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Crisis Management Strategies in Corporate Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT: Communication is an activity that cannot be separated from human life. However, in the process, there are opportunities for inappropriate communication, which can lead to conflict or also known as a communication crisis. Communication strategy is a communication effort made to convey messages appropriately to communication targets with the aim that the perceptions between communicators and communicants can be built in harmony. With the same understanding and perception, an organization can achieve its goals smoothly. However, if in the process a conflict occurs, causing a communication crisis between the two parties, a crisis management strategy or crisis management is needed. To make these efforts, the role of corporate communication is needed as the right strategy in dealing with conflicts that occur.

Keywords - Crisis Management Strategy, Crisis Management, Corporate Communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is an activity that cannot be separated from human life. In every interaction, humans need a communication process in order to establish a harmonious relationship between one party and another. When communicating, humans as communicators are required to be able to convey messages well so that they can be received appropriately by other humans as communicants. However, in the process, there are opportunities for inappropriate communication to cause conflict or also called a communication crisis (Rahimi and Imran, 2021, p. 7637).

According to Kasali (2005, p. 222), a communication crisis is a turning point that can bring problems to a better or worse direction in which the crisis can come unexpectedly. Meanwhile, Devlin (in Kriyantono, 2012, p. 171) states that a crisis is an unstable situation in an organization and is likely to have undesirable results. In other literature, Banks (1996, p. 1) defines a crisis as a major event that has the potential to negatively affect an organization, company, or industry as well as the public, products, services, and image of an organization. Another opinion from Coombs (in Khyn, 2008, p. 23) reveals that crisis communication is the "lifeblood" for all crisis management activities that have an important role in crisis management. Therefore, every individual, group, or organization needs to understand one of the crises handling strategies or also called crisis management.

Handling a crisis in a company cannot be done by one person alone. Operational parties, corporate communication, or top management levels usually take part in handling the crisis that occurs. Ideally, the company will appoint at least one spokesperson who is assigned to deliver the company's statement regarding the crisis that is happening. However, the appointment of this spokesperson cannot be done carelessly. The chosen party must have good communication and crisis management skills in order to handle the crisis that occurs so as to avoid the spread of negative issues in the internal or external scope (Fajar, 2011, p. 279).

To prevent conflicts and the spread of issues that result in a decrease in the reputation of the organization or company, an appropriate strategy is needed in handling crises in the company. Therefore, researchers are interested in examining the right communication strategy in handling crises in companies through research entitled Crisis Handling Strategy in Corporate Communication Studies.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In this study, researchers used several concepts and theories needed to find out the right crisis management strategy in corporate communication studies. The following are some of the concepts or theories used.

2.1 Communication Strategy

Communication strategy is an effective planning in delivering messages so that communicants can easily receive and understand these messages so that they can change one's attitude or behavior (Effendy, 2011, p. 38). Meanwhile, Hunger and Wheelen (2003, p. 11) argue that communication strategy is a series of managerial decisions and actions that determine long-term company performance. Kulvisaechana (2001, pp. 17-18) states that communication strategy is communication planning and management that is carried out to achieve a certain goal.

The goal is to be able to provide tactical efforts that must be carried out operationally through different approaches by following the existing situations and conditions.

According to Arifin (1994, p. 10), communication strategy is all conditional decisions made by considering the conditions and situations faced about the actions that will be carried out to achieve effective goals. Bungin (2016, p. 62) argues that in carrying out a communication strategy, the entire communication process must be understood as a process of transforming messages between the two parties, where both parties have an interest in this process and have knowledge that is exchanged with one another, therefore communication strategies must consider all parties involved in the communication process.

Fill (2005, pp. 256-257) divides communication strategies into three theories, namely:

- Pull strategy, which is a communication strategy carried out to direct the public to see, consider and agree with the company.
- Push strategy, which is a strategy carried out to focus on the company's internal performance capabilities so that the company gets loyalty and commitment.
- Profile strategy, which is a strategy carried out to maintain the reputation and image of the company so that the company's relationship with stakeholders can be maintained.

Meanwhile, the central objectives of the communication strategy consist of: to secure understanding, to establish acceptance and to motivate action which means ensuring that the communicant understands the message he receives and after that the recipient must be fostered which then motivates communication activities so that it can be concluded that the communication strategy is the overall planning, tactics and ways to launch communication by paying attention to all aspects of the communication process to achieve the desired goals (Effendy, 2011, pp. 35-36).

Based on the opinions of these experts, it can be concluded that communication strategy is a message delivery plan by paying attention to aspects of messages, communicants, communication channels and coaching that are carried out effectively to achieve the expected communication goals so as to reduce potential communication barriers and minimize opportunities for failure. Thus, communication strategy is one of the important elements needed to achieve company goals or targets.

2.2 Crisis Management

One of the strategic models commonly used to handle crises in companies is the crisis management strategy of Rhenald Kasali (in Fajar, 2011, pp. 281-282), which adapts Steven Fink's crisis anatomy model. In this management model, there are several stages that the company must go through, namely:

- Prodromal stage or warning stage, which is a condition when there are danger signs or symptoms of a crisis that must be addressed immediately. This stage is part of the turning point control system. If the management level misses the communication signal, the crisis will shift to a more serious stage.
- The acute stage, which is the condition when the previously vague crisis symptoms become clearer. This stage is often also called the point of no return. At this stage, the signals that previously appeared as warning signs are ignored. So that the crisis enters the acute stage and there is no going back. Some indicators that a crisis is in this stage include damage, the emergence of various reactions, and the spread of issues.
- The chronic stage or the clean of phase, which is a further stage of the crisis characterized by structural changes, such as the renaming of the owners or management staff of a company. At this stage, it is important for the company to decide whether or not to survive or continue the company's activities.

- The resolution stage, which is the stage of healing or recovery experienced by the company after successfully facing the other three stages mentioned. At this stage, companies still need to be careful because conditions can change back to the prodromal stage

2.3 Corporate Communication

Public relations and corporate communication are two terms commonly used by communication science practitioners. Corporate communication is an important part of the company in charge of carrying out management functions so that the company has a good reputation. In practice, corporate communication is the party responsible for establishing good relations between the company and stakeholders and handling crises that occur in the company (Argenti in Widowati, 2019, p. 195).

Corporate communication is an integration of two disciplines, namely public relations and marketing, which are needed by companies to establish good relationships with internal and external publics. However, in its implementation, corporate communication is also not only required to convey information through the media, but also handles broader corporate issues, including in this case the communication crisis (Widowati, 2019, p. 197).

Argenti (in Widowati, 2019, p. 197), concluded that corporate communication has the following functions.

- Managing the company's reputation
- Recruiting and retaining top talent
- Launching new products
- Developing corporate strategy
- Building relationships with stakeholders
- Carrying out corporate social responsibility
- Improve investor/analyst perception of the company's well-being
- Overcoming crisis
- Establishing a corporate brand

III. DISCUSSION

In implementing a communication strategy, a communication process is needed, namely the process of delivering messages carried out by communicators to communicants using the right delivery media so that effects and feedback appear in accordance with the purpose of communication itself. In its stages, Lasswell (in Sitingjak, 2013, p. 3) states that there are four communication patterns, namely primary, secondary, linear, and circular. The primary communication process is the delivery of messages using symbols as media, such as language, gestures, pictures, colors, and so on. This primary medium can directly translate the communicator's thoughts or ideas to the communicant. Meanwhile, the secondary communication process is the delivery of messages that are carried out by using a second tool or medium, such as letters, telephones, newspapers, magazines, and other mass media that are more open to the public. The linear communication process means that the delivery of messages carried out by communicators to communicants is considered a terminal point that occurs in face-to-face or media communication. Circular pattern is a communication process in which there is feedback so that there is a flow from communicator to communicator as a determinant of success in communication.

In addition, the company also needs to consider various supporting factors or inhibiting factors in the preparation of the right communication strategy so that all target messages can receive the messages to be conveyed in accordance with the company's objectives. This is in line with what Effendy (in Suwono, 2018, p. 5) said that in the context of preparing a communication strategy, various factors that are considered capable of supporting and hindering the delivery of messages must be considered. The first thing to consider in this case is who is the target of communication. In this case, it is important for the communicator to know the frame of reference of the communicant so that the company is able to provide an understanding that can be accepted by the communicant. However, the frame of reference at the personal level is more difficult than the frame of reference at the group and organizational levels.

The preparation needed in the communication strategy also includes the elements that underlie the communication itself. Vito (in Oktavia, 2016, pp. 241-242) states that there are several elements that affect the communication process:

- Source, which is the party that creates or sends information. In human communication, the source can mean one person, or it can also be a group, such as an organization or institution.
- Message, which is something that is conveyed by the communicator to the communicant. Messages in communication can be delivered through various means or communication media. The content can be information, knowledge, entertainment, advice, or propaganda.
- Media (channel), which is a tool used to convey messages (messages) from communicators to communicants. There are several perceptions about this message delivery media. The delivery media in communication take various forms, some are in the form of interpersonal communication (using the five senses) and there is also mass communication (in the form of print or electronic media). Mass communication media are used with the aim of conveying messages to communicators that are open so that everyone can see, read, or hear them.
- Communicant (receiver), namely the party who is the recipient or target of the message conveyed by the communicator. Just like the sender or communicator, communicants can also consist of one or more people and can also be in the form of groups or organizations. The receiver is an important element in communication. If a message is not received by the communicator, a problem will arise that often results in changes to other communication elements, both in the source, message, and media.
- Effect, which is the difference between what the recipient thinks, feels, and does before and after receiving the message from the communicator. This can be seen from the addition of knowledge or information, changes in attitude or behavior, or strengthening of belief in one's knowledge as a result of receiving the message.
- Feedback, which is one of the forms caused by the effect. In the communication process, feedback can arise from communicators, communicants, messages, or media.
- Environment or situation, which are factors that affect the course of the communication process. This factor is categorized into the physical environment, socio-cultural, psychological, and time dimensions

Crisis communication is a measured action taken to respond to a crisis situation that has the potential to destroy or threaten a company. This term was first introduced by Edward Bernays when responding to allegations over standard oil (Biagi in Fajar, 2011, p. 281). Ahmed (in Iskandar, et. al, I2021, p. 110) said that there are two types of crises that usually occur, namely crises that occur suddenly or are commonly called cobra types and crises that can be predicted because of slow occurrence or also called python crises.

In dealing with a crisis that occurs, there are several crisis response strategies that can be used. These strategies are commonly used to repair reputation, reduce the negative impact of a conflict, and prevent negative intentions. Coombs (in Iskandar, et. al, 2021, pp. 111-112) divides the types of crisis response into two, namely primary crisis response strategies and secondary crisis response strategies. Both types of response are divided into several strategies and tactics as follows.

1. Primary crisis response strategies are divided into three strategies, namely denial strategies, diminish strategies, and deal strategies.
 - The denial strategy has three tactics, namely 1) attack the accuser which is done by attacking the accuser or the person/group who states the organization's fault; 2) denial which is done by denying the existence of a crisis; and 3) supergoat which is done by finding a scapegoat or blaming other parties as the cause of the organizational crisis.
 - The diminish strategy has two tactics, namely the excuse technique by denying the organization's intention to do anything harmful to others and claiming that the crisis was caused by an inability to control any events and the justification technique by minimizing the perceived damage and focusing on rationalizing actions.
 - The deal strategy consists of five tactics, namely 1) ingratiation, which is done by praising stakeholders and/or reminding them of the organization's work; 2) concern, which is done by expressing concern for the victims; 3) compassion, which is done by offering money or other compensation for the victims; 4) regret, which is done by showing that the organization feels bad about the crisis; and 5) apology, which is done by taking full responsibility for the crisis.
2. Secondary crisis response strategies with a bolstering strategy, which is a strategy carried out by reminding positive things that have been done to reduce negative perceptions about the company. This strategy has three tactics, namely the technique of reminding goodness (reminder), ingratiation technique by praising stakeholders who have contributed in the past, and the tactic of placing themselves as victims (victim age).

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that communication strategy is a communication effort made to convey messages precisely to the target of communication with the aim that the perception between the communicator and the communicant can be built in harmony. With the same understanding and perception, an organization can achieve its goals smoothly. However, if in the process there is a conflict that causes a communication crisis between the two parties, then a crisis management strategy is needed.

To make these efforts, the role of corporate communication is needed as the right strategy in overcoming conflicts that occur. In the implementation of this crisis management, the party appointed as the spokesperson must be able to build the right communication by considering the elements of communication, the communication strategy used, and the crisis response delivered so that the crisis stage can be passed by ending in a good agreement between the two parties.

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