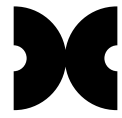




Take  
Command:

A Synchronized  
C-Suite





# Take Command: A Synchronized C-Suite

We are presently living through an unprecedented crisis. Nations, economies, and communities all the world over are buckling under the strain imposed on them by the pandemic. It is of utmost importance that leaders of organizations act together to navigate and steer through the storm. The threat is real and existential. Sink or swim. The C-Suite must move together and in sync. Otherwise, the very survival of the business is in jeopardy. Speaking to industry leaders in the region, we will examine in this issue how to achieve greater synchrony within the C-Suite.

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## C-Suite symphony

According to Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends 2018, "as the business environment becomes more competitive and digital disruption continues, organizations have become more team-centric, networked, and agile... instead of functioning as independent C-level functional experts, the C-suite itself must now operate as a team".

Regardless of the functions C-level executives are in charge of, they can collaborate closely with each other. Together, they can analyze the situation and make important decisions that are critical to the development of the company based on mutual consensus. This can be considered as a symphonic or synchronized C-Suite. The best analogy for this is the captain and the crew of a ship. The captain leads the entire crew to sail through calamitous storms. Only when the captain knows where to go, the crew will know exactly what to do, which goals to pursue and which challenges to overcome and hence, be able to prioritize how to improve their competencies to achieve better performance. C-Suite executives are like the captain and the team is like the crew of a ship. In this extremely difficult period amidst Covid-19, C-Suite synchronization becomes even more critical to the survival of businesses.

In Vietnam, we have had experiences working with family-owned companies where their C-Suite executives show either very high levels of synchronization or the complete opposite. This leads to drastically different outcomes. While the former enhances the performance of the entire C-Suite, the latter holds back the development of the company.

A C-Suite working in harmony enables trust and commitment of the team and engages the whole company. Gradually, the stock value of the company rises.

In contrast, a C-Suite in disarray increases distrust of the senior leadership team, destroys staff morale and erodes company culture. In some cases, companies have even gone bankrupt or have completely folded due to conflict at the highest level.



**SUCCESSFULLY**  
sailing through  
**STORMS**

By Linh Nguyen  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
Dale Carnegie Vietnam



# SUCCESSFULLY sailing through STORMS

## Key traits

From these experiences, we discovered that in order for companies to achieve greater synergy within the C-suite, the company and its C-Suite executives need to ensure that they have the following key traits:

### STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT:

Mutual agreement within the C-Suite on all strategic planning for the future of the company.

### SYNCHRONIZED COMMUNICATION:

The C-Suite must present a unified key message in functional meetings and operations.

### CROSS-FUNCTION COLLABORATION:

Willing collaboration rules for all functions to resolve conflicts arising from business operations.

### LEAD BY EXAMPLE:

All C-Suite executives must lead by example in all principles, rules, culture, values and behavior.

### C-SUITE TEAMBUILDING:

Organized regular team building activities involving the C-Suite to enhance and maintain harmony within the team.

As the renowned orchestra conductor Benjamin Zander once said: *“The conductor of an orchestra doesn’t make a sound. He depends, for his power, on his ability to make other people powerful.”* Accordingly, the C-Suite in a company holds the future of the company and its people; they need to use their power, together as One team, to create power for others.





# Fostering organizational AGILITY

By Kasemsook Booncharoen  
VP Strategic Property  
Tesco Lotus

## Friendly and relaxed

There are eight members of the senior leadership team in Tesco Thailand. There's the chief executive officer, the chief financial officer, the chief operating officer and key directors from property, people, marketing, product and corporate affairs.

They meet once a week to catch up and update each other. The key is that these meetings are not conducted in a very formal manner. The Tesco way is to be focused so as to optimize the time spent. Meetings involving the senior management are short and precise. I can observe that they are quite relaxed whenever I present to them.

This friendly atmosphere can be seen whenever a new person assumes the role of the chief executive. For instance, when the new chief executive of the United Kingdom group joined Tesco, he sent an email message to every colleague all over the world. The same was true of the Thailand chief executive. Through this casual introduction, our C-Suite showed that they want to receive direct feedback within the organization. As a result, the C-Suite will start to closely understand the thinking and needs of Tesco staff.

“

*When an organization is flexible, it plants the seed of innovation in its people.”*

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#### ABOUT:

*Kasemsook Booncharoen has been with Tesco for close to 13 years. He started as a senior construction manager and became the head of construction in charge of the expansion program for new stores. Before he assumed his current role as the vice-president for strategic property, Kasemsook oversaw facility management and building assets for Tesco Lotus Thailand.*

# Nimble

It is because of this atmosphere that the C-Suite within Tesco is able to quickly rally to deal with the crisis brought about by Covid-19. The senior leadership team is meeting almost every day to steer the direction of the organization in such challenging times. Doing so allows them to provide a quick decision-making process to support the business and colleagues. This is how there is synchronization in the Tesco C-Suite.

While we are very focused on meeting business objectives, Tesco also emphasizes strongly on how we meet those outcomes. We are talking about the "how" and not just the "what".

# Culture

What I mean is that in working towards our goal, how we get there is very crucial. Are we aggressive while doing so? Do our colleagues agree with our methods and our style? In terms of personal development, Tesco wants its colleagues to be aware that the "how" is equally important in the pursuit of meeting KPIs. The People team looks at this. How others view us and how we meet our targets are vital elements in everyone's performance evaluation at Tesco. Tesco wants to foster and sustain a culture of collaboration.

## Advice to achieve greater synchrony

- Focus on roles and not job titles.
- Do away with closed offices, especially dedicated rooms for senior management.
- Work together and sit together as one team to support collaboration.
- Focus on how the work is done and not how much time is spent.
- Provide network access to support work from home/remote off-site access.
- Have cross-functional teams collaborate to meet common objectives instead of individual KPIs.

# Trust

We manage to achieve a friendly atmosphere at work also because of the design of our workspaces. Our newly refurbished office concept was recently implemented. We removed all personnel offices which supported hierarchy and social barriers and replaced them with breakout zones and informal collaborative spaces where colleagues can chill out and still have discussions. I feel very comfortable whenever I am in the office because it feels casual. Last year, even before we were hit by Covid-19, Tesco started a policy of working from home on Fridays. We can do this because we trust one another to deliver results regardless of our work location. A climate of flexibility emerges. When an organization is flexible, it plants the seed of innovation in its people.

“

*We removed all personnel offices which supported hierarchy and social barriers.”*







# Empowerment through ALIGNMENT

## Downward spiral

In my previous company, for three consecutive years, the revenue generated did not meet the company's budget. The revenue generated in 2018 was the same as that in 2016. Profits also decreased. It declined from over 15 per cent to 11 per cent. Management costs soared. Indirect personnel costs increased by nearly 5 per cent in three years.

The blame game started. The sales department said that the marketing department had not sufficiently supported them through advertising campaigns and promotions. Sales accused marketing of running ineffective marketing programs for new products.

At the same time, the marketing department believed that budget had been continuously cut and their campaigns had been tightly controlled by the finance department. As a result, it was impossible to launch the campaigns in time and attain the optimal outcomes as planned. To add to fingerpointing, the human resource department complained about not having enough manpower and that the quality of existing personnel was less than ideal. There were not sufficient staff engagement and motivation in the organization. Manpower costs were also too high and this affected profitability.

"No cooperation, no sharing, no teamwork". These were the words that were often repeated in official surveys and in informal communication. Cross-functional collaboration was low at almost all levels and departments. Focus groups were then conducted to find the underlying cause. Related action plan workshops were conducted within and across departments.

The bleak situation went on for a few years and it caused many senior managers to leave. The board of directors decided to select replacements from the parent organization to fill in the vacancies created to avoid cultural and linguistic conflicts. The priority was to ensure that there was good understanding among colleagues. However, the problem was not resolved immediately and the company had to repeat the process several times. It was clear that the source of the problem lay in people management.

By Tuan Nguyen Ngoc Anh  
Vice President Human Resource  
Duy Tan Plastics Corporation

### ABOUT:

*Duy Tan Plastics Corporation was established in 1987. It is one of the leading plastics companies in Vietnam. Besides manufacturing plastic packaging products, Duy Tan also produces plastic-based products for households and industries.*



# Doing it right

It was crucial to resolve problems arising from cultural and linguistic differences. Causes of personal conflict were examined. There was an urgent need to foster engagement and teamwork within the board of directors and among managers. Workshops on culture, personal leadership and teamwork were held. Team building activities were organized. Despite such efforts led by the directors, the situation did not get better.

When there is no synergy and cooperation, the cause is often attributed to people. There may be personal conflicts, lack of understanding and empathizing, no sharing, uncooperative attitude...

“ Synergy would be the most important factor to achieve breakthroughs and in overcoming crises.”

I learnt the following lessons from that episode:

- There must be sufficient horizontal links in the structure of an organization. This can be achieved through inter-departmental meetings, task delegation, information sharing, virtual groups and interdisciplinary projects.
- Tasks must be well defined to avoid overlap and working at cross purposes.
- The performance management system must not result in each person looking out only for her targets or KPIs. Organizational strategies and goals must be the focus.
- Formalized working environments and conditions do not encourage creative thinking and flexibility.

Furthermore, I believe that in order to achieve synergy and greater cooperation, especially among the directors, more attention should be paid to two areas:

- The human factor.
- Context, including organizational structure, systems, processes and the work environment (working conditions).

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*We need people who share the same beliefs and values, build trust and prioritize the common goal.”*

# Breakthrough

This was proven when the same company achieved a revenue growth of nearly 35 per cent. The company strengthened its market coverage and re-organized the almost broken distribution system. These were accomplished by a different set of directors and with a new management system. There was synergy in the board which meant that consensus was arrived at in a quicker and easier way. Results ensued.

The benefits of synergy have been highlighted by many. From my experience and observation, synergy would be the most important factor to achieve breakthroughs and in overcoming crises.

Synergy requires both people and context. We need people who share the same beliefs and values, build trust and prioritize the common goal in every decision to be made. To empower organizations to realize their full potential, the structure, system, processes and environment must come together as one.



**Empowerment**  
through  
**ALIGNMENT**





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*All decisions will be made collectively. There is no such a thing as a one-person show.”*

# CONSENSUS

## through VALUES

### Values

The Indonesian Employment Social Security Administration Agency, also known as BPJamsostek, is a public service organization that oversees social security in Indonesia. Even so, like private businesses, BPJamsostek is not immune to disruptions. As such, the agency needs to possess organizational agility and team collaboration to combat these challenges.

The directors must take the lead in displaying values so that the organization acts in sync. At its very core, BPJamsostek has seven organizational values.

They are:

- Faith (Iman)
- Excellence (Ekselen)
- Modelling (Teladan)
- Harmony (Harmoni)
- Integrity (Integritas)
- Concern (Kepedulian)
- Enthusiasm (Antusias)

These values can be encapsulated in the acronym Iman ETHIKA. This acronym is outlined in the BPJamsostek Board of Directors Regulation. These seven values must be implemented by all BPJamsostek staff, including the directors. The Board of Directors of BPJamsostek consists of seven people, including the President Director.

By Naufal Mahfudz  
Director of General Affairs and Human Resources  
BPJamsostek



# Collective decision making

Furthermore, to enhance collaboration, the Board of Directors must implement the Harmony value which has the following three characteristics:

- Respect differences of opinion and respect for others.
- Build communication and collaboration to achieve synergy both with internal and external parties.
- Maintain balance in life and work to increase work productivity.

In running BPJamsostek, all decisions must be discussed and decided through a Board of Directors meeting which must be attended by at least four directors including the President Director who must be present at every stage of the decision-making process. This ensures that all decisions will be made collectively. There is no such a thing as a one-person show.

Having such values and guidelines are vital because the Board of Directors do not know each other beforehand. We are appointed by the President of the Republic of Indonesia. This is the first and most important challenge for us. So, at the beginning of our stint, we will get to know and understand each other's personalities. Our behavior will be guided by BPJamsostek's values and this enables us to work well with each other.



*Crucial goals must be achieved together across units. This sets the condition for synergy and synchronization.”*



CONSENSUS  
through  
VALUES

## Cohesion

Annual organizational targets are determined by the directors collectively. Like most organizations, KPIs (key performance indicators) are used to measure target achievement. What is special is that several important KPIs are shared across directorates. In KPI sharing, crucial goals must be achieved together across units. This sets the condition for synergy and synchronization. Within BPJamsostek, this ensures that we do not work at cross purposes.

In addition to professional synergy, we also periodically carry out joint social activities. We engage actively in sports such as cycling, running and stand-up paddling. There are sports clubs within BPJamsostek that caters to these activities. Staff are always encouraged to involve their families as well.

# MASTERING Uncertainty



## ABOUT:

*Soo Kok Leng is the author of Think Wits Win: How to Use Sun Zi's Art of War for Success.*

*He was with HP from 1977 holding various management positions for 20 years in Singapore and the US. After HP, he was the executive director of Falmac Ltd running its worldwide businesses. In 1997 he started up 3Com Technologies in Singapore.*

*He has been running a management consultancy since 2002. At the same time, he holds appointments in about a dozen industries. He served as the chairman of Jurong Town Corporation, ST Electronics, Singex group, among others. Presently, he is a director in a number of companies including CapitaLand Commercial Trust Management, Temasek Management Services and Trusted Services. He is also a governor of the Singapore China Foundation and corporate advisor of Temasek International Advisors. He was honorary economic advisor, Binhai New Economic Area, Tianjin, China, and corporate advisor of ST Engineering.*

*In addition, he was a non-resident ambassador to Austria and an adjunct professor with the National University of Singapore.*

*He was conferred the Public Service Medal and the Public Service Star Medal by the Singapore government and the Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold with Star by Austria.*

By Soo Kok Leng  
Chairman, CapitaLand Commercial Trust Management Ltd

## Timeless wisdom

Covid-19 took the world by surprise. There were other surprises in the recent past although they may not be as challenging as the current global virus pandemic. This is just another example of the reality that we have been living in – a world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA). What do we do to prepare ourselves and to deal with such challenges? I suggest that we learn from those who have proven themselves to be highly successful in such an environment.

VUCA was first used by the United States Army War College as the battle zone is a constant VUCA environment. Hence, one place to find wisdom is from the writings of those who had succeeded and been recognized the world over. Sun Tzu is one of them. He was a military general in the ancient Chinese Spring and Autumn warring period (circa 771 to 476 BCE). It was an extreme example of VUCA as it lasted for 300 years. Strategies and tactics were tested in life and

death situations. Sun Tzu's timeless treatise on warfare the Art of War contains the teachings needed for success in a VUCA world. Even now, many centuries later, Sun Tzu's lessons are still highly relevant. It is not just the words that matter most but the way he formulated strategies and tactics that differentiated him from others. This is underscored by his dialectical thinking style coupled with his quick analytical and logical thinking. As a combination, it is known as ambidextrous thinking.

One of Sun Tzu's key focus was to understand the psychology of people and think dialectically of situations to derive superior strategies that will shock the competition. Hence, in our very difficult Covid-19 situation, it is crucial to focus on rallying people together to work as a team. This can be achieved by aligning everyone's interests and uniting as one to achieve seemingly impossible tasks.



# Overcoming the odds

One of the greatest challenges I faced was when I was working for Hewlett Packard (HP). I was put in charge of the worldwide supply chain of the integrated circuits division and I just arrived in the US from Singapore. Two weeks into my new role, I was told that our single largest customer served us notice that they will drop us and go to our Japanese competitor if we do not improve our performance in three months.

A long-standing and major problem was that more than half the time, we did not meet our “on time delivery” performance. In addition, our lead-time and cost were way above the industry average. This was despite having some of the best equipment and very talented people. The leadership has been changed a couple of times but the problem persisted. The staff became demoralized as they were working hard and yet the results were unacceptable. The immediate challenge was that we had only three months to make this work or we stand to lose our single largest customer. If they leave, other customers may also do so.

The initial focus was to identify the root cause of the problems. After a couple of weeks of talking to my team members and the people on the ground, it was clear to me that our operations were not productive and that there were coordination issues throughout the organization and with the customer. A silo mentality pervaded the organization with everyone protecting their turf. We were not moving in the same direction. It was difficult to gel the leaders without a common sense of direction, which was the first thing that needed to be done.

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*Unless leaders share and commit to a common direction, they will not let go of their turf.”*

## Alignment

After understanding the issues, I formulated an overall strategy. I took the effort to separately discuss the strategy with each head more than once, constantly adjusting it based on their inputs. During the discussions, the leaders aligned their thoughts towards what I have planned. Next, I organized an off-site meeting to develop our vision, mission and goals. The participants were divided into three groups to develop their ideas. When they shared with the rest of the groups, they were amazed how close their proposals were. For the first time, they had a shared set of vision, mission and goals.

Following this, we put our strategic plans together and implemented them as best as we could. The result was that we beat the goals set by our single largest customer within three months.

# People persuasion

I faced several obstacles in tackling this problem. When I first arrived, the general environment was one of scepticism. The question on everyone’s minds was: What does this Singaporean know about wafer fabrication and leading the worldwide supply chain? Before my appointment, this position was spread over three departments ran by three leaders and things were not running well. I used to run the back-end operations in Singapore. They were right. I knew very little about wafer fabrication but that was also my strength. I focused on connecting with the people at all levels rather than technology. It was people who finally made this work. This was precisely what Sun Tzu referred to as the ability to win over people’s hearts and leadership, which allowed operational excellence to work. The ability to win over people’s hearts is paramount above all else – this helped make the business successful and was even recognized by our toughest competitors at that time, the Japanese integrated circuits companies.

Structure must follow strategy. This was why I got everyone to agree to put both engineering and production under the same leader as there are always tension between priorities in these functions.

Also, to meet the three-month deadline, the company implemented a 12-hour work shift and 7-day operations instead of 8-hour shifts, 5-day operations. This seemed like a near impossible task as we were in a rather conservative small town. The local media were up in arms against what we

were trying to do. Even the top leadership of our parent company was concerned. However, with a single-minded focus, my leadership team stood firm and worked with the people on the ground to explain the reasons and also gathered inputs from them on the final implementation plans. I held townhalls and spoke to people at all levels as much as possible in small groups to explain our dire state of affairs and why we had to change. My direct staff did the same. When we turned on the 12-hour shift, everything went smoothly. We had the people’s support and they devoted themselves to their respective tasks.

“

*I focused on connecting with the people at all levels rather than technology.”*





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