

LEVEL 7 ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATION

Student name:	Tsoi Mei Kwan	Student ID number:	2322638
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Academic honesty / referencing:	Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your <u>submission</u> you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, <u>cited</u> or quoted in order to complete this assessment.		

Revitalizing Sa Sa International:
An Organizational Change Initiative for Innovative Expansion

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	P.2
2.	Force Field Analysis for the Change	P.4
2.1	Identifying Forces for Change	P.4
2.1.1	A Need to Increase Profitability	
2.1.2	Need to Maintain a Leading Position	
2.1.3	New Technologies	
2.1.4	Socio-Cultural and Economic Shift	
2.1.5	Lower Operating Cost	
2.2	Identifying Forces Against Change	P.5
2.2.1	Fears of the unknown	
2.2.2	"That's Not How We Do It Here" Attitudes	
2.2.3	Cost increasing	
2.2.4	Loss of staff over time	
2.2.5	Obligations toward customers	
2.3	Analysis and Application	P.6
3.	Applying Kotter's Model	P.9
3.1	Create a Sense of Urgency	P.10
3.2	Build a Guiding Coalition	P.11
3.3	Form a Strategic Vision	P.11
3.4	Enlist A Volunteer Army	P.12
3.5	Enable Action by Removing Barriers	P.12
3.6	Generate Short-term Wins	P.12
3.7	Sustain Acceleration	P.13
3.8	Institute Change	P.13
4.	Leadership and Implementing Successful Organizational Change	P.14
5.	Managing the Resistance to Change	P.15
6.	Conclusion and Recommendations	P.16
	References	P.17

1. Introduction

The latest financial document, "The Unaudited Sales Update for the Third Quarter of 2023," presented to the Board of Directors of Sa Sa International Holdings Limited (hereinafter referred to as "Sa Sa"), underscores the imperative need for a shift in marketing strategies. Despite significant efforts post-border reopening, store sales in Hong Kong and Macau have risen by 43.7% compared to the previous year. However, in comparison to the pre-COVID-19 period, the recovery rate stands at only 46.9%. The proportion of tourists in the sales mix was 46.9%, a considerable reduction from the pre-pandemic figure of approximately 74%. The 2023 Christmas season marked the first full reopening of borders, supported by government initiatives to attract tourists and stimulate local spending, yet offline sales reached only 43.1% of the pre-pandemic levels. More concerning is the decline in online sales, which fell by 5.6% year over year (Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, 2024c).

In response, the Board convened an emergency meeting. Analyses revealed that with the resurgence of outbound tourism, Hong Kong residents are engaging in what has been termed "revenge travel," adversely affecting local consumption. Moreover, the anticipated increase in tourist numbers has not materialized as expected. Crucially, the behavior of Mainland tourists has evolved in the post-COVID landscape; they now seek deeper cultural experiences, such as attending concerts and sports events, rather than primarily focusing on shopping for luxury goods. Coupled with the high costs of overnight stays and a weak Renminbi against the US dollar, there is a preference for same-day returns, especially among residents of the Greater Bay Area. These shifts have resulted in fewer visits to Sa Sa's shops and lower spending per transaction.

These changes in the economic and socio-cultural dimensions of the general environment are largely beyond the company's control. The best approach for Sa Sa is to modify its internal environment to adapt to these new conditions (Randall, 2004, 27-28). Consequently, the Board has appointed the writer of this report as the Change Agent to implement a strategic transformation before the situation becomes irreparable.

As previously outlined in Assignment 1, my primary recommendations are twofold. Firstly, in addition to aggressively competing for a share of the saturated female market, there is a need to bolster our presence in the still-growing male cosmetics market. Secondly, it is essential to fully leverage cutting-edge technology to enhance the in-store experience, improve service quality, and focus on developing AI-powered beauty consultants.

2. Force Field Analysis for the Change

Before embarking on the proposed changes, we apply a Force Field Analysis to evaluate their feasibility. This method assesses the equilibrium between forces driving change and those resisting it. For successful change implementation, the driving forces must be stronger than the resisting forces (Randall, 2004, p.35-40).

We identified and scored the driving and resisting forces at Sa Sa on a scale from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong), based on their influence on the planned changes. The scores for each side are then tallied to gauge overall impact.

2.1 Identifying Forces for Change

2.1.1 A Need to Increase Profitability:

The survival and growth of the company hinge on profitability, which is a primary motive for the directors to initiate change. This force is rated with a maximum score of “5”.

2.1.2 Need to Maintain a Leading Position:

The brand effect enhances user loyalty and attracts new customers. Despite fierce competition, Sa Sa maintains a competitive advantage. This force is assigned a score of “3”.

2.1.3 New Technologies:

Although currently lagging behind in information technology, Sa Sa can leverage its subsidiary, Sa Sa Dot Com Limited, which possesses expertise in various areas (Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, 2024b). This force is scored “3”.

2.1.4 Socio-cultural and Economic Shift:

With the recent reopening of borders, it is challenging to determine whether these shifts are temporary or permanent. We assign a score of “3” to this force.

2.1.5 Lower Operating Costs:

Employing technology to reduce operating costs is crucial for sustainable growth. This force is given a score of “4”.

2.2 Identifying Forces Against Change

2.2.1 Fears of the Unknown:

Change often incites fear among staff. However, cosmetics are not a necessity, it is easy to be affected by economic and social-cultural shift. Therefore, given Sa Sa's long history of over 46 years, change is not unfamiliar (Chaileedo, 2023), the impact of this fear is moderate, scoring “3”.

2.2.2 "That's Not How We Do It Here" Attitudes:

Some staff members express concerns that AI beauty consultants have no hearts, they might undermine the company's ethos of "serve with heart" (Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, 2024b). This concern is scored “3”.

2.2.3 Costs of Digital Transformation:

Although digital transformation entails significant investment, the potential for rapid returns justifies a lower impact score of “1”.

2.2.4 Loss of Staff Over Time:

Staff is mostly concerned about loss of job, with potential high impact, thus receiving a score of “4”.

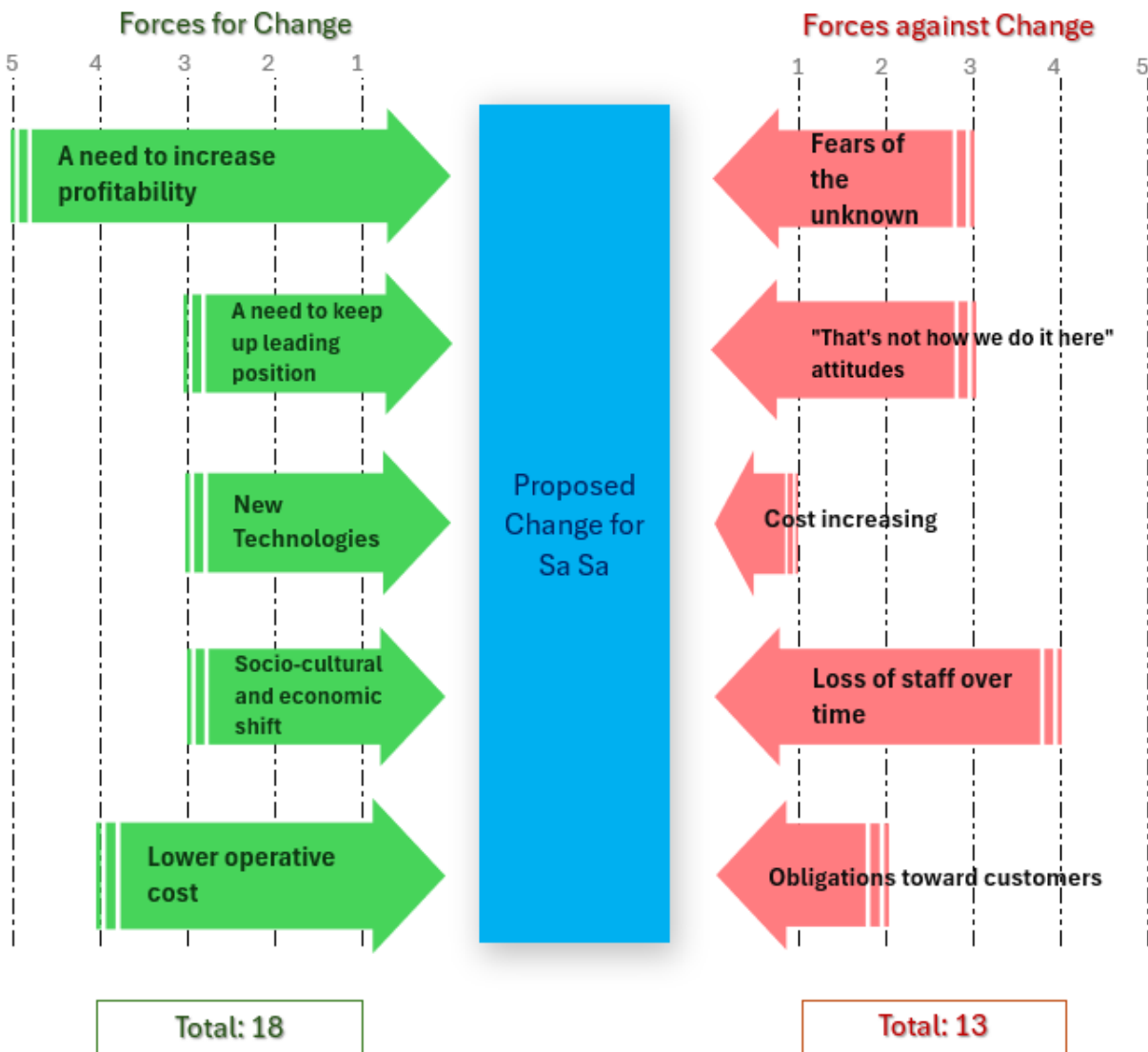
2.2.5 Obligations Toward Customers:

The influx of male customers could potentially disrupt the shopping experience for some female customers but may not be too many. This issue is deemed less impactful, with a score of “2”.

2.3 Analysis and Application

Following the scoring, a visual diagram will illustrate the balance between the driving and resisting forces, guiding the strategic decisions for implementing change.

Diagram 1: Force Field Analysis for Sa Sa

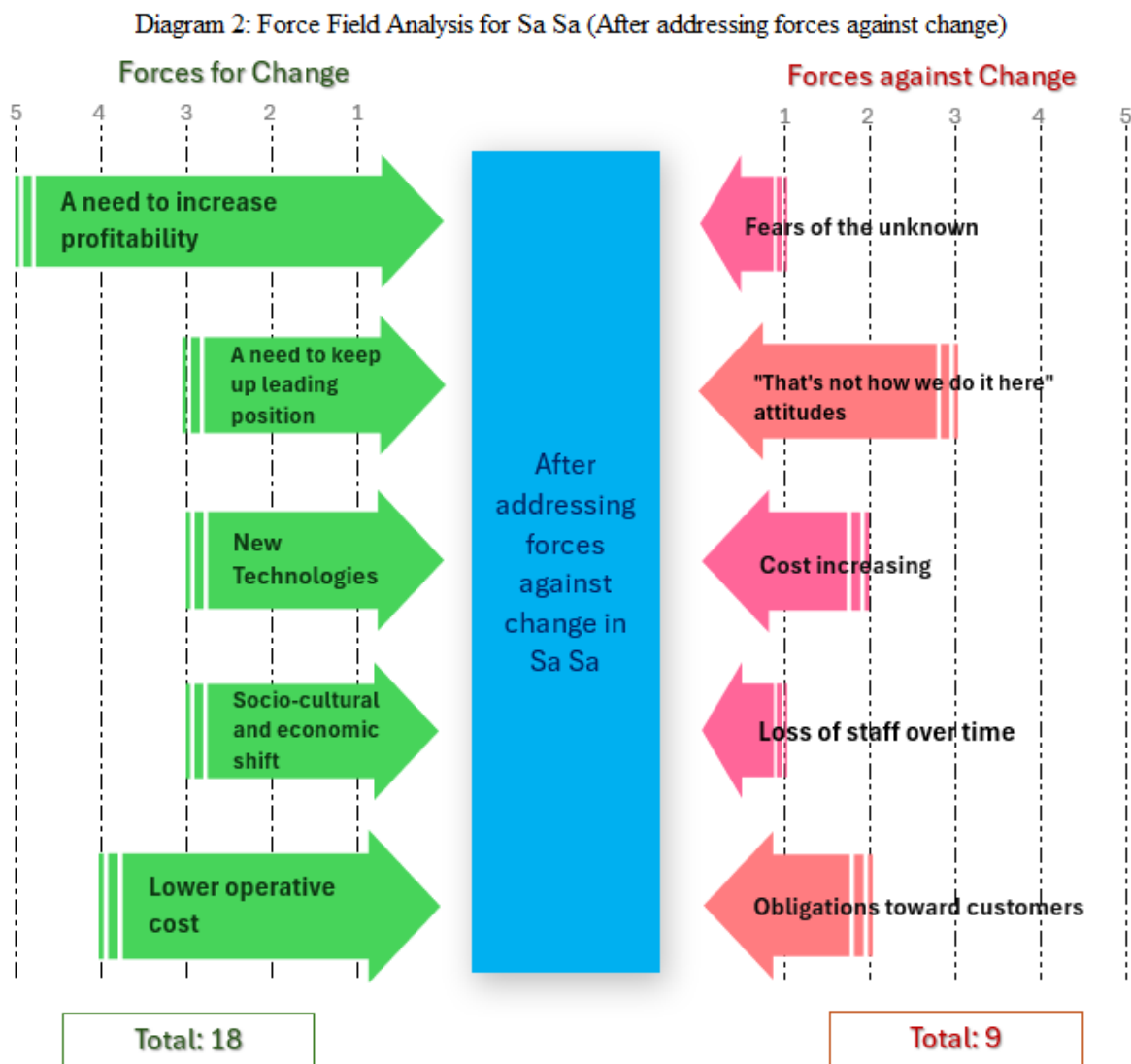


Source: Lewin, K. (1943) 'Defining the field at a given time', *Psychological Review*, 50(3), pp. 292–310.

As indicated in the Diagram 1, the forces for change exceed the resistance by 5 points. To further increase this momentum, we implement specific strategies. Among the six methods to address resistance, we employ education and communication (Kotter and Schlesinger, 2008).

Training staff to adapt to new situations can reduce their fear of the unknown from a level "3" to "1". This adjustment implies an increase in the cost of change. Sa Sa's well-established training institution, Sa Sa Beauty Academy (Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, 2024b), can introduce additional courses, slightly raising the cost from "1" to "2".

During meetings, directors communicate with all staff members, informing them about the steady increase in Mainland tourists and the company's active efforts to expand its store network (Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, 2024b). They reassure everyone that no jobs will be lost due to these changes, which significantly alleviates job-related anxiety, reducing it to "1".



Source: Lewin, K. (1943) 'Defining the field at a given time', *Psychological Review*, 50(3), pp. 292–310.

Consequently, as shown in Diagram 2, the forces for change remain at "18" while the resisting forces decrease to "9". With the forces of change now doubling those of resistance, the Board signals the green light to proceed.

Understanding that rushing into substantial challenges can lead to failure, it is essential to select a change model that promotes steady and secure progress.

3. Applying Kotter's Model

According to our expert on change management, Dr. Joe Leung, four prominent models of planned change are noted for their similarities (Leung, 2024, pp. 93-104). Despite this, we have chosen to adopt Professor John P. Kotter's model for our strategic changes. Professor Kotter developed his model after analyzing 100 organizations undergoing transformations, identifying which strategies were effective and which were not. His research has helped numerous organizations successfully navigate change (Mind Tools Content Team, 2024), providing us with a solid foundation of confidence in his methodology.

Diagram 3: Kotter's Eight Steps of Change

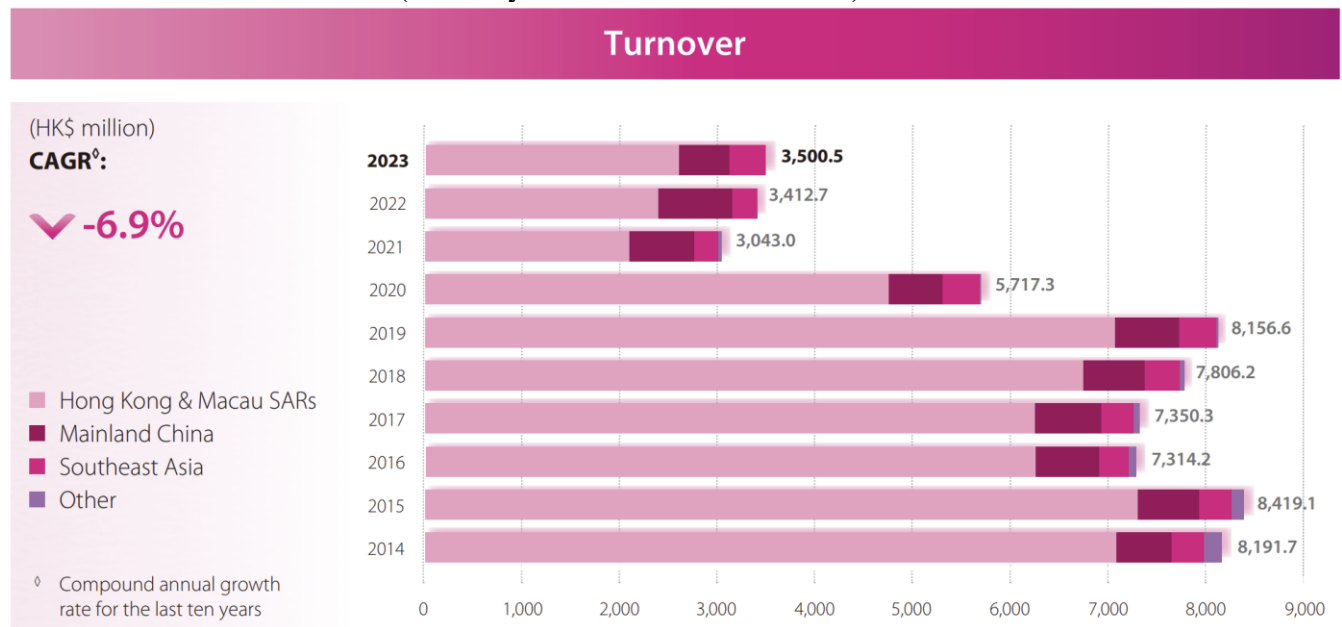


Source: Kotter, P. J., (2024) 'The 8 Steps for Leading Change', *Kotter International*.

3.1 Step 1: Create a Sense of Urgency

Creating a sense of urgency is crucial for sparking the initial motivation needed to begin the change process. The Board initiates this by holding an open dialogue with all employees, candidly discussing Sa Sa's declining profits and increased market competition. This is evidenced by a ten-year turnover report showing stagnant sales since the fiscal year 2015.

Diagram 4: Sa Sa's Ten Year Financial Report Summary - Continuing Operation - Turnover
(For the year ended 31 March 2023)



Source: Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, 2022/23 Annual Report, p. 23.

According to Kotter, for change to be effective, 75% of a company's management must support the initiative (Mind Tools Content Team, 2024). If a single meeting does not suffice to engage the staff adequately, additional conferences should be planned, incorporating diverse inputs including customer frustrations and experiences, such as the discomfort a male customer may feel when asking a female salesperson about eyebrow pencils.

For effective change, the provided information must resonate not just intellectually but emotionally with the majority of the staff (Kotter, 2024).

3.2 Step 2: Build a Guiding Coalition

Once a majority of the management is inspired, the Board should identify capable and influential individuals to form a change oversight team. This team should include members from various levels and departments who are committed to the change (Kotter, 2012, p.59-68).

3.3 Step 3: Form A Strategic Vision

The coalition needs to craft a vision that directs the change efforts, unites the coalition, and develops strategies to achieve it (Randall, 2004, p.138). After thorough discussion, the coalition decides to adjust the company's vision from 'making life beautiful' to 'making more lives beautiful'. We also go with a practical and measurable goal 'to enhance turnover by 25% over the next three years, 10% in the first year and 15% in the rest'. We apply the 'blue ocean' strategy and digital transformation as strategies to achieve the goal.

The blue ocean strategy is for organizations to find 'blue oceans' (uncontested, growing markets) and avoid 'red oceans' (overdeveloped, saturated markets). A company will have more success, fewer risks, and increased profits in a blue ocean market (Kim and Mauborgne, 2004). The Hong Kong Trade Development Council and the Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong are concerned about the development of the beauty and cosmetics industry. A report in 2021 concluded that the female cosmetics market is not only saturated but overcrowded. The ladies' cosmetics market has become the 'red ocean', filled with fierce competitors. However, according to data released by Euromonitor (The Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong, 2021), a market research firm, the overall growth rate of the Mainland men's cosmetics market is currently 13.5%, which is twice the global average growth rate. In 2020, the retail scale of various Chinese men's beauty products exceeded RMB 16.7 billion, indicating that men's acceptance of beauty products is increasing and the scale of the male beauty economy is exploding. Nevertheless, experts point out that overall, this market is still far smaller than women's. It is still in the cultivation period (Xu, 2021). In the 2023 financial report, Mainland tourists contributed more than 70% of Sa Sa's sales (Chaileedo, 2023). This changing atmosphere in Mainland China is the 'blue ocean' for Sa Sa (Barney and Hesterly, 2020, p.166-168).

Digital transformation is the integration of digital technology into all areas of a business, fundamentally changing how you operate and deliver value to customers, as a result, appealing to more customers (Barney and Hesterly, 2020, p.50-51). However, Sa Sa seems to have fallen into the trap of success, relying too heavily on their offline sales success. Sa Sa's digital transformation seems more like a belated attempt to remedy the situation and did not actively maintain with the market changes in a timely and proactive manner (Chaileedo, 2023). We should invest more and have a full-scale digital revolution, especially founding both male and female AI beauty consultants to teach how to choose and employ cosmetics, introduce and promote products both in stores and online shopping platforms.

3.4 Step 4: Enlist A Volunteer Army

Massive change requires the support of many people rallied around a common vision (Kotter, 2024). Various communication platforms like emails, hall meetings, and social media are utilized to spread the new vision and strategies. Regular updates and responsiveness to employee inquiries are crucial. We need to make sure the majority is not only accepting the need for change but also desire to see it happen (Freeman-Gray, 2024).

3.5 Step 5: Enable Action by Removing Barriers

Barriers that hinder progress must be eliminated. This might include altering structures that undermine the vision. The organizational structure, job descriptions, and compensation systems should be reviewed and aligned with the new vision. The coalition must provide the necessary resources, training, and support for employees to contribute to the change process (Kotter, 2012, P.106-113).

3.6 Step 6: Generate Short-Term Wins

Organizing actions that lead to visible, short-term wins sustains the change effort. Without this, critics and negative thinkers might hurt our progress (Freeman-Gray, 2024). We operate the spacious Canton Road Shop as an experimental site. Tsim Sha Tsui is a place that attracts both tourists and local residents. It is also famous for absorbing novelty. It is a perfect spot to try original ideas and easier to get good results. We can take about half a month to install AI beauty consultants and gentlemen's corners with full-scale male cosmetics for sale. We also launch aggressive

marketing campaigns on social media, in stores, and on the website. The coalition is fairly sure that within two months, this store will make a substantial turnover growth. Its success story can arouse the interest, enthusiasm, and confidence of others (Kotter, 2012, P.124).

3.7 Step 7: Sustain Acceleration

Kotter warns against declaring victory too early (Mind Tools Content Team, 2024). The coalition should use the credibility from early successes to uproot systems, policies, and structures that do not align with the vision, continuously applying these changes across the company. We can invite the pilot scheme frontline staff to share their experiences and joy. Most importantly, we must enrich our exclusive brands of male cosmetics portfolio, especially those products suitable for the skin characteristics of Chinese men, as many as possible before our rivals take any action.

3.8 Step 8: Institute Change

This final step ensures that the change efforts are deeply embedded in the organization's culture. Changes to norms, values, Human Resources processes, and more are made to align with the new direction (Mind Tools Content Team, 2024). One effective way to anchor changes is to reward and recognize employees who embody the new culture and processes (Freeman-Gray, 2024).

The effectiveness of Kotter's change steps at Sa Sa hinges significantly on the leadership of its founder, Chairman, and CEO, Dr. Kwok Siu-Ming Simon. His decisiveness and suitability for leading such organizational change are essential considerations.

4. Leadership and Implementing Successful Organizational Change

In Western leadership theory, four primary styles¹ are commonly recognized (Leung, 2024, p.110). Dr. Kwok, who serves as the founder, Chairperson of the Board, and CEO, exemplifies authoritarian leadership, consolidating all authority within his roles. While this style facilitates efficiency and quick decision-making, it also has significant drawbacks. These include demotivating employees, overlooking valuable contributions from skilled team members, and potentially fostering discontent and even hostility within the workforce (Wang, Cheng, and Wang, 2018). The high employee turnover rate at Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, which consistently exceeds 30%, reflects these deficiencies and suggests that the leadership style may be a contributing factor (Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, 2024b)."

According to Bass and Hater (1988), the transformational leadership style is often deemed the most suitable for contemporary business settings due to its ability to boost employee morale and strengthen team cohesion. For Sa Sa's changes to stand a better chance of success, it would be beneficial for Dr. Kwok to adopt a transformational leadership approach. Integrating the decisiveness of his authoritarian style with the motivational and innovative qualities of transformational leadership could not only enhance organizational effectiveness but also foster a more empowered and unified workforce. The question remains, however, whether Dr. Kwok can successfully achieve this blend.

¹ They are Authoritarian (autocratic), Participative (democratic), Delegative (laissez-faire), and Transformational Leadership.

5. Managing the Resistance to Change

While authoritarian leadership may not be the most suitable style for Dr. Kwok, paternalistic leadership seems a better description. In paternalistic leadership, the leader serves as a paternal figure and treats employees as members of an extended family (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). One of Sa Sa's key missions is to build a family-like community and equip staff with the best skillsets to address challenges (Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, 2024b).

Dr. Kwok should continue to empower people. This is also an obligation of transformational leaders. To excel in leadership, he must:

Not merely execute his authority by forcing employees to follow his direction but lead by a vibrant vision. Dr. Kwok, a daily user of masks, eyebrow pencils, concealer, and moisturizing foundation (Yau, 2018), is capable not only of leading the team by vision but also by example, inspiring their mind and passion, which is imperative for a transformational leader (Bass and Hater, 1988).

If Dr. Kwok's decisions are disagreed upon by employees, it can cause tension in the workplace (Kotter and Schlesinger, 2008). It's helpful for him to communicate with employees to explain the various factors that lead to his decisions. These discussions give employees the opportunity to ask questions and make them feel more involved in the decision-making process.

Paternal leaders often try to take up all the responsibilities and find it difficult to delegate tasks to others. This may cause employees to question whether leaders trust them. Learning to delegate tasks can increase his productivity and improve employees' leadership skills, thereby boosting team morale (Kotter and Schlesinger, 2008). The goal of transformational leadership is for leaders and followers to raise one another to higher levels.

If Dr. Kwok can manage the barriers to become a transformational leader, he can gain benefits from both authoritarian and transformational leadership styles.

6. Conclusion

Sa Sa faces significant threats as its profitability is decreasing. It is also encountering big opportunities in the male cosmetics market and digital transformation. When facing something significant, one must accelerate but not cause upheaval. Therefore, we start our change by first utilizing Force Field Analysis to determine whether change is possible. After getting the green light, we employ Kotter's theory and make changes step by step until these changes become the DNA of the company. Ultimately, improving Dr. Kwok's leadership ensures the success of the change.

Throughout the change process, we recommend several strategic actions. Firstly, we suggest using training and communication to weaken resistance until the support forces are twice as strong as the opposition, thus smoothing the entire change process. It is also crucial to provide employees with an honest presentation of the challenges the company is currently facing to stir a sense of urgency. We advocate formulating a vision statement, "making more lives beautiful," and pairing it with practical and measurable objectives to drive progress forward.

In addition to continuing our competitive efforts in the saturated women's cosmetics market, we propose seizing opportunities in the burgeoning male cosmetics market and embracing digital transformation as two pivotal strategies to achieve our goals. We recommend selecting key individuals to form a guiding coalition to oversee these changes and involve as many staff as possible in creating a volunteer army. The Canton Road Shop should be selected as an experimental site to secure short-term wins, which will help maintain momentum in our broader strategic initiatives.

Furthermore, we suggest a thorough inspection of systems, structures, and policies to identify and eliminate all barriers to progress, thus refining them to better support the change. Given Dr. Kwok's central role in leading change, we strongly urge him to evolve his leadership style from paternalistic to transformational. This would involve him leading more by vision, engaging in open dialogue with staff, and delegating greater powers, thereby empowering the entire organization.

With all these efforts, we are wishing Sa Sa all the best on this exciting new chapter!

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