

Corporate Communications in a Manufacture Company for Handling Covid-19 Cases: Health First

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ABSTRACT

Employee health is essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this reason, efforts from companies to handle COVID-19 cases internally are needed, which include corporate communications consisting of internal and external communication. The purpose of this study is to obtain an overview and perform an analysis on how a manufacturing company carries out corporate communications in Cilegon City, Indonesia, in handling COVID-cases internally. This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study method and involved several informants consisting of the COVID-19 handling team, employees, and external company parties. The results of this study indicate that the company has anticipated the COVID-19 cases by issuing a COVID-19 Business Continuity Plan (BCP), which includes prevention efforts, team recovery, and procedures for employees whom COVID-19 infects. The BCP was communicated and implemented using various communication media such as WhatsApp, email, SMS, telephone, announcement boards, and employee screening cards for internal parties. Meanwhile, for external parties, it was communicated through email, telephone, and WhatsApp. With good internal communications, COVID-19 cases can be prevented, and deaths due to the virus can be avoided. Employees also become more aware of the obligation to comply with the COVID-19 health protocol. With good external communications, handling COVID-19 cases will be faster and more effective as the company can collaborate with other parties.

Keywords: *Corporate Communication, Internal Communication, External Communication, COVID-19*

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee health in a company environment is significant (Johnshon, 2018). Both company managers and researchers have recognized that a work environment that does not prioritize employee health can lead to low employee productivity (Bufquin, 2021). Thus, employee health should be the primary concern of companies, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has lasted more than a year. The COVID-19 pandemic is a threat to human health and life. It is more than a health crisis; the COVID-19 pandemic is also an information and socio-economic turmoil (WHO, 2020). The pandemic and its associated responses prompt the deepest global recession in nearly a century and push an estimated 70-100 million more people into extreme poverty. Employees must continue to work amid uncertain situations and face various risks, from working and doing activities at their workplace to returning home (Qiu, 2018). Many of them are exposed to COVID-19 in their surrounding environment.

Employees' health and well-being, including their mental health, become priorities, especially during this pandemic. In facing the pandemic, the

company focuses on adapting to the work environment by protecting employees so that they will be able to balance their personal and professional responsibilities and prioritize their emotional, mental, and physical health and well-being (Sari, 2019). The increasing number of COVID-19 cases has caused concern for company owners, management, and employees, including those in Cilegon, Banten Province, an industrial city (Wong, 2021). There are many large national and multinational companies in the city (Verčič, 2020).

The number of COVID-19 cases in Cilegon has been increasing. In November 2020, the city was declared a red zone (Newman, 2020). Based on Cilegon City Health Office data, the circumstances of COVID-19 in Cilegon have reached 1,002 cases; 99 people have confirmed positive for COVID-19, 31 people died, and 872 recovered. Some of the cases are related to exposure in the work environment. Therefore, handling efforts from the company are needed (Riel, 2007). A manufacturing company in the Industrial Estate of Cilegon has made the handling efforts (Mohamad, 2014).

Since the Indonesian Government published the first COVID-19 in March 2020, the company quickly designed a COVID-19 Business Continuity Plan based on regulations from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Manpower. The BCP contains strategic planning for handling COVID-19 cases in the work environment (Mahriya, 2020). The first cases in this company were identified between October 2020 and February 2021 with 31 points, of which 28 employees returned to work, and 3 employees had independent isolation under the company's supervision through the COVID-19 handling team (source: company-internal data) (Reddy, 2020). This handling effort is supported by the communications carried out by the company both internally and externally (Lozano, 2019).

Corporate communications emerge from the relationship between the company and its environment to help collect, deliver, and interpret information from the environment and represent the organization to the outside world (Kumar, 2020). Organizations are networks of people who communicate with each other (Adalja, 2020). In all organizations, communications flow vertically, and horizontally, internally and externally, formally and informally, linking employees internally to each other, various layers of management, and the organization's many external resource-holders. The commitment shows reliable communication in a company to resilience and situational awareness. Therefore company leaders must upgrade the quality of communication practices (Gereffi, 2020).

Several studies on internal corporate communication focus on corporate communication on employee job satisfaction, employee productivity, and employee loyalty, or external communication in achieving company targets, fostering good relations with external parties such as the surrounding community, customers, and Government. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies need to prioritize employees' health, not only to focus on their productivity and communicating with customers about sales. Therefore, this research focuses on how corporate communications were carried out by one of the manufacturing companies in the Cilegon Industrial Estate Area for maintaining employee health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Tran, 2020). Employees are considered critical human resources that should be prioritized.

2. METHOD

This research employed the qualitative approach with a case study method focusing on

communications in handling COVID-19 cases in the company as health is a primary concern during the pandemic. Data were obtained from observations, in-depth interviews with informants of the COVID-19 handling team members and employees recruited through snowball sampling technique, and various documents. The data were validated using triangulation, and data analysis was conducted.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Employee health has always been a concern of the company management, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the first COVID-19 case was published in March 2020, the company's management has initiated various efforts by designing a COVID-19 Business Continuity Plan (BCP) based on the Ministry of Health and the Ministry's regulations of Manpower. The BCP has been communicated to employees through various communication media, such as emails sent to all employees and announcement pamphlets placed at several employee gathering points.

The Business Continuity Plan for COVID-19 prepared by the company management consists of (1) prevention of COVID-19 exposure in the company by improving sanitation quality, limiting physical contact, monitoring employee health, and initial independent screening for employees and guests; (2) Management Recovery Team consisting of a team of employees who collaborate with several health services, such as Krakatau Medika Hospital, Sariasih Hospital, and Siloam Lippo Karawaci Hospital; and (3) procedures when an employee is confirmed to be infected with COVID-19. The Business Continuity Plan can be seen in the following figure 1.1:

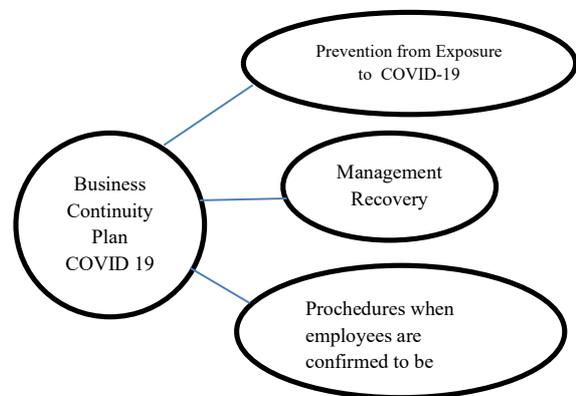


Figure 1. COVID-19 Business Continuity Plan based on the result

Various efforts have been made, such as communicating the obligation to wear a mask and distributing masks to all employees; providing a lot of faucets and hand wash at some places and the main gate so that all employees who just arrive and are about to go home can wash their hands and have their body temperature measured; resetting the distance of the work table in one room and add some room for workplace; resetting the space in the office prayer room and obliging all employees to bring their own prayer mat; arranging the dining room where food for employees is provided; changing from a buffet to providing rice in boxes; the dining table which previously could be used by four people can only occupied by two people; rearranging the number of employee buses and the number of employees who enter the bus; large buses, which generally have a capacity of thirty people, are replaced by buses with a total of fifty people, but only 50% of the power is filled so that the contact distance can be monitored; and arranging the work-from-home work schedules in several work units, allowing the work-from-home scheme to be implemented; a team of company doctors are always ready.

With such efforts, when the virus was spreading in the company in October 2020, the handling team was ready, as explained by one informant who is one of the team members:

"When the first case occurred, the employee had a fever. Then, the employee told you reported his condition to his manager, then the boss reported to the COVID handling team, and the COVID handling team recommended the employee to take a PCR test at a health center that the company had appointed. Then, after three days, the result was immediately submitted to the COVID handling team, and it was positive. We then asked employees to do tracing to those who made close contact and asked them to take the test according to the rules" (interview on 24 February 2021)

As the informant explained, when there was the first case of an employee confirmed positive for COVID-19, all parties coordinated and communicated. This has been done until now.

Communications are carried out both internally and externally. Internal communications done include vertical communication and horizontal communication. Vertical transmission is carried out between leaders and subordinates, such as when employees who are confirmed positive report their

condition to their superiors and their superiors respond. In contrast, horizontal communications are carried out between parties from the managements and the COVID-19 handling team, which handles the case.

Internal communications are conducted face-to-face or by using media such as email, WhatsApp, telephone, and pamphlets posted on bulletin boards. The company also issued an independent screening card as a communication medium for employees who have to travel out of town and come to work. From the screening results, it will be decided whether the employees can immediately go to work or have to take a PCR test first and other procedures.

Not only internal communications, the company also carries out external communications. Based on interviews and observations, the company communicated with several health laboratories such as Kimia Farma Cilegon City, Kimia Farma Serang City, Krakatau Medika Hospital Cilegon, and Siloam Karawaci Hospital. External contacts are carried out in collaborations so that employees receive services to carry out tests, both antigen swabs or PCR in several laboratories and hospitals, and other health services related to COVID-19 cases. Besides, external communications are also carried out by company doctors who are part of the COVID-19 handling team with the Regional Health Office, such as reporting when an employee is confirmed positive.

External communications are also carried out with customers who visit the company. The company made a screening form containing questions about what the customer did in the past fourteen days. From the screening results, it can be decided whether or not the customers can visit directly or are not allowed to visit the company because of health reasons and customer travel history. Various external communication media are used, including email, telephone, SMS, and Whatsapp. The COVID-19 handling team always updates government regulations regarding COVID because the rules become the basis for making policies and decisions. Based on the results of the research, the corporate communications to deal with COVID-19 are as follows:

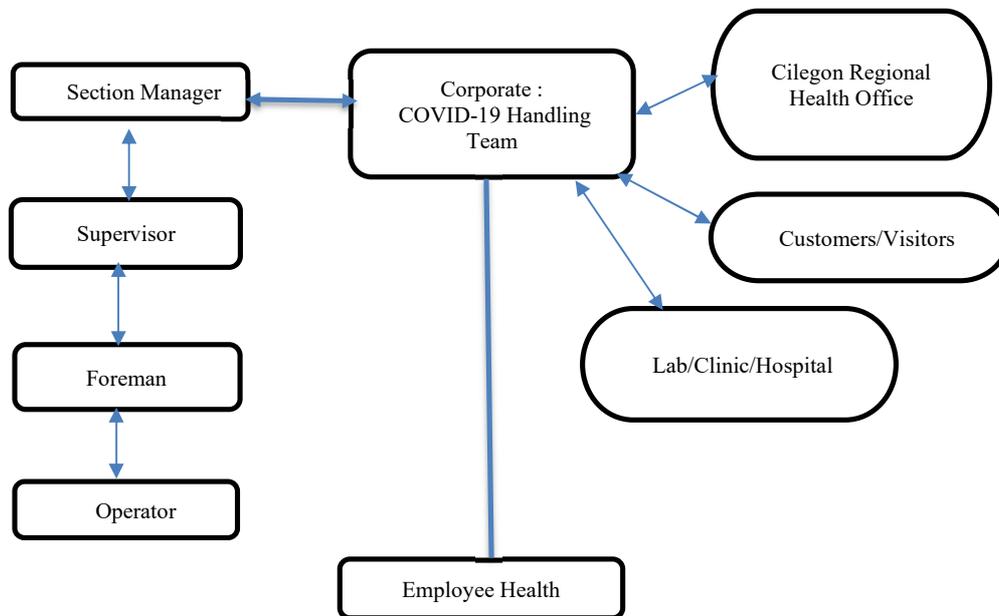


Figure 2. Corporate Communication for Handling COVID-19 based on the result

Internal and external communications carried out by the company are a form of corporate communications. As From bun describes, organizations are networks of people who communicate with each other. In all organizations, communications flow vertically and horizontally, internally and externally, formally and informally, linking employees internally to each other, various layers of management, and the organization's many external resource-holders. Good corporate communication is needed to maintain employee health, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Goodman believes that managers should take strategic actions to establish and maintain excellent and coherent corporate communication practices across different stakeholder groups.

Understanding and practicing effective communications within the company are fundamental. Neglected communications will create gaps for vulnerable employees and cause difficulties in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Company leaders must strive to improve their communication skills so that critical messages can be appropriately conveyed and the company's goals are achieved, which are to seek and prioritize employee health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. CONCLUSION

Corporate communications conducted by the company consist of internal and external communications to strive for and prioritize employee health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The company appointed the COVID-19 handling team to coordinate with all parties by using various communication media based on the employees' conditions, such as WhatsApp, email, announcement boards and independent screening cards, and communicating with external parties through telephone, email and WhatsApp. With good internal communications, the number of COVID-19 cases can be monitored and suppressed, and deaths can be avoided. Employees also increasingly become more aware of the obligation to comply with the COVID-19 health protocol. Meanwhile, with good external communications, handling COVID-19 cases will be faster and more effective because companies collaborate with other parties.

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