

Simplification of the Role of Public Relations

Simplifikasi Peran dari Public Relations

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Abstract

An organization's public relations practice tends to shift and obscure the initial concept. A supplier company for construction needs in Batam City in 2012 then experienced an internal conflict. Workers or employees take a demonstration in the yard of the company building. They objected to the wages of work at that time so they held a demonstration to demand a salary increase. Then what is the role of public relations? This study aims to seek simplification or simplification of the role of public relations by company management. The results of this study indicate that there was a simplification of the company towards the role of public relations in a company. This form of simplification includes the company imposing the role and duties of public relations to the operational secretary which in fact is different from the work area, causing multiple tasks by one division. So that the public relations division is also burdened with the work of selling the company's products.

Keywords: *Corporate Image; Public Relations; Simplification*

Abstrak

Praktek public relations sebuah organisasi cenderung bergeser dan mengaburkan konsep awal. Sebuah perusahaan pemasok kebutuhan konstruksi di Kota Batam pada tahun 2012 lalu mengalami konflik internal. Para pekerja atau karyawan melakukan aksi demo di halaman gedung perusahaan. Mereka merasa keberatan dengan upah kerja pada saat itu sehingga melakukan aksi demo untuk menuntut kenaikan gaji. Masalah ini berhasil diselesaikan dengan jalan tengah antara perusahaan dan pekerja melalui mediasi public relations. Kemudian bagaimana peran public relations? Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mencari penyederhanaan atau simplifikasi peranan public relations oleh manajemen perusahaan. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa terjadi simplifikasi perusahaan terhadap peranan public relations di sebuah perusahaan. Bentuk simplifikasi itu diantaranya perusahaan membebankan peran dan tugas public relations kepada operational secretary yang notabene berbeda wilayah kerja sehingga menyebabkan adanya tugas ganda oleh satu divisi. Sehingga divisi public relations juga dibebani kerja penjualan produk perusahaan.

Kata Kunci: *Citra Perusahaan; Public Relations; Simplifikasi*

Introduction

Public understanding of the importance of the profession of public relations (PR) in an organization is still limited. PR that figures in preserving the image of organizations has often experienced a simplification in various forms and ways by the management. Typically, the simplification of the roles and functions of PR is by making PR assist marketing works or by making another division cover PR's tasks. Based on preliminary observation, efficiency was often found as the reason.

The real function of PR is maintaining relationships between a company or organization with its internal and external public. This relationship is significant for the images of the organization or companies in which the PR works. Public relations itself is a science that is supposed to manage images. The establishment or protection of the image of an organization should be managed by PR. Therefore, the fate of a company's reputation can be seen from the performances of its PR. The more effective this division runs its functions in managing the company's image and dealing with problems, the more positive the reputation of the company.

In 2012, a construction material company in Batam put up with an internal conflict. The workers conducted a demonstration in the company's yard. They felt that their remuneration was insufficient and demanded a raise. The public relations then internally mediated the management and the workers. Through that moderation, the PR acted as the link between the workers' needs and institution conditions. The PR collected information to understand the underlying cause of the conflicts and assisted the management in making a decision or proposing a solution to the conflict. In the end, the company opted to raise the workers' remuneration based.

In 2013, the position for PR in that company was taken over by the company secretary since the previous employees who hold the PR had resigned. The job of PR that was executed by the company secretary continued until 2015. Differently, while the previous PR played a reasonable significant role in the company's decision-making, the new PR, who also the company secretary, cannot manage conflict effectively since the new PR did not have authority in the decision making. The director executed all the decisions of the company. However, it made the company ineffective. Ideally, a company employed a specialized staff in PR so as not to burden other divisions. A task in mediating companies and the employees, companies and the consumers, companies and the partner cannot be casually handed out to different positions in the company's structure that do not specialize in the field.

Principally, a PR is a specific function required by any commercial and noncommercial organization. The existence of PR in an organization can touch and infiltrate both social aspects and public concern. Ruliana and Dwiantari (2015:271) pointed out steps in a PR's strategy in shaping an image. The first step is by defining problems through surveys and observations regarding competitors, which may have possessed the same product. Consequently, the organization should design a different outcome. The second step is planning, and it is divided into short-time, medium-term, and long-term plans. The next step is taking action and communication. It is executed by defining communication strategy through communication components, such as identifying the approach for selecting communicator, message, audiences/communicant, and effects by considering the customers' needs and wishes. The last step is evaluating all programs that have been done by the PR through a guest comment. The feedback will be discussed and followed up. If the result has been proper, it means that the product position has successfully created the image.

The development of the character of the public has become more diverse, and it calls for a particular communication treatment. The organization, therefore, needs to have a strategic communication activity. This communication activity involves management as the decision-makers of the organization and public relations. Public relations, then, should be supported utterly by the management (Ishak, 2012: 378).

A study conducted by Anggraeni et al. (2014: 219) regarding the PR's strategy in supporting the marketing of PLN (Indonesian Electricity Company) in Cirebon showed that, in helping the marketing attempt of PLN, a supporting factor for making the promotion successful was needed. One of the supporting factors mentioned were the criteria for PR. The PR should have formal education, work experience, look, skills, individual characteristics, and adaptation. Furthermore, they should have programs that aim for the capacity building of the employee, such as training, seminar, workshop, and other managerial and technical training. Another supporting factor is a standardization of the PRs to be more communicative in delivering messages and raising the awareness and credibility of marketing programs.

A Model for PR Education for Professional Practices that is published by International Public Relations Associations (IPRA) defined PR as a function of management that is unique. Not only does it coaches and maintains the vision upheld between organizations and the public, but it also should both involve management in every issue and problems and effectively assist management in pursuing and taking advantage of changes occur. Furthermore, PR is needed for responding to public opinion and warning the company to anticipate putative tendencies by researching with healthy and ethical communication as the primary tool (Rosady Roslan, 1998: 16).

According to J.C. Seidel (Oemi, 2001: 24-26): "Public Relations is the continuing process by which management endeavors to obtain goodwill and understanding of its customer, its employees, and the public at large, inwardly through self-analysis and correction, outwardly through all means of expressions." The explanation illustrates that PR is a constant task to produce an excellent and stable image, as well as a decent relationship to all elements in the organization by both doing self-analysis and correction and making a subtle but effective announcement for the company.

With that in mind, public relations includes all types of communication that occur between an organization and the public. It is the reason that companies start to realize the significance of public relations in assisting the performance and the image of the companies. The image of a company is crucial since a positive image can ease the company to communicate and reach the aims effectively, whereas a negative image produces an inverse consequence. A positive image protects a small technical and functional mistake, while a negative image could worsen the error.

An image not only represents the experience and hope of the consumers towards the quality of companies' service but also substantially contributes to the management, meaning that it has an internal effect. In other words, a less clear image of the company can affect the attitude of the employees (Sutojo, 2004: 60).

This research tried to illustrate how a company simplified the role and function of PR. This simplification undeniably affects the organization, especially the image management that is typically under the PR's expertise. The purpose of PR in an organization is to create a harmonious relationship both internally and externally, and that role indirectly will influence the company's image.

The title of this research is the simplification of the role of public relations. The company is PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete, Batam. The research question is, how is the simplification of the task and function of PR in PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete Batam.

One of the tasks of PR is to facilitate communication, and therefore, in a company, the job of this division is to be an attentive listener and communication mediator. Public relations work as a bridge between a company and the public, meaning that PR keeps the two-way communication working, as well as facilitating communication by eliminating obstacles and hurdles in the middle of it for the sake of effectivity. The process aims to provide the required information, whether by the institution or the public so that both parties can create a collective decision or vision for the sake of both.

The practices of PR can be reflected through persuasive communication theory or communication that attempts persuasion, temptation, and influence to make a communicant happily act as what is wished by the communicator. Persuasion is essential for PR since this division attempt to reach an organization through that method. According to K. Anderson, persuasive communication is communication behavior that aims to change a belief, attitude, or behavior of an individual or a group through message transmission.

DeVito (2011: 377) explained that persuasive communication focuses on talk that is strengthening, illustrative, and informative. However, still, the primary aim of this technique is to improve or transform one's behavior and attitude. Consequently, facts, opinions, and motivational advice should also sharpen the persuasive goal. With this in mind, it can be said that there are two aims of persuasive talk: to transform someone's behavior and to motivate the receiver.

Persuasive message planning can be used for PR to persuade related parties of the organization. Effective persuasion should be designed according to the focus of the receiver of information. This planning is vital for PR since every organization should transmit a message with a convincing tone, whether for the consumers, suppliers, partners, and other related parties. That is to say, PR should understand how to inform not only an activity, a theme, and a duration, but also how far the support from management, facility, and funding support in fulfilling target and wish of the company work.

Apart from the persuasive communication theory, PR can also use two-way traffic communication to realize the company's goal. Two-way traffic communication describes PR's orientation to make organizations and public adjust. This model emphasizes the use of social science research to acquire co-understanding and two-way communication between the public and the company. For PR, the feedback given by the customers can improve, transform, and develop the product. Feedback is analyzed by PR to evaluate public opinion. This division investigates whether the response will be positive towards the company's image or negative so that harming the position of the organization in society.

PR is a communication technique. Public relations aims to create understanding based on truth, knowledge, and complete information and be a mediator that is capable of resolving a conflict of interest. With this in mind, PR is a communication process, but not all communication is PR. Hence, because PR is different from other forms of communication, PR focuses on establishing understanding through knowledge. Through PR's activity, a positive change will appear. In other words, the key to PR's success is

communication. Whether a PR can be successful mostly rely on how far PR can make a productive relationship with the people, whether internal or external.

Through communication, PR can deliver information and encourage, motivate, persuade, influence, and change the attitude of the public. Also, PR should keep a good relationship, understand, and support both the organization and the public. The essential key to the success of PR highly depends on effective communication. For a PR practitioner, its primary function is to grow and develop the relationship between the institution and the public, whether internal and external. Besides, PR is obliged to establish understanding, boost motivation, and public participation to create an atmosphere of public opinion that can benefit the organization.

According to Kasali in Ruslan (2010: 11), the function of PR is to create and develop the perception rate of an institution, organization, company, and products. With that in mind, the activity, directly and indirectly, affects the future of the organization, institution, company, or products. In practice, there is an activity called fact-finding, planning, communicating, and evaluating, and the ultimate aim of the method is to create the company's image.

It is in line with Cutlip and Center (2005: 126) towards four processes in PR:

Defining the problem (Fact-Finding). This stage includes an investigation by monitoring knowledge, opinion, attitude, and behavior of related parties. In other words, it is a function of organization intelligence. This function provides a basis for every step in the problem-solving process by defining "what is happening now?"

Planning and programming. Information collected in the first step is used to create a decision regarding the program, strategy, communication action, and target for the public. This step considers the finding to generate policy and organizational plans. The second step answer, "What is the basis to grasp the situation? What should we do next? what should we change?"

Taking action and communicating. The third step is by implementing the program and communication that is designed to attain a specific goal for the public to reach the program goal. The question in this step is, "who is the person that should do and deliver the message? When, where, and how should it be done?"

The significant role of PR involves a relationship with any party, not only on the relation in the narrow sense since personal ties also have a substantial role in campaigning PR. It includes how PR can raise awareness, sympathy, and understanding of the company or organization's activity, including creating a favorable attitude, goodwill, tolerance, mutual understanding, confidence, mutual appreciation, and in the end, a good image.

For Watzlawick, Belvin, and Johnson (2011), public relations is about delivering messages accurately and capable of growing positive image, as well as raising public awareness of the company. A good image can create a good reputation. On the other hand, in Ardianto and Soemirat (2004: 114), Jefkins found that in general image is defined as an individual's impression of a phenomenon as a result of knowledge and experience. On

the other hand, Arker and Mayer in Nova (2011: 298) argued that an image is a bunch of opinions or impressions or one's or group's imagination of an object.

As the theme of the research, namely on the organization, then an image that will be discussed here is the image of an organization. The image of an organization is constituted from many elements, ranging from the history of the company, financial success, and stability, quality of the product, success in export, healthy industrial relationship, reputation as job creators, accomplishment in social charity, to commitment in research. A positive and brilliant image is a dream of any company.

A company's image in the public eye can be seen from the opinion of reality. In other words, an image is constituted of perception. According to Kotled in Nova (2011: 97), perception is one's perspective in interpreting an event based on the information they obtained. To make the desired image, a company should understand precisely the process that happens when a public elicits information regarding a reality that happens.

A good image of an organization is a vital asset since an image affects public perception and, therefore, the operation of the organization in many ways. Each company should have an image in society, and it can range from good, medium, and poor. A poor image breeds a negative effect on business. Also, it can impinge on the company's capability in competition.

Methodology

The research used a qualitative approach, and the method used was a case study to obtain a holistic and clear picture of a social situation with other situations. Also, it aimed to elicit both an illustration of a process and a set of categories or patterns on how is the form of the role and function of PR in creating the company's image distorted.

The data were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The object of the research was the whole human resource in the PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete, and the subject of the research was three employees of the company. The data was collected using several techniques. The first technique was fact observation of the phenomenon of task and function of PR in PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete, Batam. The researcher also interviewed semi-structurally the General Manager as the key informant and some other employees as additional information on the role and function of PR in the company. The other technique was a literature review or documentation study to review secondary data that can be notes, data, or past documents of the company. The data validity technique used was a credibility test, and it ran by executing triangulation sources in which the researcher verified data obtained through various sources to result in a conclusion. It then was cross-checked with the source of the data. The data then were analyzed using descriptive data analysis to illustrate and reveal the phenomenon that happened. Furthermore, it was performed to acquire a clear illustration regarding the subject-matter, namely the role and function of PR in shaping the company's image.

Results and Discussion

The interview with the key informant, Suyono, the general manager of PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete, demonstrates several forms of simplification of the role and function of PR in the company. The simplification can be seen from this interview:

Almost all management staff in this company carry out the task of PR. However, this job mainly is delegated to the company secretary.

It can be said that all management staff, including the managers of the department in the company, do the function of PR.

Our company delegate works of public relation to the operational Secretary (OPS).

The reason that the company simplified the task and function of PR can also be seen from the interview below:

Now, our company does not have a special division to handle the position of PR. However, because, after we discuss it, it is needed, the company secretary doubles the role and function of PR.

Because the management has discussed it, we agreed not to recruit a new employee for PR as in 2013 due to efficiency. One of the ways to tackle the problem is by rearranging the tasks and the job of the employee. A change that happens after this efficiency takes effect is that the function of PR is delegated to OPS (Operational Secretary) and helped by the management team. If the secretary is deciding a problem, the secretary can discuss it with team management or me immediately.

The burden of the management team was worse with PR's task they should do. The trouble was prominent in OPS, which can be seen in the passage below:

OPS approaches the public and external parties of the company and offers the company product. Also, they keep the relationship between the company and the client and company and employees good.

Of course, a critical point of OPS as PR is to build the company's image by delivering a positive image to the consumer of PT. Sempurna Readymix Concrete, Batam.

There is! One of the ways to make the image of PT. Sempurna Readymix Concrete positive is by responding and commenting as fast as possible regarding problems happening in the field. It will then be discussed and evaluated by the company's internal through a monthly internal meeting held by OPS. Owing to this meeting, the company could create credibility and professionalism to the consumers of PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete, Batam. OPS quickly responds every time the customers complain about PT. Sempurna Readymix Concrete, Batam. Besides, OPS also routinely minimize each distortion that can disturb customers.

The role of OPS in executing the task and function of PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete can be divided into two regions, with the internal and external parties. Here is the passage of Interview with Erica, the OPS of PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete, that shows the division.

The implementation of the task and function of PR in the internal region:

In doing the duty and role of PR to increase information regarding the company to each division, we use a strategy in making a simple monthly report accounting for 75 pages. It is then spread to the employee in each division so that each employee is not lacking or left from the information. At the beginning of the month, a meeting to share and review problems faced by the employee in the daily jobs. For future planning, the company is planning to make the report online so that it can be accessed and saved anytime. It will make the report not to be disseminated patiently from division to division so that the information that is gotten also be faster. However, this plan is still discussed by team management. Besides, as one of the forms of implementation of the last PR, we routinely conducted an internal meeting to explain events and phenomena that happened in the work site at the end of every month.

We teach the company solidarity by celebrating the birthday of each employee each Friday during the second week of every month. We provide cakes and birthday presents for birthday employees. The party is started by singing birthday songs and taking pictures together. Then it is followed by having lunch together. Indirectly, the bond between employees will be more cohesive because all employees gather without considering the department.

Yes, one of the tasks of public relations in this company is building the image of the company by showing a positive image to the customers of PT. Sempurna Readymix Concrete, Batam.

The OPS figures in being communicators, namely as a part that delivers needed information, whether in the planning or execution done by the company. It also links the management and the public and the departments in the company.

The implementation of task and function of PR with the external party:

I hand out the catalog product of the company and describe the work system of the company to the potential consumer.

I always try to respond and accept complaints from the customers however small it is. I also verify and monitor everything. As a result, a projected mistake can be anticipated. With this in mind, I hope I could maintain and protect the image of the company.

Furthermore, here is the perception of OPS as the person in charge of PR's company regarding the management policy that merges PR to other divisions.

I have to play a dual role in the company, meaning that I have to be the PR as the company order and be the OPS of the company. This situation sometimes complicates me in balancing and managing my tasks and job. Also, I have to deal with public hope, whether in the external of the company or internal. Demands that have not been fulfilled by the company also another challenge for me. This is because I have to respond to the requests but, at the same time, utterly understand that, for now, the company cannot accept the demands. In that situation, I find a situation like this: I have to explain well by adapting to the position and the character of the object that propose the demands.

Personally, I prefer differencing OPS with PR. This is because if those two positioned is merged, the task and jobs of those positions will not be maximal.

Interview with the former PR of PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete (2008-2013), Elistina Xie, showed the perception of management towards the function of PR and the performance of PR by far in running PR's division in the company. She said:

As long as I know, the company saw PR as the mediator between the internal and external publics. Also, it saw PR as the solver of any conflict or hurdles that might happen. However, sometimes, the company indirectly hoped the PR to do marketing functions, such as sharing brochures and offering the company's products.

PR in PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete can be said reasonably independent because PR in PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete only needs to be responsible to and report to the management team. Usually, the management team did not meddle in the PR's activity when there was not significant occur.

The PR's position in the organization structure of the company was directly under the management team. Therefore, PR was responsible for and reported directly to the management team.

The implementation of PR's performance in the company:

Yes, one of the examples was a strike that happens in the middle of 2012. After finding out the organized protest, the management team sent me to be the mediator between the company and the workers. I was assigned to figure out the underpinning reason for the strike.

The primary reason for executing this program is to open and expand the insight of the surrounding public to understand environmental issues, together with doing corporate social responsibility of the company and improve the image of the company so that the reputation of PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete can grow.

There is, for the internal side, for example, the internal meeting was conducted at the end of every month.

Every month meeting at the end of the month had been a mandatory routine in PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete, Internal meeting can be said practical and helpful in improving the image of the company if it assists the management in easing in taking a decision towards situation that happens outdoor.

The perception of PR's management and the simplification of PR's role:

In my opinion, the system of PR in this company had been sound although there was room for improvement to be better.

For me, public relations can be said effective if it can assist the management and the activity in the organization in reaching the aim of the organization. Also, it should be able to maintain a relationship with society so that the organization's decision can obtain public support. The public relations should also figure in being the mediator between the board of the organization and the public, whether with the internal side or external.

I do not thoroughly agree with the decision of the company to merge PR to OPS because, based on my experience, PR had a heavy workload. By adding the workload to OPS might burden the position. I think a person who is in charge of executing the job might be depressed due to the overload.

The function of public relations as a communicator

The role of OPS as PR should run its service as a communicator. This function is required in a company to be the bridge between the company and the public, or between the management and the employee. The ultimate aim is mutual understanding. The role of the OPS in the company discussed in running PR's position is the spokesman of the company and information delivery, as well as maintaining harmonious relationships among the department and between the society.

Through the statement that is expressed by the general manager and ops in the interview, it can be said that the implementation of the function of PR as the communicator has more than one communicator or spokesman that can represent the company to talk with the public. Although it cannot be ignored that the activity of those divisions aims to create the image of the company, the result that is obtained if those divisions run the function of PR as the communicator will not be sufficient.

In addition, the application of the system is not suitable for the concept of Public Relations in the company as stated by Morris (2008: 13) that a company that has a relationship with the broader public should need an independent department of PR with complete staff. Thus, what made differences in the answer among the informants is a misunderstanding and mistake between the activity of the PR and the PR itself.

The Function of Public Relations in Establishing the Internal and External Relations of The Company

Internal and external activity done by PR can have a positive impact on the company since the operation can improve the public trust and can establish a harmonious relationship between the company and the public, whether it is for the internal or external party of the company.

The OPS in the construction material company above that figured in the same function as PR executed a set of planning, aims, activities, and follows up to improve the image of the company. The OPS here followed the tasks and the roles of the previous PR and responded to the complaint that was given by the customers.

The activities of PR executed by OPS above implies that OPS cannot run the task and function of PR optimally. It is because not only the OPS cover the workload of PR, the activity tended to be one-way to the internal public, and the external was less considered. The OPS cannot work as PR optimally since it must perform initial administrative worklists. Consequently, rarely did the OPS went outdoor or into the worksite of PR. Lack of resources was also the challenge of OPS to complete the task and function as PR.

The Function of Public Relations in Running the Work Process of Public Relations

The OPS working as PR should be the planner and person in charge of the plan done. The interview showed that the OPS run the task and function of PR. These steps executed by the OPS had been in agreement with the work process theory of public relations despite some differences in the activity. As has been said by Ruslan (2010: 37), each management of a company or organization is different in the structure of the management and the operation of the product and service. Indeed, the differences can also reach the marketing and finance management system and structure organization for human resource division. Therefore, it is not surprising if the roles and functions of public relations in the management of companies are different.

Fact-finding that was done by the OPS through the reports from the work site was arranged and discussed in the internal meeting at the end of the month. The plan and strategy done were by linking the related employee or division to discuss the project or solution towards the problems. After that, the implementation was applied in the worksite as what has been discussed and planned in the meeting. Finally, the evaluation was executed in the meeting held at the end of the month to see the result of the plan and strategy implemented. It was re-discussed after OPS found the fact that was taken from the feedback from the employee or other related parties.

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that steps executed by the OPS are in line with the working process theory of PR according to Cutlip, Center, and Broom, despite differences in the implementation. The end of the month internal meeting implemented by the OPS had run well. However, it would be more effective if the company expand the meeting towards other activities done by the OPS acted as PR.

Conclusion

PT Sempurna Readymix Concrete did the simplification of PR. The simplification occurred as the company misunderstood and mistook the activity of PR with PR itself. The first simplification done by the company was by burdening the role of PR to OPS, which had a different field of expertise. Consequently, a division has a dual role. This happened since the management saw that if OPS could not complete the task of PR, that division could ask for help from the management team. The other simplification was equalizing the role of PR with marketing so that PR was also burdened with selling the company's products. This simplification contradicts the aim of PR itself. The OPS and former PR of the company disagreed with the simplification. Apart from adding the amount of workload of other divisions, this strategy encumbered performance in PR's division and made the effectiveness of PR not to be maximum.

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