

**UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF E- LEADERSHIP:  
HOW TO LEAD PEOPLE AMID COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN  
FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY: THAILAND**



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Thematic paper  
entitled  
**UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF E- LEADERSHIP:  
HOW TO LEAD PEOPLE AMID COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN  
FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY: THAILAND**

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ABSTRACT

In the digital era, there has been continuous digital technology development in Thailand especially during COVID -19 times. It's undeniable that information technology has played an important role and fundamentally changed how people work in almost every industry. Therefore, e- leadership could be identified as complex challenges for many organizations in Thailand. Since most of the food and beverage industries tend to rely more on traditional leadership. The researcher was then interested to explore the difficulties and learn how to lead people during crisis and social distancing. This paper used the qualitative method by interviewing with leaders from 3 large food and beverage organizations in Thailand. An important finding in this paper is that many large food and beverage organizations in Thailand were not ready to deal with this unexpected conditions and most of the leaders were unprepared to this changing work environment context. So, the role of e-leadership became the challenges but needed for organizations to retain its performance. In addition, this paper will also discuss the recommendation that e- leaders would require for success including the technology that will further support the working condition. This paper concluded that e-leadership is required to keep the company running and will seize opportunities to build competitive advantage strategies in the future.

KEY WORDS: E-leaderahip/ Covid 19 Outbreak/ Food and Beverage Industry/

23 pages

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 health pandemic has hit almost all countries in the world, including Thailand. It is considered to be one of the historic turning point that brought about the new social and economic norms, triggering a new human era. COVID-19 has completely changed landscape of humanity in term of behavior and lifestyle. This rapid spread has a very concerning effect on economic consequences globally and most of the businesses in different way. Food and beverage industry is also one of many industries that have been impacted from this outbreak, caused enormous losses in many sectors. People have been suggested to maintain “social distancing” from the government policy, leading to lower traffics to eat at the restaurants and purchase goods. The overall business environment has placed the negative impact towards the performance of the company. To respond to government policy, many organizations have to adopt work from home practices. This condition has changed the work culture of many Thai organizations. The technology become the essential part in enabling and empowering people to work from different locations. People are forced to work more online to keep distancing while maintaining their effective performance amid the outbreak.

Some organizations have been surprised and are not ready to face this condition. Under the dark of uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity during the crisis time, leadership comes to play the big role in order to lead and face with rapid or high-impact decisions within a limited working environment setting. Leadership has become an increasingly difficult in today's globalized world. The role of leadership became critical for organizations to maintain the organizations performance and business continuity. Remote work, separated teams and distance management were unusual experiences for every manager considering as new and huge challenges since Thailand holds on towards traditional hierarchies and collectivism culture which

normally require physical presence and face-to-face interaction as part of social norm. Hence, it's interesting to explore what are the difficulties that each leader has to face and how to respond to the sudden changes in order to keep the business running as well as keep the team safe and well cared for amid COVID-19 outbreak in food and beverage businesses. In addition, the use of information technology must be adopted to facilitate the distance work practices. From the academic point of view, the study of the relationship between technology and leadership was initiated a long time ago. In fact, the practice of leadership with the use of electronic tools to manage the business (or called e-leadership) is expanding rapidly (Van Wart et al., 2016) due to the technology advancement. Therefore, an effective e-leadership is needed to promote companies' adaptability and continuity during the time of crisis.

The initial question arises on what are the challenges for organizational leaders in managing and leading their people during the COVID-19 pandemic in food and beverage industry? This paper will discuss about how to lead people in times of crisis, learning about the leaders' challenges towards e-leadership and personal learning experiences to achieve their companies' goals, fight against the intense crisis management to manage remote work and their ability to influence the team as a whole.

### **1.1 The Question of this Study**

E-Leadership: What are the challenges to lead people more effectively in times of crisis?

### **1.2 The Objective of this Study**

- To explore the challenges or difficulties in the form of e-leadership on how to lead people in times of crisis
- To identify the factors that influences and difficult for the manager to lead people remotely in the time of crisis

- To suggest other related industries in large enterprises to re-design and implement the right leadership management approach to achieve their companies goals more effectively during the time of crisis.

### **1.3 Research Scope**

In this research, the secondary data will be obtained from the related case study and public research journal. In addition, the primary data will be gathered through in dept interview to describe in deep detail of the issue using interactive questions (open-ended) to get the information from the potential respondents who are in food and beverage industry and have the direct experiences in leading people in the time of COVID-19 pandemic. The potential respondents are 8 potential manger or directors who have been working in food and beverage industry based in Thailand for more than 10 years and are in the position to lead many employees to get through tough time of crisis. Each director will represent different group of businesses under the umbrella of food and beverage industry which will be divided into 3 groups as below.

- Restaurant business
- Food business
- Beverage business

### **1.4 Contribution of the Study**

The main focus of the study is contributed to any educational organizations and medium to large enterprises under the food and beverage industry, Thailand context.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Leadership and E-Leadership**

Leadership is the term that defines the use of power and series of key exercises that needed to influence a person or a group of people on certain issues. Several past studies on leadership focused on how to achieve, manage, and influence the followers to be able to get in the path of successful outcome (Northouse, 2016). Leadership is the process of social interaction in which a leader tries to influence the behavior of employees aiming at achieving the goals of the organization (Alberto Silv, (2016). Apart from positional authority, leaders' ability to influence may come in form of charisma, attitude, behaviors, specific skills or certain style. Different groups of people require different types of leadership in relation to influence and power. Later in twentieth century, challenges of technology disruption, corporate culture, new generation staff and the nature of authority within culture have dramatically and rapidly changed the way people lead (Waldman, D. A., Ramirez, G. G., House, R. J., and Puranam, P. 2001).

Information and communication technology (ICT) has played a major role on businesses and society nowadays; however, the adoption of Information and communication technology is somehow new and has not been well adopted into leadership practices in many traditional organizations (Van Wart et al., 2017). The study of Zaccaro and Bader 2003 stated that today 's organizational leader got tackled by the rapid changes of digital disruption and the increase of global dispersion of customers, stakeholders and suppliers that require more frequent interaction and connection across the globe. In order to response to such changes, e-leadership has been introduced and refers as leaders who conduct the leadership exercises mostly though electronic channels. In additional, Avolio, Kahai, and Dodge (2000) defined e-leadership as — leading from a distance to change attitudes, feelings, thinking,

behavior, and/or performance over individuals and/or group of people with the use of advanced information technology. E-leadership could help the leaders to achieve the assigned goals as traditional leadership through advanced information technology. (Iriqat & Khalaf, 2017) It helps the leaders to communicate with their staff from the remote area or different locations, but it's also important for the leaders to train employees to know how to use new technology to support their needs and build relationships (Hertel, G., Geister, S., & Konradt, U. 2005). Therefore, e-leadership described as a very important factor when leading in a virtual environment.

## **2.2 Related Variables for E-Leadership Challenges:**

### **2.2.1 Virtual Communication**

It's important and critical for the leaders to have the ability to communicate the intention to their subordinates and that their subordinates understand the intention and be able to do the jobs accordingly (Walvoord et al. 2008). Virtual communication is non-face-to-face communication; it allows people interact with others without being in the same room with the use of technology. Virtual communication became the new norm in many organizations as the technology has evolved, allowing for access to people worldwide. Then it has become the major challenges when it comes to communication for some traditional organization as well as if the communication is not enough and managed poorly between the leader and subordinates, it could lead to the negative result on that particular area of works, caused by misinterpretation of the communication as well as communication delays (Gibson and Gibbs, 2006). Lee (2014) states that it's the responsibility of the leaders to ensure that the communication technology is being applied and the team members are well-trained and have sufficient knowledge and information on the communication technology when needed to facilitate their work when interacting within the team. The study of D. Robey, H. M. Koo, and C. Powers 2000 also states another interesting aspect upon the difference in generation and time as people born in a decade ago were



not familiar with the use of advanced information technology, but it will soon become essential part of their daily work life within a few decades. It is therefore essential that leaders are excellent communicators and understand that communication is not merely about communicating the message, leaders need to understand how knowledge can be shared in the most effective and efficient way (Walvoord, A., Redden, E., Elliott, L. and Coovert, M. 2008).

### **2.2.2 Decision Making**

Decision making in the crisis refer to 'what do we do now' which is triggered by each scenario of events and mostly in crisis time and directly experienced by the leader (Stern & Sundelius, 2002) Overcoming the businesses challenges require an interdependent series of decisions to be made in a timely manner under complex and uncertain environment (Deverell, E., & Olsson, E.-K. 2009). Vera, D., & Crossan, M. (2004) suggested that the decisions that made during crisis time contain uncertainty which could lead to ineffective result and negative outcomes. The related literature also stated that making decision under crisis include extreme insecurity, vulnerability, high cost (including loss of money), negative outcomes, and bias among related stakeholders. During crisis, problems with leaders' decision-making have become more intense as business environment grows more complex, the full of failure-prone decision-making practices tends to increase. (Kay and King, 2020)

### **2.2.3 Remote Management**

The work environment has suddenly changed and forced many organizations to adapt the new remote setting which have led to new forms of supervision that monitor the work progress of their staff in indirect form (Sewell and Taskin, 2015). With the use of proper technological information systems, it allows the staff to connect, update and inform their manager more autonomous (Walvoord et al. 2008). Since traditional leadership method is no longer applicable in current context, people are required to extend their collaboration outside their own department and outside their own organization and it's impossible for leaders to control and monitor

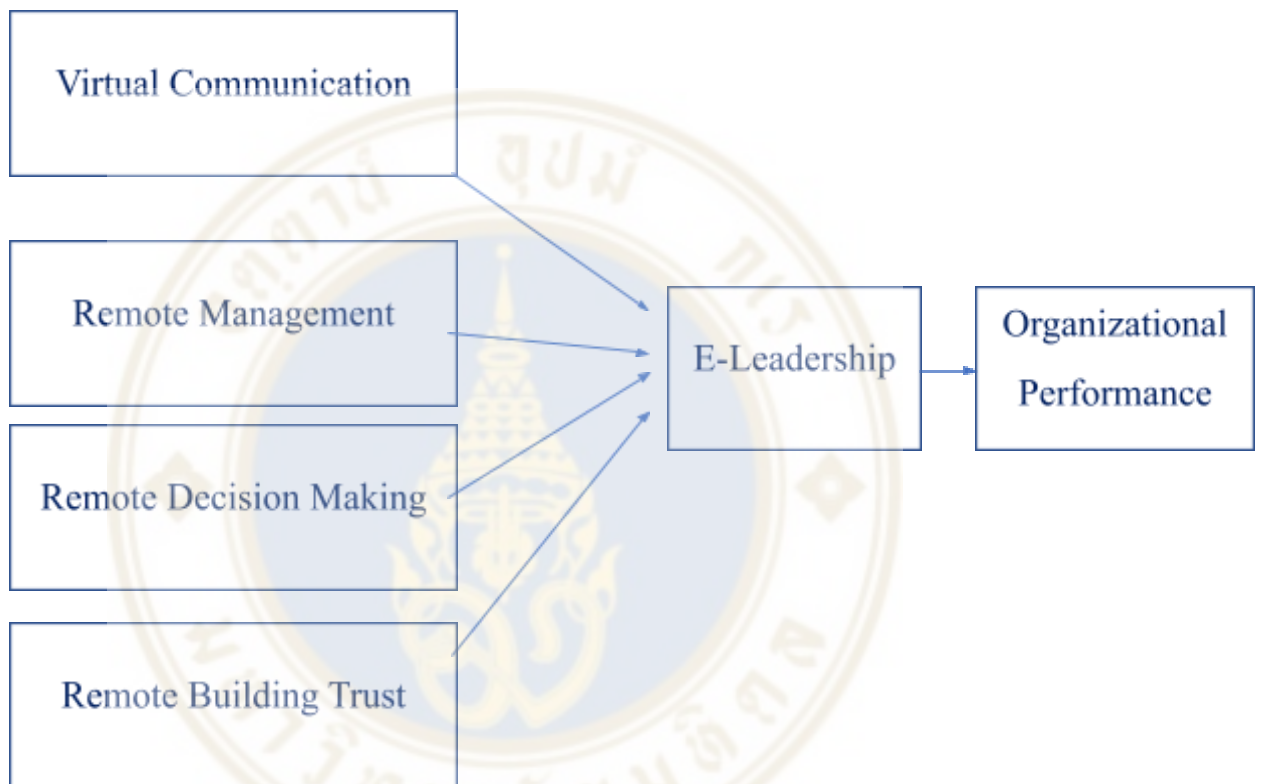
everything on their own (Mahler, 2012). According to the study of Offstein and Morwick, 2009, it is essential to allocate the authority necessary to empower the workers and fulfil their tasks including decision making. even if it sometime leads to failure. Thus, the leaders should display and act as a role model and behave in the way that they expect others (followers) to follow and do.

#### **2.2.4 Building Trust**

Trust is an emotional bond between one person to another person's mind depending on the form of interactions. (S. L. Jarvenpaa, 1998) Trusting under the new work environment is one of the most challenging issues of e-leaders (P. L. Hunsaker, and J. S. Hunsaker, 2008). Focusing on establishing trust in the first stage under the new environment helps the team that work separately to share their beliefs and perspectives effortlessly. Kanawattanachai and Yoo (2002) stated that trust is essential element that determines the employee performance and success of a task in a virtual work setting. Trust building is at the core of leadership and working remotely truly challenged managers' ideas of how to build trust. Thus, it's important to build trust and connect with the members consistently in the first stages when adapting to the new working environment will gives e-leaders the chance to solve the trust problems.

### 2.3 The Research Model

In conclusion, there are various challenges faced by leaders to lead and manage employee and business performance related to virtual communication, remote management, decision making and trust establishment. The model of this study is developed and illustrated below in **Figure 2.1**.



**Figure 2.1** Research Model

Based on the related past study, this research defines e leadership as a leader who adopt the technology information to communicate, manage and lead the team as well as business operation remotely in food and beverage industry during crisis period. The paper will focus on investigating and accessing leaders' difficulties in term of virtual communication, remote management, decision making and building trust as well as other related information that link to these unusual challenges.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

According to the research objective, this research can identify that the most challenging factor are communication, remote management, decision making, and building trust. These factors have the relationship with main questions, bringing about the challenges that may affect many leaders to lead the team and organization amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **3.1 Data Collection**

In this study, in-depth information will be gathered and conducted through qualitative method to access and get the information from the selected respondents who have expert experiences and insights into crisis management, ensuring that the research interest were pursued and carried on. The semi structured interview will be set up separately based on each person's availability and is conducted via **phone call** due to current social distancing regulations.

#### **3.2 Research Sampling**

The targeted respondents of this study are director or manager who is currently leading the team and organization in food and beverage industry based in Thailand. They have the real experiences to lead the team and handle any unexpected situations occurred during COVID-19 lockdown. These leaders must have leadership experiences more than 10 years in food and beverage industry and manage at least 5 members in the team. To justify the level of data accuracy and taking limited resources into account, the selection sample is proposed at 8 people at the maximum for this study.

### 3.3 Individual Interview

8 leaders in food and beverage industry (Table 3.1) in Thailand are asked to give an individual interview one by one regarding the difficulties or challenges that they faced and struggled during the lockdown management. The researcher approached only the top management level with more than 10 years experiences to ensure that their answers are not imaginary, reliable, and based on their real personal experiences. The interview open-ended questions are translated to Thai questions as local language and then reverse from Thai language to English answer as the interviewee preferred to speak in their local languages. They are willing to answer longer with more details. During the interview, the voice is recorded with note taken and take 30 minutes on average to complete each interview. For confidentiality purpose in this interview, each interviewee will be given the initials name of FB1, FB2, FB3, FB4, FB5, FB6, FB7 and FB8 accordingly. The questions for the interview are developed based on the related literature presented in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.1 List of selected interviewees**

No.	Name	Leader Experiences (years)	Team members (ppl)	Position	Industry group
1	FB1	17 years	15	Director	I.T.
2	FB2	11 years	5	Manager	Food Retail
3	FB3	18 years	12	Director	Cafe
4	FB4	15 years	20	Manager	Non-Alcohol
5	FB5	12 years	7	Director	Public Relation
6	FB6	20 years	21	Directors	Alcohol
7	FB7	11 years	6	Manager	Advertising
8	FB8	13 years	17	Director	Human Resources

**Table 3.2 List of interactive questions for qualitative analysis**

<b>Questions for leaders</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is this pandemic affecting the way your organization operates?</li> <li>2. How have you responded to the situation with Covid-19 from a personal and professional perspective?</li> <li>3. How do you manage yourself not run dry in times like this?</li> <li>4. How are you managing your management teams throughout this crisis?</li> <li>5. Due to COVID-19 crisis, the shift from traditional leadership to a more agile (digital) of leadership is unavoidable. How do you deal and handle such changes?</li> <li>6. Do you think leading food or beverage businesses are different from other businesses? If so, what are they in your perspective and why do you think it's different?</li> <li>7. How have you developed the right set of planning scenarios to execute under this crisis?</li> <li>8. For you, what matters the most for business continuity and building resilience –in the future?</li> <li>9. What is your biggest piece of advice to give any businesses out there?</li> <li>10. Is there anything else that you're doing in terms of preparing for the future that you hadn't been doing previously?</li> </ol>	
<b>Questions for leaders in each factor</b>	
Part 1: Virtual Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How can you be sure to communicate effectively with the team at times like these?</li> <li>2. Do you have standardized communication systems and protocols to ensure clear and transparent communication with all stakeholders during crisis? If yes, please elaborate more in detail.</li> <li>3. As a leader, how to create a common understanding of what needed to be done and manage the feeling of losing a grip among your team during crisis?</li> <li>4. How would digital communication impact you in term of leadership and how do you overcome these challenges with team?</li> </ol>

**Table 3.2 List of interactive questions for qualitative analysis (conts.)**

<b>Questions for leaders in each factor</b>	
Part 2: Remote management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How have you been keeping your employees motivated?</li> <li>2. What matters/issues do you think it's the hardest for you to manage your employees and business during this outbreak?</li> <li>3. Do the organizational rules change at all in this uncertain time and how do you manage to this change with your team?</li> <li>4. How would you ensure the well-being of your people and the safety of your productive assets in the event of a crisis?</li> <li>5. What matters/issues do you think it's the hardest for you to manage your employees and business during this outbreak?</li> <li>6. Do you think the new way of working puts a lot of pressure towards your team? If yes, how do you help them to get out of this pressure and work more effectively?</li> </ol>
Part 3: Remote Decision Making	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. During this pandemic, as a leader, you need to be flexible, agile, and decisive, how do you process each decision-making among cross-functional?</li> <li>2. How can you be sure that each decision you make is going to give you the positive result?</li> <li>3. If you make the bad decision, how would you handle the consequences? And how would you communicate this to your employees and related stakeholders?</li> <li>4. What is the most difficult decision that you need to make during this crisis time and why?</li> </ol>
Part 4: Remote Building trust	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you think trust is important to drive the team and business? Please explain why.</li> <li>2. How do you build trust through activities online? Do you find it difficult or experiences any negative impact from this? Please explain in detail.</li> <li>3. Do you provide any commitments with your team during this complex time? If yes, what are they?</li> <li>4. How do you display work-trust towards to your team under this uncertain environment?</li> </ol>

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

In the research of **‘Understanding the challenges of E- Leadership: How to lead people amid COVID-19 outbreak in food and beverage industry’**, individual interviews were conducted to deeply understand their views and obtain certain qualitative data. Regarding to the research findings, e-leaders face diversified challenges which are typically related to trust building, team management, distanced communication, and problems arising from new cultural adoption with diversity. The result of the interview will be shown and described in 4 parts as following:

#### **4.1 Adapting to new way of working (work online)**

The outbreak of COVID-19 has affected the culture organizations, leadership and the way people usually perform their work in different dimensions. The directors and managers in large food and beverage industry were invited to give the interviews. The respondents are titled with manager level and above taking care of more than 5 team members within the different departments such as Human Resources, Advertising, Food Retails as well as Public Relation and so on. They all have been working in food and beverage industry for more than 10 years and have been leading team for more than 5 years. Their demographic background and work experiences were varied and not related.

Regarding their adjusting process, they all admitted that they usually (before the Covid situation) set up the meeting with face-to-face interaction every Monday to check up on team progress and conditions. Online meeting was something that they were not familiar and lack of know-how, even information and communication technology has long been acknowledged in term of its benefit and functions. Furthermore, proper tools and systems were not ready to support, use and



share among the team in the beginning. 6 out of 8 leaders stated that most of their jobs were based on ground which mean that they must make physical present and interaction to give an order and control the workflow. However, under the time of crisis, they need to manage, approve, and make decision via online channels, learning on how to be the host of the meeting and share information online. In addition, 3 of leaders said that they were often get distracted to focus by the surrounding at home since they have kids playing around.

‘It was the hard time for us all. We never think this kind of situation would happen and it was sudden for all of us. The approval process still needs physical sign and place the approval in the system which can only be accessed at computer in the office. The senior management and the company are now working hard to make it easy for the employees to continue working. The company already hired the software developer to start working on this project. **(FB2, Food Retail)**

‘This is not just in the normal course of events, but we are in times of crisis. Most jobs in our department needs events and press release to show output which mostly are on ground activities such as CSR activities to help the society. When everything needs to be online, it added up more stress to me because I never touch and experiences online working. It needs me to control and spread overall works when we need to develop new projects. I personally must learn on how to set up the meeting online via Webex application. I never use this application before, but it’s important for me to learn’. **(FB5, Public Relation)**

The overview of the first part finding is that their organizations were not ready to handle this situation due to unprepared of both tangible and intangible resources. 7 out of 8 leaders never expected this kind of situation before and they never had experiences of working via online at all since they prefer to work traditionally. 1 of the leaders said that he used to work via online from his previous company. Many organizations must adapt to the new way of working about how to manage and lead each function to work effectively under the time of crisis.

## 4.2 Dealing with diversity among team members

Another interesting aspect is **diversity**. Diversity in teams is typically interpreted by factors such as ages, gender, culture, geographic location, different practices, and values. There was a new wave of younger generation. These young people are the new faces of the company and have been played extensive roles which have influenced the performance of the organizations. However, the pain point for them is that they were new to the company and it's difficult for them to connect and build the relationship with other people both inside and outside organization since they had no chance to greet and know other people. Additionally, this generation tends to consume news from social media and compare their work environment with their friends. This means that their views and thought are within their circle and less likely to expose to wider and mature views. Under the time of crisis, the new generation would have the low opportunity to get to know other people in the company. It might add on some difficulties for this young people to get the work done or get any assistances from other department. It would also put more pressure and stress on them leading to job dissatisfaction and demotivation. As a leader of the team, it's important to pay special attention to them and how to blend them into the organization's wheels and keep productivity going or has no effect on work productivity. 6 of the leaders agree that this is considered as of the challenges that they must cope with to get the business running under time of crisis.

‘We recruited new faces to the team. They were new graduated and some with few years of work experience. We need to train and teach them on what to do, but with remote setting. It was quite challenging in term of allying everyone in the team on the same page. **(FB7, Advertising)**

I have to say that age-diverse within the organization started to show its effect. This is the new challenges for us as a leader to learn their values, thought and specific traits of each person due to ages differences and find a way to blend them in the teams. One of the ways is to have greeting session for newcomers to get to know other people in the company including different department. **(FB6, Alcohol)**

### **4.3 Communicating effectively from a distance – cybersecurity and digital communication skills**

Leaders obviously need effective communication skills to deal with people within internal and external environment. Under the situation of social distancing, it's also certain that the form of communication would require certain tools and system to facilitate the process such as hi-speed internet, laptops and Webex application to digitally and virtually connected. Six of the managers placed the concern over confidentiality of digital communication since they were worried that the confidential information and data such as new product launched, exclusive online campaign or customers information will leak to public or even get hacked. They further supported that they understand and well-aware that their organization systems don't have high level of cyber security to protect the data leaking and hacking if any. Most leaders have reduced the level of trust in communicating from distance with the use of information technology. They expressed that this is one of the factors that make e-leadership harder to accomplish.

Besides the system, the knowledge on how to effectively use digital communication among each member in the team were varied. When they work at office, they are not responsible to find the solution to any technical difficulty that has occurred. Other people will fix for them. Thus, some people were very good, but some people are having hard time to use such tools since they never learn to understand or fix the issues before. When the systems behave in erratic way, some of them were blank and don't know how to fix it. This would certainly have an impact on the effectiveness of the performance of team and the organization respectively.

'Usually our work is paper-based. When we need to work from distance, we need to adopt digital communication to slow the job. It's true that digital communication helps us to stay connect with stakeholders at various levels, but I don't trust my company's system since it has not been well developed. I don't encourage my team to send me any files, because I am afraid that the confidential data could be hacked during transmission. **(FB8, Human Resources)**



‘I set the schedule with my team to have online meeting to check their progress and communicate any updates that happened within and outside our organization. I think it’s important for your team to know and acknowledge on what is going on. Some of my team said that it’s hard to use email and the messaging application. They are struggled when the internet network is not good, the voice will be gone, and they lost focus. Thus, I encourage my team to conclude what they understand after the meeting in one short paragraph and upload to team portal. **(FB4, Non-Alcohol)**

‘One of my team member once experienced notification of error from excel program that something was wrong, she was panic and just leave it silent. I didn’t know what happened until I followed up her work. She said that she has not finished it because the program was error. This is one of the things that keep the work delayed and unproductive. Thus, I need my team to report any technical issues immediately to smoothen the workflow. **(FB6, Alcohol)**

#### **4.4 Creating enthusiasm virtually (Team motivation)**

Almost all eight leaders in the current crisis situation stated that they were in very difficult time in determining the business strategy and managing team’s works. This problem arises due to limited resources and enforced regulations regarding the social activities to reduce the spread of infection of World-renowned COVID- 19 pandemic. When people are engaged in low interaction and spent most of their time on electronic devices, they are likely to engage in grinding loneliness of working from home and it would consequently lead to reduction in employee’s motivation and satisfaction to work. Hence, the leaders must find the ways to manage their business and encourage their employees to stay enthusiasm and keep them optimistic from the distance. 6 out of 8 managers are encouraging more greeting and social talk within the team. Each member can share their personal life, funny story, and good moment to bring out more positive vibes. Additionally, they can take lunch breaks with their

colleagues over unofficial chat and video call like they used to do when they are working at office. The objective is to create engagement, motivate companionship among team and maintain job satisfaction and productivity.

‘I know that everyone in my team has to adopt working from home and worked on laptops all day in small bedroom which is not good in the long term. Working with the computer is the requirement of our jobs. However, I think social interaction is also important. When they work at office, they can chat and make fun with their teammate or hang out during lunch time. One of my team members has talked to me of being depressed and isolated privately. I think this could reduce their job satisfaction and affect the quality of the work in the future. I understand the issue and try to help them. I believe that talking to someone who you trusted like buddy could help eliminate the pain of being isolated. So, I was thinking to have buddy for my team to support each other in every work- related issues’. **(FB1, I.T.)**

‘I always motivate my team to chat and gossip with their peers after work or during break no matter inside or outside colleagues. I am afraid that they will lack of social interaction and connection which could affect the job performance in the long run since our job really required physical and social interaction in every part of the jobs. It’s one of the way to keep our team members optimistic and active. **(FB5, Public Relation)**

#### **4.5 Building trust from distance**

First, all leaders admitted that they have different level of trust towards different person in the company. In trust-building, several challenges were expressed. Normally, people who have been with the organization for a long time will gain the higher credit of trust from the leader. On other hands, the newcomers who just joined the company for a year would need to prove themselves in order to earn higher level of trust from the leader. The obvious gap between traditional and e- leadership seems to be that no physical interaction and facial expression are shown and working method is said to be differ. Thus, mutual trust played a key role in successful virtual working

environment which mean that trust is seen more important in virtual setting than traditional setting under time of crisis. 7 out 8 leaders admitted they like to check and monitor the newcomers since they were not sure whether they would complete the tasks accurately and properly or not. They said that they could not see them physically and struggle to trust that their employees were indeed working at home especially for the newcomers who have been working in the company for less than 1 year. Consequently, they informed their team to be available at all times which could affect their work-life balance and cause more job stress. Showing low level of trust towards employees reflected in form of low job satisfaction and productivity.

‘When it comes to work remote, it’s obvious that I need to trust and believe that my team can deliver same quality of work as they perform in the office. I have to say that I believe those who have been with me for long can do the task as assigned and deliver on time. But for the member who just recently joined. I still have some doubt, but I try to share my idea and experiences to them. I am honestly open and stay around for 24/7 if they want to reach me. I want them to come to me if they have any problems. So, I can understand them more. Most important part is not to check their location or what are they doing. I think that would make them feel more pressure and want to stay away. **(FB3, Non- Alcohol)**

“I believe that everything starts with good intention and willingness. As a leader, it’s important to demonstrate trust and keep your team posted and aware of all related issues as well as support them. If you trust your team member, it won’t matter where they work. Make a move if they started to act or behave in such an unfavorable way, but ensure to teach them and make learn from this mistake in polite way. **(FB5, Public Relation)**

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Conclusion**

##### **E-Leadership in Thai Food and Beverage Industry**

This paper is proposed to explore the challenges of e-leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic that forced organization's leaders to switch their traditional leadership style to be more touchless and digitalize. E-leadership is a new form of leadership that requires the leader to achieve same objectives in digital manner. The role of information technology has considered to be the solution for maintaining organizational performance. Most of the jobs in food and beverage industry are based on ground and paper based. They require physical present of the leaders to smoothen the workflow and make certain decisions. The use of modern information and communication technologies are something that they have never related and associated with before. The companies were unprepared to handle this unexpected situation and reliable tools and application were not ready to facilitate all the employees to work from distance. Leaders need to make tremendous efforts to adjust to the new working environment and manage the team remotely to work effectively as well.

##### **Challenges faced with e-leadership**

Diversity, trust, communication, and work motivation are considered as the significant factors that leaders are struggling with in e – leadership. Pertaining to level of trust in the team, the leaders has placed most concern. They tend to believe in the people who have been working in the company for long, but not the newcomers who they rarely know. For the communication, the challenging is that they don't trust the form of digital communication. They have low level of trust compared to

communicating directly where they can feel and see people's expression when face-to-face interaction occurs. Additionally, they were afraid if they say something or write something, it could be encrypted and hacked since the company don't have high security system to protect the information. In term of employees' motivation, keeping employees active and motivated is difficult to do when limited interaction and social activities are allowed under this situation. Managing diverse group of people from distance is also underlying factor to determine the challenges of leaders. Young generation could be difficult to manage and organize the works.

## **5.2 Further Recommendations**

The obtained finds are interpreted into further recommendation for other food and beverage companies, any third parties or large organization based on this research result.

### **5.2.1 Recommendation for other companies**

#### **Social activities online**

To encourage more interaction among newcomers, it's essential for the leaders to create the social activities via online. This is to get people involved and strengthen the relationship within the team. It can be done weekly or bi-weekly to drive more engagement. For example, sending e card or writing an email to other members in team to wish for Thai's new year during Songkran festival. They can share team successful story to each other every week or celebrate the birthday by blowing e card together as a team. Furthermore, leader can also help to set up the meeting to introduce newcomers to another departments. In this way, the newcomers will feel more relaxed and reduce their anxiety in working

#### **Training for technological program and application**



Since all the technological mediated tools and environment are new to most of employees, the proper knowledge and know how should be provided and educate the employees to work with more confidents. The online townhall or e learning session should be implemented widely to facilitate the learning process. This could further develop to reach all level of employees as standard procedure of the company. When the employees know the same standard technique and skills, they all can work together more effectively and efficiency.

### **Individual greeting**

To reduce the gap and create more trust among team, it's important for leaders to have private session with each employee via online. This is to listen, provide proper direction, communicate the right expectation, and offer appropriate suggestion to each particular employee. In addition, unleashing the power of shared decision to the employees would help increase the overall company morale. It will also increase the level of confident towards employees. They will have the opportunity to take greater responsibility and learn if they made the wrong decision, encouraging them to realize the impact and understand that the role leadership is much deeper.

## **5.2.2 Recommendation for the future**

### **Develop High Level of Cyber Security System**

In terms of preparing for the future and reducing the concern that the leaders have, it's would be better to start developing higher level of cyber security system to be more protective and apply to the whole organization. Getting trustworthy developer to develop the standardized systems and application to be used creating internal eco system. Thus, it will help increase confident for the leaders to use organization's systems and application to work and send information more smoothly and efficiently in term of data protecting and transformation. The works will be done faster and more effectively without worrying of information leaking to others.

### **5.3 Limitation**

The first limitation of this study is the sample size together with the constraints of collection time, available time of the interviewees and resources. Consequently, only **8 respondents** were gathered to give the interviews, instead of the stretch target of 10 respondents. Moreover, considering the size of the organization, the information of the respondents was in the perception of large company's leader which could not represent for other scale of companies such as small to medium enterprises. Moreover, this research was conducted only in Bangkok area or said to be geographically limited. The obtained results might not be sufficient to represent the entire industry operating in Thailand. Another limitation of this research is the language barrier during the individual interviews which were primarily conducted in Thai with the help with researcher's own interpretation. Therefore, some messages may be lost or misinterpreted during the translation.

### **5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies**

As stated in limitation section, future studies should be encouraged to bridge such gaps. Since e- leadership is still new in many Thai organizations and has not yet been much explored in deeper scales, there should be further studies on smaller size of enterprises to identify other differences, opportunities and interesting insights including a study on the influence from other possible factors if conducted under normal conditions without restrictions and quarantine. Extending more scope of the study to other industries which might have other working style. This is interesting to explore and expand to cover all areas of Thailand to gather more deep and better insights. According to our qualitative research, the diversity is an interesting factor to study in the future since it started to affect the way the leaders lead the team. It's undeniable that younger crews will step in more in the future and the leaders must be ready to cope with them.

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