



Organizational Communication on Islamic Organizations in Overcoming Conflict in North Sumatra

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Abstract. This research seeks to explore organizational communication within Islamic organizations in mitigating conflict in North Sumatra. It examines the coordination mechanisms of Islamic mass organization in conflict resolution, the information sharing processes, and the communication forms among Islamic organizations in the regions. Data were collected through interviews, document analysis, observations, and focus group discussions, utilizing a modified version of James Spradley's methodology. The analysis process involves collecting, re-reading, constructing, organizing, and forming logical relationships from the data. The findings reveal that the three Islamic organizations – Muhammadiyah, NU, and Al Washliyah – coordinate horizontally, vertically, and diagonally to address conflicts in North Sumatra. Al Washliyah demonstrates a more structured approach, explicitly mentioning “Coordination Meetings” in its Articles of Association, unlike Muhammadiyah and NU. The study highlights the use of correspondence and various media platforms – print, electronic, and social media (especially Facebook and WhatsApp) – to promote information sharing and manage both internal and external communications for conflict resolution. While Muhammadiyah and NU have dedicated units for conflict resolution, Al Washliyah does not. Internal conflicts are resolved hierarchically, while external conflicts between Islamic organizations and the broader community are addressed through joint activities and a collective commitment to religious, social, economic and political fields. Despite fluctuations, these efforts underscore the dynamic nature of conflict resolution within these organizations.

Keywords: Organization Communications, Islamic Religious Institution, Conflict, North Sumatra.

1 Introduction

In Indonesia, although socio-religious organizations continue to develop, some of them have become established, for example Muhammadiyah, NU, and Al Washliyah. These three organizations are among those that are already established, with the exception that Al Washliyah is especially more established in North Sumatra as its birthplace [1]. In fact, several organizations that previously experienced rapid progress have now experienced setbacks, for example Al Ittihadiyah, Islamic Association (Persis), and the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council (DDII). Meanwhile, the Indonesian Muslim Syuro Council (Masyumi), for example, has long disappeared from the political and social scene in Indonesia, even though it used to be an advanced organization and respected by all parties.

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On the one hand, the emergence of various religious-based social organizations in Indonesia is a blessing for Muslims, because they can contribute to society in various segments of life, such as religion, education, health, and so on. However, on the other hand, it is also covertly - sometimes even openly--dividing Muslims themselves.

Another thing that needs attention is the existence of egocentrism among organizational administrators. When there is an issue that should require a common understanding of the issue, but apparently it is not communicated to each other. There is no intensive communication between one organization and another. The problem then is, what is the role of religious organizations as gatekeepers providing information to Muslims? Of course the answer is not as simple as imagined. A joint commitment is needed between organizational administrators so that there is communication between institutions that are in the name of religion and Muslims. For this reason, communication between organizations is needed.

So far no one can deny the importance of communication in organizations. In fact, many studies have concluded that organizational communication is part of efforts to minimize conflict within organizations, especially those caused by miscommunication. Or the conducive organizational climate is influenced by the effectiveness of organizational communication. Job satisfaction is also caused by harmonious communication within the organization. And so on, various research conclusions show the importance of organizational communication. In fact, it turns out that these conclusions did not emerge recently, are not a contemporary issue, but have been around for a long time.

Regarding this, as R. Wayne Pace & Don F. Faules [2] point out: "Traditional literature on this field emphasizes that communication and organizational success are related. Improving organizational communication means improving the organization." Suhaediman Yuwono even noted that there are at least three things that have a positive impact if organizational communication runs effectively [3], namely:

1. Skills arise in carrying out work because the information needed to carry out work becomes available and the things expected from a responsibility become clear. The work proficiency effect is also obtained because communication is an input that encourages creative thinking.
2. The emergence of encouragement for work morale (performance) through communication means that curiosity which if not channeled can reduce work morale cannot be fulfilled. With communication, the needs of personnel can be met in carrying out their duties, it can also be understood why they work and their enthusiasm can then be encouraged.
3. Communication is the main tool for personnel to work together. Communication helps unite an organization by enabling personnel to influence and imitate one another.

The importance of organizational communication of course does not only apply internally, but also externally. External communication, which is understood as a

form of communication that takes place between an organization and society outside the organization, aims to establish harmonious relationships with society outside the organization, customers and the government. Usually this work is carried out by the public relations or public relations division (human/public relations officer) in one organization. In fact, the importance of communication is not only in relation to building organizations, but also building the lives of individuals, families and society in general.

2 Research Methods

This paper adopts a qualitative method to obtain in-depth descriptive data [4]. Data collection techniques included purposeful interviews with key individuals appointed by the Head of the Local Leader (*Pengurus Wilayah*) of the Islamic Organization in North Sumatera. Non-participatory observation was utilized to collect data from both inside and outside office activities. Document analysis was conducted to explore the history, vision, mission, organizational structure, and main work programs of the three Islamic organizations studied. Data analysis followed an adapted version of James Spradley's approach [5], beginning with data recording and proceeding through steps of collecting, rereading, constructing, organizing, and ultimately identifying logical relationships (Miles et al., 2021). This comprehensive process ensures a robust understanding of the organizations' dynamics and communication. In order to assure data validity, this paper utilized triangulation techniques, which involve comparing and cross-checking data gathered from interviews, observations and documents. This method enabled the researcher to verify multiple sources of information, thereby enhancing the reliability of the analysis outcomes (Flick, 2020).

3 Result and Discussion

The research results show that each organization has its own conflicts, both internally and externally, especially with its constituents or cadres. Conflicts also often occur between administrators, both daily administrators and daily administrators and the administrators of institutions or autonomous organizations (*ortom*) below them, especially in mass organizations that have autonomous institutions or organizations. Conflict handling also differs from one organization to another. The problem is almost the same for every organization studied, that conflict is not anticipated from the start, therefore handling is more sporadic, where there is a problem/conflict then a way to resolve it is sought.

Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah (Al Washliyah) are among several mature religious organizations in Indonesia [6]. Their internal communication structure has been established, evidenced by their periodic appointment of leaders at all levels, and the working meeting (*rapat kerja*) among these leaders upon election to determine future programs. These working meetings are usually followed up by further meetings, task assignments, and leader coordination, most of which are formally communicated through specific letters. Informal

communication usually occurs to resolve emerging matters related to the organizations or its members. As such, communication in these organizations has occurred through formal and informal rules. The existence of organizational structure and communicative relationship as well as their interdependence is in accordance with the system theory, which examines on a system's parts management, relationship, and interaction.

Organizational understanding is always related to the issue of relationship, structure, and interdependency instead of a constant attribute of things [7]. An organization is like a living being responding to its external environment for survival. It cannot be isolated, and as such its members must interact with other organizations in its environment to survive. Without this interaction, the organizations become closed (exclusive), diminished, and slowly extinct. As such, it may be appropriate that these organizations adopt the principle of *equifinality*, which means that they can achieve similar goals from a variety of ways. The problem is, the previously mentioned organizations - Muhammadiyah, NU, and Al Washliyah – seems to have internal and external communication problem all over Indonesia, including in North Sumatra. It must be noted that this communication problem is serious, as the aforementioned Islamic-mass organizations habitat is naturally *in* society, as opposed to *on* it. When they fail to communicate effectively to society in which they are a part of and of which compose their members, they may find the same society to no longer be interested in them and thus become obsolete.

Organization Information Theory based on the assumption that humans essentially organize to reduce information equivocality, that is to reduce ambiguity in information processing [8]. This can best be done if the created organizations cooperate with each other internally and externally such that information produced by or related to the organization can be understood as well as possible. As such, the aforementioned Islamic organizations should make use of any available opportunities to communicate internally and externally to ensure information being given or received as best as it should. In the case of Muhammadiyah with its *Majelis Tarjih* or NU with its *Bahsul Masa'il*, communication opportunities have only been optimally used internally, not externally. Even the public relation branches of these organizations, which are supposed to communicate externally, in reality only do so to communicate to their members/ cadres/sympathizers.

In these organizations, there are no section/body/institute which manage communication with other Islamic organizations, especially from and between them. This is despite the fact that they have understood their interpretations on Islam to be different, especially in the area of *furu'iyah*. The lack of communication also hampers the implementation of the universal Islamic mission of these organizations, with each attempting to prove "Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*" separately [9]. Due to their huge size, it is almost certain that if each of these organizations focus on certain action, instead of overlapping with each other, most of the problems besetting Indonesian Muslims can be alleviated. For example, at the North Sumatra level, Muhammadiyah can have a special focus on health, NU on economic empowerment, and Al Washliyah on legal issues.

Based on the above elaboration, it is recommended that Muhammadiyah, NU, and Al Washliyah have their own special department/coordinator/section/unit which manage external communication properly, such that they can achieve their vision and mission, as well as execute their actions successfully. This communication should be conducted not only with their members/cadres/sympathizers, but also with the general public, especially the Muslim community (*umat*). There is also a need to form inter-organizational communication forum such that each organization can jointly be responsible to benefit the Muslim community (*umat*) [10]. Organizational exclusivism should be avoided, as all Islamic mass-organization should be open to the Muslim community as a whole.

4 Conclusion

In principle, Muhammadiyah, NU and Al Washliyah, have their own patrons in handling internal conflicts. All of them refer to the respective Articles of Association and Bylaws (AD/ART). If it is not technically found in the respective AD/ART, it is usually explained in other Organizational Instructions/Guidelines. In general, efforts to resolve conflicts within the Muhammadiyah of North Sumatra are oriented towards the Decree of the Muhammadiyah Central Leadership Disaster Management Institution Number: 006/Kep/I.17/B/2012 Concerning: Guidelines for the Structure, Organization and Work Mechanisms of the Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Institution (Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center), while specifically handling internal conflicts in Muhammadiyah is carried out hierarchically within the organization's management.

A conflict is seen in the sector where the conflict occurs, then the person who has the right to resolve the conflict that occurs is the Muhammadiyah leadership in that sector. If a conflict occurs at the branch level, then the branch leader is the first to resolve it, if there is a deadlock then the leader above him resolves it, in hierarchical order upwards. There are exceptions to handling conflicts at Muhammadiyah universities, so the one who resolves them is the PP Muhammadiyah Diktilitbang Council.

There are efforts to resolve conflicts externally by carrying out joint activities and no longer conflicting with the different religious understandings between Muhammadiyah, NU and Al Washliyah. For NU itself, even though its initial birth was as a result of the conflict between Muhammadiyah and NU, during the New Order era an understanding was established to no longer bring up existing differences. This is also the case for Al Washliyah, that conflicting religious understandings are no longer an issue, instead what they want to highlight are the similarities that each organization has.

Based on this, it is necessary to optimize the public relations function in each institution to detect as quickly as possible conflicts that may occur. There is also a need for a communication forum that bridges external relations between Islamic mass organizations in North Sumatra.

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