

LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN RURAL TOURISM: STRENGTHENING HUMAN CAPITAL FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF “KETAN HITAM” AGRO - EDU TOURISM IN PUSPAMUKTI VILLAGE

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Abstract

This study explores the application of Learning Organization principles to enhance human capital and ensure the sustainability of the community-based agro-edu tourism initiative, "Ketan Hitam," in Puspamukti Village, West Java, Indonesia. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The findings demonstrate that key dimensions of Learning Organization—such as continuous learning, team learning, shared vision, inquiry and dialogue, strategic leadership, system connection, empowerment, and embedded systems—are actively implemented through skill development programs, knowledge exchange between generations, and community-driven innovation. These learning processes contribute to strengthening the capacity of local farmers and tourism managers to adapt to market changes, improve service quality, and create value-added products. Despite facing infrastructural and resource limitations, the village demonstrates resilience and adaptability. This study highlights the critical role of learning-oriented strategies in empowering rural communities and sustaining agro-tourism models rooted in local knowledge and collaboration.

Keywords: Learning Organization, Human Capital, Rural Tourism, Agro-Edu Tourism, Community Empowerment, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism plays a significant role in improving local community welfare by optimizing natural and cultural resources sustainably (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). One effective approach to enhancing rural tourism sustainability is the concept of a learning organization—an entity that actively learns and adapts to environmental changes (Senge, 2006). This concept enables community-based tourism managers to improve human resource capacity, making them more competitive in the tourism industry (Garcia et al., 2020).

In the context of the Ketan Hitam Agro-Edu Tourism in Puspamukti Village, strengthening human capital is a key factor supporting the sustainability of tourism enterprises. Human capital encompasses the skills, knowledge, and experiences individuals possess within the tourism community, which improve productivity and innovation (Becker, 1993). Tourism managers with strong learning capacities are more adaptive to changing tourism trends, technological developments, and government policies supporting sustainable tourism (Stone & Stubbs, 2019).

This study aims to analyze how the learning organization concept is applied in managing Ketan Hitam Agro-Edu Tourism in Puspamukti Village and how human capital strengthening contributes to tourism sustainability. Academically, this research enriches literature on learning organizations in rural tourism, particularly regarding human resource development. Practically, it provides references for village tourism managers, government officials, and academics to develop organizational learning strategies to enhance community-based tourism sustainability.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating learning organization and human capital concepts within rural tourism, especially community-based agro-edu tourism management. Most previous studies emphasized physical and policy aspects of rural tourism development (Sharpley & Roberts, 2004; Hall et al., 2016), whereas this research offers a learning organization-based approach as a sustainability strategy.

The study's implications include strategic recommendations for agro-edu tourism managers to build a learning culture that supports innovation and destination sustainability. Through a learning organization approach, the tourism community can independently manage market changes and sustainably enhance visitor experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

The learning organization concept was first introduced by Senge (1990), emphasizing the importance of creating a sustainable learning culture. In rural tourism, learning organizations are increasingly relevant to address dynamic industry challenges (Garcia et al., 2020). Previous research shows organizations applying learning principles have higher competitiveness and innovation in managing market changes (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

Human capital also plays a crucial role in supporting tourism sustainability (Becker, 1993). Stone & Stubbs (2019) found organizations focusing on employee skill and knowledge development have greater chances of business sustainability. Similarly, Gannon et al. (2021) demonstrated that sustainable tourism success depends heavily on the quality of local community human capital.

Other studies discuss learning organization applications in community-based tourism. Garcia et al. (2020) highlighted that tourism organizations implementing learning principles improve service innovation and destination attractiveness. Hall et al. (2016) revealed that learning-oriented rural tourism is more capable of long-term survival compared to those relying solely on natural resource exploitation.

Thus, this study develops an approach integrating learning organization theory and human capital in community-based tourism. It contributes a fresh perspective on how human capital can be strengthened through organizational learning to achieve sustainability in agro-edu tourism.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative case study approach focusing on the Ketan Hitam Agro-Edu Tourism in Puspamukti Village. The case study method allows in-depth exploration of learning organization implementation and human capital strengthening in rural tourism (Yin, 2018).

Data Collection: Data were collected through in-depth interviews with tourism managers, local community members, and visitors. Direct observation of tourism activities and training sessions was also conducted. Secondary data included tourism planning documents, annual reports, and related literature.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to categorize data into main themes related to learning organization and human capital. Triangulation compared interview, observation, and document data to enhance validity.

Credibility and Validity: Member checking was conducted by allowing respondents to confirm interview results. Peer debriefing with academics and tourism practitioners provided additional perspectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Puspamukti Village, located in Cigalontang District, Tasikmalaya Regency, West Java, is rich in natural beauty and culture. Its cool climate and stunning mountainous landscape offer great potential for agricultural tourism development. The village's signature product is black glutinous rice,

a cultural heritage passed down through generations. This rice commands a higher market price than regular rice, driving the local economy.

In leveraging tourism potential, the village-owned enterprise (*BUMDes*) initiated the Ketan Hitam Agro-Edu Tourism, combining farming with tourism to create a unique visitor experience. Attractions include:

- Black glutinous rice farming education: Visitors learn cultivation processes from local farmers.
- River tubing: recreational river activities around the village.
- Culinary tourism: Serving dishes made from black glutinous rice.
- Traditional arts: Showcasing local culture and performances.
- Adrenaline rides: Off-road motorcross for extreme sports enthusiasts.

Learning organization is measured by indicators reflecting the organization's ability to learn, adapt, and grow sustainably. Marsick & Watkins (2003) identified seven key dimensions used here:

1. Continuous Learning: Ongoing individual learning.
2. Inquiry and Dialogue: Culture of questioning, discussion, and critical thinking.
3. Team Learning: Learning based on teams.
4. Embedded Systems: Systems supporting learning (e.g., information systems).
5. Empowerment: Empowering individuals to act.
6. System Connection: Organizational links to external environment.
7. Strategic Leadership: Leadership that supports and facilitates learning.

The learning organization concept stresses continuous learning, adaptation, and transforming knowledge into action for improved performance. Field findings show these principles are applied through community empowerment activities, especially in developing Ketan Hitam Agro-Edu Tourism. Analysis is based on Marsick and Watkins' framework and Senge's five disciplines of organizational learning.

1. Continuous Learning and Personal Mastery:

Continuous learning is evident from frequent and diverse agricultural extension activities involving experiential learning. Farmers reflect on old practices and compare them with new techniques like organic fertilizer use, water management, and crop rotation. Personal mastery is seen as a commitment to self-development within a learning community. Farmers are more proactive in trying new methods, seeking information, and sharing experiences, embedding learning into their work culture.

2. Team Learning:

The presence of 11 farmer groups and one Women's Farmer Group (KWT) represents structured collective learning. These groups serve as economic units and active learning communities facilitating dialogue, reflection, and best practice exchange. Cross-generational collaboration blends youth's technological adaptability with elders' local wisdom, fostering two-way knowledge transfer and innovation, such as value-added post-harvest processing.

3. Mental Models and Inquiry & Dialogue:

A significant achievement is the community's mindset shift toward innovation. Study tours to other tourism destinations broaden understanding that farming can integrate with service and tourism sectors. Dialogues among tourism managers, farmers, and external parties foster a healthy learning climate, encouraging questioning of old practices and openness to new approaches. Early stages of double-loop learning—rethinking underlying assumptions—are evident but need systematic strengthening.

4. Shared Vision and Strategic Leadership:

The main strength of the Ketan Hitam initiative is the shared vision of making Puspamukti a center for agricultural education tourism. This vision is widely embraced, strengthening social cohesion and ownership. Strategic leadership is demonstrated by tourism managers initiating collaborations, promotional strategies, and inclusive community involvement. Participative leadership aligns with

learning organization principles, with leaders acting as learning facilitators. Engaging farmers as tourism guides exemplifies leadership empowering the community.

5. Embedded Systems:

Although not fully formalized or digitalized, learning support systems are developing. Regular extension schedules, documentation of activities, and social media use for information sharing institutionalize learning, preventing dependence on individuals and embedding it into village systems.

6. System Connection:

Puspamukti connects externally through partnerships with tour & travel communities, relevant agencies, and digital promotion. Activities like study tours and digital marketing enable the community to absorb, evaluate, and adapt external knowledge to local needs, demonstrating adaptive capability—a hallmark of learning organizations.

7. Empowerment:

The community is an active agent of change, not just a program recipient. Empowerment occurs as residents initiate, decide, and lead learning processes. Farmers serving as tour guides mobilize local capacity for broader goals. The Women's Farmer Group plays a vital role in product diversification and post-harvest processing.

Implementation Challenges: Structural and Natural Dimensions

Despite significant progress, implementing learning organization principles faces structural challenges such as inadequate road access, limited water resources for tourism facilities, and human resource constraints. Without local government support in infrastructure and policy, learning processes risk stagnation.

However, adaptive strategies like product diversification, digital promotion, and community involvement show Puspamukti's resilience and capacity for innovation despite limitations.

The application of learning organization principles in Puspamukti teaches that social and economic transformation begins with strengthening community learning capacity. The village's success lies not only in economic outcomes but in an empowering, inclusive, and adaptive social process. With institutional and policy support, this model can be replicated in other villages as a learning-based development approach.

CONCLUSION

The Learning Organization principles are clearly reflected in Puspamukti's Ketan Hitam Agro-Edu Tourism development, integrating individual and collective learning. Continuous learning and personal mastery enable farmers to actively enhance their capacities through training and hands-on experience. Team learning within farmer groups and KWT fosters intergenerational knowledge exchange and social cohesion. Mental model transformation occurs through critical dialogue and study tours, encouraging innovation in agriculture and tourism. A shared vision of sustainable development drives broad participation and strategic leadership from within the community. Learning has been institutionalized through embedded systems supporting knowledge sustainability. External connections strengthen innovation adaptation via partnerships and digital technology, while empowerment is evident in active community involvement as the main agent of village transformation. Overall, Puspamukti demonstrates that a learning organization approach effectively builds local capacity and supports sustainable agricultural tourism development.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the qualitative approach focuses on narrative depth and contextual understanding, so generalizing results to other villages should be done cautiously. Second, data depend on informants' openness, which may introduce subjective bias or incomplete information. Third, the study does not deeply examine the long-term economic and social impacts

of learning organization principles. Time constraints and limited access to secondary data also challenged triangulation strengthening.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on findings, it is recommended that village government and Ketan Hitam Agro-Edu Tourism managers strengthen community learning systems through continuous training, local knowledge documentation, and digital technology utilization. Collaboration with academics and practitioners is important to foster research-based innovation. Increasing youth involvement is crucial for regeneration and faster technology adoption. Policy-wise, local government should improve infrastructure access to tourism sites, facilitate agricultural product processing industries, and incorporate learning organization principles into village development planning to ensure the initiative's ongoing growth and sustainability.

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