

Radio Business Navigation in the Era of Talent Scarcity: Governance Strategies of Istara FM Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

The radio broadcasting industry is currently facing dual challenges: aggressive digital media competition and a scarcity of human resources interested in pursuing broadcasting as a profession. As a youth-segmented radio in Surabaya, Istara FM is at a critical point where the regeneration of broadcasters clashes with the rapid growth of the digital creator economy. This study aims to analyze the business navigation and governance strategies implemented by Istara FM Surabaya to maintain operational sustainability amidst talent limitations. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. Data were collected through observations of broadcasting activities and social media management, as well as documentation studies related to the station's business model. The results indicate that Istara FM utilizes three tactical pillars: shifting broadcasters into 'hybrid-talents' who manage the entire content lifecycle, optimizing automation to act as an operational shield, and pivoting from traditional advertising to 'consultative' local partnerships. The study concludes that the station's survival isn't about technology alone, but about a radical restructuring of HR functions that prioritizes 'willpower' and adaptability over traditional job descriptions

INTRODUCTION

Evolution of Radio: Between Traditional Resilience and Digital Disruption

Against all odds, radio remains a cultural survivor that refuses to fade. It hasn't just survived the visual media chaos; it has thrived by being incredibly fluid. Digital convergence actually provided radio with a new backbone rebuilding its infrastructure through IP-based systems and multi-radio networks. This shift transformed a traditional medium into a versatile multimedia platform, capable of managing complex, real-time multicast communications. (Keller et al., 2001).

Let's be real: hardware isn't the hero of this story. We can't deny that AI and Big Data help keep our networks from collapsing under modern pressure (Argyroudis et al., 2022), but they are just plumbing. They don't solve the identity crisis radio is facing. In this decade, the ground has shifted under our feet. We aren't asking 'How do we transmit?' anymore. The real, nagging question is 'Who is actually left to speak?' Radio is currently in a street fight for survival. Giants like Spotify and the podcast explosion haven't just changed the rules they've basically set the old rulebook on fire, forcing local stations to rethink why they even exist

Human Capital Crisis in the Traditional Media Industry

Indonesian radio is facing a strange survival crisis. Even though technology has made broadcasting a breeze, the people to run the mics are simply vanishing. We can blame this on the skyrocketing Creator Economy. To put it bluntly: Gen Z is over the radio booth. They're chasing digital fame on TikTok and Instagram, hooked by the promise of creative control and fast cash luxuries that old-school radio just hasn't figured out yet. (Tarigan et al., 2022).

The gap between the abundance of Communication Science graduates and the lack of applicants in the radio industry creates a crucial research gap. This issue is not merely a technical broadcasting problem, but rather a matter of strategic management. Media companies are required to reformulate their "career promises" to remain attractive to young talent, who now have different professional standards than previous generations.

Surabaya's Media Landscape and Local Challenges

As the largest economic hub in East Java, Surabaya has a very unique media dynamic. With around 35 radio stations operating on the FM frequency, Surabaya is an extremely crowded market. The egalitarian character of Surabaya's audience and their thirst for local information make radio an important social instrument. However, this density of radio stations is not matched by an even distribution of talent.

Radio stations in Surabaya now have to compete for a shrinking "advertising pie" while also vying for increasingly scarce "talent." Stations targeting the youth segment face the greatest pressure, as they must directly compete with the ever-changing digital lifestyle trends. At this point, organizational management skills are put to the test: how can a radio station continue to sound "cool" and "energetic" to listeners, while behind the scenes they are struggling with limited staff?

The Urgency of the Istara FM Surabaya Case Study

Istara FM Surabaya was chosen as the research object because of its position as a legendary "Hits" radio station that has remained relevant across various decades. As a youth-focused radio station, Istara FM is at the forefront of the battle to capture Gen Z's attention. An interesting phenomenon arises as Istara FM has managed to maintain its "healthy" operations and stay commercially relevant, even though it operates with a much leaner team structure compared to the pre-digital era.

Istara FM's success in navigating business amid this talent shortage provides a management model that is important to document. This research not only looks at how they broadcast, but also at how they turn a "crisis of interest" into a sustainable management strategy. Through a multi-skilling approach and the use of appropriate technology, Istara FM demonstrates that a radio station does not need a building full of hundreds of staff to remain competitive.

Problem Statement and Objectives

Based on this background, this study formulates the following research questions: (1) What are Istara FM's HR management strategies in addressing the scarcity of talent? (2) What are the patterns of operational and financial management at Istara FM to remain sustainable amid limited human resources? The objective of this study is to analyze the restructuring patterns of work roles (multi-skilling) and to identify models of technology integration that support organizational resilience.

Theoretical review

Media Management Theory (Alan B. Albarran)

Media management is a systematic process of managing an organization's resources to produce high-quality content while maintaining economic profitability. Albarran (2016) emphasizes that contemporary media management must operate on two levels: the macro level (economics and regulation) and the micro level (staff and technology management). In the context of talent scarcity, the pillars of Staffing and Leading become especially crucial.

Albarran states that media organizations are labour-intensive and capital-intensive entities. When the labour market undergoes shifts, such as potential broadcasters moving their interest to the creator economy sector, media managers must reengineer their staffing strategies. This involves retaining talent through organizational culture and the development of hybrid skills so that operations can continue with fewer personnel who possess broader capabilities. (Shao, 2016).

Media Convergence Theory (Henry Jenkins)

Media convergence is not merely a technological change or the merging of various media platforms, but rather a cultural shift in which the boundaries between producers and consumers become blurred. Jenkins (2004) defines convergence as the flow of content across multiple media platforms, cooperation among different media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences. For radio industries such as Istara FM, convergence means the transformation from "Radio as a Broadcaster" to "Radio as Content". Radio can no longer rely solely on terrestrial audio. Convergence demands audience

participation through social media and the visualization of content (visual radio). In this study, convergence is used to examine how Istara FM synergizes the role of conventional announcers into a multiplatform talent capable of producing both auditory and visual narratives simultaneously. (Jenkins & Jie, 2024).

Organizational Resilience Theory

Resilience is far more than just a survival instinct; it is the art of thriving while the floor is shaking. Burnard et al. (2018) frame this as an organization's capacity to absorb heavy shocks while keeping its core engine running. In the radio business, this resilience works on two fronts: the tech side (operational) and the business plan (strategic). This study takes a closer look at how Istara FM leverages AI and automation to steer through challenging times. Their knack for spotting looming threats, like the current talent drought, and swiftly reshuffling staff roles is a shining testament to their organizational resilience. (Anwar, 2023)

Resource-Based View (RBV)

In Talent Management Let's talk about what really gives a company its competitive edge. It's not those generic tools that everyone has access to. Instead, it's the unique and valuable assets that truly set a company apart. This lens forces us to look past the cold hardware and focus instead on the human grit that provides the station with its competitive 'soul.' We aren't just looking at staff; we are looking at the unique talent that makes Istara FM impossible to replicate in an automated world. To truly win, these assets especially human ones must be impossible for competitors to simply clone (inimitable) and must be backed by a rock-solid organization. This VRIO logic is exactly how we measure whether Istara FM's team is just a 'cost' or a genuine competitive weapon. (Rotjanakorn et al., 2020).

RBV helps to explain why Istara FM places greater emphasis on "willpower" and teamwork. In situations where human resources are limited, organizations no longer seek fully developed talent, but rather talent with the capacity to be nurtured internally (in-house development). By optimizing existing internal resources through multi-skilling policies, organizations can create added value that competitors relying solely on conventional work models do not possess.

The Creator Economy Phenomenon and Changes in Gen Z's Work Characteristics

This study also adopts the perspective of the sociology of work to understand the shifting characteristics of labour in the digital era. In today's Creator Economy, becoming a public figure is more accessible than ever, breaking away from the days when mass media like radio held all the power. Gen Z, in particular, seems to favor work models that are flexible and project-based, offering plenty of personal exposure. (Seyfi et al., 2024). By delving into the intricate tapestry of work psychology woven by this new generation, radio management can gracefully pivot from the confines of rigid, bureaucratic structures and embrace a symphony of collaborative and hybrid work patterns.

Media Ecology Theory (Marshall McLuhan)

When we examine Istara FM's human talent through the VRIO framework, it becomes evident that we are considering much more than just 'staff.' We're talking about a rare asset that's hard to replicate. You can buy the same software Istara uses, but you can't buy the way their announcers connect with a Surabaya listener at 5 PM in the rain. That 'human spark' is what makes their model so hard to imitate; it's baked into the station's DNA, not just written in a manual

RESEARCH METHODS

Paradigm and Types of Research

This study uses an interpretive paradigm with a descriptive qualitative research type. The choice of qualitative methods is based on the need to understand management phenomena in depth and comprehensively (holistically), especially regarding decision-making strategies amid an HR crisis. According to Creswell, J. W., & Poth, (2017), qualitative research is highly appropriate for exploring complex social problems where the variables are not easily measured quantitatively. In this context, the researcher aims to narratively describe how the managers of Istara FM Surabaya navigate business to maintain the radio station's existence in the era of digital disruption.

Case Study Approach

The approach used is a single case study. This approach was chosen in line with the thinking of Robert K. Yin (2017), who states that a case study is the right strategy if researchers want to answer "how" and "why" questions regarding a set of contemporary events over which the researcher has little control. Istara FM Surabaya was selected as the single unit of analysis due to its unique characteristics as a youth-segmented radio station that has managed to survive with a highly efficient (lean) organizational structure amid the phenomenon of limited broadcasting talent.

Research Subjects and Objects

We decided that Istara FM Surabaya was the perfect case to dissect how local radio actually survives today, focusing specifically on their business moves and internal governance. To get to the heart of the matter, we didn't just talk to anyone; we hand-picked informants who are in the thick of policy-making. This purposive sampling led us straight to the Manager of Istara FM. We see this role as the station's 'strategic anchor' because it's where the hardest jobs collide: managing a shrinking talent pool while simultaneously steering a commercial roadmap through a messy digital market

Data Collection Techniques

To get the truth about Istara FM, we decided that a simple survey wouldn't cut it. We needed to see the gears turning. This meant we had to juggle three different angles at once. First, we grilled the Manager on the 'hard' stuff: Gen Z, AI automation, and their commercial survival, even using digital messaging to fill in the blanks between meetings. We then cross-checked those insights by keeping a close watch on their live digital assets to see how their team handles the multiplatform grind. To round it all out, we spent time digging through their 2026 company profiles and latest broadcast logs. By the

time we merged these three streams of data, we had a much clearer picture than any single interview could have provided

Data Analysis Techniques

We didn't just follow a checklist; we treated the Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, (2014) model as an interactive cycle to make sense of our fieldwork. This meant being brutal during 'data reduction' we had to cut through hours of interviews and pages of notes to isolate the specific management patterns that actually matter for Istara FM's survival. Any fluff that didn't explain their strategy was tossed out. We then used data displays to map out how their 'localism' policy actually fuels their financial health, turning a mess of information into a clear visual. Finally, we didn't just accept our first impressions. We constantly cross-checked and verified our conclusions against different sources to make sure the final story we're telling about Istara is rock-solid and grounded in truth

Data Validity

To ensure the quality of research results, the researcher used Source Triangulation and Theory Triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data from managerial interviews with field facts through daily content observation. Meanwhile, theory triangulation was conducted by testing field findings using various theoretical perspectives, ranging from Albarran's Media Management, Jenkins' Convergence, to Organizational Resilience, in order to ensure that data interpretation has a strong scientific basis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

New HR Paradigm: From Competitors to Synergistic Convergence

Based on primary data obtained from interviews with the management of Istara FM Surabaya, an interesting finding emerged regarding the management's perception of the Creator Economy phenomenon. While many traditional media outlets feel threatened by the presence of influencers and content creators, Istara FM has instead repositioned its paradigm. The informant stated:

"ISTARA does not view content creators and others as competitors. Instead, we see that as one of their other strengths, which also serves to support the development of the transition process to becoming a digital or converged radio." (Rudi Didi, Interview on January 3, 2026).

These findings indicate the highly practical application of Henry Jenkins' theory of media convergence. Istara FM no longer views radio as a rigid audio medium, but rather as a multimedia ecosystem. By recruiting talent who are already digitally skilled (Gen Z), Istara is actually streamlining its training process. These talents bring "inherent" visual and social media interaction skills that previous generations of broadcasters did not possess. This aligns with Albarran's level of human resource management analysis, which emphasizes the importance of adapting to new consumer behaviours that favour visual and interactive content.

Restructuring Job Roles: Multitasking Policies and "Willpower"

The main strategy for addressing the talent shortage is the implementation of multitasking policies. Every broadcaster is required to possess hybrid skills, ranging from vocal techniques to visual content production. (Deuze, 2007). The primary criterion sought is willpower, which, according to the Resource-Based View (RBV), is a valuable and rare asset. (Barney, 1991).

Istara FM is tackling the challenge of talent scarcity by fundamentally rethinking how work is distributed. Now, multi-skilling isn't just a nice-to-have it's absolutely essential. The informant emphasized:

"Yes, it's absolutely right. ALL ANNOUNCER ISTARA must be multitasking... The main criterion that ISTARA looks for is willpower first. That's basically it." (Rudi Didi, Interview January 3, 2026).

The emphasis on willpower highlights that in an era of talent scarcity, an adaptive attitude is far more valuable than having a single technical skill. In strategic management theory, this is referred to as the development of flexible Human Capital. (Jooss et al., 2024). Broadcasters at Istara FM are not only required to master vocal techniques, but must also be able to take on roles as video editors, social media admins, and even event coordinators.

However, this multitasking policy carries the risk of burnout. To anticipate this, Istara FM has built an organizational culture based on teamwork. Informants noted that the way to maintain productivity is by "always feeling like a team." Academically, this represents a form of relational organizational resilience, where the strength of the team compensates for the shortage of personnel.

Let's talk about how Istara FM keeps things running smoothly around the clock.

Let's be blunt: AI at Istara isn't some shiny trophy; it's a shield against burnout. Without that automation-hybrid grinding away during the dead hours of the night, a station this lean would simply go dark. We observed that they've basically offloaded the mind-numbing loops to the machines so their real talent doesn't hit a wall by noon. It's a 'force multiplier' that actually has teeth. (Pérez-Torres, 2024). The goal isn't to make the tech look smart it's to keep the tech tireless. By dumping the mechanical grunt work on a bunch of code, the crew finally gets the mental space to be loud, local, and human. That's the one thing an algorithm can't fake: the authentic vibe of a Surabaya street.

In operational aspects, Istara FM demonstrates a healthy reliance on technology. Lean management strategies are implemented through an automation system that operates 24 hours a day. The informant explained:

"The broadcast automation system at Istara is extremely crucial, operating 24 hours a day. That's why we pay such close attention and handle the maintenance of its equipment with great care." (Rudi Didi, Interview January 3, 2026).

The use of automation technology here does not serve to replace humans, but rather acts as a "goalkeeper" to ensure the broadcast continues even when the number of studio staff is limited. This is supported by the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the content production process. The acknowledgment that AI is "nothing new for Istara" indicates that this radio station has moved past the phase of rejecting technology and has entered the

optimization phase. In media economics studies, the use of AI acts as a force multiplier a tool that enables one staff member to produce a creative output equivalent to that of three conventional staff members. (Lee & Suh, 2024)

Economic Media Transformation: The "Problem Solver" Strategy for Local Partners

The most crucial aspect in maintaining the health of the organization is the financial aspect. Istarsa FM realizes that relying on national spot advertisements is a significant risk amid economic sluggishness. Therefore, they have taken strategic measures by strengthening local branding. An informant explained:

"We don't see them as clients, but we try to become a part of them... which in the end makes us one of their problem solvers." (Rudi Didi, Interview January 3, 2026).

Istarsa FM doesn't survive on luck; they survive because they've become a 'fixer' for the Surabaya market. They realized early on that the old model of just peddling 30-second ad spots is a dead end. Instead of being a mere broadcaster, they've reinvented themselves as a marketing lifeline for local MSMEs. By mixing live on-air talk with street-level events and social media, they tackle the actual pain points their partners face daily. This isn't just noise it's about delivering results and community access that global algorithms can't replicate. Their bank balance stays steady because they've ditched the transactional style for a deeply consultative one. By acting as a problem solver rather than a simple airtime seller, Istarsa has built a bond with the local community that is as gritty and unique as Surabaya itself. This strategic pivot is what shields them even when big national brands start cutting their budgets (Waller, 2020).

Table 1. Istarsa FM Surabaya Business Navigation Strategy Matrix

Strategic Dimension	Main Implementation	Resilience Output
Human Resources	Multi-skilling Policy & Focus on Willpower	Operational efficiency with a lean staffing structure
Technology	24-hour broadcast automation & AI integration	Sustainable content production without reliance on a large staff
Financial	<i>Local Brand Partnership & Consultative Selling</i>	Income stability through local partner loyalty (Community Wealth)
Product Characteristics	Hyper-local Content & Narrowcasting	A competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate by global digital platforms

The table above shows that Istarsa FM's resilience does not rely on a single aspect, but is instead the result of synergy between internal efficiency (Human Resources & Technology) and external reinforcement (Finance & Product). This integration forms a stronghold for local radio amidst declining interest in broadcasting talent.

Let's dive into an interesting finding from this study: how Istarsa FM fits into the world of personal branding among influencers.

While influencers or content creators operate based on algorithms and personal popularity, Istarsa FM endures through the strength of its "institution" and "community." Informants emphasized that although broadcasters are required to become influencers in their own right, they still operate under the Istarsa brand umbrella, which has a long-standing legacy in Surabaya.

The fundamental difference found lies in the aspect of information accountability. In the era of disruption, audiences are beginning to experience information fatigue due to the flood of content from amateur creators, which is often unverified. (Bazlutckaia et al., 2024). Istarsa FM fills this niche by enhancing its role as a gatekeeper. While they communicate in a laid-back, youth-friendly style, every bit of information they share is carefully curated by their management team. This creates a higher level of trust from local advertisers compared to if they were to advertise solely through individual influencers. This strategy represents a form of strategic resilience that combines the speed of social media with the credibility of conventional media.

Local Economy: Transforming the Role from Broadcaster to Community Orchestrator

"Istarsa FM isn't just surviving by chance it's thriving because it does what Spotify simply can't: it owns the local pulse. What we discovered is that their success doesn't come from battling algorithms, but from becoming an integral part of Surabaya's landscape. They've shifted from being just a 'radio station' to a 'community orchestrator.' By playing the middleman for the city government and local youth scenes, they've built a kind of emotional loyalty that a digital playlist just can't touch. We also spotted a massive change in how they handle money. They've basically walked away from the stiff Jakarta agency world to focus on Surabaya's MSMEs. It's a scrappy, leaner financial model. While revenues might not be as high as they were in the past, the net profit remains strong because they have managed to cut unnecessary overhead costs. (Huang, 2024).

Psychological Challenges and Talent Retention: The Hybrid Work Culture
Increasing workloads through multi-skilling policies can definitely add to employee stress levels.

Observations show that Istarsa FM mitigates this risk by shifting to a more horizontal (flexible/non-bureaucratic) organizational structure. Leaders at Istarsa FM are directly involved in the creative process, which in management theory is referred to as Transformational Leadership. This immersive style of leadership weaves a tapestry of unity and belonging among the crew. This explains why, even though the offer to become an independent creator is very tempting, the talents at Istarsa FM still choose to stay. They gain added value in the form of access to industry networks, advanced technological facilities, and the professional credibility built by the institution. This HR retention strategy is no longer based solely on high salaries, but rather on portfolio development and networking opportunities provided by the radio station for its broadcasters. (Crowley-Henry et al., 2019)

Discussion: Synthesis of Findings and Their Comparison with Previous Research

This section is crucial for positioning the research findings on Istarsa FM within the broader academic landscape. Unlike previous studies, which tended to view radio as a medium that was "defeated" by digital platforms, the findings at Istarsa FM demonstrate that radio is actually able to "co-exist" through local navigation strategies.

This study reinforces the theory of organizational resilience, which states that the ability to survive is not always related to the amount of capital, but rather to structural flexibility.(Yamin et al., 2024). Compared to traditional media management research that emphasizes job specialization (functional specialization), Istarsa FM instead proves that in the era of disruption, functional generality (multi-skilling) is the key to efficiency.

In addition, the findings regarding the role of radio as a Problem Solver for local MSMEs provide a new contribution to media economics theory. While global platforms wield algorithms to cast their nets wide, local radio stations like Istarsa weave a tapestry of "emotional closeness" and "human curation," creating a symphony of connection that resonates with the heart. This proves that the human factor (human touch) and trust remain valuable commodities amidst the flood of impersonal AI-generated content. Thus, Istarsa FM's resilience is not merely technological resilience, but also value-based resilience that preserves the harmonious relationship between media, talent, and the community.

Strategic Capability Analysis of Istarsa FM through the VRIO Framework

To unravel the secret behind Istarsa FM's strategy for conquering the talent drought and securing a lasting edge over competitors, the researcher employs the VRIO framework (Value, Rarity, Imitability, Organization). The field findings reveal that the multi-skilling prowess of Istarsa FM's team shines brightly, ticking all four boxes with finesse:

1. Value: The hybrid capabilities of Istarsa's crew aren't just an asset; they are a survival mechanism. By functioning as both broadcasters and digital producers, the team allows the station to slash operational overhead while maintaining a constant multiplatform presence. In a market where speed is everything, having a 'one-man-army' staff is a massive financial advantage.
2. Rarity: While Surabaya is flooded with Communication graduates, finding talent with the actual 'willpower' to grind in traditional media is becoming nearly impossible. Istarsa FM's focus on raw character over just technical degrees makes their HR pool a rare commodity that competitors who still hunt for 'celebrity' announcers can't find.
3. Imitability: You can buy the same software Istarsa uses, but you can't buy the internal culture. The flat, non-bureaucratic bond between Istarsa's management and its lean crew is a psychological fortress. This 'organic' loyalty is a nightmare for large, rigid media giants to replicate. They might mimic the tech, but they can't clone the street-level work ethic.
4. Organization: Istarsa doesn't just 'have' tech; they are built around it. Their 24-hour automation isn't a side feature it's the engine that lets the human staff focus entirely on high-impact creativity. The station is organized to be lean, fast, and remarkably tireless.

In a world where the airwaves once roared with the broad strokes of broadcasting, Istarsa FM now dances to a different tune, embracing the art of narrowcasting.

This strategic pivot mirrors the industry's evolution, as it shifts from casting a wide net to weaving intricate connections with specific communities, fostering a deeper, more resonant engagement. The scarcity of talent actually forces radio stations to focus more on what they do best: Local Connection. Amidst the flood of global content from streaming platforms, Istarsa FM offers something algorithms cannot provide a local Surabaya context. The use of relevant language, discussion of local issues, and collaborations with Surabaya-based local brands create a strong "defense fortress." This is what experts refer to as a hyper-local strategy. Istarsa FM's business navigation proves that the future resilience of local radio no longer lies in the strength of its broadcast signal, but rather in how deeply its roots run within the community.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that Istarsa FM beat the talent shortage by making a radical bet on hybrid skills and 'willpower-based' human capital. Their resilience proves a vital point: a lean staffing structure often beats a massive technological investment. By pivoting from a traditional 'selling' model to a 'solving' one, they've secured a financial base through deep local partnerships. Istarsa FM's navigation shows that local radio wins when it stops trying to be a global platform and starts being the soul of its community. In a world of cold algorithms, their transformation into a 'community orchestrator' proves that being hyper-local is the ultimate competitive shield.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study is limited to a single case study of a youth-segmented radio. Future research should explore similar strategies in different radio segments (e.g., news or talk radio) or conduct a comparative study across different cities. Radio managers are suggested to transition from transactional advertiser relationships to strategic, solution-based partnerships to ensure long-term financial stability.

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study (interview transcripts and observation logs) are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, while maintaining participant confidentiality.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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