purple sweet potato sticks, cheese sticks, cheesy potato sticks, shrimp-flavored fried dumpling crackers, original banana chips, and chocolate banana chips. The marketing reach has expanded beyond West Sumatra to several cities, including Medan, Pekanbaru, Jambi, Bengkulu, Aceh, and Batam. Marketing activities are conducted through both offline distribution and online platforms such as Shopee, Tokopedia, and Facebook Marketplace. This business expansion demonstrates that MSMEs with adaptive marketing strategies and product diversification are better able to survive and compete in broader markets (Sedyastuti, 2018).

Implementation of Socialization Activities

The socialization activity on employee empowerment and engagement at Azizah Crackers MSME was successfully conducted and attended by the business owner and all employees involved in production and business management. The activity aimed to increase participants' understanding of the importance of human resources in supporting business sustainability and development. Prior to the activity, employees were generally viewed only as workers responsible for completing production tasks, while their role as active contributors to business development had not been fully optimized. According to Robbins



and Judge, organizations that actively involve employees in organizational activities tend to have stronger teamwork, higher motivation, and better work performance (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Throughout the lecture, participants received material on employee empowerment, employee engagement, and the importance of a collaborative work culture. The materials were delivered in simple, understandable language to ensure participants could easily understand the concepts discussed. During the activity, employees began to understand that empowerment is not merely about delegating work, but also about providing trust, opportunities, and responsibility so employees can contribute to organizational goals. This finding is consistent with Spreitzer's explanation that psychological empowerment encourages employees to feel more meaningful, competent, and responsible in the workplace (Spreitzer, 1995). The socialization also emphasized that employees are valuable organizational assets whose active engagement significantly affects product quality, customer satisfaction, and business sustainability. Employees who are emotionally and cognitively engaged in their work generally demonstrate greater enthusiasm, dedication, and responsibility toward organizational goals (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Similarly, Bakker and Demerouti stated that engaged employees are more likely to work enthusiastically, contribute actively, and maintain higher levels of productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

During the discussion and question-and-answer session, participants demonstrated strong enthusiasm and active participation. Several employees shared challenges encountered during production processes, including maintaining consistent product taste, improving work efficiency, and addressing limited technical knowledge of production methods. Meanwhile, the business owner expressed expectations that employees would become more proactive and demonstrate greater initiative in supporting business development. The discussion session became an important forum for strengthening communication between employees and management. Open communication is considered an important factor in building employee engagement because employees who feel heard and appreciated are more likely to develop organizational commitment and motivation to work (Lockwood, 2007). Interestingly, the discussion revealed that employees were willing to contribute more actively to the business but lacked sufficient understanding and opportunities to participate in decision-making. This finding supports the view of Conger and Kanungo, who explained that empowerment involves providing employees with opportunities and authority to participate meaningfully in organizational activities (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Empowered employees



tend to develop a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility toward organizational success.

Evaluation Findings

To measure the effectiveness of the socialization activity, a qualitative evaluation approach was employed, consisting of direct observation during the activity, participant feedback through group discussions, and informal interviews with the business owner and employees.

a) Observations During the Activity

Based on direct observations by the implementers, several positive changes in participant behavior and attitudes were identified. At the beginning of the session, participants appeared hesitant and passive, with only a few employees willing to respond to questions or share their opinions. However, as the session progressed and the facilitators created a more interactive and supportive atmosphere, participants gradually became more open and confident. By the end of the discussion session, most employees actively participated by asking questions, sharing their experiences, and proposing ideas for business improvement.

The business owner also demonstrated active engagement throughout the activity. Initially, the owner tended to dominate the conversation and speak on behalf of the employees. However, after the facilitators encouraged the owner to listen more and allow employees to speak freely, a noticeable shift occurred. The owner began asking employees for their opinions directly, which encouraged them to speak more openly. This behavioral change indicated that the socialization had succeeded in raising awareness of the importance of two-way communication in the workplace.

b) Participant Feedback Through Group Discussion

During the group discussion, participants provided verbal feedback on their understanding and perceptions of the material presented. Several key themes emerged:

1. Increased Awareness of Empowerment Concepts: Employees reported that they previously did not understand the concept of empowerment and assumed that decision-making was entirely the owner's responsibility. After the socialization, employees acknowledged that they now understand that they have the right and opportunity to contribute ideas and participate in business decisions. One employee stated, "Selama ini saya hanya berpikir bahwa pekerjaan saya hanya memproduksi kerupuk, tetapi sekarang saya mengerti bahwa pendapat saya juga penting untuk



kemajuan usaha."

2. **Motivation to Contribute More Actively:** Many employees expressed a desire to contribute more to the business. They mentioned feeling valued when their opinions were heard during the discussion session. Employees stated that they would be more motivated to work if their contributions were recognized and appreciated by the owner. "Saya lebih semangat bekerja jika ide-ide saya didengar dan dihargai," one participant stated.
3. **Improved Communication and Trust:** The business owner acknowledged that the socialization broadened his/her perspective on the importance of involving employees in decision-making. The owner stated that communication had previously been mostly one-way (from the owner to employees). After the activity, the owner expressed a commitment to improving communication by holding regular meetings and providing opportunities for employees to share their ideas. "Saya sadar selama ini kurang melibatkan karyawan. Ke depan, saya akan lebih sering bertanya pendapat mereka," the owner stated.

c) Feedback from the Business Owner

In an informal interview conducted after the socialization, the business owner provided positive feedback regarding the activity. The owner stated that the delivered material was highly relevant to the challenges faced in managing the business. The owner also acknowledged that, prior to the activity, employees were viewed only as production workers, but now understands that employee engagement and empowerment are essential to business sustainability. The owner committed to implementing several strategies, including holding regular meetings, appreciating employee contributions, and involving employees in simple operational decisions. This commitment aligns with Dessler's explanation that appreciation and employee involvement are important components of effective human resource management, as they strengthen employee loyalty, motivation, and performance (Dessler, 2020).

d) Summary of Evaluation Findings

Based on the qualitative evaluation, the socialization activity successfully achieved its objectives. The following indicators of success were observed:

1. **Increased understanding:** Participants demonstrated improved understanding of employee empowerment and engagement concepts, as evidenced by their active participation in discussions and their ability to explain these concepts in their own



words during the feedback session.

2. Increased enthusiasm and motivation: Employees showed greater enthusiasm than before the activity, as evidenced by their willingness to express opinions, share experiences, and propose ideas for business improvement.
3. Improved communication between owner and employees: The activity created an open forum for communication, enabling employees to express their aspirations and the owner to better understand employees' needs and expectations.
4. Mutual agreement for implementation: Both the business owner and employees agreed to implement the lessons learned during the activity, including regular meetings, an appreciation system, and employee involvement in decision-making.

These qualitative findings support the view of Fauhatun et al. (2022) and Rahmana et al. (2022), who reported that empowerment-based educational programs can improve participants' motivation, participation, and productivity in community-based organizations.

The qualitative findings from this community service activity provide compelling evidence that the socialization approach effectively enhanced participants' understanding and motivation. The observed shift from passive to active participation during the session demonstrates that interactive learning approaches, which combine lectures, discussions, and mentoring, are effective in improving participants' engagement and comprehension. This finding aligns with Robbins and Judge's (2019) assertion that interactive learning approaches are more effective than passive methods in improving participants' understanding and engagement.

The increased awareness of empowerment concepts among employees supports Spreitzer's (1995) theory of psychological empowerment, which states that when employees feel more meaningful, competent, and responsible, they are more likely to contribute actively to organizational goals. Prior to the activity, employees viewed themselves merely as workers responsible for completing routine tasks. After the socialization, they began to recognize their potential as active contributors to business development. This perceptual shift is critical because, as Conger and Kanungo (1988) explained, empowerment involves providing employees with both the opportunity and the understanding to participate meaningfully in organizational activities.

The finding that employees were willing to contribute but lacked opportunities and understanding is consistent with the literature on employee engagement. Schaufeli et al. (2002) emphasized that engaged employees demonstrate enthusiasm, dedication, and



responsibility toward organizational goals. However, engagement cannot develop in an environment where employees are not given opportunities to participate or feel that their contributions are not valued. The socialization activity created a forum where employees could express their aspirations, an essential first step toward building a culture of engagement.

The business owner's acknowledgment of previous shortcomings and commitment to change is a significant outcome of this activity. As Dessler (2020) noted, organizational success is highly influenced by employee participation, competence, and commitment, all of which are cultivated through sustained management effort. The owner's willingness to hold regular meetings, appreciate employee contributions, and involve employees in decision-making reflects an important shift in management perspective. Lockwood (2007) emphasized that employees who feel heard and appreciated are more likely to develop organizational commitment and work motivation, which ultimately benefits organizational performance.

The success of this activity also reinforces the findings of Sihite et al. (2024), who demonstrated that employee engagement and empowerment positively influence productivity in MSMEs. Employees who feel involved and appreciated tend to work more effectively and contribute positively to business development. The current activity provides practical evidence that targeted socialization can initiate this process, even within a short timeframe. When compared with previous community service studies published in *Jurnal Dedikasia* (Fauhatun et al., 2022; Rahmana et al., 2022), this activity confirms that empowerment-based educational programs can improve participants' motivation, participation, and productivity. However, the current study extends this finding by focusing on integrating empowerment and engagement strategies into a single intervention, addressing a gap identified in previous research.

It is important to acknowledge that behavioral change and practical implementation require continuous processes and long-term commitment. As noted by Noe et al. (2021), knowledge improvement and positive attitudes do not automatically translate into sustained behavioral change. The challenge lies in translating the enthusiasm and understanding gained during the socialization into concrete daily practices. This requires consistent reinforcement by the business owner and ongoing opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making.



Sustainability Plan and Follow-Up Actions

To ensure the long-term impact of the empowerment and engagement initiatives, a sustainability plan has been developed in collaboration with the business owner and employees. The following follow-up actions are proposed:

Table 1. Follow-Up and Sustainability Plan

No.	Follow-Up Action	Timeline	Responsible Party	Description
1	Regular employee meetings	Monthly, starting one month after the activity	Business owner and all employees	Holding regular meetings to discuss production issues, share ideas, and evaluate progress
2	Suggestion system	Within 2 weeks after the activity	Business owner	Establishing a simple mechanism (physical suggestion box or WhatsApp group) for employees to submit ideas and feedback
3	Employee recognition	Monthly, starting one month after the activity	Business owner	Appreciating employee contributions through verbal recognition, awards, or small incentives
4	On-the-job mentoring	Ongoing, weekly	Business owner	Providing guidance and coaching to employees to improve technical skills and build confidence
5	Follow-up evaluation and refresher socialization	3 months after the activity	Community service team and business owner	Conducting a follow-up visit to assess progress, address challenges, and provide additional guidance if needed
6	Documentation of best practices	Ongoing	Business owner	Recording successful practices and challenges faced for continuous improvement and learning

Source: Primary data from community service activity, 2026

The business owner has committed to implementing monthly employee meetings and a suggestion system, recognizing that employee involvement in decision-making is essential to building engagement and ownership. The community service team will maintain communication with the business owner and provide support as needed. This follow-up is critical because, as Sudjana (2010) emphasized, evaluation is an important component of community service activities to determine whether the objectives of empowerment and educational programs have been achieved effectively and sustained over time.

Long-term sustainability will also depend on the business owner's commitment to



consistently applying the principles of empowerment and engagement in daily operations. The business owner has expressed willingness to continue implementing the strategies discussed, particularly the monthly employee meetings and recognition system. This commitment is encouraging because, as Dessler (2020) noted, organizational success is highly influenced by employee participation, competence, and commitment, all of which are cultivated through sustained management effort. Furthermore, the business owner plans to expand engagement initiatives to include cross-training, in which employees are trained to handle multiple production tasks. This will not only build employee capacity and confidence but also create operational flexibility, ensuring business continuity even when employees are absent. This approach aligns with Noe et al.'s (2021) assertion that employee empowerment activities are important for improving employee participation, responsibility, and work effectiveness within organizations.

Overall Summary

Overall, this community service activity successfully conveyed the importance of employee empowerment and employee engagement as essential factors in supporting MSME sustainability and competitiveness. The qualitative evaluation demonstrated positive shifts in participants' understanding, attitudes, and motivation, as evidenced by increased participation in discussions, improved communication between owner and employees, and mutual agreement to implement the lessons learned. The business owner's commitment to follow-up actions, including monthly meetings, suggestion systems, and employee recognition, provides a strong foundation for long-term implementation. Although behavioral change and practical implementation require continuous processes and long-term commitment, the activity succeeded in establishing a foundational understanding among employees and business owners regarding the importance of collaboration, communication, and active participation within the organization. Similar findings were reported in community empowerment activities in *Jurnal Dedikasia*, which showed that empowerment-based educational programs can improve participants' motivation, participation, and productivity in community-based organizations (Fauhatun et al., 2022; Rahmana et al., 2022).

Figure 1. Implementation of community service activity at the Azizah Crackers production house



Conclusion

Given these conditions, concrete efforts are needed to enhance employees' capacity and participation in the business. One such effort is through socialization activities that provide understanding, insight, and knowledge about the importance of empowerment and how to increase employee engagement across all business activities. This community service activity aimed to provide socialization on the concepts and strategies of employee empowerment, as well as ways to increase employee engagement in the operations and development of the Azizah Crackers MSME. It is expected that this activity will establish a shared understanding between owners and employees, enabling the business to perform better, grow, and remain competitive in the market.

Based on the implementation and results of this community service activity at Azizah Crackers MSME in Indarung, Kilangan, Padang, West Sumatra, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The socialization activity successfully provided both the owner and the employees with a clear understanding of human resource empowerment and the importance of active employee engagement across all business processes. Participants understood that employees are strategic assets determining product quality and business sustainability.
2. Shared perception and improved communication were established between the business owner and employees. Employees became more confident in expressing obstacles and ideas, while the owner gained a better understanding of employees'



needs and potential.

3. This activity served as an effective initial step in fostering mutual awareness to improve work performance and quality. It is expected that the understanding gained will be applied sustainably, creating a conducive, efficient work environment that drives the Azizah Crackers MSME toward further growth, competitiveness, and greater economic benefits for all parties involved.

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