

MAINTAIN A CULTURE OF INTEGRITY AT WORKPLACE DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Nur Najwa Atirah Kamaludin¹
Fadillah Ismail²

¹Faculty of Technology and Business Management, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), Malaysia, (E-mail: ap170510@siswa.uthm.edu.my)

²Faculty of Technology and Business Management, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), Malaysia, (Email: fadillah@uthm.edu.my)

Article history

Received date : 28-12-2020

Revised date : 29-12-2020

Accepted date : 28-2-2021

Published date : 29-3-2021

To cite this document:

Kamaludin, N. N., & Ismail, F. (2021). Maintain A Culture of Integrity at Workplace During Covid-19 Outbreak. *Jurnal Penyelidikan Sains Sosial (JOSSR)*, 4(10), 15 - 20.

Abstract: Integrity is a powerful double-edged sword for companies today, is necessary for long term success and corporate sustainability. Cultures of integrity are committed to doing the right thing, not just as a matter of marketing or positioning, but as an uncompromising stance embodied by the words and actions in any environment and situation encountered. Having integrity in the workplace has become very important these times, especially in the current situation where all countries are facing with pandemic Covid19. Hence this paper as an initiative to the employer or organization in identifying factors that ensure the stability and practice of a culture of integrity during Covid-19 by its employees in achieving the same goals in any situation in the workplace or outside the organization.

Keywords: Culture, Integrity, Workplaces, Covid-19

Introduction

An outbreak of an emerging disease (Coronavirus disease 2019, Covid-19) due to a novel virus named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) started in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019 and these viruses rapidly spread all over the world (Lai *et al.*, 2020). The epidemic of Covid-19 had been announced as a pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO) on 12 March 2020. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of issues and problems at workplace occurs in terms of many aspects, one of them are culture of integrity at the workplace had been disrupted and abandoned. Integrity is crucial personal trait that can exert a powerful influence in any setting. Any threat to culture of integrity in the workplace can impact and result in a toxic or corrupt working environment that may be harmful and deleterious.

Integrity is an important element in the workplace (Bywater-Schulze, 2019). Integrity forms staff who have good behaviour and are free from negative counter behaviour such as stealing, vandalism, prolonging breaks without permission and skipping work (Zainal *et al.*, 2019). Weakness of integrity will contribute to the collapse of moral values and the deterioration of an occupational profession. As such, integrity will also affect emotional success, career and

financial success, job success, relationship success and staff physical success. Emotional success is the influence of being happy, satisfied or calm and instead worried, anxious, frustrated, angry or dissatisfied. Career and financial success in general are the ability to control spending habits and adequate savings for one's future and career. While work success is defined in terms of high productivity namely pleasure of work, dedication to work and optimism towards one's career as opposed to the habit of doing bad and unreliable work, having bad relationships with colleagues and supervisors, tendency to perform prohibited activities in the workplace and attitude of considering work as a compulsion. For success in relationships in the context of general satisfaction is a harmonious harmony and relationship with friends, colleagues, relatives and spouses as opposed to relationships filled with conflict, conflict, disappointment, separation and misery (Strand, 2021). Accordingly, in terms of physical success can be seen as health-oriented such as continuous exercise, a healthy diet, adequate rest and good health care such as avoiding alcohol abuse, tobacco and drug addiction caused by self-error (Bywater-Schulze, 2019).

Literature Review

During this hard critical time, an organization are constantly faced with various forms of threats and challenges either from within and outside an environment, these threats can affect productivity, performances, and effectiveness of an organization. In addition, a culture of integrity at workplace during Covid-19 also one of an issue due to integrity among workers at workplace was not really good and satisfying during this pandemic. Lack of integrity culture is not only given bad effect and affected to workers only but also to an organization's reputation. Kedebe and Lemma (2020) noted that lacks of integrity culture leads partiality on services providing, services delayed, changing the rules or regulation, concerned body of organization act abnormally, declining performance because of previous leaders transferred to another position and a single change have constraint on function of an organizations. Surveys such as that conducted by Stephens (2016) have mentioned that an equally complex approach is needed to encourage good attitude and to generate a culture of integrity among workers at workplace. It is essential for an organization to find strategy in maintaining a culture of integrity at workplace during Covid-19 pandemic.

A big problems or challenges that need to be addressed in an effort is to build up culture of integrity and ethics at workplace. The fourth challenge of Vision 2020 which is to form a strong society of moral and ethical characteristics as well as its citizens have religious values and intact spirituality is based on noble character, this is in line with culture of integrity. It has previously been observed that integrity is the most respected quality of leadership and it is the most predominant management skills that organization need to accomplish (Shafter *et al.*, 2016). Recent evidence by Molina (2016) also state that integrity is an organization functioning consistently with the purposes and values for which it was created. Along these lines, it is necessary for an organization to clearly express its purpose and ideals for an internalisation and incorporation of its participants into everyday work. Management and leadership of an organization are required to formulate a clear and strong integrity for an aligned execution of organizational policies that institutionalise continuous or ongoing moral evolution within and inside an organization.

Based on this simple definition, integrity can be simplified as a key to an achievement of an outcomes of quality work entrusted to an individuals or organizations based on integrated and

comprehensive work characteristics. According to Mocamber (2019), integrity is considered as the honesty and truthfulness of an individual's actions. It stands in opposition to hypocrisy. Judging with the standards of integrity involves regarding an internal constancy as a goodness. It is now established from a variety of studies that improving culture of integrity has become a major concern and it is very significance in an organization (Kebede and Lemma, 2020).

In the context of a job or service, integrity encompasses complete qualities of an individual or an organization based on pure universal values (Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit, 2013). To move towards a brighter future in organization in fighting Covid-19 pandemic issues, an organization should be smart in carry on or managing success, having an ethical society and workers that are trustworthy and with culture of integrity. Integrity can lead to ethical thinking and better decision making among workers in an organization. Moreover, workers in an organization also should be more rigorous, having a strongly principles and trust in order to cope a various problems or challenges as well as maintaining good organization's name. Recently investigators by Vaduva *et al.*, (2016) have examined that integrity guarantee a uniform application of an ethical principles not only regionally but also globally.

Discussion

Generally, integrity refers to the set of superior qualities that exist among individuals and based on the principle of adherence to honesty and moral practices. Integrity needs commitment to pursue an action that are favourable to oneself and others beyond the demands of a current objectives or target. Organization with high integrity culture are described as a collaborative, constructive, innovative, and strong partnerships. Kebede and Lemma (2020) had noted that it is very important to keep going an ethical organizational culture framework in maintaining organizational management integrity and for understanding and managing people in organizational environments. Moreover, for long term success of an organization and to generate trust and level up efficiency, culture of integrity at workplace also necessary.

Ideally, integrity divided into two basic parts which are individual and organizational. According to an individual level, integrity is the harmony between an action with moral, ethical and legal principles as well as the harmony between self-interest and public interest, while in organizational level, integrity has been enshrined in an accomplishment an ethics codes, customer charters or structure and work processes as well as adherence to best practices. The code of ethics is affirmed, repeated and lived by all members of an organization so that it becomes a routine and will eventually become the corporate culture. Studies by Hamid *et al.*, (2020) had shown that integrity in the workplace is important due in promoting a positive culture an organization in the workplace. One where there is a good decision making, open communication and a powerful moral compass that guides all actions and decisions, while careless behaviour and mistrust can create uncomfortable and distressed work environment.

Integrity is a prerequisite to personal success and for evolving leadership skills. Individuals with integrity will build trust, respected and counted on to do what is right. They also able to stable respect and authority, and also enable to share their values with others. At corporate level, it takes individuals of integrity to develop a consensus around shared values. As this consensus builds, the corporation develops a culture of integrity and this impacts an interpersonal relationship within an organization and creates highly valued work conditions. Workers become

more inspired to take pride and enjoy with their works. The culture of integrity also impacts an actions and policies of the leadership team and the quality of the corporate governance system.

There are some factors that can be lead in maintaining a culture of integrity at workplace during Covid-19. One of them is organizational factors likes the formation of organizational structure. Organizations needs to prepare a job description, ethics code and rules that clearly describe an ethical behaviour to the workers. It is possible to encourage consistent ethics among workers in which case the responsibilities and influence of leadership on ethical behaviour or acts of workers are immense. Extensive study by Engelbrecht et al., (2017) has shown that integrity offers very logical reason in trusting, feeling of fairness and moral character provides a sort of predictability that can help in managing with uncertainty. A leader with good integrity will be recognized as trustworthy which will guide to trust in that leader. Culture of integrity as positively related to trust among top management team and had good impact on followers' trust (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Existing research by Spencer and Van (2017) recognized that leader should established high personal integrity, good personality and deep alignment with organization's values key criteria for encouragement to all leadership roles. Next, organization should maintain culture of integrity by making an obligation to regularly walk the talk into management job descriptions and monitor whether specified business goals actively support ethical conduct throughout an organization.

In addition, an organizational culture likes the amount of behaviour patterns, attitudes and basic expectations shared and disperse to member of an organization. An organizational culture based on high ethical standards can be a motivator on the practices of ethical behaviour among workers. Next, critical level of an ethical issue is an acceptance of organization members to the misconduct that occurs. If action taken is wrong and causes harm to the others, this shows that an issue is significant and serious attention should be taken. Top management in an organization needs to build up moral foundation for an organization by setting and demonstrating a high level of ethics and promoting beneficial integrity to workers. Through the commitment of top management, it covers the creation of organizational ethics and seeing the leadership component is a significant aspect, this is due to leaders can generate, maintain and change the environment. Teamwork in an organization has been essential to remote consultations whilst maintaining a culture of integrity during this pandemic. Therefore, it is paramount in taking time to ensure teams is running efficiently and organization members are free to discuss their opinions and concerns (Ruparell., 2020).

An organization can take an action in maintaining culture of integrity at workplace by ensuring and encourage integrity in an organization's performance as a responsible business. Other than that, lessen the risk of wrongdoing by parties employed by or aligned with an organization, organization will responsibly handle suspected and substantiated wrongdoing. Culture of integrity is very important in preventing corruptions and lost capable workers and the trustworthiness of the worker to keep organization secrecy. Previous study has established that workers with high integrity are said to be more rational, honest, and independent compared to those with less integrity (Macomber, 2019). Aristotle also had said that individual with moral will doing the right action because they know that an action is correct consistently and in tune with themselves. Recent studies by researcher Spencer and Van (2017) also had established that organizations that exhibits 24/7 integrity and initiate ethical conduct as a first concern by putting in place high standards, setting good example and communicating openly will exert positive

influence on workers. This means that if workers had a good integrity, so culture of integrity in an organization also will be good and maintain.

To create a good culture of integrity at workplace during Covid-19 pandemic, there are some phases on successful behavioural change efforts. Firstly, workers should understand why integrity is compulsory. Organizations must employ extensive approach to train workers about the significance of integrity in everything they do. This should start with communicating the vital facts regarding new ethical guidelines and procedures. It is important to note that variety of ways should be used to share this information and it should occur at all levels of the organization. The message about changing to a culture of integrity must begin from top and be methodically cascaded throughout an organization. Once workers in the workplace understand why culture of integrity is important, they want to know what is in it for them. Other than that, culture of integrity must be well understood. This phase involves increasing the emotional commitment of individuals and teams to consistently engage in ethical behaviour. An appreciation for how hard it is to create integrity must be taken into account. Workers need to have chances to react to the changes if they are not able to express their concerns, they will be less likely to embrace the practices of integrity. While workers should feel free to indicate their feelings, they must also understand the advantages of integrity. Once everyone understands the case for integrity and becomes emotionally committed to the effort, they must learn new, and accompanying behaviour and actions. Next, practices of integrity should be understood. Workers must comprehend new behaviour they are expected to acquire and the new processes to which they should adhere. Organization should provide workers with knowledge through appropriate behaviour, teaching workers exactly which behaviour are needed to hold up the changes to organizational integrity is crucial.

Conclusion

In summary, culture of integrity is an elemental leadership attribute and it is crucial for strong, ethical culture that good conduct starts from the top. Integrity is closely related to an ethics and it is a set of adequate values and morals that standardize the behaviour of an individuals, organizations and also profession. Work culture refers to the values, beliefs, and attitudes of workers towards the work or job task that they do. In the context of integrity, it is a concept of involving work culture practices that demand integrity practices such as integrity in punctuality, integrity in carrying information, integrity in providing the greatest services, integrity in dealing with the department heads, workmate, and even the community. A culture of integrity in services needs to be demonstrated by workers in an organization through the practices of trust and authority entrusted to them for common good.

If an acts and practices which do not have an integrity are continues without any efforts to deal with it, especially during this hard time where Covid-19 virus is plaguing it, then it will be able to low down the reputation of an organization, cripple the trust of the community and worker's good image will be affected. Every organization worker should cultivate morality in themselves and attain their trust in God, self, family, society, employer and country as best as possible.

Therefore, it is very important and significant for the workers of the organization to cultivate a culture of integrity even though the whole country is still impacted and affected by Covid-19 virus in order to produce a competitive and developed Malaysian workers and nation. This is because good culture of integrity among workers will lead to good organization's name and

reputation. To move towards better and greater excellence in terms of works and attitude among workers in an organization, an organization should be wise in managing success, and create workers who have good ethics and integrity. Moreover, an organization must take full responsibility for ensuring and maintaining a culture of integrity at workplace so that all staff members in an organization can work in a healthy and good working environment.

References

- Bywater-Schulze, A. (2019). Integrity in the public sector-A new professionals' perspective. *Public Sector*, 42(2), 21-22.
- Dinis-Oliveira, R. J. (2020). COVID-19 research: pandemic versus “paperdemic”, integrity, values and risks of the “speed science”. *Forensic Sciences Research*, 1-14.
- Engelbrecht, A. S., Heine, G., & Mahembe, B. (2017). Integrity, ethical leadership, trust and work engagement. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*.
- Hamid, A. L., Raval, A. D., & Pitroda, J. R. A Critical Literature Review on Transparency and Integrity in Construction Industry.
- Kebede, D. A., & Lemma, M. (2020). Phenomenological Study of Exploring Integrity Culture during Covid-19 in Ethiopia. *International Journal of Commerce and Finance*, 6(2), 33.
- Lai CC, Shih TP, Ko WC, et al. Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19): the epidemic and the challenges. *Int J Antimicrob Agents*. 2020; 55:105924
- Macomber, A. (2019). How Important is Integrity in the Workplace? *Journal of Continuing Education Topics & Issues*, 21(1), 18-21.
- Molina, A. D., 2016. Ten Recommendations for Managing Organizational Integrity Risks, s.l.: IBM Center for The Business of Government.
- Ruparell, K. (2020). How important are the team dynamics in the battle against COVID-19? *Journal of Neurology*, 1-1.
- Šamáňková, D., Preiss, M., & Příhodová, T. (2018). Integrity in the Workplace. In *The Contextual Character of Moral Integrity* (pp. 121-133). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Shafter, M. E., Ghnaem, S. S. & Abdelmotaleb, F. A., 2016. The Roles of Management to Increase Efficiency for Employees and Interconnected with Good Leadership. *Journal of Business and Management*, 18(11).
- Spencer-Cooke, A., & Van Dijk, F. (2017). Creating a Culture of Integrity: Business Ethics for the 21st Century. Routledge.
- Stephens, J. M. (2016). Creating cultures of integrity: A multi-level intervention model for promoting academic honesty. *Handbook of academic integrity*, 996-1003.
- Strand, C. L. (2021). Employee Perceptions of Honesty and Integrity within National Park Service Leadership.
- Vaduva, S., Alistar, V. T., Thomas, A. R., Lupițu, C. D., & Neagoie, D. S. (2016). Moral leadership in business: towards a business culture of integrity. Switzerland: Springer.
- Zainal, R., Som, A. M., & Mohamed, N. (2019). A comparative study on the implementation stage of corporate integrity in the Malaysian Public Sectors. *Religación*, 4, 123-129.