THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL, MANAGER, AND EXECUTIVE IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: CASE OF INDONESIA CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BANDUNG

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify factors that influence level of employee engagement in a consultant company named Indonesia Center for Sustainable Development Bandung. Researcher collected the data using ethnography method with two main tools that are in-depth interview and participant observation. The Domain Analysis by Spradley (1979) is used as the data analysis method to interpret the influential factors of employee engagement based on BlessingWhite (2011) theory. The researcher concluded that the most influential factor of employee engagement is manager that have specific tool to increase the engagement level by using "constructive bullying" approach. In addition, "client-server" relationship is the significant factor to improve employee engagement level. This research only focused on strategies of ICSDB in building employee engagement and did not discuss the measurement of employee engagement level. It also evaluated the existing theory of employee engagement that can be useful to enrich the understanding contextually. Based on several researches on employee engagement has been done, there is still few research done in a consultant company. Therefore, this study seeks to use a newly established consultant company as the research object that is still rarely done by other researchers.

Keywords: Consultant, Employee Engagement, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Background

The world today is faced with the advancement of science and technology that lead to the weakening of the boundaries between countries. Globalization in the modern era cannot be denied has entered into all aspects of human life ranging from education, economy, politics, and religion. The economy is one area that is affected by globalization with highly significant. Globalization is forcing companies to create a global strategy to gain competitive advantages in order to win the global competition (Iancu, 2014). To meet this challenge, the company should be able to optimize all of its resources including human resources, physical resources, and organizational resources (Senge, 1996). Human resource is the most valuable asset that all members of the company should be well integrated to work together to achieve corporate goals (Armstrong & Murlis, 2004). One part of the human resource that is very important is employee engagement because it is very influential on employee satisfaction and employee performance in the company (Karatepe, 2011).

ICSDB (Indonesia Center for Sustainable Development Bandung) is a newly established consulting company that runs sustainable programs such as community development, corporate social responsibility, etc. that become a bridge for governments,

companies, and communities to achieve common prosperity. Generally ICSDB has two core activities, namely training and research. In training activities, ICSDB provides seminars and training to companies or parties who need information about community development, corporate social responsibility, conflict management, etc. ICSDB also conducts research that requires them to go to the field to gather the information needed from particular community that ultimately ICSDB will provide recommendations of sustainable development program based on the results of the research to the client that they are working together. In some cases, the ICSDB also makes the process of implementation of the proposed program to the client and evaluates the programs that have been implemented also provides reports of the implementation of the program to the client.

Research Objectives

Based on the problem statements that are already explained above, this research tries to achieve some objectives as described below:

1. To know and understand what efforts or strategies have been made by the Indonesia Center for Sustainable Development Bandung in building employee engagement.
2. To identify the factors those affect the level of employee engagement in the Indonesia Center for Sustainable Development Bandung.

Research Limitation

This research only discussed and identified the strategies that have been taken by the ICSDB in building employee engagement within the organization. This research did not discuss the measurement of the level of employee engagement in the ICSDB. In addition, the research object of the study also becomes the limitation. The research was only performed in ICSD Bandung and was not conducted in ICSD Jakarta that already well established.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a deep sense of belonging to a job or organizations, by which they are motivated and able to devote their best abilities to help organizations to achieve success through a variety of tangible benefits for organization and individuals inside the organization (MacLeod, David, & Clarke, 2009). Engagement in this case is not only limited in term of the job or the organization, but it is also about the emotional bonding and even more to all aspect in the organization including other employees, clients, partners, suppliers and all stakeholders of the company. In general employee engagement within the company can be seen from the commitment of employees to achieve organizational goals and implement the company's values in daily life in the organization. In the end, employees who have an engagement to these organizations are able to create prosperity for the organization, which in turn will positively affect the well-being of employee itself (MacLeod, 2009).

Influential Factors of Employee Engagement Level

BlessingWhite classified the factors that can influence the level of engagement in a company in their report on 2011. These factors come from the aspect of individuals, managers, and executives. These three aspects are the roles within the company that play a direct role in creating employee engagement within the company. Therefore, these roles become a determinant factor in the development of employee engagement in a company.

Individuals (ownership, clarity, and action)

Based on the results of research conducted by BlessingWhite (2011), there are three roles that make individual significantly influence the level of engagement, namely *ownership*, *clarity*, and *action* (BlessingWhite, 2011). The employees of the company should already have a sense of ownership to the organization. The ownership certainly will greatly influence the level of employee engagement. The sense of ownership to the company is an early stage of engagement which in turn it will become an engagement to the company. An employee cannot be engaged with the company if he does not have a sense of belonging. Ownership became a determining factor in employee engagement because of the assumption that employees come to the organization with unique motivators, interests, and talents (BlessingWhite, 2011).

An employee must be able to determine and identify anything they want achieve in the organization. They should really understand his desires, what he wants to achieve, and what the final goals he wants in the organization. In addition, an employee must also know which direction the organization is going to be taken. Those aspects named as *clarity*. After an employee clarifies all aspects above, he must be able to perform an action to achieve both ownership and clarity. They should have the initiative to develop their skills, achieve their core values, and identify how to use their abilities in achieving organizational goals (BlessingWhite, 2011).

Manager (coaching, relationships, and dialogue process)

The first factor that make managers can influence the level of engagement in a company is because they have coaching function. Coaching can improves employee engagement level because in the process of coaching a manager helps employees to achieve their organizational as well as personal goals and ultimately improve the quality of the engagement of the company (BlessingWhite, 2011). The understanding of each team member's unique interests, talents, and aspirations is the driver to build employee engagement based on coaching role (BlessingWhite, 2011). In the end, the managers keep the conversation going by offering feedback, course improvement, and progress opportunities to ensure high achievement. All of those will form the engagement especially for the employees as well as the managers. The ability of managers to build relationship also greatly affects the level of employee engagement. The more employees feel they know their managers as people, the more engaged they're likely to be (BlessingWhite, 2011). In some regions, the relationship between employees and managers has greater impact on

engagement than coaching ability of managers. Managers have to remove the veil of their position or title and become known to employees. This may not mean they become good friends, but this means that a manager must perform its role to share personal motivation for work, challenges, strengths and weaknesses, and the reason they came to the organization and why they choose to stay.

Executive (trust, communication, and culture)

The most important factor for an executive in building employee engagement is *trust*. Although in the previous factors of managers have been described that there is a tendency of employees to more trust more their managers than to the executives, in fact the trust in executives can have greater impact than the trust given by an immediate manager (BlessingWhite, 2011). The ability of executives in directing the employees is also fundamental factor in building employee engagement. This is because a clear direction given by the executives will align the employees' interests with the company's goal to strengthen the engagement of the employees. The engagement will not happen if the definition of success and the company's direction is not defined clearly. Therefore, the engagement will be improved if the executives could be able to give a clear communication strategy to build confidence in the workforce within the company (BlessingWhite, 2011). The next influential factor of employee engagement is the culture of the organization. The executives could improve the employee engagement by shaping the culture of the organization because it has impact on the level of engagement within their company. In their research, BlessingWhite (2011) likens the corporate culture as the waves. If the wave rises, all the boats will rise too. The corporate culture is formed from the words and actions undertaken by all leaders in the company collectively.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

This research uses ethnographic research method to describe the factors that influence employee engagement in Indonesia Center for Sustainable Development Bandung (ICSDB). Ethnography is the study of a culture or cultures that a group of people share (Van Maanen, 1995). Ethnography is not only used for investigate ethnic communities but also can be used for investigate organization as well as specific events. In the ethnographic method, there are two major tools to obtain data which are participant observation and in-depth interview (Schutt, 2014). The informant is a major source in the primary data collection in this study. Given that the ICSDB team members number only seven people so all members of the team are the key informants in this study.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis method used in this research is Domain Analysis which is a qualitative analysis method based on the theory developed by Spradley (1979, in Leech and

Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The researcher decided to use the domain analysis method because it is the most commonly method used in the data analysis of qualitative and ethnographic research. Domain analysis is useful to identify the larger units of cultural knowledge that is called domain (Spradley, 1979). This method was developed from the belief that the symbol is an important aspect in communicating cultural meaning. Spradley (1979) stated in his book, these symbols have three elements: the symbol itself called the *cover term*, one or more referents called *included term* or collected data, and the relationship between symbol and referent called *semantic relationship*. The following figure shows the illustration of domain analysis method in this research:

Table 3.2 Domain Analysis Components

DOMAIN	COVER TERM	VARIABLE
Influential factor of employee engagement in ICSDB	Individual	Ownership
		Clarity
		Action
	Managers	Coaching
		Relationship
		Dialogue Process
	Executives	Trust
		Communication
		Culture

RESULTS

Individual Role
Ownership
Almost all members of ICSDB are people who love freedom and do not like to be bound to the rules, organization, or a system that requires them to comply with existing systems. It can be seen from the observation and direct information from several parties such as managers and executive. For example, in ICSDB they do not have SOPs that regulates them about what time they should come to the office. At first glance it appears that they do not have ownership to the ICSDB because they can freely come to the office whenever they want. However, if we do a deeper observation it would appear that they are people who are engaged to the ICSDB. An ICSDB executive stated, *"Mereka adalah orang lepasan, tetapi mereka mau mengikatkan diri di dalam ICSDB."* The form of ownership is showed by ICSDB members in their actions when they are binding themselves to this organization. They understand that out there they will not find a company that could understands their character like ICSDB. The action of ICSDB members in binding themselves to the organization is a form of engagement that they have for this organization. They realized that ICSDB is able to be a place for their hobbies and passions not only for their job. One proof of the

engagement through the ownership occurred when they are offered with a new job in a larger company by the executive of ICSDB. However, all refused to take this opportunity and still choose to stay in ICSDB with the main reason that they have committed themselves and create engagement in this organization.

Clarity

Just like a loving relationship, an engagement would not be happened if there is no understanding each other. Each individual understand that their position in ICSDB is to provide benefits to the society not to make money. They are aware that this organization is not profit oriented so that they will not to get regular salary from it. Clarity is indirectly become a filter for people who want to work in ICSDB. If they do not agree to work in non-profit oriented organization, then they will try to find another job. Therefore, it can be said that the employee who still stay in ICSDB are those who already have an engagement and accept the value to be achieved by ICSDB. Based on the results of research finding, clarity in ICSDB is also a key factor in creating engagement at the individual level. This is due to the final stage of individual engagement is do an action. Without having clarity in understanding the company's goals and personal desires, an employee in ICSDB will not have a clear direction to perform actions within the company. The members of ICSDB have realized that their organization value is "*to create social prosperity and not to make money.*" Therefore, in the next step they are able to perform an action to meet these objectives by having a second job outside the organization, which could give them more income.

Action

Based on the previous explanation about clarity factor, all team members in ICSDB clearly understand that their role in the organization is not to make money or profit oriented, but to contribute to the community. It has become value and goal to be achieved by ICSDB. Therefore, all team members in ICSDB have taken action to achieve these goals. Currently, all members ICSDB already have a second job outside the organization to earn income to support their family needs. They do this action because they have clarity on the organization's goals and values. They do not want to make ICSDB as a place to gain their main income because it can eliminate the company's values and goals. ICSDB is an organization that does not have SOP (standard operating procedure), but they had seriousness and a high level of morale in doing their job. This was proven from the way they work as a consultant. Unlike the other consultants who work under the contract, ICSDB work based on the needs of society, not based on the contract with the client. In general, a consultant working on the project for the time specified in the contract. After time in the contract agreement is up then the project will be ended and there is no follow up anymore. This is very different with the ICSDB. They run the program which is not limited by contractual agreement, but according to the needs of society. If in the project contract only lasts for one month, while people still need the guidance then ICSDB would continue their work programs until the community can run the program by themselves. This also happens

when people can run the development program less than one month, the program will also be completed for less than 1 month even the agreement in the contract is lasting for 1 month. They do this action because they understand clearly that their organization is non-profit oriented.

The next indicator that ICSDB members have good action to achieve their goals in their job can be seen from their enthusiasm .When they do the work, they are often carried away and drowned in the work even forget about the time. This is because they do their work with happiness. One proof of this aspect is the existence of several programs that take longer than the time which is already agreed in the contract. They still continue the program even the contract is up. One of the easiest things to be identified is that they still maintain communication with people they have known when they were doing work in various rural areas. Sometimes, they also often get a telephone call from people they meet during their projects in various regions in Indonesia. This proves that they were never really loss contact from their job, even they already finished it for long time before.

Manager Role
Coaching

The goal of manager's role of coaching in ICSDB is to help employee achieve organizational goals and their personal desires. This is because engagement cannot be achieved if the employee cannot achieve organization's goals and their personal desires. One case for the example is when there was a member who was still finishing his master education. The manager realized that he has a personal desire that must be achieved which he has to finish his master. Therefore, one form of coaching that was done is to give time for him to focus on his thesis and do not involve him intensively in the project because it can disturb his personal achievement. The second case is about company financial lending policies. Manager and executive are aware that every employee in ICSDB cannot depend on project-based salary given by ICSDB. While on the other hand, the employee must also support their family needs. Therefore, the executive encourages the employees to make a side business to earn additional income. In the end, they made the company's policy to provide capital loans for the employees who want to open a business. This step was taken to bring together the point of employee engagement which is the company goals and the employee's personal desires.

Relationship

Manager is the most influential actor in ICSDB because they have role as a bridge between the executive and team members as individuals. The researcher saw a very dominant person in the organization that is very influential in building engagement, namely Preto who have position as Program Director. He is a dominant person who can build a pleasant work atmosphere. As a manager, he has the responsibility to maintain and improve the engagement among each team member. Therefore, he and several team members of ICSDB run a tool to create the emotional relationship between the team members through *constructive bullying*.

It is a form of communication that is most often found in ICSDB. Constructive bullying has a function to create a strong mentality because their job is to deal with people who they have never met and knew before in the society. They said, "Knowledge can be learned, but the mentality is hard to be obtained." In this way they can get a team member who has a strong mentality and is able to face variety of threats. Sometimes it also results a negative effect in the team because not all team members can accept this system. This is the important role of a manager to recognize each member so that he is able to measure the level of bullying.

Based on the observations that have been done, it can be seen that the social network in ICSDB refers to one person, namely Preto the program director. It is proven from the pattern of their social interaction that makes the researcher able to conclude that Preto is the most dominant actor in this organization. Preto ever conducted a little experiment with self-silencing attitude and did not say anything for a day to see the response of the other team members. As a result, all members of the team on that day followed to be silent and the atmosphere becomes cooler than usual. This is proof that the role of manager is crucial in building interpersonal relationships in ICSDB. The next finding about the relationship that can influence the level of employee engagement in ICSDB is the existence of "*client-server relationship.*" The researcher saw a very close interpersonal relationship between ICSDB and their developed society. In fact, sometimes some representatives of the community came to ICSDB office to visit the team. The researcher has attended the election of the chairman of the Koperasi Nurkayana which is one result of the development programs by ICSDB in Pangalengan. At the end of the session on that day, the new chairman replaced the old chief named Sino. At that moment, the researcher saw the whole thing in the room from one side of the room. At that moment the researcher saw Sino shed tears and hug Preto as a program director at ICSDB. I saw that it was a very positive sign that shows ICSDB closeness with the community. They have given a very high dedication to Pangalengan region so as to create an emotional connection that is very close to the people.

Dialogue Process

Based on the results of participant observation and in-depth interview, the most dominant role of dialogue process in ICSDB is to keep the level of engagement that has been built. A manager in ICSDB should conduct dialogue process when there is indication of an employee that began to lose their engagement. The case example is when there was an employee who began to leave many responsibilities given to him. All ICSDB members and executive consider the performance of the employee is already very bad. At that moment the manager's role in ICSDB is to conduct dialogue process towards that unengaged employee. Based on research, there are two types of approaches used in conducting dialogue process in ICSDB they are group approach and personal approach. One of communication culture built on ICSDB is a group discussion including the discussion about the decreasing of employee performance. The purpose of this approach is to encourage the unengaged employee to improve himself. However, this strategy did not work and the manager must also use a

personal approach. Overall, a formal dialogue process in ICSDB was done to maintain engagement or solve problems related to engagement.

Executive Role

Trust

One example of *trust* factor in ICSDB is autonomy. ICSDB manager is given an authority by executives to manage their organizations independently and must not follow the ICSD Jakarta. The entire operational activities in ICSDB are regulated by the manager and the individuals within it and are not affected by the policy of ICSD Jakarta. This is because the ICSD executives had given the sense of confidence to the ICSD Bandung members. The ICSDB members are allowed to use the various facilities provided by companies such as cars, motorcycles, computers, etc. In fact, they were allowed to stay in office. Currently there are 3 ICSDB members who lived in the office building. Mutual trust is an aspect that is highly valued in ICSDB. This is because one of the company's cultures to be built in ICSDB is honesty. Honesty is able to create trust among executives, managers, and individuals in ICSDB.

Communication

One of the most important communication role of the founders of ICSDB is transfer the knowledge and values that must be kept by each member of the team. The values given by the founders are deeply embedded in the hearts of each individual. The founders of ICSDB regarded as being highly meritorious and highly respected by every individual. This is most noticeable when we compare the team atmosphere when there is no executive and when there is one in the forum. If in a forum there is no executive, the atmosphere will be very free and crowded, but if the founder is coming then the atmosphere will be calm and when the founder spoke then all members will be instantly silent and listen carefully. This is where the researcher sees a big tribute to the founder or executive in ICSDB. In the end, the communications conducted by the executive ICSDB was instrumental in keeping the engagement level within the organization remained high through the company's vision and values that strongly and consistently transferred to the employees.

Culture

ICSDB has a principle that "work should not disrupt their games". This principal becomes one of the ICSDB culture. They consider that the workplace is a playground[1] for their hobbies. However, with all the freedom, they still hold the principle that "Our work is playing, but we are not playing around." Although they assume that the work is game, but they are never playing around with their work. ICSDB always find a game that is fun to do in the middle of their work. This game according to researcher point of view is their way to relieve boredom and reduce the sense of missed to the families they left at home. Sometimes

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[1]*Playground* is also the name of the chat room for the ICSDB team members.

the games serve as one of the tools for doing ethnography research. They often invite local people to play bridge with them. One of the strength of ICSDB team is they can always find a way, or a game that could make them enthusiastic to do a job.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Finally, the researcher concluded that there are several factors that influence the employee engagement level in ICSDB based the theory of employee engagement by BlessingWhite (2011) that are factors that come from individuals, managers, and executives. All of these factors can be found in ICSDB. However, there is one that become the most dominant factor that determine the level of employee engagement in ICSDB namely *manager*. Manager in ICSDB can be interpreted as a program director that is responsible to manage all team members in ICSDB. From this dominant factor, there is derivative result namely strategic efforts that directly influence the level of engagement in ICSDB. This strategy was used as the major tool to create employee engagement in ICSDB namely *constructive bullying*. Constructive bullying is a very effective communication way to build employee engagement especially in organizations that have a high level of flexibility such as ICSDB. For the ICSDB, bullying is a form of recognition given by co-workers. This is because constructive bullying can only be conducted on people who already familiar with them and have relatively close interpersonal relationship. If an employee in ICSDB isn't bullied, then he will feel to be ignored and isn't considered as part of the team. This is also felt by the researcher, I really feel very strong emotional engagement when ICSDB manager bullied me that in the end made me feel as part of the team. This is the role of constructive bullying in building engagement that originated from a form of recognition that considers us as part of the team. The manager said, "If you cannot accept for be bullied, then you're not ready yet to be part of the team."

The next dominant factor in driving engagement is a "client-server" relationship. ICSDB all members agreed that one of the factors that make them still stay in ICSDB is because they already have an emotional engagement with their developed community. This is supported by a study stating that the employee who interacts directly with a client or customer will have a higher level of engagement (BlessingWhite, 2011). This theory has been proven by the research finding in this study. The researcher saw that the client-server relationship is one of the main reason why they still stay at their current job until now. This is of course in line with the concept of ethnographic research methods that seek to immerse ourselves in the community that builds the highest achievement is the creation of emotional engagement between ICSDB members as researchers and the society.

ICSDB is expected to strengthen the individual factor in building employee engagement within this organization. The individual is expected to develop themselves, especially to improve self-confidence and be more proactive in carrying out their work as a professional organization. So far individuals in ICSDB had been given freedom to be creative in accordance with their interests and abilities. This could be a weakness and the strength of ICSDB as well. The negative impact of this system is a variation in the work

standard. This will probably make their work results difficult to be compared between individuals within ICSDB because their work based on each interests and characteristics. However, it could be strength for ICSDB if they can develop this system more academically or scientifically so the work process can be more structured by presenting the research results from various viewpoints of the individuals in ICSDB.

The researcher also still has not saw the *ownership* variable in individual factor. It is undoubted that interpersonal relationships and engagement of ICSDB members is very strong among them. However, a strong relationship does not ensure they have a strong engagement towards ICSDB itself as an organization. This can be explained by the history of the ICSDB. ICSD Bandung was established after the existence of a group of some people who concerned in community development activities. This of course affects the engagement pattern in ICSDB that lead to a kind of engagement that only occurs among the members rather than to the organization itself. This kind of engagement of course has its advantage and disadvantage. The advantage is the emotional bonding that already created will be stronger because it is not limited by the status of the organization. In other words, they will sustain to have a strong engagement even though they were in the social interaction outside ICSDB such as family, education, etc. On the other hand, this kind of engagement will lead to dependency interaction. It is because of this engagement only focuses on human interaction in the organization and doesn't happen for the organization itself. In the end, when the interaction patterns leads to separate itself from the interaction of the organization then ICSDB will be abandoned by its members. Therefore, they need a balance between engagement that comes from the interaction between people in ICSDB and the interaction between humans and ICSDB itself.

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