Establishing Multicultural Relationship between Employees through Public Relations Activities

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Abstract: *The differences on cultures, characteristics, and personalities among employees in multinational companies become common things. As a multinational education provider for universities in four countries: Australia, Canada, USA, and Ireland, EduCo Global also faced the same problem, especially within the marketing team members in Southeast Asia. The aim of this study is to determine problems arise due to the differences on cultures, characteristics, and personalities among employees. Besides, it also aims at determining Public Relations activities in establishing multicultural relations between employees from Southeast Asia marketing team. This research uses descriptive method with qualitative approach. Data were obtained through in-depth interview. The result of this research shows that problems occur because the employees are difficult to socialize, understand, and adapt with others. The differences in age, educational background, and gender may lead to the differences in perception and communication skill. In order to lower the number of problems caused by multicultural differences, the company used public relations activities, such as giving awards, conducting regular conference meetings, conducting tour and gathering, and coordinating internal media to facilitate communication between the employees. Those activities were conducted to maintain the performance and productivity of employees and raise their awareness to learn other cultures.*

Keywords: Multicultural, Public Relations, Global Communication

1. Introduction

Employees play a very important role in the implementation of company's vision and mission. Therefore, employees who have the ability and expertise to work and are able to provide the best contribution to the company are needed. Managing relations between employees is very important, because it will form relationships that can create solid work groups and have high morale. Employees interact each other in their work activities. Understanding each other is needed to build harmonious relationships between employees.

A harmonious relationship between employees is needed to build a good internal company relationship that will have an impact on employee performance and will indirectly have an impact on company performance. The company must have a management function that is able to create a conducive and harmonious work atmosphere among employees, so that the harmonious relationship can create positive work commitments through high work loyalty performance.

The problem of employee relationship will be increasingly complex in multinational companies since it hires employees from various countries in the world. This creates many differences, not only characteristics and personality but also culture as well as the distance between countries. Differences in characteristics, personalities and cultures require employees to understand each other. If the diversity among employees are not managed properly, it may cause a negative impact on the company. Manpower diversity in a company, undeniably, has negative side, such as difficulty in communicating and increasing tension and conflict in the workplace. Diversity also brings differences in communication styles, which often creates misunderstandings. Prasidyamurti stated that employees experience obstacles due to ethnic and cultural diversity among fellow employees such as workforce adaptation, language barriers in communication, and miscommunication between employees that cause disputes.

EduCo Global is an education provider company working several universities located in 4 countries: Australia, Canada, the United States and Ireland. The company has a marketing team located in Southeast Asia, consisting of 5 countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The marketing team which consists of various countries certainly have different cultures from each other. Cultural differences between employees in the marketing team make a difference in behavior. The distance between countries separating employees makes the communication process more complex. Signal noise and time differences often cause problems and misunderstandings between employees. The lack of personal direct contact also often leads to the lack of trust and a less harmonious relationship. If the diversity of workforce culture can be managed wisely, it will lead to a dynamic and integrative potential. Therefore, to facilitate intercultural relations and reduce distortions, employees should be able to understand the culture of other employees.

Public Relations is required to be able to carry out functions as 'mediators' between the organization and the public internally or externally as well as maintaining and developing reciprocal communication needed in overcoming or minimizing the problems that arise. In this case, Public Relations has the communication role to create mutual understanding between the organization and its public. One way that is done by Public Relations to overcome communication problems is by carrying out various activities, both online and face to face. The activity was created with the aim of enhancing good relations between employees so that mutual understanding and mutual trust would occur between employees.

The factor that makes this research interesting to be conducted is that Public Relations must be able to understand complex communication problems between

employees, as happened with the EduCo Global Southeast Asia team. The result of this research is expected to be able to provide an overview and model for the implementation of activities that can be done by *Public Relations* to establish multicultural relationships between employees. Therefore, this study aims to find out problems arising from distance between countries, differences in personality, characteristics and culture between EduCo Global employees, to find out the reasons and objectives underlying Public Relations activities in establishing multicultural relationships, and to determine the implementation of activities conducted by Public Relations Department of EduCo Global in establishing multicultural relationships between employees.

The research on intercultural communication has been conducted previously by other researchers. One of them is by the researcher, Anindita and Woelandari (2020), on their research that aims at find out more about intercultural communication practices among expatriate students in the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program at the International Language Institute, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Indonesia. By conducting this research, it is expected to enrich the information on intercultural and multicultural communication.

2. Method

This research uses case study method with qualitative approach. It was conducted at EduCo Global that is spread in several countries: Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Manila and Melbourne. The data of this research was collected by observation, documentation and in-depth interviews with competent people. Informants in this research are the most knowledgeable people about the implementation of Public Relations activities, such as Brand and Communication Manager, Regional Director of Sales and Marketing Southeast Asia and Regional Sales and Marketing Manager of Southeast Asia. This research uses triangulation techniques in the form of source triangulation. Data analysis can be done qualitatively by means of data reduction, data presentation and data conclusion.

3. Results and Discussion

EduCo Global is a multinational company with employees coming from various cultures and countries. The differences that exist within the employees can cause problems. Therefore, it should be managed well. On the contrary, the differences that exist in employees can provide great performance for the company if it is managed properly.

3.1 Problems Arising due to Distances between Countries, Personality, Characteristics and Culture Differences between Employees

Personality is divided into two different types: introverted and extroverted. Those two personalities may cause conflict among employees. However, the extrovert employees are easy to socialize, influence, and express whatever they feel so it tends to be easy to manage conflicts within themselves and they are able to communicate the unpleasant things well. On the other hand, the introvert employees are having difficulties to communicate the unpleasant things for

themselves and tend to be difficult to socialize and maintain self-conflict that has an impact on the emergence of prolonged conflict between employees. These results indicate that employee personality has an impact on employee communication skills. Low employee communication has an impact on the emergence of problems between employees.

Perception is a source of problems that occur between EduCo employees with various characteristics such as age, education and gender. This means there is an ineffective communication process that causes a variety of perceptions that can be a problem between employees. It is because perception is a process of thinking ability based on experience. In addition to perception, it is also caused by communication skills, which are influenced by employee characteristics.

The results showed that cultural differences among EduCo employees caused problems such as misunderstanding due to ineffective communication processes, and lack of English comprehension. In addition, there is a low level of trust between employees due to a low cultural image such as having low work discipline, low work motivation and also low work commitment.

3.2 Background and Objective of Public Relations Activities in Establishing Multicultural Relations between EduCo Global Employees

The results of this study indicate that Public Relations conduct various activities to multicultural employees as part of their duties and responsibilities in conducting company internal relations to prevent and overcome problems that occur between employees due to differences which can make working conditions not conducive and errors in performing tasks that can have an impact on declining employee performance and productivity. Various activities are carried out by Public Relations for multicultural employees to strengthen personal relationships between employees and introduce the culture of other employees so that employees can understand and adapt to fellow employees who have differences in personality and cultural differences.

3.3 Implementation of Public Relations Activities in Establishing Multicultural Relations between Employees

Based on interviews and also observation on various documents related to activities carried out by Public Relations of EduCo Global, it can be found that: 1) Regular weekly meetings are conducted every Monday via Skype. The limited distance and workplace of employees does not become a significant obstacle in establishing communication between employees. Routine activities are carried out once a week. Every Monday there is a weekly meeting held for all employees to discuss various activities that have been carried out in the previous week, activities that will be carried out the following week, update sales, discuss work targets and work performance and evaluation from the Director of Marketing. This meeting becomes a means to establish intimacy between fellow employees because after the meeting is over, the employees are given time to greet

each other and talk about experiences while working; 2) Providing facilities or means to communicate intensively with each other through social media, such as Facebook groups and Whatsapp groups. Facebook and Whatsapp groups are created to facilitate employees in various work experiences such as obstacles, complaints and tips during working. The media is also used as a medium for sharing personal information such as birthdays, childbirth, marriages, sharing issues that occur in the field, sharing tasks, etc. In addition, the media is also used to greet and share knowledge between employees; 3) A conference was held and it involved all EduCo employees including: Southeast Asia Quarterly Sales conference and Southeast Asia Annual Sales conference. The conference is held once a year in various countries. In 2016, the conference was held in Bangkok, Thailand on December 10-14, 2016. The conference was held to discuss targets and achievements and evaluate performance over a certain period and discuss work targets that would be carried out over the coming period. At the conference, there was Gala Dinner and giving rewards to the highest-sales employees for 1 period. The conference was also used to conduct inbound and outbound with games and activities to strengthen the relationships between employees. The location of the conference was carried out alternately to a different country. Problems that occur between EduCo employees with different characteristics, culture, personality and distance between countries can be explained based on Johari's Window Theory. The Johari's Window concept as an embodiment of how a person relates to others is described as a window consisting of 4 cells, each cell showing an area of the self that is both open and hidden.

Self-disclosure is important to realize effective interpersonal communication in an effort to achieve the more intimate and harmonious relationship. Self-disclosure can be interpreted as the process of giving or disclosing information about yourself to others, which includes a variety of things, such as thoughts, feelings, and behavior of someone or other people who think about it. Self-disclosure makes the cell area open at Johari's Window even bigger. In this study, differences in culture, personality and characteristics make multicultural employees less understand the characteristics and personality and culture of employees. This condition is supported by the distance of workplaces that are far away in different countries between one employee and another which makes intensive and personal communication difficult. Thus, it can be stated that the problems that occur among EduCo Global multicultural employees are because the open areas in the Johari's Window are very small and dominated by closed areas, blind areas and unknown areas, making it difficult for employees to communicate effectively, misunderstandings and misperceptions occur and are less able understanding other people's cultures and personalities.

Differences in work locations in different countries make employees unable to communicate intensively and cannot understand the personality characteristics of the employees. These conditions make the hidden area contains information that is known about yourself but closed to others is very large. Many personal information that is closed to other employees that can be a barrier in dealing with other employees. This condition also causes miscommunication, reduces the level of trust in the behavior of other employees,

does not understand the feelings, and motivation of other employees at work which results in problems between employees. Differences in work locations in different countries make it rare for employees to meet in person and it is difficult to understand and get to know other employees. This condition makes the blind area in Johari's Window become large. Each employee with his culture, characteristics, and personality has their respective advantages, but the strengths and abilities of employees will not be understood or will not be known by other employees if the employees do not know each other and communicate with each other. Lack of understanding of other employees' ability leads to low trust in other employees at work which can have a bad impact when working in a team because employees who have great ability can be considered low by other employees.

In this study, the problem that occurs among EduCo Global's multicultural employees is due to the lack of employee openness which means that the open area in Johari's Window is smaller than the blind area and closed area. The size of the closed and blind areas causes a lack of trust between employees and can lead to misunderstanding and perception in communication, causing low employee performance and productivity which can impact on the company's low productivity and performance globally. Therefore, it is important for Public Relations to carry out various activities that can increase the openness of multicultural employees. Public Relations make various efforts to increase openness between employees through activities that can improve the closeness of personal relationships and increase knowledge about the culture of employees so that employees are expected to understand each other, trust each other and can communicate effectively, and create harmonious relationship that can support employee performance. Public Relations of EduCo Global give awards to employees with high sales in certain period. It is one of Public Relations efforts to improve the blind area in Johari's Window because with the award given in an open forum attended by all employees, the employees will know the potential of other employees. The increased of blind window may rise employees' confidence and support employees' performance.

Other Public Relations activities carried out by the company are conducting regular meetings, coordinating internal communication through Facebook and Whatsapp groups, holding a gala dinner, touring to various countries, outbound, inbound, which aims at increasing the open area in Johari Window and minimize blind areas and closed areas. Routine activities, regular meetings, and activities with games that involve emotional closeness will result the intensive communication and personal communication between employees. Employees will be more informed about themselves. The information about oneself will continue to grow vertically; thereby it will reduce the covered area. The greater the open area then more productive and beneficial interpersonal relationships. Through self-disclosure, it can create effective interpersonal communication in an effort to achieve closer and more harmonious relationships. Knowledge about oneself will be able to improve communication and at the same time communicate with others will increase knowledge about

oneself. By opening up, the self-concept will be closer to other employees, more open to accept other people's experiences, ideas, and cultures. It will be more likely to avoid defensive attitudes and more carefully look at oneself and other employees who have different cultures.

4. Conclusions

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that: 1) As a multinational institution, EduCo Global has employees with different distances between countries, characteristics, personalities and culture so that various problems arise between employees, such as employees unable to communicate well about unpleasant things and they tend to have difficulty in socializing, understanding, and adapting to others and is concerned with personal gain. Differences in characteristics such as gender, age, level of education of employees can have an impact on employee perceptions about the tasks assigned. Cultural differences also make it difficult for employees to communicate effectively, especially related to the mastery of international language, misunderstanding in communication that can complicate business processes or work; 2) Public Relations perform various activities to multicultural employees as a form of their duties and responsibilities in conducting internal company relations to prevent and overcome problems that occur between employees due to differences that can make working conditions not conducive and errors in carrying out tasks that can have an impact on declining performance and employee productivity. Various activities are carried out by Public Relations for multicultural employees to strengthen personal relationships between employees and introduce the culture of other employees so that employees can understand and adapt to fellow employees who have differences in personality and cultural differences. 3) Activities undertaken by *Public Relations* EduCo Global in establishing multicultural relationships between employees include: *awarding* employees who received the highest sales, conducting regular meetings once a week, once every three months or once a year, providing communication media and maintaining communication between employees, tours and gatherings are held 3 months and once a year by Public Relations to increase familiarity between employees and also to improve employee understanding of other cultures in various countries, and coordinating the internal media in the form of Whatsapp, Facebook, and Skype groups to facilitate employee communication due to differences in workplace distances spread across different countries and to maintain and improve effectiveness in communicating between employees.

5. Suggestions

Suggestions from this research are that this study only conducts a qualitative study, further research can be carried out by examining aspects that affect multicultural communication problems between employees quantitatively. The results showed that basically the main problems that often occur in multicultural employees are female employees. Therefore, it is better to do an overhaul of emotional intelligence training for female employees so that female employees are more able to control and regulate emotions in work. In addition, problems also occur in languages where misperceptions and misunderstandings often occur due to language differences. Therefore, it is advisable to have an international training course so that employees can master international languages well so as to minimize and prevent the occurrence of misperceptions and establish effective and mutual communication.

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