

Challenging Issues of Leadership Development

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1. Introduction

It is apparent that leadership in an organization is indispensable for an organization's success. The Organization that invests in leadership development will be on the frontline and gains competitive advantages.

Given advanced technologies and many changes in social and economic contexts in an era of globalization, a necessity to develop a potential leader to lead and manage an organization towards professionalism so as to be able to compete with others is, clearly, seen. It cannot be denied that a strong and talented leader is a valuable asset for any organization. Some may say that almost organizations' success is based on their leaders' talents, their motivation, and the network of these leaders.

During the past decades, many scholars have, then, introduced a strategic framework for leadership development. Accordingly, leadership competencies are identified and leadership development strategies have been created. Some of them have been employed in many organizations. Nevertheless, not a single approach guarantees a means to an end for an organization's success. This brings about challenges for any organization to implement leadership development strategies in its own organization.

In this regard, it has become more crucial for an organization to develop a leadership development framework into a tangible way and this appears to be very essential for a large organization, particularly the civil service. Obviously, a strong leadership in the civil service is a key component to underpin a good government, which requires highly competent leaders to work for the benefits of the nation in an increasingly competitive global community. In other words, a country cannot be of high standards and competitiveness regardless of talented leaders.

This paper will, then, discuss on three main aspects of leadership development in Thai civil service, which comprise:

- Leadership definition and competencies;
- Desirable styles of leadership;
- Leadership development framework (leadership development strategies, leadership development measurement and organizational culture that supports leadership development).

2. Leadership Definition and Competencies

In order to respond quickly to changing circumstances, an organization requires leaders at all levels of management. Not solely top managers, but also first-line and middle-level managers should exercise leadership.

Many scholars attempt to define what leadership is. Some may say that leadership is the act of influencing others to follow. In a Richard Lynch's book, called "Lead! How public and nonprofits managers can bring about the best in themselves and their organizations", leadership is characterized by a group of skills and productive thoughts, aiming at creating an organizational situation in which committed, self-confident people work in exciting jobs that enhance the followers' self esteem.

Leaders are, therefore, defined as "people who work by influence." They act in ways that cause others to choose to act in accordance with their leader's wishes. Since power is the ability to influence the actions of others, leadership can, then, be viewed as the effective use of power.

The book has, also, illustrated that leaders' personal power stems from six sources, which include:

- 1) their reputation in their field;
- 2) their technical ability;
- 3) the clarity of their personal objectives;
- 4) the value that their followers place on their relationship with them;
- 5) their ability to communicate effectively with followers; and
- 6) the optimism that results from self-confidence and self-esteem.

In terms of leadership in the Thai civil service, it refers to the determination or the ability to lead and manage people as well as the ability to determine an organizational vision, goals, and work methods so as the subordinates are able to perform their work in an efficient and effective manner, and meet the organizational goal.

In this connection, leadership competencies for senior executives in Thai civil service are identified, which involve skills, motives, personality characteristics and other attributes that are critical to a leader's performance.

The followings are the competencies of the Thai senior executives. They have been grouped into four main clusters based on similarities of importance and content.

- 1) People Management
 - Adaptability and Flexibility
 - Communication
 - Collaborativeness
- 2) Management Wisdom
 - Change Management
 - Customer Service Orientation
 - Strategic Planning
- 3) Result-driven Management
 - Accountability
 - Result Achievement
 - Resources Management

- 4) Professional Management
- Decision Making
 - Strategic Thinking
 - Leadership

All of these sets of competencies are applicable to Thai senior executives in order to bring about high performances of these leaders.

3. Desirable Styles of Leadership

Although leadership potential can be found in many of your subordinates, not all of them can assume a role of desirable leaders. As mentioned earlier, leaders should acquire ability to influence others to want to follow. Such influence is, certainly, related to the styles of leadership.

From my perspective, desirable styles of leadership in the civil service are connected to the following characteristics:

1. Focusing on the result.
 - Leaders should rather focus on the work performance or result of the subordinates. Some leaders give importance to work process and details and subordinates' complimentary words.
2. Leading and managing with accountability and flexibility.
 - Leaders should manage effectively in order to be able to lead. Furthermore, they must be accountable for the mistakes of the subordinates and manage to solve the problems. Good leaders should, also, allow the subordinates' flexibility to perform their duties by focusing on the result.
3. Making things happen or taking action.
 - Desirable leaders should be proactive and putting policies into practice. The subordinates require from the leader much more than setting a goal, but the action taken to achieve that goal.
4. Promoting an organizational culture of open communication, cooperation, and recognition.
 - For the subordinates, a working atmosphere of open communication, cooperation, and recognition is considerably desirable. Good leaders should, then, promote a collaborative working atmosphere in the organization. Staff meeting is encouraged as a forum for exchanging ideas and views on work performance. Additionally, high performers should be promoted while normal or average performers are given an opportunity for training and personal development. Besides, desirable leaders should be open-minded and acknowledge the value of the subordinates' work and their time.

4. Leadership Development Framework

Due to the fact that good leaders are critical for the success of the organization, a leadership development framework should be developed in any organization of the civil service. Such framework may include leadership development strategies, development measurement and organizational culture that supports leadership development.

With regard to leadership development strategies, the Thai civil service has launched a Fast-track Scheme and New Wave Leaders Training Program. As for the Fast-track Scheme, it is aimed to develop young leaders for the Thai civil service. Those who are selected by an organization to be the fast tracks should lead the project under the supervision of the mentor. They are, also, be exposed to leadership lessons and success stories as well as study visits to benchmark best practices in their field so as to increase their expertise and skills.

Concerning New Wave Leaders Training Program, it is aimed at developing a network of potentially young leaders in the Thai civil service. The short-course training program for these potential leaders is conducted every year, providing them with a multi-approach learning environment on leadership development.

Accordingly, development measurements for the fast-tracks or young leaders have been taken based on their projects and performance. These people are expected to be promoted rapidly. At present, the fast-track scheme is piloted in some Thai departments and needs further development before expanding to all Thai departments.

Apart from this, it is noted that organizational culture plays a major part in supporting leadership development. Apparently, the organization which promotes the culture of initiative thinking, learning and developing personal skills as well as encouraging a challenging project will bring about leadership development.

1) Initiative Thinking

- an organization should increase opportunities for independent decision-making of the subordinates. The appreciation of diverse and creative ideas should be recognized and the good ones are taken into account.

2) Learning and Developing Personal Skills

- employees in an organization should be given an opportunity to have a study visit in order to widen their perspectives. Mentoring program and individual development plan are required for young employees. Additionally, mobility across the department every three to five years should be established.

3) Encouraging a Challenging Project

- Managers should delegate responsibility to the subordinates to enable them to do their best. Assignments should be challenging, thereby leading to a more creative work.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, leadership development is a key mechanism for the organization's success. Realizing that the cause of developing good leaders is truly a worthy cause for the departments and the Thai civil service, departments should, then, adopt a pragmatic leadership development framework in their own organization. This will occur on the basis that the top executives of the organization support such development.

In addition, a leadership development framework, which includes leadership development strategies and training programs as well as leadership development measurement should be well- designed in accordance with clusters of leadership competencies. More importantly, the culture of the organization that supports leadership development should be promoted in an organization on the continual basis.

In this connection, it is anticipated that a continual and tangible leadership development framework will be implemented across the Thai civil service in the near future, and this being considered as a challenge for Thai departments to strive for it.

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