

New Normal Leadership: How to Lead Educational Organizations in Time of COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract- There should be no doubt that leadership is crucial for the success of organization. It is even more essential in time of COVID-19 pandemic because it increases uncertain and risk of management addition to rapid changes of context and technology. This article aims to research, identify, and present how COVID-19 has affected educational organizations, how educational communities have reacted to the situation, and some recommendations educational organization leaders should consider and apply to their situations.

Keywords: New Normal, Leadership, Education Organization, COVID-19

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is hard to define, but easy to detect if you work or live under an administrator or a boss who has no leadership. Administration or Management has been known for over a century as means to get things done [1]. However, if you investigate more closely, the different between successful and unsuccessful is how things are gotten done. Searching on how things have been gotten done, leadership comes into spotlight. If you search the keywords “articles or topics on leadership” in goole.co.th web, it comes up with more than 700 million tittles on the topic [2]. Based on my experience, leadership is a key success of management and winning of human hearts. Success through management is an ultimate goal of every manger, but if that success comes from full engagement and satisfaction of members of organization.

Towards the end of 20th century and at dawn of 21st century, leadership plays a great part in management due to uncertain and unpredictable changes. Under uncertain and unpredictable circumstances, organizations need proactive leaders who are capable to envision to lead the organization and brave to take risks with strong decisions based on sufficient information and supportive knowledge. In addition to these challenges, COVID-19 pandemic catalyts the need of super leaders to lead in abnormal situations as normal as possible, which bears the head topic of this article, “new normal leadership”.

Although, “new normal” is not a new phase and new concept, derived after the impact of COVID-19, but COVID-19 causes new normal measures of our behaviors so that we can work and live safely under the turbulent world of COVID-19 pandemic. In general, “new normal” is a situation where someone has to live a new life as normally as possible after a big change or a big loss hits him or her unexpectedly. Kent [3] described new normal as a new kind of living that one had to accept whether you liked it or not. The unexpected matter happened that would not let you return to your former definition of “normal” again. Similarly, Cross [4] said that grieving after a loss is a very normal human experience none of us got to escape. You might feel confused and disoriented after unexpected events happened to you. Your reaction to such situation was shock. You might reject the new reality that had completely and irreversibly changed your life and the world around you. So, new normal is a way of life one has to face and adapt in a situation where unexpected even has happened to you and everyone is “COVID-19 pandemic”. New norm in time of COVID-19 would be a kind of life we have to learn, adapt, and live with it as normal as possible. There is no way to avoid that or easy way out. New normal leadership would be a kind of leadership that could lead us through this circumstance effectively and well. Now let us explore what we can do about it.

II. KNOWING COVID-19 AND IT EFFECTS

Old Thai saying teaches us that in order to win the war, we should know the enemy well. Either we want to win the war against COVID-19 or just to play safe to live along with it, it would be much better off if we know COVID-19 and its effects well. This article does not mean to be a medical paper, so fact and information about COVID-19 would be related to the purpose of educational leadership.

I wrote and presented on many occasions that we had confronted with breakouts and crisis numbers of times. It seemed that we won most of times, or at least we could live our normal lives or nearly normal lives along with them. But this time is different! What makes COVID-19 different from other breakouts? How much knowledge do we have on the matter? How long will it take us to win it or at least be able to live with this epidemic

as normal as possible. In short, our daily life, social activities, and work will become normal again. This article would not answer all of these questions, but at least the findings might guide us how to deal with COVID-19 more properly. In order to hit the point, there are three important questions that need to be answered. Firstly, what is COVID-19? Secondly, what impact does COVID-19 affect us, both individually and socially. And lastly, what should we do about it?

1. COVID-19: Less dangerous, but More Effects

Up to now, COVID-19 has been known as an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus [5]. It is the same type of virus as SARS or MERS. Most people who are infected by the disease would experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without special treatment, but those who have medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer would be more likely to develop serious illness.

The COVID-19 virus spread primarily through droplets or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughed or sneezed. To prevent or slow down transmission was to be well-informed about the COVID-virus, how it caused and spread. To protect yourself and others from infection by washing your hand or using alcohol-based rub frequently and not touching your face.

When the COVID-19 was firstly detected, it was called SARS-Cov-2 because, it caused by the same virus family as SARS or MERS [6]. However, the more we learned about this disease, the more we found out that this disease was much different from SARS or MERS, late named COVID-19. Although the death rate of COVID-19 was much lower than SARS or MERS, approximately, SARS was 9.5 percent, MERS was 34.4 percent while COVID-19 was 2.3 [7]. But why did most nation state leaders enforce more rigor measures? The reasons might be because we knew very little about COVID-19 at present. What was known was that COVID-19 spread more easily than other virus-caused diseases, there were no certain and effective drugs to cure illness, and that COVID-19 could possibly permute. Vaccines have been under researched and developed. Some countries even started vaccinating their people, but results were yet to wait. What if COVID-19 could permute, all vaccines and injections at the moment would be wastes.

2. COVID-19 Impacts

The second point I would like to discuss is how much COVID-19 has affected us. Since the dawn of year 2021, all walks of lives and careers have been immensely affected by COVID-19. The pandemic has huge impact on aviation industry due to travel restrictions and slump in demand among travelers. Most countries use strong measures such as country and/or city lock down. Although, aviation industry is a partial economic factor by itself, but it affects many other related businesses such as tourism and merchandises. Chain effects of tourism and merchandises are hotels, restaurants, food industries, domestic transportation, agricultures and so on. This is just one sample of COVID-19 that affects business and its chain impacts.

Up to now there is no doubt that COVID-19 outbreak has big impacts to all sectors and living souls. Labour Organization [8] pointed out that COVID-19 crisis was quite different from previous world crisis. The impact of the lockdown had surpassed that of the initial trade shocks and of the travel restrictions. The crisis had pushed many families into poverty and inequalities. Country and city lockdowns had disrupted production flows, caused demand for non-essential goods and services to plummet the forced enterprises to suspend or scale down. Many persons lost their jobs and incomes. However, the government alone could handle the matter.

United Nations Development Programme [9] warned that the COVID-19 pandemic was far more than a health crisis. It affected societies and economies at their core. The impact might vary from country to country, but it likely increased poverty and inequalities at global scale. Without urgent socio-economic responses, global suffering would escalate, jeopardizing lives, and livelihoods for years to come. Wikipedia [10] reported the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education that, estimated on June 7, 2020, around 1,725 billion learners were affected due to institutional closures. About 134 countries implemented nationwide closures, 38 were implemented local closures, and only 39 countries where schools were currently open. School closures, not only impacted students, teachers, and families, but had far-reaching economic and societal consequences. Some social and economic issues included student debt, digital learning, food insecurity, homelessness, accessing to childcare, health care, housing, internet, and disability services.

Numbers of infected persons and deaths might scare us as Worldometers.info [11] reported that the world infected and dead cases were 109,437,413 patients and 2,412,621 deaths by February 15, 2021. If the fight against COVID-19 means to be a marathon one, we have to learn to live with it and that is why we need strong leaders. We cannot shut ourselves at home forever. The criteria for us to weigh on what we should or should not do are based on two principles: (1) whether COVID-19 is an easy spreading disease or less easy spreading, and (2) whether

COVID-19 cause high death rate or low death rate. According to the statistic shown above, it might be assumed that COVID-19 is an easy spreading disease because it only takes about a year to reach one hundred million infected patients, but low death rate because only about 2.20 percent of the patients died from the infection. The question is how we shall use this fact to live new normal along with COVID-19 rather than being scared and shutting oneself behind the door at home and waiting for a new and big economic depress in the next few years. The new depression is meant to be much serious than the 1931 depression for sure.

III. COVID-19 AND US: WHAT ARE CHOICES

I use capital U and S in US to signify that COVID-19 and US are equal parties. The strategy is to look for best alternatives on how to deal and live with COVID-19. At hand, there are three choices: let it go, fight to win, and live with it. Decision must be made, and quickly.

After the breakout, most countries around the world have implemented rigid policy and enforced strong security measures such as China [12], United Kingdom [13], Brazil [14], or Thailand [15]. A few have used more relax measures to deal with COVID-19, such as in Sweden (Aderson 2020), Netherlands, Portugal, or Singapore [16]. Either choices come out with mixed results for the infection, but differences in society and economic impacts. Although, factors related to society and economic impacts might include many variables, but lockdown or not lock down seems to be a crucial factor. If the fight against COVID-19 is the marathon event, not a sprint running as Swedish Prime Minister, Isabella Lovin told BBC (reported in 17], nation state leaders who have better understand of the situation and clear visions to lead their countries, will recover sooner. This, again, calls for strong new normal leadership.

The statistic that educators and educational administrators should know in order to make decisions and lead educational organizations is the statistic on hospitalization and dead possibility based on age groups. Report presented by Center for Disease Control and Prevention [18] showed that infected patients of older ages are riskier than younger, and the death rate was higher. For examples, a person whose age was over 85, was likely to be infected and hospitalized 13 times higher than referenced group (group of 18-29 years old), and death rate would be about 630 times higher. Young children, under 4 years of age were about 4 times lower than referenced group ages. And if a child of that age got infected, the death rate was about 9 times lower. The probability of a person whose age was between 5-17 would be infected by COVID-19 was about 9 times lower, and death rate was about 16 times lower than the referenced group ages. Based on these statistics just mentioned, it is fairly safe for educational institutions, in all ages, to open on regular basic new normal practices. It is high time academics, educators and educational administrators dare to challenge

During the breakout throughout the year of 2020, educational institutions were recommended online or distance learning modes. Although technology could enable teachers and students to access to learning, but there were problems related to distance learning such as unequal access to technology and unequal access to educational resources. The report revealed that when schools were closed, online learning had become a critical lifeline for education, [10] and cited UNESCO that online learning recommendations in response to the crisis that (1) Examine students' readiness and choose the most relevant tools, (2) Ensure inclusion of distance learning programme, (3) Protect data privacy and data security, (4) Prioritize solutions to address psychosocial challenges before teaching, (5) Plan the study schedule of the distance learning programmes, (6) Provide support to teachers and parents on the use of digital tools, (7) Blend appropriate approaches and limit the number of applications and platforms, (8) Develop distance learning rules and monitor students' learning process, (9) Define the duration of distance learning unit based on students' self-regulation skills, and (10) Create communities and enhance connection.

I wrote in the article presented at the symposium [19] that although online technology at present was capable to handle complicated tasks using video conferences, but it could not replace human teachers in many aspects. So, real teachers, real classes, and human interactions, face-to-face classrooms are necessary medias of learning management. But at the same time, normal classrooms have to be operated in well-prepared educational organizations, with highly safe environment, and full cooperated personnel, students, parents, and stakeholders. A new normal set of conducts and behaviors must well designed, articulated, understood, and conformed. To achieve the mission, educational institutions need strong and new normal mindset leaders.

IV. EDUCATION UNDER NEW CONTEXT

Learning from reviewing on education adaptation to COVID-19 situation, some findings could be mentioned as follow.

Firstly, the brief recommendations by The United Nation[20]that the first thing that the country should do before re-opening schools was to suppress transmission of the disease and plan thoroughly. (2) Protect education financing and coordinate for impact because the pandemic would affect much economy, but education was important. So, the countries should procure education finances. (3) Build resilient education systems for equitable and sustainable development. (4) Reimage education and accelerate changes in teaching and learning, which were heats of education. Fail to do so, education might face entropy.

Luna-Bazaldua, Levin, & Liberman [21] wrote in World Bank Blogs on learning in the time of COVID-19, stating that during school closures, some students might continue learning through online or distance learning while other might stop learning. So, when schools reopened, students came back with different level of learning. Schools needed to remedy students' learning background by alignment of instruction and additional supports to where students were in their learning trajectory. Assessing students learning so that learning guideline and support could be done. Many countries assessed all students before reopening schools, such as Chile, Kenya, South Korea, and Vietnam, to name a few.

HundrEd[22] shared a short but meaningful message that students, parents, and educators throughout the world were well aware of the effect of COVID-19 as schools were closed and quarantine methods were used to cope with global pandemic. While governments and health care centers were working hard to fight against the virus, educators and educational institutions were working hard to keep education going. Major challenges emerged from the pandemic were (1) worldwide problems and solutions were not well organized and shared. Limited understanding of how educators, students, and parents coped with their situations were not well distributed. (2) There was little or no evidence of cooperation between countries on the matters. (3) Educators were forced to teaching while the systems were not ready or well prepared. Results revealed that we were far from using best practices for online learning and difficulty with homeschooling. (4) Operative and collaborative forms of learning were very limited especially for hands-on learning like music, theater, dance, woodwork and so on. (5) Intrinsically motivated learners would work on their owns, while those who were not intrinsically motivated found it hard to pursue. (6) Concern of students spending too much time on screens were now clear. So, offline classroom interactions were in needs. Parents might be at work while students and other members of the family were at home. Online learning created new homelife styles and learning. (7) How different age groups were learning and what would be the best ways to cope with learning difficulties were not clear and needed further investigation. Although it was clear that new models of teaching and learning were needed to replace traditional ones, as Kendra Thornton was cited in the report, but what should that be.

Suggestions and alternatives learnt above are useful, but there are also other alternatives to help educational organizations heal with the wounds. In addition to rapid changes, uncertain causes, and disruptive technologies, COVID-19 pandemic multiplies the situation to amore complex and urgent agenda. Scary as it might be, but challenging guts of educational administrators and educationists. Both students and educational institutions come to a crossroad to make and take a big decision. Unless enforcing by laws such as Basic Education, students' alternatives are either to continue schooling or quit schools and find jobs to earn some income for living. If one decides to continue schooling, one has to be sure that education gained by continuing schooling, with expense but unsecured return income, is a reasonable choice. Education at present is balanced to return income, benefited from education. If not, students are likely to leave schools. On the other hand, educational organization administrators and staffs need to redesign by focusing on really useful education, which I call "eatable education". Education is not what we learn now and apply in the future, but good education is what we learn and use at present and be bases for further learning. Education must adapt, change, disrupt, or relax and wait extinction.

V. NEW NORMAL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

As I start off in the introduction that, administration or management is a mean to get things done and leadership is capability to get things done with and by followers who envision the same needs and readily commit full engagement to get things done with satisfaction and pride. Leadership shades light on the present situation which should be known as "New Normal Leadership in Time of COVID-19 Pandemic," or in short COVID New Normal Leadership.

In my opinion, a leader or a person with leadership is a person who dares to lead others to do something good in time of hardship for the benefit of public good. The concept applies to anyone who leads, not depending on authorized positions. In time of COVID-19 pandemic, New normal education leaders should lead as follow.

1. Open schools or educational institutions on regular face-to-face classroom learning without fear of COVID-19 pandemic, but with careful designs of safe-education zones and educational activities. I understand the people fear of the disease and I know that learning could be done online with high performance of technology, but learning is more than obtaining facts and information. Learning is a process of interaction and response between a learner to environment, especially human environment, individually or socially by or with knowledge, skills, and attitude learnt. Whole learning could not be done by oneself alone. Through variety of channels of sensation, learning acquired and transformed. Online, offline, and many other channels of learning should be applied.
2. To be able to succeed and achieve a set goal mentioned in number one above, school or educational institutions have to make schools or educational institutions “safe zones” by making school or institutions “education bubbles”. Firstly, declare the school or institute campus a “safe zone”. Secondly, anyone, a student, or teacher, administrator, school personnel, parent, or guest, who has a flu-like symptom **must not** come to school. In case of a student, teacher, or school personnel, home quarantine is **not** considered as absent. Since school ground acts as a bubble shield to prevent and non-transmission of COVID-19, school is safe for educational provision. Thirdly, school administrators and teachers should be resources of information on the disease and practices on how to deal with the situation.
3. In addition to running school in regular mode and in safe zone, school administrators, teachers, and personnel should play role models of how to live and work during the time of COVID-19 pandemic and become leaders to lead educational organization and community through crisis.
4. Cooperation, collaboration, and engagement are key actions needed for human being survival in time of COVID-19 because we never know how long we shall have to live with the disease, and how hard would it affects us. To survive the crisis, all community members and world citizens must share what we know and practice, learn and cooperate, collaborate, and engage in our parts of actions and wider range of functions.
5. Finally, a good leader should never blame others. In spite of all efforts, things might still go worst, do not blame anyone, but ourselves and cooperate, collaborate, and engage to do our best to lessen or eliminate the crisis.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

In time of COVID-19, it seems that nothing is certain except “uncertainty”. However, leadership is skillful and characterized for dealing with uncertainty. This article points out that we need strong leadership, new normal leadership, to lead us through the crisis. Literature reviewed revealed that although every country and its citizens do their best to fight against the disease, but sharing, collaborating, and coordinating among countries were not effectively organized and operated. My conclusion and recommendation suggested how educational institutions should be doing in order that education provision could be done on regular or normal teaching and learning activities along with online services. Cooperation, collaboration, and engagement are three key concepts or strategies that local community and world citizens should aware, adopt, and practice for the sake of human being good.

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