

Stakeholder Communication Strategy Based On Relational Dialectics PT DMGP

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the stakeholder communication strategy implemented by PT DMGP in addressing community resistance to the geothermal project located within the Mount Gede Pangrango National Park area, Cianjur Regency. A qualitative approach with a case study method was applied through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and document analysis involving 18 informants from corporate, government, security, media, and community representatives. The findings reveal that DMGP's communication strategy is dialectical and adaptive, progressing from informational to persuasive and finally to dialogical patterns. The study concludes that communication success is not defined by the absence of conflict, but by the organization's capacity to manage contradictions as constructive social energy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The growing importance of renewable energy in Indonesia has positioned geothermal development as a strategic national priority. However, projects conducted in environmentally sensitive or protected areas often face public resistance. The geothermal exploration of PT DMGP within the Mount Gede Pangrango National Park (TNGGP) illustrates this tension. Despite legal compliance and government support, sections of the local community have expressed strong opposition, fearing ecological degradation and social disruption.

This situation underscores the complexity of corporate community

communication in achieving social legitimacy. Freeman's Stakeholder Theory (1984) argues that organizations must balance competing interests, while Grunig's Excellence Theory (1992) stresses two-way symmetrical communication to achieve mutual understanding. However, such symmetrical communication is often challenged by socio-political inequalities and public distrust, especially in extractive industries. [1], [2]

To interpret these tensions, this study applies Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) by Baxter and Montgomery (1996), which conceptualizes communication as an ongoing negotiation of contradictions rather than a linear message exchange. RDT asserts that

relationships are dynamic, evolving through competing needs, openness vs. closedness, autonomy vs. connection, and certainty vs. uncertainty. [3]

The research focuses on two key questions:

1. How does PT DMGP implement its stakeholder communication strategy?
2. How does Relational Dialectics Theory explain the contradictions in DMGP's stakeholder communication?

By addressing these questions, this paper contributes to the theoretical expansion of RDT within organizational contexts, showing how corporate stakeholder communication evolves as a dialogical, reflexive process in managing social tensions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Corporate Communication

Corporate communication integrates public relations, crisis management, and stakeholder engagement to maintain organizational reputation and legitimacy [4]. Argenti (2017) defines it as a strategic function aimed at aligning organizational actions with societal expectations [5]. When communication is top-down and defensive, it risks deepening public scepticism; conversely, open and dialogical communication fosters trust and legitimacy.

The Excellence Theory by Grunig and Hunt (1984) identifies two-way symmetrical communication as the ideal model, emphasizing negotiation and shared understanding between organizations and publics [6]. This principle becomes essential in managing community resistance within high-risk sectors like energy.

2.2 Stakeholder Theory

Freeman (1984) asserts that a firm's sustainability depends on its ability to manage relationships with multiple stakeholders. The Stakeholder Salience Model by Mitchell et al. (1997) adds that stakeholder influence is

shaped by power, legitimacy, and urgency. [1], [7]

In practical communication, Morsing and Schultz (2006) propose three corporate communication strategies: [8]

1. Informative strategy—one-way dissemination of company data.
2. Response strategy—reactive engagement to stakeholder feedback.
3. Involvement strategy—proactive collaboration and co-creation of meaning.
4. The third approach aligns closely with the relational logic of RDT, treating communication as a dialogical and negotiated process rather than a persuasive one.

2.3 Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT)

Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT), developed by Baxter & Montgomery (1996), views communication as a process of managing contradictions within relationships. Its four core elements are [3]:

1. **Contradiction** – opposing needs that coexist in relationships.
2. **Motion** – change and transformation through interaction.
3. **Totality** – the interconnectedness of relational systems.
4. **Praxis** – human agency in reflecting and acting upon tensions.

In organizational communication, contradictions are not obstacles but productive energies that drive transformation [9]. This study uses RDT to explain how PT DMGP's communication evolved through contradiction, negotiation, and reflection.

By integrating Stakeholder Theory and RDT, this research proposes that stakeholder communication follows a dialectical cycle:

Contradiction → Negotiation →
 Collaboration → Reflection → Renewal
 This cyclical framework highlights that communication success arises not from consensus but from managing differences through dialogue.

3. METHODS

This research employed a qualitative case study approach [10] to explore the dialectical communication processes between PT DMGP and its stakeholders. The study used the post-positivist paradigm, emphasizing interpretive understanding of communication phenomena.

3.1 Data Collection

- a. **Interviews:** 18 informants from corporate management, government (ESDM, local officials), security institutions, local media, and community groups (AMGP).
- b. **Observations:** non-participatory observations during public forums and meetings.
- c. **Documents:** corporate reports, regulatory documents, and media articles.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman & Saldaña's (2014) interactive model:

- a. Data reduction,
- b. Data display, and
- c. Conclusion drawing and verification.

Thematic coding was conducted based on RDT's four core dimensions.

3.3 Validity

Credibility was ensured through triangulation of data sources and member checking with key informants. Ethical considerations included confidentiality and informed consent.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Key Relational Contradictions

Four dialectical tensions were identified:

- a. **Openness–Closedness:** The need for transparency versus confidentiality.
- b. **Autonomy–Connection:** Corporate independence versus community inclusion.
- c. **Support–Opposition:** Institutional endorsement versus public protest.
- d. **Certainty–Uncertainty:** Technical assurance versus social doubt.

These tensions shaped the communication process, aligning with the RDT concept of contradiction as the engine of relational change.

4.2 Evolution of Communication Strategy

PT DMGP's stakeholder communication evolved gradually as the company adapted to changing public sentiments and regulatory pressures. This evolution reflects a strategic response to relational contradictions that emerged between corporate objectives, government expectations, and community concerns. As organizations operate within complex stakeholder networks, communication must evolve from transactional dissemination to dialogical interaction to achieve legitimacy and trust [4], [1].

Drawing on Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT), this transformation can be understood as a movement through phases of contradiction, motion, and praxis, each representing a communicative adaptation to tension [3], [9]. The progression of PT DMGP's communication strategy across these phases is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. PT DMGP's stakeholder communication evolved across three phases

Phase	RDT Element	Main Approach	Outcome
1. Informational	Contradiction	One-way disclosure of	Legal transparency, low

Phase	RDT Element	Main Approach	Outcome
		technical data and compliance information	community trust
2. Persuasive	Motion	Negotiation through local leaders and intermediaries	Emerging dialogue, partial conflict resolution
3. Dialogical	Totality & Praxis	Collaborative CSR programs and village communication forums	Sustained dialogue, trust-building, and reflection

Source: Processed primary data (2025)

As shown in Table 1, PT DMGP's communication strategy progressed from a compliance-oriented, informational phase to a dialogical, participatory model emphasizing transparency and collaboration. This progression illustrates the company's growing awareness of communication as a relational process rather than a linear tool for persuasion [5], [4].

The informational phase primarily focused on fulfilling regulatory obligations, aligning with the contradiction stage of RDT, where tensions between openness and control dominated. The persuasive phase represented motion, during which the organization began negotiating meaning and managing community resistance through localized dialogue [3]. Finally, the dialogical phase reflects totality and praxis, where contradictions are redefined through collaborative practices, such as village communication forums and participatory CSR programs [8].

This adaptive trajectory underscores that conflict and contradiction are not obstacles but catalysts for communicative transformation and legitimacy-building [11], [9]. By integrating Stakeholder Theory and Relational Dialectics Theory, PT DMGP demonstrates how communication evolves as a dialectical process of learning, negotiation, and mutual construction of meaning [1], [10].

4.3 The Dialectical Cycle of Stakeholder Communication

The stakeholder communication process at PT DMGP followed a

dialectical and cyclical pattern rather than a linear or static progression. As the organization engaged with multiple stakeholders, government agencies, local communities, and civil society groups, communication moved through a repetitive process of tension, adjustment, and collaboration. This dynamic reflects the Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) principle that relationships are continuously shaped through the management of opposing forces [3].

The dialectical cycle observed in this study can be summarized in Figure 1.

During the conflict stage, differences in values and perceptions created resistance between the corporation and the community. The negotiation stage emerged as the company initiated interpersonal and institutional dialogues to address stakeholder concerns, often mediated by local leaders. As trust developed, communication progressed to the collaboration stage, where joint initiatives such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs and Village Communication Forums (FKD) were established. The reflection stage involved mutual evaluation and learning from prior interactions, resulting in strategic improvements and increased social legitimacy. However, as external and internal conditions evolved, new tensions periodically reappeared, restarting the communicative cycle [4], [8].

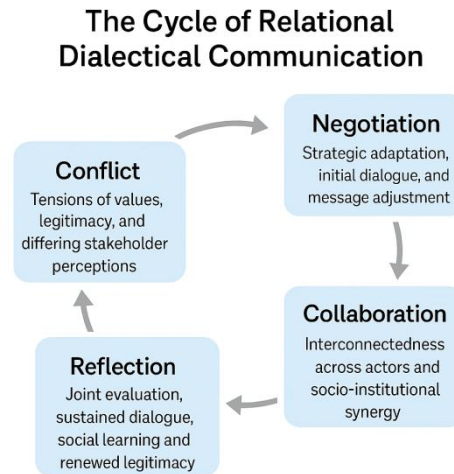


Figure 1. The Cycle of Relational Dialectical Communication (PT DMGP)

Source: Processed by the researcher (2025), adapted from Baxter & Montgomery (1996); Freeman (1984); Cornelissen (2020)

This recurring process demonstrates that stakeholder communication is inherently dynamic and never permanently resolved. It supports the view that contradictions in relationships serve as catalysts for renewal and adaptation, consistent with Baxter's conception of motion and praxis in RDT [3],[9]. Through this lens, PT DMGP's communication practice exemplifies a learning-oriented organizational model, in which conflict operates as a productive force for sustained dialogue and legitimacy-building [12], [1].

Moreover, by integrating Stakeholder Theory [1] and Corporate Communication principles [4], the cycle illustrates that effective communication arises not from stability, but from the organization's ability to adapt reflexively to continuous social change. This finding reinforces the argument of Cornelissen [4] that communication management must evolve as an interactive system of meaning-making rather than a top-down process of persuasion.

4.4 Theoretical Integration and Model Development

The results of this study reveal that the stakeholder communication

practices of PT DMGP can be conceptually explained through an integration of Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) and Stakeholder Theory. The integration of these two frameworks enables a deeper understanding of communication as a relational and adaptive process, where organizational legitimacy is achieved through the management of social contradictions rather than the elimination of conflict [3], [1], [9].

Stakeholder Theory, as proposed by Freeman [1], focuses on identifying and prioritizing actors based on their power, legitimacy, and urgency. This approach is valuable for mapping external expectations and understanding the complexity of stakeholder relationships in strategic projects. However, Stakeholder Theory alone tends to emphasize static categorization rather than the dynamic evolution of communication. This limitation is addressed through the application of Relational Dialectics Theory, which highlights the ongoing negotiation of meaning and the transformative role of tension in maintaining relational balance [3],[9].

By combining both perspectives, this study develops the Dialectical

Stakeholder Engagement Model (DSEM), as illustrated conceptually below:

“Contradiction → Motion → Totality → Praxis → Legitimacy”

This model captures the cyclical and reflective nature of stakeholder communication observed in PT DMGP. The contradiction stage marks the emergence of opposing interests among stakeholders; motion represents negotiation and adjustment; totality emphasizes systemic interdependence; and praxis involves reflective action through participatory forums and collaborative CSR programs. These four dimensions collectively produce legitimacy, defined as the organization’s acceptance within its social environment [4],[6].

The Dialectical Stakeholder Engagement Model therefore reframes corporate communication as a learning-oriented social process, consistent with Baxter’s view of dialogue as an ongoing co-construction of meaning [3], [9]. Rather than perceiving communication as a linear tool for persuasion, this model positions it as a mechanism of mutual transformation between corporate actors and their stakeholders. It aligns with Cornelissen’s assertion that effective corporate communication emerges when organizations “listen, adapt, and integrate stakeholder perspectives into decision-making” [4].

Furthermore, this model bridges theoretical and practical dimensions by demonstrating that social legitimacy is sustained through reflexive dialogue, where conflict and cooperation coexist in equilibrium. PT DMGP’s experience illustrates how energy sector organizations can use dialectical communication as a foundation for responsible governance and longterm stakeholder relationships.

4.5 Discussion, From Resistance to Reflective Legitimacy

PT DMGP’s case illustrates that stakeholder resistance can become a

foundation for reflective legitimacy. Through dialogical adaptation, contradictions such as openness vs. secrecy and autonomy vs. connection were managed productively [3],[13]. The transition from persuasion to collaboration demonstrates that legitimacy is achieved through communication that prioritizes empathy, transparency, and shared governance [1], [9].

This process transforms communication from an instrument of control into a relational practice of accountability and trust, aligning with Grunig’s and Freeman’s perspectives on symmetrical communication and stakeholder interdependence [11].

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that PT DMGP’s stakeholder communication strategy is dialectical, adaptive, and reflective. The organization’s success lies not in eliminating conflict but in transforming it into collaboration.

Theoretically, the research expands Relational Dialectics Theory into corporate communication and introduces the Dialectical Stakeholder Engagement Model (DSEM). Practically, it highlights that social legitimacy depends on transparent, participatory, and reflexive communication.

Future research should apply the model to other energy sectors and examine digital platforms’ role in stakeholder dialogue. Ultimately, communication is not merely a managerial tool but a moral practice, a process of co-creating meaning, legitimacy, and sustainability.

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