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“Share our similarities, celebrate our differences” - M. Scott Peck

Just a few days away, I will be in Thailand for 4 years. Time flies.

One of the most popular questions I got over the past years is if I have any problem adjusting myself to the Thai culture and the Thai working style.

Of course, every country must have its own unique cultures and its ways of thinking. But instead of trying to compare the cultures with what we are familiar with, I think we should try to understand and respect the differences.

There are several times in my life that I have to live in another country. There might be some small difficulties in the beginning but if we see new experiences as good opportunities to learn new things and to meet new friends, then it should be something positive for us.

When it comes to work, if there is any problem, I don't think it is because of the Thai culture or because of the 'Thainess' of our staff, but rather, I think most of the problems come from the cultures within the organization itself.

When I first came here, DTAC was like other big companies in the world that had several layers of organization structure. This type of organisation's structure might suit the competition back then, but when the competition changes, we have to adapt.

And that's why Khun Vichai (Bencharongkul, ex-Co-CEO) and I mainly focused on restructuring the organization and encouraging more cross-functional practices in the company.

We started by reducing the number of layers in the company, flattening out the structure. From having a few management reporting to the CEO, I now have over 30 executives as the CEO's direct reports. We had also adjusted the management style by shortcutting internal communications flows from the top to the bottom and vice versa to ensure faster reaction to the market change.

In the meantime, we had also initiated more rounds of brainstorming meetings among staff from different departments to facilitate information and knowledge exchange and to create a sense of ownership throughout the company.

The new office's design also helps in creating a more fun and dynamic work environment by bridging the gap between executives and employees.

In the past, each executive must have his own office, a secretary sitting in front of the room, plus several other status symbols. We changed that by designing the floor to have more open space whereby executives should sit among their teams.

When we first raised the new office's design idea in a meeting, some people opposed it, claiming that it would be against the 'Thai culture'. However, like I said, I never believe that the existing gaps in the company were resulted from the Thai culture, but must be rooted somewhere in the company's culture.

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Today, after four years of trying and experimenting, I have noticed several positive changes in the company. People have more interactions, executives and staff are more united and there are also more cross functional work. The fact that there are not more than 5 out of the total 4,500 employees who are *farang* has even reinforced my belief that the Thai culture is definitely not the cause of the problems as often claimed.

Having said this, however, all the changes could not have been achieved if the employees felt that they were forced into it. As the leaders, both Khun Vichai and I had the duty to move the company forward. But when it came to execution, we respected and gave the staff the freedom to make the call.

Importantly, I myself never believe in imposing farang's concepts or work styles upon local staff.

There were several multinational corporations who had attempted to paste their successful concepts from one part of the world onto the local markets, and eventually learned the painful lessons the hard way. One of the reasons behind the failures, I would assume, must come from the lack of attempt to open up their mind to accept differences.

I think acceptance is a two-way reaction. If we want someone to accept us, we must accept them first. If we want someone to understand us, we must try to understand them first. If we want someone to respect us, we must respect them first. All of these take time and we must act upon what we think, not only talking about it.

Although I came from another part of the world and people can, from a far distance, tell that I am a farang, I think I have one thing in common with my Thai staff - the desire to move this company forward.

For me, having respect, understanding and appreciation towards the 'beauty' of differences while sharing the similarity of having the same goal should be the perfect recipe of adjusting oneself to the new culture and the new environment.