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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND STRATEGIC RESILIENCE IN HIGH-CONTEXT CULTURES: A CASE OF AN ASIAN INSURANCE

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ABSTRACT

The study analyses Thenextgen Advisory, an insurance intermediary located in Penang, Malaysia, with a specific emphasis on its franchise model and innovative sales strategies. The findings have shown five problematic areas - systems and processes, culture, human capital, leadership styles, and organisational climate - which require strategic decisions and practices to maintain dynamic capabilities in the face of environmental changes while also accessing qualitative resources. To achieve strategic resilience, the implementation of matrix structures to transform organisational processes is pivotal in this case. This involves focusing on open communication systems, technological diversity, interactive control, and embracing low-context cultures to foster adaptive innovation and clear communication. The use of affective commitment and integrated transformational leadership styles is critically suggested to inspire employees with organisational purposes.

These strategies will enable the organisation to sustain its dynamic capabilities during environmental changes while achieving superior competitive advantages.

Keywords: Matrix Structure, Dynamic Capabilities, Cultural Diversity, Affective Commitment, Integrated Transformational Leadership, Technological Responsiveness.

JEL classification: O53, M14, N75

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the global pandemic that spanned from 2019 to 2021, Thenextgen Advisory demonstrated its adaptability by strategically responding to unpredictable factors such as the adoption of hybrid meeting models, decentralisation of the organisational structure, prioritisation of motivational incentives, and crisis management strategies. However, to maintain and expand the business, it is essential to possess additional managerial skill sets that include diversity and inclusion management, effective decision-making, categorisation skills, teamwork, communication, leadership, and prioritisation skills [1]. Currently, Thenextgen Advisory is faced with major issues including value creation, cultural conflicts, cultural homogeneity, intercultural competencies, and inefficient decision support systems that could hinder business growth and innovation [2]. The strategic solutions will be critically provided aligning with organisational values to build sustainable business resilience model.

HOLISTIC BUSINESS DECISION-MAKING ON STRATEGIC RESILIENCE

Decentralising the decision-making style is identified as a critical factor for the business continuity of Thenextgen Advisory – as indicated in Table 1. This approach has demonstrated favourable outcomes in terms of employee recognition and motivational empowerment, resulting in high job satisfaction and a healthy work environment [3]. In the past, decision-making was primarily led by the CEO and a small number of employees at the director level. It is arguable that in the past, the company's human resources (HR) and intellectual property were inadequate, and employees may not have possessed sufficient

domain experience to contribute to decision-making. During the initial growth stage, intermodal thinking integrating intuitive and rational-analytical styles is necessary to avoid potential risks that could have negative consequences for stakeholders [1]. Effective decision-making requires the implementation of data analytics and decision support systems, particularly within teams. Rational-analytic thinking, which relies on facts and numerical data, demonstrates an empirical progressiveness in supporting intuitive thinking.

Table 1. Decision-Making Process in Thenextgen Advisory

Level of Decision making and Responsibility		Potential Benefits	Potential Detriment	
Past – Centralising Style	Director Level Entrepreneurial Styles Majority Basis [Intermodal Thinking]		Reducing the risk which is related to inexperienced decision-making from low-level staff.	Low-growth business and undeveloped innovation
Present – Decentralising Style (SME)	Director Level	Project Basis [Intermodal Thinking]	Tasks are well-delegated to suit individual capabilities and specialism while thriving innovativeness in project management.	Internal conflicts from an open discussion. Reverse Delegation Issues and Ineffective Priority Management
	Management Level			
	Team Level Individual Basis [Rational-Analytic Thinking]			

Source: Authors

The belief in power in Fig. 1 as an external locus of control presents a significant issue, as individuals may believe that superior performance in decision-making can only be achieved through this belief [4]. Excessive reliance on intuitive thinking in the decision-making process has been found to be associated with a sense of superiority among decision-makers. This self-perceived superiority may, in turn, result in long-term unconstructive conflict, diminished decision quality, and a tendency to act as self-appointed mind-guards, thereby erecting psychological barriers to progress [5]. These negative consequences upon cultural aspects have been elucidated in the methodology section of the research.

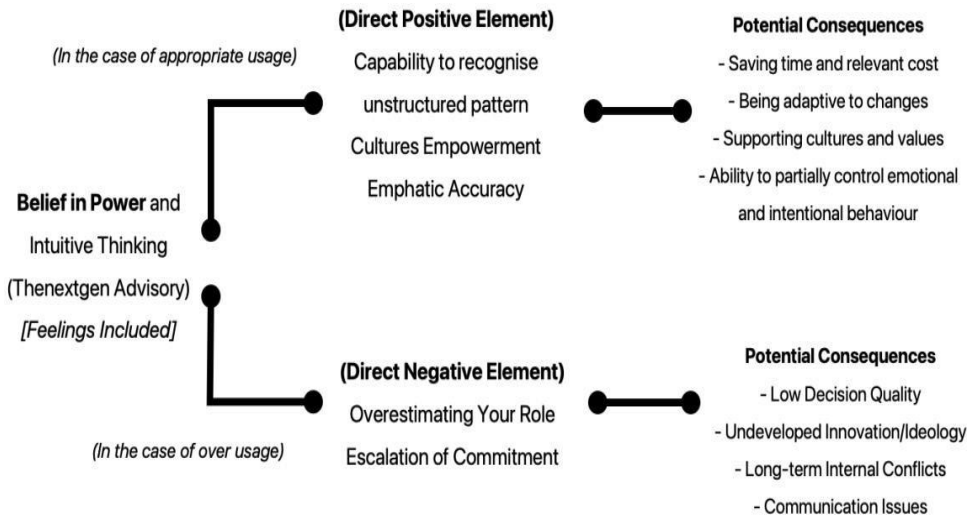


Figure 1. Impacts of Belief in Power: Insights of Thenextgen Advisory

KEY FINDINGS ON BUSINESS RESILIENCE

As an insurance service sector player, the company emphasises a growth mindset and financial planning services that align with Generation Z preferences. Hence, the company underwent a rebranding exercise from "Uncle Khor Group" to "Thenextgen Advisory," centred on a new mission and vision to motivate employees towards new geographical targets. The rebranding of Thenextgen Advisory marks the initial step towards enhancing the company's functional resilience. In this regard, highlights of Porter's Five Forces Model [6], Table 2. would illuminate the competitive landscape of the industry and how the functional system responds to environmental changes.

Table 2. Market Attractiveness in the Insurance Intermediary – Analysis of Thenextgen Advisory

Porter’s 5 Forces Model [6]	Analytical Consideration based on Thenextgen Advisory Focal Target Market – Generation Z / Located in South-east Asia (SEA)	
Bargaining Power of Suppliers	HIGH	Since the diversity and size of Thenextgen Advisory might be low compared to a larger insurance industry; therefore, there is a high probability that universities graduate as the major supply might be considering other offering alternatives.
Bargaining Power of Buyers	LOW	Presently, the focal market is low competitive and niche, Thenextgen Advisory has a certain potential to bargain and offer comparable alternatives of selected insurance companies that give the power to negotiate with both consumers and insurance companies.
Competitive Rivalry		There are no predominant competitors in the determined markets as Thenextgen Advisory aims to target a niche market – generation Z that particularly prefers to have more accessible, convenient, and understandable insurance [7].
Threat of New Entrants		Entering the markets significantly requires experience, HR, and financial resources to reach consumers and obtain personal sales. Thenextgen Advisory has expertise in this market since the founder has practical experience in the insurance
Threat of Substitutes	HIGH	Banking agencies in Thailand – focal market region, currently offer both online and physical services of life insurance as the intermediary, which is more reliable while could provide exclusive benefits corresponding to the local preferences [8].

Source: Authors

Systems and Processes

Thenextgen Advisory has opted to adopt the divisional structure to manage its agencies across various regions. This structure is particularly suitable for decentralisation and bureaucratic extension, allowing managers to be more specialised in a particular consumption behaviour [9]. These features are consistent with the company's mission and employee recognition-motivational scheme. However, structural contingency theory [10] suggests that no single structure is optimal for sustaining a business model over the long term, and thus Thenextgen Advisory is encouraged to consider the matrix structure. To facilitate these changes, combination of functional and divisional structure is needed to be integrated simultaneously across different functions.

On the contrary, implementing the matrix structure could potentially result in conflicts and rigidity due to cultural and cognitive differences in creating effective strategies. To mitigate this, adopting low-context cultures in Asia, emphasising collaborative relationships, could generate constructive conflict, which in turn positively impacts team coordination and performance [11]. Additionally, to resolve any international conflicts arising from structural changes, it is recommended that managerial control systems should be considered in alignment with the matrix organisational structure across Thailand and Singapore, which is the focal market sector in recent years.

Cultures

Thenextgen Advisory is dealing with a lack of diversity in its internal human resources management (HRM), as most of its organisational structure consists of individuals from Chinese backgrounds. This poses a significant challenge in expanding into the global market, given the existence of a high-context culture and belief in power, especially in Southeast Asia – Fig 1. Wider reach of foreign customers in this business context represents ample problematic areas, as analysing international-related behavioural changes requires a deep understanding of the varied cultural differences in local markets, which establish throughout different norms and consumption behaviour [12], as a result, achieving global market expansion may be unattainable without developing intercultural competence. To align with the mission of developing innovative practices, the company needs to develop intercultural competence from both external and internal perspectives, as diagnosed in Table 3.

Table 3. Cultural Diversity Issues in Asian Context

Issues in Developing Intercultural Competencies <i>Inside Operational Systems of Thenextgen Advisory</i>		Approaches to Effective Diversity Practices [13]	Potential Benefits towards Thenextgen Advisory
Internal Perspectives	Cultural-Related Team Performance and Needs of Motivators in Other Regions	Implementing diversity-related performance indicators (DRPI)	Attracting and Retaining Talent (Increase Level of Stewardship)
	Adjusting Attitude towards Various Cultures (Inclusion-oriented Culture) <i>[People Resilience]</i>	Establishing diversity manager and diversity training initiatives – (Non-judgmental observation)	Reputation and Higher Decision Quality in Recruiting Process
External Perspectives	Embracing Technological Changes Across Different Regions/Cultures	Evaluating external diversity-related norms of stakeholders and technological acceptance	Adaptive Technological Competencies
	Customers Service and Behavioural Changes of the Different Marketplaces		Societal Connection and Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Source: Authors

Table 3. emphasises the importance of balancing cultural differences, especially in high-context cultures. The sophistication and reliance on non-verbal signals in Asian cultures can create psychological barriers and potential misunderstandings when developing intercultural communication skills, particularly when organisational beliefs and personal values do not align [14]. Hence, embracing low-context cultures in the recruitment process and cultivating cultural intelligence (CI) would assist in balancing reliance on reciprocal personal relationships.

Human Capital

To cultivate innovation and employee commitment, Thenextgen Advisory should prioritise a motivational incentive scheme, particularly in wider context cultures that empathise relationship-level motivational factors [15]. However, due to Malaysia's high power distance index (PDI) [16] and long working hours with an approximate of 60 hours per week [17], providing individual autonomy and feedback is challenging to suit international cultural context adaptation, leading to potential mental health issues and employee resignation. Addressing autonomy issues is crucial to achieving Thenextgen Advisory's mission, and without it, rewards, and challenges in the motivational framework [15] may not be effective.

Leadership Styles

According to Porter's 5 forces model – Table 2, Thenextgen Advisory needs to prioritise university graduates as a key factor in their new mission statement. Research has shown that Malaysian graduates lack leadership skills in the era of Industry Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) and digital transformation [18]. Based on cultural management styles, senior managers at Thenextgen Advisory are authoritative leaders who train new hires to follow specific approaches [19]. However, to align with Thenextgen Advisory's mission, transformational leadership styles need to be integrated with authoritative styles to inspire employees and innovatively adapt to technological changes in IR4.0, while preserving the traditional leadership value would significantly reduce internal conflicts from senior managers' perspectives.

Organisational Climate

The factors that significantly impact the organisational climate are divided into two dimensions: positive-related norms, which include policies that prioritise creating healthy interpersonal relationships within the organisation, and negative-related norms, which refer to communication issues that arise due to non-verbal signals in high-context cultures, as identified in Table 4. These cultural norms interact with the organisational climate [20], which indicates the qualitative effectiveness of holistic performance at Thenextgen Advisory.

Table 4. Relationship between Organisational Climate and Culture: Performance Analys

Cultural Norms of Thenextgen Advisory (Asian Cultural Perspectives)		Effects on Organisational Climate [21]	Effects on Organisational Performance
Positive-Related Norm	Policies regarding cultural emphasis on building a healthy interpersonal relationship <i>(Effective working in the condition of high-context cultures)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empathy and understanding of root causes in unmotivated employees (<i>Reduce Employee Burnout and Stress</i>) - Trust creation (<i>Reduce Resistance to change</i>) 	Both norms must be reciprocal in balancing the benefits and values of Thenextgen Advisory to preserve organisational characteristics/values and achieve qualitative performance.
Negative Related	Communication issues concerning non-verbal signals in high-context cultures and cross functional meeting <i>(Values)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ambiguous shared values, delegation, and purpose of actions - Non-transparent Process (<i>Failure to change management</i>) - Information-sharing and Data Accessibility Issues 	

Source: Authors

METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

To achieve sustainable outcomes from its strategic plan, the research has developed a comprehensive strategy map, presented in Fig. 2.

Strategy Map for Thenextgen Advisory

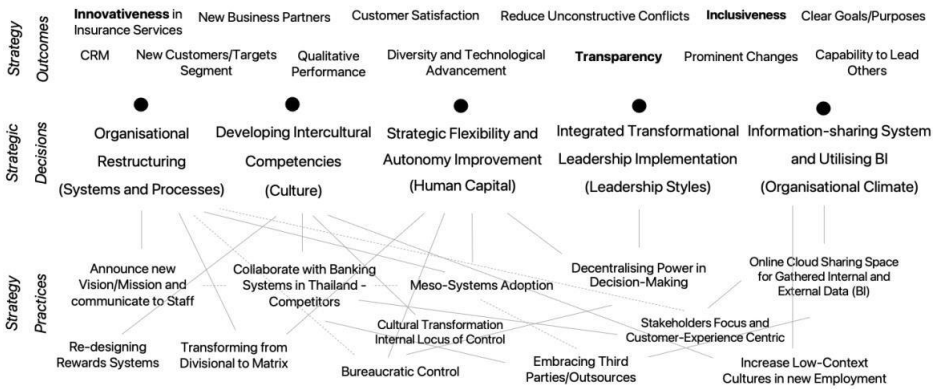


Figure 2. Strategy Map for Thenextgen Advisory

Systems and Processes

The observation in the business demonstrates that the network structure and fully decentralised strategy-making are not aligned with the values of Thenextgen Advisory. The implementation of the matrix structure in the organisation's restructuring processes is therefore recommended and requires an interactive control approach as diagnosed in Fig. 3.

Strategies in Structural Change

[Thenextgen Advisory]

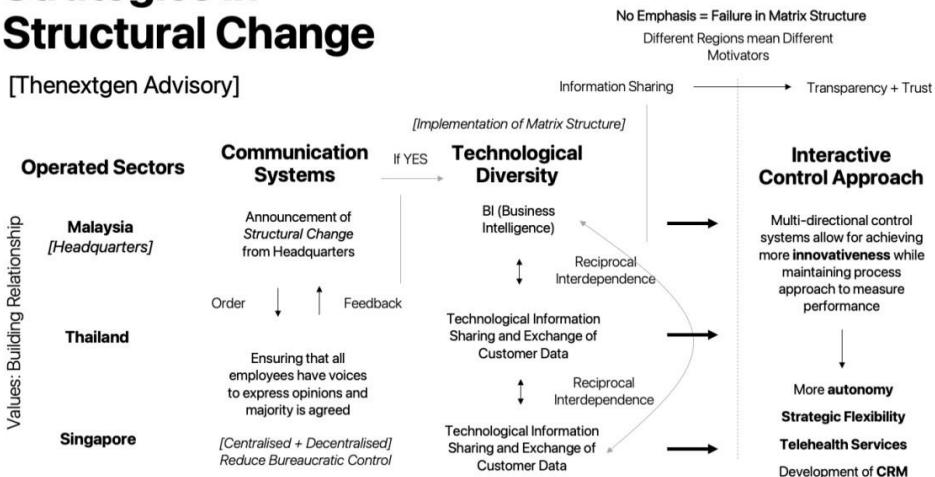


Figure 3. Strategic Structural Changes for Thenextgen Advisory

As Thenextgen Advisory transitions towards a matrix structure, it is important to consider how resistance to change may be perceived as unacceptable norms and symbols of disagreement by directors, particularly in high-context cultures [22].

Cultures

To enhance its intercultural competencies, as outlined in Table 3, the strategic solution suggests a collaboration strategy with public banking systems in Thailand. The strategy allows for open approaches while prudently providing practical action plans to mitigate threats of substitutes, as described in Table 2 and effectively gather extensive consumer data. This demonstrates the adoption of meso-system strategies with a focus on both micro and macro environmental factors, enabling the organisation to respond to international technological advancements and exceed customer expectations in insurance services. Internally, redesigning rewards system for low-context cultures and valuing individual cultural differences among employees is a key variable in achieving strategic resilience and effectively responding to crises [23].

Human Capital

Autonomy plays a crucial role in energising group agencies in the franchise business model, and it helps prevent employee burnout. Therefore, achieving strategic flexibility in the four key terms outlined in Fig. 4 will have a significant impact on the strategic objective of Thenextgen Advisory, especially in resolving issues related to excessive working hours.

Strategic Flexibility and Autonomy Improvements



Figure 4. Four Strategic Key Terms to Improve Work Autonomy in Thenextgen Advisory

Reasonable adjustment of the criteria autonomy in Fig. 5 would enable employees to independently design their work methods and schedules. According to empirical research, achieving strategic flexibility in subsidiaries requires both affective commitment and criteria autonomy [24]. Affective commitment can be fostered by aligning organisational and individual values while ensuring that commitment is not driven solely by external incentives or other factors [21]. Fig. 5 below illustrates how Thenextgen Advisory can integrate affective commitment and autonomy criteria to enhance strategic flexibility once encounter with technological disruptions.

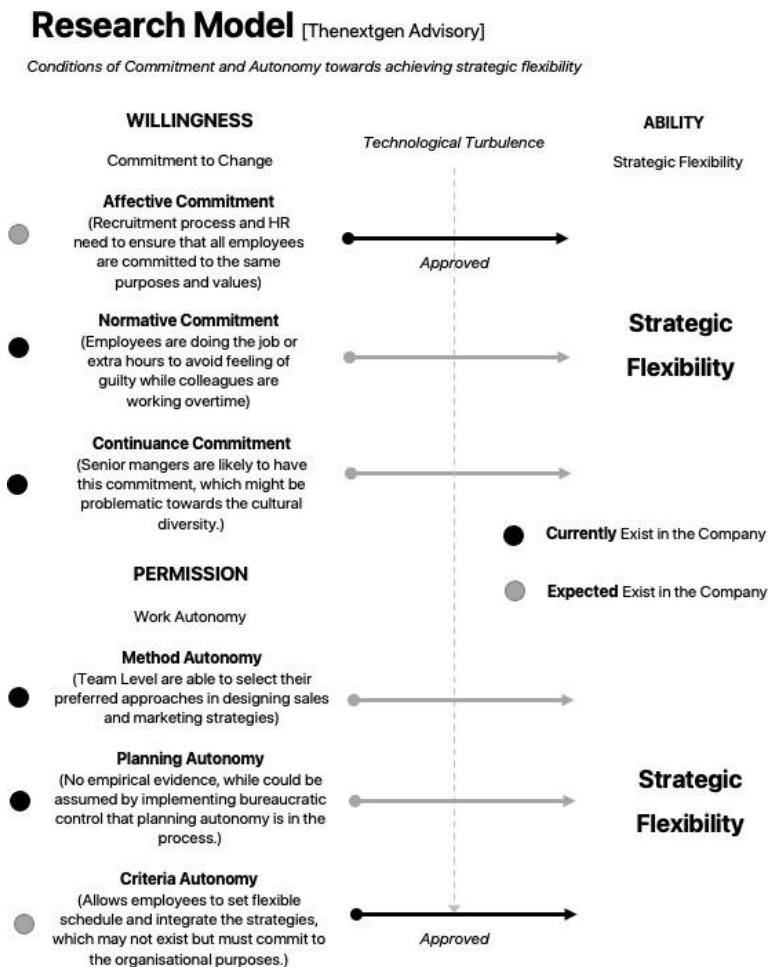


Figure 5. Approaches to Strategic Flexibility in Practices

Leadership Styles

One of the crucial factors driving the franchise business model is a transformational leadership approach, which emphasises team development and growth-oriented mindset instead of mere incentives [25]., aligning with the group agency creation mission. This leadership style fosters affective commitment and autonomy [26]. by encouraging employees to focus on purpose rather than reward. Autonomous actions, as non-monetary needs, may negatively impact the financial performance of Thenextgen Advisory [27]. Fig. 6 evaluates how the organisation should centralise information to balance the results of multidimensional performance.

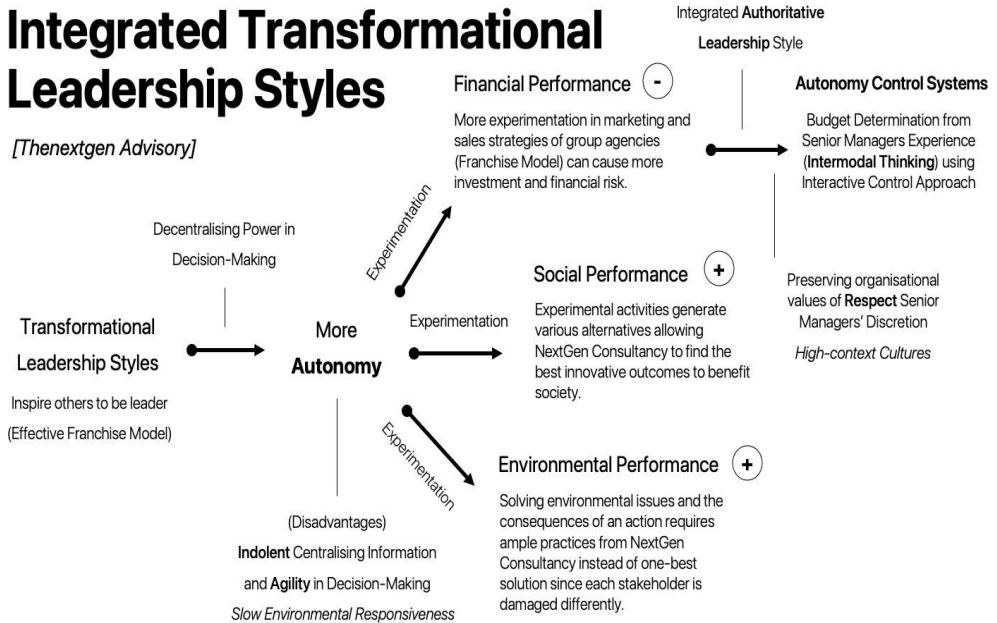


Figure 6. Approaches to Effective Model of Integrated Transformational Leadership Styles

Organisational Climate

To enhance organisational resilience and the capability to learn from crises, it is imperative to be responsive in communication issues of high-context cultures [28]. Furthermore, to support ambidexterity and adaptive innovation, the

implementation of information-sharing systems and the utilisation of business intelligence (BI) - as demonstrated in Fig. 7 are essential in developing the progressive organisational resilience maturity [29].

Information-sharing System and Utilising BI

[Organisational Climate in Thenextgen Advisory]

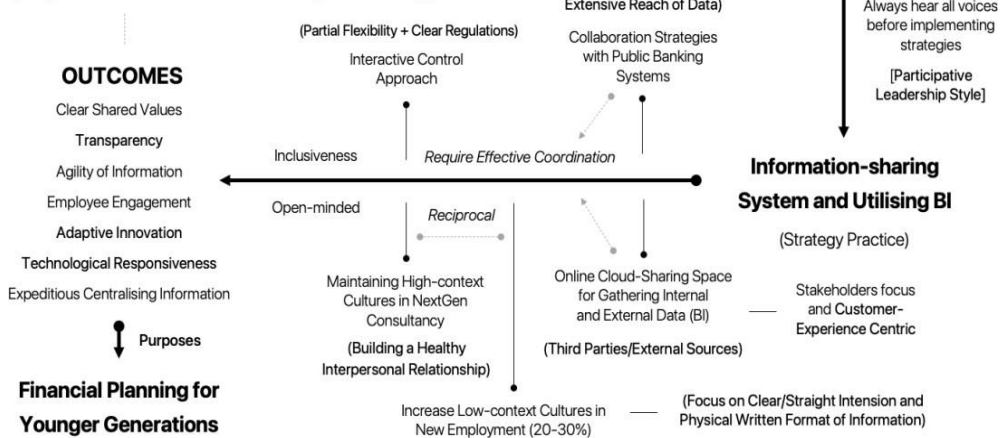


Figure 7. Operative System in Accomplishing Objectives through Information-Sharing and Utilisation of Business Intelligence (BI)

CONCLUSIONS AND RESULTS

Assisting Thenextgen Advisory's HRM with the redesign of their organisational system and implementing it to expand their market reach across Southeast Asia in alignment with their proposed mission and vision statement, requires a minimum of five crucial strategic decisions identified in Fig. 2. The subsequent sections covering five key strategic areas will thoroughly analyse essential arguments and outline primary steps for implementing sustainable models of business resilience.

Systems and Processes

The current divisional organisational structure of Thenextgen Advisory has power distribution and competency development challenges. The foundational method to obtain technological diversity across different regions is the practical

adoption of a matrix structure, which significantly impacts sales and marketing strategies. Essentially, implementing BI in the matrix structure would improve information sharing and the organisation's collective heritage system. The research found that the fully open network model may be effective in various conditions, but rapid changes in strategic flexibility that do not align with organisational values would not be widely accepted in Asian-based systems.

Cultures

Thenextgen Advisory is currently facing challenges related to cultural homogeneity, which is evident in their pure high-context cultures. To promote diversity, it is essential to develop intercultural competencies that can effectively embrace low-context cultures. In addition, new strategic practices need to be developed to collaborate with public banking systems in Thailand, considering different cultural perspectives and facilitating technological changes in the mesosystem. Moreover, redesigning rewards systems is crucial to support these changes. Table 5. presents the strategic resilience in energising staff in the long term.

Table 5. Strategic Resilience in Developing Intercultural Competencies

4 Sight Methodology [30] Implementation Steps – Developing Intercultural Competencies (Thenextgen Advisory)	
(1) Foresight	<i>(External Management)</i> – Evaluate options in selecting Thai public bankers to collaborate with and ensure that they are committed to the same organisational purpose and shared values. (Communicate to employees concerning strategic decisions, and include them in determining the direction of the business)
(2) Insight	<i>(Internal Management)</i> – HR department would adopt the cultural diversity notion in the recruitment process and majorly focus on low-context cultures until there are predominant satisfying structural changes. HR needs to ensure that personnel from low-context cultures are properly incentivised to reduce unconstructive conflict and meet their expectations.
(3) Oversight	<i>(Internal Management)</i> – Monitor technological changes in sales and marketing activities and how they affect customer experience, specifically in financial planning. Customers might be more various from different cultural lifestyles and preferences. <i>(External Management)</i> – Measure information agility and effects upon experimentation performance of employees
(4) Hindsight	To change both dimensions of management, the willingness of personnel is vital to cultural diversity learning, and a collaborative approach. The purposes of Thenextgen Advisory must be clearly communicated to ensure the establishment of the affective commitment.

Source: Authors

Human Capital

In high-context cultures, it is essential to consider the individual situation of employees to foster autonomy and flexibility. However, in Southeast Asia (SEA), centralising decision-making and polarising executive management are common practices that tend to value people based on their positions. These norms can hinder innovation and result in unprogressive performance. Additionally, psychological problems related to working extra hours are prevalent issues. To proactively cope with these challenges and create innovative approaches, decentralising power in decision-making would be elaborated in the organisational system, while the managers must consider based on experiential development at the team level since it directly corresponds to the required capabilities in intuitive thinking and the design of managerial information system (MIS). Besides, the research found that affective commitment and criteria autonomy are supposed to slightly adapt to organisational practices since the process of achieving strategic flexibility may be time-consuming, and immediate conceptual adoption may tremendously cause lower financial performance.

Leadership Styles

To mitigate the negative impacts of high autonomy on financial performance, integrated transformational leadership, which is outlined in Table 6, is fundamentally required.

Table 6. Strategic Resilience to Integrated Transformational Leadership Styles

4 Sight Methodology [30] Implementation Steps – Integrated Transformational Leadership Styles (The nextgen Advisory)	
(1) Foresight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore relevant issues in implementing transformational leadership styles, their consequences upon employees’ engagement/autonomy, and 3 aspects of performance (Financial, Social and Environmental) - Investigate the innovative ideology compared to main competitors (Bankers) while the organisation currently considers authoritative leadership styles
(2) Insight	<p><i>(Decentralise Power in Decision-Making)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formulate the integrated transformational leadership strategy to achieve adaptive innovation and use authoritative styles to design autonomous financial control systems <i>(Employees would be allowed to set the preferred budget on experimentation, while need to be reasonably and critically controlled by senior managers’ intermodal thinking.)</i> - Preserving authoritative styles would represent the high-context cultural values of being respectful to senior personnel, which influence interpersonal organisational climate
(3) Oversight	<p>The level of autonomy from the employee’s perspective would be measured to determine how effective autonomy financial control systems are. <i>(In the following conditions)</i> – Integrated Transformational Leadership Styles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If more autonomy, higher all aspects of performance = Effective (Expectation) - If more autonomy, lower financial performance = Issues in autonomy financial control systems - If more autonomy, lower social/environmental performance = High authoritative leadership styles <p><i>(Imbalance Integration)</i></p>
(4) Hindsight	<p>Transformational leadership styles and outcomes are not instantly reflected, adaptive innovation requires the strategy to be consistent over time with the contribution of senior managers and employees.</p>

Source: Authors

Organisational Climate

In Thenextgen Advisory, communication issues arise from non-verbal signals that reflect a lack of clarity in shared purposes and values, non-transparent processes, and an underdeveloped working environment that stifles innovation, ultimately leading to low employee engagement. To reactively manage future internal crises within the organisational climate, information-sharing systems and business intelligence tools must be employed. Table 7. below provides significant approaches to utilise BI and the system efficiently to suit the specific context of Thenextgen Advisory.

Table 7. Strategic Resilience to Utilisation of BI and Information-Sharing Systems

4 Sight Methodology [30]	
Implementation Steps – Information-sharing Systems and Utilising BI (Thenextgen Advisory)	
(1) Foresight	-Introduce grievance systems to generate the report regarding internal communication issues and perspective on non-verbal signals in Thenextgen Advisory aligning with participative leadership styles to solve the possible conflicts. -Analyse how agile the information is at the group agencies level, compared to the resources/data of the director level (<i>Externally, benchmark obtained resources from competitor perspectives to assist learning programmes</i>)
(2) Insight	-Coordinate with external sources/third parties to create an online cloud-sharing space for gathering internal and external data with a focus on stakeholders and customer-centric experience. -Collaborate with public banking systems in Thailand to increase the agility of information, effectiveness in decision-support system and extensive reach of data. -Increase low-context Cultures by 20-30% within 2025 (<i>Focus on shared clear intention of information and purposes</i>) -High-context cultures are encouraged to be stable, which represents the organisational identity and values on building a healthy interpersonal relationship.
(3) Oversight	Assess changes through 7 crucial factors in considering the success of this strategy, while enhancing collective organisational heritages and the customer experience in financial planning . 1.Clearness of Shared Values/Purposes 2.Transparency 3.The Agility of Information 4.Employee Engagement 5.Adaptive Innovation 6.Technological Responsiveness 7.Expeditiousness of Centralising Information
(4) Hindsight	Inclusiveness in the terms of information-sharing and open-minded in collaborating with external parties must be importantly emphasised to assure experimental learning from obtained resources and skills to integrate them into further strategy practices. (<i>Cyber-security is essential in these strategic decisions.</i>)

Source: Authors

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