

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF MENTORS AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUCCESS OF THE UMKM CLASS UP PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY IN WEST JAVA PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

The "MSMEs Move Up Class" program in West Java Province is a government initiative to enhance the competitiveness and capabilities of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through mentorship. The success of this program depends on the effectiveness of the communication established between mentors and MSME entrepreneurs. This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the strategic role of mentor communication in supporting the success of the MSMEs Move Up Class program. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, where data is collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. Data analysis techniques are carried out thematically to explore effective multilevel communication strategies during the program. The findings show that the communication established by mentors is multifaceted and strategic. Interpersonal communication proves to be the foundation for building comfort and trust between MSME entrepreneurs and their mentors. Furthermore, mentors adapt their communication roles as a mentor, coach, facilitator, or motivator—according to the needs and readiness level of each MSME entrepreneur. Mentor communication is a key instrument in encouraging MSME entrepreneurs to sustain their businesses. Mentor communication is not merely a supporting activity but a strategic instrument at the core of the "MSMEs Move Up Class" program's success. This success is achieved through effective relational communication. Implications: Practically, the findings of this study recommend that organizers equip mentors with skills that emphasize adaptive communication competencies, emotional intelligence, and diagnostic abilities.

Keyword: Communication Strategy, MSME Mentorship, Mentor's Role, MSMEs Move Up Class Program, Case Study.

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in supporting the regional and national economy. In Indonesia, this sector is the backbone of the economy, contributing significantly to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and job creation. However, amid increasingly fierce competition, many MSMEs still face challenges in increasing their business capacity, such as limited market access, suboptimal human resources, and minimal use of technology. To address these challenges, the government, through the Department of Cooperatives and Small Businesses, provides facilitation through the MSME Naik Kelas Program as an effort to encourage economic growth and development.

The MSME Upgrade Program not only focuses on providing financial assistance but also emphasizes the importance of structured and ongoing mentoring. Mentors are expected to build effective communication with MSMEs to provide motivation, understanding, and solutions to various challenges they face. Communication by mentors serves not only as a medium for conveying information, but also as a tool for building emotional bonds and trust with MSMEs. An inappropriate communication approach can result in messages not being conveyed effectively, thus impacting the overall effectiveness of the program.



Figure 1. Summary of MSME Data Upgraded in 2023

(Source: West Java Provincial Cooperatives and Small Enterprises Office)

Data from the West Java Provincial Cooperatives and Small Enterprises Office (Figure 1.1) shows that in 2023, there was an increase in the number of MSMEs upgrading to small businesses. Micro-enterprises upgrading to small businesses increased by 17.5% after mentoring, and small businesses upgrading to medium-sized businesses increased by 10.3% after mentoring. This indicates that the communication during mentoring has yielded results that align with the objectives of the MSME Naik Kelas program—previously known as MSME Juara. This data demonstrates the critical role of mentors in driving MSME growth and the success of the MSME Naik Kelas program.

The 2024 MSME Naik Kelas program in West Java Province is a novelty, resulting from evaluations of the MSME Juara program conducted over the previous five years (2019-2023). The difference between the two programs lies in their objectives and focus. MSME Juara aims to provide training and prepare MSMEs for expansion, with a primary focus on strengthening competitiveness and quality. MSME Naik Kelas aims to mentor MSMEs to transform their business scale through gradual mentoring. The duration of the two programs also differs, with MSME Naik Kelas tending to be longer than MSME Juara. Based on this evaluation, the 2024 MSME Naik Kelas program offers a longer mentoring period than previous programs, at eight months. However, the duration of the MSME Naik Kelas program remains a challenge for mentors, especially in the current digital era.

Previous research conducted by Nurrohimah et al. (2023) concluded that a strong interpersonal communication network acts as a key pillar of MSME resilience during a crisis, enabling them to adapt and survive, even under very challenging conditions (Nurrohimah et al., 2023). Another study conducted by Nurhidaya et al. (2024) explained that there are inhibiting and supporting factors that influence interpersonal

communication between mentors. Inhibiting factors include MSMEs' difficulty opening up to new people, living long distances, and not having a mobile phone. Supporting factors include the time devoted by MSMEs, the mentors' skills in building communication, building mutual trust, and the mentors' experience and knowledge shared with MSMEs (Nurhidaya et al., 2024). Research by Lusianingrum et al. (2024) highlighted the transformation of MSME marketing communications through mentoring in social media content management, which positively impacted consumer interactions and increased sales. Through targeted mentoring, MSMEs demonstrated increased understanding and skills in designing, producing, and distributing relevant and engaging content on social media platforms (Lusianingrum et al., 2024).

Another relevant study used by researchers to understand interpersonal communication is the study conducted by Sari et al. (2022) on self-efficacy. The results showed that the interpersonal communication skills of guidance counselors have a strong influence on fostering student self-efficacy (Sari et al., 2022). From this study, researchers sought to understand and describe how interpersonal communication can help foster self-confidence in an individual. In this context, guidance counselors are equivalent to MSME mentors, and students are equivalent to MSME owners. Interpersonal communication is used by mentors to guide MSME owners in developing a sustainable business mindset and continuously striving to create new innovations in their businesses.

In addition to the aforementioned research on interpersonal communication, researchers also utilized previous research that addressed the role of mentors. The study conducted by Uyuandi et al. (2024) aimed to determine the influence of the role of MSME mentors on the performance of MSMEs in Bandung City. The results showed a significant influence of the mentor role on MSME performance and managerial capabilities. This performance improvement can include sales growth, operational efficiency, product quality, financial management capabilities, and innovation adoption. Thus, this study strengthens the argument that the active and effective role of mentors is a crucial determining factor in encouraging MSMEs to grow and achieve better performance (Uyuandi et al., 2024). Another study conducted by Ningsih et al. (2024) showed that MSME owners are motivated to run their businesses through the role of mentors due to the personal approach. The mentor's role includes raising awareness of the importance of their business, providing important information, assisting groups in using media, building networks, and sharing knowledge and experience (Ningsih et al., 2024).

The concept used by researchers in this study is the concept of interpersonal communication explained by Joseph DeVito. DeVito defines interpersonal communication as a process of conveying messages between two or more people who are connected and influence each other. The objectives of interpersonal communication according to DeVito are divided into 5, namely: (1) to learn, (2) to influence, (3) to play, (4) to relate, and (5) to help. Furthermore, Joseph DeVito explains the effectiveness of interpersonal communication which is a benchmark for success in communication such as awareness, cultural sensitivity, flexibility, orientation to others, openness, metacommunication, self-confidence, immediacy, expression, positive attitude, empathy, supportive attitude, equality, and interaction management (DeVito, 2007). Through this study, it is hoped that effective communication strategies can be found to support the sustainability and success of MSME programs or similar programs in the future.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Merriam (2009) explains that "case studies include as many variables as possible and portray their interactions, often over a period of time," meaning that case studies provide researchers with a holistic and comprehensive view of the complexities of communication within a real-life social context. Furthermore, Merriam emphasizes that case studies are heuristic, meaning they not only explain phenomena but also help readers understand the meaning and dynamics that occur within the MSME mentoring process being studied (Merriam, 2009).

Data collection techniques were conducted using three methods: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. The researchers conducted participatory observation by participating in activities organized by the West Java Provincial Cooperatives and Small Business Office, including technical outreach for mentoring in the 2024 MSME Naik Kelas program and an evaluation of the role of mentors in the 2024 MSME Naik Kelas program.



Figure 2. Documentation of Technical Socialization Activities for MSME Upgrade Assistants (Source: Researcher Documentation, 2024)

The data analysis technique used by the researchers was qualitative data analysis, as described by Miles and Huberman (1984). The stages of this data analysis process include collecting and verifying data accuracy, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. To prove that this research is scientific and accountable, data validity testing is necessary. The facts of reality in qualitative research are pluralistic, depending on social construction and individual backgrounds. Therefore, data validity testing is an important part of this research. In this study, the researchers referred to data validity, which is divided into four criteria according to Lincoln and Guba: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Sugiyono, 2008).

In this study, the subjects were government officials, regional coordinators, mentors, and MSMEs who worked during the MSME Naik Kelas program. However, not all subjects were included as informants. The focus of this study was the communication strategies and roles developed by MSME mentors in the MSME Naik Kelas program in West Java Province in 2024. The research was conducted in West Java Province from 2024 to 2025.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication strategies play a crucial role in fostering interactions and emotional connection between individuals to achieve goals, especially within an organization or group. Effective communication can bridge relationships between individuals or groups across all organizational elements. Without a strong strategy, information conveyed through communication will give rise to misunderstandings and hinder collaboration, ultimately leading to reduced productivity and potentially damaging reputations. With a well-developed communication strategy, the "MSME Naik Kelas" (Upgrading MSMEs) program is key to its success. This strategy serves as a crucial tool for guiding mentors, convincing MSMEs, and ensuring consistent implementation in the field.

The research findings indicate that mentors in West Java employ two communication strategies to build relationships with MSMEs: interpersonal approaches and benefits-based persuasive communication. MSME mentors predominantly employ interpersonal communication styles, such as active listening and an emotional approach. Trisna, one of the MSME mentors, applies an interpersonal approach to building communication with the entrepreneurs she mentors, as she told researchers in the following interview:

"I approach them slowly, engaging them in conversation with business owners, and the key is to make them feel comfortable with me as their partner."

This is in line with research conducted by Nurrohimah et al., which states that interpersonal communication between mentors and MSMEs can provide guidance and motivation for MSMEs in developing their businesses (Nurrohimah et al., 2023).

Trisna considers this interpersonal approach to be quite effective in encouraging MSMEs to share their stories with mentors and find solutions needed to develop their businesses. Efforts can include building trust or a sense of comfort between MSMEs and their mentors. Trisna believes that the comfort level of business owners is a key factor in encouraging them to be open about the problems they are facing. This statement also aligns with the research findings of Nurhidaya et al., which emphasize the importance of interpersonal communication in building trust between mentors and business owners. The study explained that openness, empathy, and the ability to build comfort are key supporting factors in successful communication between mentors and MSMEs (Nurhidaya et al., 2024).

This was also conveyed by an MSME mentor named Dinda, who uses interpersonal communication to convince MSME owners. Dinda told researchers in an interview:

"One way I do this is by using interpersonal communication. It's quite effective in instilling confidence in business owners."

This statement aligns with the findings of Sari et al. (2022), who explained that positive interpersonal communication can foster self-efficacy or self-confidence in the individuals being mentored. In the context of MSMEs, this means that interpersonal communication by mentors can build business owners' confidence in running and developing their businesses (Sari et al., 2022). This interpersonal communication approach aims to build business owners' confidence in their mentors and in the implementation of the MSME Naik Kelas program. The purpose of Dinda's interpersonal approach as an MSME mentor is to influence and relate (DeVito, 2007). In this way, MSME mentors can effectively build relationships based on mutual trust and confidence, enabling mentors and MSMEs to work together to achieve their goals, contributing to the success of the 2024 MSME Naik Kelas program.

Based on the two statements explained by the research informants to the researcher, the implementation

of the concept of interpersonal communication in the relationship between mentors and MSMEs aims to build relationships (to relate) and provide assistance (to help) (DeVito, 2007). As mentors, Trisna and Dinda require trust from MSMEs so they can understand all forms of communication provided by the mentors. To build this trust, interpersonal communication is conducted so that MSMEs are open to discussing the problems they are facing and can find solutions together with the MSME mentors. Once trust and openness are established among MSMEs, expectations or hopes arise from MSMEs for the mentors to play a role in realizing solutions to their problems. This aligns with Biddle's role theory, which states that a person's function is driven by the expectations or hopes of others (Biddle, 1979). In this study, MSME mentors function because of the expectations from MSMEs that they can help them advance their MSMEs. Interpersonal communication itself plays a crucial role in building relationships and trust between mentors and MSMEs. Applying an interpersonal communication approach can increase the effectiveness of mentoring and enable mentors to understand the needs of the MSMEs they are mentoring.

In addition to using an interpersonal communication approach, another mentor, Dewi, employs a communication strategy using persuasive, benefit-based sentences. Dewi shared this opinion during an interview with researchers:

"Of course, with knowledge or skills they don't yet know, we can also explain the benefits for their business."

In line with this statement, previous research by Uyuandi et al. (2024) also demonstrated that mentors play a significant role in the performance and managerial capabilities of MSMEs. The active role of mentors can be a crucial factor in driving MSME development (Uyuandi et al., 2024). Dewi's statement aligns with the research by Ningsih et al. (2024), which shows that one of the important roles of mentors is to provide information and knowledge that MSMEs lack. Mentors not only provide emotional guidance but also help raise awareness of the importance of business development through relevant education (Ningsih et al., 2024).

The application of persuasive communication by MSME mentors enables entrepreneurs to be more open and trusting before making decisions. The mentor's role here is key, namely as an agent of change who motivates MSMEs to continuously innovate and make their businesses sustainable.

Effective communication will undoubtedly strengthen and build trust between communicator and recipient. By providing new knowledge or information, it is hoped that MSMEs will open up and collaborate with mentors to achieve the success of the MSME Naik Kelas program. The communication role established by mentors with MSMEs demonstrates that mentors serve not only as information providers but also as facilitators in the learning process, motivators in facing business challenges, and strategic liaisons between MSMEs and their supporting ecosystems. In this context, communication is a strategic instrument that enables knowledge transfer, builds trust, and strengthens the adaptive capacity of MSMEs. Therefore, effective communication in the mentoring process is a crucial factor determining the success and sustainability of the MSME Naik Kelas program.

The analysis shows that communication implemented by mentors plays a crucial role in building trust and readiness among MSMEs to adopt change. The personal approach used by mentors has been proven to facilitate business owners' acceptance of new insights.

Meanwhile, from an academic perspective, Herdiansyah Gustira, an expert in business management, emphasized that performance is an essential element in assessing and following up on the sustainability of

MSMEs. He explained that the role of mentors is crucial in supporting business development.

"In the context of MSME mentoring, performance is crucial because it can help assess the effectiveness of the mentoring and whether the main objectives of the mentoring have been achieved. Our role is to assess whether our presence is helpful or not. Besides helping, is it improving their businesses or not?"

He further discussed the focus of MSMEs that can be used as success goals by mentors, according to the needs of the MSMEs they are mentoring, as explained below:

"The next chapter, true success, is this. Through our mentoring, we certainly hope not only for good products and profits, but also for their businesses to be sustainable. Building MSMEs focuses on the topmost, products and profits. But they forget that products and profits don't just come from the heart; they must build a culture, team, behavior, and mindset. Then, behavior and mindset are all crucial for MSMEs to achieve products and profits. Next, I talked about the paradigm shift from product-centric to customer-centric. If I used to make a product that I thought was good, but when I sold it, why didn't anyone buy it? I thought my food was delicious, but when I sold it, why didn't anyone buy it? Well, that's it, because the focus was on this side, product-centric. Now, the paradigm has shifted to user-centric, so if we learn about design thinking, the first step is... "The key is to understand the user. We must first understand the user. We will create solutions that meet the user's needs. A product is not just about the product itself, but, as much as possible, the product becomes something new when purchased and consumed by the user."

In addition to assessing performance, the regional coordinator and mentors also act as a liaison between MSMEs and various available resources. This view aligns with the research findings of Lusianingrum et al. (2024), which showed that transforming marketing communications through mentoring plays a crucial role in shaping MSMEs' mindsets so they focus not only on the product but also on understanding consumer needs. Approaches such as design thinking and a shift from a product-centric to a customer-centric paradigm are part of a communication strategy proven to increase the competitiveness and sustainability of MSME businesses (Lusianingrum et al., 2024).

The focus of MSMEs on developing their businesses and the success indicators of MSME Upgrades to increase turnover and assets are interconnected in their implementation on the ground. This communication role and strategy are key to the success of MSME programs. Therefore, Herdiansyah emphasized the importance of mentors' ability to understand the needs of the MSMEs they assist, so that the approach used can be more targeted, as stated below:

"Well, the approach does vary. One of the skills an MSME mentor must possess is to identify the potential of those they mentor, then assess their circumstances. Not everyone needs mentoring, but not everyone needs coaching either. So we have to consider, 'Oh, this one needs mentoring, this one needs a motivating approach, this one needs coaching, and so on.'"

This view reinforces the research findings of Ningsih et al. (2024), which asserted that the effectiveness of mentoring depends heavily on the mentor's ability to adapt their role contextually—whether as a mentor, coach, facilitator, or motivator. This flexible approach allows mentors to respond to the specific needs of each MSME based on their business conditions and personal characteristics (Ningsih et al., 2024).

Research findings in the field indicate that communication fostered by mentors plays a significant role in preparing MSMEs to accept and navigate various changes in their business context. This confirms that mentors not only serve a strategic function as information providers, but also as facilitators who assist in the learning process, motivators who build business resilience in facing business challenges, and liaisons who open access to strategic resources and relationships. Therefore, effective communication in the mentoring process is a crucial factor in supporting the sustainability of the MSME Naik Kelas program.

This finding also aligns with Herdiansyah's statement, which emphasizes that the quality and performance of mentors must be assessed not only by their presence but also by the extent to which they are able to promote the overall development of MSMEs. Performance, in this context is a crucial parameter for assessing whether the mentoring process has succeeded in creating tangible changes in the mindset, capacity building, behavior, and business orientation of MSMEs. As Herdiansyah explains, assessing mentor performance includes the ability to identify the specific needs of the MSMEs they mentor and implementing an appropriate approach to ensure optimal development.

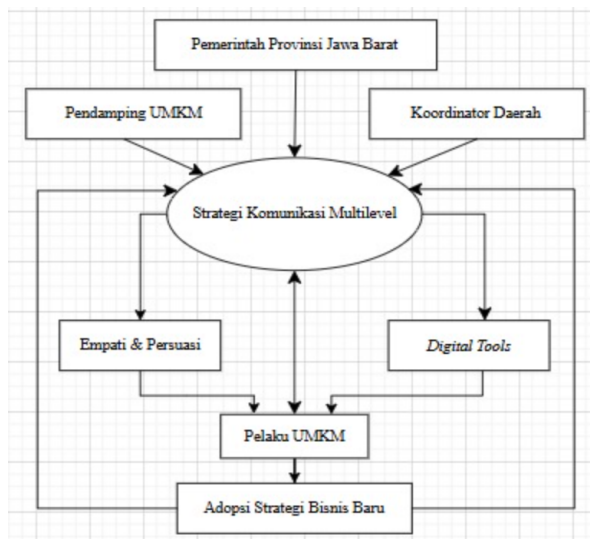


Figure 3. First-Degree Construct Diagram: The Role of Communication in the Success of the MSME Upgrade Program

(Source: Researcher Process, 2025)

The first-degree construct model in this study was designed to summarize the strategic role of communication facilitators in supporting the successful implementation of the 2024 MSME Upgrade Program. The effectiveness of communication facilitators depends on their ability to position themselves as a bridge between MSME aspirations and program policies. Facilitators who are able to act as adaptive communicators, facilitators of equal dialogue, and morale boosters contribute directly to the program's success, both in terms of participation, innovation adoption, and achievement of mentoring targets. This model demonstrates that the role of communication in program success is rooted in three primary functions of facilitators: (1) Information and knowledge facilitators, (2) Trust and relationship builders, and (3) Motivators and directors of business transformation. These three forms a mutually reinforcing functional circle in supporting MSMEs to achieve sustainable upgrade. Understanding these constructs is crucial for developing more impactful communication interventions in the future.

CONCLUSION

These results indicate that the communication skills developed by mentors are multifaceted and strategic. Interpersonal communication has proven to be fundamental for building a sense of comfort and trust between mentors and MSMEs. Furthermore, mentors adapt their communication roles as mentors, coaches, facilitators, or motivators according to the needs and level of readiness of each MSME. Communication strategies, such as interpersonal and persuasive approaches to MSMEs, have proven effective in encouraging MSMEs to create and adopt new business strategies. This is evidenced by the emergence of new innovations in MSME products.

This study concludes that the success of the MSME Naik Kelas (Upgrading MSMEs) program fundamentally depends on the ability of MSME mentors to implement communication strategies and build relationships and trust with MSMEs. This enables MSMEs to develop their businesses, maintain competitiveness, and transform their business scale, in line with the objectives of the 2024 Upgrading MSME program. Based on these conclusions, the researchers recommend that the government standardize and strengthen the communication skills of mentors. Communication aspects need to be integrated more formally and structured into the technical aspects of mentoring. Developing effective communication guidelines and best practices can help ensure consistent quality interactions between facilitators and MSMEs.

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