

## Organization Change Management in the Tire Manufacturing Industry in Malaysia due to the Covid 19 Pandemic

Ahmad Zemy Kamarulzaman<sup>CMILT</sup>

Student of Master In Management, Faculty of Management and Information System,  
Sultan Azlan Shah University, Kuala Kangsar, Perak, Malaysia

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**ABSTRACT:** Covid 19 or also known as Coronavirus Pandemic had been declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a Pandemic on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization. The virus was first identified in Wuhan China in December 2019 subsequently it has spread rapidly throughout the world. As at 11 April 2021, there was 135,057,587 cumulative cases Globally and 2,919,932 deaths recorded (World Health Organization, 2021).

Covid 19 have brought uncertainties throughout the world which have caused governments across the world to implement various degrees of restrictions including lockdown which have affected the business community on how they manage their daily business operations in lieu with the concept of Social Distancing, Work From Home and other SOPs that were created to ensure safety at work.

Companies must adapt fast to the ever-changing environment with the uncertainties and must implement new process to meet these uncertainties and in the same time must revise their organization vision and objectives. In the same time, people need, and requirements must also be seriously considered due to the anxiety that Covid 19 have created. New strategies must be created to ensure the companies stay resilient during the turbulent times and in the same time must ensure that the people wellbeing, and concerns are well taken care of.

**KEY WORD:** Covid 19, Pandemic, Change Management, Leadership, Tires

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### I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Governments throughout the world were caught “Off guard” with the Covid 19 Pandemic as most had thought that they will be able to manage the Pandemic efficiently. They did not realise the impact that the infection rates would have on businesses and the people perception of the virus itself. Furthermore, the impact was quite huge due to the various strategies imposed by the governments especially on movement restriction and border closing in order to contain the spread of the virus. The strategies that were adopted by the governments to “combat” Covid 19 have brought adverse impact to their nation economy due to lockdown that have been enforced by majority of the governments globally have cause consumer to stay at home and spending have been reduced drastically except for necessities goods and products.

Malaysia have not been spared from the impact and the Malaysian Government have put in place various strategies to cushion the impact of Covid -19 Pandemic. The first case was identified in late January 2020 when it was detected to have infected travellers from China arriving in Johor from Singapore on 25 January 2020 ((Sipalan & Holmes, 2020). The current infected case as at 15.04.2021 are 367,977 cases with 349,039 cases have recovered and deaths were recorded at 1,363 cases (Worldometer - Coronavirus, 2021). The Malaysian government have enforced 2 full lockdown and other various strategies to control the Covid infection rate. Due to these control measures, businesses in Malaysia have felt the negative impact towards their business.

Overall, the Malaysia GDP have contracted 5.6% compared with a growth of 4.3% in 2019, following the deterioration in all economic sectors because of several waves of Covid-19 infections, as well as the enforcement of various movement control order throughout the year (Bernama, 2021). In order to rectify the economy downturn, the Malaysian government have introduced a few stimulus packages which are intended to preserve its’ people welfare and good being, support businesses and strengthen the country economy. The economic stimulus package or measures are known “ESP2020” which was announced on February 27, 2020, “Prihatin Rakyat” which was announced on 27 March 2020, “Penjana” which was announced on June 5, 2020, “Permai” which was announced on January 18, 2021 and “Pemerikasa” which was announced on March 16, 2021 (Flanders Investment & Trade, 2021).

The various stimulus packages can’t help the country economy recovery if the people and business does not work along with the Malaysian government. Whatever it is, from the first day when Covid 19 have been declared in Malaysia, barring the political barriers, the government have received good cooperation from

the people and businesses as they realized the importance of being resilience during the turbulence times of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Even with the Covid 19 pandemic, the Malaysia Tire Market stood around USD 1.20 billion in 2019 and is forecast to register growth of RM 1.68 billion by 2025 (Research and Markets, 2021). This is in view of the increasing per capita spending of the people which have resulted in the upgradation of vehicles and hence inducing demand for technology advanced replacement tires on the country (Research and Markets, 2021). This have opened the door for the tire companies that have already been established in Malaysia with better business opportunities whereby the customer outreach is improved. However, the competition have become very fierce among the players in the tires industry by the addition of new products and dealers to meet the projected increase in demand.

In any case whatsoever, none of them have escaped the impact of Covid 19 and in order for them to meet their objectives of increasing their Sales and Customer base, they need to adapt to the sudden change in the environment. Companies that does not adapt faster or take their own time to implement changes, will not be able to meet their objectives or worst, they may not be able to sustain their business. The tires company must realize that, customers are reluctant to change their vehicles due to the uncertainties that was caused by the Covid 19 pandemic and as such, the sales of vehicles have dropped by 12.4% in 2020 when compared to 2019 (Focus2Move, 2021). Indirectly, the Tires Replacement markets have now increased as compared to the Original Equipment market. Change Management have now become the most important strategy that needs to be applied by all companies regardless of their industry to adapt to this new norm.

## **1.2 Change Management**

Companies globally are now having to adapt to the rapidly changes required in an organization due to the recent developments. Managers must realise that; changes are not just about process and how a company operates but it also encompasses the organisations' Goals and Objectives that can be achieved by designing and implementing new processes to ensure that the changes will be effective. Such changes include the company environment and resources to support the changes as the changes will impact the current process, systems and employees. The development for such changes must include a planning and testing stage, seamless and accurate communication, scheduling and implementing the change and a methodology to document the change and process by analysing and evaluate the effectiveness of the change that have brought to the organization. For any organization that wants to evolve and remain competitive, organizational change is an essential element that must be considered and a proper analysis needs to be done to identify if the change is needed and if so when and how to do it in the organization.

Change Management have now become the most common phrase in articles and various types of news media. Peter Drucker have commented as to whether it is about if one can manage change at all or merely lead or facilitate its occurrence within an organization (Drucker, 1999). In any change management plan, it must ensure a smooth transition during the changes and must ensure that employees are clearly guided throughout the whole change journey.

The human element is an integral part towards the success of any change management plan as it is the core part of such change management plan As stated by Courtney (2020) 70 percent of change initiatives fails due to the negatives employee attitudes and unproductive management behaviour as it is the employees themselves whom will decide if they are willing to accept and adapt to the changes. The technology advances made throughout the years is an important element as it normally accompanies and complement such changes.

Change management is not just about employees accepting the changes, but managers must be involved in such changes also and not be left out by the leaders. The leadership of any organization that intends to start the change management plans must ensure that clear communications and expectations is conveyed to all levels and must hear and be able to understand any mixed feelings or any contradictory ideas of any managers and employees may have.

## **1.3 Change Management in the Malaysia Tyre Sector due to Covid 19 Pandemic**

Tyre manufacturers in Malaysia have not been spared from the effect of Covid19 pandemic. Anchor companies such as Continental Tyres Malaysia, Goodyear Malaysia, Michelin Tyres and Hankook Tyres, to name a few, had to strategize their plant operations and retails strategies to minimize the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. If no changes were done immediately, their business will be badly affected as their reluctant to adhere to the SOP for Covid 19 will have a negative impact on their Brand Image.

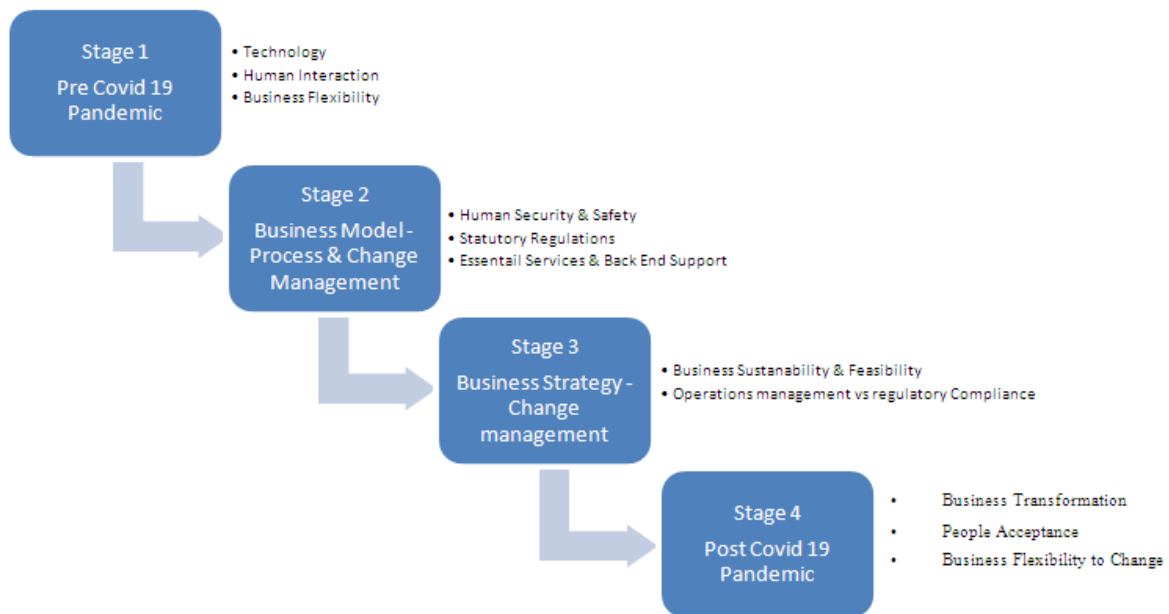
As stated by Vinay Kumardue to the speed and impact of the virus was so widespread, it has surprised all governments, business and the human race alike. No one have been spared from the effect of the Pandemic and it will be an everlasting impact on the ways organizations are going to work in the future. (Kumar, 2020)

In order to secure more market share, the companies need to be able to adapt to the current market situation which is more competitive. This is where, they must have an effective Change Management Strategy

whereby the strategy needs to be accepted willingly from the first point of the Supply Chain Process which may be from the Procurement of the raw materials or procurement of finished products from their associate companies till the finished products reaches the consumer.

Covid 19 greatest impact is on human which have directly impacted business as people are worried to go out and reluctant to be near to each other which indirectly impaired productivity and decrease consumer demand. As such, tyres companies in Malaysia needs to formulate urgent strategies to match the rapid changes.

Majority of the tyre companies in Malaysia had focused to adapt their current processes to adapt to the new norms especially on the human needs for Safety; be it their employees, suppliers, distributors & retailers and consumers. This directly translates to 4 stages which was addressed by them.



### 1.3.1 STAGE 1

In stage 1, organization regardless of their business models, must immediately adapt to the new norm in doing business. Failure to adapt to this new norm can be detrimental to their business. Companies that have invested in the Digital Technology have made inroads during these turbulent times. As stated by Preez, 2020 *What has become clear over this incredibly turbulent period is that companies that had been making savvy digital investments pre Covid 19 were the most resilient and best placed to weather the storm* (Preez, 2020).

Human interaction needs to be changed to meet the new norms whether be it for employees, suppliers or consumers. Here, Goodyear have changed their retail business to meet the new norm which translated to the flexibility of how they do their business. They had strategized their retail business with a new Business Strategy by calling it “Goodyear Zero Contact initiative”. Whereby technology was used to the fullest from locating the store till the work is completed for their customers.

Tyres company such as Continental Tyres Malaysia have also started the initiative to protect their employees and business from the impact of Covid 19 by establishing a Crisis Central Response Centres (CCRC) and limited all travelling on need to basis. Safety advice have been issued to all employees in their interest as employees are valuable assets to the company in order for it to sustain its’ business. Digital technology have been implemented immediately to facilitate Work from Home, the Sales & Marketing Strategies and Distribution Operations Automation which is available to Continental Malaysia and have helped them to ease through the Stage 1. (Continental Tyre , 2020)



Source: Continental Tyre PJ Malaysia Sdn Bhd

Whereas for Bridgestone Malaysia, they also always ensure that all of its’ employees fully adhere to the Covid 19 SOP when they are in the company premises. (Bridgestone, 2020)

Whereas, for Goodyear Malaysia, they quickly adapt the changes in their retail business model to retain their customer base and in the same time ensure their staff safety.(Goodyear, 2020)



Source: Goodyear Malaysia Sdn Bhd

During Stage 1, employees must be educated and supported throughout this unprecedented crisis which have caught everyone globally; surprised as none have anticipated the extent of the effect that Covid 19 Pandemic. Change Management plans have started to be developed to meet the needs to continue with their business so that it will be sustainable throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic yet will still relevant even after the pandemic.

### 1.3.2 Stage 2

In stage 2, the tyres companies must start to make the necessary changes to their business process to reflect with the Human Safety and Security elements whether in their Administrative Office or in their Distribution Centre. Bridgestone have ensure that employees and visitors (clients and suppliers) adhere to the regulated SOP which have ensure minimum contact and will adhere to the ruling on Social Distancing of Covid 19 (Bridgestone, 2020).

Even Continental Malaysia have ensured that their employees adhere to the SOP and additional safety measure were taken to ensure employee and visitors are protected whilst they are in the company premises.(Continental Tyre Malaysia, 2020).

During stage 2, employees, visitors and suppliers would have already been educated on the new processes and will have been able to adapt to the new environment including adhering to the Statutory regulations. The Critical Response Centres will have already been established to support the tyres companies’ employees, clients and Vendors so that business can still be sustained although with limited staff on site. Support

team and services will be ready to provide their assistance remotely by utilizing the technology that would have implemented whereas in case that physical presence is necessary, the regulated SOP will be strictly adhered to.

Distributions Centres will have already adapted to social distancing rules and the financial process should have converted to digitalization which indirectly will save administrative cost as hard copy requirement and physically approving of tasks is now digitalized. Even governments entities and agencies have also evolved and adapted to the digitalization technology.

As stated by Yassier, "Digitalisation, which is the process of leveraging digitalisation to improve business process, has created new trade opportunities for firms to sell more products to bigger markets, resulting in countries diversifying their export basket" (Mohammed, 2020).

Change management dictates that processes need to be revised and changed according to the current environment and is acceptable to all internal and external stakeholder and it must be sustainable in the long run for the strategy to be operational and cost effective. In Stage 1, majority of the changes in the business processes would have been developed and in Stage 2, the companies would have implemented the changes in its' process in order to sustain its' business during the pandemic.

Companies have now started their employees with Online training to ensure they will be equipped with the necessary skills to face the new processes and to adapt to the changes in the workplace and environment. Familiarization with the new processes is an important element in any Change Management to ensure its' success.

### **1.3.3 Stage 3**

The most important stage is stage 3. This is where, for the tires companies in Malaysia that have already implemented the new process in Stage 2, have been able to sustain their business amid the chaos that was created by the Covid 19 pandemic. Companies that did not adapted to the changes immediately, had faced business problems and with their operations strategies, as they are facing difficulties to sustain their business during the turbulent period. Remote working will be the normal practise and will not be any hinderence to the company operations as the employees will have familiarize and adopted to the new processes. Virtual Teams meeting and discussion between internal and external stakeholders will be the most preferred method instead of a face to face meeting. Support and back end service are ready to provide their assistance at anytime and mobility will not be an issue anymore as problems can be easily identified if it can be resolved remotely or at site.

The companies which have progress positively with their new process, now have the opportunity to expand their business globally. Especially with the various incentives provided by the Malaysian government in collaboration with the Malaysia Rubber Council whom have been tasked by the Malaysian government with the investment promotion of tyres and to pave the path for export with the goal to further expand the local tyre industry and strengthen its position in the global market. It is projected to expand at 3.4% per annum and worth US\$78 bil by 2030 (The Star, 2020).

Whilst the companies that did not implement Change Management Process to ride the turbulents waves that was brought by the Covid19 pandemic, have problem in sustaning their business and need to make drastic changes in order to sustain their business. This is apparent when Toyo closes down its' Silverstone Plant in Taiping, Perak, Malaysia due by the the effects of Covid 19 which have effectively pulled the plug on the business (Ismail, 2021).

With the introduction of digitalization in the tires companies operations retail business, customers will now be assured that their safety is given the upmost priority by the companies and as such will not be hesitant to proceed to the retails outlets. This is quite important as during this Covid19 pandemic, the replacement segment is increasing as compared to the Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM) segment as sales of new vehicle have dropped drastically owing to the pandemic. However, it is forecasted that the Sales of Tyres for both segment is expected to gradually increase from 2021 to 2026 (TechSci Research, 2021).



Source: TechSci research

Companies who have not adapted quickly to the change in the environment at the earlier stage of the Covid-19 pandemic will not be able to recover fast and will not be in a position to capitalize on the forecasted increase as they may just have started to revise their business model and have not implemented new processes that are required to meet the new challenges.

#### 1.3.4 Stage 4

In stage 4 i.e. Post Covid 19, tire companies that have moved ahead with the Change Management during the Pre Covid-19 pandemic will now have the opportunities to expand their business due to the vacant space that was left empty by the slow movers. They would have already implemented the Change Management process within their Supply Chain Management and will only have to manage and continue with the improvement to ensure their business feasibility in the current environment which may change abruptly as no one is able to predict when the pandemic will be able to be controlled to the minimum level possible.

These companies will then have the flexibility to change their processes to meet the current environment and will be able to adapt to the environment without any problems as all of their stakeholders, internal and external, including their customers have already accepted the changes made. Business has already been transformed as the companies would have already implemented the key initiatives that will have contributed to:

- i. Improved Work process – Activities & Process executed remotely, Digitalization Transformation, Clear & Transparent Leadership
- ii. Skilled Workforce – Workforce have attended on-line training to be equipped with new skills to meet the changes, more knowledge earned, right tools availability and motivated employees.
- iii. Improved Workplace and Organizational Culture - Work from Home, Effective Collaboration & Interaction, Safety at Workplace.

These tire companies will be able to adapt easily to the new environment although they may have faced an abrupt stop to their growth in the past during the Pre Covid stage, however due to their perseverance, acceptance and capability to adapt to the new environment, they have devised new strategies to ensure the feasibility of their business operations to meet the uncertainties. By adapting to the new environment, they have managed to break from the past state of inertia and made the necessary changes to their current technological and processes and with improvement in people interaction and acceptance to the new norms.

#### **1.4 Change Management and its' importance to the continuity of a firm during Covid19 Pandemic**

In this turbulent time, Change Management have become the most important factor that firms need to embrace due to the change in the environment caused by the pandemic. In his book, Peter Drucker have stated that everybody has accepted by now that change is unavoidable. But that still implies that change is like death and taxes – it should be postponed as long as possible and no change would be vastly preferable. But in a period of upheaval, such as the one we are living in, change is the norm (Drucker P. , 2012). Companies that does not adapt to the current environment will have problems in the continuity of their business as they did not do anything to improve their company processes to adapt to the changes.

As stated by Dr Dennis O'Grady, change has a bad reputation in our society. But it isn't all bad – but by any means. In fact, change is necessary in life – to keep us moving, to keep us growing, to keep us interested. Imagine life without change. Its loud static, boring and dull (O'Grady, 2006). Sometimes, changes are perceived as a strategy designed by management as a method for retrenchment whereas it is about the implementation and application of structured process with specific set of tools to achieve a desired outcome by leading the people side of change due to change in the environment whether be it internally or externally especially during this pandemic. The whole Supply Chain needs to adapt to the changes in order for the changes to be effective and not just the firm's employees as the objectives of the firm will have change from making higher profit to sustainability.

The change during Covid 19 pandemic is of utmost importance to any firm due to the uncertainties that has been brought together with it. Leadership skills to guide employees on embracing the changes requirement is very important in order to avoid the misunderstanding. Dr John Kotter have stated in his Kotter's 8 Step Process for Leading Change, whereby he emphasis that organizational leaders who are planning major change initiatives from scratch would be wise to consider his recommended 8 step process which are; there must be a sense of urgency created on the need for change, a firm and strong change guiding leadership throughout the organisation must be formed, create an overall vision for the people whereby it must easily understand and accepted with a strategic vision and initiatives, enlist a volunteer army, identify and remove the barriers and obstacles for the change implementation, create short term targets for the firm to have a taste of early victory, sustain the acceleration and institute the change (Kotter, 2012).

One of the most important elements to ensure the success of any changes is Emotional Intelligence whereby leaders with such skills, will be able to understand and manage his own emotions and as well those around him. The leaders of successful change management initiatives as often those whom often exhibit outstanding competency in personal areas such as self-awareness, self-management, empathy, social awareness and relation management. Emotional intelligence is the quality shared by effective leaders (Goleman, 2004). Leadership is the Central to institutional or organization change (Moore, 2009). It is the leader's responsibility to initiate the change and they have the responsibilities to identify he challenges and overcome and implement it in their organization.

In any Change Management process, there will be resistance and most of the time it will come from the employees whom will always feel threaten especially during this pandemic times as quite a number of companies throughout the world have had to close down their business. It has caused anxiety and fear among the employees due to this reason which can be true in some situation. In Malaysia. tires companies not spared as evident to the closure of the Silverstone Plant in Taping, Perak Malaysia as mentioned before because of the pandemic. Jeff Hiatt through his change management consultancy and learning centre i.e. Prosci, had created the ADKAR model whereby he has identified the five building blocks that brings a successful change which are; Awareness of the Need for Change, Desire to Participate in and Support the Change, Knowledge of How to Change, Ability to Implement the Change on a day-to-day basis and Reinforcement to Keep the Change in place (Hiatt, 2006).

As cited in an Article by The Boer Fellowship, Jim Hemerling explains during the TED (Technology, Entertainment & Design) convention in Paris 2016, the key to successful transformation is putting people first and explained that the most important strategic imperatives for the transforming of organizational change is by empowering and energizing the task (The De Boer Fellowship, 2020). As further stated by (Kouzes & Posner, 2007), leaders of organizations often lack the patience for getting things done because in addition to the organization's vision, is the sense of urgency. However, when followers are left behind due to the leaders' sense of urgency, the organization fails to realize the vision. Therefore leaders whom are identified as effective, will take into account the need and values of their followers to create a community of shared values that will ultimately lead to the generation of a common course of action (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This all relates to leaders with exceptionally "Emotion Intelligent" (EQ) skills whom are in a better position to spearhead the change especially during the pandemic time as everyone will display differential type of emotion and they will look at any changes made as an objective by the organization to terminate their employment.

In any situation, majority of the tires manufacturing companies have already ensured that their employees are well equipped with the required knowledge and are ready to adapt to the new norms once they

return to office. Changes in an organization is not just about managing the change during the offset but it is from the time the change is announced, the leaders must be able to manage the change processes by leveraging on change management best practices by effectively communication on the change and ensuring the stability, be willing to engage and connect with employees from all level, encourage optimism and resilience so that the human side of change can be effectively managed and create a team that will be able to adapt effectively for the changes that are in the pipeline.

Once changes have been implemented and processes are “running at it should” during the pandemic, companies should take a back step and analyse if there was anything that they could do, to make the change more better and how to incorporate the new process into their own Standard Operation Procedure. They should at all time monitor the progress and ensure the efficiency of the process to achieve the new vision and objectives

## II. CONCLUSION

Majority of the tires companies in Malaysia have done quite well to adapt to the current environment change which is not easily predictable. The leading players in the industry such as Goodyear Malaysia Berhad, Continental Tyre Malaysia Sdn Bhd, Michellin Malaysia Sdn Bhd, etc have manage to ensure the sustainability of their tires business in relation to the Malaysia economy by adapting to the changes fast.

The road ahead is not an easy one, as with Covid19 Pandemic, there is no clear path for anyone and any organizations regardless of the advances made in the fight against Covid 19. Even with the development of vaccines does not guarantee the protection for lifetime as majority of the manufacturers have stated that the vaccines developed can only offer protection for a least 6 months.

With the tire industry is forecasted to grow gradually in Malaysia from 2021 after facing the Covid 19 turbulence in 2020, the tires companies must ensure that any changes that was and is currently undertaken will be relevant to their current and future business model to ensure their business continuity. The tire companies should capitalise on their newly gained capability to change to examine the competitive developments such as business growth opportunities and even strategic mergers and acquisitions. They must ensure that precious opportunities and resources are not wasted just because they ignored the importance of managing change.

The leaders themselves must be willing to demonstrate their willingness to accept and embrace change and to do this they must be emotionally intelligence. As stated by Foltin and Keller (2012), preparing leaders in the domains of emotionally intelligence will enable them to engage with staff, build commitment, forge working relationships and increase staff satisfaction (Foltin & Keller, 2012). The leaders now have to ensure a much more resilience organization by using a more robust change management approach due to the Covid 19 pandemic. They have to address issues related to; how does the leadership is expected to manage their workforce expectations and well-being, how will the central response office can help to manage stakeholders and ensure efficient communication, how to maintain a clear and consistent communication strategy, how to adopt the new digital technologies and how to leverage on line learning to upskill the knowledge of their employees

The Covid 19 pandemic have spread rapidly throughout the world which have caused uncertainty to global economy and not to forget how the pandemic itself have different effect on people and organizations with various types of reaction due to such complexities and uncertainties which include the feeling of anxiety and well-being, the feeling of losing control and the conjectures around financial insecurity. Whatever the situation maybe, leaders and their organisation must be able to adapt to the changes faster and must be able to activate continuity plans for their business and must always consider an agile change management approach. With these efforts, it will assist the leaders to have the potential to ensure the transformation of their business to the required state and will also enable their people to always be able to adapt to the new environment.

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