# Leadership Style and Stress Coping Methods Among Institutional Administrators in the Situation of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

The pandemic situation of COVID-19 has greatly affected the daily life in many aspects, causing changes in social systems so rapidly that humans have to adjust their lifestyles to cope with this unpleasant situation. This includes the school administrators who must provide education in accordance with the new normal, both physical and mental preparation of instructors and learners under the COVID-19 situation, by use of situational leadership style to suit and adapt to rapidly changing situations. When a person is unable to adjust himself in a proper timely would cause many problems both physically and mentally. Strategies for coping with stress are making an effort, both behavioral and psychologically that people must use together to control and minimize stressful situations. In the part of the school administrators, one important coping technique is trying to deal with problems proactively so that to prevent problems in advance from occurring or recurring. Executives need to use stress management skills constructively, ie, they are responsible for trying to manage stress effectively, and reduce the stress that causes the negative effects to a minimum by adjusting the attitude towards stress, organize daily management system, manage tasks by setting goals in advance, manage tasks by specifying priorities, follow up the situation and prevent personel from exhaustion or burntout. However, Lazarus & Folkman's theory of stress and coping with stress will give an explanation and clear instructions which are easy to understand and to be studied and practiced so that a person can deal with stress and knowingly keeping the mental balance back to normality.

**Keywords:** situational leadership; stress; coping with stress; COVID-19 pandemic

## Introduction

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) continues to the present, if we are to ask ourselves whether daily life still good or not, it seems that the answer should not be much different among people in every country around the world. We are helping each other pray that this deadly disease will be gone from the world as soon as possible. Although it is trying to sprout species to fight vaccine and the various human-made drugs to save the victims of the virus strain.

When looking back and reviewing the origins of COVID-19, many people will be able to remember that, in December 2019, the city of Wuhan in China's Hubei Province announced the ongoing epidemic situation of pneumonia, which has severe respiratory symptoms linked to the novel coronavirus (SAR COV-2). The infection is widespread throughout China and other countries all over the world in just a few weeks. Until February 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) named the new coronavirus COVID-19 and reported to the public health of all countries of the massive number of infections and deaths from the virus. (Douedi, Steven., Miskoff, Jeffrey DO. (2020).

## The pandemic of COVID-19 in Thailand

The COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand has been ongoing since January 13, 2020 and is part of the global COVID-19 pandemic where Thailand being the first country to see its first confirmed COVID-19 case outside of China (South China Morning Post ,2020). Screening of travelers entering the country found sporadic cases throughout the month, which most of them were travellers or residents from another country. Until January 31, 2020, it was reported that a patient infected with COVID-19 was found in the country for the first time. The number of cases remained low throughout February with 40 confirmed cases at the end of the month. But by mid-March 2020, the number of patients increased. by identifying the cause of infection from many groups. The largest group took place during a Thai boxing match at Lumpinee Stadium on March 6,2020 with more than 100 confirmed cases per day a week later. (Krungthep Turakij, 2020).

Despite the government's efforts to resolve the COVID-19 pandemic promptly with various measures included screening for COVID-19 at international airports, investigating the disease, campaigning to wear masks along with more frequent hand washing, avoiding crowds, self-quarantine, and do not go out of the residence at night, emergency decree  as well as ordering the closure of educational institutions at all levels, the government has been still heavily criticized for handling the crisis in many aspects. In the latter wave outbreak there are no lockdown measures across the country but using the method of determining the measures according to the risk areas including planning the distribution of vaccine against COVID-19 urgently. However, there were still delays in vaccine imports and reasonable pricing. This pandemic has also caused incidences, including social and economic instability, as well as education administration of school administrators. What we are facing today is a situation that is critical and something that has never

happened in the country before. These are the signals that we must defend and adapt our own ways to deal with any various situations that occur.

Not only Thailand is facing such problems, it seems that the whole world is experiencing the same fate, but may be more or less different. Therefore, administrators have to manage education in accordance with the new normal. There are management guidelines such as preparation for online teaching in equipment and technology, curriculum design taking into account the differences of each learner, management of educational academy and teachers to succeed in learning management. There should be a joint consultation and planning of all involved parties: from policy makers, school administrators, teachers, educational personnel, entrepreneurs in business and civil society sectors, parents, as well as preparing both physically and mentally of teachers and learners. (Patcharaporn Duangchurn, 2020).Under the COVID-19 pandemic situation that no one has ever experienced before, school administrators therefore need to set up teaching and learning management guidelines under the use of appropriate leadership and in accordance with the changing circumstances.

The effectiveness of education management depends on the administration. It can be seen that developed countries will do their best to improve and provide education at all levels for the people. School administrators are important people to achieve the objectives. Managers must have relationships with subordinates with diverse ideas and minds. All speech and action cannot be used the same way for everyone because it would cause trouble. Many executives suffer from anxiety disorders about tasks assigned to subordinates. If we considered superficially,the executive position seems comfortable, there are people who always appease and respect, but inside every executive's mind, there is always anxiety causing stress and headaches (Sudsang Muenram, 2011)

The purpose of this article is to present the use of situational leadership and coping with stress by applying the stress theory of Lazarus and Folkman to analyze stress and stress coping of school administrators in the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, along with presenting stress relief strategies for administrators respectively.

**Situational Leadership Concepts**

Due to the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the most appropriate leadership style to be used should be situational leadership, which is the study of the influence of different situations that affect leadership styles to drive the organization to be successful.

Leadership must be adjusted according to the situation. Certo (2008) stated that the expression of situational leadership to make decisions in organizational policies consist of 3 important components: leader, subordinates, and situation. All factors must be expressed in balance. Therefore, for the success of the work, each component must be expressed as follows:

1. Forces in the manages. Administrators should create value for themselves to demonstrate being a good example as well as being fair to their subordinates in terms of welfare and progress and most importantly, administrators must consider the benefits of the organization as a main purpose emphasizing on the success of the cooperation of all parties.

2. Forces in subordinates. The duty of the administrators is to direct the subordinates to take part in the decision-making, and should encourage them to have leadership characteristics and responsibility. Let them express their opinion to the leaders. Make them understand about the goals and objectives of the organization and realize the various problems that are occurring to the organization. Subordinates with sincere intentions will be able to overcome the arising problems. Having good human relations will help to coordinate better between each other and also help to improve the efficiency of work as well.

3. Forces in the situation. Circumstances are the key factors in determining the role of those involved in decision-making and will also affect the performance of the leadership style of the administrators which may be considered separately as follows:

1) Situation is the environment that determines the size of the organization and the scope of each area of work. When the environment changes, it has a direct impact on the structure of the organization and on organizational behavior as well. A good leader should adapt appropriately in each situation to be able to make appropriate policy decisions.

2) Considering various environmental situations, administrators should go back and assess whether subordinates and associates are competent enough to deal with such situations, especially when faced with various problems and obstacles. The leaders should assign responsible person to fix those problems.

3) In a situation, the leaders may consider that what is currently going on is beyond the ability of their subordinates to make decisions about taking action. Therefore, the leaders may reserve a decision in the matter and then decide for themselves.

4) In urgent situations, waiting for the conclusions from all the stakeholders can be a time-consuming delay as everyone has different ideas. The leaders may use self-determination methods to resolve the situation in a timely manner (Rattana Kanchanaphan, 2020).

It can be said that situation leadership is a leader with 3 skills:

1. Good at thinking: think before speaking, think rationally, think carefully, think foresight, think consciously, and think positively.

2. Good at people: know yourself, understand others, can categorize people, use people's strengths, build acceptance, and trust.

3. Good at coaching: can teach people, develop good people, have coaching skills, can pull people's potential, focus on the value of the person, build self-confidence in subordinators along with developing them to face that situation in the future steadily.

Circumstances are constantly changing, ambiguous, complex, and ambiguous. Leaders need to adjust themselves immediately by avoiding the use of emotions and choose the right person, along with developing him to face that situation firmly to achieve success. The key qualities of a situational leadership are flexibility, agility, adaptability, and resilience. Because the team waits for management and decision-making from the leader to work with the team in arising situations and to produce good results.

Today's managers or administrators tend to experience very high stress at work. This is because the organization has to adapt all the time to keep up with the rapidly changing environment. Stress is part of our daily life. If a person get a small amount of stress, he will be able to adapt himself, in this case stress will be good for that person. If the amount of stress is too great to be unable to adjust, the person will step into a state of illness which causes the effects of stress on the body, mind and actions or behaviors. When people are in stress for a long time, it will weaken the health of the body due to an imbalance in the hormonal system. It can cause symptoms such as headaches, backaches, fatigue, pain, or cause other forms of mental illnesses of physical origin.

**An application of the theoretical concepts explaining the stress of Lazarus and Folkman (1984).**

Dr. Richard Lazarus and his collaborator Dr. Susan Folkman have presented a detailed theory of mental stress. It was built on the concept of cognitive assessment. and coping with

personal problems which is the main point of the theory by seeking answers from integrative analysis and presented his work in a book titled Psychological Stress and the Coping Process.

According to this theory, stress is an emotional response system, that is, a result of interaction between the individual and the environment. When there is an imbalance between the demand from the environment and the ability of a person to respond in different ways for each person. It depends on the individual's assessment of the stimuli that affect it. According to Lazarus and Folkman's theory of stress, the emotional response consists of 3 components: the input system which consists of stimulus properties, a person's assessment system and the output system, which refers to the type of a person's response. The details are as follows:

1. Properties of stimuli include:

1.1 Intrinsic refers to information about events that cause a person to meet intense emotions such as regret, anger, resentment. It is specific to the individual.

1.2 External features (Extrinsic) means non-specific information, such as things that are not clear. something new, what is yet to come.

1.3 The properties of the information obtained in the retrospective assessment of the response determined.

2. Person evaluation system

This system is the heart of the emotional response system which emphasizes the process of evaluating the intellectual of the person (Cognitive Appraisal Process). It is the process of assessing what happens to the person and how to respond them. The hierarchy in the assessment is as follows:

2.1 Primary Appraisal is the assessment of stimuli using of the internal elements of a person, such as values, beliefs. In this case, it is an assessment of how the situation is. The results of the assessment will come out in 3 ways: 1) not relevant and does not affect the normal state of the person, 2) is beneficial and positive for the person, or 3) is stressful, as in the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation is full of stress, so the assessment characteristics will be expressed as follows:

2.1.1 Assess the situation of the COVID-19 outbreak as a threat by assuming that the upcoming events will cause harm and loss. It is a prediction of negative events.

2.1.2 Assess whether it is a challenge by predicting the outcome of the event and how it will benefit which is a positive prediction of events. In the event of a COVID-19

situation, individuals, whether children or youth including parents assess that in a crisis, there is an opportunity; online learning, working from home (WFH) means you don't have to deal with traffic congestion on the road during your commute which reduce the fatigue of having to get up early in the morning to get on time for work and class time, being together in front of members in the same family. There are various activities inside the house that can work together to achieve success. An opportunity mentioned above might not have happened within the family for a very long time. However, the above positive and negative assessments are only speculations. Anticipatory events and the outcome is unclear and ambi-guous, which can be both positive and negative. The assessment of events that have already occurred, for example after 1-2 semesters of online learning, if learners, teachers and parents retrospectively assess that the events caused learning difficulties and lack of social interaction required, they will evaluate that it is a loss of opportunity needed to develop individuals by age.

2.1.3 Assessment of danger or loss is a further negative assessment about the result of past events, for example, your child's learning behavior changes, children become more stressed from homework, high anxiety, and eyestrain from using screens for long periods of time. Paranoid with the people around you when you need to go outdoor which leads to detrimental effects on mental health in many forms and to changing one's personality.

2.2 Secondary Appraisal is an assessment of a person's ability to deal with an incident and how to fix it including assessing the help that will be given to how they can deal with what has happened and how they can use past experiences to assist in their assessment. It is possible that the initial assessment was inconsistent with the second stage assessment. For example, assessing the importance of getting vaccinated against COVID-19 in the early stages when many people still lack confidence in its effectiveness. and outcomes of vaccination, they confused getting information about the pros and cons of vaccines from different manufacturers. But over a period of time, the number of COVID-19 infections is increasing rapidly, people are also extremely alert and aware of the immunization process because it has been through the experience of the past to help assess the necessary importance of vaccines, and when there is a shortage of such vaccines people are trying to find "helpers" to get the vaccines in a variety of ways including traveling to receive the desired vaccine abroad in the group of potential people who can do it.

2.3 Reassessment is reviewing the results of the assessment after the using of a problem-solving approach has failed for being able to maintain the balance of one's mental system. The reassessment is like a review of the failure to achieve the objectives. It came out in the form of using defense mechanisms in various forms at the level of consciousness rather than the level of unconsciousness by showing behavior to reduce tension in the adjustment of the mind to feel better, return to normal mental state and feel relieved of stress, even if the problem persists or cannot be solved completely. As the majority of people accept the measures and regulations which the government has adopted to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus by willing to cooperate in all aspects with all concerned parties, etc.

**Stress and response to stress**

According to Lazarus's Theory of Stress (1984), when a person is faced with a stimulus and that stimulation causes stress, one's response to stress or adaptation to stress is as follows:

**Cognitive Responses and Perception.**

When a person is under stress, cognitive responses and perception are possible in three ways:

1. Escaping and avoiding.

It's a person's attempt to deal with the stress they faced to help one feels that the danger or threat to one's mind is reduced or gone by using self-defense mechanisms which is found in most people. A person will conceive or perceive events in a self-centered manner, distort perceptions or deny what is happening. As can be seen from the COVID-19 pandemic, some people are stressed about being under the government's various measures. Before that, they have been able to do whatever they want as long as it's not illegal such as meeting after work tasks, to drink and clink, discuss issues of interest without conditions. People therefore distort these perceptions and violate various measures claiming that it is the right of individual freedom to act or try to deny that COVID-19 is no more terrifying than the common cold or various deadly cancers.

2. Accepting and coping with stress.

A person tries to reflect on the source of stress. Finding out how to deal with stressful situations, assess their ability to cope with stress, trying to change themselves to

become stronger and more tolerant to be able to cope better with stress and to have more "endurance" than ever.

3. Learning to live with stress.

If a person is unable to correct or change the stressful stimuli, a person must learn to cope with stress through different strategies, such as self-relaxation or seeking help from others

From the psychosomatic mechanisms to reduce stress in 1.2 and 1.3 when considering the response behavior of people in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic up until today, we can notice that most are aware and accept that they can survive in this unavoidable situation. Adjusting one's daily life in accordance with the reality that they are facing, seeking patterns and methods from various sources that will be used as a "helper" in easing the feeling of stress, both physically and mentally, mutual encouragement, learning to seek new knowledge and technology to improve the performance or study at home of each person, to be effective about the objectives which will help divert attention from receiving information about such ailments and create concentration in the work that they are interested so that these can help the days pass quickly and enhance hope and the meaning of a more successful life.

Response to the stress mentioned above will continue to cover the behavioral responses in items 1.4 and 1.5, namely:

4. Response to emotions and feelings.

People with stress will change moods and feelings caused by a feeling of frustration restless, pressured, oppressed, scared, anxious, depressed, sad and guilty. Some people are angry with themselves, angry with society, angry with leaders, angry with government and blame the environment. Therefore, it often shows physical symptoms. and reactions resulting from stress and anxiety including difficulty falling asleep, irritability, numbness in any part of the body. restlessness and pain in some area of the body.

5. Behavioral responses.

It is the reaction of the body to prepare or retreat. Behavior may include facial expressions, gestures, tremors due to muscle tension. There is a spasm caused by fear. or severe anxiety, stuttering, raving, talking nonstop, less work due to lack of concentration,

forgetfulness, more errors in performance including aggressive behavior or avoid coexistence in society.

In addition to the responses of feelings and perceptions above, individuals have a corresponding bodily response as follows:

**Physiological response.**

Refer to changes in the autonomic nervous system, such as changes in the work of the heart system, changes in endocrine function, which Selye (1976) divided the body's reflexes into 3 phases:

1. Alarm Reaction Stage.

This is the period when the body is stimulated to be ready and awakening to create mechanisms to combat stress. There are various system changes in the body automatically. The body's response to the stimulus at this stage does not take long to adjust or may enter the second phase, the resistance phase.

2. Resistance Stage.

It's actually a period of adaptation. The body will adjust the imbalance of various systems to return to normal. There was a change that required the readiness to protect oneself. At this stage, the body builds immunity to disease by secreting stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. The blood sugar level has changed. The response returns to normal as the stress decreases. But if the stress persists for an extended period of time, the resistance phase will not go back to normal, a person will feel distressed and have physiological changes such as high blood pressure, increased heart rate, increased respiratory rate causing exhaustion, sweating a lot, dizzy, muscle contraction which causes pain in the body such as headache, nape, migraine, nausea, wound in the stomach, wheezing, rash on the skin, etc., If the resistance period continues for a long time, it makes adjustments ineffective. The person will continue to be more stressed until the point of being unable to adjust and enter the 3rd phase

3. The Stage of Exhaustion.

When a person can no longer adjust the imbalance of the body persisted until the body is unable to return to normal, a person will develop a mental illness or may die from depression or does not perceive the reality around him anymore.Coping and relaxing techniques

Strategies for coping with stress are individual, both behavioral and individual efforts in psychologically reactions, each individual must be used in tandem to control, restrain, and minimize the stressful conditions of life. Kumar (2020) has proposed 8 techniques for problem solving and stress relief as follows:

As shown in diagram 1, coping and stress relief techniques go through 8 stages of a person's behavior, starting with 1) removing distraction by diverting your attention away from the problem, and then 2) venting your anger by expressing your emotions to reduce it. 3) redefine the situation by looking at the problem in a different way. 4) take the direction of the problem: taking into account the solution and collect information about the problem. 5) accept the truth, that is, if you can't do anything, learn to accept the problem. 6) see social support, that is, get help when needed. 7) turn to religion. if the problem is beyond human capacity and 8) proactively cope with the problem, which means making an effort to prevent problems in advance from occurring or recurring.
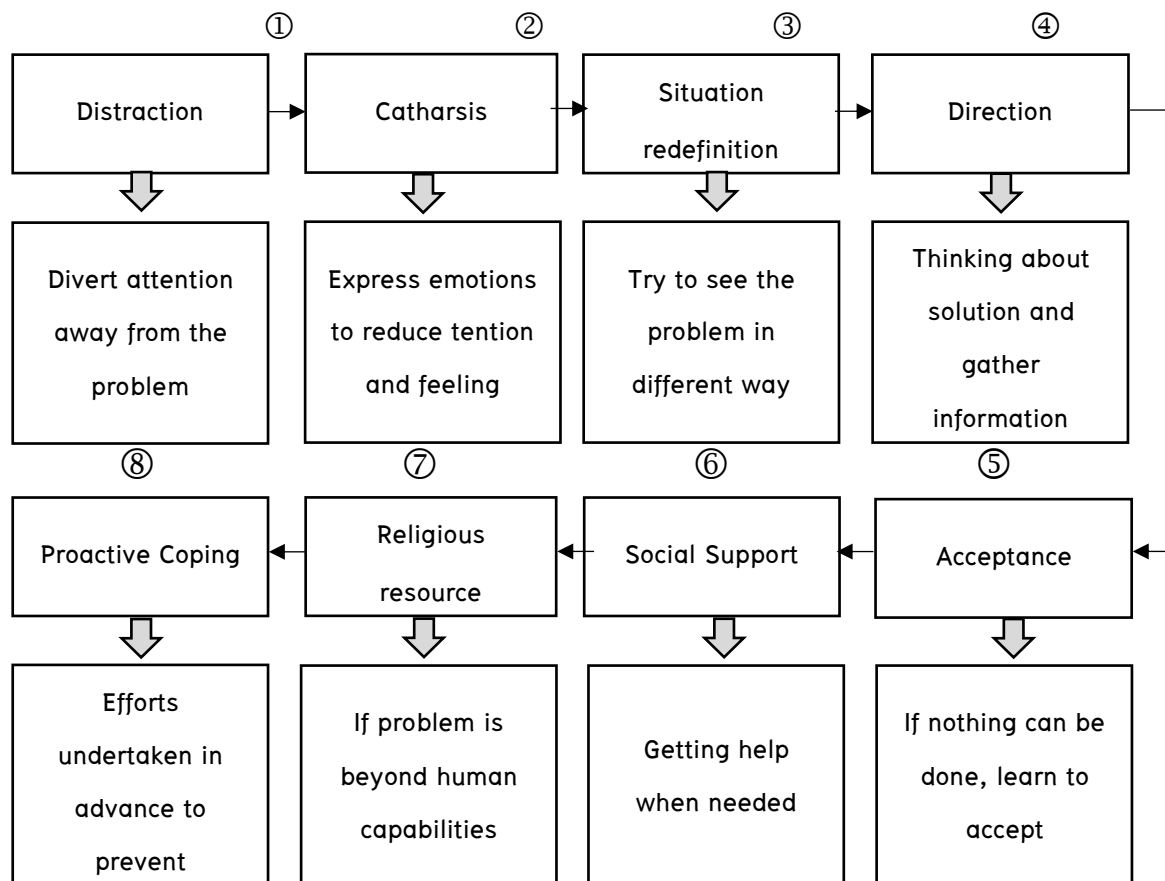
① Distraction → ② Catharsis → ③ Situation redefinition → ④ Direction

Distraction → Divert attention away from the problem
Catharsis → Express emotions to reduce tention and feeling
Situation redefinition → Try to see the problem in different way
Direction → Thinking about solution and gather information

⑧ Proactive Coping ← ⑦ Religious resource ← ⑥ Social Support ← ⑤ Acceptance

Proactive Coping → Efforts undertaken in advance to prevent
Religious resource → If problem is beyond human capabilities
Social Support → Getting help when needed
Acceptance → If nothing can be done, learn to accept

**Diagram 1** Stress coping and stress relief techniques.

source: drkumarpsychologist.wordpress.com

In the context of using situational leadership in management, executives need to use stress management skills constructively, that is to say they are responsible for trying to manage stress effectively and reduce the stress that causes the negative effects to a minimum. as an example of the following guidelines.

**1. Adjust your attitude towards stress.** It is considered a creative challenge. It welcomes the opportunity to work better. To have a positive attitude towards stress, it will inspire you to take action, striving to achieve goals and encourage you to use your full potential. If you don't adjust your attitude to get enthusiasm from the beginning, you may not be able to cope with the pressure. This will cause stress in a debilitating way, both physically and mentally.

**2. Organize daily management system.** To help reduce the number of decisions that must be made every day, problems should be automated and ensure that there are enough teams to deal with the arising situation.

**3. Manage work by setting goals in advance clearly.** Defined goals with a written action plan both work and personal will help reduce stress, that is:

You always know where you are going and therefore you have very little fear of the unknown.

Obstacles do not escalate into a threat because you have anticipated and have prepared a plan to deal with it.

Making alternative decisions would help easier managing because there is a goal as a criterion

A written step-by-step action plan can help you to achieve the goal because it is to decide in advance what specific action to take.

Management with the mentioned planning system will make easier to use leadership. This is because what is expected and necessary activities are set, including those responsible for each matter clearly. This determines standards and procedures for measuring the effectiveness of both individuals and organizations. Leaders and teams automatically know if their productivity is sufficient. The follow-up steps will show where the problem lies and can point out the point to fix the problem before it's too late. The stress caused by the ambiguity of where something went wrong is eliminated. On the contrary, everyone knows where they are going and how they intend to get there.

**4. Manage work by specifying priorities.** When there are multiple responsibilities at the same time, effective time management by prioritizing can greatly reduce stress. A planning and goal setting system helps identify conditions for rational prioritization, considering the level of the work outcome, is it high or low return? Such as considering the impact on the organization, the urgency, the difficulty of the implementation investment value, etc. As for defining the operating procedures to achieve the success of each goal will help to identify what kind of work should you do yourselves? and which part should be assigned to others to do. The most effective way to choose activities to do is to estimating the hourly cost of the person in charge. High-paying people should be doing high-paying jobs that are worth the time investment. It was not chosen because of personal preference.

**5. Follow up closely to the situation.** One of the most stressful feelings as a leader is the fear of missing out on important news or do not know what happened as it may cause heavy damage to the productivity of organizations and individuals. Therefore, plan to eliminate the stress of experiencing the unexpected by defining a system that will help to get to know the organization regularly, for example, there is a clear working order, design reports that regularly provide important information about the status and performance of the organization.

In addition, leaders should act as good leaders by providing inspiration, direction, and support for individual needs. This gives the team the confidence to move forward. Try to be a great listener and a good observer. Learn to connect with what is seen and heard to create a correct understanding.

**6. Prevent exhaustion or burntout in working.** Such physical symptoms often arise from unrelenting stress. This results in severe willpower and dramatically reduced productivity.

Prevention is a better way for yourselves and your team. An effective leader must show himself to be a good example by managing stress creatively. Identify specific sources of stress and then plan and take appropriate action to eliminate or alleviate the stress.

Executives must maintain a balance in managing stress on a regular basis. Ignore things that may cause negative stress, such as the same old attitude, the same work habits, the same non-creative problems and promote both personal and work fun, take care of various wishes of life to always be in a balanced and appropriate dimension. (Ponsanan Rungcharoenkitkul, 2021).

**Conclusion**

The pandemic situation of the COVID-19 virus has greatly affected people around the world in many ways, whether in the dimension of economic, social, political, causing changes in the family system, education system, public health system, trading business system and transportation systems. It happened so quickly that it was beyond expectation that people of all groups, parties, and levels needed to urgently adapt mental adjustment to be able to continue to live safely. If a person is unable to effectively adjust the new lifestyle in accordance with the current situation, this leads to a state of stress which manifests both physically and mentally. Management of educational institutions in the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis, administrators need to adopt various techniques and methods, especially the use of situational leadership so that administrators, teachers, learners, parents and personnel of educational institutions able to adapt for living in a new way of "New Normal" by emphasizing practices under the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 strictly. The leaders have to make educational institutions a safe place from COVID-19, resulting in learners to learn to their full potential and be safe from disease as well as to encourage the use of technology through the internet in learning activities so that to communicate with learners at home which is close to teaching in a real classroom. Educational institution administrators must focus on the use of modern teaching materials so that students can learn anywhere, anytime by using technology in conjunction with practical learning (active learning) which will lead to success in managing education effectively.

The theory of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) states that stress, occur or not, depends on person's assessment of the incident whether it affects one's welfare or not, and one must use the available resources to the fullest. Coping is a behavior that individuals express to protect their mental state that is disturbed by problems and stress. Lazarus & Folkman emphasizes that it must be a person's cognitive and behavioral processes used to deal with the needs of the body, both outside and inside of a person including mental processes or mental mechanisms that a person uses to maintain mental balance to be able to return to normal. Therefore, executives need to use stress management skills creatively, that is, they are responsible for trying to manage stress effectively and reduce the stress that causes the negative effects to a minimum. In addition, executives should act as good leaders by providing inspiration, direction, and support for individual needs. This gives the team the confidence to move forward. Try to be

a great listener and a good observer. Learn to connect what you see and hear to create the right understanding.

What a person needs to pay great attention to is self-care. The term "mind master, body slave" is still in use because every human being must face problems, no one can avoid it. The important thing is taking care of one's body and mind to be strong. Keep practicing to control your emotions, including being mindful to be ready at all times to prepare to deal with various problems that may lead to stress, knowingly.

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