

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: LEADERSHIP SKILLS FIT FOR THE FUTURE

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Abstract: *The social and economic crisis caused by the current COVID-19 outbreak is an extreme but relevant example of the types of challenges leaders face today. It is no secret that the current public health crisis has sent the economy into turmoil, leaving businesses large and small fighting for survival and a workforce living through exceptionally challenging times. Developing leadership in global organizations should be targeted at specific high-leverage skills to give executives the best possible chances for success in the post-coronavirus era. For this reason, this paper is written in an effort to identify the leadership skills needed as a result of experience in facing the crisis and risks of covid-19 as a step forward to compete with the challenge.*

Keywords: *Covid-19, Leadership, Leadership Skills*

Introduction

Leadership was certainly existed around us in daily life and played an important role in various fields included business organization, public service, education system, governance of a country and even a small family. It was considered as a core of everything we had done well. According to McCauley & Palus (2020), leadership can be defined as a combination of a series of behaviours that will inspire people to follow the leader to achieve a shared goal, not just to obey. Thus, leadership is important to motivate others to take action which towards right destination as well turns vision into reality. As mentioned above, leadership requires the person who are capable, have positive impact and responsible for developing others, and this kind of person will be known as leader.

Leader is someone who have certain knowledge, skills and ability to motivate, to guide and lead the team towards the attainment of vision (Phillips & Phillips, 2020). A leader must be able to fulfil the characteristics included high quality performance, have transparent goals and strategies, proper decision making, keep promises, creative and innovative at problem solving (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017). Thus, a leader is considered as an influential person

which capable to make decision, set direction, organize and lead others towards the right destinations in ordinary times or even in crisis.

To face the changes in the fast-paced era, leaders in an organization need to have the characteristics of vision leadership and achievable goals. The leadership aspect is very closely related to the context of how it is practiced. Not only is it seen in the context of the importance of the background factors, personality and skills possessed by the leader, but also the impact and influence of leadership on organizational performance and employee commitment is also often questioned (Rzepka & Bojar, 2020). Past studies show that among the issues that arise in the aspect of leadership are weaknesses and unpreparedness of skills and competencies among leaders (Singh, 2021). Therefore, most of the main focus of leadership theory is to see the impact of leadership on the organizational environment especially on the commitment of followers and the success of the organization itself (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020). This is because in the global world workers are made up of those who are more educated, exposed to the living environment of the modern era and have a wide knowledge and expectations of the work done and eloquent.

During the Chinese New Year in December 2019, a novel coronavirus has emerged and caused acute respiratory infection. The viral has spread rapidly and caused coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) around the world until today and has not over yet. According to Worldometer (2020), the total number of confirmed cases in worldwide has exceeded 40 million with more than a million of deaths cases and it is still increasing continuously from day to day. In fact, the outbreak of pandemic has brought a huge negative impact to worldwide and has caused a lot of uncertainties, ambiguities, volatility and complexity. According to The Star Online (2020), the pandemic has caused shrinking of global economy, thereby some of small medium enterprises (SME) does not survived and caused the rising of unemployment rate.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disordered the operation of numerous industries and business organizations. Thus, leaders must be able to equip with the appropriate leadership skills to lead others to survive through this challenging and uncertain market during this pandemic. It is particularly significant for leaders to learn and develop their leadership skills that can fit for current and future due to the proper leadership skills that fit for future able to pave the way for crisis response decision.

What Is Leadership Skills Fit for The Future?

Whether in company management, education system, national governance or any other fields, effective leadership skills are essential to deal with the issues and uncertainties in present and future. There were some practices and characteristics of effective leaderships that fit for future.

Effective crisis communication

Communication is an interaction process between both parties in receiving and delivering information (Ren, 2019). Communication is crucial between the speaker and listener for better understanding and even reach a consensus between each other. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought uncertainty and caused anxiety among society if the leaders choose to be silence at this crisis time. During crisis, people will require for reassurance and reliable facts from leaders and leaders have to understand people's demands. Therefore, effective crisis communication is a fundamental requirement during this crisis. There should be integration of communications,

operations and policy in crisis communication (Lu, 2020). Effective crisis communication helps to link up each other and to provide clear direction for both parties and ensure that all people have equipped with the necessary resources and key information. Besides, an effective communication between good speaker and good listener tend to share with the transparent guidance and reliable information. As Malaysian, we can obviously saw that there is a great leader who is always strive, calm and smart in leading the medical team and the front-liners to deal with this COVID-19 pandemic. The great anti-epidemic leader of Malaysia during this pandemic is Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, a health director-general in Malaysia's health ministries. According to Wissgott (2020), Datuk Dr Nor Hisham Abdullah has been awarded as one of the 'doctors at the top' in the world for his strategies against the COVID-19 pandemic and trusted by Malaysian society. Besides, Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah has been recognized as a 'truth-teller' by Malaysians due to he was clearly updated the latest information about the virus to the public through his social media platforms with trustable sources to the public through his social media platforms (Wong, 2020). His effective crisis communication has reassured most Malaysians by telling the facts and he have made proper decisions since the begin of the movement control order (MCO). Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah once posted on Facebook, said 'listening is the main principle of leadership'. Figure 1 shows the Facebook post shared by him.



Figure 1: Facebook post shared by Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah

Emphasize the responsibilities and core values of leadership

The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity for the leadership values to be re-emphasized by the leaders. Effective leaders should be resilient and able to focus on the their missions during turbulent times. There are 3 sets of values, including public value, organizational value and personal value (Lu, 2020). Leaders can create the public value by contributing public service to the community. A public service leader is responsible to focus on public safety needs while protecting all staffs. Hence, the leaders have to provide health care services to public by supporting and equipping staff at the same time emphasize on safety of staffs. It was obviously that Malaysia's health care leaders, frontline workers, health care workers and volunteers have played a good role model in focusing on needs of patients and society. They deserved the best recognized and praised as they put their efforts to contribute to public service in the fight with pandemic (Bernama, 2020).

Besides, the valuing and listening feedback, integrity, transparency and fairness is the basic characteristics for leaders to establish personal value (Lu, 2020). The Prime Minister (PM) of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as a leader to govern a country is playing a significant role to make the critical decision during crisis. It is gratifying that the PM have implement the movement control order (MCO) to flatten the curve of COVID-19 infection and had held several times of live speech to clearly deliver the facts and information about pandemic. Other than that, PM have to focus on the his leadership values to protect all citizen. PM as a leader must always make decisions and take actions in the context of core value by doing what they said. It should be fair to reinforce the rules of restriction during MCO among people for the purpose to win against COVID-19. PM should strictly ensure that all people had complied with the MCO rules and be fair to penalize all those who have break the rules.

Moreover, the organizational value can be created through teamwork, customer focus, accountability, commitment and respect (Lu, 2020). The emphasis of organization core value is to focus on customers' needs while reassuring employees all the time. Leaders focusing on these values tend to help the organization to persevere through the crisis. The Apple incorporated (inc.) is a good example in focusing on their organizational values. According to Leswing (2020), there were more than 30 Apple's retail stores in the affected areas has been closed during the pandemic. It can be considered as a wise decision made by them due to the principles of Apple inc. is to put the basic and safety needs of employees first by continuing to pay employees as usual by amending the leave policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, Apple inc. is still staying connected to its local communities and customers and continue to develop its business via digital systems. Hence, Apple technology is undeniable to be recognized as world leading technology.

Resilience and adoption of technology

The began of movement control order (MCO) that implemented in Malaysia since 18th of March 2020 has limited or even prohibited the gatherings of crowd across the country, thereby the businesses other than convenience stores, supermarkets, and grocery stores that sell daily necessities have to temporarily close (Idris, 2020). In this situation, leaders of organizations must take proper actions under clarity of the 3 sets leadership core values, visions and missions and plan effective strategies to maintain the survival of business through this crisis. Employers as leader of the organization are responsible to reassure, motivate and communicate with their staffs with strong proved sources. Therefore, leaders require adequate data to plan for next step and take action. Leaders have to catch up with technologies and leverage the latest technologies as technology became more developed and permeating society. The online meeting platforms such as Google Meet, Microsoft Team, Zoom etc. are able to link up employers and employees. In this way, both speakers and listeners can be guaranteed to be equipped with necessary information so that the leaders able to make proper decisions based on sufficient sources of facts. In addition, some small businesses had started to utilize the live streaming to market their products and services to keep their business on going. Leaders are advised to adopt this marketing strategy by utilizing the technology such as Facebook or Youtube live streaming function as the live streaming marketing strategy has become the trend for a business to develop and enable business to keep their customers.

Other than that, the adoption of digital wallet is also important for business to adapt the crisis. According to Lin (2020), World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that the Covid-19 virus

could stick on paper money and survive up to 17 days, hence the using of cash could be risked to spread the coronavirus. Therefore, WHO was encouraging use of contactless payments due to COVID-19 (Huang, 2020). The using of e-wallet was considered as the best alternative to make payments with just simple tap on mobile device to prevent any contact and spreading of coronavirus between people. Moreover, all business premise in Malaysia are compulsory to register MySejahtera, a QR code registration technology in mobile app, for the purpose of tracing customers' contacts (TheStar, 2020). It is for businesses significant to keep tracing on their customers' contacts during pandemic to control the spread of viral. Hence, the high adoption of technology is crucial for businesses to operate inS effective way and could improve the competitiveness of business by leveraging the technology. Figure 2 shows a customer who is registering with MySejahtera before entering to public place.



Figure 2: A customer who is registering with MySejahtera before entering to public place (TheStar, 2020)

Appropriate decisions-making for short and long term plan

Critical decisions-making is essential in this uncertainty and ambiguity crisis. The limited of high quality data will be the prohibition for leaders to make decision during the crisis due to the fast changing situation and lot of unknow and unexpected things will occurred around us. Therefore, an effective leader should be react quickly and make wise decisions based on the experiences, common sense, intelligence or any other evidenced-based knowledge to achieve the short term plan at the same time focusing on long term goals. It is obvious that a successful leader will capable to acquire an appropriate balance between long and short-term strategies by making comprehensive investments in the future. In this crisis times, leaders should clarity about the current situation, gather more reliable information and feedback as quick as possible, think outside the box and develop critical solutions to address the short-term priorities while remain the long-term health of organization (Kaul, Shah, & El-Serag, 2020).

Conclusion

Leadership skill are considered as an important personal skill that everyone should be equipped regardless of race, age and gender. Leadership skills is significant and useful for everyone whether in workplace, school or family to effectively complete every task with others as a team. People with leadership skill manage to self-dicipline and self-improving while leading others to a brighter future together. Besides, a good leader must has clarity of goals, integrity, set transparent directions and be responsible to reassure and motivate the team through the crisis. There is undeniable that the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the economic,

public health infrastructure and life quality of worldwide countries. The lesson learned from this pandemic is everyone must have self-improvement and to become a successful leader in life. A successful leader with leadership skills that fit for future is capable to overcome the current challenges at the same time developing strategies to achieve long-term plans. Thus, leaders nowadays must continuously improve themselves, dare to response to challenges met and manage to coordinate action in effective ways in this crisis times.

Lastly, as a Malaysian, we should be proud of outstanding performance of our government and all of the healthcare leaders who have led us through this crisis. The responsibility and work done by leaders during this pandemic able to build a platform for effective response to crisis time in present and even in future.

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