

Leadership Communication: Three Model Approaches

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Abstract—The objective of this article is to portray the close relationship between communication and leadership. Communication approaches to leadership mean the dynamics of leadership could be explained and understood by theories of communication. By using literature review, there were three model of communication in viewing leadership. Firstly, leader uses communication as a tool for influencing people (linear or transmission model). Secondly, communication is view as something discursive that emphasizes leadership as a dialogical process (relational model). Lastly, leadership is viewed communication as distortion and manipulation that aims at dominating (distortion model). The best model depends on situation, culture, and size of people in organization.

Keywords—*leadership communication; transmission model; relational model; manipulation model*

I. INTRODUCTION

“Leadership is a complex concept that has been studied from myriad perspectives both in organizational studies and across diverse disciplines” [1]. One of disciplines that is inseparable from leadership studies is field of communication study. “Since the beginning, communication is a topic frequently associated with leadership” [2]. For instance, research results stated that 60% to 70% of the time owned by leaders or CEOs was spent on communication activities such as meetings, negotiations, meeting constituents, accepting aspirations, complaints, or controlling subordinates, and facing company crises. Thus, it is in accordance with a statement that “Leadership, first and foremost, is a communication-based activity” [3].

The relationship between communication and leadership is extremely close. “Leadership and communication are indispensable” [4]. Both fields complement each other. Therefore, “the discipline of communication and leadership is referred to as field of twin studies” [5]. Leadership is a social phenomenon that becomes a part of communication studies. Leadership studies have also long concerned about the importance of communication. In short, “leadership is the same as communication, leadership = communication” [6].

Nevertheless, the perspective of leadership communication continues to experience changes in line with the fluctuations in the field of science, paradigm, and the dynamics of economic and socio-political development that continues to grow. Industrial era of leadership communication is different from the

post-industrial era one. Some philosophical traditions, theoretical thinking orientations, and research results have produced many different theories, models, and orientations of leadership communication.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs qualitative approach. The method employed in this research is literature study done by collecting sources related to the topic of communication and leadership. The data were collected from secondary sources: books, journals, and articles in prints and electronic forms from the internet. Moreover, the data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis technique. With this technique, the data were analyzed based on the elements of histories, theories and orientations, paradigms, emphasis, and attributes of each model. The term model in this research refers to the representation of the concept of leadership communication.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research have resulted in three model approaches on leadership communication: linear model, relational model, and manipulation model. Each model has different worldviews on how communication views leadership.

A. Transmission Model

This model appeared when the industrial era began to grow. People who had lived in the agricultural sector began to migrate to the city looking for new jobs in the industrial sector. Their orientation was to make money. “The life of society had also become increasingly opportunistic” [7]. As a result, the large number of workers in the industrial sector created conflicts with managers [8]. Hence, it emerged the perspective that leaders must be strong in their personality and competence compared to their subordinates. The goal was that the leaders could control their subordinates. This situation eventually became the beginning of an era when leadership communication tried to apply a psychological approach. In this case, communication is seen as a tool to support leadership effectiveness.

The definition of leadership itself is formulated as an effort to influence others to achieve organizational goals. “Without the ability to persuade, leader will have no follower” [9]. The focus of the research places more leaders as agents of change. Therefore, the research analysis unit emphasizes more on

individuals as the main reflection. “Most would agree that leaders are individuals who guide, direct, motivate, or inspire others. They are the men and women who influence others in an organization or community. They command others’ attention. They persuade others to follow them or pursue goals they define. They control situations” [10].

The views on classical management, for example, also support a psychological perspective by emphasizing individual-centered communication. “Some disciplines, such as management tend to promote the psychological perspective of leadership with individually centered communication, often with formal position power” [11]. Leadership communication in this model is seen as a linear process (sender-message-recipient). This is a classic model of communication described as the process of sending messages from senders to recipients, then the messages are translated and interpreted, and the recipients act based on the message.

Communication serves as a tool of command and persuasion from leaders to subordinates. The function of the leader is the task function, which expresses the organization’s visions and policies, delivers assignments, motivates, supervises, and gives sanctions and reprimands to subordinates. Leader communication styles are also formal and instructional directives. Therefore, the credibility and competence of leaders, in terms of ethos, pathos, and logos, are very important.

Leadership effectiveness is measured by how far the leaders can use communication skills effectively. Good at speech, negotiation, presentation, reading, writing, and listening effectively are several skills that a leader must possess. The higher the communication skills means the more effective the leadership performance.

The research paradigm of this model is based on positivism that believes in empirical truth with a quantitative approach. The explanation sought is the law of cause and effect. The approaches and research of classical leadership produce theories used in leadership communication such as ‘the great man theory’, trait theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory, and transformational theory. All of these theories emphasize that leaders are the main actors in changing the behavior of subordinates in the organization and social life.

B. Relational Model

The term ‘relational’, based on the old management means “an individual likes people and thrives on relationship” [12]. This pattern of relationships is still subject-object relations. Meanwhile, the worldview of social construction sees relational as an inter-subjective relationship, the relation of subject-to-subject. Relational leadership is defined as “a social influence process thought which emergent coordination (i.e. evolving social order) and change (e.g. new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced [12]. Furthermore, “Leadership can be seen as a two-way influence relationship between a leader and as follower aimed primarily at attaining mutual goals” [12].

The transmission model is criticized by many parties because it places too much emphasis on individual leaders. The model is one-way without considering followers or subordinates, including aspects of the organizational culture surrounding it. Whereas, when people talk about leadership, many elements are involved in the leadership such as the elements of leaders, followers, communication infrastructures, and organizational cultures. Thus, the leader is only one variable.

The post-industrial era began the emergence of a new model of how to view communication and leadership. “Leadership and communication studies increasingly overlap in the emerging post-industrial paradigm, which emphasizes relational and process-based leadership [13].

In line with the emergence of constructivism paradigm, leadership communication is no longer seen as a one-way persuasion tool. Communication comes from superiors to subordinates. In this paradigm, communication is a discourse between leaders and followers. “Leaders appear through socially constructed reality” [14]. Leadership communication is seen as a two-way and interactive dialogue process.

The focus of the research no longer emphasizes on individuals, but is more social, which emphasizes the importance of social relations in leadership. Leaders and subordinates are two elements that influence each other. The orientation of relational model rests on the process, not on the law of cause and effect. The method frequently used in this model is qualitative research. The macro theory of leadership communication that appears in this model is discursive communication, which is based on LMX theory, social exchange theory, and network theory [15].

C. Manipulation Model

The third model views leadership communication as a domination. This model emerges from the critical tradition of Marx and neo-Marxists. The leadership is viewed “as mechanisms through which management establishes and maintains a relationship of power and authority over employees” [16]. For this approach, leadership is power, control, and hegemony. Leaders are seen as manipulators who aim at ‘subduing’ subordinates to follow the interests of leaders, shareholders, or company profits.

This model is a “rise of managerialism associated with the hegemony of the New Right; and the crisis of western (and especially North American) management in the face of globalized capitalism” [17]. Critical theory has several basic assumptions. First, the organizational and social structure for critical theory is a structure and process creating power imbalances. Second, inequality of power will generate alienation and oppression of certain social classes and community groups. Third, the task of critical theory is to uncover hidden inequality due to leadership, which results in producing oppressed groups. That is where the struggle of the workers is needed to create emancipation, hence organizational structures and processes are not lame [18].

From the point of communication, domination of power generates communication manipulation and distortion that comes from leaders to subordinates. It is believed that “manipulation is about deception” [19]. Deceptive messages are defined as “deviation from what can be considered rational and cooperative communication” [20]. Then, it states that, based on the Information Manipulation Theory (IMT), “deceptive messages as deformation of an ‘honest’ expression of information” emerge different characteristics. First, fabrication is a fabricated message or false or deceitful information. Second, concealment is a message that expresses lies by storing hidden facts and truths. Third, distortion is to interpret facts or truths based on their interests. Fourth, equivocation is to do evasion when a statement is compared with other facts and views.

Deceptive communication occurs because of: (1) the need to be affiliated with one group or for the sake of self-esteem; (2) the need to increase personal needs; (3) the need to defend themselves both socially and economically in unfavorable situations; (4) the need to increase personal power. Deceptive communication can also occur because people want to save their own pride, reduce communication tension, and improve social relations [21].

A concept of systematically distorted communication states that distorted communication is that “One of the participants is deceiving himself or herself regarding the fact that he or she is actually behaving strategically” [22]. If manipulation is related to fraud against other parties, the distorted communication is systematically a fraud against oneself, which is forerunner of Habermas’ critical theory, which showed German political communication practices when Hitler came to power. To study this communication distortion, which borrows Freud’s psychoanalytic analysis concerning id, ego, and superego, the communication distortion that occurs at the level of language, behavior, and nonverbal communication, were analyzed.

The concept of Habermas’ communication distortion was then developed by Mueller in the context of political communication [23]. Mueller defines distorted communication as “All forms of restricted and prejudiced communication that by their nature inhibit a full discussion of problems, issues, and ideas that have public relevance”. Distorted communications have been classified into three categories; First, directed communication is the type of communication carried out by the Nazi regime and the communist government, which openly controls vocabulary and language semantics to be able to instill its political ideology towards the citizen’s soul. Second, arrested communication is to do communication restrictions. Third, constrained communication is communication activities monopolized by a regime [24].

If the linear model takes a unit of individual analysis, the relational model is more social and the critical model takes a unit of structural analysis, namely the imbalance of power in organizations and social life. The focus of critical model studies is not on leaders or leaders and followers, but on unequal communication systems. The theoretical foundation of critical models in leadership communication generates dialectic leadership, which rested on Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuring and feminism theory. This research method for

critical models can be conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. Meanwhile, the research orientation is more aimed at empowering subordinates to superiors.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the aforementioned three models there might be one that can be utilized as a guidance. In social science, considering that since social reality is complex, there is no better model. The problem lies on which focus and approach will be chosen. Other concern that must be considered are the conditions of the research site.

If the symptoms shown in a large sample with many variables, the best model to be employed is the transmission model. However, if the consideration is to study small numbers of data in depth, then the approach employed is the relational model. Conversely, if the practice of leadership communication within the organization shows injustice and domination, the model to be employed is the manipulation model.

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