

Employees' Responses to Corporate Culture Reinforcement Communication by BRI Culture Agents: A Case Study at BRI Purwokerto Branch

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ABSTRACT: This study examines employees' responses to corporate culture reinforcement communication conducted by Culture Agents at the Purwokerto Branch of Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI). As part of BRI's effort to internalize its core values, AKHLAK (Amanah, Competence, Harmony, Loyalty, Adaptability, and Collaboration), Culture Agents play a strategic role in facilitating communication and embedding cultural values across organizational levels. Employing a descriptive case study approach, data were collected through direct interviews and triangulation to provide a comprehensive understanding of employees' perceptions and experiences regarding cultural communication. The findings reveal three dominant perspectives on corporate culture: as operational routines, as normative values guiding behaviors, and as strategic instruments supporting organizational vision. Employees demonstrated varying levels of comprehension of the AKHLAK values, ranging from comprehensive and contextual to general awareness. Role modeling emerged as the most effective communication method, supported by structured programs such as the Culture Activation Program (CAP) and multimodal channels combining formal and informal interactions. Positive outcomes included increased awareness, improved discipline, and gradual behavioral alignment with corporate values, indicating successful though incremental cultural internalization. However, the study also identified structural and psychosocial barriers, including workload constraints faced by Culture Agents, limited interaction frequency, diverse employee backgrounds, and information gaps. Recommendations from employees emphasized intensifying interactions, strengthening cascade communication across units, fostering two-way and participatory dialogue, and integrating cultural reinforcement with training and reward systems. Overall, this study highlights both achievements and challenges in organizational culture reinforcement at BRI Purwokerto Branch, underscoring the importance of systematic, consistent, and adaptive communication strategies in sustaining cultural transformation.

KEYWORDS: Corporate culture, internal communication, AKHLAK values, Culture Agent, BRI

I. INTRODUCTION

Corporate culture is one of the fundamental elements that shapes organizational identity, guides individual behavior within it, and influences overall productivity levels. In the context of PT Bank Rakyat Indonesia (Persero) Tbk, recognized as one of the largest state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Indonesia, the implementation of a work culture has become a crucial focus through the development of core values encapsulated in the acronym AKHLAK (Trustworthiness, Competence, Harmony, Loyalty, Adaptability, and Collaboration). These values are designed to serve both as behavioral guidelines and ethical work standards, which are expected to be consistently internalized across all levels of employees. To support the internalization process, the company assigns Agents of Culture (commonly referred to as culture agents) as strategic actors responsible for delivering, communicating, and reinforcing cultural values in the workplace.

At the operational level, particularly at the BRI Purwokerto Branch, the role of culture agents is a crucial instrument in fostering effective internal communication regarding corporate culture. These agents function not only through formal channels—such as socialization activities, training, and official meetings—but also through informal communication that takes place in daily interactions among employees. Research by Kanapathipillai et al. (2023) demonstrated that communication and organizational culture significantly influence bank employees' performance, with communication being the dominant factor, thereby justifying the focus on cultural reinforcement communication. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this communication process is ultimately determined by the extent to which employees are able to respond to cultural messages. Employee responses—whether in the form of acceptance, rejection, or reinterpretation—become critical indicators of the success or failure of organizational culture reinforcement. In other words, the presence of culture agents does not automatically guarantee the full internalization of AKHLAK values, as successful implementation largely depends on the dynamics of internal communication and employees' readiness to adapt to the embedded cultural values.

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A study by Soeder et al. (2025) further showed that psychosocial demands related to work organization are perceived as highly stressful, particularly for company staff. Based on the researcher's preliminary observation of 361 non-frontline employees at BRI Purwokerto on December 2, 2024, findings revealed a discrepancy between employees' knowledge and their understanding of the corporate work culture. Quantitatively, 95.56% of respondents reported awareness of the organization's declared work culture. Corporate communication was found to correlate significantly with bank performance, supporting the argument that internal communication impacts organizational outcomes (Kitemu et al., 2024). However, the findings also indicated that such awareness is not necessarily accompanied by a deep understanding of the attitudes and behaviors representing these cultural values in daily practice. This phenomenon illustrates a cognitive and affective gap, in which employees are aware of cultural concepts normatively but have not yet succeeded in internalizing them into concrete actions within their work activities.

Within the internal context, particularly regarding cultural reinforcement, a significant gap remains in employees' comprehension and internalization of work culture values such as the BRILian Culture and AKHLAK. The BRILian Culture is positioned as a foundational framework for establishing a productive and harmonious work climate that aligns with the company's strategic vision. In its implementation, the role of Culture Agents is crucial. A Culture Agent is an employee appointed by each work unit and legitimized by a Culture Leader to act as a partner in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the success of corporate culture practices (SK BRI, 2020).

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive case study method aimed at providing a comprehensive, systematic, and detailed account of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs. In this research, the researcher constructed a factual and accurate description of the context and dynamics observed in the field without offering in-depth causal explanations. The primary focus of a descriptive case study is to present a thorough depiction of phenomena within both theoretical and empirical frames, enabling readers to gain a clear understanding of the situation under investigation (Yin, 2018). The central focus of this study is employees' responses at BRI Purwokerto Branch to corporate culture reinforcement communication.

The data collection process involved direct observations through interviews with selected informants. Subsequently, the researcher applied data triangulation by processing the interview transcripts to analyze employees' responses to cultural reinforcement communication at BRI Purwokerto Branch. This approach allowed the researcher to identify how both parties—the culture agents and employees—explained and interpreted the dynamics of the communication process.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that employees at BRI Purwokerto Branch hold diverse yet convergent understandings of the concept of corporate culture. Three main perspectives were identified from the interviews. The first perspective views corporate culture from the standpoint of operational routines, in which culture is understood as habits in conducting business as well as the existing practices within BRI that comply with prevailing regulations to govern daily activities. The second perspective reflects a more comprehensive understanding, particularly among senior employees, who define corporate culture as values, norms, and behaviors that serve as standards or are highly esteemed by both employees and management in performing their daily operational duties. This perspective demonstrates a deeper grasp of the normative dimension of organizational culture, aligning with Permana (2021), who emphasized that organizational culture functions as a determinant of employee commitment in the Indonesian banking industry. The third perspective links corporate culture with the organization's strategic aspects, in which culture is understood as an instrument to foster organizational spirit and vision, thereby highlighting its integrative function in achieving organizational objectives.

With regard to the comprehension of the AKHLAK core values (Amanah, Competence, Harmony, Loyalty, Adaptability, and Collaboration), all informants demonstrated adequate recognition of BRI's main values. Their level of understanding can be categorized into three levels. The first level shows comprehensive understanding, in which informants could explain the concrete application of each value within their work context. For example, a Unit Head described that Amanah is practiced by completing tasks according to deadlines, Competence through continuous skill development, Harmony by fostering a harmonious work environment, Loyalty through compliance with organizational rules, Adaptability by seeking solutions to challenges, and Collaboration by effectively working in teams. This finding resonates with Jun and Park (2022), who demonstrated that internal communication campaigns in the banking sector can enhance employee trust and commitment to organizational change. The second level indicates contextual understanding, where informants perceive AKHLAK values as guiding principles in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. The third level shows a more general awareness without detailed elaboration, yet still reflects recognition of these values.

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The implementation of corporate culture in daily work practices reflects a strong consensus among all informants. Several fundamental reasons underpin this implementation. First, cultural values are considered highly relevant and interrelated in achieving organizational goals, reflecting an understanding of the linkage between culture and organizational performance. Second, cultural practices are perceived as a normative obligation that shapes attitudes and behaviors aligned with organizational objectives, indicating value internalization as a professional duty. Third, corporate culture is viewed as an instrumental function that facilitates work and serves as a guideline for accomplishing organizational goals. Fourth, cultural values are regarded as the behavioral foundation underlying every employee's daily tasks and responsibilities. These findings confirm that cultural values are not only cognitively understood but also internalized into daily work practices. Consistent with Kopmann (2004), internal communication in banking organizations has been proven to act as a value driver that sustains financial institutions.

This research further identifies various strategies employed by culture agents in communicating corporate values. The most dominant approach was role modeling and exemplary conduct. Informants consistently reported that culture agents conveyed cultural messages by embodying values in their own behaviors and responsibilities, which served as observable examples in daily interactions. This approach is seen as the most authentic and persuasive method of transferring values, being more effective than mere verbal instructions. This practice resonates with Leśniak (2018), who emphasized the importance of feedback in the banking context as a motivational tool, where culture agents act not only as role models but also as motivators. Cultural communication was also delivered through organizational rituals such as morning prayers, briefings, and formal branch meetings, which provided structured opportunities for regular reinforcement of cultural messages. Additionally, structured programs such as the Culture Activation Program (CAP) were identified, reflecting the organization's commitment to systematically institutionalize cultural transformation.

Cultural communication was multimodal, combining face-to-face and virtual interactions embedded in everyday work culture. This strategy highlights the adaptation to diverse communication platforms and employee characteristics, aligning with Madsen (2023), who showed that internal platforms can foster employee engagement in the modern banking context. Ongoing socialization emerged as a consistent communication strategy, whereby the reinforcement of corporate culture was achieved through repetitive and continuous exposure, emphasizing the importance of consistency for cultural internalization.

All informants recognized the presence of the culture agent at BRI Purwokerto Branch, specifically mentioning Ms. Desi Ceriawati from the Risk Management and Fraud Team, indicating sufficient visibility of the culture agent within the workplace. The roles of the culture agent can be categorized into four main dimensions. First, as a communicator, the culture agent conveyed the importance of corporate culture and communicated employee responsibilities in achieving organizational objectives. Second, as an educator, the agent provided knowledge and examples of cultural implementation in daily activities, offering continuous updates on cultural values. Third, as a symbolic figure, the culture agent functioned as a cultural icon and role model for other employees. Fourth, as an implementer, the culture agent embodied and applied the cultural values in daily work, raising cultural awareness and ensuring alignment with BRI's cultural standards. This finding parallels Alam et al. (2020) in their study at BRI Syariah, which highlighted that superior-subordinate communication and incentive provision play significant roles in motivating and enhancing banking employees' performance.

Communication processes and channels between culture agents and employees exhibited varied patterns. Most informants reported positive interactions with culture agents, though variations existed in terms of interaction frequency. The mechanisms identified reveal a layered process beginning with the establishment of shared understanding through meetings and discussions, followed by the application of cultural values in daily practices by culture agents and "BRiliant Agents," who acted as exemplars. This process demonstrates a systematic and gradual communication approach, moving from cognitive awareness to behavioral change. Communication also involved reciprocity and reward mechanisms, including reminders about risk awareness and recognition for employees who exemplified cultural values, serving as positive reinforcement. Communication channels were diverse, encompassing digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups for CAP, formal channels like meetings and emails, multimodal interactions via face-to-face, telephone, and Zoom, as well as ritualized communication through morning prayers and formal branch meetings. Such variety reflects adaptation to diverse employee preferences and maximizes cultural message dissemination.

The evaluation of communication effectiveness revealed generally positive perceptions, albeit with nuances. Some informants explicitly stated that culture agents were effective in communicating corporate values, while others noted that effectiveness depended on timing and context. These insights align with Volderauer et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of responsive and adaptive strategies in VUCA contexts, including cultural management. A few informants regarded communication as effective but in need of further improvement, reflecting both appreciation for current efforts and recognition of potential enhancements. Effectiveness was also assessed through observable behavioral changes, indicating that outcomes could be measured through tangible work practices.

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The impact of culture agents' communication on employees' work practices was reported as positive at varying levels. Some informants observed moderate improvements, while others described transformative effects, where cultural education provided by the agent became the foundation for both individual and team practices. This indicates a multiplier effect, in which cultural communication extended beyond individual influence and spread horizontally across work teams.

In terms of cultural change, most informants acknowledged improvements in workplace culture following reinforcement by culture agents. While some changes were gradual and subtle, others noted tangible outcomes such as enhanced employee discipline, reflecting the operational-level success of cultural internalization. Nonetheless, the transformation process was recognized as gradual, requiring time and consistency.

Despite these positive outcomes, challenges and barriers were also identified. Structural constraints emerged as the main challenge, with communication deemed less optimal due to the culture agent's heavy workload and role conflict between primary responsibilities and cultural functions. Limited time was consistently highlighted as a key obstacle, with reduced interaction intensity impeding effective value transfer. Socio-psychological challenges also surfaced, particularly concerning employees' diverse backgrounds, which led to varied mindsets and adaptation to change. Resistance to change pointed to organizational inertia that required careful management. Information gaps were also observed, as some employees expressed a lack of knowledge regarding communication media and cultural initiatives, reflecting uneven exposure across the workforce.

Employees' recommendations for improving communication effectiveness centered on several themes. Intensifying interaction was the most frequent suggestion, including organizing more cross-departmental activities, strengthening engagement across all employee levels, and fostering more routine inter-line interactions. Continuous socialization was also emphasized, particularly regarding the role of culture agents themselves, to raise awareness of their function. Broadening communication reach was another theme, with suggestions to intensify efforts across all units through representative meetings to ensure cultural values cascade effectively throughout the organization. Informal community-based approaches were also recommended to leverage informal structures in reinforcing cultural messages.

Improving communication quality was another key recommendation, with informants highlighting the need for two-way, interactive, and participatory communication rather than a purely top-down approach. Consistency and continuity were considered essential for sustainable cultural reinforcement. Training and development were also recommended as formal programs to strengthen understanding and skills related to organizational culture, while reward and monitoring systems were proposed as reinforcement mechanisms. Enhancing the capacity of culture agents was also emphasized, underlining the importance of exemplary leadership and responsive updates to cultural changes. Specific aspects such as strengthening risk awareness were also highlighted as requiring further attention.

Synthesizing the findings, this study identifies several significant achievements in the communication of cultural reinforcement at BRI Purwokerto Branch. High levels of awareness regarding AKHLAK values across employees reflect success in the awareness-building phase. Positive reception of culture agents' roles, combined with the dominance of role modeling as a persuasive communication method, demonstrates effective cultural messaging. Behavioral changes, though gradual, indicate positive transformations in organizational discipline and alignment with corporate values.

Nevertheless, areas for improvement remain, particularly regarding communication intensity, frequency, and reach. Structural barriers, especially role conflict and workload, require better management. Although formal initiatives such as CAP exist, further institutionalization of cultural communication is necessary.

The practical implications highlight strategic needs: (1) a more structured cascade communication system to ensure vertical and horizontal diffusion of cultural values; (2) sufficient resource allocation, particularly in time and personnel, to support culture agents' functions; (3) integration of cultural reinforcement with performance management and reward systems for systematic reinforcement; and (4) more customized communication approaches that are sensitive to employees' demographic and psychographic diversity, considering varying mindsets and adaptation to organizational change.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that corporate culture reinforcement communication at BRI Purwokerto Branch has produced positive outcomes, particularly in building employees' awareness and gradually shaping behavioral alignment with organizational values. The findings highlight that role modeling by Culture Agents, supported by structured programs and multimodal communication, is an effective strategy for cultural internalization. Nonetheless, challenges remain in terms of workload constraints, interaction frequency, and psychosocial diversity among employees.

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The study suggests that strengthening cascade communication structures, intensifying two-way dialogue, integrating cultural reinforcement into performance management, and allocating sufficient resources for culture agents are essential steps toward sustainable cultural transformation. More broadly, this research contributes to the understanding of how communication practices shape the success of corporate culture implementation in the banking sector.

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