Why DASH+ is Key for SME Businesses in the New Normal

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The disruption wrought by the pandemic has accelerated the digital revolution of even the most resistant of businesses. According to a 2020 survey by Microsoft and market research firm IDC Asia Pacific, close to 75% of Singapore organisations sped up their digitalisation plans because of Covid-19.

While digitalisation is proven to make organisations more competitive, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are now faced with a different challenge: adapting to the New Normal.

The pandemic has amplified the volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, and hyperconnected (VUCAH) nature of today's business landscape. It is not enough for SMEs to simply *digitise* their business and maintain the same approach to operations and decision-making as before. The capabilities to solve complex problems, handle ambiguity and embrace agile innovation are crucial to achieving extraordinary results in a VUCAH world.

Contrary to common beliefs, these capabilities can be learned and developed over time through the right exposure. SMEs need to embrace the different competencies that will make their business more resilient, innovative, and adaptable in the face of many unknowns.

This is where the **D.A.S.H+ framework** comes in.

The DASH+ Framework for Businesses of the Future

The D.A.S.H + framework, which stands for Design Thinking, Agile Thinking, Systems Thinking, Human Capital, and Leadership plus, is the

Singapore Institute of Management's (SIM) framework to navigate "double disruptions" caused by the pandemic and rapid technological advancements. It provides organisations of all sizes with a model to successfully adopt and integrate the competencies required for an increasingly VUCAH world.

Here is a breakdown of the different competencies required for businesses of the future and why they are important:

Design Thinking

Design thinking is a human-centred approach to creative problem-solving. It addresses the biases and conventions embedded in traditional approaches that hamper innovation and allows teams to ask the right questions when addressing a challenge.

Stanford Health Care (SHC), for instance, applied design thinking as a means to improve the patient experience at the Stanford emergency department. Ten doctors, nurses, and technicians took a two-day design thinking course where they took turns playing patients and simulating care to patients to empathise with them and understand how they might improve the experience. By the end of the class, the participants understood patients better and had an abundance of ideas on how to relieve patient anxiety and fear.

Putting the customer first makes businesses more resilient because it enables them to consistently come up with products and solutions that create value for their target market, even as customer behaviour changes. When old models fail, it can help SMEs discover new business models, customer segments, and ideas.

Agile Thinking

Agile thinking is touted as one of the most important work methodologies in the modern world. It came about as a response to the slow, bureaucratic practices inherent in large organisations, and instead promoted flexibility, agility, and independent decision-making. Agile methods work in concert with design thinking, where teams are focused on delivering value to customers in the most efficient way. It does this by portioning teams and projects into smaller, independent but collaborative units, which helps projects move faster and in real-time.

If agile methodologies are implemented correctly, they can almost always result in higher productivity, faster time to market, and lower risk as compared to traditional approaches.

Deluxe Beds is a family-owned manufacturing company based in the United Kingdom (UK) that produces beds and mattresses. The company used highly manual processes to manage their operations, and one of its key challenges was a lack of communication strategy to improve transparency and collaboration among members. But the simple addition of daily scrum meetings—simply referred to as "morning meetings"—on the factory floor significantly improved productivity, operational control, and coordination in spite of a lack of formal procedures and automation.

Systems Thinking

Systems Thinking is a decision-making approach that enables stakeholders to tackle complex problems. It encourages leaders and teams to look at behaviours and processes as parts of a system, which keeps them from being reactive and instead encourages them to consider the complexities of their situation.

The idea of investing in sustainability, for instance, might seem like a tangent for businesses as it doesn't offer any immediate, straightforward returns. But companies that do invest in sustainability have discovered how it aligns with their overall vision. Costco, Google, and Subaru are examples of companies that have invested in sustainability because of an understanding of the larger impact their decisions have on different stakeholders: the environment, their business, and their customers.

For SMEs, this can be applied to any number of situations—what to do during an economic crisis, how to appeal to a new customer, when to make big decisions. Therefore, it's imperative for leaders to be equipped with systems thinking to steer the organisation in the right direction.

Human Capital

Talent is often considered an organisation's most valuable asset—its people that make decisions, come up with ideas, and influence company culture. They also bring their skill sets to the table, which can provide organisations with a unique advantage.

However, natural talent is not enough—skills need to be honed. And as business environments change, so do the skills needed to thrive. According to the UOB Asean Consumer Sentiment Study conducted in July 2020, nine in 10 Singapore workers see an urgent need to reskill amid the job uncertainty brought about by the pandemic. Thousands of jobs were affected amid the recession, and many believe that learning new skills aligned with digitalisation will reshape the future of work.

SMEs need to reskill their workforce and equip them with new competencies, whether that's an adeptness with technology, empathy with customers, or better management of their own mental well-being.

Leadership

Leadership ties all these elements together. The DASH+ framework emphasises the importance of leadership teams in adopting and applying these competencies first. This is because organisational change starts with leadership; without dynamic and progressive leadership, everything falls apart.

Thrive in the New Normal With DASH+

While the concepts in the DASH+ framework are not necessarily new, scaling these competencies is, in fact, one of the biggest challenges organisations face.

It's easy to have a vision of an agile, highly-skilled organisation that puts customers first, but it's more difficult to put that vision into practice. Poor implementation of these competencies can lead to poor results.

Agile thinking, for instance, is one of the most difficult competencies to scale, and there have been several organisations attempting it for years to no avail. Harvard Business Review warned of one industrial company's failed attempt, which resulted in the resignation of several senior executives.

Scaling these competencies should be easier in theory for smaller businesses, but the challenge remains the same: how can organisations transform the way they operate from the ground up in a way that's seamless and integrated?

The first step is for SMEs to learn about these concepts and figure out a way to embed these practices into their day-to-day business, until it eventually becomes a part of their culture. SIM Professional Development Enterprise Learning offers training programmes which enable organisations to identify and address gaps within their businesses, and empower them to achieve transformational results.

Contact Us

We partner with enterprises and SMEs to provide end-to-end L&D solutions and bespoke training programmes. Speak to us today and find out how our organisational learning approach, D.A.S.H.+ framework can help your organisation achieve transformational results and elevate your L&D outcome.