

Educational Leaders' Outlook on Strategic Communication Skills

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Abstract—The purpose of this study was to seek out educational leaders' viewpoint on strategic communication skills at school. A reflective action research was used by doing informal, semi-structured interviews to teachers and educational leaders i.e. principals and supervisors as well as extracting information from study documentation on library research. This research proposes the importance of strategic communication skills in education in order to build trust by gathering respondents' perception on how best to communicate, align communications with school goals and values en route for develop strategic communication skills plans which will support stakeholders' engagement at work.

Keywords—educational leadership; strategic communication skills; communication in educational organization

I. INTRODUCTION

Education systems have a tendency to operate on three inter-related stages: macro, meso and micro. The macro stage will focus on developing and negotiating national policies. The meso stage will manage the national policy into practice realization, frequently pinpointed in the provincial/local departments of education. In the other hand, the micro stage will cover the schools and communities in which policies are being implemented, and where educational stakeholders want to see educational changes in practices [1,2]. Having had those stages, effective communications in formal education systems for that reason require to transpire at levels varies and involve various stakeholders, depending on the messages and ideas being communicated.

This article is aimed to discuss more on the micro stage, to reflect on the importance of communication, particularly in the communication skills, to reach out the gap which commonly transpires among educational stakeholders, i.e. principal, teachers, supervisors, students and or parents. Communication is becoming essentials as the principal – who plays role as the school leader, will need to be able to align his/her values with those of the organization to accomplish their goals in making a quality school [3].

Organizational communication involves effectively communicating with large groups. The whole process of the communication itself will be challenging should the member of organization does not have sufficient supported skills [4].

A principal normally will spend their 70 to 80 percent of their time in doing communication with other stakeholders both formal and informal [4]. But the fact that leaders still have limitation in doing a good communication in their organization [5,6], which the gap transpired from different expectations form the educational organization members, lead the researcher to explore more on the compiling the educational leaders' outlook on strategic communication skills.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Effective Communication in Educational Organization

The basic principle of communication is having at least two common elements, sender and receiver [7].

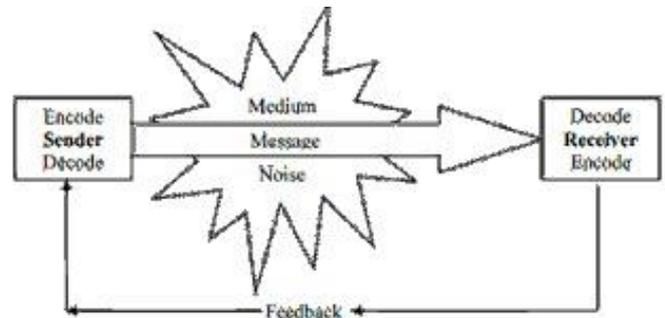


Fig. 1. The communication process [7].

Communication can be outlined as the course of action in which beliefs, thoughts, data, judgments, outlooks, attitudes and or emotional states are delivered from a person to others. As shown in figure 1, the communicator or sender is the person who commences communication by delivering a message. The receiver is then defined as the person who concludes the communication by grasping the message and act in response to it. Communication is an essentials skill for almost any profession, especially for principal and teachers, in principal–teacher–student relationship within the educational organization context [8-10].

The form of communication could be both on written or verbal. Note that at the end of the communication process, people will decode information selectively. People will have the tendency to comprehend information constructively only

when it consistent with their point of views, ideas and necessities. When it happened, then they will respond positively by showing feedback as a proof of two ways communication. But when the receiver does not provide any feedback, then the communication process is concerned to be ineffective by only showing one-way communication [3,11].

The fundamental in making sure the effective communication in an educational organization such as school is the principal's ability to work harmoniously with the school stakeholders. A principal is obliged to assemble the shared school's vision, mission, values, goals vividly in the direction of growing into more effective.

B. Impediments to Communication

As it was stated before, there are possibilities to have miscommunication in an educational organization. Failing to have feedback or suitable respond from the receivers, or the message sent was not correctly interpreted as it was meant, means that the communication has not been well managed.

The impediments or barriers of communication mostly caused by the lack of intention [12,13], trust [14,15], interest [16], distraction [17,18] or irrelevance to the receiver [19,20]. Moreover, the differences in perceptions [21] and viewpoint [22] also has the potency to be the trigger.

Up to this point, the educational leaders need to apprehend the impediments raised in their workplace to be able to scrutinize on what are the strategic communication skills that they need to build.

C. Strategic Communication Skills

It is important for the educational leaders to retain a good communication skill in order to achieve the vision alignment [23] related with the school goals and values [24]. Their communication strategy will become the heart of the organization. As it was stated earlier, poor communication strategy will countenance for information blockages, making it hard for leaders to monitor their teachers and staffs' performance or for teachers and staffs to understand orders from the leaders.

As this article was meant to documented the educational leaders' viewpoint on strategic skills, later on the findings and discussion part, the communication problems and the suggested communication skills to overcome the problems will be explicated based on the respondents' response during the research.

At the end of the research, we made sure that all the observed behaviors were noted and they were asked to fill out a questionnaire and do in-depth interview in a non formal way to record on their point of view and experience on the process and techniques that they have been through in terms of practicing communication skills in their organization. Table 1 described a brief description on the participants. As it is pseudonyms, the name printed is not original.

TABLE I. DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

| No. | Name | Age | Gender | Position |
|-----|---------|-----|--------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Anthony | 38 | Male | Principal Secondary School |
| 2 | Betty | 43 | Female | Principal Primary School |
| 3 | Anton | 39 | Male | Vice Principal Secondary School |
| 4 | Susan | 37 | Female | Vice Principal Primary School |
| 5 | Drew | 50 | Female | School Supervisor |
| 6 | Angel | 55 | Female | School Supervisor |
| 7 | Jasmine | 37 | Female | Primary Teacher |
| 8 | David | 38 | Male | Secondary Teacher |
| 9 | Ryan | 45 | Male | Principal Secondary Teacher |
| 10 | Rashad | 37 | Male | Secondary Teacher |

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

During the research, a reflective action research was done by doing informal, semi-structured interviews to ten teachers and educational leaders i.e. principals and supervisors who worked in Bandung and Jakarta who were chosen using the method of purposive random sampling. The respondents were asked on their point of view toward the most common problem occurs pertaining to communication in their school organization. The answer then being documented with their permissions to be published in this article. The researcher also extracting information from study documentation on library research.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the semi-structured interviews conducted to ten respondents, it is revealed that effective communication plays a critical role in the educational organization, but faces many challenges at the individual, team, environmental, and organizational level. All of the respondents stated that when it comes to educational organization, there are many methods of communication at an organizational level. Each of these methods has its own problems and constraints that may become barriers to effective communication. Most of these barriers arise because of misinformation or lack of appropriate transparency available to the employees.

Another impediment revealed during the data collection was the language barrier. The fact that some leaders tend to use their local language/mother tongue was found to be a barrier for teachers or staffs who are not coming from the same region. This language impediment preceded to the cultural barriers, in which all respondents agreed that those two barriers affected the lack of intention among the organizational members as they feel that they did not fully understand with the leaders' intention. Thus, it was agreed that different consideration have to made by the leaders to deal with their teachers and/or staffs. They will need to communicate more on the common language which will be easy to understand by whole staffs.

For the discussion of trust, all respondents agreed that it is essentials for leaders to build trust through communication in the educational organization, i.e. school. It is believed that trust is earned from both action and interaction. To build trust, a hundred percent respondents believe that this could start with a good communication.

The indicator of good communication is starting with openness and transparent among the whole levels, this include bad news. Eighty percent of the respondents said that honesty

is the best policy, as teachers and staffs will be more likely to appreciate a leader who can talk openly with them about problematic situations, answer questions and give them facts. They believed that leaders should lead by example and start the conversation with team members, even it might be hard.

The next communication skill that seventy percent respondents agreed is that a leader should confirm they expose positive reception in a form of appreciation and acknowledgement for their team's effort. For that reason, it is important to educational leaders to give credit where it's appropriate and allow teachers and staffs to excel. This support a study done by Globoforce which proven that employees who received recognition from their leaders recently were significantly more likely to trust them [25].

As important as giving credits, eighty percent of the respondents believed that a leader should be open to receiving feedback from their teachers and staffs. With a good gesture, positive attitude, thoughtful language, a leader can show their openness by asking their feedback, either in person or via online. This, sequentially, will help the teachers and staffs to be more open to taking and reflecting on feedback given by their leaders.

In correlation with the effective listening as proposed by Rogers and Farson, all respondents believed that the leaders need to talk straight to the point, not circling around and make sure that they are listening more by showing a genuine gesture [26]. Educational leaders are expected to validate by using the keyword used by the other person. Sometimes leaders are embraced to clarify and/or confront things in a smooth way. This technique could also be used when the leaders needs to express their aspirations, shared the organizational values, cascading the vision and mission, etc.

One strategic point that every leader should bear in mind is that they need to show loyalty. Never talk behind someone else's back or spreading out the private discussion materials in the forum. This possibly will make the trust disappear and miscommunication occurred.

V. CONCLUSION

Putting a higher notification that this research only took a small-scale exploration form action research study, the evidences and experiences revealed a tentative conclusion about educational stakeholder 's viewpoint on their leaders' communication skills has been identified. It is my disputation to propose the type of evidence that I have provided here can help stimulate discussion between educational leaders, teachers and staffs, about the language barrier, building trust, openness and transparent, expose positive reception in a form of appreciation and acknowledgement, open to receiving feedback as well as performing effective listening, could describe the communication skills outlook clearly.

While this research study is small-scale, evidence in the form of observations, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews suggests the educational leaders' outlook on strategic communication skills, advance research into this specific trend is required and links to concepts such as communication skills and organizational behavior are distinct.

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