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Facilitator of Technology Business Incubation Activities Requires the Ability to Run the Role and Function of Public Relations

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Abstract

Technology business incubators (TBIs) are designed to help startups or tenants become independent entrepreneurs through a series of integrated services. In this service, the incubator assists tenants through a facilitator who acts as a communication link. Facilitators maintain the quality and quantity of communication between incubators, tenants, and stakeholder partners. This reflects one of the roles and functions of PR in carrying out the role of communication facilitator. This research uses descriptive and comparative qualitative methods with a purposive sampling technique. The research case study was conducted at a government technology business incubator by interviewing facilitators who play a role in the collaboration and incubation functions. The facilitator becomes a conduit for information from the incubator to the tenants so that communication runs smoothly. In addition, the facilitator also facilitates tenants' efforts to build collaborative partnerships with stakeholder partners. The facilitator needs to have the capacity to carry out the role and function of public relations as a communication technician, communication facilitator, and problem-solving facilitator. Technology business incubator assistance is improving thanks to the facilitator's role and function in public relations.

Keywords: Facilitator, Public Relations, Incubation, Tenant, Startup

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

Recognition of cultural diversity in public relations (PR) practice and theory encourages the development of disciplines, opens doors for new ideas, and forms new approaches. Public relations roles generally emphasize skills and effective communication, and learning a variety of practices opens up space for recognizing cultural differences (Dutta & Elers, 2020). This opens up the role of PR in organizational communications. Dialogue as a conceptual framework for public relations activities brings stakeholder voices into the organization.

PR practitioners have a responsibility to be a link between the organization and its public (Li et al. 2012). PR is required to be able to bring a good image of the organization into public view. This image reflects the success of PR in carrying out its role. According to Lattimore, the failure of the role of public relations in forming a positive image of government is caused by the dissemination of information about government activities that are not based on a two-way symmetrical communication model (Azahary & Kriyantono, 2018).

In the scope of incubation, PR has the role of building networks for organizations, maintaining relationships with tenants in the mentoring concept, and supporting the development of networks for both collaboration and tenant partnerships. So it is necessary to prioritize two-way communication in maintaining relationships. So it is necessary to maintain the relationship between tenants and incubators by prioritizing two-way communication. This can support the process of developing business entrepreneurship developed by tenants.

Entrepreneurship is closely related to collaborative partnerships with various stakeholder groups (Liu, 2020), such as investors, suppliers, distribution partners, resource providers, entrepreneurial teams, and governments (Xing et al., 2018). Each other need collaborative cooperation. Relationships can be established through the role and function of PR as a liaison for collaborative partnerships. Incubator and tenant partnerships support collaborative partnerships with other partners.

Technology business incubators assist startups or tenants through 7s services, namely space, shared, services, support, skill development, seed capital, and synergy. In this service, the facilitator becomes a communication facilitator who is responsible for maintaining the quality and quantity of communication going well between incubators, tenants, and stakeholder partners. While the communication facilitator is one of the roles and functions of PR. So it is formulated in research that whether the facilitator of technology business incubation activities requires the ability to carry out the roles and functions of public relations. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to find the actual relationship between the facilitator of technology business incubation activities and the roles and functions of public relations

1.2 Business Incubator

Business incubators have existed since the 1950s (Mian et al., 2016). In 2012, the number of incubators reached seven thousand globally, (Knopp, 2012). Business incubators are important for the local economy as a result of value creation (Bismala, 2020). Incubators in regional ecosystems consist of key stakeholders such as industrial clusters, academic institutions, research laboratories, banks, and investors (Lamine, 2016).

Business incubation is related to business development, technology transfer, mentoring, marketing, development, and research. And the forms of business incubation embodiment mechanisms are science parks, incubators, accelerators, technology centers, innovation centers, business centers, and technopolis (Blanc, Ribeiro, Anzanello, 2019). Technology incubators are entities where knowledge is transformed into innovative products and services (Binsawad et al, 2019). Incubators are also an important element in promoting innovation (Lish, 2012). The incubation process or practice carried out by TBI is the most critical determinant of the company's success. The business incubation program is designed as a tool to spur innovation, job creation, and economic development and add value to new businesses to increase survival (Hillemane & Satyanarayana, 2019).

The business incubator provides multitenant facilities with on-site management that directs the acceleration of the successful development of the company through a series of resources and business support services developed or managed by the incubator management. Incubators accelerate the entrepreneurial process and offer support for new ventures (Lewis, Harper-Anderson, & Molnar, 2011). However, in general, the main goal of incubators is to produce successful companies that will be financially viable and stand on their own (Torun, 2018). In Indonesia, the role of TBIs includes mentoring and services referring to Presidential Regulation Number 27 of 2013 concerning Entrepreneurial Incubators and Regulation of the Minister of Cooperatives and SMEs Number 24 of 2015 concerning Norms, Standards, Procedures, and Criteria (NSPK) for Entrepreneurial Incubators.

The government through Menristekdikti in 2018 has strengthened incubator institutions by forming 44 technology business incubators (TBIs) and developing 5 new TBIs outside Java Island. Several TBIs that have produced quality technology-based start-up companies (PPBT) include (1) Incubie Bogor Agricultural University (IPB), (2) Directorate of Innovation and Business Incubation, University of Indonesia (DIIB UI), (3) Institute for Research and Community Service Yogyakarta State University (LPPM UNY), (4) Skystar Venture Multimedia Nusantara University (UMN), (5) Central Java Innovation Entrepreneurial Incubator (Innov Jateng), (6) Maleo Techno Center. (Ristekdikti, 2018). Apart from the several incubators above, there is the only government incubator, namely the Technology Incubator Center under the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology (BIT-BPPT) which will still exist until 2020, playing an important role in the development of business incubation in Indonesia. BIT-BPPT, which is located in the Puspiptek Area, South Tangerang, is one of the pioneers in developing business incubation in Indonesia and has collaborated with many universities to form incubators and transmit technology-based business incubation studies

1.3 Facilitator

Facilitators are representatives of incubator institutions appointed to coordinate and relate to tenants (Cahyanto et al, 2015). The incubator assists tenants through a facilitator as a liaison. Facilitators assist tenants in carrying out all activities related to a series of incubation activities from pre-incubation to post-incubation. The facilitator ensures that communication between incubators, tenants, and partner stakeholders can run smoothly..

1.4 Public Relation

Grunig and Hunt define public relations as the practice of managing the dissemination of information between individuals or organizations (such as businesses, government agencies, or non-profit organizations) and the public. Whether developing an organization's public image, dealing with the public, and the media, or managing issues for large corporations, requires strong communication skills and a good understanding of public relations processes as well as social and organizational systems (Johnston, 2009). PR practice is often included as an HR in marketing, English, communications, media studies, or human resources and customer service, but not as a standalone degree (Muchena, 2018).

PR is a discursive communication practice, with company PR practices producing communication power (Berger & Reber, 2013). Soft power is none other than public relations (Nye, 2004; Verči, 2008). The issue of influence and power of communication is a central issue for strategic communication (Hallahan et al, 2007).

The role of organizational PR develops with changing times, PR does not only focus on business products, but PR also helps in forming strategic messages (Mikáčová & Gavlaková, 2014). The ideal role of public relations allows problem-solving to benefit everyone between individuals and groups in competition (Hazleton & Botan, 2017). Public relations practitioners are broadly divided into four roles, namely communication technician, communication facilitator, problem-solving facilitator, and expert prescriber.

- 1) PR practitioners as communication facilitators act as communicators or mediators to assist management in terms of hearing what the public wants and expects.
- 2) PR practitioners as problem-solving facilitators are involved in the problem-solving process as part of the management team.
- 3) PR practitioners as communication technicians become communication channels (journalists in residents) who provide information and communication technical services.
- 4) PR practitioners as expert prescribers are positioned as experts who become advisors to organizational leaders, provide input and considerations regarding the decision-making process, and are close to top management (Rahmadanty et al, 2019).

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach to descriptive and comparative analysis. Researchers are key instruments in data collection. The qualitative approach believes that truth and knowledge are dynamic things that are known through understanding the interactions of the people involved (Pawito, 2007). To collect data, the research conducted depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) with the selection of purposive sampling techniques from related informants. In the dept interview, the informants were the coordinators of the technology business incubator. After the dept interview, a discussion was held through the FGD forum. The FGD technique selects people based on certain criteria specifically made for research purposes. These criteria include: (1) the informant must be a coordinator who coordinates and oversees the function and role of PR in the organization and (2) the PR team as executor of activities in the field. In this research, a comparative study was carried out that compared the real situation in the technology business incubator with the suggestions of researchers according to the actual position and role of public relations. In addition to interviews and FGDs, for data collection, literature studies, documentation, and observations were also carried out.

3. Results

Based on field observations, TBIs carries out technology business incubation service activities. TBIs helps new businesses that are developing into independent entrepreneurs through a series of integrated assistance including the provision of office facilities, production testing, market testing, management consulting, technology, marketing and finance, training, and the creation of business networks both locally and internationally.

The technology incubator business process is a collection of activities in the incubation stages (pre-incubation, incubation, and post-incubation) that are interconnected/related to achieving the strategic goals and objectives of the technology incubator (Hamdani, 2013). The goal of technology business incubation is to grow technology-based start-ups. Incubators can facilitate three main sources, namely skills, funding, and networks (David-West, Umukoro, Onuoha, 2018).

Business incubation is divided into three stages: pre-incubation, incubation and post-incubation.

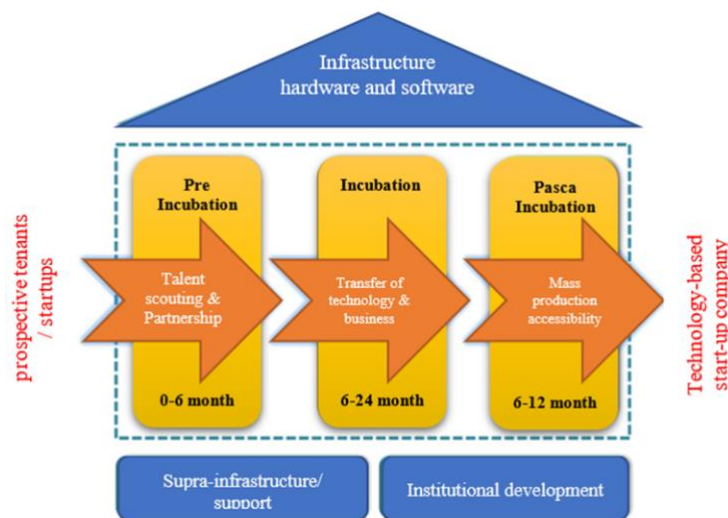


Figure 1: Stages of the incubation process (Hamdani, 2013).

The pre-incubation stage is a process in which talent scouting and partnership development take place between academics (technology producers), businesses (technology users), and the government (regulators/policies). Furthermore, the incubation stage is the core stage in a series of tenant incubation processes to create technology-based start-up companies (technology startups). In the incubation stage, there is a process of technology and business transfer, where the stages are preparation for incubation, training and mentoring, production testing, certification assistance, market access, and evaluation monitoring. From this incubation stage, it is hoped that it

will graduate tenants and be able to create technology-based start-up companies (PPBT) (Hamdani, 2013). Furthermore, in the post-incubation stage, it is directed at strengthening start-up companies for network development and managerial capacity building. Unlike the incubation stage, the facilities provided at the post-incubation stage aim to increase the accessibility of mass production and accelerate the business of start-up companies that have been formed during the incubation period.

Furthermore, based on interview data with informants, according to informant A, TBI facilitate business incubation, management consulting, and legal aspects to support the development of micro, small and medium enterprises based on technology or innovation. Furthermore, informant A added that besides carrying out facilitation, TBI also carried out human resource development, entrepreneurship, business network development, access to financing, and cooperation both domestically and abroad. TBI has MSME partners, entrepreneurs, experts, research units at government and private research centers, financial institutions, and other communities that give priority to technology and innovation as the basic pattern of business activities.

Informant B, who is the cooperation coordinator, said that the facilitator is a conduit for information that flows from the incubator to the tenants. Facilitators keep communication running smoothly between incubators, tenants, and stakeholder partners. In addition, the facilitator also facilitates tenants to build collaborative partnerships with related stakeholder partners, including researchers, engineers, practitioners, marketing partners, investment partners, and the government. In building collaborative partnerships, in general, the facilitator moves under the cooperation coordinator. The facilitator also participates in promoting and disseminating information on tenant products positively by providing added value. The presence of the facilitator supports the building of public trust in tenant products and technology business incubators through the dissemination of information on activities, services, and product promotions.

Based on the information conveyed by informant A, the facilitator communicates directly with the tenants and mediates further information. When a startup is legally declared to be an incubator tenant, the information conveyed from the incubator to the tenants is assisted by the facilitator. For example, the rights and obligations of tenants are formally conveyed by human resources who are competent in their fields in one meeting session. However, if outside the meeting session, there is still unclear information, the facilitator will help. The facilitator will answer according to their capacity and experience, or they will be asked by a more competent HR. This also happens when problems occur, so the facilitator helps mediate problem-solving. Problems can occur between tenants and incubators, tenants and inventors, or tenants and other stakeholder partners. The facilitator mediates meetings and communications with inventors. Several communication models are used to adjust to the context of the problems encountered. There are times when the facilitator meets directly so that the two-way communication process is more effective.

Informant A added that in the incubation stage, there is a training and mentoring process for tenants. This process is carried out according to the needs of the tenants based on the identification and approach made by the facilitator. The training provided by the incubator includes business and technology training by inviting relevant sources, while for mentoring, the guidance provided is in the form of mentoring in the fields of technology, marketing, and finance. Mentoring is consulted with a team of experts and professionals in their field (Hamdani, 2013).

Informant C said that the facilitator collaborated with other managers to identify and help solve tenant problems. The views of the facilitator will be considered in making management decisions. One example of a problem that is often faced is the transfer of technology. Tenants develop products from the inventions of researchers and engineers. In the incubation stage there are technology and business transfer activities, where the technology previously controlled by inventors is transferred to business partners so that the business processes can be carried out. The intended incubation partner is an incubator tenant. The communication process when technology transfer is not going well will cause problems in the future. Sometimes the understanding of tenants with different inventors can cause disputes that affect the next process.

Based on information from informant D, who is a staff of the cooperation coordinator, said that facilitators are often involved in producing information related to products and tenant profiles. This involvement is to prepare

promotional materials to convey information in the process of partnership communication with marketing, financing, investment, and private and government partners. The facilitator can provide an overview of how to produce information that can represent the perspectives of tenants, consumers, incubators, and stakeholder partners. This point of view is used following the conditions needed in news production such as news, company profiles, data presentation, stakeholder partners, and the government. Each of them has a different point of view, so a special value is needed in every production of information for consumers and stakeholder partners such as investors, government, marketing, certification bodies, test laboratories, and research.

Informant E did not dispute what was conveyed by other informants. By looking at what is happening in the field, the facilitator must be able to master communication techniques. The facilitator must take an important part in the communication process between incubators, tenants, and external partners. Based on the achievements of previous tenants, the capacity of the facilitator in communicating with tenants and external partners is very important. The support of the facilitator's capacity to communicate influences cooperation networks, marketing, and collaborative partnerships.

Furthermore, informant E explained that the facilitator assisted in several meetings. Incubation preparation meetings, discussing cooperation agreements, preparing roadmaps and action plans, as well as preparing office facilities for tenants. Tenants follow the incubator's directions in following the incubation process. An example is the reaffirmation of the rights and obligations of tenants in following the incubation stages. Tenants have the right to get office space at a relatively low rental fee, adjusted to the tenant's needs. Tenants can also take advantage of meeting room facilities, workshops, and equipment. Office facilities facilitate communication between facilitators with tenants and stakeholder partners. Tenant office facilities are close to the research cluster so it is easier for tenants and facilitators to communicate with researchers, engineers, or test and research lab facilities.

Informant E also added about tenant obligations that must be fulfilled, at the beginning of incubation tenants were asked to prepare a business roadmap and action plan by the incubator. The facilitator continues to ensure that what is prepared in the business roadmap and action plan has been fulfilled and is following what the incubator recommends. In this context, the incubator is more dominant in conveying instructions through the facilitator.

Furthermore, informant E said that in the process of technology transfer, incubators, tenants and inventors met in a focus group discussion (FGD). This discussion discussed the agreement between each party in the process of technology transfer, profit sharing, to cooperation agreements. In the process of technology transfer, problems often occur due to 1) communication that is not going well between incubators, tenants, and investors and 2) the level of maturity of technology that is not fully ready for commercialization. The facilitator plays an important role in solving communication problems that are not going well. The facilitator maintains the understanding and agreement of each party, ensures the completeness of documents, facilitates communication and meetings, facilitates problem-solving and ensures tenants get good incubation services.

4. Discussion

Based on analysis of field observation data and interviews with 5 informants, TBI carries out technology business incubation services for startups through a series of integrated assistance. Startups or also called tenants are fostered and facilitated so that they develop into independent entrepreneurs. The incubator is assisted by a facilitator who acts as a liaison between the incubator, tenants, and stakeholder partners.

Facilitators are representatives of incubator institutions appointed to coordinate and communicate with tenants. The facilitator facilitates the communication process between tenants, incubators, and stakeholder partners. The facilitator ensures that communication goes well. The facilitator becomes a conduit for information that flows between incubators and tenants, tenants and stakeholder partners, incubators and stakeholder partners, and parallel communication between the three parties. In addition, the facilitator also facilitates tenants to build collaborative partnerships with new stakeholder partners from the initial process of communication to the formation of a cooperation agreement. It can be underlined that the facilitator as a communication channel reflects his capacity to carry out the role and function of public relations as a communication facilitator. This role and function are very

attached to the facilitator. Because with the presence of a facilitator, communication between several parties is ensured to run well.

The ability to carry out the role and function of public relations as a problem-solving facilitator is also attached to the facilitator. Facilitators collaborate with other managers to identify and help resolve tenant problems. One of the examples in the problem-solving facilitator is seen when the transfer of technology that is not going well will cause problems in the future. Tenants' understanding of different inventors can cause disputes that affect the next incubation process. The troubled technology transfer process has a major impact on the sustainability of the tenant business. Facilitators and management help mediate and bring together tenants with inventors to discuss finding solutions, reaching agreements, and completing the technology transfer process.

The facilitator also carries out the role and function of PR as a communication technician. Not directly carrying out these roles and functions, but always involved with their duties. The duties of a communication technician are making photo documentation, writing press releases, letters, invitations to press gatherings, and press conferences, writing articles for internal magazines, and writing other forms of communication. This task is often carried out by the facilitator in assisting tenants.

Tenants need facilitators who have the technical expertise to produce information that has added value. This information is used to introduce company profiles, news content, and tenant product promotions. Tenants will be greatly assisted by the production of information carried out by communication technicians. The facilitator is directly involved in carrying out the task and contributes to increasing the value of the information product itself.

5. Conclusion

The facilitator needs to have the capacity to carry out the role and function of PR. The roles and functions are communication technician, communication facilitator, and problem-solving facilitator. Communication technicians can produce information that has added value for company profiles, news content, and tenant product promotions. Furthermore, the role and function of PR as a communication facilitator is to facilitate the communication process between tenants, incubators, and stakeholder partners. The facilitator ensures that communication runs well and can become a channel of information between incubators and tenants, tenants and stakeholder partners, incubators and stakeholder partners, and parallel communication between the three parties. And then the role and function of a problem-solving facilitator. This role allows the facilitator to collaborate with other managers to identify and help resolve tenant issues.

Technology business incubation assistance can take advantage of the facilitator's capacity support in carrying out the role and function of public relations. The facilitator needs to have the capacity to carry out the role and function of public relations as a communication technician, communication facilitator, and problem-solving facilitator.

This research was developed as one of the study initiatives of Sebelas Maret University students who took the topic of facilitator capacity in carrying out the role and function of public relations in technology business incubation activities. Hopefully, this research can share knowledge and be useful for the development of business communication science.

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