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Culture: The Key to Shifting Your Organization During Post-Pandemic

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Culture: The Key to Shifting Your Organization During Post-Pandemic

Cover Page Footnote

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Culture: The Key to Shifting Your Organization During Post-Pandemic

According to Schein (2016), culture forms the atmosphere of accumulated shared learning in a group. Culture can help the group to solve the problems from external adaption and internal integration. Moreover, when new members come to the group, culture leads them to learn how to be fit in the group. Sathe (1985) described culture is common understanding from members of a community. Joanne Martin (2002) summarized all the definitions of culture from other scholars. Almost every definition emphasizes that culture has two main characters: it forms in a group of people, and the organization's values need to be widely shared.

Having shared learning and value is the key to forming one's organizational culture. Shared learning is how the organization's members solve problems and communicate internally and externally. Moreover, it reveals the organization's beliefs, values, and norms it holds. When an organization has a clear culture, it can help newcomers fit into the organization more effectively.

It is imperative to understand where the concept of culture comes from, and whether culture creates a system, or if the system itself creates the culture within organizations. Culture can be a big concept when people talk about macro culture that exists before socio-system forms. It can be rooted in the natural and geographical environment. In other words, the macro culture is formed based on the ecosystem. For example, different eating cultures depend on the climate and plants in the different regions. As a result of having different eating cultures, people living in the different region can have totally diverse lifestyle and customs.

There is a force of interaction between system and culture, and they can affect each other in many ways. The formation of organizational culture depends on many factors. An

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organization is a dynamic system that receives external and internal influence (Muscalu, 2014). The elements from the external environment include technology, social, political, economic, legal, and intercultural, whereas the internal influence can be the social characteristics of its members, their values, and the business models (Schmieder-Ramirez, 2007). These factors can also affect one's organizational culture. Organizational culture itself contains seven essential characteristics: "innovation and risk-taking, attention to detail, outcome orientation, people orientation, team orientation, aggressiveness, and stability" (Robbins & Judge, 2013, p.465). As Organizational culture is related to many perspectives within an organization, it is not something we can set up immediately.

Culture is a vital component in one organization's structure. Organizational culture is a powerful force that can enhance the performance and behaviors in an organization (Chin et al., 2002). Culture and organization effectiveness has a strong and positive relationship. A strong culture can keep the organization more sustainable, even when the organization is under crisis. Moreover, organizational culture can affect an organization in different perspectives. It can influence the decision-making process, team process, communication, and the scope of how the organization sees itself in the future (Umezawa, 1994).

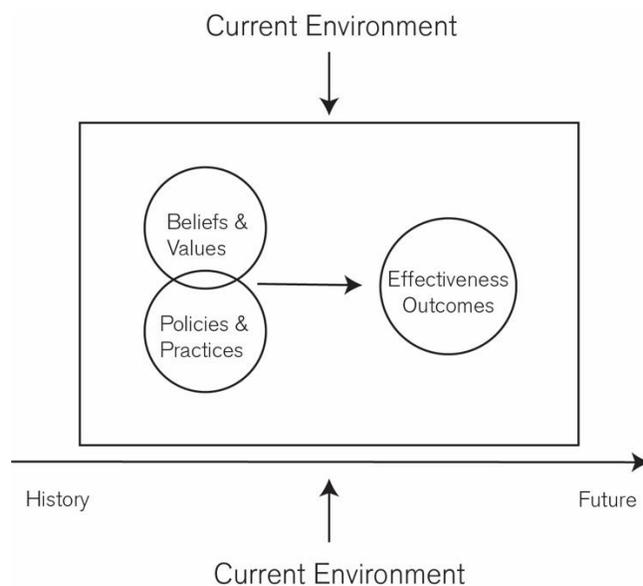
Below is a well-organized graph that illustrates an organization's development in the timeline from history, present, and future. In other words, an organization can be affected in various ways, including history (what happened in the system and within the organization before), present (what is happening now inside and outside of the organization), and future (what the organization is hoping to happen in the future). For example, COVID-19 is a current event that affects the organization, and it will eventually become a part of history. Also, COVID-

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19 can change how organization sees itself in the future. Therefore, creating a right culture is one of the key factors to create effective and positive outcomes in an organization. Moreover, culture is not unchangeable. It should shift accordingly to help organizations to thrive even under crisis.

Figure 1

Relationship of corporate culture and organizational effectiveness



Organizational culture can not only create an impact within an organization, but it can also make the relationships different between the organization and its stakeholders and partners. Soft power is a term that is often used in the political world. In politics, soft power is how countries shape their preferences of how to engage with others from an international relations perspective. Soft power is not just an ability of persuasion, it is an ability to attract and lead others (Nye, 2009).

There are many ways to build soft power, and one of the ways to show soft power is through culture. Soft power also happens in business context. In an organization, soft power

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can be the power that creates organization's impact and attractions to its board, the stakeholders, and the public. Undoubtedly, a solid organizational culture brings a strong soft power for the organizations.

Culture Changes During the Pandemic

Whether an organization accepts it or not, culture changes are happening in the world. According to recent research, there are three types of transformation that affected organizations during the pandemic. The first one is the adoption of digital technology. When people talk about the most significant change in life, it is how our lifestyle depends on digital technologies. Due to the lockdown, people were forced to stay at home for work. Organizations had to take initiatives of implementing hardware and software to support virtual workplaces. The challenge of adopting new technologies for work at home is inevitable (Dey et al., 2020). For example, the IT department was extremely hard to offer technology support when employees are not in the office.

The second transformation is the development of new business models. This might be a painful process for traditional industry, but it can also be an opportunity to grow business. Many companies can still be able to gain advantages and grow their business during severe crises and downturns (Jacobides & Reeves, 2020). There is no doubt that COVID-19 pushed organizations to adjust their old habits and develop new business models. However, it is also good timing for organizations to reassess themselves and understand their situation.

The last transformation is the implementation of new ways of working. The most obvious change of ways of working is that people began working from home. According to a report by McKinsey (2021), 80% of people expressed that they enjoyed working from home,

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and 40% of people mentioned that they became more productive. Working from home is not a temporary substitute of working style, it has become a permanent change for many companies.

Overall, based on all these changes in the environment, organizations should start to think about how to adjust their organizational cultures during the post-pandemic. As discussed earlier, environment changes can greatly impact organizational culture. The pandemic of COVID-19 has been bringing countless changes in all kinds of systems. Furthermore, the changes caused by the pandemic will continue happening in the next three to five years. According to research conducted by Brown et al. (2021), there are several cultural attributes that changed in organizations during pandemics. Flexible, transparent, supportive, decisive, and confronting conflict are five attributes that were emphasized during the pandemic. In contrast, customer orientation, individualism, detail-oriented, result-oriented, and collaborative were de-emphasized during the pandemic. Organizational culture was forced to shift in different ways, that leadership team in the organization cannot afford to overlook.

Table 1

Cultural Attributes that became more and less prominent during COVID-19

	Culture attributes emphasized during COVID-19 (Change in Ranking)	Culture attributes de-emphasized during COVID-19 (Change in Ranking)
1	Flexible	Collaborative
2	Transparent	Result Oriented
3	Supportive	Detail Oriented
4	Decisive	Individualistic

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	Culture attributes emphasized during COVID-19 (Change in Ranking)	Culture attributes de-emphasized during COVID-19 (Change in Ranking)
5	Confronting Culture	Customer Oriented

One of the reasons why cultural attributes changed this way is digital culture revealed during the pandemic. The work-from-home working mode creates more flexibilities in how people work. Moreover, members in the organization need to have more supportive and transparent communication than ever. People work and communicate through online platforms, and when they meet in person, they still need to wear masks to cover their faces, which limits the facial expressions during communications. Therefore, effective communications need to be more directive, supportive, and transparent to avoid misunderstanding.

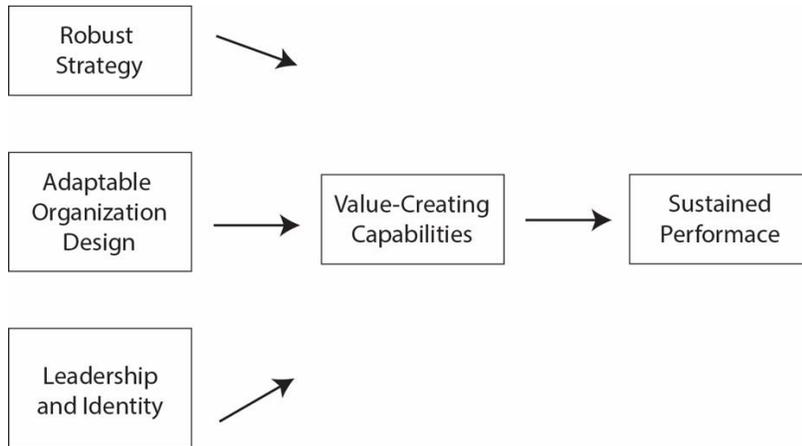
Three Recommendations Suggested for Cultural Change in Organizations

There are three recommendations that can help an organization to make cultural changes. The first recommendation is to assess if the organization’s framework is ready to adopt some changes. Worley (2010) developed the model of agility, which demonstrates what components are in an agile organization and how these components lead the organization to be more agile. Robust strategy, adaptable organization design, and leadership are three fundamental elements to create an agility framework. Once the organization builds a foundation based on these three elements, the organization will have value-creating capabilities and keep having sustainable performance.

Figure 3

A Model of Agility and Performance

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An agile organization allows people to make changes easier than other types of organization. Under the pressures from internal and external, an agile organization can adapt and adjust quickly to the changes. The adaptable frameworks support the organization to have flexible intents and make the implementations quickly. Unlike traditional organization, an agile organization is highly future-focused. Traditional organization relies on more stable structures to be efficient and grow, whereas agile organization thrives through challenges and changes. An agile organization focuses on what can be improved in the future instead of asking what we do well currently. The motivation of developing the organization is to look forward and see what will happen in the future. Flexibility is another important characteristic of an agile organization. Agile organization embraces changes and crises. Obviously, under the post-pandemic circumstances, an agile organization can shift quickly and smoothly.

Second recommendation is to choose right change models and frameworks. Change is not always easy for an organization because it can be opportunities or threats depending on the changing process. If organizations want to have a comprehensive transformation, a deep understanding of every facet of the organization will be needed, including people, process,

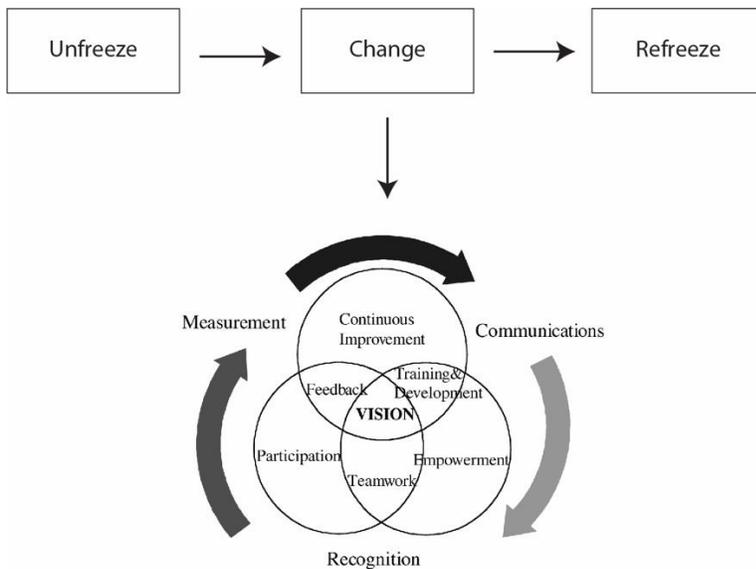
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strategy, structure, and technology (Brosseau et al., 2019). Therefore, choosing the right frameworks to manage the changing process is the key.

Any change model can possibly be applied to make cultural changes. Organizations can consider using two change models to guide the change process: Lewin's 3-stage change model (1947) and the MCR framework of managing culture changes (2002). As shown below, Lewin's model can be applied to guide the whole changing process, and the MCR framework can be used in the second stage of Lewin's model to make actual changes.

Figure 4

Lewin's 3-stage change model and MCR framework of managing culture changes



Lewin's change model includes three stages: unfreeze, change, and refreeze. The unfreeze stage is the process to understand why the organization needs change and what needs to change. This is a phase in which organizations can deeply understand the urgency of making changes, their current situation, and their positions in the environment. As discussed previously, COVID-19 has created the urgency of organizational changes. The environment

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outside of the organizations has dramatically changed. Therefore, the motivation of making changes is clear to the organizations. However, the organization still needs to have assessment to see if it is ready to change, which is the first step in the previous section.

After the assessment, it is the stage of making fundamental changes. Changing management is essential in the process. Leadership teams need to ease the change stage as much as possible. Making changes is beautiful, but it can be a complicated and painful process as it has uncertainty and fear from making changes. One of the practical frameworks that can help the organization to manage the changes is the MCR framework (Chin et al., 2002).

There are several advantages of using the MCR framework. Firstly, the three layers help the organizations to manage changes and make changes in the bigger system. The first layer is communication, recognition, and measurement. It is the biggest loop that directs the changes move forward. The second layer is called three basic beliefs, which contains continuous improvement, empowerment, and participation (Chin et al., 2002, p. 372). In the second layer, these three beliefs are to make sure new culture can work for everyone in the organization. The third layer is named three culture drivers including teamwork, training & development, and feedback (Chin et al., 2002, p. 372). The three layers of the MCR embody the concept of system thinking, which means the organization considers the set of interconnected elements within the system. Furthermore, the MCR framework allows the organization to consider some factors such as stakeholders and partners from outside of the organizations in the changing process.

Lastly, vision is the core in this change model. Vision is not about the past and the present, and vision is about the future. An effective vision describes what organization's future looks like. The vision includes mission, and goals, and strategy of how the organization

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accomplishes its goals. Vision conveys the core values of the organizations (Levin, 2000).

Visualizing the future that an organization wants to achieve is vital in the changing process. If an organization wants to generate ownership for all members in the organization, a common and mutual vision is essential. All members of the organization should align with the vision. The MCR framework emphasizes the importance of the vision. Therefore, using this framework can help organizations re-evaluate and affirm their vision.

The final stage of Lewin's change model is refreeze, in which the organization can stabilize and embed the changes into the system (Shirey, 2013). It is an important phase that the organization evaluate if changes are valid, and adjustments are necessary. The method of evaluation process depends on the evaluation goals and organization's size. Generally speaking, it can be conducted through survey, focused groups, and 1-on-1 conversations. Refreeze is the last step of change, but it is the most important one as changes fit in the organization at this stage.

The last recommendation is to make sure that leaders can lead changing in the right way. Leadership is the key factor in any kind of changes. Even when everything is ready and on the right track, unfitted leadership can lead the process to an irreversible negative result. Leadership should be involved in the cultural changing process from the beginning. There are two recommended leadership styles that leaders can consider.

The first one is evolutionary leadership. Unlike traditional leadership style, evolutionary leadership style emphasizes the idea of "everyone follows, and everyone leads" (Laszlo, 2012, p.102). Moreover, evolutionary leadership is a shared leadership style and very powerful, especially when an organization is making changes. It is because evolutionary leadership leads

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both leaders and followers to work and produce more positive results together. When leadership becomes a shared concept, the responsibilities of making changes are shared too. Instead of simply following the instructions, followers can also make contributions to the decision-making process. Also, evolutionary leadership encourages continuous learning, which is essential for the organization to keep developing and implementing new changes in the existing systems.

More importantly, evolutionary leadership is the embodiment of system being that is a new concept greater than system thinking (Laszio, 2012). Rather than thinking in the systems, this concept suggests organizations are being and living in the system. Compared to other leadership styles, it adds more empathy and full human capacities when leaders think about an organization, eventually creating a sustainable system. Utilizing evolutionary leadership in the culture changing process can ultimately generate a healthier and more sustainable organizational culture.

Another leadership style is situational leadership. Situational leadership is flexible, which leaders can utilize different leadership styles according to the followers' competence. Situational leadership has two components: directive behaviors and supportive behaviors. Directive behaviors is to give followers direct instructions to finish the task and accomplish the goals, and it is a one-way communication. However, supportive behaviors offer the space to followers. Instead of giving one-way conversations, leaders will ask followers for inputs, solutions to solve problems, share information and listen to the followers (Northouse, 2019). Applying situational leadership in the changing process, leaders can make sure all members can participate in the process no matter their competencies high or low.

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Conclusion

Overall, all organizations live in the system, where they continuously receive and create impact. Tracing back to history, COVID-19 is not the only event that dramatically changed civil development. It is also apparent that COVID-19 will not be the last crisis in the environment. Therefore, learning the process of culture change is a continuous improvement. Organizations need to cope with problems in the future and gain a strong and agile organizational structure.

The three recommendations discussed above are from theoretical framework perspectives. Thus, organizations can use these theories as a foundation when making or implementing cultural changes. Also, organizations need to research on more practical tools that support the theoretical structures when they are ready to create a step-by-step plan to initiate the changing process. Additionally, organizational culture should be future-focused. Learning lessons from the past is essential, however, focusing on history cannot create better future. Thus, transforming to an agile and learning organization is the key to shifting during the post-pandemic. All three recommendations address how to think and plan for the organization's future, not amending for the past.

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