Teachers' Zone as an Internal Communication Strategy for the English Language Institute Armidale English College (AEC)
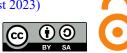
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Abstract

As an institution that is arguably quite old, AEC has employees who have a sense of ownership and loyalty and high visible from the length of service of its employees. One of the keys to its success is good internal communication, one of which is through an internal communication strategy called Teachers' Zone (TZO). This research used descriptive qualitative approach The data obtained was qualitative data which is the result of in-depth interviews with 5 resource persons who are leaders and tutors as well as AEC staff who have various working periods. AEC implied TZO as one of internal communication programs to maintain the relations with its employees and staff. In TZO, AEC used symmetrical internal communication where every employee played important role in the organization through TZO, everybody could share their problems where everybody could involve in solving them together. Beside that, TZO became a media for improving the employees' skills. TZO became a media to enrich all employees' knowledge. However, the most interesting part of TZO was having thematic costumes every TZO time. All those activities were the key of loyalty, sense of belongings owned by all AEC employee.

Keywords: AEC, Internal Communication, TZO

1. Introduction

An organization or company that has been established for a long time and consistently survives certainly requires a good and systematic communication system. Good internal organizational communication management is also needed both vertically and horizontally. With conducive internal communication, the goals of the organization or company will be easily achieved. In addition, with the establishment of good communication between employees and superiors in an organization, a healthy work climate will be created and also participate in creating a high sense of belonging (Sense of Belonging) of the employees to the company or organization.

The sense of ownership can be grown through various ways, one of which is by maintaining communication with its internal public. Internal public is all levels of employees within an organization or company (Effendy, 2012). Good communication between employees both vertically and horizontally certainly requires the right strategy implemented by the leader. The right strategy needs to be applied in

order to build a sense of togetherness and a sense of belonging to the company and also the loyalty of its members.

For an organization or company, it is certainly not easy to be able to foster a sense of ownership and loyalty to the company. Internal communication of the organization or company is then the key, as is the case with internal organizational communication applied at Armidale English College (AEC). AEC is an English language education institution that has been established since 1991. As an institution that is arguably quite old, AEC has employees who have a sense of ownership and loyalty and high visible from the length of service of its employees. One of the keys to its success is good internal communication, one of which is through an internal communication strategy called Teachers' Zone (TZO).

TZO is one of the programs implemented and run by all AEC employees, not only tutors but also all staff in AEC. TZO is a routine program that is held every month and is filled with various activities that aim to maintain good communication between members such as material enrichment for tutors and staff, monthly meetings, family gatherings, etc. In practice, TZO is filled with various activities that bring members closer together and deepen their understanding of the organization's vision. The values embedded in a group or organization will be carried out by its members and will then become an identity that is inherent in them. The values inherent in each member of the group or organization will be an important element in regulating how they behave in the organization as stated by Soetopo (2010).

AEC is a non-profit company in the form of a fairly old English language school in southern Bandung. Since its inception, approximately 32 years ago, AEC has been committed to providing affordable English education to children in the surrounding area of Soreang, Bandung Regency. With a vision "To Build the Indonesian Anew", AEC's main goal is not only to provide English education but also character education for each of its members. "To Build the Indonesian Anew" is a vision that describes AEC's goals for the future where AEC aims not only to teach English to its students but also to build the character of Indonesia's young generation so that they become a useful generation for the nation and country. AEC is committed to realizing this in various ways, one of which is by instilling positive cultural values that are a combination of local culture, namely Sundanese culture, and western culture, namely Australian culture.

AEC is committed to producing a new generation of Indonesians with character and international outlook. As an organization, AEC applies this vision not only to its students but also to all of its employees including staff and faculty. Through its principal, AEC implements various programs for staff and faculty to support the institution's vision. One of the programs promoted is TZO.

So, as a fairly old institution, which has students and employees who have a high sense of ownership and loyalty, it is interesting to study how the strategy and process of implementing internal communication at the AEC language school.

2. Literature Review
Organizational Communication
Organizational communication can be defined as the interpretation of messages that exist in the communication units of a particular organization. Organizational communication is an organizing effort

and all people involved in the process transact with each other and give meaning to everything that happens in the organization (Pace and Faules in Siregar, 2012). Another definition of organizational communication according to Arnold & Feldman (1986: 154, in Furqan, 2003) is an exchange of information between people in a particular organization or company in general the process includes various stages consisting of, attention, comprehension, acceptance as true, and retention.

In connection with what has been described earlier, organizational communication can be defined as the performance and interpretation of messages between communication units that are part of a particular organization. The definition emphasizes more on the functional aspect (objective). Meanwhile, when viewed from an interpretive (subjective) perspective, organizational communication is seen as a process of creating meaning for the interactions that constitute the organization. Organizational communication is interpreted as communication carried out by an organization, internally and externally to achieve planned goals (Grunig, 1992, in Ishak, 2012). The two organizational communication systems, namely internal and external communication, are interdependent (Asyifa, 2016).

Organizational Internal Communication
Organizational communication consists of internal communication and external communication. The definition of internal communication is a communication that occurs within an organization consisting of communication from subordinates to superiors, communication from superiors to subordinates, communication among employees of the same level. Meanwhile, external communication is communication carried out by the organization to its external environment, such as communication of sales of production products, making advertisements and relations with the general public. Rosady Ruslan (1992, in Asyifa, 2016) says that the objectives of internal communication are:
1. As a means of mutual internal communication used in an organization / company.
2. To eliminate misunderstandings or communication barriers between company management and employees.
3. As a means of communication channel or tool in an effort to explain policies, regulations and employment in an organization.
4. As a means of internal communication channels or tools for employees to convey wishes or suggestions and information and reports to company management (leadership).

In internal communication in an organization, it is generally divided into two, namely Vertical Communication and Horizontal Communication. Vertical communication is the direction of communication up or down which is hierarchical in nature from superiors to subordinates or vice versa. While Horizontal communication is communication that exists between employees at the same level (Assyifa, 2016). In almost the same statement, J. Grunig (1992, p. 558, cited in Men, 2014) divided internal communication into two shapes, symmetrical and asymmetrical. Symmetrical communication is a communication, which underlines "trust, credibility, openness, relationships, reciprocity, network symmetry, horizontal communication, feedback, adequacy of information, employee-centered style, tolerance for disagreement, and negotiation". There is always a dialogue provided by the management to communicate with the employees. In contrary, asymmetrical communication is a communication conducted one-way, from the top level to the lower level. This policy is implied to keep the control over the employees.

Internal corporate communication is now getting more attention from the leaders of organizations or

companies because internal communication is now considered to play an important role in a company because communication barriers and failures of internal organizational structures in a company can end up being a disaster for the company (Bharadwaj, 2014). Now internal communication is seen as a "Central Component" of a business process in a company (Hargie, et al., 2004, p. 5 in Bharadwaj, 2014). Furthermore, Welch & Jackson explained that internal corporate communication is not only limited to discussing birthdays, the birth of an employee's baby, employee weddings or bowling scores, but when. Currently, the discussion in internal communication has been broader, even to the discussion of company goals and the company's strategic vision (Bharadwaj, 2014).

3. Research Methods

This research is a descriptive qualitative research where the researcher focuses on the implementation of the organization's internal communication strategy carried out at the AEC English course institution. The data obtained is qualitative data which is the result of in-depth interviews with 5 resource persons who are leaders and tutors as well as AEC staff who have various working periods.

Furthermore, the validity test used is through triangulation. Triangulation itself according to Moleong (2014) is a technique to verify the validity of data by comparing with something outside the data. The data triangulation used in this research is source triangulation.

4. Findings and Discussion

It is interesting to see how AEC can survive for more than 30 years as an organization. Based on the study, internal communication held so far in AEC played significant role to keep the good atmosphere of the internal organization. The internal communication was maintained really well especially by the principal of AEC, Mrs. Indri, who created one of internal communication programs, named Teachers' Zone (TZO). TZO gave a huge contribution to make the employees solid and loyal to AEC. The internal communication was applied symmetrically.

TZO as a Symmetrical Internal Communication
Vertical Communication
TZO played a crucial role in building the compactness of the employees. Based on the interview held with the informants, it is found out that TZO was a media used by the management or the leader to communicate various information both formally and informally. The vertical communication happened during TZO could be seen in two forms, they are formal discussion and informal discussion. The level of formality depends on the topic that would be discussed. If the topic were quite serious and related to AEC as the organization, then it would be discussed seriously in a formal setting. When it came to a casual communication, the leaders or in this case the principal and the vice principal would just take an enjoyable discussion. They did not place themselves always as the boss of the organization, they always tried to make the level the same with other employees, just like what Mrs. Ria mentioned in the interviewed. She said that as hard as possible she would just lower her level whenever she met the other employees. Even though she has been teaching for more than 20 years, and she is also part of the board, she would always place herself in the same level with others. In another occasion, when it came to communicating the rules or policies applied in AEC, she would take her role as part of the board. In this case, she would place her level higher than others, just like Ruslan mentioned that one of the internal communication functions is to communicate the policies and rules that have to be obeyed by everyone in the organization (Assyifa, 2016).

Almost the same thing said by Mrs. Indri, the principal of AEC. The vertical communication done by leaders depended on the topic that would be discussed. If the topic did not relate to AEC as the institution, any employee could straight away talked and discussed with the principal, there was no such hierarchical rule because she said that actually the way how AEC treats the employees is family oriented. However, when the topic of discussion was a little bit serious then the way that the flow of the vertical communication would be different. The principal sometime did not really need to deal with the problem straight away since there was already clear coordination line between the employees. So, it made it possible to make problem solved faster. Ms. Icha, as one of senior teachers, who have been working for more than 5 years also added that, there was a clear boundaries on how they communicated internally with the leaders of the organization, but she mentioned that even thought there were different treatment, the leaders always kept the principle of kinship in solving any problems.

Horizontal Communication

The horizontal communication was maintained well. During TZO, each employee could really communicate freely with others. Since the leader of the organization always performed the same thing, so without any hesitation they could communicate anything during TZO. They could really express their feeling also their opinion towards any issues revolving in the organization. The employees really used TZO as a momentum to share experiences, stories and also updated information related to their life since they rarely gathered together in their daily activities. Just like what Ms. Icha said, in TZO, she could meet other teachers to talk and discuss many things not only about their jobs, but also their personal life. Ms. Nabilla added almost the same thing, she said that the conversation in TZO between the employees made them become closer to each other and the bond between them become more tight. As the principal, Ms. Indri also said that TZO is used as a media to know each other more which then everyone would be able to understand each other more and in the end, the sense of belongings could be created.

Even though there were vertical and also horizontal communication inside AEC, but both of them were practiced symmetrically. Just like J. Grunig stated, there was always time for discussion provided by the principal. Everybody in AEC is treated as a family. Everything was discussed to find a solution agreed by all members. Everyone had the same chance and portion to deliver their suggestion and opinion. (Grunig, 1992, p. 558, cited in Men, 2014).

Solving Problems Together

According to Ruslan (cited in Assyifa, 2016), one of internal communication functions is to clear up misunderstanding and also communication blockages inside the organization. In TZO, according to the principal, Ms. Indri, said that TZO was built for the members to share anything, just like stories experiences and also problems, including personal problems related to AEC as the organization. TZO has become a place to share problems also solutions. Everyone is involved in the discussion to find the best way to solve it. It made all the members feel safe because they knew that they were not alone.

Besides sharing personal problems such as, obstacles faced when they were teaching, facing naughty students also facing some complaints from parents, TZO can be a place where everybody was involved as well to think and discuss about some problem faced by AEC as the organization. Everybody was welcomed to share their thoughts and ideas to finally make a decision together. Everybody could be really open to each other. As part of symmetrical internal communication, this openness led to the sense of belonging, which gradually grew thicker and thicker.

TZO as a Self-development Media

There were many activities done in TZO. Besides a media for gathering and also solving problems together, TZO also became place to study. In the every TZO rundown, there was a special time for the employees to study something new. The lessons could be related to English, teaching method and strategy or even a totally different material just like marketing strategy. Just like what Mr. Satrio, a new teacher, said, TZO was very interesting and useful since he could learn something new, not only English but also other knowledge. Ms. Icha added that, TZO gave her chance to grow and improve her skill, especially in teaching. She felt that she was lucky that she got that facility. Ms. Ria also mentioned that by learning something new in every TZO time could make her keep updated about English materials, so all employees especially teachers could adapt and catch up the lesson which was very dynamic. Through TZO, everyone was given chance to improve and develop themselves, since in symmetrical internal communication, employees becomes the center of the organization.

TZO as a Stress Relief

Being open and trust each other could make all AEC's employees could be themselves without worrying being judged by others. This condition made all employees could express themselves even by doing silly activities such as having certain costumes every time they did TZO. They did not hesitate to wear unique even weird costumes to AEC. Every TZO had its own outfit theme. This activity became one of the best joyful and relaxing activities during TZO time. Everybody could really enjoy the moment. They shared laughter together. All informants agreed that this part became the best part of TZO. They said that this activity could grow sense of ownership and internal relations between the employees.

Conclusion

AEC implied TZO as one of internal communication programs to maintain the relations with its employees and staff. In TZO, AEC used symmetrical internal communication where every employee played important role in the organization. Symmetrical internal communication allowed AEC to have employee-centered communication, every employee could speak and share their thought without any hesitation. Through TZO, all employees were treated as a family. Moreover, through TZO, everybody could share their problems where everybody could involve in solving them together. Beside that, TZO became a media for improving the employees' skills. TZO became a media to enrich all employees' knowledge. However, the most interesting part of TZO was having thematic costumes every TZO time. Everyone could enjoy themselves by being weird together by using unique and out of the box costumes. All those activities were the key of loyalty, sense of belongings owned by all AEC employees.

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