COVID-19: ADAPTING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Abstract

This conceptual paper discusses the challenges faced by organizations in facing the pandemic of COVID-19. Until the paper is written, Malaysia is still under Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) and the number of COVID-19 cases is still reported day by day. The pandemic gives a very significant impact to human life over the world including the business and non-business organizations. The change of working culture somehow creates some challenges to the organization. The paper also views the implementation of change that can be applied by referring to the Kotter’s 8 Step Model of Change. This model can be adapted to help leaders and employees facing with the new normal in the organization.

Keywords: COVID-19, Organizational Change, Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The great attack of Novel Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19) forced the Malaysia’s Prime Minister to announce the Movement Control Order (MCO) starting 18 March 2020. All schools, offices and business companies were commanded to temporarily close. Most of business activities in all sectors such as education, tourism, food and beverages; and transportation were hardly affected. Until the paper is written, Malaysia is still under Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) and the number of COVID-19 cases is still reported day by day. The pandemic gives a very significant impact to human life over the world including the business and non-business organizations.

It is the nature of a human being, when the things that are commonly practiced have been prevented and at the same time they are commanded to practice new things that are out of the ordinary, there might be many challenges to be faced. The challenges are not only on the individuals but also faced by the organizations (Hite & McDonald, 2020).
THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE

Within the organization, it is the government that plays a major role in ensuring that all employees understand and adhere to the standard operating procedures that have been outlined by the government. A change in work culture is the responsibility of all employees but it is not easy to be implemented (Arora & Suri, 2020). This is a huge responsibility for a leader to ensure that these new norms are practiced.

One of the significant challenges faced by the organization is the challenge in separating work and family. During the MCO, most of the employees are instructed to work at home. This is where the obstacles can be seen as sometimes being separated or isolated from family members for a few moments to concentrate on works or participate in meetings may be challenging (Setyawan & Lestari, 2020; Editorial, 2020; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020).

The potential conflicts occur between work and family spheres may be greater as all of family members are at home (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). The instructions to do remote works where the staff in organizations need to complete their jobs at home mix up the responsibilities toward the organization and also commitment with family members (Editorial, 2020; Adalja, Toner & Inglesby, 2020).

The psychological well-being is also significantly impacted by the change of the working nature in an organization (Shaw, et al. 2020; Editorial, 2020; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). The adaptation with new changes by individual workers and new norms of social interaction psychologically affect the employees in an organization. Working from home may create a greater risk of isolation among childless and single employees which leads to feelings of loneliness and social exclusion Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). The psychological distress and depression also may occur due to many uncertainties such as functional impairment, anxiety about being infected and reduced quality of life (Editorial, 2020).

Similarly, the quality of communication is also impacted by the crises. With the COVID-19 pandemic forcing employees to work from home, the ability of employees to communicate has changed dramatically with the loss of face-to-face interactions (DeFilippis et al. 2020).

The impacts on the organizational environment can be seen when all organizations must comply with the standard operating procedures in managing the crisis. Normally individuals are attracted to working environments and culture that they highly value (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). When the organizations are allowed to run as usual, workplace flexibility and modification are needed to support safe workplace openings. Settings must achieve the physical distance to reduce the spread of viruses (Shaw et al., 2020). The instructions such as to wear mask, to implement
physical distance and to implement the optimum level of cleanliness are the new norms in the organization which sometimes hardly followed by public people. Facing the crisis of pandemic of COVID-19, everyone has to adapt to the new norms and changes (Carnavele, 2020).

ADAPTING CHANGE IN ORGANIZATION

According to Harvard Business School Professor John Kotter, change in an organization is very challenging because it involves changes in human behavior. In 1996, Kotter introduced 8 steps of the change process in an organization. In managing organizational change following the COVID-19 pandemic, Kotter’s 8 Step Model of Change as illustrated in Figure 1 can be used as a guide by every head of the organization. According to Kotter, there are eight steps of the change process in an organization, namely (1) creating needs, (2) forming a strong alliance, (3) creating a vision of change, (4) communicating through communication, (5) removing barriers, (6) forming short-term targets, (7) building change and (8) strengthening change in culture.

![Kotter's 8 Step Model of Change](image)

(1) Creating Needs

A person is more likely to accept change if he or she feels there is a need for it. If employees feel their company is doing well, the need for change will be felt low. Those who plan for such changes need to conclude that there is an external or internal threat to the competitiveness, reputation of the organization, and may even affect survival (Shanafelt et al., 2019). Certainly by looking at the magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 on the world, indirectly employees already understand the new norms that need to be practiced. People are advised through mass media and social media regarding personal care such as social imprisonment, hand washing, wearing face masks and so on. Government leaders and the Ministry of Health are actively providing information
and reminders to the people on the importance of adopting these new norms. However, as a human nature, not everyone will obey instructions. This is where the role of the head of the organization is very important especially when the manufacturing and enterprise industries have reopened. Therefore, every organization that starts operating must ensure that employees comply with the standard operating procedures set.

(2) Forming a Strong Alliance

To convince people that change is needed, leaders do not have to convince everyone individually. Within an organization, many new things will be introduced. For example, rotation attendance, online meetings, working from home and so on. There are some who are uncomfortable with this new practice. However, when the leaders in each department or division practice the culture among themselves first, this new culture is more easily applied to the employees later (Larsson, et al. 2016).

(3) Creating a Vision for Change

In order to make a change, a leader must have an overall vision for the change. When the vision is interesting and gives a clear picture of the future, one will be more committed to change (Mohd Adnan & Valliapan, 2019). The vision to achieve is that the country is to create a healthy and disease-free population. Therefore, the government's goal to reduce the number of COVID-19 cases curve and eventually become zero needs to be understood by every head of the organization. Similarly, the vision that needs to be set within the organization in ensuring that all employees are not infected with COVID-19. A clear vision will facilitate the process of change within the organization.

(4) Communicating through Communication

When employees know what is going on, they will be more receptive to change. By getting complete information, employees will be more committed. Indeed, a lot of information and advice channeled to the people either through the mass media or social media (Nawaz, et al. 2017). However, taking into account employees who have different life backgrounds, there are still some who do not absorb the information well. It is a big role for a leader to use effective communication methods to his employees. The head of the organization needs to know all his employees and wisely to use the most effective means of communication.

(5) Removing Obstacles

As change efforts are made, it is likely that many obstacles will be encountered along the way. It is not easy to stop someone from doing something that is previously allowed and not wrong. Obstacles such as negative reactions certainly exist. Certainly
it was a bit difficult at the beginning of its implementation. However, over the time as it has become a culture, this is no longer an awkward thing to do.

(6) Forming Short-Term Targets

In the period of change, if the organization can make a small victory history, the process of accepting a change will be more effective (Kotter, 1996). For example, changing work norms by using the Internet or working from home. There are many things to understand and learn. Employees have never met, presented proposals, completed assignments or interviewed online. Since the pandemic, they need to know some applications to do those activities. As an appreciation or support for the efforts of these employees to learn new knowledge, a leader can give the employees short-term targets. If they reach a certain level, they will be given some credit or reward. Emotional support and instrumental support such as training are important to create happiness and motivate employees to get used to the new culture.

(7) Building Change

COVID-19 dynamics is something very different. Accepting changes in the work culture is the toughest thing to do for an employee. Not all employees can happily adapt to organizational changes Sveningsson, S. & Sörgärde (2020). As the government emphasizes the change of the norms from time to time the change maybe built and familiarized.

(8) Strengthening Changes in Culture

Finally, the changes need to be ensured to be part of the norms and culture of the organization. The leader of the organization must continue to strengthen and maintain the new norms within his organization. This is because it is impossible for change to happen by itself. Cooperation between the two parties is a must.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, COVID-19 gives a very significant impacts to the whole world. The world has to adapt with the change due to force of the pandemic. Certainly there are many challenges and obstacles towards cultivating new norms within the organization. Each leader and employee must take on a role in implementing the change in the organization. The Kotter’s 8 Step Model of Change can be the guideline in implementing organizational change.
REFERENCES


