

LEADERSHIP OF THAI ORGANIZATION IN VUCA AGE AMONG EPIDEMIC MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of the research on Leadership of Thai Organization in VUCA Age among Epidemic Management is the qualitative research by collecting the data from 12 key informants who had passed the purposive selection including the executives in the public and private organizations. The research results revealed that the leadership of Thai Organization in VUCA age is highly capable of managing the organization in the epidemic because it is a critical condition affecting the survival of the organization and it is challenging to lead the organization through the epidemic situation. This is the situation with V (Volatility), U (Uncertainty), C (Complexity), and A (Ambiguity). The success factors of Thai organization leadership in VUCA era include vision, decision-making, perception of information, understanding of the situation, clarity in action, and sensitivity to change.

Keywords: Leadership of Thai Organization in VUCA Age, Management, Epidemic Situation

INTRODUCTION

Stepping to 2021, all organizations in Thailand encounter serious challenges due to the COVID-19 epidemic that appears to be more serious than in 2020. In addition, the result of the Cross-Industry Disruption in the past 2-3 years arising from technological development, regulations and competitive pressures, business operations have continuously changed (Somjai, Vasuvanich, Laosillapacharoen & Jernsittiparsert, 2020). At the same time, economic conditions have changed dramatically from mid-2020 when the global economy has shown signs of recovery from declining inventories in many countries and more active manufacturing industries and the trade war between the US and China began to unfold. But at the beginning of 2021, the situation turned unexpectedly and failed to deal with it as a result of the global coronavirus outbreak resulting in a sluggish global economy. Thailand inevitably faced the condition of VUCA. According to current situation of the COVID-19 epidemic in Thailand (as of January 23, 2021), 309 new cases of COVID-19 confirmed, 13,302 cumulative cases, 2,782 in treatment, 10,448 recovered. 198 new cases, 20 severe cases, 72 deaths (Department of Disease Control, 2021) were found since the new wave of coronavirus outbreak in mid-December 2020 last year. From the beginning in Samut Sakhon Province, the number of infected people now spread to 60 provinces across the country. It seems that the epidemic around this is fast compared to the first round of outbreak. Many people who expected the Thai economy to turn around and expand in 2021 became more uncertain. At the same time, the government has continuously tried to launch measures to stimulate the economy and increase purchasing power for people in the country, *i.e.*, the project of Kon La Kreung Phase 2 for some qualified people to receive 3,500 baht in the application of “Pao Tang” and the “Rao Chana” Project by giving remedies of 3,500 baht per person for 2 months and the reduction of electricity and water bills for 2 months in the billing cycle of February - March 2021.

Thailand is also preparing to receive 2,000,000 doses of the vaccine from Chinese company Sinovac in February and 26,000,000 doses of vaccines from England and Sweden's AstraZeneca in May-June 2021. The first vaccine was on 14th February (Rachatanan, 2021). Although injections in many countries and manufacturing companies distribute to different countries, Thai people still have concerns about the effectiveness or side reactions of the vaccine. In addition, the situation of the outbreak in foreign countries is still severe. The Thai economy continues to face difficulties throughout this year. In addition, other risk factors that

will drag tourism income are such as political stability which delayed spending on national budgets as well as the drought that will directly affect the agricultural sector. When considering these risk factors, it can be seen that Thailand still faces challenges that exist all around and no one can predict how long these problems will continue and how much of their impact will be. Disruption today is not just a short-term impact. It is a state that must be continued for a long time (Krishnamara et al., 2020).

The organization management to cope with the epidemic situation would need strong leadership able to assess the situation from various perspectives in an understandable and timely manner. The leaders must be agile to work as quickly as possible to firmly handle new uncertainties and challenges in today's rapidly evolving world of competitive technology. Economic environment both inside and outside the organization causes many organizations to be affected significantly. These situations are called "VUCA World" which is an important issue for organizational leaders to understand and prepare to keep up with this VUCA world situation and also disruptive innovation. It was said, "Hurry to change first or we might be forced to change". Today's world is changing rapidly with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. That intensifies the so-called VUCA World or VUCA which is an abbreviation of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. The origin of VUCA World was a term first used by the US military in the US military context in 1990 to describe the ever-changing, uncertain, complex and ambiguous situation in the global society as a result of the end of the Cold War. At that time, the leadership was required to lead the organization to success that was different from other leaders. It addressed the modern world after the Cold War (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Later, VUCA was used in business by strategy leaders to describe the complex, chaotic, volatile and changing business environment. This means that unexpected events happen suddenly. Thus, the solutions must be reacted quickly. According to the Australian philosopher Peter Drucker, the most dangerous thing in a chaotic situation is not chaos but the actions based on yesterday's reasons. It is a challenge for organizational leaders to understand and adapt to change with an approach that is based on "solving problems and planning to reduce uncertainty" to a world of fast movement with the participation of personnel in the organization, continuous development, quickness in making decisions, and proactive work. In addition, the organizations face 3 challenges regarding VUCA World (Suksawang, 2017) No one likes VUCA World. Most people do not like change because it shakes the Comfort Zone. The stability and confidence in the familiar area disappear causing fear because of the transition from the comfort or SCSC became discomfort side or VUCA. Of course, no one likes it. 2) People with low ability and performance are difficult to live in VUCA because of today's highly competitive environment. It makes everyone need to be developed continuously. Even the organization itself must be developed continuously. Because of the rapid change, small organizations have an advantage. It will take time to change something making the organization unable to compete. This can be seen from many large organizations that gradually terminate the operation. 3) VUCA World uncertainty causes the employee engagement to diminish when personnel feel that the situation in the organization is unclear. Complication will lead to uncertainty. People feel insecure in the mind causing the level of engagement of personnel to decrease. The personnel look for a new workplace that they can feel secure and safe to replace. The organizational leaders must make sure to retain their personnel by developing personnel, skills and competencies to reduce fear and uncertainty.

The leadership of the VUCA era of organizations in Thailand are facing the COVID-19 epidemic make the role of the leader of the organization to be able to lead the organization through the waves of change need high "Leadership". The leaders must know how to adapt, learn quickly, have skills in choosing to receive information, have the ability to analyze, have good planning, tact, dare to make decisions in various situations, understand the weaknesses and strengths, open to change, be flexible and believe in working with others in order to survive in this situation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To study the Leadership of Thai Organization in VUCA Age among Epidemic Management.
2. To study the suggestions for the Leadership of Thai Organization in VUCA Age among Epidemic Management.
3. To recommend the factors of success in the Leadership of Thai Organization in VUCA Age among Epidemic Management.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted the research by studying the 12 key informants including the executives in the public and private sectors in Bangkok. This is the qualitative research by studying and researching textbooks, documents, articles and research works related to the subject and research objectives. The research instruments consisted of structured interviews. The researcher collected the data from: 1. In-depth interviews with key informants specifically selected following the specified issues and steps, 2. Appointment and interview date; the researcher contacted the key informants to clarify the research objectives and schedule the interview, 3. Introduce and build relationships. Before the interview, the researcher introduced herself and clarified the purpose of the interview. The interviewees were clarified before the interview that the information obtained from the interviewees will be confidential and anonymous. The permission was asked in taking notes and ask questions one by one according to the interview form until completion. The analysis was performed on the data obtained from the interview in 3 steps; data reduction, data display, and drawing of conclusion (Miles and Huberman, 1987).

RESEARCH RESULTS

In vision: During the crisis from the COVID-19 epidemic, the organizations have to operate in an ever-changing and rapidly changing environment. The government is reporting the outbreak and number of cases each day to keep an eye on the daily situation. As it is difficult to predict changes ahead of time whether there will be an increase or decrease in the number of infected people the next day, the leadership in vision is essential to foresee and assess the situation in order to determine how the organization should be prepared to comply with the number of cases of infection from the daily report. Various measures of the government have been adjusted in the operation constantly such as closing various types of establishments, social distancing, limiting the organization of certain types of activities, prohibition on traveling outside the area in some provinces. These cause the halt in economic activities. Organizational leaders must have a vision for assessing the current and future situations in order to be ready to adjust the organization's operational approaches in a timely manner. "... Leaders in this era must open their minds and be generous enough to accept the changes that might occur. Due to the epidemic of COVID, we cannot keep doing the same thing. We have to constantly seek new methods and find new ways. There is always a risk and a chance in making mistakes. If the leaders do not open opportunities for new things to happen, the organization will not be able to progress from what it is today ..."(2nd Interviewee). It can be concluded that the leadership of the Thai organizations in the VUCA era must have the vision in managing the epidemic with the commitment driving to the changes in management of the organizations to work and keep up with consumer behaviors. The leaders must keep up with the changing world and must foresee with the new ideas to support new functions and create opportunities in a crisis believing in themselves and others.

In decision-making: Despite the complicated and limited information in the COVID-19 situation, the decision-making of organizational leaders in Thailand is able to make proactive and administrative decisions that respond to rapidly changing needs by implementing policies and measures of government to urgently manage the epidemic and the number of people

infected each day. All can be used in a timely manner in this difficult situation. This is because it relies on flexible decision-making and working policy adjustments in accordance with the government measures announced periodically according to the severity of the disease. In addition, the challenging decision-making in dealing with the highly uncertain COVID-19 situation affects the organization. Organizational leaders must use both mind and brain to lead the organization to operate continuously and quickly. The emergency plan should be provided to deal with the uncertain situation in which an emergency might arise at all time by relying on essential medical and public health information of Thailand together with good decision-making "... In this situation, the focus must be on speed, not perfection. Every day emergencies happen all the time. The leaders who can make bold and timely decisions are required. Even if complete information is lacking, similar information must be replaced before emergency plans are needed to cope with uncertain situations. The clear goal is essential to help supporting faster decision-making..." (4th Interviewee). Therefore, the leadership of the Thai organization in the VUCA era in managing decision-making epidemics must require courageous decisions by relying on various information to make the best decision in ambiguous and uncertain situations. The leaders must be able to analyze and distinguish information and news in the internet world as well as knowing how to collect and use information in making decisions. Thus, they can make decisions quickly and respond appropriately to changing situations including providing opportunities for members of the organization to participate in decision-making.

In the information awareness: The COVID-19 epidemic situation requires the organization to operate in an environment with various risk factors. A lot of information or factors are involved to be considered. The leaders must be aware of the news, monitor closely, and be able to predict changes in the situation. It helps keeping the leadership up-to-date and keep up with monitoring and acknowledging the information of the government and the public health department with various guidelines and measures. This can stop the root cause of the outbreak, such as the prohibition of joint activities in congested areas, avoiding entering crowded areas. The gel and alcohol hand washing is provided at various points in the organization. People wear masks all the time in the workplace. The personnel in the organization must be informed to strictly abide by organizational leaders. It is necessary to make personnel aware of the outbreak that, despite its rapidity, it is something everyone in the organization can cooperate with to keep it safe from COVID-19 exposure. "...The leaders must have the leadership in closely monitoring the situation continually in order to analyze and determine the direction of the organization and the right investment in both the short and long term. The work must be reviewed to determine whether the current management still meets the New Normal way or not. It must be quickly adapted by using flexibility both inside and outside the organization to cope with the crisis..." (6th Interviewee). Therefore, the leadership of Thai organizations in the VUCA era in the management of the epidemic in information awareness must choose, analyze, and link to enormous information to be able to make decisions quickly and respond appropriately to the situation by following news information from various media. The leaders must always keep pace with the change and know how to filter news that has been received as well as being able to digest important information or news quickly.

In the understanding of situation: The COVID-19 situation has had an impact and change in many people's lifestyles. Organizational leaders with awareness and understanding in this volatile and uncertain situation will be able to lead the organization through difficult time. Because various contexts in society are completely changed and will never be the same again, the business must be driven to survive and grow in this era whether it is the same way of working or not. The traditional business model may have brought success and growth in the past but it may no longer be able to bring success in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic situation. Leaders of each organization must have leadership with an understanding of the situation focusing on coping with the changes that have occurred. In addition, the strategic plan needs to be adjusted in order to cope with the crisis appropriately to make the organization and the personnel in the organization survive. "... In this era of the COVID-19 epidemic, there are new challenges to leadership. They need to keep up with the current situation, be able to analyze a lot

of information and make decisions quickly. They must see everything through from start to finish and be aware of the changes. The leaders must accept and listening to ideas from all around especially in this crisis which may cause an unexpected negative impact on the organization ...” (8th Interviewee). The leadership of the Thai organization in the VUCA era must be observant, visionary, and comprehensive. In particular, understanding the strength and weakness of oneself and the organization can analyze the impacts that will occur in the current situation. There is clear communication to make people in the organization understand altogether taking into account the feelings of the people around as well as being ready to listen to information and opinions that strengthen new perspectives on solving problems and cope with the COVID-19 situation.

In the clarity of operation: In managing the organization in the COVID-19 situation with an uncertain, complex and vague environment, organizational leaders must have a clear leadership in action planning by considering working styles such as work from home, meeting on the phone or the internet instead of holding meetings where personnel have to gather. The procedures must be established to keep at least 1 - 2 m distance between people during their duties or activities in the central area of the workplace such as lining up for food, sitting in a meeting room, sitting at work points, using a resting point, supervising the cleanliness of place regularly. The cleaning frequency must be increased with disinfectants in vulnerable areas such as doorknobs, taps, power switches, copiers, or other devices with a large number of people using. The ventilation system should be increased for more air circulation or increasing the frequency of cleaning the air conditioner at least once for 2 months. “... During this time, many problems occur. The leadership of organizational leaders must focus on the most important thing by clearly setting the priorities of things and observing from organizations that have been successful in dealing with the epidemic in recent times as well as looking at the problems in a systematic way...” (2nd Interviewer). The leadership of Thai organizations in the VUCA era must have a clear management appropriately for the time and situation. They must prepare to cope with the guidelines for acting and working in the organization prioritizing tasks. It is appropriate and consistent with the situation by having careful thinking processes and solving difficulties quickly.

In the agility to change: In the midst of the ongoing volatility around the world, including Thailand from 2020 to 2021, the focus is on working processes that need to be flexible, adaptable to the situation ready for organizational adjustments for sustainability and survival. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the economy recesses. Many countries have shut down resulting in a large number of unemployed and a decline in economic growth. Thailand is also facing the same problem. These things cause the rapid change until it is an unpredictable adjustment of what will happen. Whether positive or negative, it continues to happen. This challenges the leadership potential that must be agile to change. They must move quickly and ready to modify. This includes the ability to regain management under the unpredictable extreme circumstances of COVID-19 where organizations are all confronted with this uncertainty. In this condition, leadership must be agile and responsive by adjusting operational methods that respond to the changes that arise in a timely manner so that the organization can be maintained without loss. “... The world is always changing. When the COVID crisis occurred, the leaders must have leadership to lead the organization to cope with uncertainty equally and quickly with the ability to build flexibility and agility in work to stably cope with new challenges. They must not be self-centered but must be open to listen to ideas from all sides ...” (9th Interviewee). Therefore, the leadership of the Thai organization in the VUCA era in the agility to change must have the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. The leaders must be fluent in communication to guide solutions to various problems in order to be used in a timely manner. They must learn the problem, pay attention to the people, and be open to diverse ideas in order to be able to respond promptly to handling issues.

DISCUSSION

In vision: The leaders must be committed and drive change in the management of organizational works to keep up with consumer behaviors and keep up with the changing world. The leaders have to be forward-looking and have new ideas to support new ways of working. They must create opportunities in a crisis believing in yourself and others. According to Kouzes & Posner (2007), it was stated that the leaders must have vision. There is a need to make something happen. In changing something, the leaders must know their co-workers and be able to communicate to inspire colleagues to bond in visions that bring hope and exciting possibilities in the future. This is correspondent with the study of Jiraphon Sangpho, et al., (2017).

In decision-making: The leadership must have the courage to make bold decisions based on information and make the most of ambiguous and uncertain situations. The ability to analyze information and news on the Internet and know how to collect and use that information to make decisions is required in order to be able to judge quickly and respond appropriately to changing situations allowing the members of the organization to participate in decision-making. This is correspondent with the study of Usa Tantaphong (2020).

In information awareness: The leaders must choose to receive and analyze enormous information links in order to be able to make decisions quickly and respond appropriately to the situation. They must keep an eye on news information from various media and always keep pace with the change as well as knowing how to filter news that has been received. The leaders must be able to digest important information or news quickly. This agrees with the study of Nithida Viwatpanich (2015).

Understanding of situation: The leaders must be observant, have vision, and have comprehensive knowledge especially understanding their own strengths and weaknesses and those of the organization. They must be able to analyze the impact that will occur in the current situation, to have clear communication in order to make people in the organization understand altogether, and to consider the feelings of those around them to listen to information and opinions that reinforce new perspectives in solving problems and coping with rapidly changing situations. This is correspondent with the study of Thanyawit Srichan (2016).

In the clarity of operation: The leaders must be clear in management and keep up with the events. There must be the thoughtful process to deal with a wide variety of difficulties, quickly resolve minor issues related to the main problem, and see the world holistically. Then, these can be separated and transmitted into different parts to see a clear picture and able to prioritize things as well. It agrees with the study of Patcharaphorn Duangchuen (2018)

In the agility to change: The leaders must have the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. They must be fluent in communication to guide solutions to various problems in order to be used in a timely manner. They must learn the problem focusing on people, be open to diverse ideas to enable rapid response to management issues, and be able to empower teams to make decisions and to address issues without having to wait for centralized decisions. This correlates with the study of Chotika Jaitip (2019).

New knowledge gained from research: Thai organization leadership in VUCA era in the epidemic management would need leadership in the organization that has high ability to administer the organization in the epidemic environment. This is because it is a critical condition affecting the survival of the organization and it is challenging how to lead the organization through a highly volatile pandemic (V-Volatility) situation. It is the situation or environment that cannot be predicted or foreseen. It is sudden, unexpected or very quick changing. It is also the situation of Uncertain (U-Uncertainty) because it is difficult to predict. It lacks clarity and cannot find clear information to confirm each situation making it difficult to make decisions. The world today has a high degree of change. It is complicated (C-Complexity) due to the many factors and complexity of decision making. It is also ambiguous (A-Ambiguity) because the results cannot be predicted clearly. There is still a vague and a mystery. The benefits from this study lead to the success factors of Thai organization leadership in the VUCA era in the management of epidemic disease which can be explained in the following figure 1.

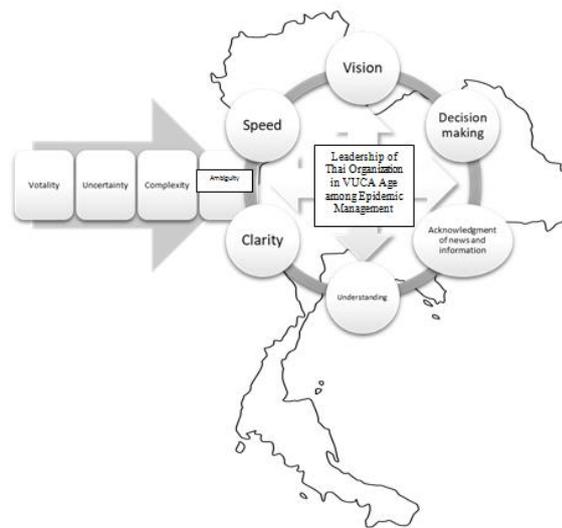


FIGURE 1
FACTORS AFFECTING THE SUCCESS OF LEADERSHIP OF THAI ORGANIZATION IN VUCA AGE AMONG EPIDEMIC MANAGEMENT

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