

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Asian Association of Management Organizations (AAMO) extends its sincere greetings to all of its readers and fellow members. It is with great pleasure that I present the upcoming issue of AAMO's newsletter, "Leading the Way," and I sincerely hope you are doing well and staying healthy.

2022 was an extremely hazardous year with, Geopolitical unrest, financial instability, an inflationary recession, and food and energy shortages brought on by the conflict in Ukraine and the COVID-19 epidemic. The past year had been a period of profound change and disruption across Asia as well. Throughout the region, countries struggled with the adverse public health, economic, and social repercussions of the worldwide epidemic. Asia is currently at a turning point. The region has made rapid progress in both economic growth and human development, but there are also risks and challenges. A pandemic that left no sector of business or society untouched in its wake has provided leaders in Asia with the opportunity to learn how to deal with pressing concerns including delayed infrastructure development, the emergence of a new, digital age, and the threat of climate change.

Today, the world could be on the verge of an era marked by significant supply-side issues amidst a shifting geopolitical environment. The business leaders of today are acting with courage and conviction while making decisions for their companies in a world of increased volatility and unpredictability. They embrace the turbulence and look for new chances rather than being passive and letting crises pass. They make decisions with a feeling of resolve and purpose. At the same time, they are equally willing to learn, unlearn, and embrace change.

The complexity of the world is increasing. A continual state of flux is something that leaders must embrace. To be relevant in the new environment, they must continually reinvent themselves. This is a time for organisations like AAMO, and the National Management Organisations to lead the way in assisting management in embracing change and implementing new modes of learning and working; in turn building management capability amongst their constituents.

The next decade is of particular significance for AAMO because Asia is now the region with the fastest growth in its economy. Much of the global trade is now concentrated in Asia and the world's fastest-growing large and emerging economies are on this continent. For Asia to transition from being the world's investment magnet to becoming its value generator, management expertise and innovations will be essential, and AAMO has a crucial role to play in introducing new ideas and best practices to Asian businesses. This issue of 'Leading the Way' explores modern and emerging trends in management and leadership from the region of Asia-Pacific. Within this newsletter you will find articles focused on a variety of topics surrounding management and leadership, contributed by our member national management organisations.

In this edition, we examine how the high productivity can be achieved through a planned lifestyle, having courageous conversation at workplace, how leaders should tackle sustainability, Talent Acquisition after Covid-19, educating humans to be close to each other and importance of career guidance among other topics. These topics will be relevant to many. Some of the key trends in management that we have seen in recent times have revolved around increasing employee engagement, flexible work style, strong organizational culture, rewards of sustainability, life long career and impact of career guidance, Strategies of retaining the best talent, to name a few. Having observed all that over the past year or so, we are certain that the only thing that remains constant is change. It is essential to raise awareness and learn from people throughout the world to better adapt to that ongoing change. 'Leading the Way' aims to facilitate that learning. This newsletter's practical content will give readers the proper tools and a deeper grasp of the management challenges that many nations throughout the world are now facing.

Finally, I'd want to thank everyone for their contributions and encourage them to keep up the good work in order to make our online newsletter a success. Let us continue to further promote the AAMO mission of sharing resources, knowledge and regional information.

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For Asia to transition from being the world's investment magnet to becoming its value generator, management expertise and innovations will be essential.

S K Cheong
PRESIDENT

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VALUE SYSTEM

By Vivek Mehra, Vikramshila Education

Culture as it is perceived and implemented by organisations.

Ever wondered about the origin of the term 'culture of a company'? A quick search on the web will show that it is a Western concept.

The classical definition of 'culture of a company' is- Company culture is how you do what you do in the workplace. It is the sum of your formal and informal systems and behaviours and values, all of which create an experience for your employees and customers (taken from The Great Place To Work).

Notice how culture applies to employees and customers. This is critical to understanding how all of this pans out in reality. As long as you are an employee or a customer, you are treated in a manner that somehow 'gets the job done' without causing too much disruption.

It also means that if you are not yet an employee (like a potential employee evaluating the company) you are really not covered by the definition of the company.

Similarly, once you are thrown out or leave on your own, you are no longer 'a part of the culture' of the company. The same stands true for potential customers or ex customers.



Does culture change when leadership changes?

▲ No one really cares about both

Another interesting set of words is ‘formal and informal systems and behaviours and values. I wonder what an informal system really is. Is it even a thing?

An ‘informal system’ has to have an informal mechanism to address transgresses? Who, then, decides what a transgression is and who decides what is the right way to address it (in an informal system)?

One of the lines I used to use a lot is, “Culture stems from the top.” In my case, I assumed the mantle of setting culture with my behaviour and my actions. This gives rise to an interesting question—does culture change when leadership changes?

In all my previous engagements, there was a direct, clear, and measurable change in the so-called behaviour and value system every time there was a change in leadership. Notice, I did not call it a positive or a negative change, because, to me, this is of no consequence. The fact is that with the change in leadership, culture of an organisation changes.

Similarly, employees who are within an organisation under a particular leadership have a set of behaviours and values (not to mention informal systems) that get the job done. When the same individual is thrown out or leaves or is under a different leadership, the set of behaviours and values change. We have all observed this and I am sure I do not have to quote research to prove this.

So, is it safe to assume that culture is fluid and dependent on leadership, behaviours, and actions? Is the definition of culture an absolute for all types of industries, subsidiaries, etc. across the globe? After all, leadership styles, ethnicity, etc. influence local cultures.



▲ And of course, the mother of all questions what is the culture of a company?

There is another more recent set of events that need to be examined to understand culture. Tech giants (such as Amazon, Google, Microsoft, etc.) along with small entities (especially in publishing) announced redundancies. Even a cursory scan of social media shows that from the smallest entity to the largest giant, the experience of being thrown out has been a stressful and humiliating one.

If culture rules the company and as Western thought leaders have told us, “It is the best thing next to sliced bread” then what is causing all the stress? The answer lies in the fundamentals of management that have originated in the so-called developed world, located primarily in the Western Hemisphere.

To understand why culture should transcend employment and leadership one has to dig a little deeper in another part of the world.

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Closer home, there are a number of corporate houses who are known for their work ethics. Notice I did not use the word culture. Among these, the one standing the tallest is the Tata Group. There are many legendary stories about their policies but I will pick just two



Tata Group Policies

Handling financial crisis

The situation just around the time of World War I was very grim for Tata Group. At the time, Dorabjee Tata, the then Chairman of the group, had gifted a 260 carat (approximate size) diamond to his wife, Meherbai. To pay salaries of employees, Dorabjee pawned this diamond along with his wife’s other jewellery.

The crisis was taken care of and the Tata conglomerate continued to grow, as it does, even today. The diamond was later released, but sold off when Meherbai died of cancer. The proceeds laid the foundation of the Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai.

Handling humanitarian crisis

Probably the most painful period in the Tata history was the 26/11 terrorist attacks on their hotels (including other sites) in Mumbai, that resulted in the deaths of many people including their employees. Families were devastated.

There is no case-study on how the families were handled both with emotional and financial support and that is the way the Tatas would like to keep it. They do not want to attract publicity nor do they want to shout from the rooftops for what they believe is “the right thing to do.”

This is a far cry from how companies today want to garner brownie points for smaller acts. However, the family of every employee who lost his/her life and those who got injured are being looked after by the Tata Group.



Lessons for the corporate world

Actually, there isn’t much to learn from this for most of the Western world. The concept of family and belonging is quite different there. But we, in the East, especially in India, have the opportunity to make a course correction.

‘Corporate America’ gave us the mantra of ‘shareholder value above all else’. CEOs are ‘sacrificed’, minions are ‘slaughtered’, and human capital is expendable as long as investors gain.

The East has always had the concept of ‘family’ whether it was family-owned businesses or family-based cultural values.

Experience is respected more than educational qualifications, and when one was to retire, one was always (without exception) given some sort of send-off. Retrenchment was treated as breaking a family and they were few until the British arrived.

It is time for ‘Corporate India’ to move away from ideals set up by ‘Corporate America’; those ideals might work for the Americans, but are not compatible with Indian values.

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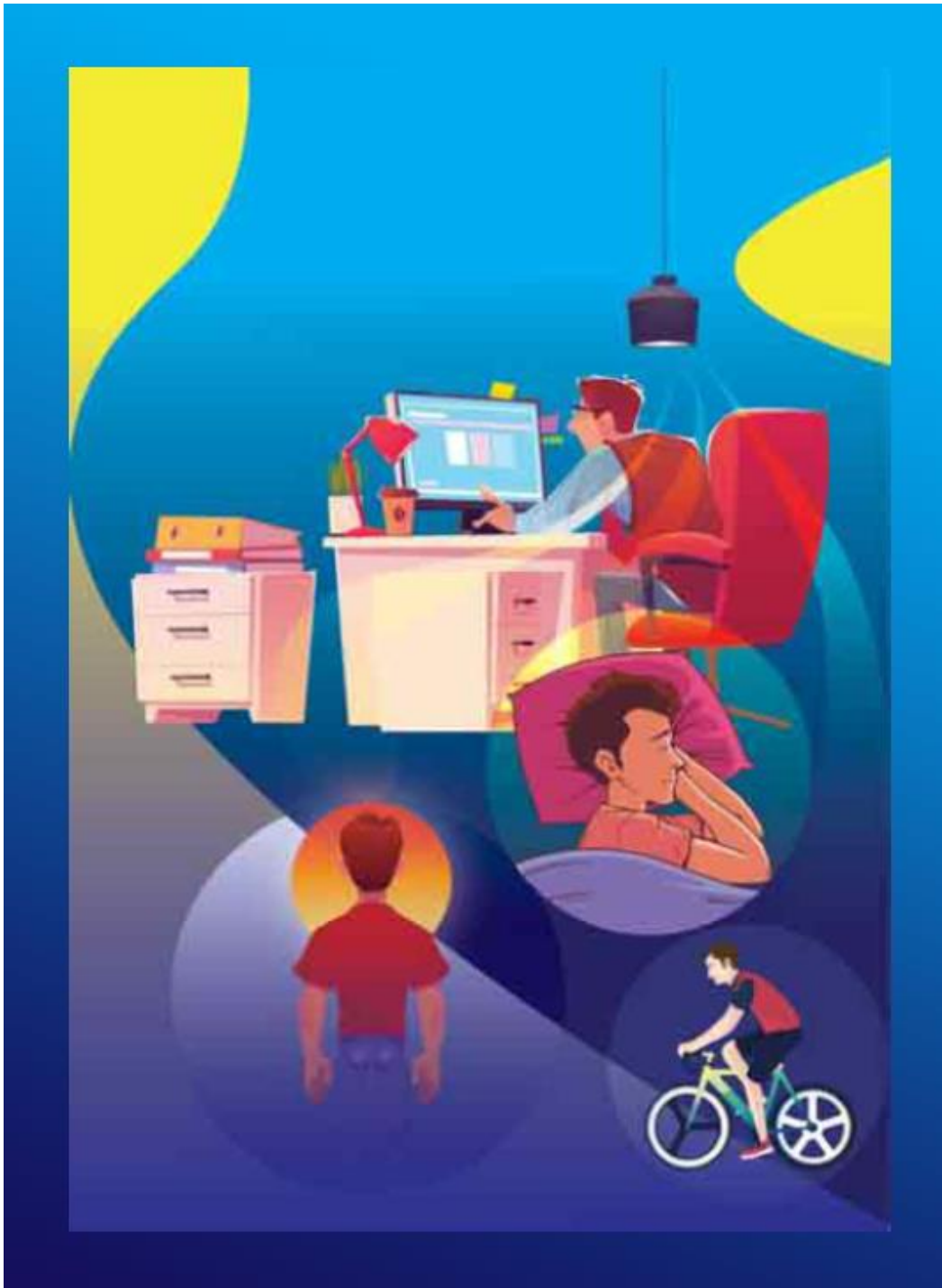
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THE S-E-S CYCLE

By Amit Mishra, Indian School of Business, Hyderabad



High productivity can be better achieved through a planned lifestyle than performance enhancing drugs.

What do you call a process that balances all factors of production that will give the maximum output with the smallest effort? If you were living in the 1960s and ever bumped upon the writings of a gentleman named Peter Drucker, you would surmise nothing other than the notion of employee productivity being elicited here. But as the times changed, the definition of employee productivity evolved to suit the colour of its times. And if a movie buff in you ever chanced upon a flick that featured a struggling writer called Eddie Morra (played by Bradley Cooper) who unlocked the highest of human potential through a nootropic called NZT, you would ruminate on the idea of productivity very differently than the contemporaries of neoclassical management era.

When the idea of employee productivity walks the lanes of the laity, it exudes a definition that simply means ‘the amount of work that an employee can do in a given amount of time’.

But the inherent simplicity of the definition hides the intricacies that the denotation holds. The productivity of an employee depends on a multitude of factors, and one among the plethora of variables that make an employee productive is the motivation level of the employee.

The science of motivation validates that the monoamine neurotransmitter called dopamine is essentially responsible for keeping our motivation level up to get work done or achieve a goal. As we go a little deeper to understand the importance of hormonal balance in the stability of the body and the mind, we realise that there is another monoamine neurotransmitter that is accountable for stabilising our mood and controlling anxiety called serotonin.

Similarly, we have a few other neurotransmitters like norepinephrine, glutamate, gaba, endorphin, etc., whose optimal balance in our body is paramount for the healthy functioning of our mind which eventually leads to increased productivity.

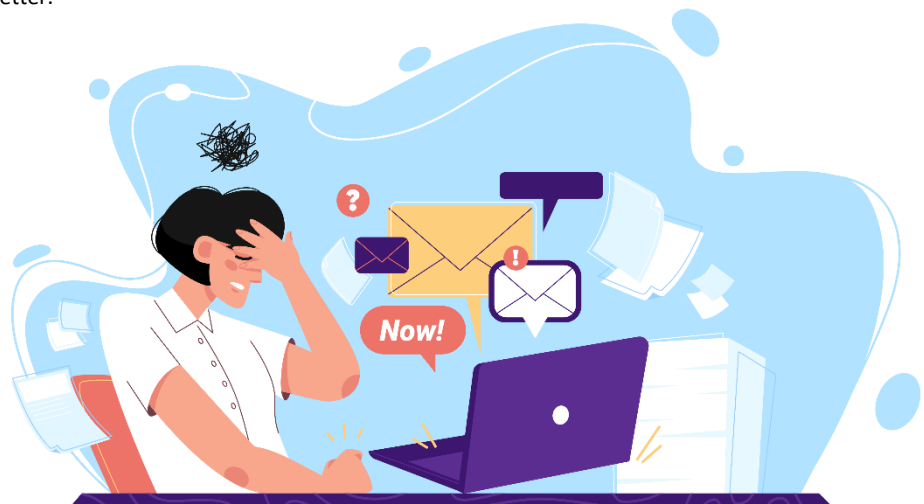
We live in an age where employees experience stress and depression at work more than ever. According to Gallup’s 2021 survey, 57 per cent of American and Canadian employees said that they experience stress daily, an increase of eight percentage points from the year before and higher than the global average of 43 per cent (2020).

There seems to be a rise in the usage of anti-depressants in most developed economies. In 2018, as per the NHS data 70.9 million prescriptions for antidepressants were given in the UK, up from 36 million in 2008; similarly, the United States witnessed a spike in the use of antidepressants in recent times. We also have another category of people who use nootropics or ‘smart drugs’ to enhance their cognitive performance and productivity, just like Eddie Morra, from the movie *Limitless*, transformed his life with a miracle drug. Likewise, people look for ways that could elevate their efficiency at work and help them feel better.



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The use of these smart drugs for non-medical reasons has exponentially risen among all age groups, and many take them to remain productive while turning a blind eye to their side effects.



Among the clutter of the utility of smart drugs, there is a method whose significance lies in the promise of turning a dejected soul into a productive being. The recent research in the field of—‘Sleep’, ‘Exercise (Workout)’, and exposure to ‘Sunlight’—provides enough shreds of evidence to ensure that practising the method optimally leads to a higher level of productivity, heightened motivation, and stability of mind.

According to a The Lancet research, based on a survey of more than 400,000 Taiwanese citizens, just 15 minutes of moderate activity per day or 90 minutes per week—such as brisk walking—can add three years to your life. Not only does a workout of 15 minutes come with tonnes of health benefits but it also improves our mental well-being, lowers the effect of stress, and helps in neural growth which leads to enhanced cognitive performance and higher productivity at the workplace.

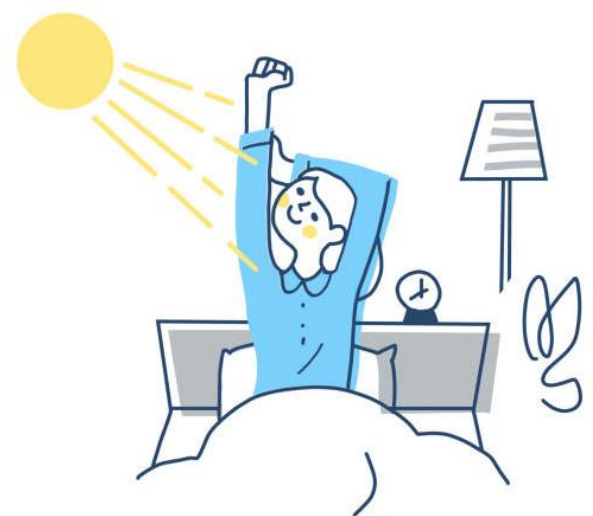
Exercise also causes the release of two important neurotransmitters called Endorphins and Dopamine which are responsible for making us feel good, energetic, and motivated.



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The three variables of Sleep-Exercise-Sun (SES) are important for remaining healthy and living a productive lifestyle.

The other important variable for higher productivity is quality sleep. Poor sleeping patterns not only affect the overall health of the individual but also plummets the efficacy of the work. A recent Gallup study inferred that an estimated 7 per cent of American employees report sleeping poorly on a regular basis, and they report more than double the rate of unscheduled absences compared to non-sleep-deprived employees. Healthy sleeping patterns improve psychological well-being and lower stress and depression, eventually, leading to improved concentration and efficiency at the workplace.

The last and the most ignored, also deemed inconsequential by many, is exposure to sunlight. In today’s age, when more and more people are opting to work from home, shop online, and have access to many other resource from the ‘shadowy’ comfort of their home, they seldom get exposed to natural light. Research corroborates that the brain releases more of the hormone called serotonin when exposed to sunlight. Serotonin has been linked to mood enhancement and, improvement in mental calmness and concentration. Exposure to an adequate amount of sunlight leads to the enhancement of cognitive functions, and it also alleviates depression and mental pain.



Thus, for being productive, it is necessary to improve our sleeping patterns, get adequate exercise, and soak up sunlight on a daily basis. The three necessary variables will not only help increase our effectiveness at work but also make our lives better.

We at our research call it, the S-E-S cycle. No drug in the world can guarantee prolonged productivity without any adverse effects, but the S-E-S comes with no side effects as the variables involved are natural. Going back to the simple definition of getting things done in a given time frame, it is evident that when one's mind is at peace, his/her work will be of higher quality than one whose mind is stressed and distraught. Ergo, productivity will always be the result of a planned lifestyle.



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CHALLENGES OF TALENT ACQUISITION AFTER COVID-19

A Deep Dive into Asia's Recruitment Market and Post-Pandemic Trends in Hong Kong

By Zion Lee, DBA Candidate at SBS Swiss Business School



The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted nearly every aspect of human life, and the workplace has not been spared. The impact on employee safety, well-being, and motivation has led to significant challenges in talent acquisition for companies.

The shift towards remote work has compounded these challenges. In a report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), by early May 2020, the total volume of online job vacancies had fallen by over 50% in all countries. The report also highlighted that the pandemic led to a loss of 57 million jobs in 2020 globally. However, since the beginning of the recovery from COVID, OECD countries have created 66 million new jobs in 2022. The pandemic has significantly affected the recruitment market, and this article will examine the challenges and post-COVID trends in Asia, with a focus on Hong Kong.

How COVID-19 has Affected the Recruitment Market

According to a LinkedIn report, the pandemic fueled internal hiring in the Asia-Pacific region, with the average rate of internal mobility increasing by about 15% in 2020. Indonesia led the region with a 24% rate of internal mobility. The types of roles with the highest rate of internal mobility in the Asia-Pacific region are generalist roles with transferable skills, such as product management, finance, and consulting.

On the other hand, a survey by NGS Global highlighted that the pandemic has negatively impacted executive search budgets and changed the search process for executive talent.

Organizations had to assess executives' capabilities in leading a virtual/remote workforce and onboarding new hires remotely has been challenging for some organizations. HR teams have implemented measures to encourage collaboration, including virtual team-building activities and online social events.

Talent Acquisition Challenges in Asia

Talent acquisition in Asia has been impacted by the pandemic in several ways. A report by TDC highlighted that the pandemic has led to recruitment difficulties, time-consuming and expensive recruitment processes, and the postponement of campus recruitment exercises due to economic uncertainty. Companies in Asia are facing challenges engaging with fresh graduates in the digital era and need to have a more disruptive business future while searching for the best candidates.



Recruitment Difficulties

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges for companies in finding qualified candidates for open positions. With the shift towards remote work and limitations on face-to-face interactions, companies have had to adapt their recruitment strategies to the new normal.

One of the most significant challenges has been conducting interviews and assessments online. This has led to longer recruitment processes that are more time-consuming and expensive. Companies have also faced challenges in engaging with potential candidates, as traditional recruitment methods, such as career fairs and networking events, have been canceled or moved online.

Social distancing measures have also limited opportunities for face-to-face interactions, making it more challenging for companies to connect with potential candidates. This has made it difficult for companies to build relationships with potential hires and assess their fit with the organization.

Postponement of Campus Recruitment

Campus Recruitment has been seriously affected, with universities and colleges shifting to online learning platforms and canceling in-person events. As a result, companies in Asia have faced challenges engaging with fresh graduates and identifying the best candidates for entry-level positions.

The postponement of campus recruitment exercises has made it difficult for companies to connect with students and recent graduates, who are a critical source of new talent. Traditional recruitment methods, such as campus job fairs and networking events, have been canceled or moved online, creating further difficulties for companies in identifying and attracting top candidates.

To address these challenges, companies in Asia have had to rethink their campus recruitment strategies. This includes leveraging digital channels and virtual events to connect with students and recent graduates. Companies have also had to be more creative in their recruitment messaging, highlighting the benefits of working for their organization and offering opportunities for growth and development.

Competition for Talent

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased competition for top talent in Asia, as companies across the region are vying for the same pool of candidates. With high unemployment rates due to the pandemic, job seekers have more options to choose from, making it more challenging for employers to attract and retain the best candidates.

To differentiate themselves from their competitors, companies in Asia must offer competitive compensation and benefits packages. This includes providing attractive salaries, benefits, and opportunities for growth and development. Companies must also showcase a strong employer brand that resonates with job seekers, highlighting their unique company culture, values, and mission.

Moreover, companies must be proactive in their recruitment efforts and reach out to potential candidates through various channels. This includes leveraging social media, job boards, and employee referrals to connect with potential candidates and build a pipeline of talent.

Another key factor in attracting and retaining top talent is providing a positive work environment. This includes creating a safe and supportive workplace culture that prioritizes employee well-being and provides opportunities for work-life balance. Companies must also offer opportunities for upskilling and reskilling to help employees grow and develop in their careers.



Post-COVID Trends in Hong Kong

Remote work is becoming increasingly popular among Hong Kong companies, with 89% of 2022 contracts being for remote work, according to SCMP. This trend is expected to continue in the long term as companies aim to access talent globally without being restricted by geographical borders.

Hong Kong companies are commonly hiring remote workers from various countries, including Ukraine, India, the Philippines, the UK, and the US, to fill talent gaps. The top roles being hired for are software engineers, marketing and sales professionals, project managers, and developers. Workers born in the 1980s and 1990s are more open to remote work and are capturing new opportunities that come with it.

Remote Work as a Competitive Advantage

Companies in Hong Kong have embraced remote work as a way to access a global talent pool and fill skill gaps within their organizations. By offering remote work opportunities, companies can attract top talent from around the world, without being limited by geographical borders. This allows them to remain competitive in the global marketplace, even as they face challenges in talent acquisition within the local market.

New Opportunities for Workers

Remote work has opened up new opportunities for workers in Hong Kong, particularly those born in the 1980s and 1990s. These individuals are more open to remote work and have been quick to adopt the technology and tools required to work effectively from home. This generation is also more likely to prioritize work-life balance and flexibility, making remote work an attractive option. As a result, these workers have been able to capitalize on the new opportunities presented by the shift towards remote work, allowing them to access a broader range of job opportunities and potentially higher compensation.

Challenges Facing Hong Kong Workers

Job Security Concerns

Participating in the flow of knowledge creation only makes sense if the organisation is able to seize the value from new knowledge. Innovative leaders will remain open to process but push for prototypes as early as possible. They will also appreciate that change is rarely welcomed with open arms and will need to possess the inner strength to take the helm in order to apply new ideas and carry those through to completion. Leaders must drive the shift from incremental improvement to changing the game.

Low Wages and High Cost of Living

The high cost of living in Hong Kong has made it difficult for many workers to make ends meet, leading some to quit their jobs in search of higher-paying opportunities. Companies need to consider offering competitive compensation packages to attract and retain talent, taking into account the rising cost of living in the region.

Retirement Uncertainty

Many workers in Hong Kong are uncertain about their ability to retire early due to financial constraints. Companies can help address this concern by offering comprehensive retirement benefits and financial planning resources, enabling employees to better plan for their futures.

Solutions for Companies to Address Talent Acquisition Challenges

To address the challenges of talent acquisition, companies need to focus on several areas. They can improve employer branding to attract and retain top talent, leverage social media to connect with potential candidates and promote job openings, use data analytics to track hiring metrics and make informed decisions, and focus on employee development and training to enhance skills and increase retention.

1 Improving Employer Branding

A strong employer brand is crucial for attracting and retaining top talent. Companies should invest in building a positive company culture, showcasing their commitment to employee well-being, and highlighting the opportunities for growth and development within the organization. A strong employer brand can help differentiate a company in a competitive job market, making it easier to attract the best candidates.

2 Leveraging social media

Social media platforms can be a valuable tool for connecting with potential candidates and promoting job openings. Companies should use platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter to share information about their company culture, job opportunities, and employee success stories. Engaging with potential candidates through social media can help companies build a talent pipeline and stay top of mind for job seekers.

3 Utilizing Data Analytics

Data analytics can help companies make informed decisions about their talent acquisition strategies. By tracking hiring metrics like time-to-fill, cost-per-hire, and quality of hire, companies can identify areas for improvement and make data-driven decisions to optimize their recruitment processes.

4 Focusing on Employee Development and Training

Investing in employee development and training is essential for companies looking to attract and retain top talent. Employees are seeking opportunities to learn and grow in their roles, and companies that provide these opportunities are more likely to have satisfied and engaged employees. By offering ongoing training and development opportunities, companies can demonstrate their commitment to employee growth and create a culture of continuous learning.

Employee development and training can take various forms, including formal training programs, coaching and mentoring, job shadowing, and on-the-job training. These opportunities can help employees develop new skills, improve existing ones, and enhance their knowledge in their respective fields. They also create a sense of engagement and ownership in the organization, which can lead to increased productivity and job satisfaction.

Providing employees with development and training opportunities can also contribute to the organization's success. Employees who receive training and development opportunities are better equipped to handle new challenges and take on leadership roles, which can lead to increased innovation and competitiveness. Companies that invest in employee development and training also benefit from increased employee retention rates, reducing the costs associated with recruiting and training new employees.

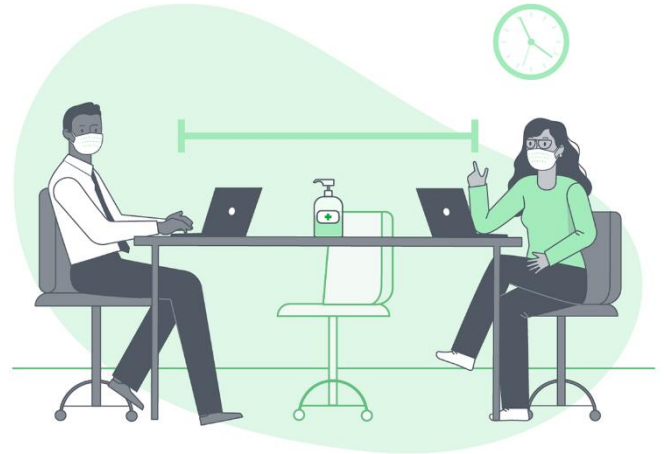


Conclusion

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant challenges to talent acquisition for companies worldwide. These challenges include ensuring employee safety and wellbeing while maintaining business continuity, addressing low employee motivation, and adapting to distance working, competing with other employers in the region due to high unemployment, and adapting to the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of the current business environment.

Despite these challenges, companies can still find ways to attract and retain top talent by improving their employer branding, leveraging social media to connect with potential candidates, using data analytics to make informed decisions, focusing on employee development and training, offering competitive compensation and benefits packages, and prioritizing employee safety and wellbeing through safe work environments, mental health support, and wellness programs.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for companies to innovate and adapt to distance working and digital transformation. The crisis has highlighted the importance of maintaining employee health and support, building employer branding, and cultivating a positive company culture to attract and retain quality talent. Companies that can effectively address these challenges will have a competitive advantage in acquiring and retaining top talent in the post-pandemic world.



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Australia and New Zealand (IML ANZ)

Institute of Managers and Leaders

WHAT IS HOLDING LEADERS BACK FROM TACKLING SUSTAINABILITY?

Article explains why imperfection shouldn't hold you back from action and her advice for how to go about forming and implementing a sustainability strategy.

By Kate Ross, Institute Member MIML



The rewards of sustainability are big for business.

According to research from Deloitte Insights, businesses that lead with purpose can expect faster growth and higher market share gains than their competitors. Then there's the flow on benefits of increased customer satisfaction and employee engagement and retention. So, why aren't more businesses adopting a

purpose-driven approach and implementing sustainability initiatives? Often, it's a misconception about what's involved or uncertainty about where to start. Here's what you need to know about taking action and making a difference, it's not as complex as you might think.

Good Intentions

Any delay in tackling sustainability usually isn't caused by lack of good intentions. There are so many genuine people and leaders who want to make a difference. Whether their personal drivers lie in making a difference for people or the planet, they are motivated and driven to shift the needle as a force for good.

The challenge for many is knowing where to start. Depending on the organisation's sustainability track record, it can be complex, heavy and hard. How are you supposed to tackle a carbon reduction strategy within the business? How do you untangle years of practice to do business in a more sustainable way?

The truth is, we can't let these fears become barriers to sustainability. If a business is to survive into the future, it's not a choice about whether to take action but when.

There's no Line in the Sand

Sustainability isn't an end goal. There's no line in the sand. And there likely never will be. There will always be new, different and better ways of approaching sustainability in a business.

That's not something that we should find daunting. Rather, it's something to look forward to. Sustainability is about progress, not perfection. It's about continuous improvement towards business goals.

There are no perfect solutions. And waiting around for one is only going to make it harder for the business to reach their end goal. Having issues in your business that can't be overcome immediately doesn't need to stop you from making a start, setting goals and beginning to make positive changes.



Strategy and action

Once you start diving into sustainability, you'll likely find that it's a Pandora's box. There's so much you can do... but you have to start somewhere. Where do you start? With a materiality assessment to identify the issues that matter most in the context of your business. Then you can start to prioritise these issues into a strategic action plan.

Often, what seemed like a barrier isn't a priority for now in any case. All of a sudden, the walls are down and you can start to take that necessary imperfect action towards the bigger picture.

The important thing here is that you do take action. A sustainability strategy stuffed in a drawer is worthless. Keep your action plan realistic so that it is achievable. Make the first step a simple one and build from there. All of those early steps add up to create momentum and positive impact.

There's no denying that for a business starting today, it's easier to incorporate purpose into planning from day one. That's not to say those businesses won't make mistakes. Sustainability isn't a perfect science. If you have a 10-year-old business, or even a 100-year-old one, it's a more complex proposition but one you should start all the same.



Collaboration = Amplification

While this is absolutely a project that needs to be led by the business leaders, it shouldn't sit within a silo. You'll see the greatest impact when you make changes and implement initiatives across the business.

When you include your teams in the process of identifying what matters, you'll likely discover people within the organisation who are really keen to work on this. You can then put your brightest – and most enthusiastic – minds to work to come up with solutions that drive positive outcomes.

Bringing the team along for the journey puts you a step ahead for the change that's required.

This is also an opportunity to engage your business partners and suppliers for a full value chain approach. They may share similar goals and working together can amplify your impact.



Sustainability is all about changing behaviours. Small shifts can lead to big results but that requires buy-in from across the organisation.

Authenticity and Transparency

Let's be clear here. Simple steps don't mean greenwashing, that is taking meaningless action to look good to your customers. Greenwashing won't cut it with your customers and it will have the opposite effect of what you're trying to achieve.

It's a sustainability fallacy that many leaders fall into. They know the business is far from perfect so they either stall altogether and take no action or they try to make the situation look better than it really is.

There is no expectation of perfection. There is no expectation that you'll build a sustainable business model overnight. There is no expectation that you have all the answers.

What your customers, stakeholders and suppliers do expect is that you're setting measurable goals and working towards them, authentically and transparently.

If there's something problematic in the business, address it. Outline what actions are in place to tackle it and the timeframe for those actions.

If you don't, everyone will be talking about the elephant in the room rather than all the good you're actually doing.

As uncomfortable as it is, this is the kind of transparency that's required. If you're doing nothing, you'll be called out on it. What you won't be called out on is the areas you're genuinely addressing, even if they aren't perfect right now.

The real competitive advantage

Addressing the table stakes of sustainability – things like carbon emissions, water quality, fair wages and energy – have become an expectation of doing business. The perspective on these is that they're part of being good global citizens and not something to differentiate a business.

The real competitive advantages for business lay outside this minimum benchmark standard. Go beyond the basics and switch your thinking beyond doing less harm to considering ways the business can do more good. As the business evolves, sustainability will move from being a silo strategy to your business as usual. And that's just the way it should be.



About the Author



Kate Ross

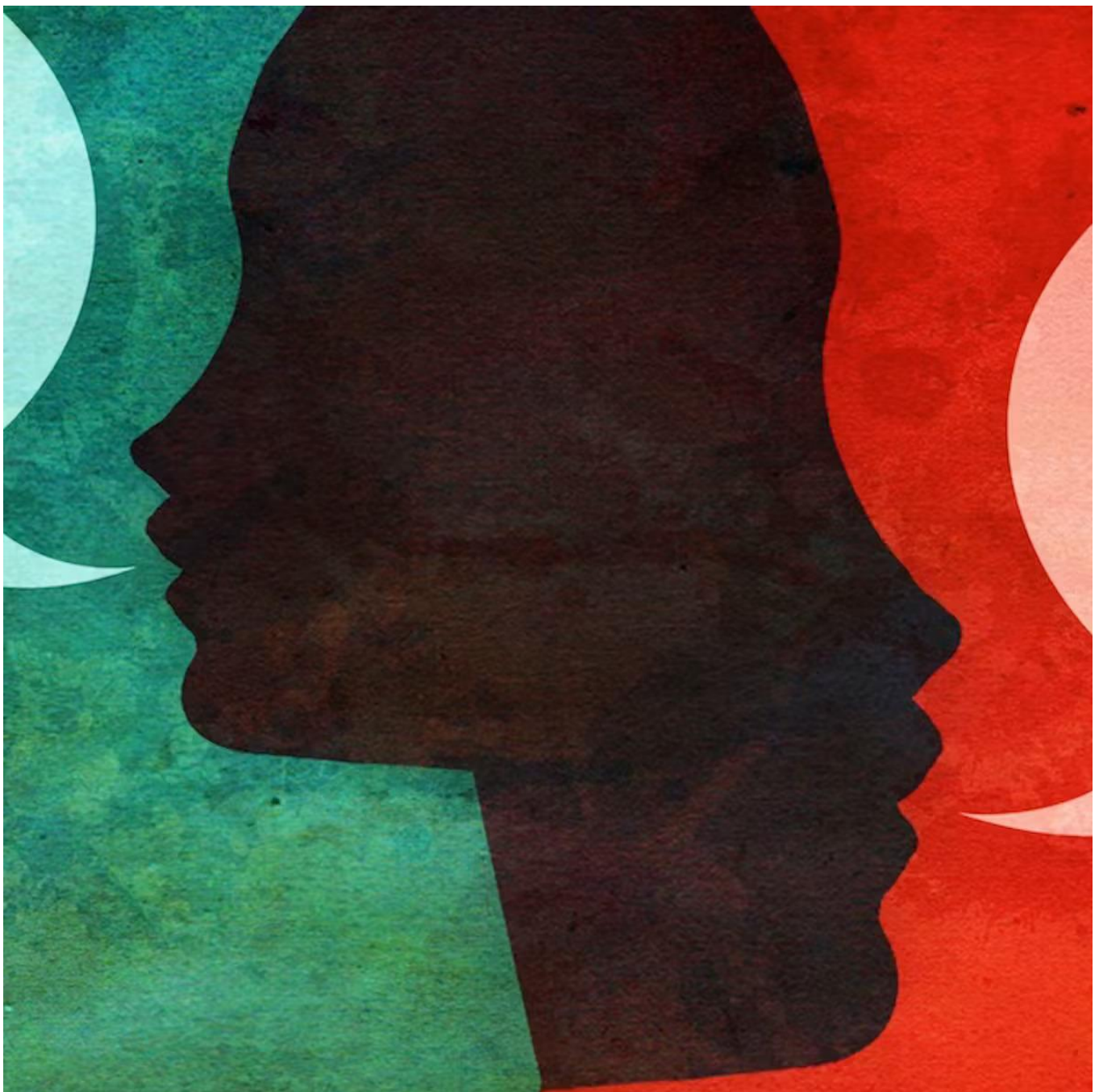
Sustainability consultant, Institute member MIML. Kate Ross is the founder of Game Change Limited, Kate has a career that has focused on working with environmentally focused companies, BCorps, NGOs and social enterprises.

Australia and New Zealand (IML ANZ)

Institute of Managers and Leaders

HOW TO HAVE COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS AND WHY IT MATTERS

By Rebecca Houghton, author of 'Impact: 10 Ways to Level up your Leadership'



Research from MetLife tells us that 77% of employees who have supportive managers say they feel mentally healthy versus only 47% of workers who don't receive that support. But research by Circle In shows that managers are increasingly overwhelmed by the type of conversations they are being involved in.

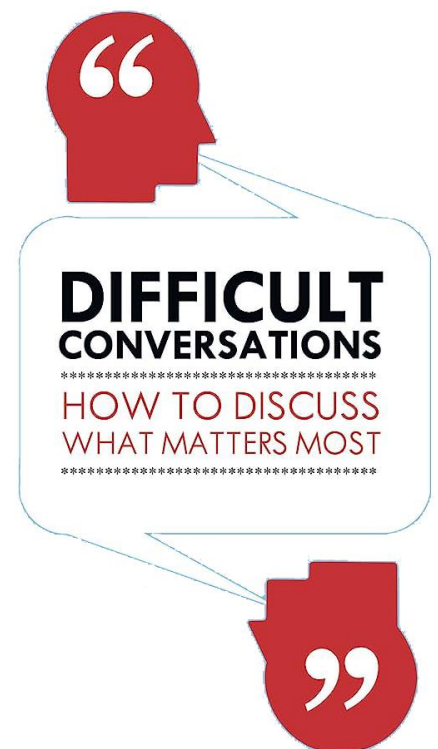
Traditionally unspoken topics such as mental health, domestic violence, divorce, pregnancy complications are increasingly entering the workplace vernacular, and there's a sharp rise in contentious topics such as vaccination mandates, climate change, reproductive rights or marriage equality.

As this evolution of what constitutes a 'normal' workplace conversation continues to progress, our leaders and teams need revised tools and techniques to ensure they can have courageous conversations about topics that are new or taboo. These new or taboo topics are on top of the traditional feedback and bad news conversations that required us to have a courageous conversation in the past – but they haven't gone away, and they still prove difficult to most of us. Part of the reason we avoid difficult conversations is our entrenched desire for harmony.

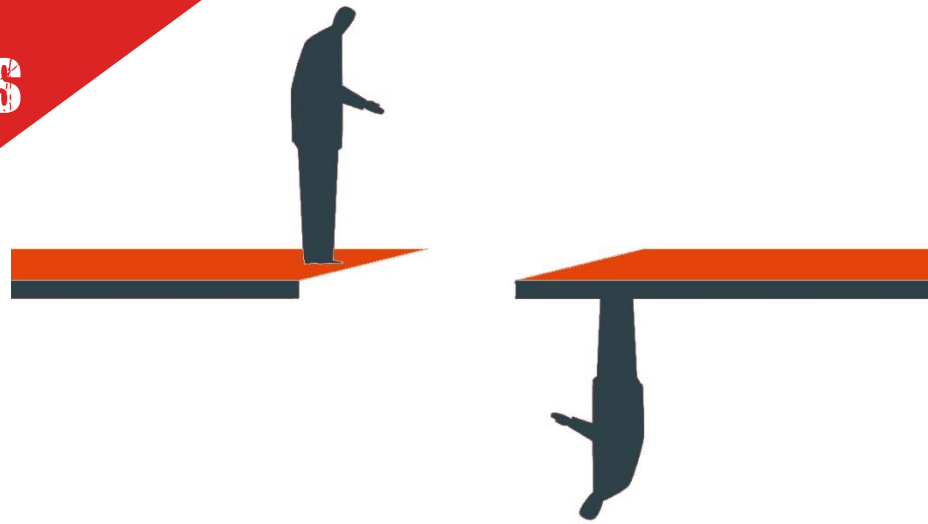
From a survival perspective, our brains are programmed to preserve relationships, which is why we can feel resistance to tackling certain topics in case we say anything that might threaten our relationship with others.

But an age of tagging, tweeting and texting combined with sudden and prolonged social distancing has changed how we have these conversations, and how we choose to engage: what we're prepared to risk or how deeply we need to connect to make it feel real again. It means we are sharing more confronting issues, and we are prepared to argue for what we believe in – all of which goes against the grain of that prehistoric desire for harmony.

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Courage is derived from the Latin word Cor which means heart. It takes great courage to have one of these conversations, and it's why so many of us avoid doing so.
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Three considerations to have a courageous conversation



1. Take Heart:

A courageous conversation improves your personal health and happiness, as well as enhancing corporate performance and team culture

HEALTH They allow you to express and release frustration and stop tension building up.

HAPPINESS A Chinese/US study demonstrated that when employees expressed their frustration in a regular and structured way, it increased their happiness in the workplace.

PERFORMANCE A Chinese/US study demonstrated that when employees expressed their frustration in a regular and structured way, it increased their happiness in the workplace.

SAFETY it takes courage to tell someone they are doing something wrong, but that very courage is what saves lives at work.

CULTURE Diverse teams flourish when differences are celebrated rather than repressed, so when challenging topics can be discussed without the need for courage, that's evidence of both inclusion and psychological safety.

Acknowledge what you're scared of – because if you weren't experiencing some fear, you wouldn't be perceiving this as a conversation that needs courage. There's a range of things that might be making you fearful. Their reaction and having to deal with it is a common fear.

If it's a formal conversation, many people fearing making a mistake or doing it wrong. Another common fear is losing an argument, looking stupid or being proved wrong. Once you label these fears, you take a big step into your courage – you are literally feeling the fear and doing it anyway.

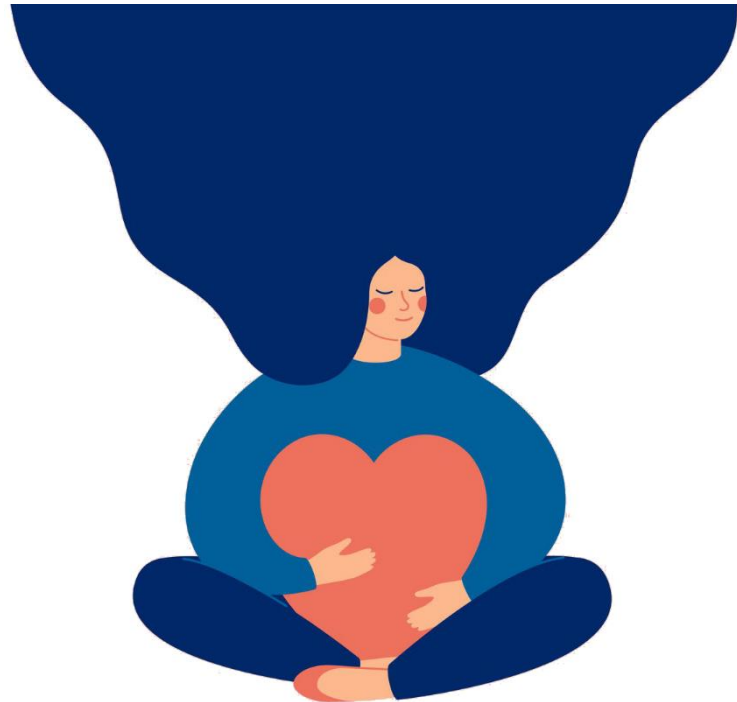


2. Use your heart

Share your fears. By speaking them out loud when you open your conversation, you're sharing your own vulnerability and at the same time, laying down some rules for engagement – the things you explicitly want to avoid as a result of this conversation.

Practice your empathy – you don't need the answers to start the conversation, but you do need empathy. If you enter the conversation with empathy for what might be happening to them, what their reality might be, and what perspective they might have, you'll find yourself in a different headspace – and a far more collaborative one.

It's a material shift from using your head to using your heart, and for many leaders especially, it's a challenge to be ok with being vulnerable or not having a solution for someone's problem. For many leaders, this is an area of significant strain.



3. Listen to the hearts of others

Acknowledge that much has changed since the pandemic, and this means that taboo topics, once-predictable reactions and long-held beliefs are all likely to not be where they were two years ago. And this means we have to start over in our understanding of what people want and where they are coming from.

Before you need to have a courageous conversation, try having a curious one. Ask questions about what people want, feel and believe now compared to what they did before Covid. This way you'll all feel your way around potential reactions in a neutral space, before it matters.

There are many topics that some people are happy to discuss at work today but would not have done in the past. And there are plenty of topics that some people will react poorly to. Rather than make a guess based on out-of-date assumptions, why not investigate now?



About the Author



Rebecca Houghton

Author of 'Impact: 10 Ways to Level up your Leadership' (\$29.95), is a Leadership and Talent Expert and founder of BoldHR. Rebecca builds B-Suite leaders with C-Suite impact by working at an organisational, team and individual level.

Sri Lanka

Institute of Management of Sri Lanka (IMSL)

THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREER GUIDANCE AND ITS IMPACT FOR A LIFE-LONG CAREER

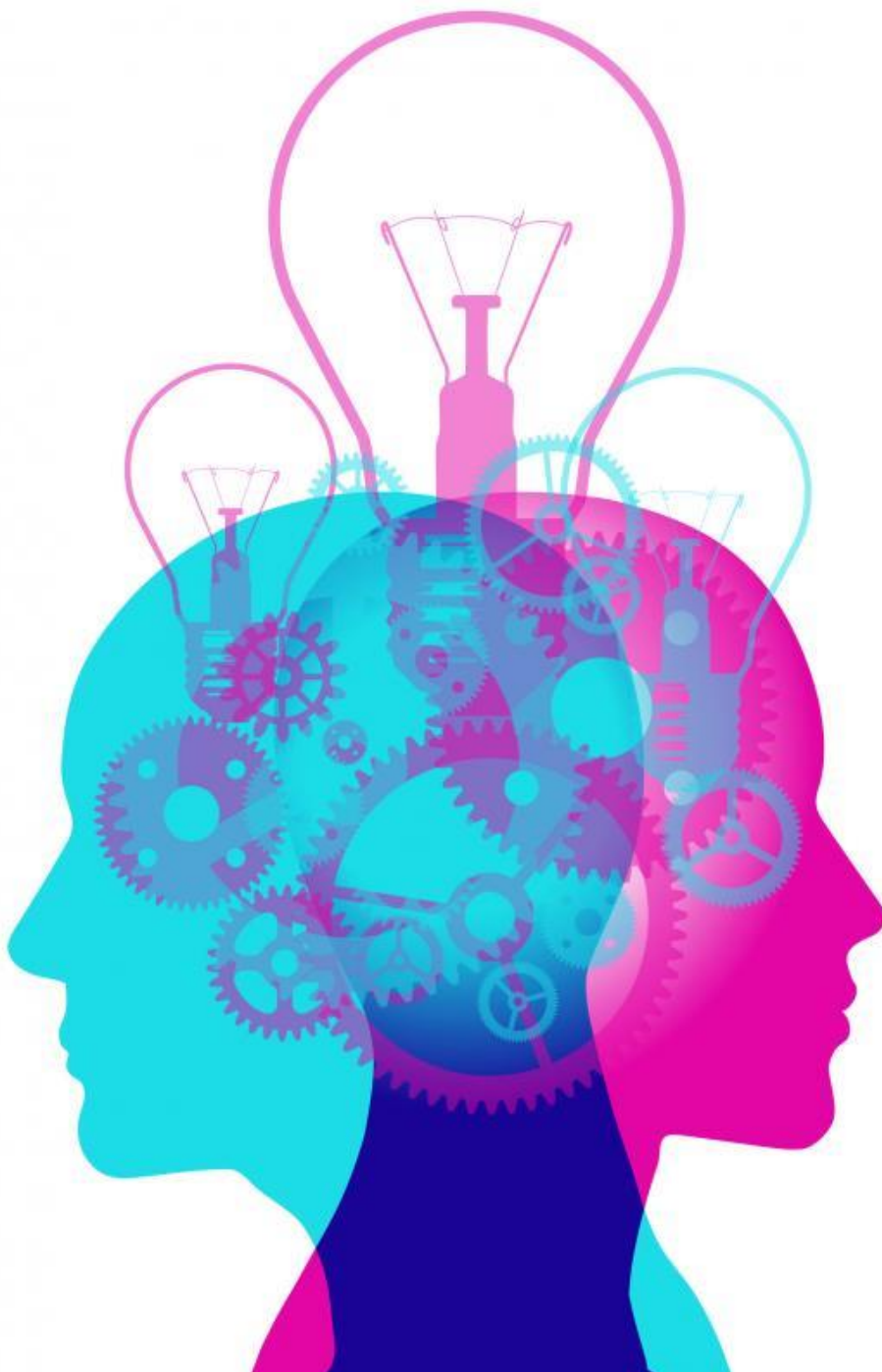
By Dr. Niluka T Amarasinghe, Assistant Treasurer IMSL

A career is identified as a profession or chosen line of work, which can include one job or multiple jobs. It also refers to the education, training, and experience needed to grow in your current role or move on to another one. Career guidance describes the services which help people of any age to manage their careers and to make the educational, training and occupational choices that are right for them. Today, we witness many employees indicating their unhappiness in the careers that they are in, because of not being guided properly in career decision making prior or during the tenure of their service. It helps

People to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications, skills and talents and to relate this knowledge about who they are and who they might become within the labour market.

Career development can be seen as a process that encompasses much of the life span—one that begins in childhood, continues into adulthood via the progression of one's career behavior, and culminates with the transition into, and adjustment to, retirement. It is a concept designed to capture the dynamic, changing nature of career or work behavior and is sometimes used as incorporating career choice and at other times as distinct from it.

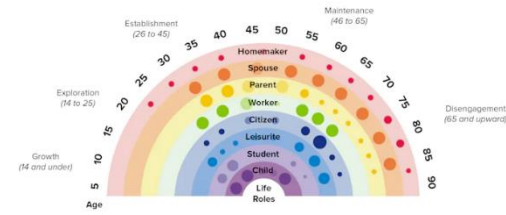
Career choice may be seen as the process of selecting and entering a particular career path, whereas career development refers to one's experience before, during, and (especially) after career choice.



“

The process of counseling is based on the foundation of “Career development theories” that conceptualize the employee career concerns.

It is important to understand career development theories as they, Explain the phenomenon of career choice and development, serve as a foundation for career interventions and Predict outcomes that can be expected from career interventions and environmental influences.



Career development theories can be divided into four categories:

1. Self-Concept (Life span theory of Super)
2. Trait factor (Trait and factor theory by Frank Parson)
3. Decision- Situational factor (Social cognitive career theory)
4. Psychological structure (Holland theory)



Effective career guidance is a process which aims to equip individuals with a clearer understanding of themselves and their potential for future career development. Career guidance helps individuals to assess their career development needs at various points in their lives, Understand the process of effective choice of a career, clarify their objectives for the future, take appropriate action to implement these objectives.

In order to support employees in career guidance, the construction of a proper career guidance model is essential.

Career guidance models could be designed in three ways:

Normative: highlighting the cost to benefit factor,

Descriptive: considering the way people make decisions

Prescriptive: incorporate the advantages of the normative and descriptive models, while minimizing or circumventing their disadvantage

Decision-making models can be used for facilitating better career decisions in three complementary ways, By the counsellor in face-to-face situations, as a blueprint for computer-based career guidance systems and as a learned systematic framework for independent implementation.

Many countries have adopted numerous ways to support the labour force in career guidance and have national level policies to systematically educate the employees.

Australia uses Nationwide telephone information service that provides employment information, employment trends, perspectives on career decision-making Internet sites that provides a wide range of labour market, career, and occupational information.



Japan has launched a comprehensive program titled “Plan to Foster a Spirit of Independence and Challenge to Youth” which includes, The establishment of regional employment support centers targeting youths, The promotion of career education in elementary and secondary schools, The stationing of ‘job-supporters’ and career counselors at employment security offices, The provision of strong support to business start-up projects, A national computer assisted information system by which labour supply and demand information can be made available to pesos across the Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Sweden and United Kingdom have career guidance and counselling methods embedded in and nation.

Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Sweden and United Kingdom have career guidance and counselling methods embedded in and carried out through career education programs whilst these methods are carried out through comprehensive guidance and counselling programs in Canada and United States.

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A properly formulated career guidance model would capture the personal attributes and personality characteristics of an individual and it would map the best choices in a logical order to achieve the optimum out of the given scenarios.



In order to guide a student to select the ideal job according to the real characteristics and likings of the individual, timely shifting of careers, refocusing on the career direction, finding a career at a layoff situation and career options in the senior citizen ages are some of the career related needs of an individual. Coaching and counseling are required for an individual at any of these stages and therefore, proper advice from a professional counselor is a prerequisite.

Whilst Educational institutions should construct such models to assist the students on these parameters and guide them, organizations should have a properly executed career development plan to groom their employees and develop them for future responsibilities.

The importance of a properly crafted career guidance model and an execution plan is high, and it would be an inevitable tool for organizations in their retention policy and it would also be a deciding factor for the success of an individual’s progression in their careers.



About the Author



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An academic who is engaged in Lecturing on Management & Business administration fields for many Universities. He is a Council member of IMSL since 2019 and currently functions as the Assistant Treasurer.

Philippine

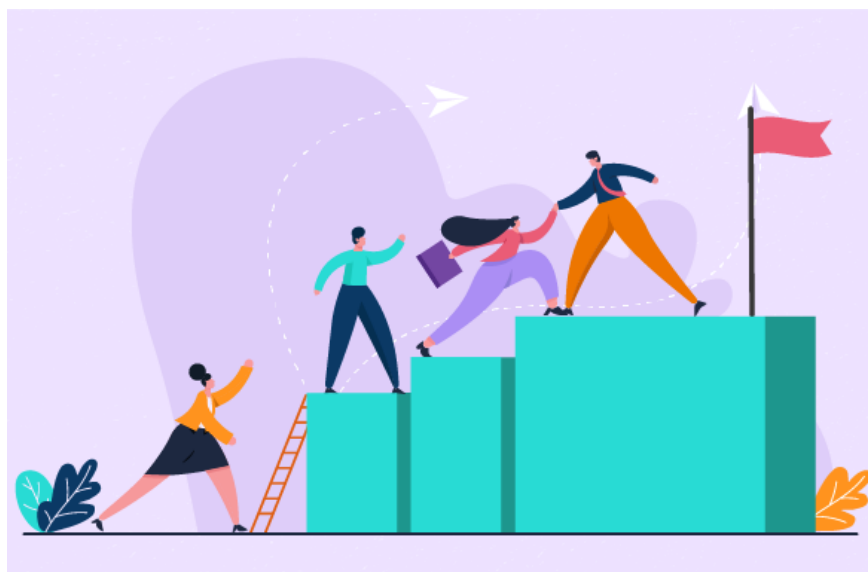
Management Association of the Philippines

NATURE'S BRIDGE TO 21ST C. EDUCATION

By Dr. FEDERICO "Poch" M. MACARANAS, PhD.

A new age of leadership is upon us -- starting from the 9/11 World Trade Center bombing, the global financial crisis of 2009, the COVID pandemic, to the networked disinformation amidst the looming geopolitical and -economic divides -- confronting every human with great uncertainty. (Not to speak of Nature's own reminder - that climate change and earthquakes are still part of our reality.)

Not all people can solve those existential problems -- but educating humans to be closer to each other as humans is a step forward, by bridging divides of ages, races, organizations, nations, and positions to make sense of a chaotic world.



Swarm Leadership

Thus, we see the rise of the responsive leader who "connects everyone to collaborate so we learn from each other in quickly adapting to fast-changing situations" -- rather than those who are plainly relational by engaging the follower with his/her own skills and traits, or the directive leader who shows his/her own way. Nor the charismatic one who asks others to gaze at a person to inspire them.

These are labels, respectively, of Leadership 4.0, 3.0, 2.0, and 1.0. by Richard Kelly, *Swarm Leadership and the Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Palgrave: 2019)

Leadership 4.0 sees leaders as part of a swarm: a leader who connects others, as in a swarm of locusts, bees, termites, and ants that find themselves in self-organizing communities; wired across cultures, disciplines, and fields; agile, thanks to networked intelligence. A leader who rethinks power as "achievable through people rather than over people" (Peter Miller, *Smart Swarm*, 2010). One who harnesses the networks of its own members, and thus sees their organization as a network of networks, not fearful of doing everything by oneself.

No organization, not even one that represents the elite of any group by any metric - political parties, economic groups, social clubs, or technological entities - will survive the 21st C. without loosening organizational hierarchies. The V formation of flying geese has no single leader; when one is up front, one has to work the hardest because of wind resistance.

Reforming Education

One of the “new” issues that has attracted enterprise leaders of the country is the mismatch between what industry needs and what schools offer. Rather than line up for a job, college graduates are admonished to create them to help solve the country's endemic underemployment and severe unemployment problems. Many bright ones vote with their feet for greener pastures elsewhere.

Is the trifocal structure of Philippine education the problem? Or is that merely a manifestation of the deep underlying cultural legacy of geography – an archipelagic mindset, amidst water in the ring of fire, and a Latin feudal economy in burgeoning Asia?

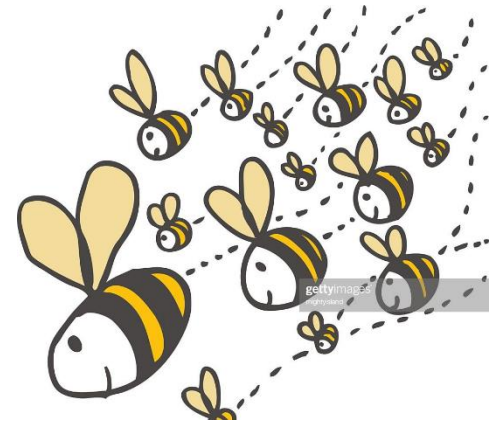
Can education leaders and reformers learn from Nature? Can we be connected even as we are geographically divided? Vision/mission statements abound. Commitments, abilities, and willingness however do not come in the same proportions, heavily weighted towards promises until deaths do the parting.

Why not study a collective scenario of doomsday, or how to forestall it? Huddled polar bears in freezing Arctic weather take turns moving inwards around a circle - in a slow dance to redistribute warmth within a group. Will the old and nouveau rich of the country be able to do the same for the poor amidst them? Some cynics will say, “but we are in the global warming stage!”

The dark side of crowds

The dark side of crowds is how Peter Miller (*Smart Swarm: Using Animal Behaviour to Change our World*, Collins: 2010) saw the February 4, 2006 stampede in the PhilSports Arena. Wowowee, the popular television game show was taping for its first anniversary program. It lured crowds of over thirty thousand people in the stadium for only about seventeen thousand – on promises of minibuses, a home, and a million-peso jackpot.

Even before the gates opened, Miller narrates how the crowd of “hungry and sleepless” people scrambled, upon hearing a spokesperson allegedly announce “that only the first three hundred people with tickets would be eligible to compete for the million-peso prize.” As “hope and dreams of getting rich would vanish” if they would not be among the first to enter the stadium, people pushed from the back, caused a barricade to collapse, and unnerved the guards who instinctively closed the gate.



People behind, unaware of what was transpiring, ended up in a frenzy as an energized throng. The surging crowd and the steep incline toward the gate resulted in the crushing death of seventy-four people, mostly older women, and hundreds injured.

Miller notes two guides for preventing tragedies: restraining crowd behavior through information for “individuals to maintain personal control,” and keeping people density below critical levels. These are as useful for any structure, or even in urban planning and population programs. He adds how healthy markets likewise require information. “When investors give up personal judgment in favor of following a crowd’s whim, they disconnect a market from critical information.”



▲ The wisdom of “smart groups”

Thus, working with others in “smart groups” is Miller’s first lesson from swarms in nature. Taking the cue from biology, he notes that the resilience and flexibility of swarms, flocks, herds, colonies, and schools result from how interaction is managed. Hence, education systems can focus on how to reduce the VUCA aspects of 21st C. life through problem-solving groups, as in small learning teams in the case study approach, or huge ones like those who contribute to Wikipedia.

What determines the size of “smart groups”? Both the magnitude of the problem and the way groups are structured. In the case of a more massive challenge, e.g., in reforming the learning skills and competencies in general or teacher education in the Philippines, a solution is combining liberal arts with science (or STEM courses) -- the same prescription that Albert Einstein promoted for learning in the last millennium.

“
The best way to serve the group, it turns out, is to be true to ourselves.”

Peter Miller – Author of Smart Warm

The mechanisms to manage interactions include (1) local knowledge with a diversity of information, (2) heuristics or rules of thumb to minimize computational requirements, (3) repeated interaction within teams and “quorum thresholds” for wiser decisions, and (4) “a healthy dose of randomness in individual behaviors.”

Miller’s second learning from smart swarms is for individuals to bring ideas to the table in their true authentic selves, not blindly copying others, ready to agree or disagree, competing as well as cooperating (co-opetition).

All these are from animal behaviour with which humans can instinctually change the world.

Disclaimer

This article reflects the personal opinion of the author and does not reflect the official stand of the Management Association of the Philippines or MAP

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About the Author



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Malaysia

Malaysian Institute of Management

THE ONTOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP: EMBRACING OUR SHARED HUMANITY IN CULTIVATING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

By Rozana Halpin, Ontological Leadership Coach (PCC)

I remember when I was first introduced to the word “Ontology”. It was when I was approached by a good friend to participate in a coaching program which focuses on using a methodology of Ontological, Mindfulness and Ecological (O.M.E). Confined by my ignorance, and deluded by the scientific sounding name, I briefly entertained that idea that I might have the title “Dr” by the end of this 9 months program. Upon further research though, this ego-driven thought was quickly dissipated by my newfound understanding of the word “Ontology”.

“In philosophy, ontology is the branch of metaphysics that deals with the study of the nature of existence or being. It is concerned with questions about what types of things exist, and what their fundamental properties and relations are. Ontology seeks to understand the nature of reality, including the relationship between mind and matter, the nature of time and space, and the nature of causation.

It is a fundamental area of inquiry that has been studied by philosophers throughout history, from ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle to contemporary philosophers working in a variety of traditions. The aim of ontology is to provide a comprehensive account of the nature of reality, and to explore the basic features of the world in which we live”. At least that’s what Chat GPT said.



Ontology examines the fundamental nature of our existence and what it means to be a human being. It explores questions such as: What defines a person? What is the essence or core of our identity? How do our thoughts, emotions, and experiences relate to our existence?

Ontology in this context delves into the nature of consciousness, personal identity, and the relationship between the mind and the body. It seeks to understand what makes each of us unique as individuals and how we fit into the broader framework of reality.

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*The best way
to serve the
group, it turns
out, is to be
true to
ourselves.*

So how does it fit into the context of leadership?



Leadership goes beyond the realm of strategies and tactics. It taps into something deeply human—the essence of our existence and the principles that guide us towards effective leadership. This perspective, known as the ontology of leadership, invites us to explore the fundamental aspects that shape our understanding of leadership and its impact on organizational culture. By embracing the ontology of leadership, we can create an environment that empowers individuals to thrive, collaborate, and fulfill their potential.

At its core, the ontology of leadership reminds us that leadership is not merely a title or a position of authority. It calls us to take tangible steps that align with our human nature and to connect with a sense of purpose that transcends the mundane. We delve into our passions, values, and aspirations, uncovering the underlying motives that drive our actions.

When we understand our purpose as leaders, we ignite a fire within ourselves and inspire our teams to rally behind a shared vision. Our purpose becomes the compass that guides our actions and decisions, infusing them with a profound sense of meaning and significance.

Secondly, we identify the values that resonate deeply with us, infusing our leadership with authenticity and integrity. These values become the guiding principles that shape our interactions and decisions.

Values also play a crucial role in shaping the culture of our organizations, even if some organisations simply use them as mere decorations on their walls or wave them as flags of honour to assuage themselves and the masses.

Embracing the ontology of leadership means prioritizing values such as integrity, empathy, and inclusivity. When we lead with integrity, we build trust and inspire others to act with honesty and transparency.

Values are meant to ground us in a moral and ethical framework that resonates with our shared humanity.

When we embody empathy, we create an environment where people feel seen, heard, and valued. And when we foster inclusivity, we celebrate diversity and create spaces where everyone can contribute their unique perspectives.

As we navigate the complexities of today's world, the ontology of leadership becomes increasingly relevant. It prompts us to reflect on the interconnectedness of our actions and their impact on the broader societal landscape. Embracing this perspective allows us to cultivate a culture of

continuous learning and adaptation.

We encourage our teams to embrace change, take risks, and learn from failures. By fostering a growth mindset, we empower individuals to navigate uncertainty with resilience and creativity.

Throughout history, we find inspiring examples of ontological leaders who embodied these principles. One such leader is Mahatma Gandhi, whose commitment to nonviolence, justice, and equality transformed a nation. Gandhi's ontological leadership stemmed from a deep understanding of his purpose and unwavering dedication to his values.

His actions inspired others to join him on a journey towards collective well-being and societal transformation.

Other inspirational leaders who exemplified these principles are leaders like Nelson Mandela, whose unwavering commitment to justice and reconciliation changed the landscape of a nation and champions like Malala Yousafzai, who, despite facing immense adversity, advocates fearlessly for girls' education and equality. These leaders remind us of the profound impact we can have when we lead with purpose, values, and a deep understanding of our interconnectedness.

Building authentic relationships lies at the heart of ontological leadership. As leaders, we foster an environment where trust, respect, and collaboration thrive. We actively listen to others, seeking to understand their perspectives and experiences. We create spaces for open dialogue, where diverse voices are heard and valued. By forging strong connections with our teams and stakeholders, we build a community united by a shared purpose and a collective vision.

Ontological leadership calls us to embody the values and principles we advocate. We lead by example, modeling the behavior we expect from others. Our authenticity becomes a source of inspiration, encouraging our teams to embrace their own unique qualities and strengths. As we navigate the complexities of leadership, we remain humble and open to learning, acknowledging that our growth is a lifelong journey.

Ultimately, ontological leadership calls us to live and lead in alignment with our highest ideals and values. It challenges us to transcend the superficial aspects of leadership and tap into the deeper wellspring of our humanity.

“
By embracing the ontology of leadership, we become catalysts for positive change, creating organizational cultures that inspire, empower, and uplift individuals and communities.”

To conclude, the ontology of leadership reminds us of our shared humanity and the profound impact we can have on others. By embracing this perspective, we cultivate organizational cultures that prioritize purpose, values, and authentic relationships. We create spaces where individuals can flourish, collaborate, and contribute their best selves. In today's fast-paced and ever-changing world, the ontology of leadership offers a compass that guides us through uncertainty and empowers us to navigate challenges with resilience and adaptability. As human leaders, let us embark on this transformative journey, shaping a future where organizations serve as catalysts for positive change in the world.



About the Author



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Macau

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WHY I TRAINED MY 6-YEARS OLD BOY IN MATH OLYMPIAD

By Brian Tang, Corporate Training Consultant

Not long ago, my 6 years old son who was in Primary one told me that his teacher has enrolled him in Math Olympiad competition. Was my boy's math grade outstanding? Not at all. Why did the teacher decide to enrol him? I am not sure. In any case, I am not unfamiliar with the Math Olympiad competition, for I myself have participated in a few of them when I was young.

Anyone who has participated in public assessment tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, GMAT would know that although the test questions are different in every single test, the underlying patterns remain largely the same.

The reason I trained my boy in Math Olympiad was not because of the award, glory, or fanfare on his CV. Through the Math Olympiad, I want him to develop a lifelong skillset – **thinking on paper**.



Let me explain with an example. I found this P1 Math Olympiad question on the internet:

A class of students lined up to enter a museum. Peter is the 20th student counting from the start of the line, Harry is the 23rd counting from the end of the line. Peter stands right behind Harry. How many students are in this class?

I believe that even adults won't be able to come up with the answer right away, let alone Primary One student. Let's think about it. To solve this problem, we must be able to do the math while juggling with multiple information (two characters standing at different places, Peter stands behind Harry). Is it difficult? Absolutely for Primary One student. The key to solving it is to draw the situation on paper.

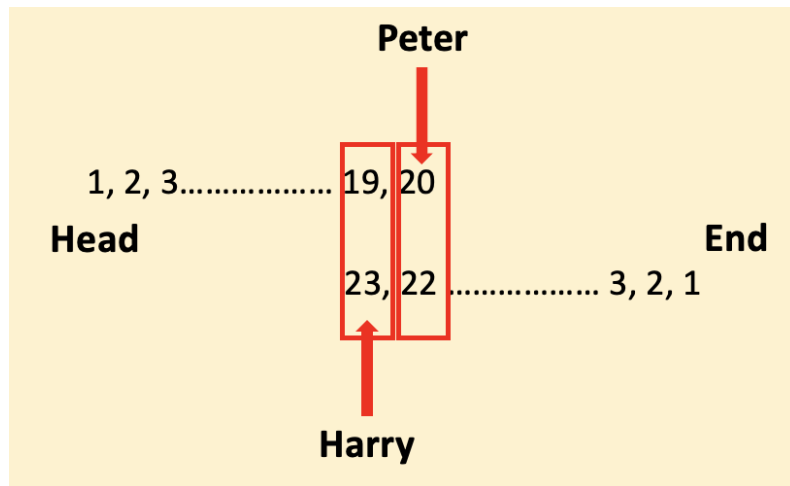


When you draw it out, the answer is almost self-explanatory: $20+23-2 = 41$ (minus two due to duplicate counts for Peter and Harry)

The purpose of questions like this is not to test the student’s actual arithmetic skill but their ability to visualize the problem. The game changer is to think on paper. Make a graph, draw a line – whatever it takes. First put it on paper, only then do you start to think.

Don’t underestimate this simple skill – it’s almost counterintuitive. Most people are used to think, analyze, and problem-solve within their head. In other words, everything stays in their head.

Let’s look at an example. A restaurant owner is suffering with declining sales. Seeing that Korean food has been gaining a lot of popularity in his community, he is thinking whether he should introduce Korean cuisine in his restaurant.



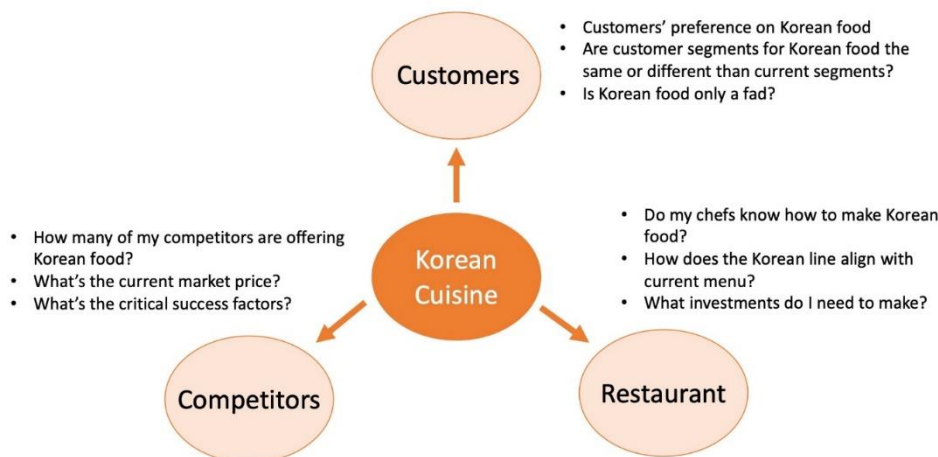
The owner obviously has a lot to think about, such as:

- How does the Korean cuisine blend into the existing menu?
- Is the market for Korean food already saturated? Is there room for growth?
- Do my chefs know how to make Korean food?
- How did my competitors succeed or fail in Korean food?
- What if my customers turn out not liking the Korean food? Do I have a Plan B?

Too many questions. Too many possibilities. If the owner only thinks within his head, he will likely be overwhelmed and miss key information. A better way is to “think on paper” with a structure, such as mind-map.

This mind-map takes on three key considerations: Customers, Competitors, Company (i.e., his own restaurant). As you can imagine, you can go even deeper and wider to capture more ideas.

There are other tools one can use, such as fishbone diagram, force field analysis, SWOT, etc. Thinking on paper is a much more effective way to problem-solve than thinking in the head. It has at least three advantages:



1. Tap into the benefits of different senses

In addition to using your mental power to tackle the problem in your head, thinking on paper can tap into your visual sense (seeing the problem on paper) and your kinaesthetic sense (writing or drawing the problem on paper). The more senses you use, the more channels you can explore to solve the problems.

For instance, imagine you attend a lecture only to listen to the speaker for 30 minutes, you are not likely to retain a lot of memory at the end of the class. However, if you, in addition to listening to the lecture, also get to participate in group discussion, watch a video, and engage in hands-on activities, you are much more likely to develop your own interpretation of the contents of the lecture.

2. Externalize the problem and stay objective

When you write the problem on paper you basically externalize it. The problem gets disconnected from you. I am not suggesting that when you externalize the problem you don't own it anymore. I am saying that when you write it down, not only do you externalize the problem itself, you also externalize the emotions associated with it. Emotions are the devil that skew our judgement. When we put it on the paper and "see" it with our eyes, we literally become the third party to the problem – it gets much less personal. Hence, we get calmer and more objective in our judgement.

Thinking on paper allows you to communicate the problem more effectively with others.

3. More efficient and effective communication and discussion

Thinking on paper allows you to communicate the problem more effectively with others. Imagine you try to describe a problem (take the Korean cuisine example) and lay out your train of thought purely with words to others. It is by no means easy. Speaking precisely and concisely is a skill that takes a lot of practice. Furthermore, verbal communication leaves a lot of room for misinterpretation.

Conversely, if you could draw the mind-map and show it to your colleagues, you stand a much better chance to making your colleagues understand your ideas. You and colleagues can discuss the details by pointing straight to the mind-map and extending / revising the map during the discussion. The end result is efficiency and effectiveness.

Efficiency: Since all the information is written on paper, you can save much of your brain power holding all the information in your head. It can also save your time clarifying back-and-forth arguments by simply pointing to the paper.

Effectiveness: Higher level of understanding of the issue plus quality discussion will reduce biases and miscommunication, and improve the discussion outcome.

Whether or not my son earns any award in the Math Olympiad competition is not my concern. All I care is to plant a seed in his problem-solving skill, which can benefit him for life. By the same token, practice thinking on paper can bring you less frustration, more objective and effective discussion, and better decision-making outcomes.

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About AAMO:

AAMO is a partnership of National Management Organizations (NMO) whose purpose is to share and actively leverage resources to enhance the achievement of their respective missions. AAMO is an independent, nonpolitical and not-for-profit Association of NMOs, which promotes, facilitates and supports the development of professional management in the Asia Pacific Region.

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