

Implementing Good Pandemic Leadership

Abridgement of article and thoughts on implementing change

Pilvi Rehn

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Author:	Pilvi Rehn
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Supervisor (Arcada):	Anu Nyberg
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Abstract:	
<p>Background The Covid-19 pandemic has caused an increase in mental health issues amongst health care workers and contributing factors increasing these are reportedly, lack of personal protection equipment, lack of support, lack of good communication and lack of good leadership. Research concerning specific pandemic leadership is limited. Objective The study aimed to help leaders find ways to support team-members and employees maintain good health in situations like the pandemic and the questions asked are how leaders can support team-members' sense of Coherence. Method A two round modified e-Delphi was used to explore leadership experts' opinions on good pandemic leadership using the theoretic frame of Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence. Research questions asked were how leaders can support team-members 1. Sense of comprehensibility 2. Sense of manageability 3. Sense of meaningfulness Results A leader can support a team-members sense of Comprehensibility by informing about circumstances and phenomenon and clarify what is expected of the employee during the current situation. By paying attention to an employee's workload and signalling what is good enough, a leader can support the sense of manageability. How to support a team-members sense of meaningfulness had a low level of agreement amongst the experts. Change implementation demands planning change carefully and the result of the study should be taken into consideration when making changes in an organization.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Chapters 1-4 of this implementation plan is from the article Good Pandemic Leadership- How leaders can support team members sense of Coherence, written by Oscar Sundman and Pilvi Rehn and submitted as a Master Thesis for the degree program Leadership in Nordic Healthcare at Arcada. Chapters 5-6 are reflections on a possible implementation of the findings done by Pilvi Rehn.

The purpose of the above-mentioned study was to explore Finish leadership experts' thoughts on good pandemic leadership through the lens of Aaron Antonovsky's SoC-theory. The study aimed to help future leaders find ways to help team members and workers maintain good health in uncertain and unpredictable situations such as those caused by pandemics or other crises. The questions asked was how leaders can support team members' sense of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness.

2 BACKGROUND AND CHANGE NEED

Mental health issues are unfortunately a common theme among nurses and the research shows that the current COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a severe increase in reported cases of anxiety, stress and fear amongst nurses. (Arnetz et al., 2020; Cai et al., 2020; Kang et al., 2020; Rosa et al., 2020; Sampaio et al., 2020; Shukla et al., 2020; Spoorthy et al., 2020)

The most important factors that the workers have requested from the leader during the pandemic are; communication (Forster et al., 2020; Kaul et al., 2020; Rosa et al., 2020) being transparent (Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020; Orangefiery, 2020; Rosa et al., 2020) supporting the workers (Cai et al., 2020; Dirani et al., 2020; Goodare, 2020; Kisely et al., 2020; Rosa et al., 2020; Siddiqui et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2020) giving feedback, compensation and provide with accurate training (Kisely et al., 2020).

Effective local leadership during the pandemic has also been recognised to lower stress and burnout for frontline healthcare workers (Sangal et al. 2021).

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Framework for the study is Sense of Coherence, as it provides a frame addressing cognitive, instrumental, and behavioural components as well as the motivational component of working life. The three main dimensions of Antonovsky's SoC-theory (Antonovsky 1987) are:

Comprehensibility: a belief that things happen in an orderly and predictable fashion and a sense that you can understand events in your life and reasonably predict what will happen in the future.

Manageability: a belief that you have the skills or ability, the support, the help, or the resources necessary to take care of things, and those things are manageable and within your control.

Meaningfulness: a belief that things in life are interesting and a source of satisfaction, that things are worthwhile and that there is good reason or purpose to care about what happens. (Antonovsky, 1987)

Antonovsky explains that you can either have a high or a low level of SoC in each dimension. Although every dimension is important in the pursuit of greater health, Antonovsky states that meaningfulness is the most impactful one, and that it can help the other two dimensions go from low SoC to high. This means that one of the key factors for improved SoC is the feeling of doing something meaningful. When it comes to working life, work should be interesting and a source of satisfaction. (Antonovsky, 1987)

Sense of Coherence is not only used as a frame but also directly in the context of work (Lindström & Eriksson, 2005) and While Antonovsky meant that a person's SOC was mainly formed in the first three decades of life (Lindström & Eriksson, 2006) later research has found SoC to be modified by later experiences such as those in working life (Kalimo et al., 2003) and that it can be affected by interventions at least short term (Lindström & Eriksson, 2005).

4 STUDY METHODOLOGY, EXECUTION AND RESULTS

The good pandemic leadership study is an e-Delphi study. The Delphi technique with its ability to gather current and historical data not yet known, expose priorities and social

goals and of use when precise analytical techniques seem unsuitable and when the problem benefits from a collective, subjective judgement is well suited (Linstone & Turoff, 2002)

The core of the Delphi method consists of an anonymous expert panel, receiving questionnaires in rounds with feedback of answers after each round. This with the intention to achieve consensus regarding a certain issue. The original Delphi is described by many (Linstone & Turoff, 2002) (Keeney et al., 2011) (Grime & Wright, 2016) but for this study a modified and priority setting (Hasson & Keeney, 2011) e-Delphi was chosen.

Differing from the original Delphi the modification is done by pre-determining the rounds to two with the intention to gather the expert panel's valid opinions and enable reflections on other panelists' views and then set priorities, without the goal to reach consensus

4.1 Sample

The selected sample for the study is a non-probability sample with both convenience and snowballing effects (Keeney et al.,2011). The Criteria for being considered a panelist was one of the following three; based on profession such as leadership consultants, expertise in leadership training etc., based on leadership position, or based on academic achievements related to the subject of study. Sample size was determined based on manageability both regarding hand-picking panelists and resources to analyse data gathered, but regarding a sample size large enough to respect panel members' right to anonymity and the reliability of results.

4.2 Execution

Using online Delphi method software (Metodix Ltd, 2021) panelists were given information on the study and were invited to participate. The invitation letter was sent in September 2021 by email via E-delphi software used for the study and contained information on participation. Panelists had seven days to respond before round one was closed. One week was used for analyzing round one and round two was opened after the analysis was

completed and questions for round two established. Panelists were again invited to round two in the same way as to round one.

The first round of questions were open ended questions, based on the theoretical frame of Antonovsky's SoC theory. (Antonovsky, 1987). Four questions were to be answered in text only and one question (question 5) by answering on a desirable/probable scale. The questions were 1. What do you consider to have been the greatest challenge for leaders during the covid-19 pandemic related to leadership and workers wellbeing? 2. What do you consider to be a concrete way for a leader to encourage the workers sense of comprehensibility? 3. What do you consider to be a concrete way for a leader to encourage the workers sense of manageability? 4. What do you consider to be a concrete way for a leader to encourage a worker's sense of meaningfulness? 5. In your opinion, how desirable/probable is it as a leader to be able to support the workers SoC? For each question an explanation of the term according to Antonovsky's theory of Salutogenesis was provided to ensure accurate understanding.

The second round of the Delphi consisted of statements gathered in round one, and the panelists were asked to rank them according to what statement they considered was the most important/least important when a leader wants to support their team-members sense of coherence.

4.3 Results

Of 33 invited panelists, 16 logged in to the e-Delphi software for round one (48,8%) and 14/16 (87,5%) panelists from the first round answered round two.

Reading the results of this study through the lens described by Antonovksy above answers the research questions: *How can leaders support team-members 1) sense of comprehensibility? 2) sense of manageability? 3) sense of meaningfulness?*

The employee should receive relevant information about the situation and circumstances concerning the employee and his/her tasks. The leader should be including and clarify

what is expected during the circumstances and this will eventually help with further manageability.

The right resources will support manageability, but the leader should both monitor the employee's workload and understand how he/she is managing it. Often doing one thing well instead of many things half-good, will provide a further increase in manageability and hopefully meaningfulness when seeing tasks and goals completed.

As both the results concluded and one of the panelists commented, "...everyone finds meaning in their work in somewhat different ways" and the leader should listen to the employee and hear what drives and motivates the employee and help them put things in a bigger perspective. A higher level of influence over one's own work will enable the employee to find ways to make it more meaningful.

The main perceived challenges for our panelists were related to different aspects of remote working, a second theme was the instability making it hard to lead and a third regarding creating a sense of belonging. The second theme concerned the constant change and the difficulty to make plans. The third category concerned creating a sense of team feeling and belonging.

The second free-standing question in round one asked the panelists opinion on the desirability and probability of them as leaders being able to support their workers SOC. Eleven answered in total and 8 considered it being very desirable to be able to support workers SOC. Two answered that it was desirable and one very undesirable. All comments attached to the answers were positive to it being desirable suggesting the one answer of very undesirable could be by mistake. The question of probability received a larger spread, and one panelist was neutral, six believed it was probable and four considered it very probable that they were able to support their workers SOC.

5 IMPLEMENTATION THEORY

Change implementation is a well-researched area, well known theories stretch from Lewin's famous and discussed three step theory of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing

(Cummings et al. 2015) to Kotters (Kotter 1996) very well-known eight-step process and with a somewhat different view, we have Nadler and Tushman (Nadler & Tushman 1990) to name a few. Kotters eight stages are 1. Establishing a sense of urgency, 2. Forming a powerful guiding coalition, 3. Creating a vision, 4. Communicating the change vision 5. Empowering employees for broad-based action 6. Communicating the change vision 7. Consolidating Gains and producing more change 8. Anchoring new approaches in culture. (Kotter 1996) That is, when wanting to implement change and actually succeed at it, it is worth to think it thru before setting out to improve things.

5.1 Resisting change

When looking at change from the people view, there are reasons why it is resisted. I consider these reasons for resistance easily relatable with Kotters theory, as change according to Kotter is to be doomed if the people involved in implementing change lacks commitment to the matter. (Kotter 1996) And all reasons for resisting change involves reasons not to commit to the change. Loss of control is one reason. Potential change can be seen as a threat to one's autonomy, and that is why changemakers should invites the people involved in the change process to be apart of it, to give ownership over the change. (Moss Kanter 2012) Certainty of the process is another important thing, as change can feel scary if not knowing what and when. Simple steps and a timetable are required to try to overcome this reason for resistance. Surprising people with new things is not a good way to introduce change and it is also recommended to use old familiar ways if possible. People responsible for the old ways can feel ashamed when it's time to move on to new things and their hard work is made old news, and so this is good to take into consideration. Old grudges are also good to remember and reconcile before moving into new. Being afraid if the new will be too difficult, is also a common reason for resisting change. A new software can be frightening if it-skills are outdated and assuring that there is opportunity and help to learn the new is important. When implementing change, it is important to map all stakeholders as change can have ripple effects hard to see at first. Maybe the change disrupts in a larger scale than first intended? Finally, some change can involve real threats like making someone abundant. When threats are real, honesty, transparency and fairness is recommended (Moss Kanter 2012)

6 IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDY RESULTS

Study results suggests that communication is a key element in good pandemic leadership. How does a leader or an organization implement communication? In a practical matter, implementing communication could be a deliberate move towards an organizational culture that communicates in an effective manner and an organization putting effort into communication and understands the value of it. Hopefully, the results of the study can result in organizations and leaders taking the effort to step back and review how well they have succeeded and how the structures of the organization is ale to support good pandemic leadership and what changes that could be a move towards better leadership. When reflecting upon the organization where I have worked during the pandemic situated in health care, I can't help but to think about how leaders could support workers manageability by communicating what is good enough. In many places in health care, nothing has been enough, and the communication has been singularly, you must do it, even if it is too much. Because there is no one else. The disrespect for health care workers boundaries has caused much damage and I am afraid that we have not seen ow much yet. So implementing good pandemic leadership can not be something we do not have time to implement or think about, it is something that we can't afford not to implement.

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