

LEADERSHIP OF DEANS IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN THAILAND, MALAYSIA, AND SINGAPORE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY AND MODEL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. The objectives of this study are: to explore the leadership practices of the deans in private universities in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore in terms of vision, ethics, reality, and courage; to compare these practices, to determine which of these practices relate to leadership effectiveness of the deans; and, to construct a hypothesized model of dean leadership in the perspective of the three countries. The research methodology employed both qualitative and quantitative methods for the collection of descriptive data. Six deans from private universities, two from each country, were interviewed. The emerging themes from the interviews were grouped according to the four leadership dimensions of vision, ethics, reality and courage. Thirty-four deans who were not interviewed answered two sets of questionnaires: the leadership practices questionnaire, which consisted of 40 items, and the leadership effectiveness questionnaire, which consisted of 31 items. The emerging themes from the interview and the findings from the questionnaires were used as bases for the construction of hypothesized model of dean leadership in the perspective of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Findings show that certain leadership practices exercised by the deans in the three countries can be universally endorsed and certain practices are culturally specific.

Keywords: Private University, Leadership, Leadership Diamond Model, Vision, Ethics, Reality, Courage, Leadership Arenas, Leadership Practices, Leadership Effectiveness

Introduction

Leadership is the foundation for all organizations, whether corporate, non-profit, government or higher education institutions. Leadership is a high calling and responsibility, upon which all else the organization is or does rests (Di Frances, 2005). Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish the objectives of the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent (Clark, 1997). According to Koestenbaum, leadership is the art of combining results and heart (2002).

In recent years, leadership studies and issues have gained importance not only in business but also in the academia. However, most of these studies have focused on general issues rather than in the contexts of culture within which leadership is exercised and have been based mostly on Western theories that are often transferred across cultures with relatively little concern for their cultural validity (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). In addition, a number of leadership studies in higher education focus on the traits and skills of academic leaders; however, these have missed important ingredients needed to lead in the 21st century. Koestenbaum contends that today's leadership must convey a concept that is simple as it is fundamental: quality products and services must be supported by quality people (2002). In terms of academic leadership productivity, they are quality graduates and services.

The role of private universities in the recent years has gained momentum due largely to the increasing demands for quality education that cannot be met by the public sector. This trend is felt not only in Southeast Asian countries but in the western countries as well, thus studies on leadership of deans in private universities should be pursued.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to explore the leadership practices of deans in private universities in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore in terms of vision, ethics, reality and courage, to compare these practices, to determine which of these practices relate to leadership effectiveness of the deans in the three countries and to construct a hypothesized model of dean leadership in the perspective of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

Theoretical Framework

The Leadership Diamond Theory of Leadership Greatness by Peter Koestenbaum served as the grounded theory for the research design. The Leadership Diamond Model focuses on the four leadership dimensions or strategies that leaders

have in common – vision, reality, ethics and courage. Koestenbaum shows how to incorporate these four dimensions into the daily lives of the leaders to achieve greatness (2002). He also shows leaders why these four leadership strategies are timely in the postmodern era of education.

Koestenbaum defines a visionary leader as someone who always sees the larger perspective, for visioning means to think big and new (2002). Academic leadership in the same way demands imaginative optimism (Ramsden, 1998). According to Ramsden, a visionary leader is creative and forward-looking. He or she sees a picture of excellence, a distinctive pattern that makes his or her faculty different. Visions are the heart of leadership and in a university setting; a vision draws its power to motivate from being both intellectually and emotionally engaging (1998).

A realistic leader according to Koestenbaum, responds to facts, for realism means to have no illusions. He contends that leadership survival clearly requires awareness of the world in which the leader lives and in which the leader manifests his or her leadership effectiveness (2002).

Another component of the leadership diamond is ethics. An ethical leader is always sensitive to people, for ethics means to be of service. Ethical leaders know the deep meaning of love because the base of moral behavior is first of all solidarity, love and mutual assistance (Wren, 1995). The formula for effective leadership through love is presence and contact. This means that the leader must first develop his or her heart and then show his or her heart to his or her subordinates, peers and superiors (Koestenbaum, 2002).

A leader should not only be visionary, ethical and realistic. He or she should also be courageous. A courageous leader always claims the power to initiate, act, and risk, for courage means to act with sustained initiative. To have courage, a leader must think for him/herself, which would make for being steadfast in times of turmoil, in chaos, under stress, in doubt, in anxiety and guilt, in depression and anger, under assault or abandonment, in change, in ambiguity and in uncertainty. A courageous leader could sail a ship in storm with his or her experience and calmness (Koestenbaum, 2002).

In sum, the leadership diamond shows that leadership means greatness in all the leader does. A leader must work smarter, not just harder, differently, not just better in breakthrough ways that means that the leader should develop a leadership mind (Koestenbaum, 2002).

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed both qualitative and quantitative methods for the collection of descriptive data. For the qualitative method, the deans who were interviewed were selected using purposive sampling. Six deans from private universities, two from each country, were interviewed. The emerging themes from the interviews were grouped according to the four leadership dimensions of vision, ethics, reality and courage.

For the quantitative method, leadership practices and leadership effectiveness questionnaires were distributed to thirty-four deans of private universities who were selected purposively and who were not interviewed: 21 deans from Thailand, 12 deans from Malaysia and 1 dean from Singapore. The leadership practices questionnaire developed by Philosophy in Business (PiB), a trademark of Peter Koestenbaum consisted of 40 items: 10 items for vision practices, 10 items for ethics practices, 10 items for reality practices and 10 items for courage practices. The leadership effectiveness questionnaire developed by the researcher herself consisted of 31 items covering five leadership domains: 9 items for vision, strategic action, goal setting, planning domain; 5 items for management of the unit domain; 10 items for interpersonal relationships, development assessment of performance domain; 3 items for reflection, evaluation, personal learning and development domain and 4 items for quality of education in the unit domain.

The emerging themes from the interview and the findings from the questionnaires were used as bases for the construction of hypothesized model of dean leadership in the perspective of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

Findings

Findings from the leadership practices questionnaire show that in the leadership dimension of vision, the leadership practices mostly exhibited by the deans in the three countries are directing self-development to meet the needs of the faculty; sorting out relevant and important facts and information; anticipating future consequences or implications of current situations or events to the faculty; thinking logically in a disciplined manner and trying new ways of doing things in the faculty.

In terms of leadership dimension of ethics, the leadership practices mostly exhibited by the deans in the three countries are actively encouraging teamwork and cooperation and helping build agreement when working with others; instilling a commitment to quality and excellence in co-workers; being open and friendly, and easily connecting with people; mentoring, coaching and developing others including those who do not work directly with the dean; caring for the needs and feelings of others and maintaining self-motivation and work standards in the face of disappointment and rejection.

In terms of reality leadership dimension, the leadership practices mostly exhibited by the deans in the three countries are giving support to professional associates, family and community; recognizing the creative and innovative ideas of others; updating skills and professional knowledge on a regular basis; taking time to reflect on who really one is and where his or her life is going; regularly seeking and accepting feedback from others about one's behavior, and seeing things the way they are, not how one wishes they were.

In terms of courage leadership dimension, the leadership practices mostly exhibited by the deans in the three countries are controlling one's life and decisions, admitting to making mistakes and changing accordingly; dealing with conflicts and disagreements with others quickly; examining and dealing with personal problems and traumas.

Interview

The emerging themes and practices of the deans from the interviews of the deans in the three countries in terms of vision are being committed to the goals of the faculty and the university; striving for academic excellence and advocating uniqueness; sharing the same vision and teaching leadership.

In terms of ethics, the emerging themes and practices are maintaining good relationship with people; developing people; caring for and valuing people; advocating complete transparency; fostering teamwork; empowering people; appreciating people's contributions and modeling the way.

In terms of reality, the emerging themes and practices are leadership by acceptance; updating skills and knowledge; managing resources efficiently; engaging in a dialogue; learning from feedback; networking with other academic institutions; resolving personal conflicts; preserving the culture; being aware of management issues; willing to make tough decisions.

In terms of courage, the emerging themes and practices are advocating justice in making decisions; walking the talk; willing to take risks; willing to face confrontation; challenging existing norms and decisiveness, enthusiasm and energy.

In order to compare the leadership orientations of the deans in the three countries, the means of frequencies of answers to the leadership practices questionnaire for Thailand and Malaysia were used to answer the leadership-assessment instrument made available on-line by the PiB.net, a trademark of Peter Koestenbaum to determine the leadership orientations of the deans. The answers of the only one dean in Singapore were also entered in the leadership-assessment instrument to determine his leadership orientation. The on-line leadership assessment instrument comprises the same questions as those in the leadership practices questionnaire administered to the deans. Permission to use the leadership-assessment instrument was obtained. The leadership orientations were ranked on a scale from a possible high of five (most developed) to a possible low of one (least developed). Results show that Thai deans scored highest in vision (4.2) followed by ethics (4.1), courage (4.0), and reality (4.0). The Malaysian deans leadership orientations are more on ethics (4.1) followed by vision (4.0), reality (4.0), and courage (3.8) while the leadership orientations of the only dean in Singapore are more on courage (4.0) followed by ethics (3.8), reality (3.7), and vision (3.4).

Using Chi-square, the relationship between the leadership practices of the deans in Thailand and Malaysia in terms of vision, ethics, reality and courage and leadership effectiveness was determined.

Thailand

The leadership practices that relate to leadership effectiveness of the deans in Thailand in terms of vision are:

1. Thinking logically and in a disciplined manner
2. Quickly finding relationships and connections between seemingly unrelated facts and events
3. Anticipating change and perceiving trends in education and the market before they become apparent to others in the faculty
4. Seeing possibilities or solutions where none seems to exist
5. Anticipating future consequences or implications of current situations or events to the faculty
6. Directing one's self-development to meet the needs of the faculty

The leadership practices that relate to leadership effectiveness in terms of ethics are:

1. Actively encouraging teamwork and cooperation and helping build agreement when working with others
2. Instilling a commitment to quality and excellence in co-workers
3. Mentoring, coaching and developing others including those who do not work directly with the dean
4. Being open and friendly, and easily connecting with people
5. Caring for the needs and feelings of others
6. Maintaining self-motivation and work standards in the face of disappointment and rejection

7. Building personal and academic relationships on mutual trust and respect

The leadership practices that relate to leadership effectiveness in terms of reality are:

1. Regularly seeking and accepting feedback from others about one's behavior
2. Updating one's skills and professional knowledge on a regular basis
3. Giving support to professionals, associates, family and community
4. Taking time to reflect on who one really is and where his or her life is going
5. Donating time or money to helping others on a regular basis
6. Getting in touch with the world- people, nature and oneself
7. Recognizing the creative ideas of others

The leadership practices that relate to leadership effectiveness in terms of courage are:

1. Championing ideas or plans of action one believes in
2. Constantly managing one's anxiety and not allowing it to overwhelm him or her
3. Examining and dealing with personal problems and traumas
4. Admitting to making mistakes and changing accordingly
5. Controlling oneself and decisions

Malaysia

The leadership practices of the deans in Malaysia that relate to leadership effectiveness in terms of vision are:

1. Anticipating change and perceiving trends in education and the market before they become apparent to others in the faculty
2. Directing one's self-development to meet the needs of the faculty

The leadership practice that relate to leadership effectiveness in terms of ethics is enjoying the success of others as though it were his or her own.

The leadership practice in terms of reality that relate to leadership effectiveness is getting in touch with the world-people, nature and oneself.

The leadership practice in terms of courage that relate to leadership effectiveness is questioning the way things are and looking for ways to improve or do things differently.

Since there was only one dean in Singapore, who answered the questionnaires, the relationship between leadership practices and leadership effectiveness could not be established statistically but content analysis was used instead.

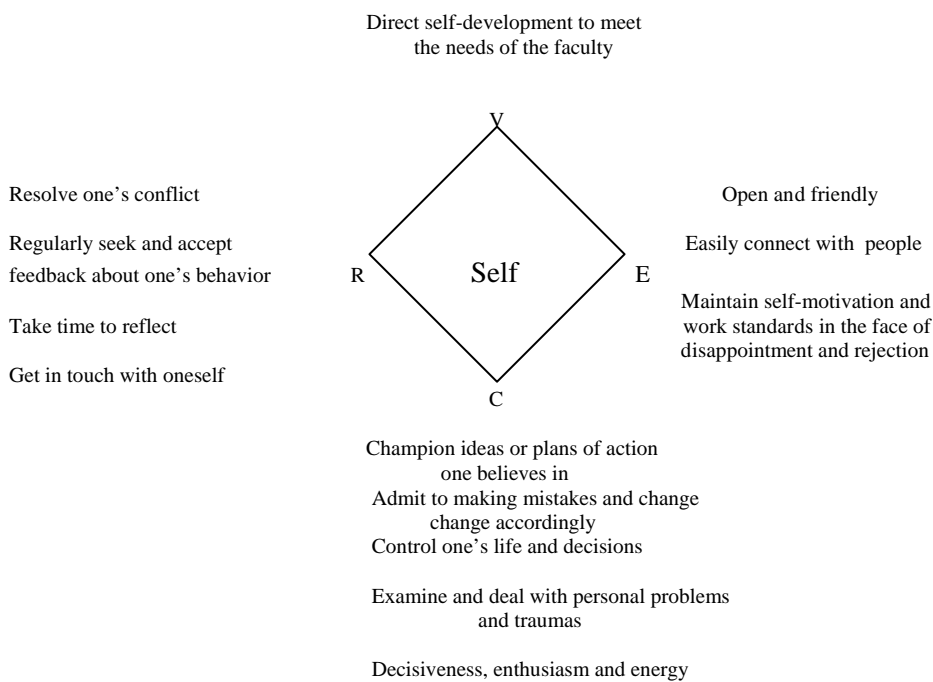
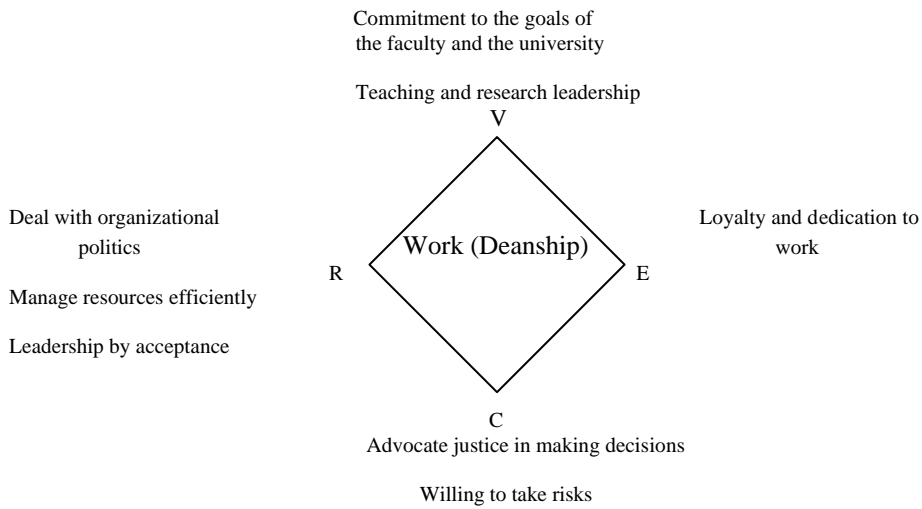
The Construction of the Hypothesized Model of Dean Leadership

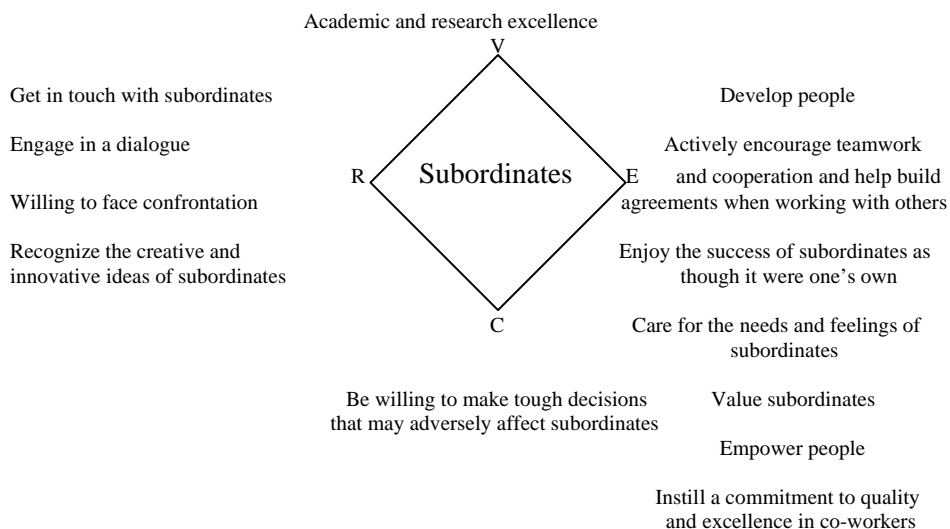
The themes that emerged from the interview and the findings from the questionnaires were used as bases for the construction of hypothesized model of dean leadership in the perspective of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

The model presented below comprises of the leadership practices of the deans in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore as indicated by the findings of the study. Koestenbaum, in his book, *Leadership: the Inner Side of Greatness* identifies six arenas of leadership: work, family, self, social responsibility, ecological responsibility, and financial strength (2002). However, the hypothesized dean leadership four-diamond model that was constructed consists of four diamonds, each diamond representing the different arenas of dean leadership: work, self, subordinates and environment.

The four diamonds include leadership practices of the deans in the four arenas of leadership in the academic setting that are essential in running their faculties and may be indicative of being related to leadership effectiveness or what Koestenbaum refers to as leadership greatness. The list of practices may not be exhaustive but the practices shown in each diamond represent the true nature of the leadership practices of the deans in the three countries.

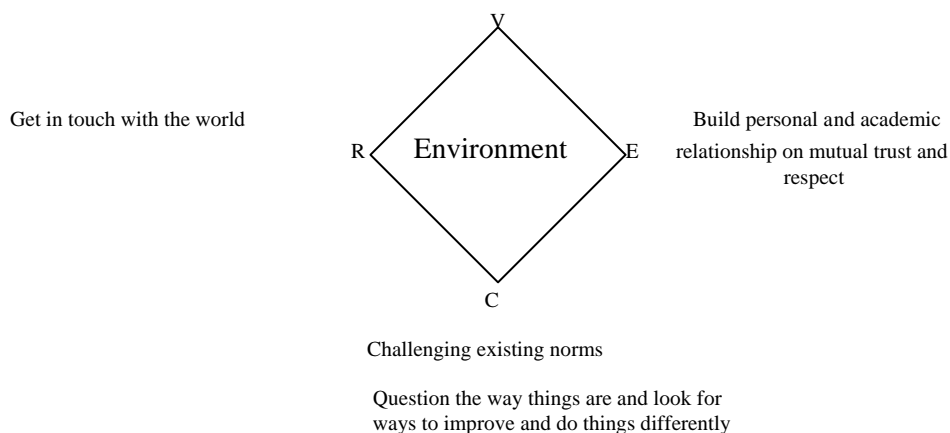
Dean Leadership Four-Diamond Model





Anticipate future consequences or implications of current situations or events to one's faculty

Awareness of global events and their relationships to existing local situations



Discussion

The themes and practices that emerged from this study are deemed important for effective dean leadership in private universities in the three countries. There are practices that could be universally endorsed and that function as requisites for effective leadership by deans. There are also practices that are culturally specific and are inherent in the context where they are practiced.

The practice that is exhibited by the deans in this study in terms of vision and is a common practice of the deans in the three countries that could be endorsed universally and is acknowledged by a number of researchers is sorting out relevant and important facts and information. Hallinger and Heck cited Leithwood et. al's claim in their study that the visionary leader's clearly defined personal values allowed principals in their study to identify important features hidden within swampy problem situations which provides a sounder basis on which to formulate solutions. Teachers, principals and deans make thousands of decisions daily, often without the data needed to make informed choices. Leithwood and colleagues found that leaders with clearly articulated personal values are more effective problem solver, as the visionary leader's values become substitutes for information (2002). Kouzes and Posner confirm

this practice. According to them, a challenge in leadership today is maintaining a vision because there are many distractions in today's leadership. Overload of information would cause people not to understand what their unit is all about hence, a visionary leader who can help people focus on two or three things that are most important to them, their unit and their organization is needed (2002).

Another vision practice of deans in this study that is important in today's academic leadership is directing one's self-development to meet the needs of the faculty. This is in agreement with what Muhammad asserts in his study about "Leadership in Higher Education in the New Millennium". According to him, in today's world of continuous change, successful leaders will be those who keep abreast of what is currently happening and making decisions that will be insightful for the institutions as well as the constituents that are served (2002). Thus, deans should try new ways of doing things in their faculties as demonstrated by deans in Malaysia and Singapore.

Results of this study indicate that deans in the three countries actively encourage teamwork and cooperation and help build agreement when working with others. The leader builds effective teams by selecting team members with complementary skills. They increase trust and self-confidence in the team by sharing information, giving positive feedback, utilizing individual member's skills and removing obstacles to team performance (Boehnke, et al., 2003). In their research on transformational leadership, Boehnke and colleagues confirm that teamwork is an essential element of success within corporate setting (2003).

In terms of reality, the practices of the deans in the three countries are somewhat different except for recognizing the creative and innovative ideas of others. All deans who answered the questionnaires are in agreement with it. A leader is compared to any endurance athlete who is constantly measuring the results of his efforts and working to improve his capabilities. This athlete measures himself against yesterday's performance but is always aware of the performance statistics of champions. One must consider both elements when preparing to compete. There are many strategies and techniques used by people trying to gain an edge, but they are always tested against realities of the competition, the course and the clock (Elash, 2008). This is also true in academic setting.

Courage is another dimension in the exercise of effective dean leadership. Without courage, a dean or a leader could not act and take charge, take charge first of his or her own life and he or she is ready to take charge of his or her faculty. This virtue is usually missing in leadership literature outlining the many lists of attributes of successful leaders (Weekes, 2008). Courage for a leader can be confronting employers and questioning the way things are done. One dean in Thailand who was interviewed exhibits this virtue. According to Weekes, courage is caring enough about one's values that one upholds these in the face of risks (2008). The dean mentioned earlier who exhibits this courage constantly examines herself and resolves conflicts within her. According to her, one has to manage one's conflicts first before one can manage the conflicts in the faculty and this requires courage. Thai deans and a Singaporean dean who answered the questionnaire are also in agreement with this virtue.

Implications of the Study

This study, while limited by sample size and institutional type, offers a preliminary substantive theory for understanding the leadership practices of deans in private universities in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. An additional strength of this study is the diversity of the sample, deans from different disciplines, enabling academic scholars to see beyond the deans of one specific disciplinary type to appraise the practices of deans in the larger educational institutions.

The findings in this study represent important leadership practices of deans in private universities in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore and suggest a framework for understanding, identifying and recruiting new deans. While this study suggests that the four leadership dimensions of vision, ethics, reality and courage are needed to be effective and great, a search committee may want to prioritize these leadership dimensions.

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