

Factors Affecting Team Development During a Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic of COVID-19 in March 2020 had a huge impact on an organization. The abrupt changes working policy and other factors restrain the employee from creating an effective team development. This paper aims to emphasize the factors affecting team development during the pandemic and classify the relevant research findings based on 29 articles. Successful team development is vital for cultivating a productive and innovative workforce, which is essential for organizational success. This paper highlighted the primary factors influencing effective team development during a pandemic, focusing on cultural changes, physical and mental challenges, and communication barriers. The disruption of collaboration between the employees during the pandemic will result in poor organizational performance. The outcome of this paper will promote a comprehensive plan for the organization on how to minimize the impact of pandemic or abrupt changes by adopting relevant strategies. The organization has resources to overcome the obstacles and make better decision-making in developing an effective team development in the future.

Keywords: Team development, Cultural transformation, Physical and psychological, Communication, Team performance, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

The employees are the greatest assets of the organization, where they deliver the work performance to enable the organization reach its goals. The management is responsible in insuring employee performance is aligned with the strategies. Organization must cultivate a positive work environment in every situation that they are in. The global pandemic of COVID-19 is a coronavirus affects the lives of all of us since beginning of the year 2020. It has caused the employees to work remotely from home. Having to change the traditional way of physically present in one set workplace during normal working hours has been a challenge to the employees.

The approach taken by the organization during a pandemic will also help in the search for factors affecting team development during a pandemic. Most organizations do a good job of managing their employees basic needs for example safety, stability, and security during the first stage of the COVID-19 issue (Jonathan, Gunnar, Matt & Alexandra, 2020).

Malaysia experienced the first wave of the spread in January 2020 and the virus spread into the community rapidly since then which caused the Malaysia Government to announce a Movement Control Order (MCO) (Asita, 2020). With that, the employees are required to work from home in line with the rule that was announced by the government. This means, the employees had to adapt to the new environment, and work remotely from home where communications were done virtually via Google Meet, Skype, and Zoom. The challenges of working from home and the impact on productivity levels are identified to support this concept paper. KPMG Malaysia through its article showed that the obstacles such as poor network issues, poor communication, and insufficient of technology readiness contributed to 61%, 14%, and 10% respectively (KPMG Malaysia, 2020).

The factors that affect team development can be derived from the series of gaps consisting of issues arising

during the pandemic as well as changing behavior due to the changing lifestyle, different working environments which affect the team performance, the stress gained to balance the commitment between of private life and career, the technology used as bridges for communication and integral function and new organization policies as agile manner strategy for continuous operation (Waizenegger et al., 2020; Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021; Jiang & Stylos, 2021). The previous studies were done on the factors that—team development in general without considering the critical of COVID-19 (Tan et al., 2019) since it happened for the first time after World War II (Krishnan, 2020). This study focus on factors affecting team development during pandemic in Malaysia.

METHODS

There are 29 articles from various sources. The information extracted from articles focuses on ‘team development’ and ‘factors affecting team development during the pandemic’. The team development is important towards organization. During pandemic, team development is hard to sustain due to some factors. The situation may affected the organizational performance indirectly. This study focus into three main areas of factor affecting team development: culture transformation, physical and psychological and communication barrier.

Team Development

It is a vital part of the organization to develop a team to offer products or services that have value to the consumers (Pritchett, 2014). The team development in virtual practice could be built in three phases: initial, control, and affiliation, including the team members and leadership (Lin & Roan, 2021). The teams must provide their skills and intelligence to ensure the organization has competitive advantage. A good team development requires team leadership to coordinate between team members by having effective communication skills to prevent any misunderstanding and conflict arises (Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2023). The team members also could develop strong relationships with each other including the high authority. Moreover, the teams may voluntarily participate in the organization’s activities when they feel motivated and affiliated from higher authority. For instance, the organization offers rewards and always cares about the teams’ health and safety. However, the team development could be affected by various factors such as technology and environmental which could influence poor performance. This can be proved through the current natural disaster are Coronavirus 2019 disease, where everyone needs to adapt to the changes to survive (Garros et al., 2021).

Cultural Transformation in the Organization

During the pandemic, the government-enforced lockdown has disrupted the organization's operations and management (Kumar et al., 2020). Societies who are employed and unemployed are required to stay at home to reduce the outbreak of COVID-19 under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Regulations. The majority of organizations focus solely on digital transformation as part of an innovation strategy to adapt to the current environment (Vahdat, 2021). Moreover, the technology used during the pandemic in daily life is increasing consisting of health, mobility, behavior, financing, work, and lifestyle (Jiang & Stylos, 2021). The fast changes forced the organization to utilize new digital practices in e-working policies to ensure their business is continuous for operation. Subsequently, these issues have affected the employee’s behavior as well as the team's work due to the abrupt changes in the organization organization's culture and working environment (Bussin & Swart-Opperman, 2021).

Team development might feel tense to use using technology in a new practice due to less knowledge and practice. According to the International Labour Organization (2020), the new norm environment also lacks facilities instead of work at offices which consist of equipment, miscellaneous as well as the internet. Hence, some employees who stay in isolated areas with poor connectivity might be anxious and worried when their tasks are delayed and undone. (Jaiswal & Arun, 2020).

However, the work productivity of the teams will slowly drop due to the low undertaking monitoring undertaken by the leadership through the online platform (Newman & Ford, 2021). Therefore, the probability

of the work being undone within the time framework as allocated is high which leads to doubt in the level of team integrity (Hashim et al., 2020).

The changes in remote policy will be largely dependent on computer networks such as Microsoft, Clouds, e-Audit, and other networking systems instead of using hardcopy files and documents (De' et al., 2020). Hence, the exchange of confidential information through the system give is opportunity to the risk of cyber-attacks (Chigada & Madzinga, 2021). The criminals might distribute the malware through spam, phishing, and others. Such crimes will disrupt the team's work performance as well as their motivation since they need to be extra cautious about reaching the teams via email. Hence, one-click at the spam on the monitor could have a crisis impact on the team development performance and the integral function in the organizations (Holt et al., 2011).

Physical and Psychological Impact on Team Development

COVID-19 virus has stirred a lot of commotion in the physical and psychological forms of human beings. The lockdown decision announced by the government of Malaysia to curb the COVID-19 virus, it has affected the employee's mental health among Malaysians. The employees faced the challenges of balancing the commitment between their profession and their private life due to their roles and responsibilities in managing home cores and family services. With that, it caused them to feel stressed and knacked physically, emotionally, and mentally (Waizenegger et al., 2020; Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021).

Besides that, there were many suicidal cases reported in 2021 as compared to 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 mental health. In September 2021, the Director General of Health in Malaysia declared that the suicidal cases rose to 143% as compared to the previous year. (Bernama, 2021).

In addition, the teams including the leader felt uncomfortable because employees needed to balance the commitment between the profession and the private life due to home chores and family services (Waizenegger et al., 2020; TonioloBarrios & Pitt, 2021). According to Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard (2014) to sustain team development effectively, the organization should permit them to work under a hybrid model mode where the schedule will be more flexible. Hence, the teams could adjust their own time and manage their work-life balance properly.

Communication Barriers on Team Development

Organizations and employees struggle to adjust to the new norm (De Palma et al., 2022). Thus, the teamwork level is required to be assessed and reviewed. Team development consist as a group of team members who work together to achieve a common goal that has been set by the management (Cannon-Bowers & Bowers, 2010). This means, the team members are required to work together to meet the company's objectives

By working from home, the employees had not been able to meet other colleagues face to face which they used to do before (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021). This has resulted in a communication issue among the team members and an organization as a whole. The employees were not able to communicate clearly to their peers and managers, and some messages were being interpreted wrongly. Even the leader reached the other team members by using communication tools such as video conferences, phone calls, messenger, and emails. Hence, some of the team members might felt left out during the conversation. The events will be challenging since multiple people are talking at the same time. The probability of participation is very low since everyone are is feeling devastated due new norm of socializing and networking which makes them feel demotivated to perform (Wreford et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the digital platform is the only channel for the team to connect to enhance the work performance effectively during the lockdown (Montrief et Al., 2020). Therefore, the sudden change in the technique of communication could affect the team performance since some employees are inexperienced in working in teleworking mode instead of face-to-face (Vasić, 2020).

The correlation between the team development and factors affecting team development during pandemic is presented as Figure 1 below:

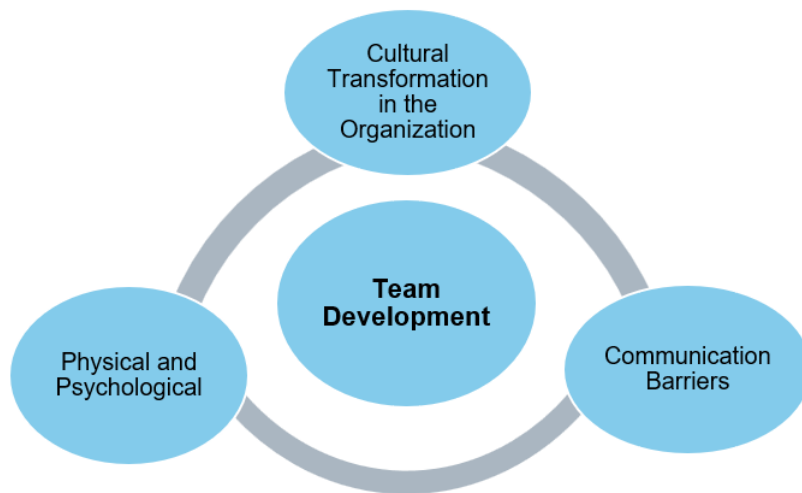


Fig 1. Factors Affecting Team Development

Discussion on the Practicality of the Factors Affecting Team Development during a pandemic

In describing the factors affecting team development during the pandemic are wide and general. Team development is a process of forming group teamwork to the outcome result. The team members usually are not constant in at one time and have different skills which need to be considered as part of the factors. Regarding Rains & Bonito (2017), it is a nature of human behaviour to be demotivated if they need to adapt to the sudden changes of policy which can be concluded as adaptive structuration theory. Since everyone needs to work from home with minimal experiences, to form a new group will consume more time and affect the team's quality. During pre-COVID, everyone can adapt to the new environment quickly since they could communicate verbally. Hence, acquaintance with team members through an online platform will be make it hard for them to exchange knowledge and to guide each other. Hence, recruiting a new team member to develop team might be challenges since the recruiter cannot see someone's personality behind the camera (Salamzadeh & Dana, 2020).

This study also focuses on the factors related to the technology and environment where both perspectives are fast changes and full of uncertainty. Therefore, the factors considered in team development need to have continuous assessment and evaluation of whether it is relevant to the present circumstances. Hence, further analysis to develop a team requires proper consideration to ensure the organization produces the greatest teamwork and business resilience in the future.

CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of team development matters to the organizations so that the work can be done as expectation and the companies can sustain their performance and productivity during challenging times. Besides that, the employee's well-being due to the pandemic of COVID-19 plays an important role supporting the organization's business performance as the work is done by the employees. In addition, the technology functions to connect the team with nother team member to perform their work during the pandemic for business survival. Team development during a pandemic of COVID-19 has been affected due to the reasons of cultural transformation in the organization, physical and psychological impact, and communication barriers. The companies should engage employees consistently through various engagement activities such as virtual team building, one-on-one sessions, and others. These would help the leaders realize the team members' situation by receiving their feedback. Hence, the team members will feel motivated to work at home due to the concern and affiliation by the high authority. Furthermore, continuous efforts are required by a leader in developing, utilizing, and maintaining the coherence of a team development without affecting their work quality. With the current pandemic of COVID 19, team leaders are now being asked for a new leadership style. They must continue to inspire and continuously lead the team development progress without physically meeting each team member in person

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