



A Study on Shaping Academic Leadership in Thailand's Public Universities: The Role of Legislation and Organizational Culture

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ABSTRACT

Advanced education in Thailand, as in numerous nations, has moved towards being self-governing. Having acknowledged that self-governing status of the colleges would lead them to be more beneficial and responsible, Thai government has set out a strategy to change all state funded colleges into self-ruling colleges. Subsequently, there are right now 16 self-ruling colleges under the oversight of Higher Education Commission in Thailand. The motivation behind this paper is to play out a basic examination of the pretended by enactment and hierarchical culture on scholarly initiative, to comprehend the possibility structure of any system of creating it. The examination addresses: a) what are the invigorating impacts of enactment and authoritative culture on creating scholastic initiative? b) what are the controlling impacts of enactment and hierarchical culture on creating scholarly authority? furthermore, c) what is the impression of personnel staff in the Thai colleges on creating scholastic administration? The last inquiry is inspired by the way that this scholastic year in all Thai colleges there were races for the new overseeing bodies (ie: workforce gatherings and college senates) and new ministers, bad habit ministers, dignitaries and bad habit senior members of resources and division heads dependent on another enactment. Exploration results show that enactment and hierarchical culture are amazing forming powers of scholastic initiative, yet they need to unite to make the vital cooperative energy of progress. This investigation shows that the need to complete scholastic authority at colleges in Thailand is arising.

Keywords: Scholastic initiative, advanced education, college administration

INTRODUCTION

In numerous nations, where training was perceived as open great, the public authority generally gave subsidizing and controlled colleges. College staffs were government workers working in the administrative conditions under the strategy coordinated by the public authority. Being public-supported substances, colleges, especially in agricultural nations, have been dealt with like other public organizations (Askling, Bauer and Marton, 1999). Under this condition, colleges were then claimed to be incapable and wasteful. Notwithstanding, roused by the public

administration change, colleges have constantly moved away from government claimed and controlled associations towards more adaptable and self-sufficient ones. This is likewise the situation in Thailand, where being self-governing college, is a way towards self-administration and accomplishing greatness (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017).

In many European countries the legislation dedicated to education and to higher education especially changed in the last year to relax the government control and to increase the university autonomy. At the same time the role of the university changed by developing the third dimension of its mission or the third mission as some authors proposed (Santiago et al., 2006). Past the customary mission of information creation through exploration and information move to the understudies by instructing, colleges need to reply to the network call and to play out an all-inclusive information and innovation move towards society. Simultaneously, there is an expanding rivalry overall which develops a colossal weight for most colleges yearn for at the new status of being top notch colleges. As emphasized by Niland (2007), "It is understood that a truly eminent university will excel in teaching and research. But paralleling and supporting those core activities will be an excellence in management driving first-rate administration systems". That means a significant change in their governance and organizational culture. Academic leadership cannot be developed without a strong and supporting organizational culture, especially in universities due to their long histories and the culture of collegiality (Meek, 2002; Arokiasamy, A. R. A., & Abdullah, A. G. (2012).

The motivation behind this paper is to play out a basic investigation of the pretended by enactment and authoritative culture on scholastic initiative, to comprehend the possibility system of any procedure of creating it. The exploration addresses driving our examination are the accompanying:

- a) What are the invigorating impacts of enactment and hierarchical culture on creating scholastic initiative?
- b) What are the controlling impacts of enactment and hierarchical culture on creating scholastic initiative? furthermore,
- c) What is the impression of workforce staff in the Thai colleges on creating scholarly authority?

The last inquiry is spurred by the way that this scholarly year in all Thai colleges there were races for the new administering bodies (ie: staff boards and college senates) and new ministers, bad habit ministers, dignitaries and bad habit senior members of resources and division heads dependent on another enactment. The structure of the paper is as follows: a synthetic presentation of academic leadership in relation to legislation and organizational culture as influencing factors based on literature reviews, research methodology, results presentation, conclusions, and some remarks concerning future research.

METHOD

We used a quantitative and qualitative approach for the study. The study was exploratory, gathering qualitative data through a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The design was set within an interpretivist paradigm, consistent with a social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckman, 1966) and the concept of *verstehen*, broadly interpreted from Weber's sociological insights and Dilthey's hermeneutics as achieving empathetic and meaningful understanding. The overall aim was to illuminate, describe and understand the meaning of research culture from an insider perspective, expressed in respondents' own terms within the context of their own knowledge and experience, through the interview process (Taylor, Steven J, Robert Bogdan, and Marjorie DeVault. (2015).

The ontological position of the study adheres to objectivism, as the researchers believe that reality lies outside the subjective experiences of respondents. This aligns with the epistemological stance of positivism that entails obtaining objective knowledge through deductive or theory testing approaches. From an organizational perspective, positivism supports the notion that an organization, as a society, can be viewed as an existing entity or social substructure that can be objectively studied (Jakobsen, 2013). Positivism was, therefore, regarded as an appropriate paradigm for this study. It further allows for results to be replicated by other researchers. Considering the aim of the study and the relatively large population, a quantitative research approach was thus adopted (Robson & McCartan, 2015).

We sent out 900 questionnaires to three different universities located in Thailand and received 207 questionnaires from the respondents. The data was gathered using a structured questionnaire, and Cronbach's alpha was applied to verify the internal consistency of the questionnaire. An alpha score above 0.75 is generally accepted as an indication of high reliability, while a score between 0.50 and 0.75 indicates moderate reliability. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for both the academic leadership and organizational culture sections of the questionnaire. An alpha value of 0.95 was recorded for the academic leadership section, confirming excellent reliability. For the organizational culture section an alpha score of 0.73 was recorded. The lower alpha score is because of the diverse measurement items (job behavior, leadership, justice, reward allocation, conflict management, well-being) and the smaller number of items. However, this section of the questionnaire can still be regarded as reliable. Detailed information is presented in Table 1 and 2 below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Academic Leadership as an Integrator

Leadership plays a critical role in any university regardless if it is concentrated in the top management decision power or it is distributed throughout the organization down to the faculties and departments (Wiseman, 2009). The American university governance model is very much similar to the companies' governance and the leadership of the American university president is shaped after the CEO of a large company. The decision power is concentrated mostly at the hierarchy top level, which means that the president has got a powerful integration role. He is an integrator (Bratianu, 2013). In order to answer our first two research questions, we formulate two hypotheses and search into the literature for arguments to support them or not. The two hypotheses are:

H_{A1}: Legislation is a powerful shaping force of the academic leadership.

H_{A2}: Organizational culture is influenced and is influencing academic leadership.

As an integrator, academic leadership is shaped mostly by university governance, since university governance, represents "the constitutional forms and processes through which universities govern their affairs". The full intellectual capital potential of the academic leadership can be achieved when the university benefits of full autonomy in concordance with the country's legislation of higher education. Idea of self-governing college was presented in Thailand by Prince Songklanakarintara in 1928 and was steadily installed in the psyches of pioneers and researchers in certain colleges. Albeit a few endeavors towards bringing colleges out from administration were made, the idea was dismissed reliably by the nation's status brought about by obliviousness and sick comprehension of the idea of self-rule. It was after the starting of the Higher Education Long Range Plan (1990-2004) by the Ministry of University

Affairs that the idea was tried (Kirtikara, 2002). The Plan expressed the requirement for the presence of independent college and made ready to change all state funded colleges towards self-governance (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017).

As an outcome, the primary scholarly capital of the college forces a progression of impediments in the monetary dynamic cycle and particularly in the inspirational frameworks for teachers, specialists, and understudies. The structural intellectual capital becomes a guardian knot of the academic leadership (Henkel, 2005). In the case of the American university governance legislation stimulates the academic leadership in transforming the full intellectual capital of the university into the operational intellectual capital, while in the European university governance legislation introduces some limitations in that transformation process (Brennan & Teichler, 2008). The degree of limiting power for academic leadership depends on the legislation of each country, which is based mostly on the tradition and culture of that country, as well as a dear vision concerning the future of higher education.

Coming with a new vision of the role of university in the knowledge economy and global market, the new legislation for higher education in Austria changed the Humboldtian paradigm of the university with a completely new one which increases the role of academic leadership. As indicated by Meistor (2007), the Austrian University Act (UG02) endorsed in 2002 and executed in 2003 is perhaps the most brave, progressed, and current law on the association of advanced education in Europe (Currie, 2005). The primary thoughts advanced by this Act are the accompanying: a full self-rule of the college, upheld by a spending designation for the three years given by the service of training dependent on scholastic execution, changing the status of the scholarly staff from government workers into representatives recruited dependent on their aptitude and accomplishments and another college administration structure. The full autonomy of universities and their budget allocation for three years contribute substantially to the development of academic leadership and strategies thinking (Bleiklie et al., 2013). In Italy, the new Law 240/2010 relaxed the ministry power over the universities by allowing them to draft their own statutes and to specify the duties and powers of central governing bodies. The new legislation allows the Administrative Board to have power beyond the rectors and students' representatives some non-academic members. Although the rector is still elected from the university's professors, the opening door for experts from the business environment as non-academic members in the Administrative Board represents a significant change in the academic leadership profile (Jose-Gines, 2001).

A dramatic change in the design of the university governance happened in Japan by the new National University Corporation Act (NUCA) implemented in 2004. The Act changed completely the legal status of the national universities, from being government-owned public institutions to independent public administrative agencies. "The aim of NUCA was to develop a strategic management system for national universities through incorporation, thus changing the traditional style of governance". The fundamental changes introduced by NUCA are the following: a) universities receive full autonomy b) implementation of corporate management c) public accountability and third-party evaluation. These changes stimulate the development of academic leadership based on the American universities model. All the above examples of legislation changes are strong arguments in validating the first hypothesis: Legislation is a powerful shaping force of the academic leadership (De Boer, 2000).

Leadership departs from management mainly due to its capacity of anticipating the future and implementing change in organizations. In such transformational stages of organizations leaders encounter a large resistance from many employees due to their inertial thinking, complacency, and fear of unknown. The roots of these reactions can be found in the emotional brain and in our direct experience of change (Bolden et al., 2012). To reduce these resistance leaders, influence people mostly by stimulating their emotions and making use of their

emotional and spiritual knowledge. Since universities are organizations with long histories and traditions, we must consider also the role played by traditions in shaping the academic leadership, when the change means the transition from administrative university management to academic leadership. That means an evolving dynamic between academic leadership and organizational culture. We must accept the fact that all real changes in our universities are complex and nonlinear phenomena which are difficult to be explained by using a linear logic of causality. Considering the active and the reactive components of the change process discussed above, we may conclude along the second hypothesis that: Organizational culture is influenced and is influencing academic leadership (Berdahl, 1990).

The Case Analysis of the Thai Universities

Up until the end of 2015, there are 20 autonomous universities from a total of 162 public universities in Thailand. Academic community can decide by referendum if the rector is elected by democratic votes or he or she is selected by a commission composed by experts in academic leadership from the university, outside the university and even from other countries. Once the new rector is elected or selected and validated by the Ministry of Education, he or she nominates the vice-rectors and organizes a competition for deans of faculties. That means that the new deans are not anymore voted but selected based on some professional and managerial criteria by the new rector. For these positions can candidate both professors from within the university or from other universities (Pongsriwat, S., 2008). This academic year there were elections in all our universities and we considered that as an opportunity to see if the new changes in the legislation which stimulates the development of academic leadership meet the expectations of the academic community mediated by the organizational culture (Somprach, K., 2003).

The present research has been performed during the period of 1st February and 31st March 2016, within three universities: Khon Kaen University (KKU), Suan Dusit University (SDU) and Thammasat University. The research has been designed in three stages:

- a) Literature search on the academic leadership and its correlations with legislation and organizational culture.
- b) Workshop with debates on the roles played by legislation and organizational culture in our universities in the academic elections within the framework of the new legislation.
- c) An empirical research based on a questionnaire, containing items resulted from the literature search and workshop debates.

The literature analysis results have been presented in the previous sections of this paper. The debates of the workshop organized at the Thammasat University with former deans of faculties and heads of department were focused on the potential development of academic leadership based on the new legislation and the inertial effect of the cultural tradition. For instance, participants at the workshop expressed their doubts concerning choosing the new procedure of rector's selection performed by a commission of experts. Most of them brought arguments in favor of the democratic election by the whole academic community, ignoring the effect of statistical attraction toward the average and not toward the best in a normal distribution of expectations. Analyzing what happened in all 56 states universities, we found out that there was only one university in which academic community decided by referendum to have a professional selection for the rector done by a commission of experts; in all other universities there were democratic elections. The debates were also about the new perspective of accepting professors from other universities to participate for academic positions in our university. Most of the participants considered that people coming from outside do not know the specific problems of our university and cannot be good leaders (Ibrahim et al., 2009).

Based on the workshop's debates and literature search we designed a questionnaire with some key items concerning the perception of the faculty staff of academic leadership. For evaluating the respondents' degree of agreement with each item formulated in the questionnaire we used a scale from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much). The questionnaire contains 12 items, and an open space for respondents to indicate 3 most important qualities they consider necessary for the elected rector. We tested the first version of the questionnaire with a pilot group of faculty staff and then improved its content. The final version has been sent online to 900 faculty staff from the three chosen universities for this research: Khon Kaen University (KKU), Suan Dusit University (SDU) and Thammasat University. We have chosen randomly the participants to this research but in concordance with the age, gender, and academic structure of each university. After one week of sending the questionnaires, a gentle reminder to all chosen participants were sent. Finally, we received 207 valid questionnaires, which means a rate of answering of 23%. Of this total of 207 respondents, 51% were females and 49% were males. The age structure of the responding group is the following: 25-35 years old (14%), 36-45 years old (37%), 46-55 years old (40%) and 56-65 years old (9%). The academic hierarchy structure of the responding group is the following: university assistants (11%), lecturers (24%), associate professors (39%) and full professors (26%). We processed the data by using Excel functions. For exploring the research third question we present in Table 1 the average value for each item.

Table 1. Results from the questionnaires

No.	Items	Average
1.	In a university, tradition plays an important role in rector's election.	3.62
2.	It is enough to be a very good professor to be also a very good rector, if elected.	2.42
3.	The rector of a university should have a good vision about the university's future.	4.75
4.	The Law of Education from 2011 combines in an inspired way the election of the rector by democratic voting of the academic community with the nomination of deans of faculties by the newly elected rector.	3.24
5.	If our universities would have financial autonomy, then it will be increased the need for academic leadership.	3.92
6.	In a university with a decentralized decision-making system, the role of deans of faculties will be increased.	4.23
7.	It is enough to be a very good professor to be also a very good dean of faculty, if nominated.	2.41
8.	Values promoted in a university play an important role in the election of the rector by the democratic voting system.	4.29
9.	The democratic voting system in a university enables the decision makers to influence more easily the faculty staff and students in electing the rector.	2.35
10.	The democratic voting system does not lead to the election of the people with outstanding qualities but with average qualities.	2.31
11.	The selection at the rector of a university through a competition is better than electing him or her by the democratic voting system.	2.91
12.	The election of the rector from outside the university is much better than electing him or her from within the university staff.	1.43

The results are self-explanatory for the perception of academic leadership by most of the faculty staff. However, we shall emphasize the fact that organizational culture plays an important role in defining that perception and therefore in motivating the election act (see item 1

and 8). The last four items deserve some discussions. Item 9 shows that most people believe that democratic elections cannot be influenced by the decision makers or some groups of interest, which is not always true. It is enough to say that many members of the academic community do not have the chance to personally know each candidate for the rector's position and his or her leadership qualities. Item 10 demonstrates that people are not aware of the statistical effects of the democratic voting system and of the fact that it is not possible to elect the best academic leader when there is no cultural archetype for such a leader. Item 11 demonstrates that most of the faculty staff still prefers the democratic elections instead of professional selection performed by a commission of experts. Item 12 is interesting since the result shows a strong inertial effect of tradition and of ignoring the fact that opening the selection process to anybody from other university or even other country increases chances to find out the best candidate. Many world-class universities have long established such policies to open internationally the process of selecting the best candidate for the president, vice-chancellor, or rector.

The last part of the questionnaire was an open space for respondents to indicate the first 3 most significant qualities a candidate should have to be elected as a rector. It is interesting to remark the fact that 11% of all validated questionnaires contain no answer to this open item. That means that a quite significant part of the faculty staff has no idea about academic leadership. May be those respondents consider by default that being a good professor is enough to be also a good rector, without any leadership qualities. Again, that is the result of inertial thinking and tradition in our universities. In Table 2, we present the most frequently leadership qualities for a rector indicated by respondents. We have not used a menu with predetermined qualities since we wanted to evaluate their awareness of such qualities. Since each responded had the liberty of indicating three qualities in his or her order of significance, we ranked them and computed their relative importance shown in the table by (%). The first remark is that most of the respondents do not make the difference between academic leadership and university management, considering that being a good manager is sufficient for a rector. Thus, to be a good manager is indicated 39.2% as a first quality, 27.4% as the second quality and 12.9% as the third one. Only 14.7% of the respondents gave the priority to vision, 9% the second priority and 4.9% the third one. In our view, vision should be recognized much more important, especially in turbulent times when change is necessary for all universities.

Table 2 Perceived qualities for a rector

No.	Qualities	Rank 1 (%)	Rank 2 (%)	Rank 3 (%)
1.	To have a vision	14.7	9.0	4.9
2.	To be a good leader	9.8	5.9	12.7
3.	To be a good manager	39.2	27.4	21.5
4.	To be a good professor	9.8	8.8	6.8
5.	To be a good communicator	2.9	11.7	9.8
6.	To have integrity	8.8	17.7	14.7

Discussion

Regarding overall academic leadership, Table 2 shows that the average scores for vision, being a good leader, a good manager, a good communicator, and integrity. The overall academic leadership score was 76%. Table 2 shows that being a good manager received the highest average score, followed by having a vision and then being a leader. While this study did not seek to investigate the question of how leadership is enacted in the research university, the interviews provided a general sense of leadership approach. The difference between

management and leadership was evident in the way many participants described their approach. The participants were not enacting management in an authority relationship by telling faculty members what to do. Instead, leadership in the shared governance model was more of an "influence relationship" that was non-coercive (Bolden, R., et al. (2012), orchestrating change through committee processes and consensus building. It is likely that these kinds of behind-the-scenes leadership efforts were not highly visible to faculty members, which would make the role of leader less understood and possibly contribute to undervaluing it in the research university culture.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the present research is to analyze the influence of legislation and organizational culture on academic leadership, based on literature study and on an empirical research performed in three Thai universities. We formulated two main hypotheses to direct our efforts and define the research area. 1) legislation is a powerful shaping force of the academic leadership and 2) organizational culture is influenced and is influencing academic leadership. The research design contains three stages. In the first stage we performed a thorough literature analysis and extracted the significant ideas for the correlations between academic leadership, legislation, and organizational culture. More precisely, the role played by legislation and organizational culture in shaping academic leadership, having in perspective the changing landscape of higher education because of globalization and the increased pressure of competition. In turbulent times, when future events become difficult to be anticipated and the decisions should be made in a shrinking time scale, the tradition of collegiality should be changed with new governance models able to create competitive advantage and sustainability in the global competition (Harman, 2002). This qualitative research stage leads us to the conclusion that legislation can be an enabler of the academic leadership, but also a limiting factor in defining the university governance and creating necessary conditions for university autonomy.

In the second stage of the present research, we organized a workshop with former deans of faculties and heads of departments at the Thammasat University focused on the academic leadership and its perception in the Thai universities. Debates were stimulated by the fact that in this academic year all universities in Thailand had to organize academic elections for the new rectors, vice-rectors, dean of faculties and heads of departments. Participants to this workshop concluded that the new legislation we have since 2011 does not provide a full university autonomy, which creates significant limitations in developing a successful academic leadership. Also, the debates demonstrate that the new openings offered by that legislation in electing the new rectors and deans cannot be fully implemented because of the inertial effect of organizational culture, because of its traditions and value settings. Based on literature critical analysis and workshop's debates we designed a questionnaire which has been distributed online to 900 faculty staff from three Thai universities. The final 207 valid questionnaires have been processed by using the Excel functions and interpreted in concordance with the purpose of the research. The result show that both legislation and organizational culture have a shaping influence on academic leadership and the openings offered by the new legislation cannot be fully implemented due to the inertial effect of organizational culture. More specifically, having the possibility of choosing between democratic election of the rector and the professional selection performed by a commission of experts, most of the respondents indicated the first alternative. Also, choosing between a candidate coming from within the university and a candidate coming from another university, the great majority of respondents indicated the first alternative (Heifetz et al., 1997).

The current examination showed the emanant need for actualizing scholastic initiative in the Thai colleges, which implies another hierarchical culture dependent on the attention to the way that in tempestuous occasions scholarly administration ends up being the best answer for the college administration. Further research should focus on the practical ways of changing the organizational culture and on increasing the motivation for academic leadership.

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