The Day Our School Went Pitch Black and the Nights We Reclaimed the Light

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Abstract

I will never forget that a year ago, last March 2020, we had to close our school suddenly. It feels like someone just turned off the light without warning, and everything went pitch black. Confused and scared, we tried to make sense of and confront the endless challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought upon our school organization. The virus caused significant interruptions to our processes, policies, people, technostructure, and financial resources. However, with each tiresome blow, the school leaders and teachers navigated through and around those challenges. The only comforting thought was we were not alone in our quest to survive, for every organization around the world was thrown into this catastrophic state and was fighting hard to persist and endure.

Looking back, I reflect on the extraordinary challenges our organization experienced akin with most organizations using Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Change Model and the three ways we responded to COVID-19.

Keywords: School Organization, Lewin's Three-Step Change Model, COVID-19 Pandemic

1. Introduction

I will never forget that a year ago, last March 2020, we had to close our school suddenly. It feels like someone just turned off the light without warning, and everything went pitch black. So dark that the place we call our second home ended up without a glimmer of light. Instead, it covered every area with deafening silence, a far contrast to the usual sounds of students' boisterous laughter and shoes clattering around the playground and along the corridors as teachers caringly reminded them to be careful. The stillness in the air robbed away the joy of classrooms' buzzing with life and intellectual noise from students collaborating in differentiated activities.

Confused and scared, we tried to make sense of and confront the endless challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought upon our school organization. The virus caused significant interruptions to our processes, procedures, policies, people, technostructure, and financial resources. However, with each tiresome blow, the school leaders and teachers navigated through and around those challenges. The only comforting thought was we were not alone in our quest to survive, for every organization around the world

was thrown into this catastrophic state and was fighting hard to persist and endure.

Looking back, I reflect on the extraordinary challenges our organization experienced akin to most organizations. Using Lewin's Organizational Development Change Model, I agree with Hussain et al. (2018) when their study highlighted that change is imperative for organizations' growth, especially when Lewin's Three-Step Change Model is deployed to analyze the stages for managing organizations' processes. Moreover, the authors underlined that leadership styles affect the organizational change processes.

2. Application of Lewin's Three-Step Change Model

Organizations are dynamic and constantly evolving.   Organizations change to solve problems, create strategies, and seize opportunities. What drives the changes are the people inside the organization.   When the crisis unexpectedly happened, the first response of organizations world-wide was to set aside their agenda and implement the mandate on self-isolation, social distancing, and observance of other health and safety protocols immediately. This resulted in closures of businesses forcing everyone to work remotely from home.

This new normal ushered in the second response of organizations to the coordinated first response to COVID-19, preparing the organization for the needed changes. Using our smartphone devices, we communicated and collaborated with all our stakeholders as we began with the **Unfreezing process,** the first step in the Change Model. We had to rethink our plans, procedures, and policies and outline key aspects to redesign the organization to function efficiently. We realized early on that the business landscape had been severely altered. There was no assurance of certainty on how the succeeding days or months would unfold; therefore, we were compelled to adapt, transform, and innovate processes to carry them out in a compressed time frame. The change management needed to mobilize the people to transform the organization overnight.

As the dark days continued, time was a precious commodity. It was evident that the faster an organization embraces and adapts to the current situation, the better for all leaders and staff to move forward to innovate for solutions and find opportunities. This was how the phase called the **Change process** of the Change Model was implemented in our organization. Our leaders and employees adopted a paradigm shift, a mindset to persist regardless of the challenges. Like most organizations, we have to reevaluate our policies, process, and procedures, particularly in delivering education and providing social, emotional, and psychological guidance. Organizations like ours found creative strategies that were forward-thinking to drive alternative ways to continue work efficiently at an accelerated pace.

Effective leadership and management are critical components to the survival of organizations. Effective leaders and managers guided the team to the transition phase during this pandemic. We took steps to maintain a resemblance of normalcy by fostering credibility through transparency, creating order and consistency, exuding confidence and compassion but cautiously engaging in quick and decisive action. Responsive and fast decision-making was a crucial factor in transforming our organization. To achieve this, we had to redesign our organizational structure by removing boundaries and cutting across bureaucracies. We revised our hierarchal structure to a flatter type to foster quicker communication and decision-making. Response turnover was immediate; all matters were treated urgent and important. Consultations were an

ongoing scenario using technology.

The most difficult challenge we encountered was the capacity building on ICT Literary training. During the lockdown, we relied on crude technological devices to aid in the remote training; the majority struggled to accomplish the needed performance tasks that ran throughout the day and ended at 10 pm every night. Each night we converged online to reflect and analyze the accomplishments of the day. This routine reinforced our commitment to our goals, maximized our potentials, refined new processes, and procedures, and magnified our faith that soon a ray of light would shine amidst the gloom and darkness.

When the lockdown eased up, we started the **Refreeze process**, the third step of the Change Model. We embraced the new normal, continued supporting each other, refined our strategies, and seized innovative opportunities. In comparison, our third response to COVID-19 was to initiate specific changes in the organization that would shape our new future. We started investing in technostructure to provide digital connectivity and the best online teaching and learning experience. Almost all organizations had no recourse but to procure or upgrade their software applications and hardware equipment to ensure continuous working conditions.

However, part of being sustainable is to be financially secured in the future.   We applied strategies and cost-cutting measures to remove unnecessary processes and cut our losses. We had to retrench teachers who opted not to undergo ICT training, for they did not have the expertise to conduct online teaching. Also, we had to adopt different schedules for our staff and streamlined operational processes to improve efficiency, reduce expenses, and promote organizational growth.

3. Conclusion

As our school organization emerges slowly from the darkness, surpassing the myriad of extraordinary challenges which have strengthened our resolve to adapt and embrace the new normal making our organization agile, flexible, and resilient to change. It matters to have responsive leadership able to steer the organization in the right direction during this dire time. Courage is not the absence of fear but the willingness to face challenges to seize opportunities. To survive, our organization chose to look for possibilities, not limitations. In the end, organizations that shine even in darkness will soon be basking in the light.

4. References

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