CRISIS, OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP

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Abstract: This article presents some arguments that the periods of crisis, dominated by the unknown, uncertainty and change determine the need to increase the degree of adaptability of the leader. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fact that leaders need two major forces: resilience and adaptability. During this challenging period, leaders had many decisions to make, made plans and acted. With the help of the two characteristics, the leaders were able to make the optimal decisions, both in the short term and in the medium and long term. In order to cope with all the changes specific to the crisis period, leaders need communication skills, flexibility in thinking and an open mind.

Keywords: change, leader, adaptability, crisis.

1. INTRODUCTION

In general, an organization is formed on two levels of structuring: the physical level, which has in common human, material, informational, financial and technological resources, and the symbolic level, which shares its mission and purpose, formal and informal relations, cultural organization. If we consider this approach of the organization, the organizational crisis can be defined as "*an interruption that physically affects the functioning of the entire organizational system and threatens its fundamental principles, identity and rationale. [1]*"

Given this approach, for an organization to enter a crisis, both of the above levels must be affected. In other words, the members of the organization find that the values and principles they have internalized are erroneous or outdated. As a result, the organization can no longer fulfill its mission for which it was built - the production of services or products. The forms in which the organizational crisis manifests are different depending on the causes that generated it. In this regard, the origin of the crisis must be analyzed very rigorously, which can be internal (poor management of resources, relations and communication) or external (any crisis of resources and relations that occurs in the proximity of the organization's interest.

2. HOW IMPORTANT IS LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS?

In times of crisis such as the one generated by the COVID 19 pandemic, organizations are forced to test and exercise their ability to react and adapt, where the leadership skills of managers are fully exploited, which in these times, become vital for the entire organization.

Moreover, for organizations, the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic is at the same time an opportunity to verify the most important values of employees such as: loyalty, involvement, commitment, attachment to the organization and, most off all, trust. Confidence within the team, but also the trust of team members in leaders. And, obviously the opposite, the confidence of the team leaders.

Leadership is a vast field, covering a wide area of subdomains, an aspect that has been discussed a lot in the last decade, being twinned with other sciences or being considered independent, depending on the orientation of the theorist who conceptualizes the term.

However, this concept translated into different values or rather a different hierarchy of priorities before the pandemic broke out. This concept was related above all to the ability to help people go beyond the comfort zone for continuous development and evolution, but also to achieve performance on all levels. On the other hand, in the context of the crisis generated by the current pandemic, it is extremely important to support employees in adapting to the new reality, but also to manage general uncertainty in order to achieve a balance in terms of psyche and morale to each employee.

In the period we are going through, dominated by uncertainties on all levels, leadership and management skills, which can make a difference, are related to the rapid identification of changes that are required, their timely management to minimize the impact of events, negative effects on the organization and implicitly on its members. At a later stage, the ability to communicate objectively and clearly with the team is vital, as is the need to maintain a high level of positivity, to inspire courage in the team, to overcome the crisis we are going through or to appear.

Both leadership and the ability to provide a coherent vision for the organization are all the more necessary and important, as most employees work remotely, a situation with a high degree of novelty and which can create difficulties. It is obvious that this change entails a series of challenges, among which the most demanding are the permanent communication with employees, the way of pursuing and sharing tasks on teams, but also the constant transmission of the situation in which the organization is in.

Moreover, one of the most important challenges offered by the current crisis is to identify the optimal way to keep all colleagues connected and engaged in the company's objectives and mission, without the existence of a face-to-face relationship. If before the members of the organizations talked face to face with their leaders, maybe even with the main leader of the company, which created an atmosphere of safety and trust through the existence of physical closeness, through the team spirit that is created within the organization. In the previous period, this team spirit was strengthened, through informal discussions during breaks or during lunch together, but in the context of the crisis we are going through, all these things are missing. In the absence of all this aspect, one can lose the feeling of belonging to the team, but also to the organizational culture, which can be an extremely important factor in motivating and involving employees.

3. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CRISIS

In this complicated period, communication is extremely important. The ability to communicate openly, honestly, without barriers should be an asset for both leaders and employees. Of course, we have to deal with a concise, objective, transparent communication about the factual situation and as optimistic as possible, as much as the general situation of the company allows because both positive and negative exaggerations create an artificial context. which can lead to loss of credibility, and hence loss of loyalty, commitment and employee involvement.

Effective communication as well as mutual listening are elements without which the relationship in the context of the crisis can suffer major imbalances. Effective communication in the context of the crisis means reciprocity, empathy and fusion.

Internal communication is essential in crisis situations because it is able to ensure cohesion and coherence for the organization [2]. These aspects are all the more necessary as today's organizations can be deployed over large geographical areas, with undefined boundaries, with members in different locations and socio-cultural contexts.

In general, internal communication in an organization has the effect, among others, of preventing the occurrence of negative individual or collective feelings such as insecurity, fear, anger, embarrassment.[3] In the context of the crisis, the lack of internal communication and, as a result, the emergence of such emotions are all the more dangerous. The stability of the organization can easily be affected by these elements. If, in routine situations, internal communication is an important necessity, in the context of the crisis, things become extremely important, even vital for the organization.

Internal communication is essential to the success of crisis resolution processes: the most effective support the organization needs can come from employees, former members and their families if they receive timely information and are made aware that it is part of the crisis solution. A common management mistake in resolving crises: although employees are one of the most important audience segments, they are often forgotten; or, worse, management erroneously assumes that they will participate without discussion and that they will do or say whatever is required of them. Instead, the lack of correct, sufficient, timely and fluent information during a crisis dramatically affects people's confidence in their own organization, thus jeopardizing the determination with which they should cooperate in resolving the crisis. [4]

Moreover, the lack of appropriate information can make members of the organization receptive to various rumors and also disseminate unverified information, which is one of the great dangers during crisis situations. One of the fundamental reasons for internal communication is to avoid the discrepancy between the extremely high interest of members eager to find out what is happening and the small amount of information provided by the organization, a discrepancy which inevitably generates rumors. [5]

Indeed, like other audiences relevant to the organization, employees have high expectations from it, but also of its leaders, in crisis situations. The members of an organization in such a situation expect their organization to provide them with protection, to show concern for their fate, to show understanding and sensitivity to their problems. Much of this hope can be met if the organization proves to be communicative, telling them in time what is happening, what will happen next, when these trials will end. Otherwise, if the organization does not communicate, they will do so anyway, using the information they have and the perceptions they have created based on them.[6]

At the same time, it is equally important during a crisis for leaders to show flexibility in thinking in order to succeed on the winding road to success and efficiency. Leaders need an open and flexible mind to explore any type of opportunity and approach, even unconventional. They must be sufficiently enlightened and open-minded to identify the possibilities that may arise beyond the obvious, even in unfavorable contexts. Most of the time, the crisis is an opportunity to reinvent, to adapt to new situations, contexts, people.

The ability to adapt is one within human nature, with the help of which humanity has survived and evolved constantly. So, there is nothing new or unknown. Evolutionist Charles Darwin said, "It is not the strongest or most intelligent species that survives, but the one that best adapts to change." In an ever-changing context, the ability to adapt and reinvent is the only sustainable competitive advantage that an organization can have. Organizations capable of adapting will thrive in uncertainty and chaos.

Companies led by leaders with an adaptable attitude will not complain about failures, they will recognize the situation, learn from mistakes and then continue to move forward.

When we talk about the adaptability of an organization, we automatically make an analogy with a person's flexibility. This is because adaptability or flexibility means being prepared at all stages of your career to adapt to new requirements or new context. These aspects are valid, at a personal level, but leaders have a great responsibility to meet these conditions. The adaptability of leaders influences the adaptability of each team member and, ultimately, dictates the adaptability of the entire organization.

Testing human adaptability and the ability to respond to difficult situations translates into resilience. It is utopian to believe that the activities of organizations have a rectilinear path, or that the environment in which things take place is a controlled one. Our times are becoming more and more uncertain, changes are happening quickly, an aspect that equally influences organizations, organizational cultures, but also people (leaders, but also employees).

Consequently, today's leaders assume that, in the organizational environment, nothing is more constant than change.

4. ASPECTS BY WHICH ORGANIZATIONS CAN BE SUPPORTED DURING CHANGE

However, there are certainly some levers that leaders have at hand to get through this uncertain period. In the following I will present some ways in which organizational leaders support the organization to adapt to change:

4.1 Agility to perceive and respond to signals.
In order to cope with the trend of change and to adapt quickly, organizations need to detect signals from the external environment, decode them, and take steps to adapt or reinvent their own organization. Adaptive organizations need to consider customized systems to make sure they get the right information because there are multiple sources of information, and most organizations have access to them.

4.2 The power to test
There are many elements that cannot be predicted and can often be discovered through experimentation and testing. Out of the desire to develop new products and services, most organizations experiment and test various improved variants of them. However, new approaches are needed in this regard, as the traditional ones are no longer as successful in our days of uncertainty. Therefore, competitors eager to adapt use a complex range of new approaches and technologies, especially in virtual environments, to generate, test and reproduce a greater number of innovative ideas faster, at lower cost and with a higher risk. smaller than their rivals can. *A few years ago, Procter & Gamble developed a Connect + Develop experimental model, using InnoCentive and other open innovation networks to solve technical design problems. [7]*

4.3 Giving up the conservative attitude.
It is difficult for a manager to cope with change and be open to it again if he shows a conservative attitude towards organizational success. For example, when there are clear signals that a product or service is not working, it should no longer be maintained. If an idea is no longer successful, investing in it is no longer justified. The power to give up certain products, services or routines is part of the change.

4.4 Don't be attached to a product in your organization

Failure is part of life and, implicitly, of the life of organizations. To adapt and cope with change you need to be able to easily move from one product to another, from one concept to another. It is vital that you do not become attached to a single product, even if it apparently ensures your success.

4.5 Flexibility in relationships with others.

In the organizational environment, the manager's relations with the team, but also with the people outside it, are extremely important and require large doses of flexibility. Working in an entrepreneurial environment, for example, requires adaptation to the needs of customers, to the needs of the people you interact with, but also to the particularities of the economic environment.

Adaptability is, in fact, a necessary skill for every manager, constituting his ability to manage a wide variety of situations and to recalibrate the organization when things do not work out according to the initial plan. For this reason, the adaptability of management must be a natural condition of any organization today, not just in the current situation, related to the epidemic of the new coronavirus. Organizations need to create environments that encourage knowledge flow, diversity, autonomy, risk-taking, information sharing and flexibility.

A truly efficient organization works because of the manager's ability to adapt to change. The organizational environment is dominated by unpredictable events and surprises. In other words, we do not have a static event, but some that can come in an unexpected way. Adaptability allows managers to respond to emerging elements and maintain competitiveness. Adaptability keeps the organization in a state of balance, allowing its members to evolve and remain competitive.

5. CONCLUSIONS

A well-known proverb says that the blockage is always at the top of the bottle. If we relate this proverb to the organizational environment, we will find that, in most cases, employees are not resistant to change, but are inefficiently led, guided, motivated by organizational leaders. We cannot discuss organizations that are resistant to change, but we can observe leaders who, through the leadership style used, train employees who oppose and resist change. However, there are also organizations recognized as having a high degree of adaptability, whose leaders manage to inspire others to open up and support change.

In an increasingly uncertain context, in a perpetual change, adaptation and reinvention are the only variables that can make the difference between organizations and can give sustainable competitive advantages to organizations that accept them.

Organizations willing to adapt will always have something to gain from uncertainty and chaos. The challenges of the current environment are multiple, and the ability of organizations to respond effectively to them is clearly dependent on the degree of adaptability and flexibility that their leaders and managers have. The absence of these traits always translates into panic, denial, indecision, short-term and inefficiency in the medium and long term.

6. REFERENCES

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