MODULE 5: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR LEADERS

Module Introduction

The module "Digital Transformation for Leaders" is part of the STRESS-LESS Program, and is especially designed for people on managerial positions.

Digitalization is changing not only society, but also the world of work to an increasing extent.

All in all, the increasing complexity due to digitalization, the accelerated changes within and outside of the organizations, the multitude of new information and communication channels, the new temporal and spatial patterns of the digital work and the increased pressure to innovate, pose new challenges for managers.

Research shows that leadership quality significantly influences the health and well-being of employees. It is therefore important that you as a manager also actively influence digital stress thus making a major contribution to the personal and professional development of other people in your organization.

In this module, we will give you an overview of new challenges and ways to meet them in order to lead the digital transformation in a healthy and successful way.

It is clear that not only the organisation as a whole influences employee well-being through the policies and opportunities it offers and implements, but managers also have an important role to play. So how can leaders act to improve the well-being of their employees and prevent stress due to digitalization at work?

Prof. Raj Raghunathan from McCombs Business School in the University of Austin, Texas, USA, has developed a practical model for happiness at work, which is called BAMBA. BAMBA abbreviation stands for:

B for Basic needs. When we talk about Basic Needs at work, we are referring to the availability of resources and the opportunity that our organisation / bosses provide to take good care of ourselves, while doing our job properly. A sense of security is also an important element of Basic Needs.

A for Autonomy. Autonomy is our ability and capacity to freely make decisions that are important to us. Every employee in an organisation is part of a hierarchical structure that operates according to certain rules and has its own governing bodies, but this does not mean that we lack freedom in the decisions we make. In the workplace, everyone should have the freedom to choose how, in what way, they can best carry out their tasks and duties. The leader's role is to encourage this autonomy by providing the support people need to be confident in their own abilities.

M for Mastery. Mastery – is the progression towards being very good at something. One of the important conditions to be satisfied with our work is to know that we are doing well in an activity. Not everyone can be a virtuoso at their job, but for most people it is enough to know

that their punctuality, honesty or some other quality or ability is appreciated by their manager. In the age of digital technology, it's important to do well online, or at least to know that you can learn basic skills for working in a digital environment. Otherwise, a lack of a sense of mastery can be a barrier to achieving good results.

B for Belonging. It represents the sense of connection with at least one other human being. Studies reveal that people feel more engaged when they have at least one very close friend at their workplace, and such close relationships are more valued than money and fame. We can argue whether in the digital environment we can create bond more easily or it is more difficult – probably it depends on the individual characteristics and digital skills and knowledge. Belonging at work however might mean not only creating or having close relations with your colleagues / partners / customers, but also feeling strong connection to the organizational mission and vision. It is an important task for the leader to make sure that each team member has a strong sense of belonging.

A for Abundance Culture. There are two types of culture – scarcity culture and abundance culture. Abundance represents the personal belief that there is enough for everyone and even if we do not have something at present, it is a matter of time and spent effort to get it. On the contrary – scarcity culture assumes that there are not enough resources for everyone. At work this means that our success comes at the cost of someone else, for example when I am promoted, the other candidates are losing the battle for promotion. If there is an abundance culture in the organization, it will mean that the fact that if I am not promoted now, doesn't mean that I shall never be promoted. Sometimes not getting a promotion might mean getting a second chance to show your abilities or getting more free time to spend on other things. The abundance culture ensures a healthy work environment where everyone believes that they have a chance to contribute and flourish.

Leaders can be both an enabler and a stressor in improving the well-being and the performance of their employees. When they provide support to their employees, it has a positive impact so that employees can cope more easily with stress (including digital stress).

With virtual teams and the growing extent of digitalisation the leadership realities have also changed. It was one thing to take care of the basic needs of your team before digitalisation and it is a completely different thing now. The modern leaders of the digital era should develop their well-being-oriented style which includes all 5 dimensions of the BAMBA model, while paying attention to the implications of digitalisation on it. In order you as a manager to take care of the digital stress at work you should develop measures at both individual and team level: things that you can do for yourself (Self-Care) and things you can do, helping your team members (Staff-Care).

For the Self-Care you can also check the following Modules of our STRESS-LESS program: "Healthy Workstyle in the Digital Workplace" and "Work–life Balance in the Digital Era".

In this module we present you concrete BAMBA activities for Self-Care and Staff-Care.

You can listen to the material here.

Activity 1

In order to take care for the Basic needs of your team members you should be aware about their current status.

It is easier to spot and talk about the problems your people face, if you are together in the office. But if you are working remotely, it is more difficult to do this regular small talk that helps us build trust and break the ice among each other.

Even if it sounds unusual to you as a manager, you should spend some effort and create a room for small talk in the digital environment too. Make sure that you have some dedicated time in your weekly schedule that you use for this small talk with each of your team members. For example, you could reserve a fixed slot within the existing team meetings to receive feedback on joint communication and working methods from the team members. This would give you the chance to quickly identify and react to any type of stress (personal, digital, etc.).

Activity 2

In order to help your team members, avoid digital stress, you should openly address the insecurities in their dealing with digital devices and software programs that they use at work.

This will also help to promote trust and open up some space for boosting your peoples' autonomy.

Here is what Steve Jobs shares: "It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do. We hire smart people so they can tell us what to do."

So, follow this advice and start implementing the so called "test phases" in your work where your team members use a digital device or a software program and deliver feedback about their experiences. In this way you will open space for an exchange in the team about the advantages and disadvantages they face in their digital work. Team members will be able to talk about real experiences, share their fears and achievements.

This will help to promote both their Autonomy and Mastery.

Activity 3

When working in digital environment, you, as a manager, should make sure that digital tools of communication work properly. If, for example, most of the business communication takes place via video conferencing, you should make sure that your team members have a good quality connection that provides appropriate sound and image sharing. If this is not the case with some of your team members, you can be sure that it will create tension, annoyance for them, which can jeopardize the following:

1. How much of the information exchanged in the online meeting they understand correctly;

2. Their correct understanding of the tasks you are assigning to them or your expectations for their work;

3. Their end results and deliverables.

During each online meeting, make sure that everyone is able to participate fully and if not, that they have the freedom to share with you what problems they face (with the online connection, devices and / or software use) and make sure to provide the necessary help for the problems to be solved.

Activity 4

When you assign tasks for people who work remotely, using digital technology (i.e. email or any instant messaging software, Skype, Viber, Teams, etc.) you have to make sure that your employee understands you correctly.

In order to do this, you have to ask them some open-ended questions.

Generally, there are two types of questions: open- and close- ended. Open-ended questions are questions that will allow your team member to give a free-form answer. Closed-ended questions, are the ones that can be answered with "Yes" or "No," or they have a limited set of possible answers.

Open-ended questions are ones that require more than one-word answers or choosing among a few options. These questions require longer responses, with answers often coming in the form of a list or a few sentences or paragraphs. These types of questions provide you the needed feedback form your team members whether they have understood correctly the task you are assigning to them.

For example, you can ask them:

- What will be the first thing you will start with?

or

- How much time you will need to finish the task?

So, in order to avoid digital stress caused by miscommunication when you assign tasks to your team members, start asking them open-ended questions and make sure that their answers are adequate to your expectations.

Now prepare a list with some open-ended questions (taking into consideration your past experience while working online) that sound appropriate and might be useful in your work.

Activity 5

You as a leader should engage proactively your team members. Regular celebrations of the small or big wins – individual or at team level – always help.

Discuss with your team and decide together whether you will be meeting weekly or monthly to celebrate your wins and how you will choose the main topic of every occasion.

Give them the freedom to propose and share their ideas of personal and team achievements.

If you are working remotely, you can do these celebrations online, in an informal set up (everyone with their favourite drink or in the company of their pet).

Monitor whether and how the sense of belonging changes due to these regular celebrations you organize for your staff members.

Activity 6

When working from home, or in case of managing remote teams, your team members do not see each other every day, which might create some physical and psychological barriers for asking help at work.

It is your task as a team leader to establish clear rules about the work processes and procedures. The responsibilities of the individual team members should also be defined. For example, it would be helpful if you discuss and record the rules how your team members should work via digital media, how they should use the digital filing systems, how the agreements should be reached and fulfilled in remote work conditions.

Creating an online library for working rules and processes will give the employees freedom to access these tutorials each time they need, learn and process the information in their own pace.

If doing it involves some other professionals within your organization, be proactive and take the initiative yourself to create such digital library and online tutorial materials. You can create them yourself, but you can also ask all your vendors to provide their materials like video and documents, which support customers in using their products.

If, and when you have built such a digital library, make sure that all your team members know about it and use it. Their feedback whether it is helpful and how to improve it is also crucial for sustaining the work productivity in digital environment.

Activity 7

When you implement a new software platform in your organization, you should create a procedure for your employees what to do when they encounter technical difficulties.

In addition, at the beginning of the implementation you should envision and plan the friction losses (time and errors). Give your employees the time and space to make mistakes while getting familiar with the new technology.

In order to open space for building their mastery with the new technology and boosting the abundance culture in the team, you should keep telling them the famous proverb that "only those who do not work do not make mistakes."

Be open in helping your team members to admit their own mistakes. The best way to do it is you to allow yourself to be vulnerable and admit your mistakes in front of your team.

Now think of a recent mistake you have done and share it with your team in the next team meeting. Share the lessons learned also.

Activity 8

Summary

In this module, you have learned how to transform your leadership actions in digital environment while you take care about: Basic Needs, Autonomy, Mastery, Belonging and Abundance Culture of your team members.

You now understand better that even online, when working remotely, you can take care for the well-being of your employees and actively work towards prevention of digital stress.

Most interventions to reduce the risk of digital stress in the workplace involve both individual and organisational approaches. Individual approaches include training and one-to-one communication with the employee. They should aim to change individual skills and resources and help the individual change their situation. The organizational approaches can be of many types, ranging from structural (for example, work schedules, online and psychical environment) to psychological (for example, social support, control over work, participation).

Use your creativity and think about what you can do in the next week to make your team members feel better at work?

Have fun!

Suggested Further Readings and Bibliography

1. Raj Raghunathan, (2016) "If you are so smart, why aren't you happy?"

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4. Franke, F. (2012). Leadership and follower health: The effects of transformational and health-oriented leadership on follower health outcomes. Dissertation, Helmut-Schmidt-Universität Hamburg.

5. Katharina Klug, Jörg Felfe, and Annika Krick (2019), Caring for Oneself or for Others? How Consistent and Inconsistent Profiles of Health-Oriented Leadership Are Related to Follower Strain and Health, Frontiers in Psychology, www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02456/full