Leading through the COVID-19 Crisis

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Editors:

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PREFACE

First and foremost, we would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to all the contributors for making possible the publication of this book chapter entitled *Leading Through the COVID-19 Crisis.* This book chapter is produced as an effort to address the importance of leading effectively and how to mobilize human capital through leadership approaches during volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) time, especially in the pandemic COVID-19 period. This book chapter consists of eight chapters contributed by academic staffs and students from various universities in Malaysia and abroad.

The focus of this book chapter is on employee leadership and management during the worldwide health crisis that resulted from the COVID-19 virus pandemic. Effective leadership theory, the implications of COVID-19 on businesses and people, the assessment of employees' emotional and behavioral shifts, and strategic methods to lead employees throughout the pandemic are all explored. Additionally, the book examines in greater detail the practical approaches that have been proposed by academics to address the absence of effective employee leadership, both from a corporate perspective and from the perspective of the employees.

1

VUCA: THEORIES, CONCEPTS, AND ITS REMEDY

Nurul Fadzilla Mohd Aris
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1.1   INTRODUCTION

Planning for the future is challenging, especially in today's world, where the unpredictable and unexpected have become the norm. VUCA; a term that has been used widely over the years, and today, it is becoming a term that best explains the current situation that is happening worldwide – Pandemic COVID-19. VUCA is an acronym made of V-volatility, U-uncertainty, C-complexity, and A-ambiguity (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). In their study, Sinha and Sinha (2020) affirmed that the US Military first introduced the concept at the end of the Cold War back in the 1990s, referring to officers' experience in operations. VUCA describes the unforeseeable and incrementally changing situation of a military engagement with a lack of information, and events frequently happen chaotically and unpredictably (Shufutinsky et al., 2020).

The US Military has been a great source of insight for strategic decision-making in terms of policy and tactics to be applied in a business (Das & Ara, 2014). According to Das and Ara (2014), from the earliest studies, VUCA stands for the fact that the battlefield is volatile. It is an uncertain place, very complex and chaotic, and also ambiguous. The pace of changes and quick judgment needed in such a place has made VUCA more impactful (Das & Ara, 2014). It is no longer the term fog of war enough to capture how complex the world of warfare is; thus, VUCA is introduced.

Das and Ara (2014) also added that companies are now operating in a business landscape that is increasingly defined by disruption. Because of this unpredictability, business leaders might want to avoid planning and forecasting entirely, but that is the wrong intuition. Instead, they should address volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity head-on. In the VUCA concept, leaders must feel comfortable being uncomfortable, meaning that they must be able to operate or work in a volatile environment because the world is changing rapidly, leading to uncertainties most of the time. In addition, the interconnectedness of political, cultural, social, technological, and economic factors creates complexity and becomes ambiguous to sort them all together.

Times like this have called upon strategic leaders to bring clarity to the VUCA world (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). They need to see beyond the fog to define the vision and the end-state and communicate it through the entire organization. The leaders' jobs are to empower the people and enable them to use every bit of their ingenuity, intellect, and talents to design the tactical approach to reach the end-state (Sinha & Sinha, 2020).

This chapter aims to provide an introductory perspective to the discussion of the whole book on navigating the leaders' roles in a VUCA environment. Specifically, this chapter discusses the concepts of VUCA by understanding its terms, analyzing the VUCA environment, identifying the VUCA remedies, and examining the leadership roles in a VUCA environment.

1.2   THE VUCA ENVIRONMENTS

Traditionally, in a non-VUCA world, management theory focuses on relatively stable, predictable, routine environments with clear objectives (ÇIçeklioğlu, 2020). These factors make possible approaches to strategize based on a few key concepts and methods because the goal-solution relationship is relatively linear. This approach to strategizing works fine until volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity come into the environment (ÇIçeklioğlu, 2020). ÇIçeklioğlu (2020) explained that the aim of management back then was to acquire information and conduct analysis upon it to determine the optimal solution and guide the organization towards its desired outcomes by means of controlling the elements within the organization.

Raghuramapatruni and Kosuri (2017), in their article, wrote that transforming a swiftly changing external environment to our benefit requires modification of many dimensions across how we develop, deploy and deliver our strategy. Furthermore, this is where complexity management finds its application to offer us substitute exemplars with which to lead organizations in these more complex environments (Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017). VUCA is a powerful metaphor to essentially describe a largely different kind of the current state of affairs, irrespective of industry or organization. Every element of the VUCA acronym represents something that is unique and different. Once we have understood and acknowledged the unique differences, we can start to reflect on what strategy or approach to managing the situation.

1.2.1   Volatility

It describes the rapid pace of change (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). The fact is that things do not seem to evolve anymore because they almost instantly change as new technology keeps coming in. With that, we have to be able to prepare for those sudden changes and respond quickly to them – which is referred to as agility. These rapid changes make it very difficult for us to anticipate what is coming around the corner, and that in itself is unsettling for us. In systematically volatile environments, change is the constant, and our approach needs to progress from resisting it to working with it (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). That being said, it is about developing resilient organizations through their agility and preparing for adaptation. The strategies emphasize shifting

from creating predetermined, well-defined goals and plans to develop agile organizations led by the clarity of vision and effective communications (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Subsequently, it will lead the organizations to be very clear about their values and objectives and, simultaneously, very adaptable in implementing capabilities and achieving that vision.

1.2.2 Uncertainty

The uncertainty in an uncertain situation demands decisions or choices making without all the pieces of information (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). The information regarding the uncertainty is procured from various elements within the system; it could come from the nonlinear interactions and the ability to adapt to local events as they evolve over time (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Bennett and Lemoine (2014) added that this situation leads to a lack of understanding and incapability to foresee what is next; it is no longer easy to predict what will happen – the results can either be dwindled, crushed or succeed. According to Raghuramapatruni and Kosuri (2017), despite the scarcity of information, an event's underlying causes and foreseeable repercussions can be anticipated; nonetheless, the outcome frequently differs. In an environment where uncertainty is widespread, traditional risk-based future analysis is not applicable. The only way to respond to this situation is to do various simulations and experiments that will allow us to explore how something will happen in the field and maintain a diverse and complementary system capable of responding to several environments and conditions that may be different (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). It has been enlightened in today's world where leaders have to be able to overturn the situation and navigate the uncertainties.

1.2.3 Complexity

It explains the many interconnected moving factors that can exist within a system, an environment, or a situation (Dima et al., 2021). Bennett and Lemoine (2014) explained that these moving factors could influence and impact each other and create nonlinear interactions. The interconnectivity and nonlinear interactions within the organizations limit the ability to control the system through direct interventions (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). In complex systems, there is no surety of a good outcome in the results of our interventions due to these interdependencies. It is because the capacity to directly align the elements of the organization towards some desired future goal is very much limited. The key response to this is for leaders to focus on creating a context that allows solutions to emerge into a changing environment (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Indeed, our world today is far more complex than it has ever been. For example, the individual technology items are so complex that no individual can understand all the technology within something as basic as a smartphone, camera, or television. Bennett and Lemoine (2014) highlighted that with these technologies, the simple cause-and-effect are being replaced by interconnectivity feedback loops. As a result, it is becoming ever more difficult to figure out why things happen and prevent recurrences in the future.

1.2.4   Ambiguity

According to Sinha and Sinha (2020), ambiguity promotes the attribute of acceptance of more than one interpretation. It demonstrates that the meanings of simple events can no longer be easily interpreted (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). When environments become complex, all the known factors such as simple, linear, and cause-and-effect descriptions collapse – ambiguity occurs due to the lack of frameworks or models to explain the observed occurrences. In an ambiguous situation, cause-and-effect relationships simply do not exist (Codreanu, 2016). Codreanu (2016) emphasized that we no longer have the certainty of yes or no, true or false, this or that.

Furthermore, we cannot know with absolute certainty what the outcome of our decisions and the choices will be. Resolving ambiguity means understanding the context in which the events occur. It requires systems thinking to look into the interconnections to gain different perspectives to construct a full context in which events can be properly understood (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Increasingly, living in a VUCA world means we have to become comfortable with fuzzy interpretations of events and choices – as a single statement could have more than one meaning (Sinha & Sinha, 2020).

1.3   VUCA'S REMEDY: THE VUCA PRIME

The exponential growth of globalization, information technology, and a changing environmental context has transformed the world into a complicated and complex world. The world that we are living in now is interdependent, interconnected, nonlinear, and more volatile. VUCAfrom the military to the business world, is to define the fundamental internal and external conditions that affect organizations within these complex environments (Codreanu, 2016). However, as much as defining VUCA environments, it is also critical to outline strategies to counter the effects of a VUCA environment. Hence, the VUCA prime model was developed and introduced by Robert Johansen (2007). Johansen (2007) provided an easy framework to encapsulate answers in which he took the four components of VUCA and turned them into acts of response. VUCA Prime, as introduced by Johansen (2007), stands for V-vision, U-understanding, C-clarity, and A-agility. Each of those helps to respond to the challenges of a VUCAworld.

1.3.1   Vision

In a volatile situation, the key focus is on vision – to see through the turbulence of volatility towards the end goal (Johansen, 2007; Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017). When we find ourselves with an extensive resource scale or faced with a fast challenge, we need to define the ultimate vision and goal. In this situation, it is necessary to strategize about how to mobilize other resources. In volatility, the work might not necessarily be complex; there is just a lot of it, and it needs to get done potentially in a short amount of time. Furthermore, effective thinking is needed to leverage resources within the organization or network base to help in managing that volatility. With a clear sense of vision, it helps to prioritize things amongst the myriad of activities, opportunities, and

demands that may emerge (Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017). In other words, it keeps people focused on what is essential to do.

1.3.2   Understanding

Next, the remedy for uncertainty is understanding (Johansen, 2007; Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017). When there are missing pieces of information that do not allow us to deal with a great amount of clarity, the first thing that needs to be done is to look for sources to understand the situation. To overcome this uncertainty, we can reach out to those in our network who may be able to provide useful information. An uncertainty also brings together the need to have a mutual understanding among the other parties. Raghuramapatruni and Kosuri (2017), in their study, discussed the essentiality of communication to ensure that every party has the same level of understanding regarding the issue. Raghuramapatruni and Kosuri (2017) added that trust is built through effective communication. Building trust during calmer periods is important to prepare in advance and make it easy to mobilize people when the crisis hits – trust is already developed, and demonstrating direct leadership can easily be accepted (Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017).

1.3.3   Clarity

The challenge in a complex environment is the ability to synthesize information. To overcome this complexity challenge, Johansen (2007) introduced clarity. Clarity, as the name implies, is defined as demystifying information to shed light through the process. In a complex situation, gathering resources and support from others is needed; however, it is not only from within our network base; it could require us to seek externally (Codreanu, 2016). Therefore, we need to understand the world's structures and their interconnectedness to define and summarize the problem as simply as possible. That being said, clarity means simplifying the processes without being simplistic (Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017). Furthermore, Raghuramapatruni and Kosuri (2017) added, a good understanding of clarity can be achieved by identifying things that can be controlled and beyond control. This identification helps to focus their efforts on solutions without dissipating too much energy to control the uncontrollable (Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017).

1.3.4   Agility

Finally, the ambiguity is being taken care of with agility (Johansen, 2007; Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017). We are already aware that the challenge in the ambiguous situation is that a cause-and-effect relationship does not exist. Therefore, agility describes the ability to switch between different dimensions of an ambiguous environment (ÇIçeklioğlu, 2020). In an uncertain scenario, we should focus on making assumptions and hypotheses about the optimum course of action, as according to Andersson (2020). As a result, we must iterate and be willing to fail quickly and again in order to develop a route that leads to increased degrees of certainty (Andersson, 2020). When

we start to see the records and effective relationships emerge, the team will have the ability to adapt and be versatile, which will later result in a positive outcome. As we clarify the ambiguity and our understanding increases, the agility to switch the direction rapidly and effectively allows us to thrive in a VUCA world (Cordeanu, 2016).

With the existence of VUCA Prime, it is observed that there are unique approaches and challenges to adapt to overcome the VUCA environments. Therefore, as we move forward in our leadership journey and approach those challenges, it is okay to take a few steps back and reflect on what challenge and the nature of the challenge we are dealing with so that we can develop the right strategy for handling the situation. Nevertheless, again, the VUCA Prime model provides a better grounding in terms of what actions are appropriate relative to the nature of the VUCA challenges. In addition, taking action upon diagnosing the situation is fundamental to get into the expected outcomes and results. Knowing VUCAand VUCA prime and utilizing them to solve the problem gives justification and validation to choose the right path of action.

1.4   VUCA LEADERSHIP

The pandemic COVID-19 and its global response have reshaped people's skeptical thinking about living in a VUCA world. Leading teams that have fractured into remote and virtual groups requires the rapid development of a distinct set of leadership skills. In the VUCA world, nothing can be taken for granted. The interdependencies among many variables (e.g., markets, customers, supplies, and regulations) create a volatile and complex environment (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). On the other hand, uncertainty breeds ambiguity, where they collide to create a range of emotional responses from employees who are concerned about their futures (Dima et al., 2021). This chapter suggests leadership roles in all four VUCA environments to help the leaders lead their team and navigate it through the unprecedented and uncharted world.

As teams become more virtual and more work is completed and submitted online, the challenges become more acute; employees may feel isolated and find it difficult to effectively manage their tasks and time (Dima et al., 2021). Also, collaboration is becoming more complex, especially in activities that involve cross-functional and external interactions. As a result, employees' morale can quickly deteriorate (Dima et al., 2021). At times like this, how the leaders demonstrate their leadership traits will directly affect maintaining morale and motivating employees' performance.

1.4.1   Volatility Environment

In a volatile environment, Raghuramapatruni and Kosuri (2017) suggested that leaders must demonstrate objectivity. A slip in performance can be a consequential source of frustration and anxiety. Though the world is constantly changing, people's creativity and ability are still present. Good leaders resist making emotional, subjective decisions. Instead, they remain objective,

helping people understand the nature of their problems and find solutions. Moreover, demonstrating objectivity requires leaders to segregate facts from opinions to ensure clarity in communication (Anamoutou, 2018; ÇIçeklioğlu, 2020).

Also, in this kind of situation, Raghuramapatruni and Kosuri (2017) promote that a leader must be confident. Confidence is essential to performance. As quoted from the infamous leadership quote by Floyd V. Filson (Fitzpatrick, 2019), "He can inspire a group only if he himself is filled with confidence and hope of success." Many acknowledge and believe that a leader who is confident about the future will help people remain resilient through changing conditions. When the volatility subsides, confident teams will take advantage most readily

1.4.2   Uncertain Environment

In an unpredictable situation, the same challenges face all, be it the leaders or the people. Therefore, through this, leaders are required to show a high level of integrity – be honest with themselves and the team (Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017). Leaders can encourage others to share their fears openly by exemplifying integrity and honesty, and they can help by engaging in and providing coaching through uncertainty (ÇIçeklioğlu, 2020; Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017).

In the VUCA, the change affects individuals differently. Therefore, leaders must display their traits of empathy (Bernstein, 2014; ÇIçeklioğlu, 2020). People tend to act out of their normal character when facing difficulties. It is the result of not knowing what will happen in the future and how to overcome it. By seeing the world from an employee's point of view and consoling to their needs, leaders will learn what motivates them and be able to develop individualized development strategies. In addition, leaders can adapt to the team's responses accordingly. Walk a mile in their shoes, and show that they are cared for.

1.4.3   Complex Environment

As things get tough, leaders must facilitate realistic expectations (Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017). It is becoming the leader's responsibility to facilitate the team to perform at their best – by identifying the realistic targets and displaying directive leadership. Thus, a leader must ensure effective communication is practiced, and all the team members must agree on the targets set by the leader. There is nothing more demotivating than a target that cannot be met. Therefore, targets should be discussed frequently and adjusted as the leader navigates changing market conditions.

1.4.4   Ambiguity Environment

An obscure state of affairs always creates a feeling of insecurity and unassertiveness among employees. Therefore, being a democratic leader who practices good people management and anticipates team engagement will help them sort things out (Cordeanu, 2016). It is vital to engage

with the team in meaningful conversations that help them understand that their challenges affect everybody within the organization (ÇIçeklioğlu, 2020). Leaders also must encourage discussions to brainstorm the possible solutions to these challenges and solicit feedback (ÇIçeklioğlu, 2020). Then, when joint decisions are made and enacted, everybody within the organization will benefit from the collective sense of purpose and set of collective goals that help inspire the team (Bernstein, 2014; ÇIçeklioğlu, 2020).

1.5   CONCLUSION

Tackling VUCA environments is not easy, but it is essential in order to thrive in a chaotic world. The VUCAmodel is a powerful tool for helping leaders diagnose and think about the nature of the challenges they are faced. Utilizing VUCA effectively empowers the leaders to choose the right leadership behaviors and the right course of action to achieve the desired outcomes. VUCA underscores the importance of sense-making, analytical astuteness, readiness planning, risk management, and situational problem-solving.

At the present time, the pandemic COVID-19 is a great example of VUCA as we were not aware that it would come, we were not prepared for it, we did not know what to do, we did not know how to work in such situations, and we were not aware of where it would impact, but now we can see how it has affected a lot in our livelihood. Coming through almost two years of living with COVID-19, leaders from many areas of expertise all around the world have come together to minimize its risks – from developing ad-hoc measures such as lockdowns and travel restrictions to changing health regulations and worldwide vaccination programs. Things are progressing well as the leaders learn and understand the problems. VUCA, when addressing it systematically and adequately, would create excellent leaders and a better world to live in. It is a never-ending process as the future is VUCA.

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2

AN OVERVIEW OF COVID-19 FROM BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

Nurul Fadzilla Mohd Aris
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2.1   INTRODUCTION

COVID-19; dangerous and lethal strains of coronavirus are spreading across the globe. In Malaysia alone, officially, according to the Ministry of Health, Malaysia (2021), COVID-19 has claimed over 15,000 lives as of August 2021, with many health workers among the victims. The pandemic COVID-19 has altered our livelihoods, including businesses. It has been a huge challenge for many industries and organizations.

Lockdowns have forced us to change the way we work, shop, and socialize. However, as vaccination rates rise, the world is starting to open up again, phase by phase, businesses begin to re-operate, and people are about to go out again. The questions are: what changes are temporary? What is transformed for good? When will life return to normal? The basis for these questions is that the world will never be the same again.

This global event of COVID-19 is not the first time a pandemic has transformed the world. Historically, crisis reformed societies, fueling technological advances and initiating social change (Shang et al., 2021). For example, in the early 14th century, the Black Death, the bubonic plague struck Europe. Back then, lockdowns were savage; infected people were detained in confined spaces to die, and the social distancing approaches were different and somewhat peculiar. As a result of the Black Death, about one-third of Europe's population died from the plague (Shang et al., 2021). Anyhow, from the desolation and ravaging event came innovation. Having fewer workers encouraged the evolution and establishment of new technologies (Russell & Parker, 2020).

Several centuries later, in 1918, a Spanish flu pandemic arose – that was surprisingly similar to what we are experiencing currently (Kurt, 2021). Schools, theaters, and businesses were shuttered. There were mask mandates and also anti-mask protests. Up to 100 million people died from the flu – more than triple the number that died in the First World War (Kurt, 2021). The flu

hit as the war ended, and both ignited changes (Kurt, 2021). As most men went to the war field, the women had to work in factories and took on many jobs that they would previously not have been able to do. Therefore, it marked a significant impact on how people saw the equality of the genders and whether it was appropriate for women to work, and so forth (Garrett, 2008). When the pandemic ended, businesses were encouraged to take greater risks in order to explore more business opportunities. It is observed that these historical changes in hindsight.

In today's world, it is possible to quantify change as it is happening. The world before the pandemic COVID-19 is gone; a reality check – we are not going back to it. Yet, people are more likely to choose not to do all the things they have been doing in the pandemic – where things are so much stuffed and suffocating. Therefore, the answer to living with COVID-19 is somewhere in the middle, and exactly where is it in the middle? It will vary by country, activity, industry, household, thus, making it so unpredictable.

As the world is entering into a hybrid mode – where people can do almost everything online, this has been a pretty big change. In this chapter, we will address briefly about the negative repercussions for businesses, as well as the beneficial impact that pandemic COVID-19 has had on the business world and how it affects changes and opportunities in business practices from a general point of view. The following sections will shed light on the impacts of COVID-19 on the business environment.

2.2 IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The event of COVID-19 exposes the fragility of an organization's business continuity plan and its resilience against financial and operational stress. Methods to brace the impact of COVID-19 are different from each companies' expertise and experience, but basically, a company needs a steady flow of capital, i.e., money, goods, services, and a workforce, to drive the flow (Deloitte Global, 2020). Unfortunately, many companies are still struggling to maintain a good business flow in the current economic environment. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) asserted that we are at risk of a financial system shock and a large-scale historic freeze of the real economy that affects households, organizations, businesses, and government (OECD, 2020).

There is no existing playbook for dealing with this economic shock as the event is unprecedented and beyond anyone's expectation. Months of movement restrictions and social distancing raise the risk of economic paralysis, affecting people in dangerous ways (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). If we look at it from the downside, a prolonged crisis can cause the bankruptcy of everyday people and firms, making it more difficult for financial systems to manage. A financial system crisis would starve the real economy of credit, which would impair current and future investment, and ultimately economic growth (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).

In Malaysia, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021), the pandemic has caused an increment in unemployment rates from around 4% (as of January 2020) to 5.3% in May 2020, just three months after the government imposed the first nationwide lockdown. This event is another indication of detrimental issues that arise from the COVID-19. Widespread lockdowns have

sped up changes that were already affecting the world economy in trade, technology, and finance.

The COVID-19 impact on businesses is a vast subject to elaborate on. Therefore, this chapter will touch on the six significant impacts and trends that have come out of the COVID-19 crisis, which define business trends for 2021 and beyond, as combinedly suggested by McKinsey & Company (Sneader & Singhal, 2021) and Deloitte Global Institute (Deloitte Global, 2020).

2.2.1   Work from Home

The first impact on business that came from the pandemic is that people are adapting to working from home regularly. According to Sneader and Singhal (2021), the McKinsey Global Institute estimated more than 20% of the global workforce from professional fields, e.g., finance, IT, and insurance could work effectively even though their working time is mostly away from the office. Many businesses have experience regulating their employees' working from home. Simultaneously, many businesses are now reconsidering changing their entire business model – deciding whether they still need office setup or adequate to operate their business in a home-based background (Chung, 2021).

In the current situation, businesses need to re-imagine the employees' workspace and support them working from home, i.e., provide the right office equipment, a comfortable setup, as well as mental health support to ensure that everyone can work from home with ease and convenience (Chung, 2021). The Economist (2021) reported that the office occupancy index in 2021 has slightly increased from last year because of the activation of vaccination programs worldwide – see Figure 1. However, the numbers probably would not rise to pre-pandemic levels. Many companies are getting used to the work-from-home system, and both the companies and employees are getting benefits from it. The company can reduce electricity and maintenance costs, while the employees can save up on transportation and commuting expenses (Chung, 2021).
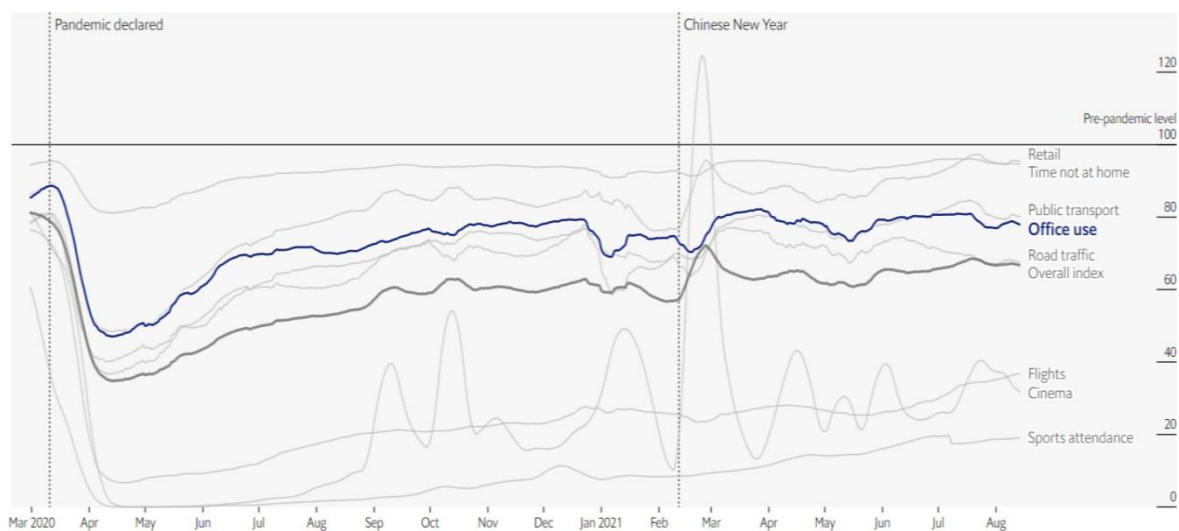

Figure 1: The global normalcy index (Source: The Economist, 2021)

2.2.2 Business Model Innovation

In conjunction with the decision to let the employees work from home, businesses today need to focus on the remodelling of their business structure in order to serve the interests of the stakeholders, i.e., consumers, suppliers, workers, and shareholders (Sneader & Singhal, 2021). They also need to reflect on their strategies for how to operate as a business. Many industries have been completely transformed during this trying time. For example, the hospitality industry can no longer offer accommodation to their customers for leisure purposes; instead, they switch to providing service to accommodate people who need to be quarantined by engaging with local authorities and strengthening their cuisine specialities and opt to the food industry. Sneader and Singhal (2021) emphasized in their research that a company's ability to quickly respond to the crisis impact will have greater chances of business survival. This pandemic has enlightened the business to consistently think about the market shift, market transformation, and business model innovation (Marr, 2020).

2.2.3 Virtual Interfaces

Sneader and Singhal (2021) suggest another big trend that is happening in the business world during this pandemic – virtual interfaces, which is also a result of regulating work from home orders. The challenges for the company to balance workforce productivity and business profitability led to the existence of such technology (Sneader & Singhal, 2021). Together, due to movement restrictions enforced by the government, the process of delivering goods and services has grown into a digital format, especially using interfaces that integrate augmented reality, virtual reality, and mixed reality. Again, during the pandemic, people realize that there are substitutes for the necessity to shop in a physical shop (Jones, 2021).

With these virtual interfaces, customers could try the products offered on themselves before deciding to purchase them. For example, a cosmetic company "Mary Kay" developed a virtual interface that allows its customers to do self-screening of their skin in real-time (see Figure 2). The results from the self-screening are then used to analyze and list the products that most suit the customers' skin conditions. This technology lets the customers experience hassle-free consultation and can be done within minutes. In the clothing line industry, this virtual interface helps customers customize their preferences according to their pre-set environments. It gives freedom to customers to choose, and all can be done at their fingertips. This digital offering is an added feature on customers' virtual shopping experience that creates a tangible, unique selling proposition that will be a turning point to capture more sales and help business sustainability in the long run (Zierlien et al., 2020).
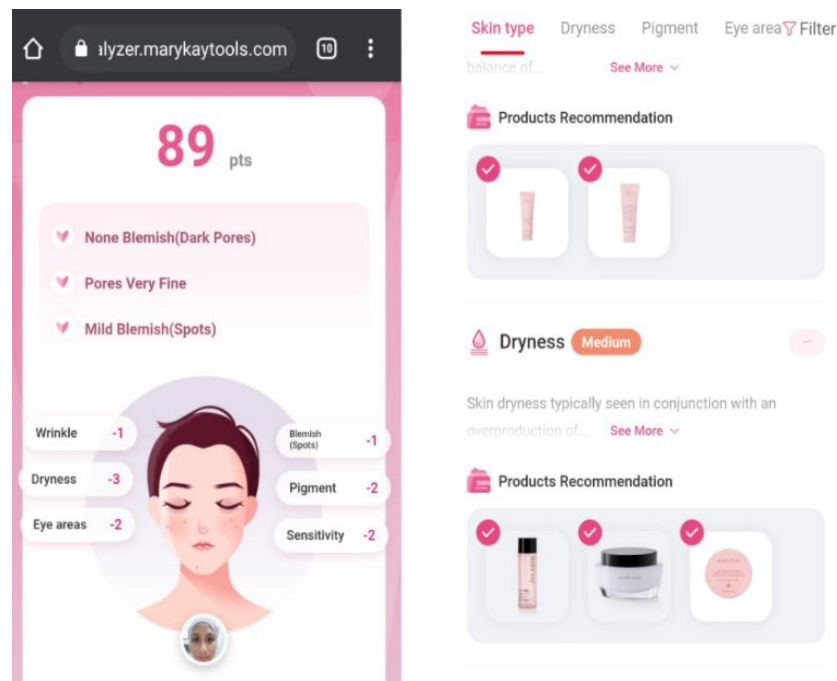
Figure 2: Example of business that integrates virtual interface - Mary Kay
(Source: Mary Kay, Inc., 2021)

2.2.4 Automation Integration

COVID-19 has caused an acceleration in the adoption of technologies where businesses are being forced to adapt to the changes or face extinction (Zierlien et al., 2020). To prevent business extinction, many companies focus on surviving by cutting down on costs that are not really adding true value to their business operations, for example, excess labor. Zierlien et al. (2020) added that this excess labor is systematically be replaced with automated machinery or systems where mostly affect areas such as warehouses, supply chains, and customer service departments. As the world looks towards the post-pandemic era, businesses are investing more in innovation and enhancement of existing technology that will bring lasting change (Zierlien et al., 2020).

It is observed that many business operations nowadays have replaced their call centers with chat-bots. Taking Telekom Malaysia (TM) for example, its UNIFI service center has upgraded its system to provide timely support to its customers. The customers can now troubleshoot their internet network problems by accessing the UNIFI mobile application, where guidelines are sorted and provided based on various technical issues without interacting with real staff (see Figure 3). Though there is still human support standing by in case the customers need further assistance, the number of human staff can be reduced.

Sneader and Singhal (2021) added in their article that automation integration is not only happening in the business world; other sectors such as healthcare, education, and government agencies are also looking for opportunities to automate their operations and transfer them to artificial intelligence to achieve a more systematic functioning. The urgency to react to COVID-

19's impact has generated momentum and pushed forward massive acceleration in a diverse range of capabilities that have come together, namely automation, machine learning, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and many others (Sneader & Singhal, 2021).

Figure 3: Example of business integrates self-troubleshooting automated system
(Source: Unifi, 2020)

2.2.5   Global to Local

According to Zierlien et al. (2021), the changing economic environment and political climate during COVID-19 have brought disruptions to the supply chains on a worldwide scale. Zierlien et al. (2021) added that this situation has led to the business changing trend towards the demand for locally manufactured/produced products. As a result, there is a big movement towards more localized buying, localized selling, and localized manufacturing. Together, this movement initiates another movement towards environmental awareness – where people realize that goods coming from overseas might take some time to arrive and would need interventions such as chemical preservatives to keep them fresh. As such, if the products' origin is from outside the country, where there is a lot of manual handling required, consumers are worried about the COVID-19 spread risks. Therefore, they prefer to switch to locally attained products, where they could also apply their sense of responsibility to help the community and country by supporting local businesses. However, Zierlien et al. (2021) concluded that this movement of favoring local products is not a forced trend – it is a surging need of existing consumers who seek sustainable change in consumption.

2.2.6   Social Engagement

During COVID-19, companies became more aware of the importance of their customer engagement, i.e., the existing and the potential customers across social media. According to

Sneader and Singhal (2021), the use of social media has become an important channel for delivering business messages, especially during this pandemic that we are going through at the moment. Theoretically, businesses that have not established a strong presence in the community will have fewer chances to grow (Sneader & Singhal, 2021).

The same concept is applied in the digital world, where businesses will suffer if they are not engaging well with their customers. The use of social media creates a more authentic presence and business-customer relationships that are less monitored or handled by communication experts (Marr, 2020). Instead, businesses today tend to seek social media influencers to increase their social engagement because these celebrities have the capacity to showcase and represent the company and the products by bringing them into people's lives – they review the products and sell stories to their followers. Sneader and Singhal (2021) labeled the social media influencers as "social capital" whose job is to build trust within their social circles. Most of the time, people are influenced because they can picture and relate to the need to have those products in their lives. So, with all this influencing work taken into consideration, it defines the interconnectedness between society and businesses. Sneader and Singhal (2021) concluded that having a strong social media presence could have more impact on business activities in the long run, i.e., prominent and distinguished brand awareness, rather than focusing only on the shareholders from within an organization.

2.3   CONCLUSION

Defying the impact of this pandemic COVID-19 on the latest business growth, especially on a national scale, remains challenging. The challenges to re-uplift the economic sectors are being affected by internal and external factors. The internal factors are mainly scrutinized by the actions to contain the virus within Malaysia, which are to curb its impact on hospitality, retail, and other economic sectors. Externally, due to the nature of COVID-19 evolution bringing the impact on transportation and travel, it has also affected the supply chains. The situation now is a very convoluted and complex feedback mechanism. Qualitatively, we could see that the impact is rather large. It will be more worrying if the pandemic lasts even longer and the impact could be more prolonged. Thus, industry players such as those in travel, hospitality, retail, and restaurants are those who are affected the most.

Beyond that, if this situation continuously affects and suppresses consumer sentiments, it could lead to a demand effect where people have little intention of spending their money to save up for their livelihood. Nobody knows how long this pandemic will last until it does; its impact on our society will remain a moving target. With the numbers of variance of concerns involving the virus mutation, it is expected that healthcare and economic shocks will also come in waves. The impact will be expanding and worsening and, as a result, will force the government to take tighter and more strict countermeasures on travel and lockdowns. These economic difficulties are expected to outlast increasingly and with a greater lag. In reality, this situation has also limited the government's ability to slow down and buffer the impact.

Due to sudden restrictions and closures in business activities, business operators struggle

to keep up a good cash flow to run their business. It has become a constant battle to keep the business afloat to avoid going into a solvency crisis. The business solvency crisis means a much longer-lasting effect on employment rates and people's survival. However, with the financial aids under the "Pakej Rangsangan Ekonomi Prihatin Rakyat" (Prihatin) and "Pelan Jana Semula Ekonomi Negara" (Penjana), the government is committed to shift its focus from curbing the impact to the economic recovery phase and rebuild the nation. Many individuals, families and business owners have benefited from these financial assistance programs in order to re-live their livelihood. These financial aids are also viewed as a means of mitigating the impact of COVID-19 and preparing the citizens for the upcoming reopening and recovery phase.

Upon reopening business activities, business owners, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, are expected to look at the big picture as discussed in the preceding sections. However, they also should not overlook minor issues that could have a detrimental impact on their operation, for instance, limited parking space, a blocked entrance road to the premise, outdated signs, and other possibilities, which can contribute to the business failing to capture the attention of potential customers. The first impression is critical for any business since it helps elevate the mood of potential customers and summarizes their expectations. On the other hand, it is critical to keep a close eye on business spending on a regular basis, as the majority of other businesses would also be affected by the pandemic, resulting in inflation. Suppliers and distributors who are directly involved in the business may have increased the costs. As a result, it is only natural for business owners to seek alternatives or alternate solutions to this problem.

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3

LEADING EMPLOYEES EFFECTIVELY DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19: THE LEADER'S TRAITS

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3.1   INTRODUCTION

Leadership has evolved throughout the periods, with different situations and challenges suitable to those particular periods. Johnson and Heckman (2018) have defined leadership as a basic element in human life based on thinking from ancient philosophers, historians, and even scientists such as Confucius, Plato, and Machiavelli. As part of human nature, leadership is not only centralized on the talent, but style, behavior, and response in leadership should be focused as well on the development of the skills. Stepping into the 20th century, to lead an organization or a team from various backgrounds is a tough task entrusted upon a big persona – a leader. The year 2020 is celebrated with joyous, bright expectations, especially for business players. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, which started to mess up all the plans, has caused the biggest impact that no one can ever imagine. COVID-19, which is a new virus that was discovered in Wuhan back in December 2019, threatening the whole planet. Many nations in the world have shown leadership agenda by taking immediate actions to mitigate the spread of the virus during the early stage of the outbreak (Hamouche, 2020).

The unprecedented move taken by any business players during pandemic mode is essential to meet the demand of the supply chain besides ensuring the well-being of their employees are safeguarded (Dirani et al., 2020). Obviously, employees who contribute to the continuity of any business organization's survival will be directly affected by the pandemic. According to Tovmasyan and Minasyan (2020), the impact from COVID-19 will influence both employers' and employees' motivation on work efficiency, including employees' physical and mental health status (Bader, Reade & Froese, 2016). Two different factors, extrinsic and intrinsic, are domineering sources to drive motivation, especially to employees (Tovmasyan & Minasyan, 2020). Turner (2017) also stresses that the motivation of employees is directly affected by the organization's performance. While few

would argue about the hardship and obstacles they go through, leaders are the ones who will face more. Stoller (2020), in his commentary, insisted that this pandemic was a reflection of the leaders on their leadership. Indeed, this crisis is a test for the leadership of a leader towards employees while accelerating work performance. According to Bhaduri (2019), effective crisis management is an integral element in leadership as the practice will go beyond normal activities that must be delivered during the crisis.

This chapter reviews highlight the roles of a leader to test their competencies in leadership, specifically after the pandemic hit globally. We will look into the characteristics a leader should emphasize that will be further discussed in the following section, which is trust, communication, and optimism, while defining how these characteristics may affect the performance and link the cooperation between leader and employees.

3.2   BUILD TRUST BETWEEN LEADERS AND EMPLOYEES

Crisis such as the current pandemic generally affects the needs of humans. A competent leader who tries to maintain a good relationship during a crisis is able to enjoy the fruits as a mutual trust has already been formed long before the crisis (Johnson, 2018). It has been considered a crucial element for leaders to win employees' trust so that the employees are able to improve their work effectiveness (Hsieh & Wang, 2015). In the pandemic era, work progress may be disrupted due to a few factors such as connectivity, health conditions, and the environment. As a result of the connectivity issue, a drop in productivity towards work performance has to be considered. During the pandemic, work from home (WFH) is the most popular method adopted by employers to curb the spread of the virus (Messacar et al., 2020). The feasibility of working at home rather than at the office is a consequence of the economic lockdown (Messacar et al., 2020), which started to be lifted in phases according to the type of economy and services offered.

For employees, the opportunity to work from home does not necessarily bring more benefits, as they may need to consider their capacity to cope with the norm. Russo (2015) stated that employees are transitioning to juggle between work interests, required to be updated or submitted when necessary and personal resources, skills, traits, or conflicts. Accumulation of tons of work and personal conditions at home may cause various threats to the employees. To bring balance between works and personal, coming to the role of effective leaders to ease the flow and lighten their employees' burden. Leaders who introduce focused strategies to nourish employees' performance, especially psychological traits, are able to aid their employees in counteracting negativity in completing the tasks (Russo, 2015).

Practicing team leadership style is essential in this hard situation. As a leader, surely the objectives and goals of the organization are required to be met. Therefore, the most effective approach to tackling this issue is respecting and caring for the employees' needs (Fliegel et al., 2016). Leaders have to always diagnose and monitor the situation surrounding the employees, which may affect the quality, performance, and deliverability of the tasks. Intervention is required to stabilize the situation after a thorough analysis has been considered (Fliegel et al., 2016). When the leaders open themselves to situations of their employees, the leaders are actually now trying to

build a close but professional relationship with the employees which the Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory suggested (Qu et al., 2015).

Constraints and hardships faced by employees during COVID-19 are unimaginable and different from one another to another. The leader's task is to ensure the motivation of employees is at the optimum level where leaders can apply three different motivation theories; Alderfer's Existence-Relatedness-Growth (ERG), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Hertzberg's Two Factor Theory (Kriek, 2018). These three theories are three classical-based motivational theories besides few other theories that can be attained on employees. A leader who is able to apply motivational theory then maintain a good leader-employee relationship will successfully grab employees' trust. Trust is a willingness to rely on the other party's competence and belief that the other party will not exploit weaknesses for their own advantage (Kistyanto et al., 2021). Furthermore, Kistyanto (2021) explained the trust dimensions include competence, integrity, dependability or reliability, openness and honesty, and satisfaction. Evans (2015), in his book "Leadership trust: build it, keep it", defines trust as "An assurance that lets people manage risk in their relationships with others." This powerful element will put the leader in a concrete point in which employees are comfortable to share their thoughts and necessity. Evans (2015) also stated that trust is to be given in order to be earned in return. Employees' action to trust their leader can be represented as a risk that will have a greater impact on the former if the trust is breached (Evans, 2015). Furthermore, leaders have been designed to be trusted by their employees with ample supply and resources that can satisfy the needs and objectives of both employees and the organization.

Over the years, researchers from different fields have developed trust-building models considering various factors, from three key perspectives emphasizing that the trust-building process is dependent on the trustee's characteristics (e.g. ability, benevolence, integrity, credibility, etc.), rationality (e.g. calculations, cost/benefit, technology, etc.) and institutions (e.g. contracts, agreements, control mechanisms, security, etc.), assuming that the trustor will perceive or evaluate them positively (Laeequddin et al., 2012). In his book, Evans (2015) further stated the three essential elements in upholding the value of trustworthiness that help the practitioner, especially in the leader-employee relationship, focus on the aspects of behavior, individual and performance; ability, integrity, and loyalty. During the pandemic, some leaders probably have doubts about their employees' ability to complete the tasks considering each employee's ability is different. The situation has always influenced the trust made by leaders who make a judgement about the ability of the employees (Evans, 2015). A charismatic and trusted leader will bind with his/her employees by showing role model behavior and presenting a sense of belonging (Tortola & Pansardi, 2019) due to trust. For instance, employees who are required to do their work at home to curb the spread of the virus have to deliver within a stipulated time. Here, leaders put their trust in employees to fulfill the commitment while the employees have to realize the expectation. This can only be achieved after mutual trust between leader and employees has been successfully tied in the early stage of team formation. Both leaders and employees have to tolerate with each other so they are able to execute their work effectively. This kind of relationship will develop the sense of belonging as the support system to build a strong engagement and foundation to the good managing

organization and fulfill the team member's needs to perform in all given tasks. Therefore, the conflict between leader and employees is now being minimized as the trust issue has now been mitigated to become the core subject of the team to move forward.

3.3 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication is an art that requires skills to master blending with smart and dynamic leadership. From the perspective of Johnson and Heckman (2018), communication is a fundamental activity of leadership as more time and energy spent by the leader to deliver messages, speech, and advice to their employees. Ruben and Stewart (2019) have summarized a description from philosopher, Aristotle, about communication where it is actually an activity through verbal with the aim to convince listeners by having skillful argument and speech deliverability. Strategic communication is essential when facing a crisis. Crisis management is directly affected by effective communication between leaders, employees, and stakeholders (Arnett et al., 2017) to avoid unwanted impact on all key players and organizations. Arnett et al. (2017) have suggested that the link between smart leadership and strategic communication offers a great deal in determining the organization's bright future through the engagement of leaders and employees. The relationship between leader and employees becomes the main element to be prioritized as these communities are looking forward to guidance, while the leader in this time has to show his/her authenticity to help the organization and employees overcome fear and discomfort (Dirani et al., 2020). Leaders should also have knowledge of virtual communication techniques, while face-to-face communication is now limited and has to be done at a distance (Newman & Ford, 2021). Relaying information to the employees will help them undergo the crisis calmly as a lot of assumptions and thinking come to their mind on how their fate will be affected and what will happen to the organization they are working with (Klann, 2003). These types of thinking and assumptions come across to their mind are due to low morale and economic recession (Mani & Mishra, 2020). In some study conducted to know the need for communication between leader and employees, (Dirani et al., 2020) has highlighted the needs from the employees' side; the importance of transparency, resources information to deal with stress and anxiety for their mental health and acknowledgment from the leader about the difficulty. The ability to address these issues and offer some suggestions to the employees through effective communication in order for them to improve their well-being will push forward the performance of both employees and the organization.

According to Ruben (2019), leadership and communication are always interdependent as they are related to specific situations in which have a certain impact associated with these two. With the aim to relay information to the receivers through various channels, the contents are undeniable can easily be understood and processed (Ruben, 2019). Communication is not only limited to the medium used to relay information but includes the selection of language, skills adapted when initiating communication, and tone used in conversation (Churchman, 2016). Effective communication from leaders stimulates the sense and spirits of the employees, especially those who are badly affected by COVID-19. Most employees react differently during crisis time, which varies in terms of acceptance to change, emotional behavior, and workloads (Dirani et al., 2020). There

should be a balance between logic and emotion in the communication between leaders and employees. A blending of logic and emotion in communication requires skills to set the competencies of the leader in successfully approaching, analyzing, and understanding the employees' situation (Johnson & Heckman, 2018). The core task for a leader during this type of crisis is to frequently listen, taking opinion and considerations from employees, asking their latest situation and well-being besides convincing them that the organization is always open to help. Such approaches will help to motivate the employees to stay positive going through this pandemic.

Talking about communication, selection of language is essential to motivate not to depress the listeners. The discipline of choosing the right language and words should not be taken for granted, as it portrays the maturity and professionalism of every single person in the organization. Churchman (2016), in his book, has highlighted the right use of language is to minimize communication disputes, which may lead to misunderstanding then tarnish the reputation of an organization. Expressive language is recommended to be used by leaders to the employees who face difficulties during COVID-19. The skills adapted by the leader when initiating communication rely on the manner, situation, and preparedness to equip empathy in the conversation (Ruben, 2019). Suggestion to the leader who has trouble to approach his/her employees who are in crisis is by arranging the sentence in an orderly manner that can be accepted by listeners. Another method is always practicing the line to avoid awkwardness and nervous especially to those who just started to practice effective communication skills. For instance, the leader can start to practice talking in front of a mirror or his/her own family to know the effectiveness of the selection of the words or even the right tone when talking. However, leaders are not entangled to use the words that he/she has been practiced but the modification is acceptable as long as the employees who will listen to the words are understood. The outcome from this activity is magnificent as it helps to boost up the employees' spirit, besides the relationship between leader and employees becomes closer.

In order to stay connected during COVID-19, Newman and Ford (2021) have listed two methods which are leader has to have a one-to-one individual call or video meetings with each employee and conduct weekly meetings with all team members within the employees. Continuous communication between leader and employees must be held at a convenient time agreed by both parties because some of them may entangle with some responsibilities at home which requires flexibility. The significance of these activities is to ensure all employees are being appreciated and being disciplined to the jobs. Leaders who give thorough attention and respond to each doubt and problems shows that he/she upholds the value of respect and manage to bring the employees to achieve the organization's goals (Newman & Ford, 2021). Once the leader emphasizes communication tools and techniques, the employees who work outside the office feel closer to the organization's goals and mission (Newman & Ford, 2021).

3.4   REALISTIC AND OPTIMISTIC

Prior to having effective communication with the employees, the leader now needs to be realistic and optimistic in any situation and circumstances being encountered. New norm is totally different

from the previous state as well as this pandemic has huge impacts on the organization as an institution that provides medium to work and employees as the driver to reach the missions and objectives of the organization. For an organization, it is an opportunity for a leader to outshine his/her leadership skills during this pandemic and to bring the company out from the crisis successfully in the future (Dirani et al., 2020). From the perspective of strategic marketing, a pandemic can also be a competitive advantage (Newman & Ford, 2021) for the organization to stay relevant in the business and to create more customer loyalty ahead of other competitors in terms of management, new product introduction, and product positioning in the market. To deliver all objectives, missions, and opportunities that the organization gained during a pandemic, leaders in the organization have to acknowledge some difficulties from the standpoint of employees. There must be some issues to be addressed by the employees in the journey of accomplishing their work. All problems and comments voiced out by the employees have to be entertained accordingly because, at the end of the day, the work delivered must be in lieu of the missions and objectives of the organization. No one should be left behind to bring success to the organization that they are working with. Since optimism is one form of competitive advantage, it is an added value, especially to the leader of the organization. Both leaders and employees who do not have optimism would easily give up before reaching the goal of the team and the organization due to all struggles, difficulties, fear, and negativity along the journey (Gordon, 2017). Optimism is the key factor for everyone in the organization to stay disciplined and keep moving forward without hesitation.

During the pandemic, surely there are some changes that will be introduced by the organization to suit the current situation with the employees and job requirements. There should be some policies to allow the employees to work away from the office, which consists of objectives, time, or procedures to be followed. In return, if there are none of these stated in an organization's policies, it becomes the responsibility of the leader to outline the policies to define his/her expectations then share them with the employees for the acknowledgment (Newman & Ford, 2021). However, the policies outlined must be realistic with the current situation as the employees are now in the process to adapt to the new norm. How does the leader will know that the policies he/she created is realistic and achievable? The only way is to look into the performance of the employees to do their jobs in this pandemic. If the leader finds the policies introduced are not suitable, the leader may take action by actively inviting the employees to share their ideas and opinions on the improvement of the policies, although the end results still on leader's hands to decide (Halaychik, 2016). Halaychik (2016) further elaborated in his book, this type of leadership style allows the employees to develop their skills and knowledge as their leader has put trust on them to diversify the viewpoints from every angle of concerns and hierarchy in the organization.

Consequently, a leader's action to include his/her employees proves that the leader is optimistic with their team members' capability to solve the issues they encounter. A leader's belief and optimism are important to be shared with the employees to transform the team and the organization (Gordon, 2017). At the end of the day, an optimistic leader can spread positivity to the employees as the leader is already engulfed with this mindset. Everyone may view all challenges they face during COVID-19 are a burden that they are struggling to overcome. By looking at the adversities on the positive side, the misfortune can be changed into a fortune for

those who can see it (Gordon, 2017). As a leader, please bear in mind that hardships will be along the journey to disturb the smoothness of the process. Once the leader is realistic with the challenges and optimistic about mitigating them, then only the leader can share their belief with their employees to influence the employees' self-esteem. A well-known positive leadership style persona, the infamous American football coach, Pete Carroll, as once said that he must share his optimism with his team members, which future will be better than the present as the cynical world that people live intend to influence the people's mind and behavior (Gordon, 2017). This designation of thinking is essential to instill self-development among the employees who bring along with them the mission of their organization. For a leader, to believe in the employees causes them to be more proactive and shows optimism towards the jobs (Newman & Ford, 2021). An optimistic leader will see hidden values that everyone cannot see; something that is impossible can be turned into possible, execute belief into reality (Gordon, 2017). At the same time, this type of leader will encourage his/her employees to plan then complete their works for future success even the situation seems uncertain globally. The challenges become the agent for the leader to envision for the future that offers benefits to the employees and organization. All in all, it is a basic requirement for a leader to value leadership competencies through success and failure, especially during this pandemic (Stoller, 2020).

3.5   CONCLUSION

In this pandemic, a leader who has the following leadership elements; trustworthiness, excellent communication skills, and a realistic and optimistic mind can lead the team successfully without bothering the obstacles that may come forward later. A good relationship between leaders and employees has now become stronger as they put trust in each other to achieve the mission and objectives of the organization. Then, it helps to mitigate any issue that may affect the professionalism among themselves. Excellent communication skills will reduce the gap of connection between the leader and employees. The communication methods to approach affected employees will ensure the employees feel appreciated and motivated. COVID-19 has also provided a platform for the leader to stay optimistic and realistic to lead the employees. This is to ease the burdens uphold by both parties in order to ensure all jobs are completely done.

Lastly, this pandemic should be seen as an opportunity for the leader to outshine his/her capabilities, competencies, and skills in leadership. The things that the leader learns and responds from the pandemic will be useful to be applied post-pandemic. Leaders are now prepared to take more challenges; providing the experience to manage the team during a crisis is tougher compared to normal situation. This can further enhance the quality and performance of the team in completing their tasks while achieving the mission and objectives of the organization.

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4

EMPLOYEES' EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGES IDENTIFICATION FOR POSITIVE LEADERSHIP ROLES DURING COVID-19

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4.1   INTRODUCTION

The Corona Virus is translated directly from its Latin origin as the Crown Virus, literally describing how powerful the virus is. Corona Virus Disease 2019, as simplified as COVID-19, is an ongoing global health crisis that attacks human well-being and stability as well as the freedom that we used to have. With over thirty million COVID-19 active cases worldwide as of early April 2021, and the numbers continue to rise, the pandemic has triggered anxiety to industry people, be it the employers or the employees. Many businesses were forced to shut down due to their inability to sustain the costs impacted by the pandemic. While, from different perspectives, many other companies are struggling to retain their operations, coping up with their financial problems and employees' engagement simultaneously.

Leading employees during this difficult time is also a challenging task because both employees and employers face difficulties coping with the uncertainties that lie ahead of them. According to Dirani et al. (2020), this COVID-19 pandemic brings unprecedented pitfalls to organizations. It leads to a breakdown of the entire entity and systems. Thus, it requires authentic leaders to come forward to respond to the crisis and overturn the situation by overcoming their fears and limitations. As crucial as steering the improvement wheel, a leader would have to grasp the shortcomings from the employees' point of view. Many employees, primarily from the non-essentials sectors, encountered increased isolation, anxiety, and loneliness due to the obligation to work from home, which affected their behaviors during and after work (Hu, He & Zhou, 2020).

Apart from that, employees who have to work in a home-based office with inadequate

infrastructure are most likely to suffer from unrealistic performance expectations, impaired employee-manager relationships, and difficulty establishing trust with colleagues (Narayanamurthy & Tortorella, 2021). In these agonizing times, organizations must play a vital role in accommodating sources to the leaders to set a clear path to assisting the employees. Based on a study conducted by Men and Yue (2019), applying internal communication within an organization can result in a positive emotional culture such as compassion, love, pride, gratitude, and creating supportive employee behaviors.

This chapter aims to study employees' emotional changes during this challenging period and discuss the best ways that leaders could apply to respond to these emotional changes to lead the employees efficiently and effectively.

4.2 STAGES OF EMOTIONAL CHANGE IN ORGANIZATIONS

To foresee and anticipate actions that would positively impact the organizational changes, leaders must identify stages of emotional change in their employees to mitigate the impact of individuals' negative emotions (Castillo et al., 2016). Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic has similar ramifications as other significant changes in organizations, and all changes must be addressed appropriately by the leaders. As such, it is the leaders' responsibility to accompany the employees to get through the changes expeditiously and most efficiently possible. Cameron and Green (2015) integrated the Adams, Hayes, and Hopson's change curve in their book and highlighted nine emotional stages, which are i) shock, ii) denial, iii) anger, iv) bargaining, v) depression, vi) acceptance, vii) experimentation, viii) discovery and ix) integration, in response to recognizing employees' emotional changes.
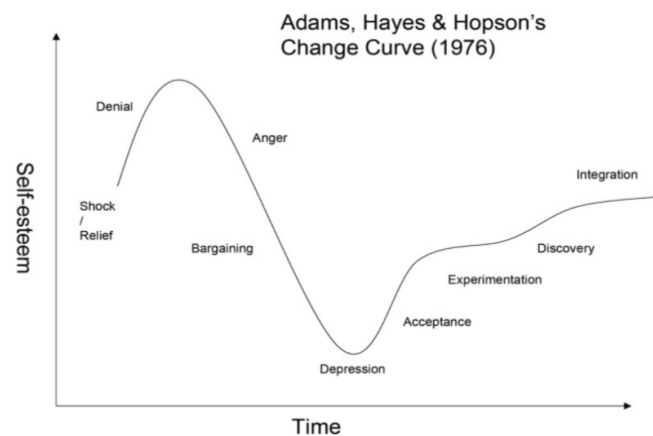

Figure 1: Adams. Hayes & Hopson's Change Curve (Cameron and Green, 2015)

Before an employee gets to feel comfortable with the changes, a few emotional processes are

involved, and each process takes time. The employees react differently accordingly to their emotional changes stage. The explanations are as follows:

4.2.1 Shock

Shock is an emotional state that happens when changes set forth, e.g., the closure of business premises and the need to work from home; most employees are confused. They are trying to comprehend the sudden proclamation as such interventions triggered by the COVID-19 outbreak introduced employees' behavioral changes, which can transition with multiple lockdowns from temporary to long-lasting (Narayanamurthy & Tortorella, 2021).

When COVID-19 was first declared a pandemic in early 2020, many businesses went into a panic state, not realizing the extent of the damage this pandemic could inflict on their operations. Concurrently, many employees found themselves losing a solid foundation on which to rely. As a result of this emotional stage, both the organization and its employees are unsure of the best course of action to take in order to move forward.

4.2.2 Denial

According to Dzhurova (2020), denial is an emotional state that exhibits refusal to acknowledge reality. It leaves comfort to the heart by pretending that change is not happening. Psychologically, it is a defense mechanism to numb the effects of the changes. As time passes by, the changes will be absorbed gradually. As we move forward to the next stage, the bottled-up emotions will erupt and lead to the confrontation of the sorrow.

At first, when the government ordered a national lockdown in March 2020, being confined at home appeared to be a welcome relief for an overworked community. Nevertheless, as the days went by and the number of persons who became infected with and died from COVID-19 rose, many of us became more skeptical and reluctant to believe that the situation would worsen even further.

4.2.3 Anger

The confrontation with sorrow will eventually create anger. Anger is a state whereby the person is to hide emotions and pain, or known as the masking effect; it disguises itself in resentment or bitterness. As a result, it builds the tendency to play blame games. It is unwillingly acknowledging the threat and shifting the responsibilities (Dzhurova, 2020). The frustrations often time burst open and redirected to other people. The feeling is too intense to acknowledge that rationally the object of anger is not to blame. When the anger subsides, the emotional reaction will start to slow down and enter the next stage, the bargaining stage. Example of situations happen in anger state; employees show dissatisfactions over changes of rules, i.e., working hour per day exceeds the regular working hour, numerous online meetings to attend, and lack of time to execute tasks.

Throughout this pandemic, a number of lockdowns have been imposed. The prolonged lockdown has created unrest among the populace. As a result of their circumstances, they are easily irritable, argumentative, and aggressive. Consequently, we have noticed many people venting their frustrations on social media, blaming others for their inability to go forward. This behavior is a natural stage of healing that can provide momentary power and structure while expressing anger towards someone or something.

4.2.4   Bargaining

Bargaining is a negotiation process to delay the inevitable by adhering to positive news and disregarding the negative ones (Dzhurova, 2020). People will try to negotiate as part of understanding that changes are going to happen. They also have the intention to minimize the impact of the changes. It helps to delay the pain, confusion, or sadness. For example, in exchange that the employers' agreement to fulfill the employees' needs, they accept to adapt to changes, e.g., stick to the regular working hour, set achievable datelines, and provide ample time to execute tasks knowing that the resources are limited.

4.2.5   Depression

Whereas in the anger and bargaining stage, the emotional state is more likely to be active, while depression, contrarily, is more likely to be quiet. It is the stage of realization that things have changed irreversibly (Dzhurova, 2020). After the bargaining stage, employees got the most out of the negotiation. There will be a bit of empathy forcing their mind to realize that they are coming into a new reality, that the only option they have is to go along with it. By isolating themselves from other people to cope with the changes, employees may cherish the emotions and produce quality works.

4.2.6   Acceptance

Acceptance attempts to normalize the situation by embracing it and adapting to the new normal while exploring possible solutions (Dzhurova, 2020). It integrates the new reality, which subconsciously assumes that change is happening and resolves it to address a new future (Smith et al., 2015). At this emotional stage, employees accept that they have no power to control the situation. Therefore, they give in to assurance feeling, which provides them with a sense of normalcy and control.

4.2.7   Experimentation

After the employees acknowledge the changes, they will consider giving tries on the new events and circumstances and look forward to what it could bring (Cameron & Green, 2015). As the COVID-19 continues, people's concerns about finances grow. They prepare by budgeting for the

long term and avoiding high-spending events. With the acceptance of the new normal, they move toward a more long-term orientation and discover new ways to manage their lives.

4.2.8 Discovery

In this emotional state, employees perceive the change positively. They realize that it is the new way of getting the job done, and it has become a new environment for them. Consequently, it becomes the new stability in their work life. They now see things from the company's perspective, that perhaps the change creates new opportunities and a better way of working (Cameron & Green, 2015). Furthermore, employees at this point acknowledged the fact that keeping a job is more important than not having one.

4.2.9 Integration

Moving forward into the integration phase is an emotional state that the employees have now voluntarily to move on. It is the phase where they start to feel comfortable again, in line with their convictions, beliefs, and values (Hills, 2016). Subsequently, they exert more control over their actions and make things happen in positive ways. Hills (2016) added that as they integrate all the changes in their emotional states, they now consciously choose to let go of things they cannot control and march forward with the things they have in hand.

However, all the above, as Smith et al. (2015) mentioned in their book, the emotional change curve is a personal journey where different personalities, life experiences, personal circumstances, and others will affect how individuals respond. Nevertheless, in a general perspective, most people will encounter this type of emotional roller coaster.

4.3   KNOWING THE EMPLOYEES' BEHAVIOR

From a general perspective, we know that the pandemic COVID-19 demands a growth mindset within the organizations to build resilience to face the uncertainties, setbacks, and economic impact. To build a culture of growth mindset requires a leader to reinforce new habits among the employees; a leader needs to make entreaty to commitment, discipline and patience to achieve a satisfactory culture of positiveness (Risley, 2020). Hence, as a first step to achieve a culture of positive growth mindset, it is crucial to identify the behavior of the employees before a leader can strategize how to equip them correctly.

Berberich (2016), in his studies about employees' reaction to downsizing, applied Mishra and Spreitzer's archetypes to define employees' responses to job dissatisfaction where each vector defines the direction of the identified group behavior (constructive/destructive in vertical and active/passive in horizontal directions). Similarly, in response to COVID-19, we can adapt the same model to classify the employees according to their right behaviors.
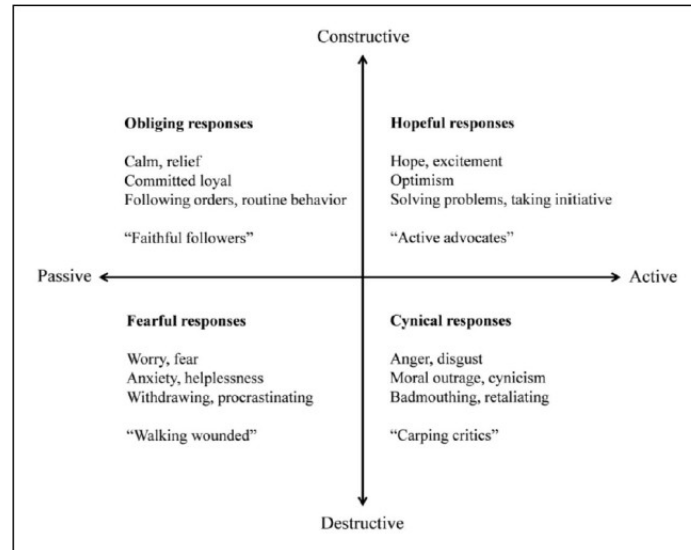
Figure 2: Archetypes of employees' responses (Berberich, 2016)

4.3.1   Constructive-Passive Behavior

Employees who belong to this behavior tend to show an obliging response. They will feel relieved, calm, loyal, and committed when they are confident and convinced with the contingency plans prepared by the leaders. Berberich (2016) described this type of employee as the "faithful followers" since they tend to remain loyal and obediently commit to doing their work. Furthermore, they hold on to old habits and do not necessarily look for new opportunities and challenges, which indicates their affective commitment since they feel attached to the organization (Berberich, 2016). Principally, their main focus is to get back to their routine behavior as fast as possible, and they look forward to a more stable environment.

4.3.2   Constructive-Active Behavior

Employees who possess this type of behavior are more into hopeful responses. They show hope, optimism, initiative, and excitement. These employees see the overall thing as an opportunity rather than a problem. They do not feel discouraged by the changes happening as they feel unthreatened (no personal harm intended to them) and can cope with it. They also exhibit strong participation in problem-solving activities. Berberich (2016) considered them "active advocates" since they actively improved their performance to achieve their targets.

4.3.3   Destructive-Passive Behavior

In reality, when employees encounter changes in the usual way they have been doing, they will

most likely enter this type of behavior. They address questions in fear response since they sense potentially harmed by the impact of the changes, showing their side of worry and anxiety. They often react in a frightened way and tend to lapse into a depressed state, feel worried about the situation, and experienced a reduction in concentration (Berberich, 2016). Employees with fearful responses react with helplessness, reflecting their belief that they have limited resources to cope with the situation, leading to increased absenteeism and dilly-dallying tasks and time spent with non-work-related activities (Berberich, 2016). In this situation, they would not do anything drastic, neither anything active. They take the exception approach where they isolate themselves and would not participate in improvement activities. Thus, naming these employees of the behavior group as the "walking wounded."

4.3.4   Destructive-Active Behavior

Employees in this behavior group respond with anger and resentment and feel personally harmed by the situation (Berberich, 2016). They naturally have the intentions to cope with the changes but react in a more energetic and agitating manner, thus naming this type of behavior as "carping critics." They show the tendency to many negatives behaviors that could risk the security of the organizations, such as badmouthing, vandalizing, or even worse, sabotaging. However, it is not entirely negative because the critics may also bring positive inputs on how to solve the situation. Their justifications and opinions on specific issues may help the management to look at different perspectives they never thought of before.

These four groups of behaviors, as highlighted in Berberich (2016)'s study, provided a comprehensive approach to classifying the employees in response to the organizational changes due to COVID-19. On the subject of managing the employees profoundly, a leader needs to understand the employees' reactions and plan to overcome such situations. As such, the employees' behaviors archetypes, as shown in Figure 2, are valuable and handy tools for leaders to strategize and prioritize ahead. We can also sub-categorize them into two types of employees from the archetypes: the predominant, demonstrated by the destructive response, and the strongest emerged from the constructive response (Berberich, 2016). As much as it is crucial to control the "critics" from giving bad influence to the rest of the employees, it is also vital to drive the "active advocates" and the "faithful followers" (which are in the constructive quadrant) to promote constructive behaviors to the people of the destructive quadrant.

In terms of managing changes and leading the employees effectively, an organization must have the capacity to allocate resources to the managers, especially in power management related issues. Power is given to the managers. Nevertheless, the question is on how are they going to use the power wisely? It is the organization's responsibility to ensure that the managers use the right leadership skills according to their situations. With that, all members of the organization will get the benefit from it.

4.4   TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Though there are many leadership styles in the leadership dictionary, the most popular and widely used is transformational leadership. As the name implies, transformational leadership is a process of changing and transforming people by involving emotions, values, ethics, and long-term goals and creating connections that increase the motivation in both the leaders and the employees (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leaders act as a model, inspiring a shared vision and getting support from the employees. They encourage innovation and risk-taking to accomplish tasks, along with supporting employees' personal development. They also foster engagement and accountability in order to recognize contributions from the subordinates. In other words, transformational leadership is a holistic approach focusing on the internal and external aspects of its followers, be it emotionally or physically, or even situational factors; all those factors affect the effectiveness of transformational leadership.

On the other hand, transactional leadership is the opposite of the transformational type. Transactional leadership is a more traditional management approach focusing on planning, organizing, delegating, and controlling. In this type of approach, good employees are rewarded and obtain reinforcements. In comparison, punishment awaits those who did not meet the expectations. In this transactional leadership, the control systems are in place, and the hierarchy is clear. In general, the leader-employee relationship in transactional leadership is a contract basis relationship. It happened when the employees were influenced to enact their roles as agreed upon with the leader in exchange for reward or avoidance of punishment (MacNeill et al., 2018).

These two types of leadership effectively bring the best out of the employees, both in terms of work productivity and social well-being. Theoretically, in times of COVID-19, the combinations of these two leadership styles seem to be the perfect solutions to the organizations. MacNeill et al. (2018) agree that the best leaders are the ones that apply both transformational and transactional styles; transformational behaviors augment the effects of transactional behaviors. MacNeill et al. (2018) also concluded that transformational leadership is a subset of transactional leadership.
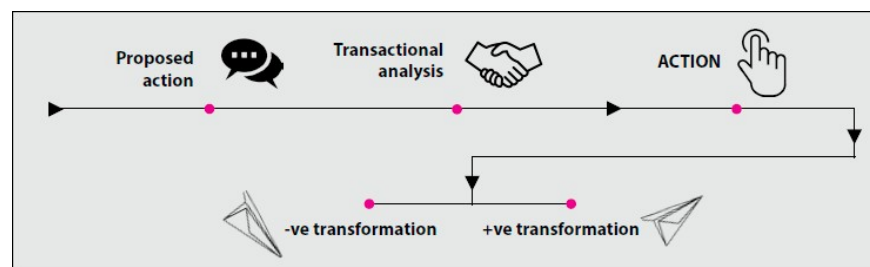

Figure 3: Relationship between transactional and transformational leadership (McNeill et al., 2018)

As to generate the highest level of employee engagement, to generate higher work performance, create a better work environment, or even enable employees to grow, a leader can apply the transformational leadership style. Contrarily, the organizations could benefit from the transactional style when making a difficult decision such as a lay-off or radical change, or conducting an emergency and handling difficult employees.

4.5   POWER AND LEADERSHIP REINFORCEMENT

As discussed earlier, with the correct method of utilizing power and leadership towards a group of employees during a crisis (i.e., COVID-19), a leader's job to organize a proper improvement propagation to the entire organization will be easier. In order to apply the right style of leadership, we take a look back at Adam, Hayes & Hopson's emotion change curve (Figure 1), where we can summarize the emotional changes into three phases.
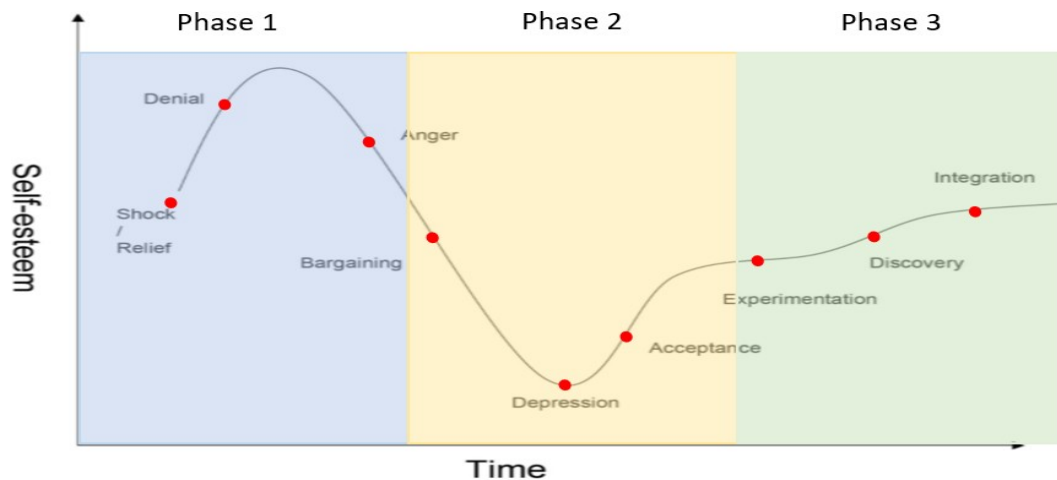
Figure 4: Three phases of emotional change

The first phase consists of shock, denial, and anger emotional state. It is a phase of confusion, whereas, in this phase, the employees try to grasp that the change is happening.

The second phase consolidates the reactions of bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This phase is like a problem-solving phase, where the employees come up with plans to acknowledge that the change will be a new reality.

The third phase is the engaging phase, where the employees start to respond to changes and work in the new norms. As we distinguish the emotional reactions to their phases, naturally, the approach to every phase is different. Thus, we can plan the implementation of leadership and how it should evolve at every phase.

4.5.1   Evolution of Leadership in Phase 1

To effectively lead the employees, the first phase is the most critical to address. It is the pilot phase to successfully set the path to the goal. The first thing in terms of the actions required from a leadership perspective is to control the situation. Right from the offset, the employees need to know the direction of the changes. As Voehl and Harrington (2016) mentioned in their book, the general requirements to overcome resistance to change are by enlightening the employees about the need for change and updating the organization's current status where it needs to be in the future. Therefore, a leader's perception is essential, and it is the leader's role to provide a clear vision to the organization. A clear vision helps the people within the organization learn how they can fit in with the organization's overall direction. It allows them to feel acknowledged as they believe they are a significant figure of worthwhile individuals (Northouse, 2016).

In this phase, it is also necessary for the leaders to build a good situational analysis by developing realistic approaches to accomplish the objectives (Voehl & Harrington, 2016). The elements such as economic, social, human, and company structure are needed to assess. Economic analysis is very much needed to measure the impact on the entire organization, whether it is affecting the financial status (i.e., profitability) or deteriorating customer satisfaction. As we are now in the period of pandemic COVID-19, some regulations have changed in terms of social laws. Therefore, a situational analysis on this area helps the leaders understand its impact on the employees and the organizations. On the human side, the leaders can analyze their employees' behaviors and attitudes with the model we have discussed earlier (i.e., Mishra and Spreitzer's archetypes). Lastly, the analysis of the company structure involves studies on its productivity and efficiency.

Additionally, a leader needs to have an action plan to strengthen the objectives blueprint to ensure the employees perceive that the overall situation is under control. In this case, transactional leadership seems to be the most suitable style to apply where initially, we do not have focus groups as fewer communications between leaders and employees initiated. From a transactional perspective, leaders may have come up with unpopular decisions; however, ultimately, it is the phase for the leaders to present themselves as the person in charge. A leader may also utilize transformational leadership in some instances to motivate and mobilize employees, suggesting that the ratio for transactional to transformational style at 80%:20%.

Leaders need to recognize and identify employees who are likely to resist making significant changes for various reasons. Among the usual reasons that most likely shared by the employees are afraid of the unknown, inability to deal with the change, and the belief that the change will adversely affect their jobs (Voehl & Harrington, 2016). If looking at the priority of which group of employees need to focus on, it is the "walking wounded" (Destructive-Passive behavior). The "faithful followers" and "active advocates" will naturally support the action plans, providing that they acknowledge the plan. Meanwhile, the "walking wounded" need to be handled with extra care to convince and reassure them with the leaders' direction. The primary concern is to divert them from transforming their confusion into fear.

Apart from that, the leaders need to transparently deliver the outline of their actions plan, however, avoid giving unnecessary details. In this phase, the employees will have many questions on their minds; therefore, the leaders must not present all the aspects of the plan to refrain from getting bombarded with endless queries and doubts. Even in the initial phase, assuming that the interaction between leaders and employees is few, a leader should always initiate frequent communication. With communication, a leader can gauge and adapt to how the situation evolves.

A leader must provide direction to implement the decisions by assigning clear tasks and responsibilities to execute the plans. It is a way to get the employees to participate in problem-solving activities. Mobilizing the employees to specific tasks makes them feel like they are a part of the solutions; in return, it will increase their motivation. Once they acquire high motivation, they will voluntarily contribute to the improvement of the organization. The group of "walking wounded" will also upgrade themselves, without reluctance, to the people of the constructive group.

4.5.2   Leadership Executions in Phase 2

Now that the confusion phase is over, a leader must refine the actions plan by getting into details and adapting the plan accordingly to the current situation. In this phase, the long-term vision must be clear to everybody so that everybody can expect what the future is like for the organization. According to Voehl and Harrington (2016), the vision should describe how the organization will improve by achieving a change vision of working culture. The leaders need to have a plan that will address the main problem; simultaneously, the employees also need to be reassured that the organization is going in the right direction. Therefore, when leaders understand their employees' behavior, it is easier to incorporate task-oriented behavior. The task-oriented behavior allocates guidance and sets a clear direction to improve teamwork in a rapidly emerging virtual work environment (Bartsch et al., 2020).

Again, communication is essential in this phase. Leaders must update the current status of the organization from time to time. Voehl and Harrington (2016) highlighted that, in order to accomplish the change, leaders must widely communicate with the employees about the need for the change. However, in this case, with communication, a leader integrates employees' inputs and opinions in the decision-making process. One way to obtain input from the employees is by conducting surveys, for example, to know their state of mind and what matters most to them during this time of COVID-19. With these kinds of surveys, the management secures quantitative and qualitative data on the employees' behavior, and with these data, the development of the actions plan will be a lot easier.

During this phase, the most optimum leadership styles are transactional and transformational; the utilization weightage of both styles is equal (50%-50%). As things will be more detailed and leaders-employees are going into a dyad relationship, there will be feedback from each side. Thus, the focus groups in this phase are the "faithful followers," "active advocates," and "carping critics." The constructive groups are those who carry out the plan; that

is the reason why the leader must emphasize mobilizing them efficiently. Considering that most "walking wounded" have already joined hands with the constructive groups and become a bigger executive group, it is necessary to gather as many resources as to utilize them to the fullest.

At this stage, what a leader needs to do is identify who is in the constructive groups. Initiate engagement with these employees by consulting the ideas to strengthen their inputs and actions. Employees desire to feel respected by the leaders to be involved and work toward a realistic yet promising vision for the long run (Voehl & Harrington, 2016). At the same time, let them transmit the messages and support decisions made by the organizations to the other employees. A leader also needs to identify the critics and study their positions and claims and estimate the consequences on the decisions they may have made. When all pieces of information are in hands, the leaders can start preparing for the bargaining stage.

Consecutively, the employees will have many requests and demands; therefore, a leader must use reasoned negotiations. The need for people to feel that their concerns are being heard is a necessity (Voehl & Harrington, 2016). However, a leader must rationalize between negotiable and non-negotiable demands. The fundamental of negotiation is to create a win-win situation that both parties will benefit from the process. Conclusively, if the leader finds it impossible to grant the demands, he must be firm and stand by his decisions because, at the end of the day, the leaders too are bound by the company's rules and regulations.

4.5.3   Employee Engagement in Phase 3

Finally, the third phase; is the phase where main moving forward activities will take place. Here, the employees will try to adapt to a new reality. In this phase, it is hugely critical to re-promote the organization's vision to the employees and let them understand where the organization is going, over and beyond the current situation.

So, in this situation, leaders need to constantly manage the overall transition and emphasize the employees' engagement activities. Therefore, a leader must apply the transformational leadership style and a bit of transactional style. Again, if we were to put weightage on the application of the transactional-transformational leadership style, a combination of 20%-80% seems appropriate. The transformational style during this phase will help to elevate the employees' motivation to the highest level. Furthermore, it will naturally be resulting in a better quality of work performance. Approaching the employees with the transformational style will also create a better work environment. Indirectly, it helps in facilitating the employees' development. The focus groups in this phase are the employees from the constructive groups (i.e., "faithful followers" and "active advocates") because they have maintained their synergy to move along with the changes.

In addition, a leader should be creating a positive climate where employees can exercise open discussion and problem solving; this will help develop cohesive and functional working groups. The leadership of openness is to be said, where the leaders listen to people, ask questions, understand their conflicts, and help them overcome their conflicts. Moreover, a leader who fosters participative decision-making increases employees' degree of job autonomy (Bartschet al., 2020).

Additionally, to have effective employee engagement, a leader needs to facilitate their working condition and continuously stimulate the entire work environment by maintaining a good relationship. In the third phase, the employees' conflicts are not as acute as in phase 1 and phase 2, thus, describing that they are moving into a more stable environment. Hence, giving more opportunities and time for the leaders to create a positive working surrounding. According to Blom and Derman (2017), as the leaders influence the surroundings and the organizations through their energy, it will empower them to no longer feel helpless and frustrated due to overwhelming changes in the environments while struggling to motivate them.

To strengthen the ability of effective leadership, a leader must initiate activities for employee development. This phase is the best time to train and educate the employees so that they will always be up-front to drive organizational growth. The fact is that the more they help the employees, the more they will get in return, e.g., they can carry out the plans that we have outlined previously. Blom and Derman (2017) concluded that when an employee gets recognition, he/she is able to contribute more at an individual and team level. Furthermore, a good leader must be ready to delegate tasks; delegating challenging mandates to employees is like taking a risk to change the entire working scenario. Logically, with the mandates given to the employees, they will feel more responsible for doing things, and directly they will feel more engaged in their work. Eventually, it will be easier for the organization to move forward and overcome the crisis.

4.6   CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that during this COVID-19 pandemic period, the whole world has changed and reacted to the implications caused by it tremendously. Prominently, the current leadership concepts are differently-abled, and their effectiveness is also questionable. With the significant changes occurring unexpectedly, the organizations abruptly have to define their necessities to reassess objectives, operations, and leadership orientation. At present times, aside from bringing in profits to the organizations, leaders are now directly involved in managing, nurturing, and cultivating skillful employees.

In order to lead employees efficiently and practically, the leaders themselves must be courageous to pull up their sleeves and work hard like never before. This pandemic period has demanded faster judgments, immediate decision-making, and prompt actions from the leaders. At times like this, leaders must prioritize self-care and self-love before submitting themselves to influence others. Leaders nowadays are bound to personally acknowledge their own energy and understand their impact on other parties before encouraging participation and involvement from others. After all, a competent leader is one who succeeds in distinguishing the quality in themselves from those that fail; this implies that everything begins with self-appreciation.

When the leaders embrace and respect themselves, it can speed up the organizational changes that will further avoid unnecessary crises and distractions. Instead, it will lead to continual growth for the entire organization. When the leaders have the intention to embed knowledge and

power in their leadership skills, they will definitely be able to lead and manage the employees effectively.

To conclude, Dasborough et al. (2021) argued that the emotional intelligence construct is essential for effective leadership. In relation to goal attainment, leadership also involves in "generating and maintaining excitement, enthusiasm, confidence, and optimism" (George, 2000, p. 1039), and emotions are significant at each stage of the leader/member relationship (Cropanzano, Dasborough, & Weiss, 2017). In this respect, Caruso, Mayer, and Salovey (2002) point out that (ability) "emotional intelligence underlies a leader's 'people' or 'relationship' skills" (p. 55). The COVID- 19 crisis has provided an opportunity for leadership in most life domains (Van Bavel et al., 2020). Leaders have struggled to handle the crisis, to look after their people, and to manage their own emotions at the same time. As such, leaders with high emotional intelligence are needed to lead and give hope for the future direction of the organization.

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5

LEADERSHIP EVOLUTION TO A WORKABLE WORKING ENVIRONMENT DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19

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5.1   INTRODUCTION

The current pneumonia pandemic or called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), that caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), is spreading exponentially has started in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China (Dashraath et al., 2020; Chowdhury et al., 2020). Dubey and Tripathi (2020) stated that 86,604 patients were infected by the virus on February 28[th,] 2020, and 858,361 cases on March 31st. This number kept increasing on 15th April 2020 with 2,086,477 from 210 countries and two international conveyances.

To control the diseases spreading heavily, medical and public health experts have introduced several guidelines to slow down the disease's speediness, including social distancing and wearing masks all the time (Wang et al., 2020; Matrajt & Leung, 2020). Morin (2020) stated in her articles that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines the meaning of social distancing as remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass rallies, and maintaining a distance of about 6 feet from others if possible. A congregate setting is an environment where many people live, meet, or gather nearby for a limited or extended period, such as homeless shelters, group houses, prisons, detention centers, schools, and workplaces.

Due to the outbreaks, we had an uncommon impact on the workplace and organizational practices to keep the company growing (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). There is a complete change in the current practices in the company, and they are implementing a new routine of working conditions which is social distancing practices, to reduce the spread of the pandemic. Based on this statement, the company and organization have to change their strategy to include working from home to prevent mass gatherings. However, for the service industry, the companies have limited the employees and follow the current rules by the government.

In Malaysia, at the early stage when COVID-19 was first detected, the 8th Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin announced a Movement Control Order (MCO) on March, 18th 2020, which is the restriction on movement and staying at home. The MCO was among the first countermeasures taken by the Malaysian Government to curb the spread of COVID-19. At this moment, several orders during the earlier MCO period which were as the followings, as guided by Majlis Keselamatan Negara (2021):

1. The general prohibition of mass movements and gatherings across the country includes religious, sports, social and cultural activities. Therefore, all houses of worship and business premises are closed except supermarkets, public markets, grocery stores, and convenience stores selling daily necessities;

2. For Muslims, it is necessary to postpone all religious activities in mosques, including Friday prayers which are in line with the decision made on 15 March 2020 by the National Council's Special Muzakarah Meeting on Islamic Affairs;

3. Restrictions for all Malaysians traveling abroad and for those who have recently returned from abroad must undergo a 14-day health check and quarantine (or self-quarantine);

4. Restrictions on the entry of all tourists and foreign visitors into the country;

5. Closures for all kindergartens, government, and private schools include daily schools, boarding schools, international schools, tahfiz centers, as well as primary, secondary, and pre-university institutions;

6. Closure of all public and private institutions of higher learning (IPT) and skills training institutes nationwide;

7. Closure of all government and private premises except those involved in essential services such as water, electricity, energy, telecommunications, postage, transportation, irrigation, oil, gas, fuel, lubricants, finance, banking, health, pharmacy, fire, prison, port, airport, security, defense, cleaning, retail and food supplies.

By this restriction order, the company or an organization needs to develop a new strategy to fit with the current situation. For essential businesses, the company needs to limit the number of workers to operate the business since there is limited time given by the government. Due to this, high management needs to lead the operation efficiently with the limited workers. For businesses that cannot operate as usual, management needs to lead the workers using the work from home (WFH) method.

However, a few series of MCO enforced by the government along the way, as precedented by the events of COVID-19 mutation risks. The number of people infected by COVID-19 has increased up to thousands of cases daily since late April 2021 (Ministry of Health for Malaysia, 2021), which led to the acceleration of the National Vaccination Program. After many months of movement restrictions, together with the financial burden and mental health issues, the Government can no longer suppress the citizens from going outside. It is time to move forward and get ready to live in the COVID-19 endemic world. As the vaccination program shows significant improvement in controlling the number of COVID-19 infected cases, the country is opening up again, phase by phase, as advised by the standard operating procedures (SOP) made by the National Security Council of Malaysia (2021). Soon, the interstate travel ban will be lifted, and people are expected to resume their lives adhering to the SOPs and new norms of lifestyle.

5.2   DISCUSSION

It is difficult to determine what the modern world will look like with social, economic, and health structures on the edge of collapse. Still, its form will depend on the leaders' decision now. Governments, societies, and organizations are in crisis mode and are searching for their leaders to provide direction. The confusion embedded in this situation makes the management challenge even more challenging. Leaders encounter numerous leadership problems and conflicting requirements today, and most of these do not have a straightforward response. Then, how to lead employees effectively during this pandemic COVID-19?

5.2.1   Leading Employees Effectively during Pandemic COVID-19

The impact of the pandemic is a challenge to the leader in terms of how to lead their staff if "work from home" is implemented. Social distancing during work has affected the regular working approach for essential services, and employees' well-being will also change. Because of this, there are some ways how to lead employees effectively during a crisis.

5.2.1.1 Develop Method to Interact with Each of Other

Kayes et al. (2017) stated in Dirani et al. (2020)'s research paper that the main challenges were identified, such as inconsistent information, situational ingenuity, confusing and shifting purposes, and ill-structured circumstances. Successful leadership requires a strategic vision, and action was progressively significant within a new global environment (Bouhali et al., 2015). implementing the vision and goal shows that a leader has a proper plan to engage with their employees. A consistent plan is needed to help leaders keep in touch with their employees, especially those working remotely from home. Without a clear plan, miscommunication will happen. Lee et al. (2020) explained the active role of individual workers in countering such a crisis is as critical as the organizations' attempts to cope with it in order to respond to the evolving world and cultivate

efficiency. The successful knowledge-sharing activity of employees, in particular, has tremendous potential to help organizations make fast and efficient decisions and be flexible in a crisis.

5.2.1.1(a) Interaction using technology-driven

Carroll and Conboy (2020) explained that organizations need to normalize these emerging practices and technologies usage to attain objectives through these technology evolutions. Several models and frameworks have been developed to explain user adoption of new technologies. These models introduce factors that can affect user acceptance, such as the Technology Acceptance Model, Theory of Planned Behavior and Diffusion of Innovation theory, Theory of Reasoned Action, Model of PC Utilization, Motivational Model, Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology and Social Cognitive Theory (Taherdoost, 2018). This shows that technology that has been developed can be fitted to the user in some situations. In this crisis, technology is desperately needed to engage with employees and help them constantly. In order to explore how technology-driven or "tech-driven" activities can be adapted and routinized within the organization and its "new normal" environments, it has been built on the principle of the normalization process theory (NPT).

Carroll and Conboy (2020) stated that NPT presents "a derivative sociological theory on the implementation, embedding, and integration of new technologies and organizational innovations which is suitable to explain the normalization of new technology-driven work practices as a result of pandemics." In reality, the new aspects of technology-driven work processes and new work configurations can be defined and tested using NPT. To promote technology-driven work processes such as remote working, which we analyze by NPT, this puts new demands on technology developments, namely "coherence, cognitive participation, collective action, and reflexive monitoring."

Therefore, as the theory explains, leaders are responsible for defining the systems that will be used by their subordinates, that is, providing an optimum digital workplace that is workable for the whole team (Herrera et al., 2021). With that in mind, there are various modes of digital workspaces that leaders could use to interact with their employees, such as phone, Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, email, etc. But, to maximize the use of this platform, leaders must first step up and become tech-savvy role models for their employees. Leaders could initiate digitization transformation training through the Human Resource department to educate and equip the employees with digital workplace tools (Zhong et al., 2021). The leaders must check whether their employees understand how to use the tools to avoid any problems and issues. Subsequently, when the employees possess the knowledge to operate in a digital workspace, the leaders can set a schedule for regular communication that the team needs, such as twice a day or several times per week. This way can help to know more about the progress of the task given, especially to employees who are remotely working from home. This technology implementation helps to keep employees' health and safety during this pandemic COVID-19.
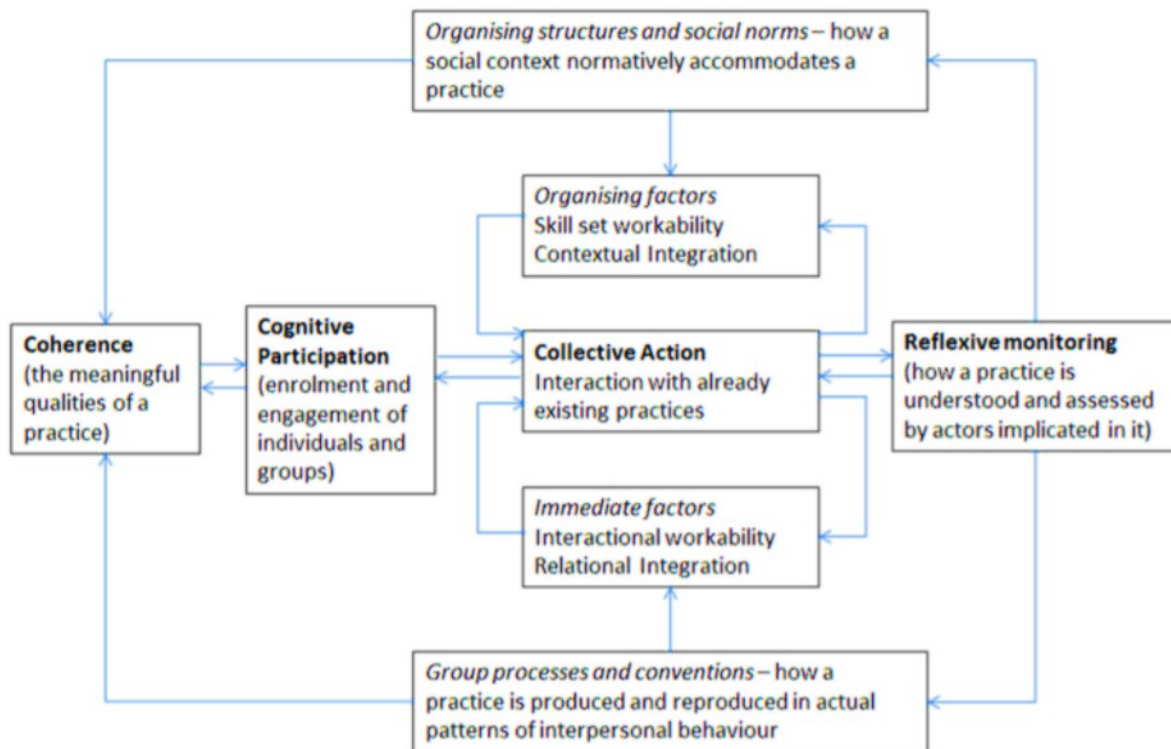
Figure 1: Model of Normalization Process Theory (May & Finch, 2009)

5.2.1.1(b) Implement new ways of thinking and communication

Because of the interaction induced by technology, leaders need to be in good emotional health to avoid employees feeling frustrated with how they communicate. Leaders need to change their behaviors and practices to communicate during a crisis.

Orangefiery (2020b) suggested that leaders must be present and listen to the employees. As leaders, we must be available at all appropriate times, and the most important thing is not to seem to "disappear" at a moment of crisis. If it is unknown who is directing the pathway, employees will immediately get more nervous. To better put the employees at ease, make more regular visits, although virtual ones. To get a sense of how much they would like to hear from leaders and in what way, talk to team members. Let employees remember that we are all in this together; the pandemic may affect certain staff members more quickly than others. Different staff members may have various issues. Leaders also must have consistent terms as simply and concisely as practicable to exchange details. Therefore, enable freedom for the employees to cope in the ways that are better for them. Chanana and Sangeeta (2020); Orangefiery (2020a) explained that leaders must show employees some empathy because their mental health is fragile during the pandemic, and they were nervous about their health and job security.

Leadership Behaviors	Leadership Practices
Listen and be present to the employees	Using compatible channels
Communicate clearly and calmly with good tone	Stick with a routine if possible
Get comfortable with uncertainty	Early and regular exchange of information
Have empathy and be self-aware	Combat against disinformation

Table 1: Implementation of communication for leaders during a crisis (Orangefiery, 2020b)

5.2.2 Positive Reinforcement and Appreciation of Work

Positive affirmation and recognition of work during COVID-19 are extremely significant (Dirani et al., 2020a). McGuinness (2020) explained that leaders need to have constructive responsibility and understand that individuals cope with their stress, duties, and personal problems is an integral aspect of crisis management. This is because employees are in line with the values of the organization. Employees see their workload as achievable and are pleased with their work-life balance in general (Wroblewski, 2019). When employees feel appreciated, they will contribute more and feel needed, even during a pandemic. In addition, diversity-oriented leaders can facilitate employees' consensus mechanisms by offering guidance and clarity, empowering employees to participate in joint decision-making, and delegating decision-making authority to subordinates (Lee et al., 2020). Secondly, McGuinness (2020) stated that leaders require foresight, the capacity to dissect disinformation, discipline, objectivity, and the need to understand the climate and circumstance. Foresight lets leaders predict challenges that could overtake their business. Dirani et al. (2020a) suggest that leaders have to make sense of life for their employees. Employees want their leaders to be present and understand their limitations when fulfilling their responsibilities during pandemic COVID-19. This will help to build good emotions towards them and encourage them to do better. Then, McGuinness (2020) proposed that leaders need to prioritize their employees by confirming gratitude for employee difficulties. This tends to develop goodwill on behalf of the company and encourages dedication. As Robertson (2012) cited in Chanana and Sangeeta (2020), organizations should make more contributions to workers so that employees know that their employers are sincerely involved in them to increase employee retention in tough times.

5.2.3 Implement New Culture at Workplace

Based on the Standard of Procedures (SOP) that the government has announced, leaders must follow the rules given at the workplace to ensure employees' safety and health. In Malaysia, there are several guidelines from the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (OSHE), Ministry of Human Resources:

1. Any person entering the workplace is encouraged to wear a facemask, and is compulsory for those with COVID-19 symptoms;

2. Comply with physical distance, prevent shaking hands, and regularly wash hands with water and soap or hand sanitizer;

3. Report to the security personnel or the person appointed to record the attendance report;

4. Measure the body temperature;

5. Take part in safety briefings on management and prevention strategies relevant to COVID-19 and occupational compliance regulations.

Therefore, leaders must take this seriously to implement a new culture at the workplace avoid having employees on-site feel stressed by the intense situation. Leaders need to be comfortable with fast decisions and, at certain crucial moments, their choices or lack of them will make a huge difference (Deloitte India, 2020). Leaders need to distress their team members by involving them in some of the other tasks, altering their team members' outlooks and solidarity, and making their members fully engaged in various forms of activities, making them more active, fun, and upward-looking by using their time and resources and their skills in more constructive ways (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). In determining organizational targets, the top leadership position will have to be decisive and rapid. Still, team coordination could be used to establish successful roadmaps to accomplish objectives and respond to the crisis (Dirani et al., 2020b). Solicit feedback on the cadence of meetings and scheduling visibility from team members. Besides, leaders can continue to exchange updates on knowledge and improve corporate principles through virtual all-hands meetings. Leaders should document them, if possible, so staff who cannot attend due to caregiving obligations or other conflicts can completely participate (Bille & Bridges., 2020).

5.3   CONCLUSION

All companies should follow innovative and imaginative employee engagement practices during this challenging period of the pandemic COVID-19 to keep workers inspired, stimulated, engaged, happy, and blissful in this tough time. Nowadays, the work-from-home regime is essential; only with the aid of online activities will it be effective. During this tough moment, companies should adopt an online practice strategy to remain in the market. For organizations to boost employee engagement, virtual partnerships should be substantial. Engaged workers often attain goals very smoothly to be able to promote a healthy corporate atmosphere, and management also explores ways to involve workers. Organizations must also understand the multiple facets that inspire and derive employee participation in organizations. Leadership matters the most in those periods. Organizations that respond, rebound, and succeed in emergencies will generally be those headed

by leaders with these essential characteristics. Moreover, those standards are not limited only to the highest rank but should also be expressed within the company at all levels. If leaders discover more productive ways to steer and invest in developing these skills for the future, these experiences are supposed to act as a roadmap.

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6

WHAT IT TAKES TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE LEADER DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19

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6.1   INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 led to an unprecedented crisis in this era. Strong leadership in navigating a company's business survival is paramount above anything else during this COVID-19 pandemic period. An unpredicted, non-routine event or cycle of events that create elevated levels of uncertainty towards an organization's goal can be defined as a crisis (Ulmeret al., 2007). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a big significant impact on most of the various sectors worldwide. There are several solutions that the government has taken to reduce the effects of COVID-19 and to improve the economic conditions and health problems by restricting cross-border movement and practicing social distancing. However, in the industrial sector, all these actions have impacted businesses negatively, and many industries have been facing unprecedented global crisis ever since, especially in the service industry (Suneson, 2020).

On the one hand, firms that provide essential services such as logistics, food supplies, and health care are allowed to operate their businesses during lockdowns, and the decision has drastically improved their business. On the other hand, non-essential service providers, such as airlines, hotels, media, and educational institutions, struggle to stay in business and start operating in new norms (Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2020). Nonetheless, all service providers need to transform from a traditional operating mode to a virtual work environment to keep their business growing (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Technology has led employees to interact and communicate within and outside their company (Huang et al., 2010). Hence, as a business leader, the changes in the environment from traditional to digital pose considerable challenges to them in sustaining and growing the business well. This chapter will review and discuss business articles related to leading employees effectively during the pandemic COVID-19. The design of this chapter uses secondary data based on research papers and articles.

6.2 LEADERSHIP STYLE

Leadership style is one of the important elements in the business world to sustain during the pandemic COVID-19, and leading employees' effectiveness can be influenced by the leadership style. According to Purwanto et al. (2019), employees are motivated to work if the leader is a good motivator, comfortable physical work environment, and employees' performance and results are valued. According to Sanusi et al. (2020), the democratic leadership style is conducive and will boost growth in SME business operations. Lack of a democratic leadership style will decline the SME business during this pandemic crisis. Participative leadership is defined as the individuals who have shared power in making decisions considered by hierarchal standards. The advantages of this leadership style are that it will encourage involved engagement and increase employee morale and performance. When employees feel that their work and voices matter, it will increase staff productivity because employees will become happier doing their work. It really helps the company to grow in the pandemic situation when employee productivity increases. This leadership style is the best way to lead employees effectively during the pandemic COVID-19. Depending on the situation, autocratic leadership, bureaucratic leadership, and charismatic leadership can also increase the SME's performance during this crisis (Sanusi et. al., 2020). However, transformational leadership is more beneficial to motivate employees but not compatible with the decision-making process for fixing problems. Hence, this leadership style is not suitable for a leader during this pandemic situation. All the literature shows that leaders need to know and choose which leadership style is more suitable and effective to practice in the company in a critical situation like pandemic COVID-19.

In a situation whereby every business is struggling, the leader should understand the importance of versatile leadership in highly disruptive environments (Kaiser, 2020). Versatility can be described as proficiency at delivering and reacting to revolutions with a wide repertoire of balancing evaluations, abilities, and performances (Kaiser, 2020). According to Kaiser (2020), versatility plays a strong role in leadership efficacy, team adaptability, and team efficiency, but not in operational effectiveness during times of difficulty. However, versatile leadership could help teams to adapt to uncertain situations, specifically in times of crisis. It involves balancing abilities and performance appropriately applied to altering circumstances and adapting to pandemic challenges (Kaiser, 2020). The reason why versatile leadership had a bigger impact on team flexibility and efficiency but not on employee assignation during this crisis is because leadership is important for a collective response to disruptive change rather than it is for employee enthusiasm (Kaiser, 2020). Consequently, leaders can use techniques in terms of paradoxes that are more successfully managed in a discursive, systemic process that addresses conflicting needs in a holistic and balanced way (J.H.Johansen, 2018).

A situational leadership style has been widely practiced in industry, which emphasizes the significance of flexible and adaptive behavior. Leaders apply different leadership styles depending on the situation the organization is facing. For example, in crisis situations that require fast decision

making, a leader applies an authoritative leadership style, while in situations that need a lot of discussions and brainstorming, such as a new marketing campaign, a participative leadership style is recommended. Situational leadership theory encourages that it is important to treat different followers differently and highlights that leaders should seize the opportunities to develop the skills and confidence of their followers. Newer leadership theories, such as transformational leadership and servant leadership, are developed based on situational leadership development perspectives (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Previous research has concluded that the two major dimensions of situational leadership theory, which are leader supportiveness and leader directiveness, are important determinants of employee job satisfaction and ratings of leadership effectiveness (Piccolo et al., 2012).

6.3   LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19

Employers are responsible for ensuring all the employees perform their work effectively during the pandemic to ensure the business's sustainability and growth. To reduce the effects of the pandemic on business, its operational results, and organizations themselves, leaders should play their roles effectively and perfectly during a pandemic situation. The efficiency and outcome of group performance can be influenced by leadership style (Tabernero et al., 2009). A proper leadership behaviour is influential in sustaining operatives' work performance and navigating them through uncertain times, regardless of how huge the crisis disrupts the firm, especially in the services industry (Bartsch et al., 2020). According to Bartsch et al. (2020), in order to maintain services employees' work operation during crisis, the best approach recommended is performing the task and relation-oriented leadership behavior. A leader focuses on establishing a supportive climate and enhancing collaborative interaction among organizations to define relation-oriented leadership behavior (Battilana et al.,2020). During a pandemic crisis, Bartsch et al. (2020) believe that teamwork improvement can be achieved in a rapidly emerging virtual work environment when the leader engages in task-oriented behavior that provides guidance and sets a clear direction for the employees. The new reality requires employees to adapt to new norms in the proper manner, and they must be led by a leader who shows them and provides all information in detail to perform their work. In order to enable them to easily adapt to this challenging crisis-induced circumstance individually in ways that suit best for each of them individually, employers need to grant their employees the necessary autonomy and support (Bartsch et al., 2020). As stated by Lagowska et al. (2020), leaders need to improve their self-awareness and expertise in the overall business areas. During a crisis, leaders have no time to learn new skills when critical events involve a high degree of urgency. Alternatively, leaders need to be willing to learn from others (their employees) so that the company's performance will not be compromised. Furthermore, a leader must be willing to collaborate and rally all employees to move in the same direction and drive improvement in the company's productivity. Moreover, leaders are encouraged to engage and involve employees by being collective leaders and having group decision-making (Lagowska et al., 2020). Close communication and interaction with subordinates and other leaders are critical in the organization

and decision-making due to the complexity and flat structure of the modern organization.

The impact of COVID-19 on the business industry has gotten severe over the past several months and has forced many businesses, even the big players, to close their operations, leading to an unprecedented disruption of commerce in most industry sectors. In this dire situation, a strong leader must take crucial steps to tackle all the unpredictable situations and overcome the crisis and challenges that arise. As per Boichenko and Tymchenko (2020), the company leader is the one who is responsible and accountable for minimizing the impact of COVID-19 on their business and its negative effects on their employees. Leaders must ensure that each department and employees are on the same page, connected, and communicating effectively as part of a cross-functional team (Boichenko & Tymchenko, 2020). An effective business process of managing decision-making and communication channels should be developed by the company under various scenarios because of employees who are working from home or not being able to go to the office due to illness or quarantine requirements (Boichenko & Tymchenko, 2020). Leaders also need to role model and review company policies to maintain good hygiene and ensure a safe, healthy, and secure workplace (Boichenko & Tymchenko,2020).

In the midst of extreme situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where employees are more stressed than in normal situations due to fears of contracting the dreaded virus, health risk concerns, and job security, a managerial leadership that is full of compassion is more effective (Hill, 2020). According to Wasylyshyn and Masterpasqua (2018), compassion leadership elements consist of empathy, benevolence, care, understanding, support, and concern for others. All of these elements are considered essential in both management and leadership practice in times of crisis. Compassionate managerial leadership thus includes acts of love, care, and selflessness that provide meaning and a sense of purpose to followers within the wider context of the organization.

6.4   VIRTUAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

Working remotely is the new norm during the pandemic. There are many ways to lead employees effectively during the pandemic COVID-19. Virtual work can start with having a virtual work environment plan. According to a study done by Benjamin (2019), there are five steps involved in implementing a virtual work plan. Firstly, the company or the leader itself needs to create a virtual environment structure and start to figure out what will and will not work for their particular organization. From there, it can introduce the remote-work plan. Next, add a hybrid work and schedule option. The hybrid-work model can then be tested, and effectiveness measured, followed by reviewing the results as well. Leaders must track and measure the performance in various contexts to determine whether the hybrid-work model is increasing the company's productivity or the other way around. Lastly, after knowing the result of every aspect, companies need to set up the best virtual method and choose the best option possible. According to the Australian Psychological Society (2020), during these hard times, it is highly recommended that leaders regularly contact and interact with employees and ensure that employees receive sufficient support. Maintaining a close relationship between leaders and subordinates is very crucial, as is confirming that all

employees get the right direction and resources, determining what support they need, setting and reviewing work task goals, and giving feedback with positive reinforcement (Australian Psychological Society, 2020). Furthermore, leaders need to choose and set up the best communication platforms via the internet to ensure all employees can check-in, interact, and participate in meetings conveniently. Setting up the workgroup on an online platform and being part of the group will allow employees to talk with colleagues, develop personal relationships, share ideas, and discuss among them. Consequently, it is the best way to lead employees effectively during this time of crisis, and it is not only increasing the social support and influencing the best decision-making but also enhancing the engagement, morale, and wellbeing of employees (Boichenko & Tymchenko, 2020).

During this pandemic, leaders have to adapt to the new reality of leading employees who are working remotely from home. The new norms practices implemented by governments and private companies enforce the new trend of working from home (Lagowska et al., 2020). Most industries are obligated to follow these practices in order to ensure that their operations are not interrupted by restricted movement control orders during the most critical situations.

According to Greenbaum (2019), companies must be prepared to set up and organize a virtual work environment during this crisis to sustain profitability. The virtual work also reduces overhead expenses such as utility costs, transportation, and child care, while employees achieve work flexibility, save travel time, and maintain performance and productivity simultaneously (Greenbaum, 2019). In this new working environment, leaders play a critical role in upholding employee engagement and commitment. Employee empowerment and working with no supervision reflect effective leadership achieved in the organization. It is necessary for a leader to set clear expectations upfront and provide employees with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and ensure all employees are on the same page during the virtual and online working environment (Hirsch, 2019).

6.5 CONCLUSION

It was studied that a compassionate leadership approach can drive a considerate response to employees' feelings of uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to survive in extreme situations, business organizations are forced to take drastic work measures which can trigger high-stress levels and low productivity among employees. Thus, organizations would benefit from implementing compassion-driven policies and leadership approaches that are more inclusive and responsive to the workplace stressors facing employees. Many organizations implemented rapid changes to their operations to keep their employees safe and to counter the spread of coronavirus (Australian Psychological Society, 2020). Every company should put high focus and pay attention to the most effective way to lead employees effectively during this COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders bear great responsibility for keeping employees and company survival and sustaining healthy conditions throughout the crisis. This chapter has discussed and proposed the leadership approach and ways to lead employees effectively during the pandemic COVID-19. Leadership style,

leadership behavior, and how the new work environment is the most important things that leaders must be aware of and practice the most suitable leadership style during the new norm situation of COVID-19.

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7

LEADERSHIP APPROACH TO LEAD EMPLOYEES DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19

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7.1   INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is a newly discovered infectious disease, and it was named Coronavirus, because the virus represents crown-like spikes on the outer surface of the virus (Khan et al., 2020). Soon after, the WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic outbreak because of its rapid spread, affecting a large number of people and thus occurring worldwide. The WHO also stated that the common symptoms of this disease are high fever, dry cough, fatigue, loss of taste and smell, etc. However, there are also a group of people who do not have any symptoms but still get infected with the virus.

In Malaysia, COVID-19, which suddenly invaded our country, has had many effects on individuals, communities, and even our nation. Undoubtedly, this virus also has a profound effect on business in various aspects, such as social, economic, and others. Thus, COVID-19 also has an extent affects on the leaders in the organization in leading the organizations. Leaders in organizations are experiencing leadership problems as they seek to manage "work from home" arrangements, the health and safety of key personnel, and workforce cutbacks as a result of severe work interruptions caused by the COVID-19 epidemic (Eichenauer et al., 2021). There is a question about how a leader can be an effective leader when the country is struggling with a pandemic situation. The leaders must have updated plans and strategies on how to lead the group in these bitter times. This chapter will discuss on how the leaders can lead employees effectively during this pandemic COVID-19.

7.2   LEADER VS LEADERSHIP

A leader is a person who has the ability to influence a group of people toward the achievement of a goal, and usually, a leader is someone who always goes first and leads others by example, thus

influencing others to follow him (Wong, 2007). However, not every leader practices leadership in an organization since leadership requires skills, ability, quality, commitment, and many more. Leadership is a word that people frequently use, but whenever someone asks the definition of leadership, many people cannot define the true meaning of leadership. Leadership is one of the concepts that is very hard to define (Silva, 2016). According to Morgan (2020), creating a precise definition of leadership is crucial for developing leaders, as every leader has their own personal definition, which influences how they lead and their leadership culture practices. Leadership has nothing to do with the titles, management, or seniority in any organization. Therefore, the definition of leadership is a process of social influence that maximizes the effort of others in order to achieve a goal (Kruse, 2013).

Another of the most famous questions that people commonly ask about leadership is whether a leader is born or made. Some people are "natural-born leaders" who are more likely to be good at leading, but actually, a leader does not have to be naturally born as leadership can be learned and trained (Muse, 2019). According to Wilson (2020), as leadership is something that can be developed over time, there are some aspects of leadership that require practice as it is not an inborn personality trait. In addition, a leader must know how to be an effective leader. As different people play different roles of leadership at different levels of an organization, the greatest contribution a leader can make is to enable others to contribute effectively (Prabu, 2012). Effective leadership can bring various people together and help them find a common purpose and work towards achieving goals because they have the ability to inspire and empower people. According to Doyle (2020), an effective leader has the ability to communicate well, motivate, handle and delegate responsibility, listen to feedback, and have flexibility in this ever-changing workplace.

7.3   LEADERSHIP PRACTICE DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

In Malaysia, statistics by the Ministry of Health (MOH) Malaysia, 2021 show that there are an increase in cases in our country; as of September 2021, there were 2,185,131 cases reported. This number shows that the situation in our country is very worrying and requires proactive measures to prevent the rapid spread of this virus because there is still no medicine or even vaccine in our country to cure this disease. The elderly, babies, children, and those with chronic diseases are in a high-risk group if infected with this disease. According to the WHO (2020), this virus can spread between people, especially when an infected person is in close contact with another person. Therefore, Malaysian authorities that are involved in the control of this infectious disease have issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in accordance with appropriate methods and measures. The Department of Occupational Safety and Health in the Ministry of Human Resources has issued a safety SOP to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace in June 2020 (Ministry of Human Resources, 2020). In this SOP, everyone in the workplace has the responsibility to follow the SOP provided to control this disease. Wearing a facemask, washing hands frequently, practicing physical distancing, and avoiding physical gathering are SOP examples in the workplace.

Hundreds of thousands of direct deaths lost, millions of people infected with the illness, long-term health implications, interruptions to global travel and trade, and displacement of

communities and individual lives are all possible outcomes. Leaders from all sectors have been called upon to respond to both direct and indirect consequences of the crisis at the world, national, and community levels, with little time to prepare and in a continuously changing environment (Ahern & Loh, 2020). Due to deteriorating economic conditions, millions of workers were furloughed or laid off, and many of those who remained employed as "non-essential workers" rushed to shift to virtual work arrangements as ordered by municipal and state governments (Eichenauer et al., 2021). Leaders, whom workers regard as a valuable source of support at work (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988), confront a huge problem in helping their employees while simultaneously encouraging productivity and goal attainment.

This substantial unpredictability heightens the problems of decision-making for leaders and necessitates a quick adaptive reaction not typically associated with leadership in more "business-as-usual" times (Anderson, 2018). Leadership may still be prepared and proactive even if they have no specialized or large-scale pandemic expertise. These prior exposures can teach us a lot about pandemic preparation, such as the advantages and dangers of different management and containment techniques (Ahern & Loh, 2020). Additionally, leaders have the responsibility to help employees adapt to the new norms in the workplace. Leadership at all levels must be adaptable in complicated and unpredictable situations (Heifetz et al., 2009). Actually, this pandemic situation takes time for everyone to adapt; thus, cooperation and help among all is very much needed in the workplace. Indeed, leaders play a big role in the workplace in leading their employees to follow the new norms, and they must have plans on how to lead effectively during this hard situation.

7.4   EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DURING COVID-19

This virus disease is an unpredictable global health crisis that is currently impacting every aspect of daily life. Without question, it has already affected the leadership concept as this disease has placed limitations on many aspects of life and has created demanding conditions for leaders (Gigauri, 2020). Generally, leaders need to respond and adapt to the situation quickly. Every organization needs to prepare a strategic plan for any changes and have a continuity plan in business to overcome these issues. Thus, leaders play big roles and responsibilities in driving their employees to achieve goals during this outbreak. Besides, leaders are facing challenges that are totally different from the usual challenges because the current situation demands a messy and trial-and-error method where there is no predictability, no certainty, and yet potentially still no end in sight (Harris, 2020).

Within the epidemic, effective leadership should take on a new form (Ball, 2020). In the article of Hoyt (2020), he clarifies Pellegrini's current leadership ideals, which include 1) be visible (the most important thing a leader can do to alleviate anxiety and uncertainty in a crisis is to be visible); 2) communicate frequently (outline updates and corresponding actions frequently); 3) communicate thoroughly (share more rather than less, and connect with the team rather than dictate to the team); 4) communicate genuinely (members will have already gathered a significant amount of data, so come down on the side of over-informing and being truthful); and 5) cultivate

realistic optimism (truth anchored in reality). Each of these ideas is included in effective crisis management, along with a good touch of resilience and patience (Ball, 2020).

An effective leader requires different skills and perspectives when leading employees in this situation. There will be intense pressure and compressed time during this crisis. Thus, leaders that have the ability to adapt and respond quickly will be successful leaders because they lead effectively even in this challenging situation. Meanwhile, leadership has many theories and theories that often focus on the characteristics of a leader but sometimes also focus on identifying behaviors that can be used to improve leadership abilities (Cherry, 2019). An effective leader can apply any of these theories to their way of leadership approach. According to Cherry (2019), some of the examples of famous leadership theories are traits theory, situational and behavioral theory, and transformational leadership.

7.4.1 Leaders Lead Efficiently by Practicing the Trait Approach

Basically, leaders can use their methods as usual, but somehow there are changes that need to be made according to new norms and current needs. Firstly, leaders need to make some adjustments to their trait approach, like their self-confidence, determination, and motivation, and communication skills. A trait is often identified as a particular personality shared by leaders that makes them better suited to leadership (Cherry, 2019). Although COVID-19 also affects leaders' life, a leader must show their self-confidence and should also have confidence and believe their employees that they have the skills and capabilities to deal with this situation. In addition, a leader should also have determination and motivation to face the new norms of working style. Without it, the leader would be ineffective and likely give up. Determination can be defined as the desire to get the job done; thus, leader should possess this trait to become an effective leader, and thus leader must be willing to keep going forward even during this hard situation because the employee will follow the leader by example (Bernasconi, 2019). Furthermore, leaders need high motivation and knowledge of how to motivate their employees. Usually, in normal life, motivation can be built through rewards and recognition. However, in these new norms, especially for companies that practicing work from home (WFH), it is quite difficult to motivate employees physically. So, as leaders, they must learn a new approach to motivating their employees, as motivated employees will encourage them to give high performance and passion at work (Doyle. 2020). According to Werder (2020), since everything in the workplace has changed, a leader can still do the same thing to keep employees motivated; for example, a leader can reward their good work by giving cash bonuses or gifts to show that the leader appreciates their good work, even the employee is struggling to work in this situation.

WFH is not easy because most employees are unfamiliar with this new norm of working in a condition that may not be suitable or conducive to working efficiently. Many people who were abruptly compelled to work from home owing to COVID-19 may not have a suitable home environment in which to complete work due to a lack of technology, failures in child care, and other difficulties. This difficulty is worsened by pandemic-specific problems (e.g., fear and isolation) that do not exist in regular telecommuting settings. As a result, while effective leaders

and managers will exhibit agentic, task-oriented behaviors, employees may view communal behaviors such as providing flexibility, social support, and sensitivity to work/family balance as more important for leaders and managers to exhibit in this context of disruption than agentic behaviors (Eichenauer et al., 2021). Thus, it is crucial for leaders to change their communication skills to communicate with their employees and master all forms of communication (Doyle, 2020). Examples of new communication platforms that became famous during COVID-19 are Google Meet and Zoom. According to Honingmnn (2020), clear and inspiring communication is essential to make this unsteady phase a success, and communication messaging will help employees move up from loss.

7.4.2   Leaders Lead Efficiently by Practicing Behavioral Leadership

Behavioral leadership is one of the theories that focuses specifically on the behavior of the leader and what leaders do and how they act (Technofunc, 2020). So, it is important for the leaders to show good behavior to their employees in these difficult times. Usually, a behavioral approach can lead to the identification of various leadership styles and their correlation with effectiveness measures. Ohio State Studies was one of the famous studies using this approach (Technofunc, 2020). In addition, a leader can use this approach during this situation to lead employees efficiently as this approach has two categories, which are task behavior and relationship behavior.

Firstly, leaders can set employees to focus on task behavior as this approach helps in facilitating goal achievement and achieving objectives. Employees are facing stressful situations, feeling unfocused and disconnected, which leads to less productive employees. Leaders should guide their employees and assist employees in implementing new strategies according to new norms and delegate tasks according to priority. Leaders should cooperate with employees to focus on work that matters most and plan quickly (Dettmann & Stier, 2020). According to Gigauri (2020), developing "what if" scenarios can be beneficial for companies and can be used to prepare for future uncertainties. As the current situation has placed limitations on daily life, a thoughtful leader must prepare strategic planning and be responsible for guiding employees. Besides, leaders should apply participative leadership skills by trusting the employees and involving them in any decision-making, especially if the decision is related to the employees (Wilson, 2012). When leaders involve employees in discussions and let them give their thoughts, this can help them improve their work performance because they feel needed, have the capability to make decisions and are treated as someone important in the company (Zheng, 2020).

Moreover, to be an effective leader during this pandemic, leaders can focus on relationship behavior. A strong relationship will help employees feel comfortable and support each other (Technofunc, 2020). Leaders should care and know what their employees are going through or if any of them have problems from this situation. Thus, leaders have to understand their employees and provide any support or attend to their needs to face this situation (Dettmann & Stier, 2020). Leaders must stay connected with the employees and always be present and visible whenever employees are looking for leaders. WFH is never easy because employees have to balance both their personal and work responsibilities. Thus, in order to have a good relationship while working

remotely, leaders can find fun and interactive ways to build relationships among employees (Harris, 2020). For example, any discussion, online gathering, or fun activities like watching movies and playing games can still be done through an online platform together. By building relationships with employees in this chaotic time, it proves that work performance can be improved, thus proving that a leader can lead efficiently even in this situation.

7.4.3   Leaders Lead Efficiently by Practicing Transformational Leadership

According to Alkadash et al. (2020), transformational leadership (TL) is defined as a process that changes individuals and transforms them through an exceptional type of influence that pushes employees to achieve more than what is typically expected. Besides, TL is one of the approaches that make employees build trust, admire, and respect towards leaders, because TL leaders are willing to work harder, and subsequently, transform and motivate employees through four factors, which are idealized influence charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Je' Czaja, 2020). Several previous studies found that transformational leadership is appropriate for jobs with greater occupational risks (de Koster et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2020). TL encourages employees to look for more effective ways to ensure safety (intellectual stimulation), inspires them to achieve previously unattainable safety standards (inspirational motivation), promotes occupational safety as a core value (idealized influence), and takes a keen interest in the physical and mental well-being of every single employee (individual consideration) (Barling et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 situation, leaders can use intellectual stimulation that stimulates employees to become creative and innovative, and encourages innovation in identifying and solving problems or issues (Breaux, 2010).

In addition, leaders should practice individualized consideration during this challenging time. Employees find themselves in unfamiliarized situations – struggling in responsibility between family matters and work-life; thus, the need for compassion and consideration from a leader is essential (Ray, 2020). As stated by Ray (2020), every employee has their own challenges or problems that affect their work, so leaders that give attention and consideration personally to employees help them endure these challenges and solve their problems, thus building a stronger relationship between them. According to Khalife (2021), transformative leaders must exhibit certain characteristics. First and foremost, they must embrace empathy. Empathy is about equality, profound comprehension, and reciprocity. It is more than just viewing things from their unique perspective for a transformative leader — it is about personalizing, accepting, and then working on it. Second, transformational leaders must accept both personal and organizational change. Such leaders recognize that change has no endpoint. Change is the only constant, and it serves as the pivot for both collective and individual growth. This approach of leadership proves that leaders can still lead their employees efficiently even in difficult times.

7.5   CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 virus is very alarming as it suddenly attacks our world in the blink of an eye, thus

affecting all aspects of everyone's life. Meanwhile, there is no cure to treat this virus while vaccines are still in the trial phase by some pharmaceutical companies. Malaysia is among the countries that have booked the supply of vaccines for Malaysian citizens, and the authorities said that the vaccine would arrive soon after all the trial phases were completed and successful.

In a situation where COVID-19 affects leaders' ability to lead their employees effectively and efficiently, leaders and employees must cooperate with each other in completing tasks or facing any issue or situation. There are many ways to lead efficiently during this hard situation that were suggested by researchers all over the world. However, a leader must be positive as it can also influence employees to be positive and strong. Not to forget, work conditions have changed with the new norm conditions. Leaders must help employees adapt to the new norms and ensure all the employees are in a good and controlled situation so that it will not interfere with their work performance in the mission to achieve goals. In conclusion, an effective and efficient leader plays a big role and holds responsibility, thus referred to as a key success for companies to continue to thrive and become successful even when a pandemic hits the country.

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8

STRATEGIC MEASURES TO LEAD EMPLOYEES EFFECTIVELY DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19

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8.1   INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on social and economic life, affecting the operational conditions of individuals and organizations at the fundamental level. COVID-19, a novel coronavirus illness, was discovered for the first time in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December of 2019. It is the most recent global pandemic epidemic that has impacted all sectors of the economy, particularly industry related to global tourism, hospitality, construction, manufacturing, and retail. According to Segal and Gerstel, economists anticipate a slowing of economic activity momentum beginning in March 2020 and continuing indefinitely. However, it appears that in many domains of management, researchers are needed to determine the influence of a pandemic on organizational processes and to forecast the challenges that managers and organizations will confront in a variety of industries. On the other hand, industries that provide critical services, such as health care, logistics, and food retailing, can continue to operate but must adopt proper standard operating procedures (SOP) to protect staff and customers. Tuzovic and Kabadayi (2020) stated in the press that "many service providers including airlines, hotels, and hairdressers, will be unable to deliver their services due to lockdown, as they will need to adjust and begin functioning under new rules and standards".

Furthermore, this epidemic appears to be continuous and existential challenges for corporate leadership around the world, regardless of where they are located. As a result, the position of the leader may evolve, and it is critical to maintain a broad perspective on the entire organization, including its people, as well as emotional and psychological endurance. Leaders must adapt and respond to the changing environments caused by the COVID-19 pandemic across the organization in order to provide this support to employees, as their resilience can have a significant impact on employees' resilience, wellbeing, work engagement, performance, commitment,

creativity, and employees helping behaviors, as well as on their own resilience and wellbeing. On the other hand, leaders should think about how they will adjust to new operational methods and conventions as a result of the changes in the organization. This chapter discusses the strategic measures to lead employees effectively during the pandemic COVID-19.

8.2 PROTECT EMPLOYEE'S WELLBEING

The notion of wellbeing has clinical (Jung, 1993), developmental (Erikson, 1959), existential (Frankl, 1959), humanistic (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961), and social psychology roots (Allport, 1961). According to Ryff (2020), different schools of thought define a mentally healthy individual differently, and the idea of wellbeing changes according to the domain and scope of the research. Welfare, happiness, mental health, material possessions, social life, vitality, self-actualization, or quality of life are all terms used to describe well-being (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Bradburn, 1969; Campbell, 1981; Diener, 1984; Larson, 1978; Keyes et al., 2002). For instance, during the pandemic COVID-19, Starbucks management offered the following assistance to its partners in order to retain enthusiasm and assist them during difficult times:

Strategies	Explanation
Mental Health Programme	Have the option of continuing their mental health benefits via Lyra Health, which provides 20 free sessions with a trained counselor or coach each year. In addition, the employee has access to Headspace, which provides mindfulness training and medication management services.
Catastrophe Pay	Along with existing perks such as sick pay and personal time off, the firm compensated all partners until May 3, regardless of whether they opted to stay at home. This included couples who had been diagnosed with COVID-19 or had been exposed to it, as well as those who need further measures (such as those 60 years or older or who have underlying health conditions).
Hardship Grants	Additionally, partners have access to the company's CUP Fund, which offers assistance to partners facing financial hardship.
Childcare	As a result of school closures, Starbucks has temporarily expanded its Care@Work program to help partners who want extra backup childcare choices. The program now includes the opportunity for partners to pick an individual or facility to assist their children with distance learning.
Flexible Working Hours	Assisting partners impacted by changed hours, changes in operations, or a temporary closure by moving them to other stores and offering disaster pay in the event of an unavoidable shop shutdown.

Table 1: Starbucks' COVID-19 Strategies

By focusing on one's wellbeing, one may obtain good consequences, such as the quality of work or services given by workers, which will decide an organization's performance and achievement of its objectives. Starbucks strives to ensure that its organizational structure is flexible and adapts to the business's current demands, thus it is fluid and evolving based on what they believe is the best complete structure for the firm. Due to their matrix organizational structure, they are not a traditional hierarchical organization as most businesses are. They appreciate their workers and refer to them as "partners," one of the ways they attempt to maintain a matrix structure. Throughout this epidemic, Starbucks worked diligently to develop solutions for navigating the crisis while keeping their employees safe and healthy.

8.3   SUPPORT REMOTE EMPLOYEES

'Work from home' or 'remote work' is not a new word to employ in the modern day. It has existed for more than a decade. However, the COVID-19 epidemic has forced the biggest number of reps

to operate remotely. Alternatively, it is referred to as Telecommuting or Remote Working. According to the PWC research, businesses should give infrastructure and resources such as data, computers, and power to workers who work remotely (Azobu et al., 2020). Individuals may choose their own working hours and the business's job is readily completed when they work from home. Work from home capabilities across a range of jobs and industries enable the construction of appropriate techniques and practises for handling current emergencies and designing future transformation. According to Starbucks (2020), management hires for characteristics such as flexibility, dependability, and the ability to operate in a team. Similarly, as DeCenzo and Robbins (2010) suggest, managers must ensure that people to whom they make offers feel that the culture or 'brand' remains a strong fit for his or her image in order to enhance the likelihood of a successful recruitment.

On the other hand, working remotely has a number of benefits for both leaders and workers, including improved work-life balance and more access to the finest talent situated everywhere. Leaders may remotely monitor their employees' everyday work routines, which is a novel and novel communication tool or approach that they must use nowadays. Additionally, problems may arise when employees with families work remotely, since they may not be as available as they are when they work in the office, as they must manage their families concurrently. Perhaps the working hours of their family-oriented workers differ from those of their single employees. For instance, they may be unable to concentrate around midday because they are preparing lunch or caring for their children.

8.4   ENHANCE LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

As a result of rapid viral propagation, the major means of communication are undergoing an inventive transformation. The majority of industries must adopt and test new standards for communicating digitally with their employees, particularly during shutdown periods. They are unable to see their employees face to face due to the prior culture. Hence, for a leader to retain staff motivation, they must virtually update their leadership communication techniques. Leaders must consider and investigate new methods or platforms of communication in order to remain connected and oversee their workforce online. In the field of e-administration, the majority of operations are now done online. According to Orangefiery (2020b), some concrete actions that leaders may take to enhance communication during COVID-19 include demonstrating empathy for subordinates, really caring about and prioritizing their workers' well-being, and being always visible and leading by example. Thus, excellent communication, even virtual communication, may assist retain employee motivation by demonstrating that their boss is accountable and tries to understand their employee's problems and hurdles when working remotely. This is confirmed by Harvard Business Review, which conducted a poll of 9,700 US workers to ascertain their motivation for remote work. The following is the outcome:

Figure 1: Total motivation based on a survey of 9,700 U.S workers (McGregor & Doshi, 2020)

8.5   MONITOR TEAM ENGAGEMENT REGULARLY

Team engagement is defined as employees that are passionate about their jobs, totally dedicated to the business, and willing to put in extra effort when doing their duties. Effective employee involvement, leaders think, may help them perform effectively. According to Vandenabeele (2014), basic human needs have been proven to be closely related to employee devotion. Even if the COVID-19 epidemic has had a profound effect on work culture, the majority of sectors and organizations are now required to operate remotely in order to comply with government directives.

Similarly, Mishra et al. (2014) assert that employee engagement has risen as one of the most significant issues in today's workplace. Employee engagement will continue to be a difficult situation for many businesses in the future due to their complexity and rigorous requirements. This may be substantiated by a KPMG report, which details how to create frequent checks by instructing and training employees on the new operational environment. To ensure that a leader is always on top of staff performance, he or she may check in weekly or twice a month. Thus, employees will feel appreciated and motivated, and will always be able to communicate any issues or difficulties they have when working remotely and receive assistance from their boss. Team engagement may be performed online using Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams, among other platforms that enable employees and leaders to remain engaged.

8.6   UPSKILLING FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD

The critical component of upskilling is expanding employee competence and employability in

order to fulfil talent demands in the rapidly changing digital economy (IT). The term 'upskilling' refers to the extra value that employees receive when they have the opportunity to upgrade their knowledge, tools, equipment, and capacity in preparation for the COVID-19 epidemic. Previously, we focused only on IT specialists when dealing with digital or technological issues. However, everyone is welcome to study and upskill their expertise in the digital world during this crucial event. For example, upskilling may apply to all types of personnel at all levels of a company, including those in leadership positions. That is to say, organizations must invest more in digital to ensure their employees' productivity remains relevant in light of the changes in the latest technology.

8.7 DEVELOP POSITIVE BEHAVIORS AMONG EMPLOYEES AND LEADERS

According to Kouzes and Posner (2012), designated leaders have been shown to inspire and encourage colleagues by validating clear ideals and cultivating positive collaboration in a polite manner. As a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, we may anticipate that employee behavior and perceptions toward the digital world would alter inadvertently as they are required to apply new technologies or digital scope. From another angle, we may consider the effort to maintain a strong connection between employee and leader as a means to ensure the employee's well-being, value, and motivation are constantly on track and to keep the leader informed when they encounter difficulties while working remotely. In comparison, remote work increases the danger of burnout and excessive workloads, but the greatest leaders demonstrate empathy and make an effort to

understand their employees' circumstances. Different employees may face a variety of different hurdles. Thus, leaders may enable employees to determine their own work hours and avoid having staff work around the clock to care for their families. According to a PWC study in 2020, a poll on COVID-19, and the Global CFO Pulse Survey, 42% of CFOs are concerned about the COVID-19 outbreak's effect on staff productivity (Azobu et al., 2020).

8.8 CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, in order to managing people well during COVID-19 is not as simple as ABC. Nevertheless, having a strong approach or plan in place, leaders may assist their staff in maintaining high levels of productivity and motivation. COVID-19 pandemic is a global scenario, as it affects the majority of countries, forcing them to adapt to a new work culture known as work from home or work remotely. Additionally, the company must spend heavily in the digital realm to ensure that its employees and leaders can stay connected and in contact.

Leaders must ensure that their workers' well-being is safeguarded and updated on a regular basis. Effective communication is especially critical when managing staff during a pandemic. This will place employers in a difficult situation whereby they need to constantly supervise their staff remotely. Nevertheless, with advancements in technology, they are able to communicate online using a variety of online platforms. According to Ravazzani (2015), it is critical to consider the variety of employees inside an organization when crafting a communication message during a crisis, since this will impact employees' sensemaking about the issue.

Finally, effective leadership during COVID-19 will assist leaders in upskilling knowledge and abilities that can be applied to all types of employees, adapting to new changes and norms during times of crisis, assisting in increasing innovative communication and protecting employee well-being to ensure employees remain motivated and secure in their jobs and organizations. Simultaneously, an HR professional or team may play a role in assisting the leader in managing workers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Farnia and Nafukho (2016) corroborate this by stating that human resource development may aid leaders in developing employees' emotional quotient and emotional intelligence, which can be considered as critical leadership traits.

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