
Building Resilient Workforce in a Challenging World: The Way Forward

Membangun Tenaga Kerja yang Tangguh di Dunia yang Menantang: Gambaran Masa Depan

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ABSTRACT

The field of Psychology which studies human in various contexts has pertinent roles in addressing the changes that people have to deal with during the COVID19 Pandemic. Psychology researchers and practitioners in the world over have played their roles in empowering individuals and community to build new normal lifestyle during and beyond the pandemic time. The objective of this paper is to discuss the role of Psychology in empowering individuals and community to relate to increasingly challenging world. It discusses the psychosocial issues in this challenging time that warrant attention by psychologists. The paper also highlights the importance of informed interventions in empowering individuals and community to become fully functioning workforce in changing and challenging world.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The spread of COVID19 has led almost all people in the world to encounter disruptive life. The pandemic which was declared in early 2020 has disrupted life activities at individuals and community levels. Life is becoming difficult for many people, causing changes in individuals' personal life, social activities and work conditions. This has, in turn, caused various difficult conditions and created many uncertainties among individuals in most part of the world. The COVID19 conditions, and the changing pattern of life activities, has made it imperative for psychology researchers and psychologists to position sustainable living and safeguarding of wellbeing as vital areas that deserve attention.

The increasingly changing life condition due to COVID19 Pandemic has placed human life in volatile and dynamic condition, uncertain and unpredictable future, complex life, and ambiguous circumstances. The pandemic has caused unpredicted changes in various aspects of human life, and their socio-economic activities, necessitating the involvement of psychology researchers and psychologists to play roles in the research front as well as the practices. As Psychologists, Psychology academics, Psychology researchers or Psychology students, we must be poised with adequate up-to-date knowledge, skills, and abilities so that we could be fully functioning in managing crises that take place in this challenging context.

The objective of this paper is to discuss the role of Psychology in empowering individuals and community to relate to the new challenging world. It also discusses the psychosocial issues that warrant for attention by psychology and psychologists. Besides, this paper also highlights the importance of informed interventions in empowering individuals and community to become fully functioning workforce in the currently challenging world.

The Roles of Psychology in Empowering Individuals and Community to Relate to the Challenging World

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Among the responsibilities of Psychology establishments (i.e., university, research center or service center) is to relate the knowledge of Psychology with its application. Like scholars in other knowledge fields, scholars and practitioners in Psychology too have the roles to generate new knowledge during pandemic, reproduce existing knowledge, systematise the application of knowledge, and transmit knowledge to the target group so that it would be benefited by many. In short, Psychology could play their roles in the context of research and practice during the pandemic.

The Roles of Psychology in the Context of Research

Psychology is a study of human, encompassing all aspects of human characteristics (behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects); human activities as well as their causes and consequences. In a challenging time, including during the COVID19 Pandemic, Psychology researchers have been generating new knowledge, explored based on certain epistemological; ontological; axiological; and teleological notions.

The epistemology or the ways to source knowledge requires Psychology researchers to subscribe to, not only empirical approaches, but divine knowledge, without simplistically denying or negating one another. Such fundamentals inform the researchers on approaches to be adopted when studying human, and the scopes to be covered in the studies of human (Shukran, 2020). The ontology or the scopes of subject matters to be studied are linked to the context where the community live and operate. By including the divine sources when approaching knowledge, researchers are able to generate knowledge and principles on the ways to manage people or the crises they face from the Quran and the Prophet's tradition, both have much to offer with regard to managing people during pandemic time.

Psychology research are also linked to the axiological notions of the knowledge in that researchers should uphold fundamental values when studying human being. The values would provide essential regulating principles that help researchers to honour research ethics and conduct studies with the aim to attain the truth about the nature of man. The teleological notion also must be given due attention, in that psychology researchers should ensure that research findings would lead to meaningful explanation or could be utilises to design interventions that bring about benefits to individuals and community.

The Roles of Psychology in the Context of Practice

There are increasingly emerging Psychosocial issues during COVID19 Pandemic that warrant Psychologists' attention. The existing and new knowledge in Psychology should be applied for good use in the community; and be integrated with other bodies of knowledge and context. In this pandemic, Psychology researchers and practitioners must be vigilant to the needs of individuals in various community, including that of the workforce community.

Despite the challenges, workforce have to continue accomplishing their tasks, performing duties, and shouldering responsibilities, The pandemic, and in effect restriction of movement, calls for the need to help the workforce in making adjustment in the way they think, manage their feeling, alter their behaviors or perform their work. Workforce could move on to have better life if they could be empowered with the abilities to deal with any changes encountered in life. There are needs to apply psychological principle to safeguard individuals' health; and position their safety as priority. There are needs to guide workforce in the community to accomplish their tasks, duties, and responsibilities in altered manner.

As a profession, a Psychologist's main job description include (a) evaluating, diagnosing, and studying human characteristics, including the behaviors, mental processes, emotion of individuals who encounter various new experience during the Pandemic, via objective assessment; (b) designing the process to change, develop, or improve individuals' and community life condition, based on the information gathered in the evaluations as well as knowledge and principles sourced from the divine sources; integrated with other relevant knowledge;(c) explaining and solving psychosocial phenomena by conducting research that pertain to changes and challenges they face; (d) sharing and applying the findings of psychological research; and (e) contextualizing or relevantising psychology theories and techniques to solve issues which occur at individual and community levels, during the pandemic.

During the pandemic the expertise of Psychologists and other professionals/scholars have been, and should continue, to be mobilized in order to help the community to have clear vision on their psychosocial life aspects. Psychologists should be mobilized to form synergized forces in managing some behavioral aspects of individuals and community during the pandemic. Psychologist could assist workforce to understand the actual scenario, verify the causes and consequences of certain situations, and be agile in their thinking and actions. There have been various interventions contributed by scholars, professionals, administrators, policy makers who came forward in responding to the psychosocial issues reported by the community. Various social and behavioral sciences knowledge or religious principles have been adopted in managing the psychosocial issues during the pandemics.

As far as Psychology Practitioners are concerned, Psychologist from various parts of the world reported the following activities during this pandemic

1. Providing a broad range of information on the nature of COVID19, its highly contagious characteristics, the ways it is transmitted, all other related information. Such is necessary for the formulation of appropriate interventions to empower the community to have judicious responses to the demands during the pandemic.

2. Gathering information that serve as bases to develop programmers that empower the community to deal with pandemic situations; and design measures that can mitigate its impacts. Psychology researchers and students conduct studies on various psychosocial issues encountered by people at various communities.
3. Educating individuals on the needs to have new thinking patterns, behaviors or new norms, and uphold the principles that health and safety must take precedence over other matters. This requires the contribution of experts from Psychology, Medical, ICT, arts, and language
4. Developing the right attitudes that are instrumental in shaping behaviors that prevent the spread of coronavirus; and promoting the acceptance of new policies or measures. This requires engagement with experts on medical, religious education, communication, sociology of work etc.
5. Enabling employees, students, and community to have good level of mental health and wellbeing. This requires the services of clinical psychologists, counsellors, and other professionals who deal with individuals who are in need of special session, or input by practitioners in virtual mass sessions.
6. Availing good ecosystem which facilitates tasks delivery, scaffolds employees' task performances, and provides necessary supports to them. This requires the initiatives by administrators and managers who adjust the work processes and alter workplace condition.

Hence how do we position ourselves as researchers and practitioners of Psychology in this challenging world of work? The existing mainstream bodies of knowledge or principles might be distinct or disconnected from the phenomena encountered by individuals and community in the current context. Psychology researchers and practitioners are expected to, thus, use contextualized Psychology knowledge in empowering organization to develop their ability to deal with internal and external challenges, pressures, or demands.

Psychology and Psychologists could conduct action research which findings would inform the design of programmers to equip workforce with necessary competencies which enable them to change, improve and develop the society, or empower individuals and community to deal with the identified COVID19-related threats, risks, or pressures. To summarize, in applying Psychology knowledge for its genuine impact, Psychology and Psychologists are expected to

1. connect the knowledge with other body/is of knowledge and context.
2. relate theory, knowledge, principles with their usage or practices.
3. transfer, disseminate, communicate findings and knowledge to various types of community (learned, learning, professional, and public community).
4. understand specific approaches, orientation, and purposes when dealing with knowledge.

Psychosocial issues in Challenging World that Warrant the Attention of Psychologists

The new zeitgeist or context caused by the pandemic is characterized by enormous types and levels of issues that deserve attention and solutions. It demands objective observation, analyses, explanation and observation that would lead researchers and professionals to design informed interventions to change, improve and develop individuals' thinking, feeling and behaviors; as well as that of the community. Psychology should come forward to address the needs in the community, by attending to and solving their psychological, physical, and social issues.

There are emerging psychosocial issues faced by workforce during the pandemic, characterized by challenging demands. This caused disruptive life that led to many changes in organization, community, country, and the world. For one, there are different constraints faced by different group of workforces. Each of them experiences certain psychological issues that require proper attention. The following are some of the issues that our workforce is facing during the pandemic time.

Individual-based issues

1. Employees' Role Conflict. Some have been made to juggle with many roles and responsibilities, causing some detrimental effects on their well-being or mental health, not only at individual employee level, but their family and community too.
2. Increased stress, psychological distress, traumatic stress due to various general and work demands (Afif Jazli, 2021). They face tough time as the result of their struggle in making living, ensuring return of business investment, caring for parents, or raising their children.
3. Perceptual error. Some receive wrong information about the new work atmosphere, causing many to experience stress (Ismail, 2015); low work performance; poor efficiency (Jalagat, 2017); and poor general life quality, such as low sleep quality, bad relationship with family members and neighbors (Syeha Nafisah, 2020).
4. Loss of earning activities. Many employees have been retrenched, causing many to become unemployed or been pushed to seek new employment (Kniffin, Narayan, Anseel, Antonakis and Ashford, 2020).

Organisational-based issues

1. Change of the Nature of Work setting. Organizations have to deal with shortage of workforce, increased labour costs, competitive pressures, rapid change and uncertainty. Nur Syafiqah, 2021).
2. Employers' Inability to retain employees. Many employing organizations are suffering from profit losses during the pandemic, and in effect, some have removed workforce from employment due to workplace inability to pay employees' salary.

3. Less conducive Work Environment. Some employees report about non-supportive work relationship with superiors, colleagues, subordinates, or clients due to working from home, changing of duty-shift of work; or absence of face-to-face communication on work-related matters (Nur Syafiqah, 2021)

Work-related issues

1. Change in Work process or Procedure. At workplaces, there have been a lot of adjustment or alteration made to work processes. In effect, employees may have to work with less supervision, increased feelings of isolation or workplace loneliness due to the absence of office mates in usual physical settings (Afif Jazli, 2021; Hickman, 2019).
2. Change of work requirement and expectations. Employees have to maneuver with the changing requirement and expectations; or require work support system at home.
3. Mental fatigue and job dissatisfaction. This is due to additional tasks, duties, and responsibilities caused by the increased or decreased demand of service or products (Qamariah, 2021).
4. Disrupted Work performance. Many restrictions, bring about negative consequences on workforce, affecting their job and contextual performances.

Situational-based issues

1. COVID19 Lockdown. The restriction of movement during pandemic affects the economic sector, in that some businesses have to shut down their companies due to their suffering from huge profit loss.
2. High Stressful Conditions. Some workforce experience increased job demands, leading to burnout that cause withdrawal from job, including resignation from the profession (Qamariah, 2021).
3. Terrifying information about the pandemic. The information causes distress especially when information is shared on social media, some of them contribute to misinformation, inaccurate news about the spread of the virus, and the statistics of people inflicted by it (Malta, Rimoin, & Strathdee, 2020).

The above psychosocial issues require the need to review the way works are performed. There are needs to empower members with the ability to take up long term consequences and repercussions of any decisions made. This requires creativity in handling work processes. In short, there are needs to attend to workforce who experience certain psychological issues.

The importance of Informed Interventions in Empowering Individuals and Community to become Fully functioning resilient Workforce in Challenging World

The psychosocial issues during COVID19 require professionals including Psychologists to play more impactful roles to reduce vulnerability among people so that they do not easily succumb to any challenging demands, to their detrimental effects and that of their organization. An important focus in this regard is the need to build resilience among workforce, that is to develop their ability to judiciously deal with the changing or challenging demands, or negative consequences that arise from COVID19 Pandemic.

Resilient individuals in a challenging world would have personal quality that enable them to have adaptive resistance to challenges (Ahern et al., 2008). They also have the abilities in shaping a dynamic process, with the context (Curtis & Cicchetti, 2007) and the abilities to deliver good outcomes to own self and organization, “despite serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228). They too have the ability to equip self with relevant competencies; maintain individuation vis a vis changes; identify issues/risks; and in turn manage them in the best possible manner. They should be empowered to judiciously meet new demands; develop balanced outcomes when managing demands; and be ready to face any new challenges.

There is also needed to assist work organization to be resilient industry, with a resilient community of workforce who lives with each other in a peaceful manner. They avoid animosity that might resulted from the challenging work ecosystem. They are guided to value collective well-being instead of personal gain. They also prioritize long-term collective productive life activities as opposed to continuous disagreement or dissent. They do not only think of their survival but their future generation too. They, hence, should be inspired to care for each other, show love for others, and think of others’ problems or needs.

In order to have resilient workforce, a set of informed interventions should be put in place. A carefully developed intervention programmer would help organization to minimize the adverse impacts of COVID19-related work issues and help workforce to recover quickly from difficulties or toughness (Robertson & Cooper 2013). Among the interventions which could be designed after obtaining information from workforce in specific setting are (Cummings & Worley, 2014).

1. Individual level interventions. This is aimed at developing individuals who are capable to judiciously respond to the demanding life situations. Workforce should be assisted to avoid or minimise the adverse impact of COVID19-related consequences. Workforce should be equipped with knowledge, on the core business of the organization, industry and its current pandemic ecosystem that require them to do cognitive adjustment, learn new skills, etc
2. Administrative/human resource level. It is important to note that different people have different needs for facilitation, scaffolding, and supports. Based on the data collected by psychologists, intervention programmes could be designed to develop or enhance the motivation, job satisfaction and well-being of employees of different background. Workforce could be trained with required skills that would enable them (a) to deal with

challenges (e.g WFH work skills, virtual interpersonal skills), (b) to learn new skills which are vital to alter their delivery of tasks and duties; and (c) to utilize available and accessible resources to perform tasks.

3. Technological/ Structural Level. Workforce should be facilitated, supported and scaffolded with supportive environment, supply of resources or support services when needed. Employers could provide infrastructure to employees, based on their needs (physical, social, psychological, spiritual). This may also involve the design of new approaches to manage the changing workplace. This entails the design of intervention system which adopts evidence-based practices. It may also involve the formulation of psychoeducation programmes which are aimed at reducing the causes, minimise the prevalence, and overcome the negative impacts of mental health issues among employees.
4. Strategic level interventions. I-O Psychology researchers and practitioners could work with colleagues of different specialisations in developing resilient industries and communities so that they are able to manage the increasingly challenging environment and thrive into the future. They may engage government agencies, private organisations, or non-governmental organisations to deal with individuals encountering or living with COVID19-related issues. The strategic initiatives are essential in designing interventions, providing supports to individuals who are in need of assistance, care and treatment.

The informed interventions form a coordinated effort that would enable individual workforce and organizations to attain desired outcomes, including

- a. Supportive organizational climate or ecosystem that could ease the workforce to have well-being in a challenging time.
- b. Synergy of various knowledge workers to collectively move the economy despite the changes and challenges.
- c. Application of knowledge and principles founded in Psychology to invent or substantiate the design intervention to change, improve, and develop work processes, organisational productivity and workforces' well-being.

2. CONCLUSION

The COVID19 pandemic does not only cause a challenging time to us but bringing with it enormous types and levels of learning opportunities, allowing us to develop, change, and improve our thinking, feeling and behaviours. New norms have been introduced, requiring all to be involved, including in managing the world of work. The challenges currently encountered should be viewed with positive step forward for our societal, and economic scenarios. This too warrants us, the Psychology academics and students, to position our roles in a highly functional manner. Psychology education programme provider should continue to train competent scientist/practitioners and psychology graduates for long term benefits of the community. This include the development of Psychology professionals who are able to develop resilient workforce to face the negative consequences of COVID-19.

Psychology researchers as well as psychologists are expected to work with other professionals and scholars of other disciplines in developing resilient individuals so that they are able to manage the increasingly challenging environment and thrive into the future. The thought and actions should gear to the efforts of making this world a better place, befitting the principles of leading the others (Khalifah) with the Islamic revealed knowledge and human sciences combined (*Amanah* towards knowledge), continue acquiring and relevant sing knowledge (the culture of *Iqra*), and nurture the development of harmonious life to all humanity (the concept of *Rahmatan lil Alamin*).

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