

**Strength-Based Operations as Organization Development Intervention
(SBO-ODI) on Enhancing Teacher Commitment, Engagement, and
Performance: A Case Study of Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani
(ACU)**

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Abstract

In the 21st century, four aspects in the era of globalization: complexity, change, competition, and connectivity, has impacted people's livings. To remain competitive the organization needs to design working environments with strong continuous-learning process to enhance commitment and engagement of the employees for better performance. Strength-Based Operation as Organization Development Intervention (SBO-ODI) was designed as a strategic intervention to support the working capabilities of the teaching and supporting staff at Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani, and was constructed based on the notions of worker strengths and right conditions as the foundation driving effective performance and success of work. The intervention was run under the core aspects of Action Research, and together with the framework of cross-functional team working, Appreciative Inquiry (A.I.) approach, Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results (SOAR) approach, positive coaching, and strength-based projects. The overall objectives of the study was to implement and to investigate the effects of the SBO-ODI method on the enhancement of ACU teaching and supporting staffs' commitment, engagement, and performances. The results from the questionnaires and observations revealed that the commitment, engagement, and performances of the ACU staffs were increased through the intervention. The participants expressed obviously in both understandings of goals in working and actions in conveying the project activities. There was a significant improvement in the participants' commitment, engagement, and performances at the level of 0.000* ($p < .05$), and the SBO-ODI intervention, finally, yielded the new model supposed to be assertive approach for working achievement of an organization.

Key words: strength-based operations (SBO), organization development intervention (ODI), strength-based projects, commitment, engagement, performance

Introduction

In recent years, the situations around the world can be characterized from four different aspects, namely complexity (Lewin, 1992, pp. 51-53 cited in Henry, 2001), change (Henry, 2001 cited Gerrit Broekstra), competition (Toffler, 1980), and connectivity (Friedman, 2005). To remain competitive, organizations need to design working environments enhance employee through a continuous learning process to possess strong commitment, engagement and competitive performance.

In educational institutions, the most important sub-unit is the roles of administrators, teachers, students, non-academic supporting staffs which represent positions, statuses, and offices within the institution (Aquino, 2000, cited in Guba and Getzels, 1957). Educational leaders must focus on the effective management of people regarding the differences of roles, behaviors and personalities. The leaders have to achieve a unity from diversity, and have to motivate people to perform particular roles within a given period of time under the standard rules. Consequently, institutional goals can be achieved. The current competitive condition of the leaders requires more committing and engaging workforce which help and support trustworthy decisions, innovation, and better performances (Cummings & Worley, 2009).

In Thailand, education for children has been considered the first priority for all parents. According to Friedman (2005) administrators, teachers, and supporting staff are obviously involved in the knowledge-based age. Consequently, in order to keep up with effective performances of administrators, teachers, and supporting staffs need to be increased their commitment and engagement in the educational institutions.

Up to the present, the current state of ACU appears normal and functioning. Any unit of the school works on normal procedures and processes accordingly. However, the smoothly state of working may not probably be supportive for any further development. As suggested that in the world of information, there is a need for developmental moves in order to catch up with the world changes (Henry, 2001). For ACU, considered as one of the educational forefronts in the province, it would be appropriate to sway the gentle state of the school for a more progressive change with the essential reason of competing ahead other educational institutions. Consequently, the researcher has sought ways to develop the school, focusing on the teaching and support staff who have been regarded as the most important factor for driving the development (Figure 1)

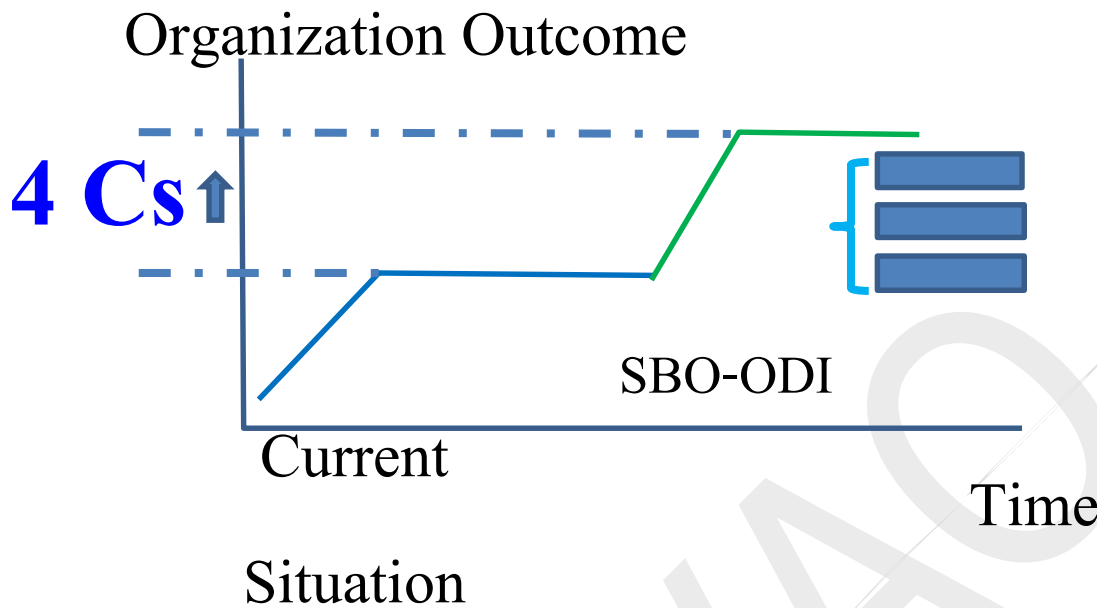


Figure 1. Opportunity for the Action Research

Strength-Based Operation (SBO) within the processes of A.I. and SOAR approaches to develop these issues in every step and to find out the different processes of SOAR between the groups of teaching and supporting staff at ACU. Consequently, the staff would have higher commitment, engagement and at the same time their performances would be increased.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the current levels of commitment, engagement and performances of teaching and supporting staff at Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani.
2. To design an organization development intervention (ODI) to enhance the commitment, engagement, and performance of the teaching and supporting staff at Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani.
3. To implement the strength-based operations as organization development interventions (SBO-ODI) to increase the levels of commitment, engagement and performances of teaching and supporting staffs at Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani.
4. To investigate the effects of the strength-based operations as organization development intervention (SBO-ODI) on the enhancement of commitment, engagement and performance of the teaching and supporting staff at Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani.

Research Questions

1. What are the current levels of commitment, engagement, and performance of teaching and supporting staffs at Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani?
2. What are the effects of the strength-based operations as organization development intervention (SBO-ODI) on enhancing the commitment, engagement and performances of teaching and supporting staffs at Assumption Ubon Ratchathani?
3. To what extent does the strength-based operations as organization development intervention (SBO-ODI) affect the levels of commitment, engagement and performances of teaching and supporting staffs at Assumption Ubon Ratchathani ?

Review of Literature

Organization Development Intervention (ODI)

Cummings and Worley (2009) described organization development interventions as a sequence of activities, actions, and events intended to help an organization improve its performance and effectiveness. The intervention for developing effective organizational should be designed to fit the needs of the organization which are based on current knowledge of expected outcomes, and to transfer the competence for managing changes to organization members. The main purpose of the intervention is to create changes leading meaningful differences and greater effectiveness.

Strength-based Approach

Strength-based approach is the application constructed under the principles and disciplines of various theories relating to positive factors driving the effective outcomes of job performance (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Laszlo & Cooperrider, 2007; Whitney, 2004; Adams, Schiller, & Cooperrider, 2004). The core principle of the approach is on positive conditions to deliver the best results of work (Laszlo & Cooperrider, 2007; Whitney, 2004).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a positive model which is based on the principles and theories of positive psychology, focusing on strength-based interventions for organization development. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastava in the 1980s (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). AI seeks the best points in people, their organizations, and the relevant parts of the world around them. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to reach its positive potential. AI unity, fundamentally seeks, to build a constructive union between the whole group of people and the massive entirety of what people talk about past and present

capacities: achievements, assessments, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights of deeper corporation spirits or souls - and visions of valued, and possible futures.

SOAR framework

SOAR stands for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results. The framework of SOAR appears as a strengths-based formulation with a participatory approach of strategic analysis, strategic development, and organizational change. The SOAR framework enhances and guides strategic planning and implementing processes which are based on the positive approaches. The processes in the SOAR framework provide the ways to *inquire* into the organization's strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and measurable results, to *imagine* the organization's desired future, to *innovate* strategies, plans, systems, designs, and structures, and to *implement* the strategy-based innovations. The SOAR engages the stakeholders in the conversations to identify and analyze strengths and opportunities for creating shared aspirations, goals, strategies, and commitment to achieve certain goals of an organization (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) These may include creating new strategies, systems, processes, and structures to achieve the goals, and then the new decision and actions might be implemented everyday (Stavros, J. and Sprangel, J., 2009). Therefore, the SOAR approach integrates the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in the transformational process for change in the organization (Daly et al., 2007), and for building a sustainable culture (Stavros, J., and Saint, D., 2010).

Employee Commitment

The organizations associated with employee development, well-being, and needs for actualization tend to include the persons who have higher sense of commitment (Dessler, 1999). According to Chalofsky and Krishna (2009), if the organization intends to foster the affective organizational commitment, it has to manifest a distinct commitment to employees to provide an environment supportive of the work. This can be said that the organization assists the whole potentials employees while they are engaged in the organization.

Employee Engagement

Research studies on organizational relationships suggest that the level of employees' engagement is correlated to organizations' profits. For instance, Hewitt Best Employee in Thailand (2009) studied the employee scores of engagement from 2001-2009 and found out that the scores of employees' engagement level of around 45-60% indicated that approximately half of the total number of Thai workforce is not likely to commit to the practice of doing more than required to make their organization successful. Moreover, the results revealed that the engaged workforce yielded only 15% of the revenues growth, and 9% of the profit growth. This can be interpreted that the engagement of employee seems to be the vital factor for long term success of all organizations in Thailand.

Job Performance

The quality of job performance contributes to the organization's development and

success. The performance of the members of any work group in an organization impacts the rest of the members of the organization. Job performance is measured by individual achievement, employee improvement, effectiveness and efficiency, productivity, competency, and quality and better services.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework explains the situation of Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani (ACU), and the process employed to improve the levels of commitment and engagement as related to job performance of teaching and supporting staff.

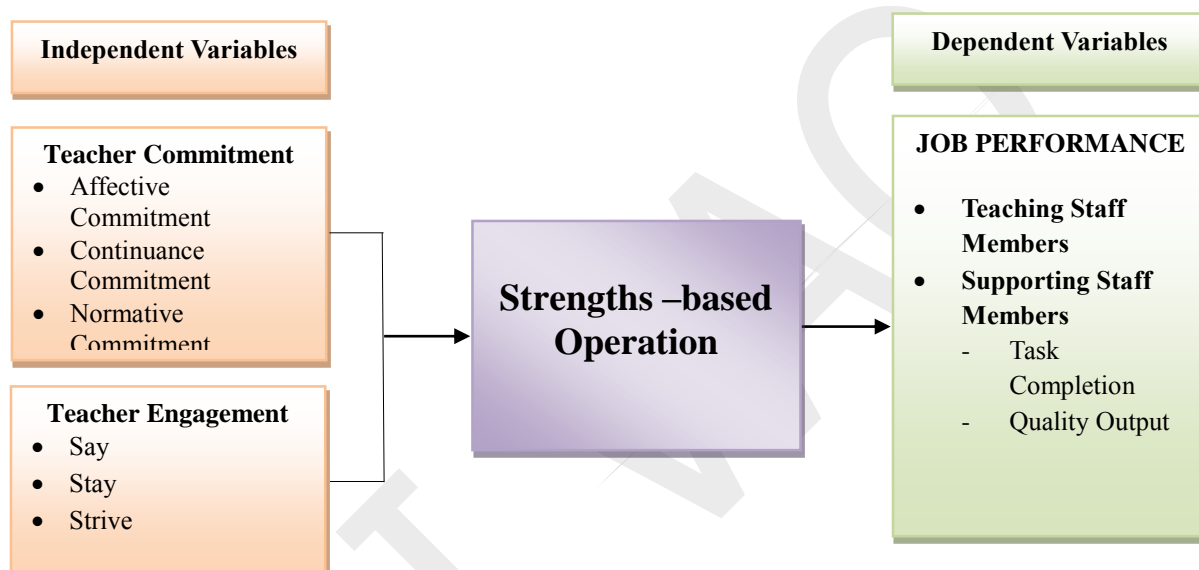


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Research Method

Research Design

The study was conducted in the form of action research which consisted of three phases, namely: *Pre SBO-ODI*, *SBO-ODI*, and *Post SBO-ODI*.

Phase I: Pre SBO-ODI (Pre – Strength-based Operations as Organization Development Intervention)

The pre SBO-ODI was regarded as the Individual-Institution (I-I) connection Workshop (workshop 1). It was the initial stage of the OD Intervention where the current states of the school and the processes were assessed using the SOAR as framework and the AI as the process used to pilot the core approaches of the intervention. Fifty teaching and supporting staff from various school units were selected as respondent and participants from the different units of the school. They answered the questionnaires and the results were used to further design the subsequent workshops and interventions.

Phase II: SBO-ODI (Strength-based Operations as Organization Development Intervention)

The SBO-ODI phrase was conducted to investigate the effects of the designed SBO-ODI interventions on 162 teaching and supporting staffs of ACU from the different units. The pre-questionnaires distributed to the participants in the Phase 1 investigated current levels of the participants' commitment, engagement, and performances. The SBO-ODI, regarded as workshop 2, included three main activities, namely: (1) sharing on their best experiences in ACU and which they want to experience again; (2) crafting representative images of their vision and aspirations ; and (3) creation of the projects to implement to further their shared preferred future. The data derived during the processes were recorded using observation method.

Phase III: Post SBO-ODI (Post–Strength-based Operations as Organization Development Intervention)

The post SBO-ODI was the stage after the OD intervention. The effect of ODI impact was measured and evaluated. The same questionnaire used in the Pre-ODI stage was now conducted to investigate the change in the levels of commitment, engagement, and performance. The comments and feedback of the participants on the projects were also included.

The results of the pre- and post-questionnaires were compared using *t*-test to show the changes in the participants' levels of commitment, engagement, performance, and also other unexpected outcomes. The pre and post –ODI observation data were also utilized in the data analysis.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were 122 teaching staff members and 40 supporting staff of the Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani employed during the academic year 2013 (Table 1) .

Table 1.

Numbers of the ACU teaching and supporting staff

Items	Description	Numbers of the staff	Percent of population
1	Teaching staff	122	100%
2	Supporting staff	40	100%
Total		162	100%

Research Instruments

Primary and the secondary data were utilized in this study. The primary data was collected from the questionnaires and the observation; while the secondary data was derived from

various studies, articles, thesis, journals which were related to the primary data. The questionnaires included three dimensions for investigation: commitment, engagement, and performance. However, the post-questionnaire included the statements dealing with the strength-based projects operation as a separate section to investigate the effects of the projects on participants. The observation instrument was redesigned as “Empathy Map” (Figure 3), where the participants' expressions and actions were listed and categorized as related to commitment, engagement, and performance.

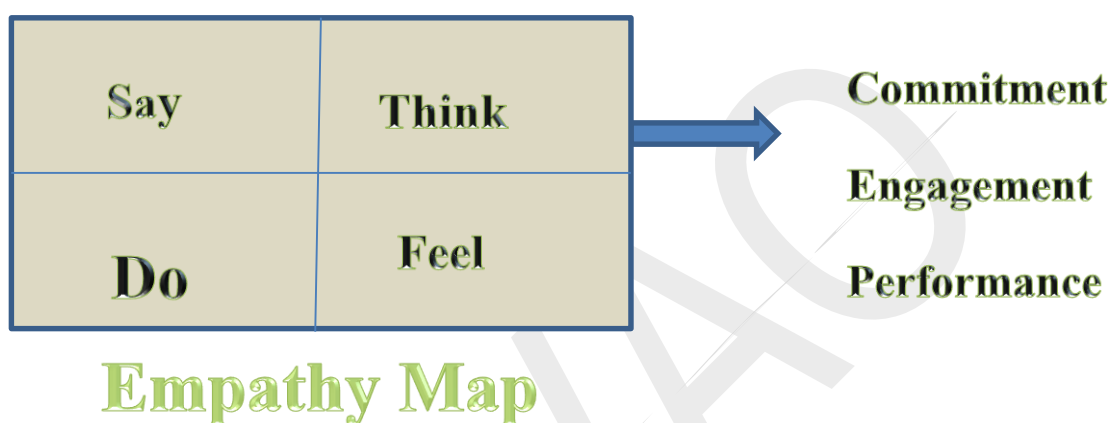


Figure 3. Observation checklist

Evaluation by observation

The data from the questionnaires and observations were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis. The focus of the analysis were on the changes in the levels of the participants' commitment, engagement, and performance as a result of the OD interventions.

Results

The discussion of the results of the study will be based the three main areas, namely (1) the current levels of the teacher commitment, engagement, and performances, (2) the effects of the SBO-ODI intervention on the enhancement of the three dimensions, and (3) the effect of the SBO-ODI after completion of the projects

1. The current levels of the teacher commitment, engagement, and performances before the ODI

The current levels of the participants' commitment, engagement, and performances were derived from the data from the questionnaires distributed in the pre SBO-ODI stage, and during the initial stage of workshop 2, and data from observation.

Table 2.

Mean and standard deviation of commitment, engagement, and performances of teaching and supporting staffs of Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani at the Workshop 1 (I-I connection workshop) from the questionnaire

Items	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	Commitment	3.14	0.68	Moderate
2	Engagement	3.59	0.57	High
3	Performance	3.26	0.62	Moderate
Total		3.33	0.59	Moderate

Table 2 shows revealed that the levels of commitment, engagement, and performances were at moderate level (n=50) after Workshop 1.

Besides, the illustrated a moderate level of participants' commitment, engagement, and performance-based on the results from the questionnaires distributed at the initial stage of Workshop 2 (Table 3).

Table 3.

Mean scores and standard deviation of commitment, engagement, and performance before the SBO-ODI intervention at the workshop 2

Items	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	Commitment	3.35	0.51	Moderate
2	Engagement	3.44	0.59	High
3	Performance	3.30	0.56	Moderate
Total		3.36	0.51	Moderate

In addition, the results derived from the observations from workshop 2 suggested that the current levels of the participants' commitment, engagement, and performance were at moderate levels (Table 4).

Table 4.

Commitment, engagement, and performance of the participants at the Workshop 2 (SBO-ODI intervention) from the observations

Item s	Focus	Stage	Very low	Low	Moderat e	High	Very high
1	Commitment	Pre ODI	18	23	50	32	20
2	Engagement	Pre ODI	17	23	44	39	20
3	Performance	Pre ODI	19	20	47	33	24

2. The Effects of SBO-ODI on Teacher Commitment, Engagement, and Performance

The SBO-ODI

The SBO-ODI phase was done through group work with participants being randomly grouped and workshop activities were facilitated by the OD consultants. The main focus of the workshop was on implementing a coaching approach to find out strengths of the participants using the SOAR and A.I. approaches. The participants shared their best experiences at work in ACU and their preferred shared future experiences. The OD consultants improved the sharing process by generating more questions to allow the participants to better discuss and create a more familiar atmosphere through conversation. The adaptation increased the level of participation of most of the participants. The OD consultants led the group to craft strength-based projects intended to improve commitment and engagement. The projects were to be accomplished as a group work and using strength-based principles. Each group brainstormed and discussed processes to finally, come up with four projects focused on improving the English skills of ACU population. The results of utilizing strength-based projects revealed that at the final stage of the workshop 2, the participants expressed more interest in sharing of ideas, provided more enthusiasm, and showed more willingness to continue and conduct the project activities.

Strength-based projects

The participants produced four school projects with English proficiency as the main focus. The four projects were discussed as follows:

Project 1: Daily English Project (Doraemon)

The Daily English Project aimed at improving the basic English speaking skills of ACU teaching and supporting staff. The projects provided the evaluation of the group members' English speaking levels by the more competent members who were appointed as the evaluators at the beginning of the project. Initially the group members appeared to be less motivating; more roles taken up by the group leader, and working atmosphere seemed to be inactive. However, after the follow-up meetings with the school director and the OD consultant; the goals of the projects and target population were made clear. Some adaptations were made so that project activities were evaluated by all the group members and an inclusion of rewards to gain more motivation plus an invitation for the support of the foreign teachers was also encouraged. The commitment and participations of the group members improved. The members shared more ideas and suggestions during the group meetings and conducted the project activities with enthusiasm and more willingness. The results showed that the English communication of ACU personnel increased to 82%.

Project 2: Only English Day (Hero)

The Only English Day Project was set up with the purpose of developing the English speaking skills of ACU teaching and supporting staff. At first, the activities of project 2 was to provide English conversation to ACU personnel every Wednesday. The working conditions in the initial stage was likely to be active as the group members supported each other in sharing of ideas. However, when there was the follow-up meeting, the group

realized that there was less progress when they compared with the other groups. Likewise, the director and the OD consultant suggested ways to adapt the project activities for more effective work. Thus, the Group 2 changed the project activities to be more engaging. The practices of English conversations were provided in Monday-and-Wednesday pattern, and then, improved to be Everyday-a-week at the final stage. Sticker notebooks, rewards and invitation of foreign teachers were also included to encourage English speaking. Regarding commitment, engagement, and performances, the participants appeared as active members from the beginning; nevertheless, all members showed intense cooperation and enthusiasm in increasing progress before the end of the intervention. Considering direct achievement of the project activities, the results revealed that there was an increase of abilities in appropriate English communication of the school personnel at 94.43%, and satisfaction of ACU staff at 83.94%.

Project 3: Academic Rally (Forget Me Not)

The Academic Rally project was created to provide the activities to develop thinking skills, English communication skills of ACU students, and to improve the working relationship of the teaching and supporting staff. Group 3 began the project with seven activities to develop the English skills of ACU population then adapted the activities by extending them to 10 groups of English practices, and improved all activities into six distinct learning groups in the final stage of the intervention. Initially the conditions were slow due to the low level of cooperation and progress until the middle period of the intervention. Thus, the director and the OD consultants suggested ways to implement a better and effective leadership. The adaptation resulted in sharing responsibilities with group members by the leader. This resulted in higher commitment and engagement of the group members. It appeared that all members became willing to complete and pleased to devote their time to complete the project. For the direct achievement of the project activities, the results showed that the thinking and communication skills of the students increased to 80%, and satisfaction of both the school personnel and students was at 87.87%.

Project 4: Bright ACU

The Bright ACU aimed at developing English vocabulary learning skills of ACU students. The group started by assigning the students to memorize and spell vocabulary words with teachers. Like the other projects, BRIGHT ACU started slow and improved its momentum midway as the School Director and the OD Consultant suggested to make the activity more interesting to the students. Group 4 improved the project activities by creating worksheets for noting the vocabulary, created interesting games and used rewards as motivation. The improvement of the activities led not only the students to involve in the learning context, but also the group members in conducting the project. At the end, the results showed that the group members provided high cooperation and acceptance of shared responsibilities. Besides, the project activities yielded the outcome of 79.19% of the students' achievements in confidence and expressions of vocabulary usage, and positive attitudes toward English learning.

3. The levels of SBO-ODI effects on the teacher commitment, engagement, and performance

The effects of the SBO-ODI intervention were evaluated after the completion of the

four projects. The results were derived from the post-questionnaires and the observations. Table 5 shows the considerable positive improvement in commitment, engagement, and performance.

Table 5.

Levels of commitment, engagement, performances at the Pre and Post-ODI phases

Items	Statements	Post		Pre		t	Sig. P value
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
1	Commitment	3.88	0.64	3.35	0.51	8.966	.000
2	Engagement	4.13	0.72	3.44	0.59	9.876	.000
3	Performance	3.89	0.72	3.30	0.56	8.891	.000
Total		3.97	0.61	3.36	0.51	10.176	.000

The level of the participants' commitment, engagement, and performance increased through the processes of the intervention. Descriptive statistics and T-test were utilized to determine significant difference. The results indicated that there was a significant improvement in the participants' commitment, engagement, and performance at the level of 0.000* ($p < .05$).

Moreover, the results from the post-ODI observation supported the improvement of participants' level of commitment, engagement, and performance. The comparison between the pre- and post- observations showed that the results increased in the three dimensions from moderate to high levels as shown in Table 6.

Table 6.

Commitment, engagement, and performances of the participants at the Workshop 2(SBO-ODI intervention) from the observations

Item s	Focus	Scale	Very low	Low	Moderat e	High	Very high
1	Commitment	Pre	18	23	50	32	20
		Post	0	0	41	68	45
2	Engagement	Pre	17	23	44	39	20
		Post	0	0	31	81	42
3	Performance	Pre	19	20	47	33	24
		Post	0	0	28	87	39

The post-ODI questionnaire reflected the results of the participants' commitment, engagement, and performance with overall mean scores of 3.97, indicating a high level of improvement (Table 7).

Table 7.

Mean scores and standard deviation of commitment, engagement, and performances after the SBO-ODI approach

Items	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	Commitment	3.88	0.82	High
2	Engagement	4.13	0.91	High
3	Performance	3.89	0.83	High
Total		3.97	0.61	High

Besides, the results taken from the separated section of strength-based projects in the post-questionnaire revealed that the overall outcomes of projects' benefits was at high level ($X = 4.11$)(Table 8).

Table 8.

Mean scores and standard deviation of the participants' performances in the strength-based projects

Items	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	Strength-based projects	4.11	0.72	High

Conclusion

The present study investigated the effects of strength-based operations as an organization development intervention (SBO-ODI). The procedures were designed based on the theories and principles of people's strengths and relationships of positive and right conditions to working performance of people. The focus of the people was on their commitment, engagement, and performance in the workplace. The participants of the study were the teaching and supporting staff of Assumption College Ubon Ratchathani. The intervention lasted for four months and included groups involved as a team in the conduct of various projects. The results revealed that the SBO-ODI had a significant effect on the levels of commitment, engagement, and performance of the teaching and supporting staff of ACU. The results of the study suggest that the SBO-ODI approach is effective may benefit other organizations similar to Assumption College UbonRachathani. where there are the inclusion of sub working units like ACU school.

Prawat SBO Model for Success

The study yielded the new model, named Prawat SBO Model for Success for change in organizations.

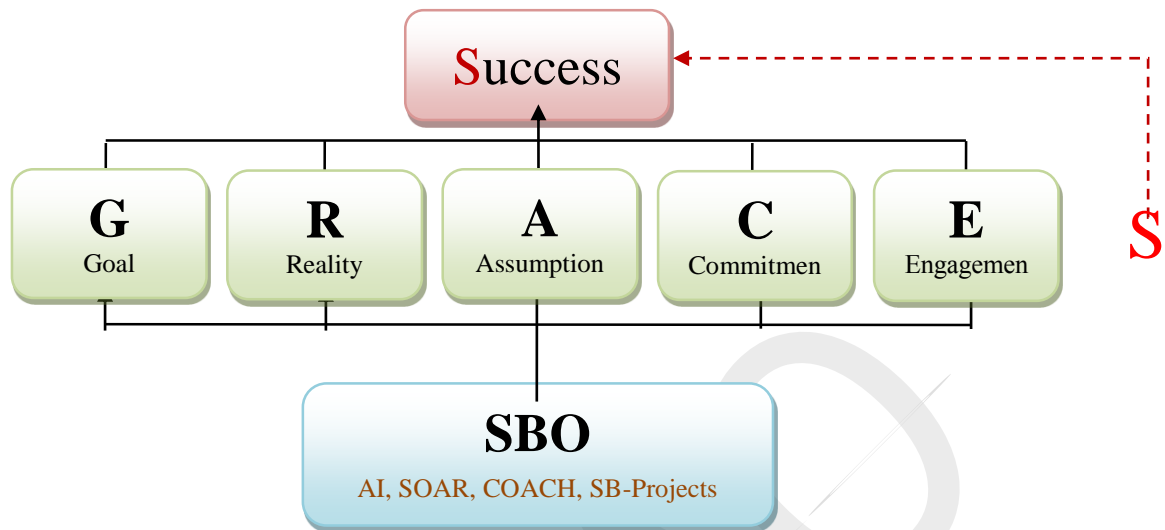


Figure 4. The Prawat SBO Model for Success

The “Prawat SBO Model for Success” is a model supporting cooperative work. The model is based on Strength-Based Operations where Appreciative Inquiry (AI), SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results), Coaching, and SBO-Projects (Strength-based projects) approaches are set as the foundation of the model. Within the Prawat SBO Model for Success, projects or activities are generated based on the strengths of each individual. The model can be used to plan and implement a project, task, or activity in groups or teams, and organizations. In addition to the foundation, the model provides the component “GRACES” where “G” means the goals, “R” is reality of the current situation, “A” stands for assumptions which may measure whether the actives are feasible , “C” and “E” are commitment and engagement which are the expected results of SBO approach, and “S” is sustainability , system, success, and students.

The Prawat SBO Model for Success includes five core steps, namely:

First, the SB-workshop creation of project should be conducted as the first step of the process. The type of projects must be in strength-based aspects in order to generate positive outcomes supporting the interest and attempts of the participants involved.

Second, the goals of projects must be clearly understood to the participants who will be responsible for carrying out the projects.

Third, there is a need for OD consultants who would facilitate the process and activities.

Fourth, the duration for conducting the project must be reasonable enough to sustain interest and celebrate initial success.

Finally, participative or shared leadership is essential for the success of the SBO initiative and project.

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