

EMBRACE A SELF-ORGANIZATION CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses on leadership that sustains and effectively manages the workforce during unprecedented time in a complex condition. One of the significant events of turbulence phenomenon is when the recent Covid-19 pandemic has struck the world in all sectors. This paper found the importance of self-organizing among employees as the fundamental skills to endure in the unprecedented time. In an analogy of the fish tank metaphor, providing a conducive environment is essential for healthy fish ecosystem. Hence, cultivating self-organization culture is fundamental for more sustainable workforce to embrace during period of turbulence. There are three ways to embrace this culture namely: i) providing vision, trust and autonomy, ii) having continuous, connected and ongoing improvement and iii) remaining agile in the data driven and tech-enabled environment.

Keywords: self-organization, covid-19 pandemic, culture, agile

INTRODUCTION

In this complex world, anything can happen. Unprecedented can emerge in all uncertainties. Recently, the pandemic Covid-19 has made it clear the importance of leadership agility to maneuver the organization into steering itself in this kind of turbulence. Health system, economic sector, academic institution, government, sports and all industries are heavily affected. All agencies collaborate unconditionally to overcome this unprecedented event. Malaysians are facing war against COVID-19. In order to flatten the curve, Movement Control Order (MCO) has been enforced and it has impacted most of the industries and sectors in the country. There are six (6) original orders (Phase-1) contained in the MCO; one of them being the closing of all government and private premises except those involved in essential services. During the closure, most of the organizations and workforce are enforced for closure around the nation and all working activities at the office has been switched to work from home using digital facilitation. Many of them are not ready. There are organizations stuck during MCO and does not have any plans on how to move forward. Then, there are many mixed reactions especially leaders and bosses that are worried of the staffs' performance at work to decline.

The conventional working cultures such as waiting for orders, direct monitoring, office-based and lack of distributed task management and tools have become the factors for lack of self-regulated working skills. Since the pandemic started, organizations are unable to attend

formal working due to office closure. This leads to another alternative like working from home, online meeting, collaborative workplace and digital communication. While these have some drawbacks, some workers and management team tend to ignore those working hours due to no surveillance from the bosses. Somehow based on recent survey from Rutter et al (2020), it shows that independent learning and organization skills are important to handle this unprecedented situation.

THE NEEDS FOR SELF-ORGANIZATION CULTURE

It is time for the leadership to give greater attention to embrace self-organization culture to ensure the sustainability of the organization in the unprecedented time. In general, self-organization is an essential process in the complex phenomenon. It is the spontaneous appearance of order or global coordination out of local level interactions in the complex system (Heylighen, 2008). From the perspective of organization, providing the systemic and conducive culture is fundamental to nurture self-organization among the employees. Furthermore, embracing the self-organization culture is a part of human empowerment. The support of self-organization culture is important because the mindset of the people in and around the team is vital (Geerlof & Bechoven, 2016). There are a few ways to cultivate self-organization culture.

Vision, trust and autonomy

Many professionals want more autonomy, but often their leaders do not support them. When the culture is able to support for more autonomy, then the energy is automatically unleashed. However, to support for autonomy, it is important to strike balance between organizational values, vision and employee's personal autonomy. First, the leader must highlight the vision to the employees as the main driver early in the process and then communicate often to ensure there is no blockade of information or misdirection. It is important since the self-organization is usually work in a cross-disciplinary team, hence by identifying the main driver, the employees are able to make sense on the direction and make connection with the relevant parties. Secondly, it is important to nurture the trust in the organization. A leader must trust the people and earn trust from the people. More importantly, the leader must help the employees to trust each other. The leader can build trust by highlighting the micro-status instead of micro-manage. The trust is not only in the beginning, but also the leader must show trust and believe the capacity of employees even when they have failed. He must support them and trust that they would pivot and find a new direction.

Continuous, Connected and Ongoing Improvement

Self-organization requires a different leadership style. Leadership with mindset of failure recovery is more essential than failure avoidance. The leader must be able to give feedback regardless of the successful condition and keep the team feeling empowered. Self-organizing is about improving the communication and teamwork and not about taking control. The leader must be able to facilitate and ask for more action and demonstration, instead of on report or timeline estimation. To empower the self-organization among the staffs, the leadership style must be able to endure in continuous, connected and ongoing improvement. Even though it is hard to start and solve in the short term, it can increase the positive status overtime.

The traditional management structures are no longer suitable for this complex world. It will make the employees feel unhappy and disengaged. More importantly, it deprives irrelevant culture for more creative, freedom and self-organization skills to be developed among the

workers. In the self-organization supportive culture, the leaders must learn that they are in charge but not in control. Hence, the leader must give space, freedom, trust and autonomy to ensure the employees can perform their very best. Moreover, the culture must embrace the growth mindset among the employees. The growth mindset motivates people to continuously improve, commit and do better. When performing the tasks, they always give their best and come up with unique ideas with the strongest intuition to test and measure the success rate. On the other hand, the employees must have the courage to fail or to make wrong judgement, to start all over again with lesson learned. Finally, the leader must ensure the organization provides the transparent and good flow of information. Without it, the information flow is blocked and certain parts are disconnected, then the people will struggle with mixed messages and incoherence. It will lead to cynicism, burnout and confusion that drag down the organization's effectiveness.

Remain Agile in the Data Driven and Tech-enabled Environment

Being agile is one of the main criteria for sustainability. Agility is the capacity to move, think and understand in a quick and sharp manner. It is essential for the employees to stay resilient in the complexities and emergence of new business models, fast moving world and high customer expectations. To ensure the employees are agile in the diversity of innovation and digitalization, the leader should prioritize to equip the employees with the required essential skills and competencies. These remain crucial to sustain agility in a competitive world. To remain agile in the data driven and tech-enabled environment requires the employees to be fully equipped with the digital, data and design-enablement. Research from Daud et al (2018) has mentioned the importance of technology and digital communication as a new dimension in the knowledge communication in the organization. Hence, it is important to inspire the employees with the digital mindset and facilitate them with sufficient technology tools and applications. Furthermore, the leader must strategize to build and ensure at least certain percentage of the workforce are equipped with digital skills. The leader must ensure the workforce understand the workflow, management and engagement in digital technology. In addition, the leader can facilitate the future of work centre. It helps the employees to upskill and reskill in all levels of digital competencies. It is time for leaders to focus on digitalization, data and capacity to design. It will help the workforce to be equipped in facing the turbulent time and survive in the technology world.

CONCLUSION

The organization paradigm is shifting to be more flexible and autonomous in the future. Hence, people in general need flexibility and agility to adapt to new pace of change. The leader and management team are able to do macro-manage instead of micro-manage to help the business grow. Meanwhile, the employees will get a high job satisfaction, sense of ownership, freedom and able to gain mastery. Therefore, self-organization is the way forward.

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