INNOVATIVE APPLICATION OF AI / SOAR AS ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION (ODI) ON ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATION AND SERVICE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY OF ASSUMPTION COLLEGE SRIRACHA

Sirichai Fonseka*

Abstract

This study introduces and tests an innovative application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI)/ SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and measurable Results) as Organization Development Intervention (ODI) on organizational operation and service quality improvement in a Catholic school. The processes of pre-ODI, ODI, and post-ODI were conducted by SERVQUAL (Service Quality Framework) survey research at Assumption College Sriracha (ACS). The school's stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, students, and parents, participated in the OD workshops and Affirmative Topic Choice (ATC) selection process. The results showed the improvement of service quality and stakeholders' satisfaction with the school's development. The success of AI/SOAR as Organization Development Intervention was found to be the significant factor of improving the school education. The researcher recommends that the originated school development plan through AI/SOAR as ODI be applied at other schools worldwide which have similar contextual characteristics to ACS.

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้ได้นำเสนอการประยุกต์นวัตกรรมของกระบวนการเฟ้นหาข้อมูลเชิงสร้างสรรค์ ความสุขและการมุ่งเน้นจุดแข็ง โอกาส แรงบันดาลใจ และผลลัพธ์เป้าหมาย (Appreciative Inquiry (AI)) / SOAR ในฐานะที่เป็นเครื่องมือแทรกเชิงพัฒนาองค์การ (Organization Development Intervention, ODI) ในการปฏิบัติการขององค์การและการปรับปรุงคุณภาพการให้บริการในโรงเรียนคาทอลิก ซึ่งกระบวน การต่าง ๆ ของเครื่องมือแทรกเชิงพัฒนาองค์การทั้งก่อนการใช้เครื่องมือ ในขณะที่ทำการใช้เครื่องมือ และหลังการใช้เครื่องมือ ได้มีการวัดตามระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงปริมาณและเชิงคุณภาพที่โรงเรียนอัสสัมชัญ

*Bro. Sirichai Fonseka has a Ph.D. in Organization Development (OD) from Assumption University of Thailand. He is the Provincial Superior of the Brothers of St. Gabriel, Province of Thailand. At the present time he also holds the following positions: Chairman of Saint Gabriel's Foundation, Thailand, Chairman of the Assumption University Council, President of the Confederation of Major Religious Superiors in Thailand, and Principal of Assumption College Sriracha, Chonburi.

ศรีราชาในฐานะเป็นโรงเรียนตัวอย่างสำหรับการเป็นต้นแบบแผนการพัฒนา นักวิจัยได้ทำการวิจัยเชิง
สำรวจแบบ SERVQUAL ที่เป็นวิธีการเชิงปริมาณ ในขณะที่การสังเกต การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก การประชุม
เชิงปฏิบัติการและการสนทนากลุ่มเป็นวิธีการเชิงคุณภาพ โดยกลุ่มผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียที่ประกอบไปด้วย
คณะผู้บริหาร คณะครู นักเรียน และผู้ปกครองได้เข้าร่วมกิจกรรมการประชุมเชิงปฏิบัติการองค์การและ
กระบวนการเลือกหัวข้อเชิงสร้างสรรค์เพื่อบรรจุเข้าสู่หัวข้อของการพัฒนา (Affirmative Topic Choice,
ATC) ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นถึงความพึงพอใจของกลุ่มผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียที่ปรับเพิ่มสูงขึ้นอันเป็น
การแสดงให้เห็นถึงความสำเร็จของการใช้ AI / SOAR ในฐานะที่เป็นเครื่องมือแทรกเชิงการพัฒนา
องค์การและเป็นปัจจัยที่มีนัยสำคัญของการปรับปรุงด้านการศึกษาของโรงเรียน นักวิจัยได้เสนอแนะ
ว่าแผนการพัฒนาโรงเรียนที่ได้มีการริเริ่มขึ้นผ่านการใช้ AI / SOAR ในฐานะที่เป็นเครื่องมือแทรก
เชิงพัฒนาองค์การนี้ควรนำไปประยุกต์ใช้สำหรับโรงเรียนอื่น ๆ ทั่วโลกที่มีคุณลักษณะทางบริบท
คล้ายคลึงกับโรงเรียนอัสสัมชัญศรีราชา

INTRODUCTION

In 1985, the economist Theodore Levitt invented the term "globalization", referring to the internationalization of educational institutions and practices. (Nelly, 2003). This term well describes developments in many areas of politics and culture that have occurred in the years since it was coined (Roger and Susan, 2003), and that may have particular relevance to formal education, which after all is among the distinctive and universal institutions and experiences in the modern world. As the economy has become increasingly globalized, links between the political, economic, and educational figures and institutions are increasingly important. "School is now the front line in the battle to remain competitive on the increasingly competitive international economic stage" (Achieve Inc. & National Governors Association, 2003).

Researchers have developed a new field of interdisciplinary study that examines the practical and policy implications of the globalization of education. Contributors to this field include educational specialists in the fields of curriculum studies, economics, history, sociology, educational policy, comparative education, and instructional methodologies (Michael Apple, Jane Kenway, and Michael Singh, 2005). The major assumption behind this emerging field is an international model of progressive education that includes teacher professionalism and autonomy, learning based on students' interests and participation active learning, protection of local languages, education for ensuring social justice, and education for active participation in determining social and political change (Kathryn Anderson-Levitt, 2006). Moreover, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank reinforce the idea in global networks that the core global curricula should consist of literacy, mathematics, science, and the skills needed

for lifelong learning and the tools to use information and data. In addition, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, representing the industrial nations of the world, have emphasized a need for a core global curriculum that consists of the expansion of literacy, mathematical and scientific studies, and the acquisition of the skills needed for lifelong learning, along with the tools to use information and data.

In recent years, such concept as UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development and the World Bank's Education for the Knowledge Economy, has been joined by a specific focus on the spectacular economic growth seen in many parts of Asia. Indeed, it has been suggested that this growth will lead to the Twenty-first century being the "Asian Century" (Dollar, 2007). This economic growth is reflected in the human development index (HDI), a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development - a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. Some Asian countries, including Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, have reached levels of high development, while Thailand is rated as having moderate development (United Nations Development Programme, 2006). Educationally, there has been a growth in availability and quality of education. Students from Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea have consistently ranked very high in English, Mathematics and Science study; however, students from countries like Thailand and Indonesia were ranked towards the bottom of the participating countries (OECD 2011).

Assumption College Sriracha (ACS), a Catholic school in Thailand, is among the institutions undergoing rapidly changing circumstances in recent years by implementing internal and external quality assurance programs. Among the challenges that ACS has faced in recent years is competition from other international schools that are located nearer industrial parks that are closely associated with the programs. There is also strong competition from schools which can afford to attract highly qualified teachers through attractive compensation and career development opportunities. ACS needs to be further developed by maintaining the strengths and improving weaknesses of the school. In this study, the researcher applied the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) / Strengths (S), Opportunities (O), Aspirations (A), and Results (R) as Organization Development Interventions (ODI) for ACS's school operation and service quality improvement (Cooperrider, Whitney, and Starvos, 2008).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were:

1. To assess the existing Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and measurable Results (SOAR) of Assumption College Sriracha.

2. To examine the current/Pre-ODI level of Service Quality in terms of stakeholders' satisfaction in Assumption College Sriracha (ACS).

3. To determine the effect of ODI on the service quality in terms of stakeholders' satisfaction in ACS.

4. To originate a three-year Development Plan for ACS by using AI/SOAR as Or-

ganization Development Intervention (ODI).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In line with the stated objectives of the study, the following questions were formulated:

1. Whether the SOAR model of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the Organization Development Intervention (ODI) can be applied for the three-year Development Plan of ACS.

2. Are stakeholders satisfied with the ODI activities through the Service Quality or SERVQUAL model at Assumption College Sriracha?

3. How do the OD Interventions impact on the Service Quality and stakeholders' satisfaction with Assumption College Sriracha?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

There are alternative hypotheses which the research expects as presented below.

1. The SOAR model of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the Organization Development Intervention (ODI) can be applied for the three-year Development Plan of ACS.

2. The ODI activities do satisfy stakeholders by the service quality or SERVQUAL model at ACS.

3. There is a significant difference of stakeholders' satisfaction with Assumption College Sriracha's service quality between the Pre-ODI and Post-ODI activities.

RESEARCH METHODS

To test the hypotheses, the study made use of both quantitative and qualitative methods using a survey of both the Pre-ODI and the Post-ODI, and engaging in AI workshops and ODI activities. A new form of action research was applied for facilitating conceptual understanding and effective practical use of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI)/SOAR as Organization Development Interventions (ODI) among Assumption College Sriracha's stakeholders. The power of the AI method was initially demonstrated in the initial Discovery interviews and continued in the group dialogues during the Dream, Design, and Destiny phases of 4-D cycle. Figure 1 shows the methodology used in this research, which involved four stages: Constructing (Pre-ODI), Planning Action (Pre-ODI), Taking Action (ODI), and Evaluating Action (Post-ODI) (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).
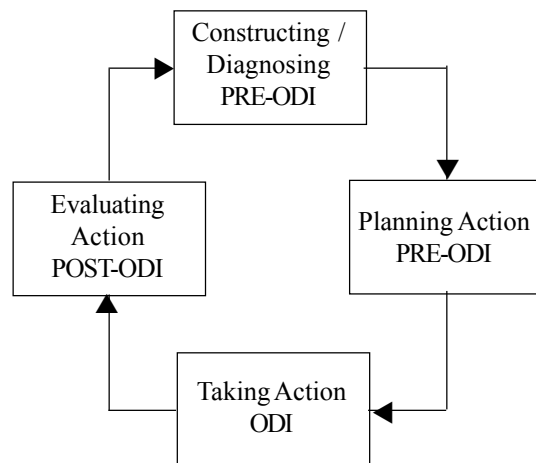

Figure 1: Four Stages of Action Research
Source: Coghlan and Brannick, 2010.

The ODI process, Action Taking stage, provided the center of the action research cycle. Many workshops on AI/SOAR were organized and these were followed by the OD Interventions. The objectives of the workshops were not only to provide the stakeholders an opportunity to understand and receive information about the SOAR, but also to establish focus on the inquiry and Affirmative Topic Choice (ATC) selection. The procedure followed an ATC workshop that led to the selection of the themes of the school development plan, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The ATC committee's main work was to organize the logistical requirements for the upcoming AI Summit at Assumption College Sriracha using the SOAR framework. The summit took four days within the core ODI program.

The chief objective of the summit was to originate the three-year development plan for the school. Seven months after this, the researcher assessed the effect of the AI summit on the ODI on the school service quality.

The target population in this study was the set of 8,016 stakeholders, which included administrators (N = 17), teachers (N = 340), students (N = 4,517), and parents (N = 3,142). The sample was selected by a probability sampling method (i.e., simple random sampling) which guaranteed the sample's representativeness of the population. The sample size was 464, which yielded a 95% confidence level with less than 5% error (Kish, 1965; Kumar, 2009). The SERVQUAL instrument was used to query the sample about their expectation and actual performance relevant to the school's service quality. The fac-
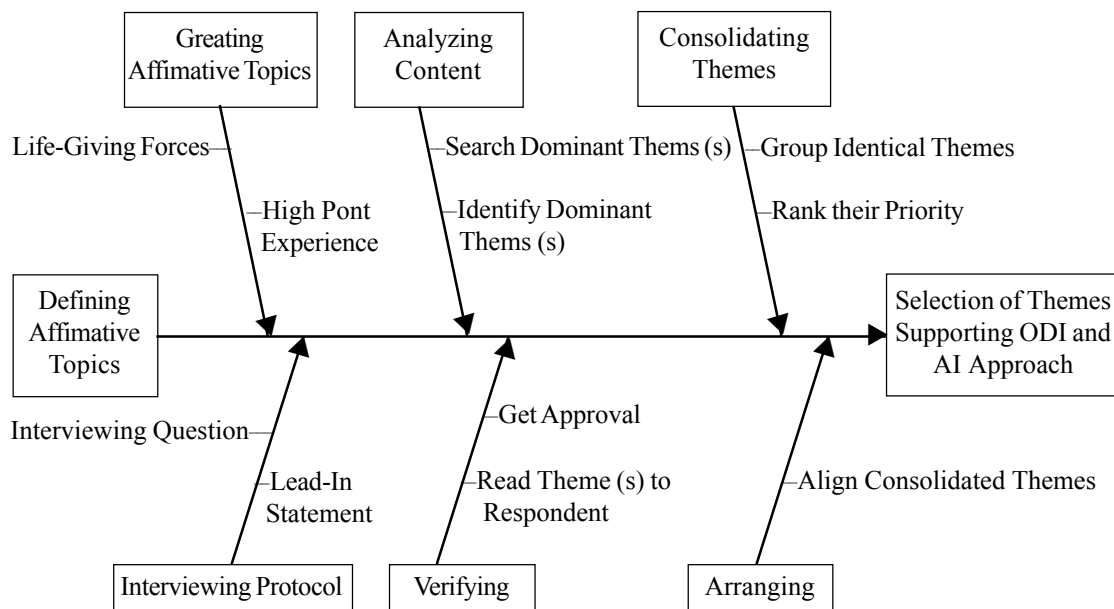
Figure 2: Affirmative Topic Choice Selection Flow Chart
Source: Cooperridet et al., 2003.

tors included in this quality involved tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and fees. The researcher tested the instrument and found that its reliability exceeded 0.70 as a minimum degree of internal consistency (Nunnally, 1987). The mixed modes of data collection involved face-to-face interviewing and self-administered survey completion. Focus group discussion and secondary data sources also were used in this study. Coding schemes were developed for the quantitative dimensions of the research and the data was analyzed through a computer statistical software program. Hypotheses were tested through a paired sample t-Test. However, the researcher verified the accuracy and credibility of the qualitative research findings through a member checking process (Creswell, 2008) that involved ongoing dialogue concerning the researcher's interpretations of the informant's perceptions.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The three hypotheses were supported at a 0.05 level of confidence. This thus indicated that the stakeholders were satisfied with the quality of the service at the school, as represented by ODI activities. The values for all six factors -- Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, and Fees – measured in the SERVQUAL surveys sharply increased between the Pre-ODI s and Post-ODI stages. The second hypothesis was supported by the finding of a statistically significant increase of stakeholder satisfaction following the Organization Development Intervention. The results support the conclusion that the AI/SOAR as Organization Development Interventions (ODI) help improve the quality of service at Assumption College Sriracha.

The action research cycle shows that, it is effective in diagnosing the many ways that the training programs for teachers cause positive thinking about the school, in formulating plans through discussion among stakeholders, and through launching AI workshops and SOAR activities. The positive impact the OD Interventions had on the school's service quality is increased as the cycles repeat until all the stakeholders are trained and tangible results are seen. This path holds good for each strategy in the school development plan. The researcher hopes that this plan, with its holistic perspective on the organization, will eliminate weaknesses by engaging all the stakeholders in a collaborative manner in the task of formulating the plan.

RECOMMENDED MODEL OF THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

An accurate estimate of expectations of customers (stakeholders) by the management is the first step towards addressing issues relating to improving service quality. In this sense, the AI summit provided an unparalleled learning experience for the management to understand the expectations of the stakeholders. It is recommended the administrators of Assumption College Sriracha (ACS) periodically use the AI platform to achieve this goal. On a more global scale, they might consider drawing up a Master Development Plan for all the educational institutions under their administration. This would enable optimum utilization of financial, personnel resources and would provide a steady and uni-

form growth in all of the institutions.

In conclusion, the Action Research Cycles 1, 2, and 3 are meant to serve as monitoring mechanisms to reinforce the strategic measures outlined in the development plan. Very few investigations/studies have quantitatively measured the real time benefits that accrued to the organization as a result of AI led intervention. It is recommended that the future researchers/practitioners of AI should statistically evaluate the effectiveness of their work. This study, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, is a small step in this direction and should help overcome the dearth of empirical research in this area. The expansion of private institutions in the educational arena suggests that in the future there will be heavy competition between educational units and the ability to provide a high quality of service will provide an important measure of competitive success.

The present study has evaluated service quality from the point of view of stakeholders' (customers) satisfaction. It is recognized that this provides a one-sided evaluation. For a more total picture, service users and service providers must provide back-to-back evaluations. Future research in this area should also employ two survey instruments and the SERVQUAL approach to obtain data. A comparison of results from two prominent test instruments may provide an ideal model of measurement of service quality in education. At a later stage, researchers might develop an exclusive and standard instrument/scale for measuring service quality in the schools. The development of such an instrument presents many challenges, but overcoming these would allow the schools to receive invaluable data

concerning the provision of services. This work would be particularly effective if it is conducted throughout the world, thereby providing comparative data that will provide insight into the environmental factors that have an impact on service quality and school development planning.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A fundamental idea underlying the research is that AI/SOAR activities and OD Interventions can transform the quality of service at a school through a new model of action research. The researcher found that the AI workshops allow the participants to select the Affirmative Topic Choice (ATC), for which the stakeholders are able to set themes using in the school's development plan, and can implement the plan effectively. The Pre-ODI survey and the Post-ODI survey are necessary to measure the outputs of the OD Interventions. The surveys indicate that the OD Interventions work very well at a school level.

After completing this study, the researcher believes that the AI/SOAR as OD Interventions investigated in the study can be applied in environments similar to ACS's. This will provide a focus of the researcher's work and should be able to play an important role in the development of a national educational system.

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