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STRATEGIC CADRE MANAGEMENT AS A LEADERSHIP INCUBATOR: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF IPNU–IPPNU IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Purpose: *This study examines how human resource management (HRM) strategies are used to strengthen the leadership capabilities of cadres in the sub-district branch board (PAC) of IPNU–IPPNU, the Nahdlatul Ulama student and youth organisations, in Buaran District, Pekalongan Regency, Indonesia, and how these strategies shape cadre engagement.* ***Design/methodology/approach:*** *A descriptive qualitative case study was conducted. Data were gathered through interviews with the chairs, members and alumni administrators, observation, and organisational documents, and were analysed with the Miles–Huberman–Saldaña interactive model.* ***Findings:*** *HRM operates through three linked stages (strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation) embodied in a tiered pathway of MAKESTA, LAKMUD and DIKLATAMA, closed by follow-up plans (RTL) and monthly meetings. Recruitment, interview-based selection and placement, four forms of training (skill, retraining, cross-functional and creativity training) and reward–sanction mechanisms convert membership into leadership practice. A shift from quantity to quality coincided with a decline in cadres from about 90 to 48, while administrators rose from about 120 to 140. Cadres reported higher motivation, enthusiasm, leadership skills and belonging, although participation remained uneven. The study proposes the Sustainable Cadre Management Cycle for Leadership (SCMC), an eight-stage model.* ***Research limitations/implications:*** *The single-case design and reliance on self-reported accounts limit generalisation; the four propositions advanced here require comparative and mixed-method testing.* ***Practical implications:*** *Youth organisations can treat every programme as a leadership laboratory by sequencing training, delegated responsibility, follow-up and participation monitoring.* ***Originality/value****: The study integrates cadre management and leadership development into one cycle grounded in an under-researched faith-based youth organisation.*

Keywords: *Human resource management; cadre development; leadership development; youth organisation; IPNU–IPPNU*

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Faith-based youth organisations supply many future community leaders, yet little is known about how they manage cadres systematically. This study shows how a district-level Nahdlatul Ulama student organisation in Indonesia moved from counting members to developing leaders: it selected cadres by interest and talent, trained them in tiers, gave them real responsibility, and

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evaluated results through follow-up plans. The findings help youth organisations, religious institutions and policymakers design cadre programmes that build decision-making and responsibility, while warning that programmes alone do not guarantee participation.

INTRODUCTION

Human capital is widely regarded as a decisive resource for organisational sustainability, and the way organisations recruit, develop and retain people has become a central concern of strategic human resource management (SHRM). The COVID-19 period made this concern more visible: it showed that HR policies must serve multiple stakeholders and differentiated employee groups rather than a narrow set of short-term outcomes (Collings, McMackin, et al., 2021), and that HR functions are most effective when they respond to uncertainty with paradox-aware, human-centred practice (Collings, Nyberg, et al., 2021; Cooke et al., 2022; Hamouche, 2023). Volunteer-based and youth organisations face a sharper version of this challenge because their members are not employees, incentives are largely non-financial, and leadership must be produced from within through successive cohorts. A new generation of members, often described as Generation Z, expects purpose, participation and developmental feedback (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Pichler et al., 2021), which makes the quality of cadre management more consequential than membership size.

The literature offers rich but fragmented guidance on this problem. Leadership-development research argues that programme-based training is necessary but limited, and that development is better understood as a system in which experience, relationships and organisational context interact over time (Day et al., 2021; Oc et al., 2023). Studies of emergent leadership likewise show that leadership is claimed and granted through observable behaviour in real tasks (Hanna et al., 2021). HRM research on nonprofit organisations documents persistent tensions between mission and external pressure and calls for a deeper account of how HR practices are actually enacted (Baluch & Ridder, 2021). In the Indonesian context, studies of IPNU–IPPNU have examined basic leadership training (Setiawan et al., 2025), the leadership style of village-level boards (Camelia & Pujianto, 2024), organisational capability at sub-district level (Muna & Sukirno, 2025), soft-skill training (Musfiroh et al., 2025), digital-era HRM (Panggo et al., 2026) and cadre strategies for Generation Z (Murad & Subahri, 2026). Related work on student cadre management reports a positive association between planning–organising–actuating–controlling (POAC) based cadre management and leadership character (Yudanto et al., 2025), and community-organisation mentoring research highlights monitoring and evaluation as sustaining governance (Sumarno, 2025).

Despite these contributions, three gaps remain. First, existing IPNU–IPPNU studies tend to isolate one element, such as training, leadership style or organisational capability, and rarely trace how selection, placement, training, responsibility, follow-up and evaluation operate as one continuous process. Second, research seldom explains how a shift from membership quantity to cadre quality is managed and what it costs in participation. Third, the field lacks a mid-range account that links HR functions to the mechanisms through which leadership actually develops, namely opportunity to act, feedback and a sense of belonging, rather than treating leadership as a by-product of attending training.

Responding to these gaps, this study asks: (RQ1) How are HRM strategies formulated, implemented and evaluated to develop leadership among IPNU–IPPNU cadres in Buaran District? (RQ2) Which HRM practices (recruitment, selection, training and development, rewards and sanctions) are used, and how do they operate? (RQ3) How do these strategies affect cadre engagement and leadership capability, and what constrains their effect? The study draws

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on the context of a sub-district board that reported about 590 teenagers attending routine activities across the 2021–2022 to 2023–2024 terms, with administrators increasing from about 120 to 140 and cadres decreasing from about 90 to 48 after selection became stricter.

The study contributes in three ways. Theoretically, it integrates SHRM, the ability–motivation–opportunity (AMO) logic and experiential leader development into an eight-stage Sustainable Cadre Management Cycle for Leadership (SCMC) and specifies participation management as its key boundary condition. Empirically, it provides process-level evidence from a faith-based youth organisation in the Global South, a setting under-represented in Scopus-indexed HRM and leadership research. Practically, it offers a replicable sequence that other youth and community organisations can adapt without large financial resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

This study treats cadre management as strategic HRM applied to a voluntary membership organisation. Strategic HRM links HR practices to organisational goals and requires attention to how practices are enacted and interpreted by the people who experience them (Collings, McMackin, et al., 2021; Guest et al., 2021). Sustainable HRM adds a regenerative perspective: practices should renew, not deplete, the human resources on which the organisation depends (Kramar, 2022). Regeneration of leadership is therefore the long-term outcome of cadre management, not a by-product of leadership turnover. To explain how practices translate into behaviour, the study uses the AMO framework, which holds that performance depends on employees' ability, motivation and opportunity to act (Bos-Nehles et al., 2023). In cadre management, selection and training build ability, rewards and belonging build motivation, and delegated responsibility creates opportunity.

Leadership capability is understood as a set of learnable competencies, namely accepting responsibility, responding to environmental change, remaining objective, setting priorities and communicating effectively. Contemporary leadership-development research emphasises that such competencies grow through systems that combine education with practice, feedback and context (Day et al., 2021), and that followers and peers co-construct leadership (Oc et al., 2023). Experiential learning supports this view: learning by doing raises motivation and engagement when learners face authentic tasks (Kong, 2021), and organisational learning depends on processes that capture and transfer experience (Argote et al., 2021). Structured debriefs, in particular, have a measurable positive effect on performance, which provides a rationale for follow-up mechanisms such as the RTL (Keiser & Arthur, 2021). Self-determination theory (SDT) supplies the motivational mechanism: autonomy, competence and relatedness support sustain quality motivation and engagement (Gagné et al., 2022; Ryan et al., 2022; Van den Broeck et al., 2021). Belonging, as a distinct psychological need, shapes whether members stay involved (Allen et al., 2021).

Research Propositions

Because the study is qualitative, it develops propositions rather than hypotheses. First, selection based on interest, talent and organisational need improves person–organisation fit and thereby the efficiency of later development (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023); structured interviews are among the strongest predictors of later performance in selection research (Sackett et al., 2022). Proposition 1 (P1): Interview-based selection and placement increase cadres' readiness to benefit from training. Second, training transfers into leadership only when learners receive authentic responsibility and structured reflection (Keiser & Arthur, 2021; Kong, 2021).

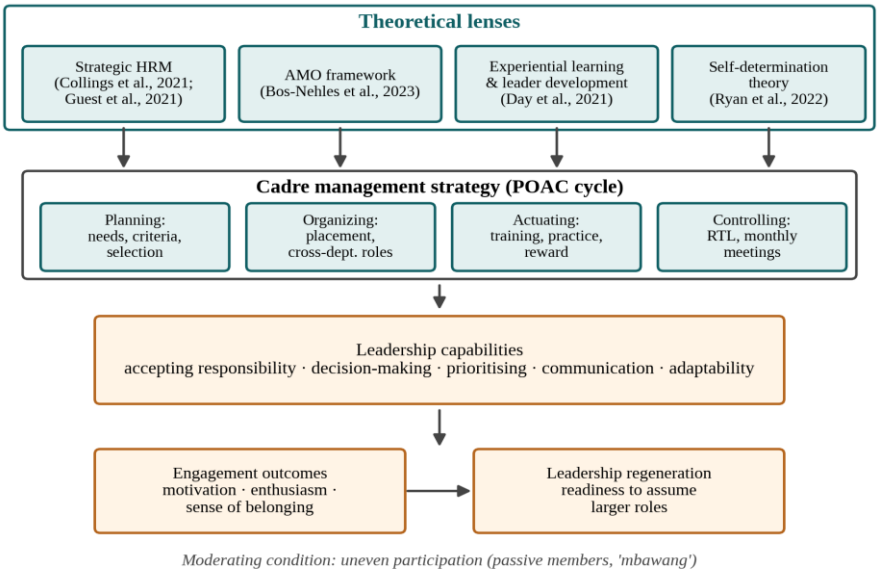
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Proposition 2 (P2): Delegated responsibility and follow-up (RTL) mediate the effect of training on leadership capability. Third, rewards and sanctions function as signals that members interpret, so their effect depends on perceived fairness and meaning (Guest et al., 2021; Saks, 2022). Proposition 3 (P3): Reward–sanction mechanisms raise participation only when they are experienced as supportive of competence and belonging. Fourth, psychological safety and voice shape whether members speak and act (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Morrison, 2023). Proposition 4 (P4): Uneven participation weakens the translation of programmes into leadership, so participation management moderates the cadre-management–leadership relationship.

Research Model

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model. Four theoretical lenses inform a POAC-based cadre management strategy, which is expected to build leadership capabilities; these in turn are associated with engagement outcomes and readiness for leadership regeneration. Uneven participation is treated as a moderating condition. The model guided data condensation and the presentation of themes in the Results.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework of Strategic Cadre Management and Leadership Development



Source: Authors' synthesis.

METHOD

A descriptive qualitative case study was adopted because the phenomenon, the enactment of HRM and leadership development inside a youth organisation, depends on meanings, practices and processes that cannot be reduced to numerical indicators. The case-study logic suits a bounded organisation observed over successive terms, and the descriptive orientation prioritises a detailed account before theory building (Pratt et al., 2022). The design is aligned with the research questions, the AMO-based framework and the intended contribution of a process model.

The study was conducted at the sub-district board (Pimpinan Anak Cabang, PAC) of IPNU–IPPNU in Buaran District, Pekalongan Regency, Central Java. IPNU and IPPNU are the Nahdlatul Ulama organisations for male and female students, pursuing learning, cadre

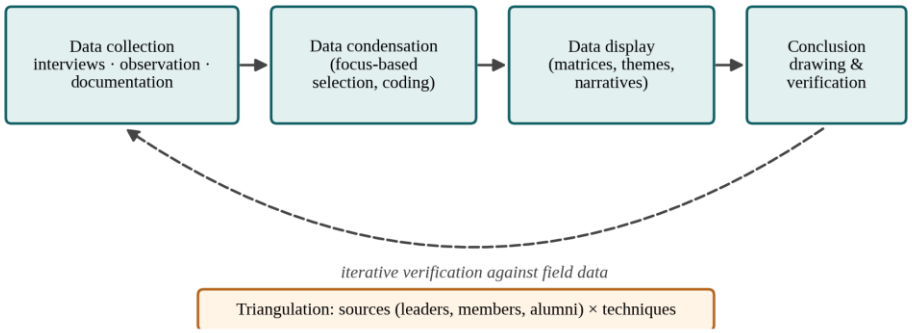
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formation, social, national and religious missions. Informants were selected purposively for their direct involvement: the chairs of the PAC IPNU–IPPNU, members, and alumni of the board. Secondary data included records of active and passive members and organisational documents on activities and membership. [Authors to insert: total number of informants and the data collection period.] Qualitative research does not seek statistical generalisation; credibility rests on information-rich informants and on sample adequacy judged by thematic saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Three techniques were used. Interviews explored how HRM strategies and leadership development were implemented. Observation recorded activities and the actors involved. Documentation drew on materials stored at the PAC secretariat, including membership data and records of activities and board composition. Using multiple sources and techniques enabled triangulation and strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings.

Analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), comprising data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing and verification (Figure 2). Data were condensed by research focus, coded, and organised into themes on planning, organising, implementation, evaluation, leadership development, and enabling and inhibiting factors. Coding was iterative and reflexive; themes were treated as patterns of shared meaning developed through the analyst's interpretive work rather than as topics that simply emerge from data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Naeem et al., 2023). Conclusions were verified by returning to the field data and by comparing sources.

Figure 2
Interactive Qualitative Data Analysis Procedure



Source: Adapted from Miles et al. (2014).

RESULT

Findings are organised into four parts: the informant and data profile, the three-stage HRM strategy, the practices through which HRM was enacted, and the effects on leadership and engagement. Interpretation is kept brief here and developed in the Discussion.

Table 1 summarises the data sources. The primary sources were persons directly engaged in the organisation, and the secondary sources were organisational records. Membership records show a quantity-to-quality shift between terms (Figure 3): administrators rose from about 120 (2021) to about 140 (2023), while cadres fell from about 90 to about 48 after screening became stricter. The earlier term emphasised the number of members, whereas the later term emphasised quality.

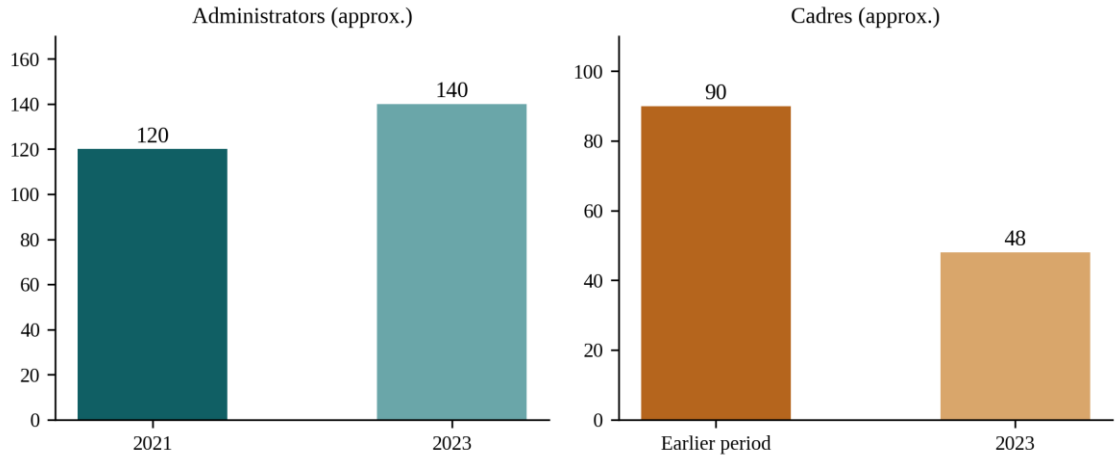
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Table 1
Informants and Data Sources

No.	Source	Role in the study	Data obtained
1	Chairs of PAC IPNU and IPPNU	Primary informants	Strategy, programme design, HRM practices, impact on leadership
2	Members	Primary informants	Experience of training, responsibility, motivation and participation
3	Alumni administrators	Primary informants	Continuity across terms, cadre pathway, evaluation
4	Organisational documents and records	Secondary data	Active and passive membership, activities, board composition
5	Observation of activities	Supporting data	Interaction among actors during programmes

Source: Authors' field data.

Figure 3
Shift from Quantity to Quality in PAC IPNU–IPPNU Buaran



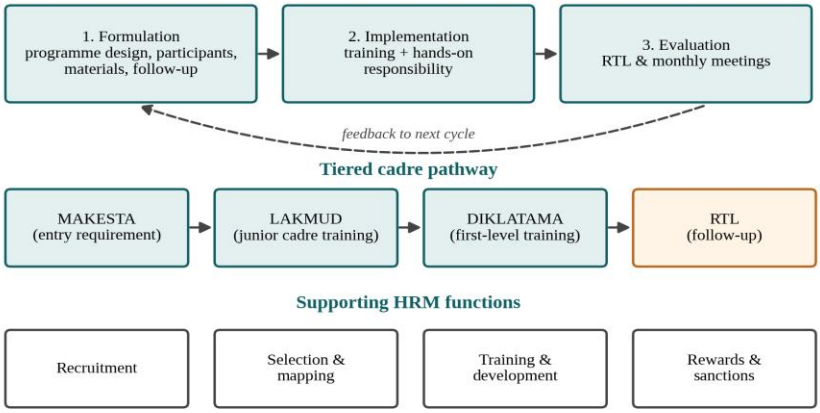
Source: Organisational records (approximate figures).

Theme 1: A three-stage HRM strategy for leadership

PAC IPNU–IPPNU Buaran develops human resources through strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation (Figure 4). In formulation, the board designs work programmes whose main direction is to raise members' leadership ability and spirit, determining the form of each programme, its participants, materials, technical arrangements and follow-up. Cadre programmes include Masa Kesetiaan Anggota (MAKESTA), Latihan Kader Muda (LAKMUD) and Pendidikan dan Latihan Pertama (DIKLATAMA). In implementation, programmes are delivered through cadre education and training, and leadership material is embedded in MAKESTA, LAKMUD and DIKLATAMA; members are also directed to apply what they learned in organisational activities, so leadership is treated as experience as well as knowledge. In evaluation, the Rangkaian Tindak Lanjut (RTL) and monthly meetings provide guidance, supervision and review of strengths and weaknesses, and members may revisit and extend theory obtained in earlier training.

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Figure 4
HRM Strategy Stages, Tiered Cadre Pathway and Supporting HRM Functions



Source: Authors' field data.

Theme 2: HRM practices in cadre management

Four HRM functions were evident (Table 2). In recruitment, candidates complete a form, must be 16–21 years old as evidenced by an ID card or birth certificate, and must have attended MAKESTA, as shown by a certificate. In selection, supporting documents are checked and an interview explores interest and talent; the chair and the formation team then map candidates to departments that match their potential, so selection doubles as a placement tool. Training and development took four forms: skill training (mapping abilities from selection interviews), retraining (RTL sessions that review earlier material), cross-functional training (committees drawing members from several departments) and creativity training (administration, graphic design and training of trainers). In compensation, rewards go to active and high-performing members, while warning letters are issued to members who are inactive or breach rules; compensation is therefore not only financial.

Table 2
HRM Practices and Their Operation in PAC IPNU–IPPNU Buaran

HRM function	Practice observed	Leadership relevance
Recruitment	Application form; age 16–21 verified by ID or birth certificate; MAKESTA certificate	Sets entry criteria that favour committed cadres
Selection and placement	Document check and interview on interest and talent; chair and formation team map candidates to departments	Fit between potential and role; basis for skill training
Training and development	Skill training; retraining through RTL; cross-functional training via committees; creativity training (administration, graphic design, training of trainers)	Builds ability and gives opportunity to practise
Rewards and sanctions	Rewards for active and high-performing members; warning letters for inactivity or violations	Signals expectations; can motivate or discourage

Source: Authors' field data.

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Theme 3: Effects on leadership and engagement, and their limits

Members and department coordinators took part in determining, conceptualising, implementing and evaluating work programmes, which gave them leadership experience instead of only instructions from the chair. A clear example is LAKMUD: coordinators and members of the Cadre Department designed the whole event, from materials and speakers to the programme concept, catering and lodging, and follow-up, made decisions and bore responsibility for risks. A second example is the committee for the arts and sports week (PORSENI), in which one sub-committee combined daily administrators and members of the Organisation and Cadre Departments. The PAC IPPNU chair explained that a main aim of HRM was for cadres to decide firmly, face the risk of their decisions and take responsibility for their actions. Informants linked the strategy to higher motivation, enthusiasm, leadership skills and sense of belonging. However, some members remained passive or merely followed along, described locally as "mbawang", so engagement was not evenly distributed.

Table 3
Thematic Findings, Evidence and Links to the Literature

Theme	Evidence from the field	Literature link
Three-stage strategy	Formulation of programmes; implementation through training; evaluation through RTL and monthly meetings	SHRM and POAC (Collings, McMackin, et al., 2021; Muna & Sukirno, 2025)
Selection and placement	Interviews on interest and talent used to place cadres	Person–organisation fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023)
Learning by doing	LAKMUD planning by cadres; cross-department PORSENI committees	Experiential learning (Kong, 2021); AMO opportunity (Bos-Nehles et al., 2023)
Follow-up and evaluation	RTL and monthly meetings review strengths and weaknesses	Debriefs (Keiser & Arthur, 2021)
Engagement and its limits	Higher motivation and belonging; some passive "mbawang" members	SDT (Ryan et al., 2022); voice (Morrison, 2023)

Source: Authors' analysis.

DISCUSSION

From Programmes to aMmanaged Cadre System

The Buaran case shows cadre management operating as a managed system rather than a calendar of events. This aligns with leadership-development scholarship that criticises programme-based thinking and promotes developmental systems (Day et al., 2021), and with SHRM arguments that practices should be coherent and sensitive to the groups they target (Collings, McMackin, et al., 2021). The POAC reading is consistent with studies of IPNU–IPPNU at the Ngronggot sub-district, where planning, organising, implementation and evaluation underpinned capability development (Muna & Sukirno, 2025), and with evidence that organising is especially important to leadership character in student cadre management (Yudanto et al., 2025). The tiered MAKESTA–LAKMUD–DIKLATAMA pathway, with RTL closing each loop, is the structural expression of this system. The finding extends earlier work that has treated training, style or capability separately (Camelia & Pujianto, 2024; Setiawan et al., 2025) by showing how they are chained.

Planning in Buaran began with criteria, documents and an interview that mapped interest and talent, and these data were then used to place cadres in departments. This is a practical form of person–organisation fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023) and matches evidence

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that structured interviews are strong predictors of later performance (Sackett et al., 2022); it supports P1. The same logic appears in needs-based programmes such as the soft-skill training in Babat, where local needs shaped content and post-training support (Musfiroh et al., 2025). The decline in cadres from about 90 to 48 should not be read as failure. It reflects a deliberate trade-off between breadth and depth: a smaller, better-matched cohort can receive more responsibility per person, which is consistent with a regenerative view of HRM (Kramar, 2022). The cost is a thinner pipeline, which the organisation must manage.

The most distinctive result is that leadership was built by delegating real tasks. LAKMUD and cross-department committees gave cadres opportunity, the third element of the AMO triad (Bos-Nehles et al., 2023), while training supplied ability and rewards and recognition supported motivation. Learning from authentic tasks is known to raise engagement (Kong, 2021), and organisations learn when experience is captured and transferred (Argote et al., 2021). The RTL functions as a structured debrief; a meta-analysis shows that after-action reviews improve performance (Keiser & Arthur, 2021), which supports P2. The pattern parallels experiential programmes in Babat that combined hands-on training and post-training support (Musfiroh et al., 2025) and mentoring-based governance improvement elsewhere (Sumarno, 2025). Because delegated risk-taking presupposes confidence in senior administrators, trust between senior and junior cadres is a likely precondition for this mechanism (Legood et al., 2023). Theoretically, the case suggests that opportunity and reflection are the active ingredients, with formal training acting as an enabling condition.

Motivation, Belonging and the Participation Gap

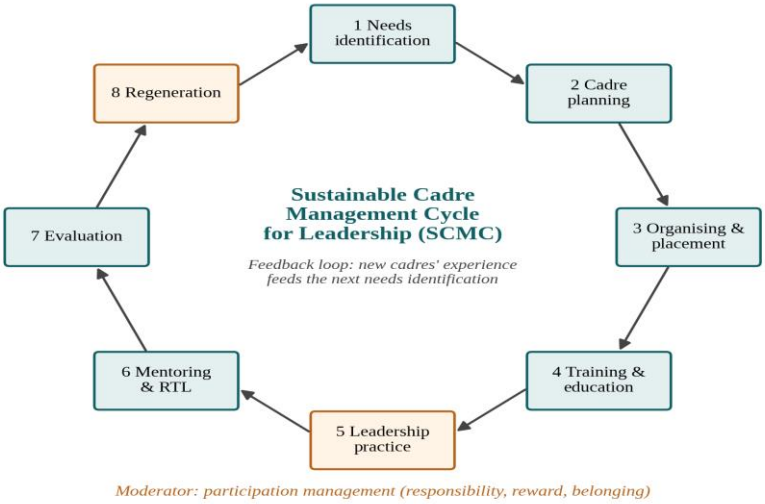
Cadres reported greater motivation, enthusiasm and belonging, which is consistent with SDT: delegated responsibility supports competence and autonomy, and shared committees support relatedness (Gagné et al., 2022; Ryan et al., 2022; Van den Broeck et al., 2021). Caring HR practices and meaningful work are linked to engagement (Albrecht et al., 2021; Saks, 2022), and belonging is a distinct driver of persistence (Allen et al., 2021). Job-demands–resources research adds that job resources such as autonomy, feedback and support sustain engagement, whereas demands without resources erode it (Bakker et al., 2023). Yet “mbawang” members show that programmes do not automatically convert into participation. Voice and silence research suggests that members withhold effort when they doubt the value or safety of contributing (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Morrison, 2023), and signalling theory suggests that rewards and sanctions work only when they are read as fair and supportive rather than controlling (Guest et al., 2021). Warning letters may therefore deter breaches without motivating inactive members. This supports P3 and P4 and implies that sanctions need to be paired with feedback, graduated responsibility and recognition. The finding also refines prior IPNU–IPPNU work, which reports positive outcomes without addressing uneven engagement (Setiawan et al., 2025; Muna & Sukirno, 2025).

Synthesising the results yields the eight-stage SCMC (Figure 5): (1) needs identification, (2) cadre planning, (3) organising and placement, (4) training and education, (5) leadership practice, (6) mentoring and RTL, (7) evaluation, and (8) regeneration, after which the experience of new cadres feeds the next round of needs identification. The cycle is iterative rather than linear, and participation management moderates every transition. Mentoring is understood here as guidance by senior administrators, delegated tasks and RTL rather than a formal mentoring programme, because the data do not show one. The model moves from “prepared cadres” to “cadres who experience”, then “cadres who can lead”, and finally “cadres who prepare the next generation”. It builds on the capability-oriented work of Muna and

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Sukirno (2025) and the tiered-pathway emphasis of Panggo et al. (2026) by specifying the mechanisms between stages.

Figure 5
The Sustainable Cadre Management Cycle for Leadership (SCMC)



Source: Authors' synthesis.

Theoretical contribution, implications and context

Theoretically, the study contributes in three ways. It integrates SHRM, AMO and experiential leader development into a single process model for a voluntary youth organisation; it identifies opportunity and structured reflection as the main mechanism linking training to leadership; and it specifies participation management as a boundary condition that qualitative and quantitative work can test. By tracing a quantity-to-quality shift, it also shows that cadre management involves trade-offs rather than monotonic improvement, in line with calls for a more stakeholder- and context-sensitive SHRM (Cooke et al., 2022; Collings, Nyberg, et al., 2021) and with nonprofit HRM reviews that stress the interplay of mission and pressure (Baluch & Ridder, 2021). The case further resonates with organisational resilience scholarship, because a cycle that learns from each cohort builds adaptive capacity (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021), and with positive youth development, which values meaningful roles and supportive adults (Lerner et al., 2021).

Practically, five actions follow. First, use selection interviews to map interest and talent and to place cadres deliberately. Second, treat each major programme as a leadership laboratory by assigning cadres real planning, decision and risk responsibilities. Third, institutionalise RTL and monthly meetings as structured debriefs with documented follow-up. Fourth, track participation by cohort and pair sanctions with feedback, recognition and graduated roles. Fifth, prepare for the digital generation: emerging digital and AI-enabled HR tools can support recruitment records, mentoring and communication (Budhwar et al., 2023; Meijerink et al., 2021), but they require careful work design that keeps people's autonomy intact (Parker & Grote, 2022) and digital-leadership skills (Tigre et al., 2023).

Contextually, the findings come from a faith-based, volunteer organisation in a Muslim-majority, collectivist society in which membership is also a form of religious and social belonging. In such settings, identity and shared purpose can strengthen commitment (Haslam

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et al., 2021), but they may also mask passivity when attendance is socially expected. The results should therefore be transferred cautiously to organisations with different incentives, and future work should test the SCMC across districts, organisations and countries. The study is a single-case design based largely on self-reported accounts, and leadership capability was not measured with validated instruments. The numerical membership data are approximate. Mentoring was inferred from practice because no formal programme was documented. Future research could use multi-case comparison, longitudinal designs that follow cohorts into later board positions, and mixed-method testing of P1–P4.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that IPNU–IPPNU Buaran strengthens leadership through a three-stage HRM strategy (formulation, implementation and evaluation) realised in tiered cadre programmes, follow-up plans and monthly meetings. Recruitment, interview-based selection and placement, four forms of training, and rewards and sanctions convert membership into leadership practice. The strategy is associated with greater motivation, enthusiasm, leadership skills and belonging, but participation remains uneven. The study contributes the SCMC, an eight-stage cycle that links cadre management with leadership development and identifies opportunity, reflection and participation management as key mechanisms. Academically, it refines SHRM and leader-development theory for voluntary youth organisations and provides four testable propositions. Practically, it offers a replicable sequence for youth, religious and community organisations. Future research should compare multiple cases, follow cohorts longitudinally and test the propositions with mixed methods.

Author Contributions

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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