

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

A STUDY OF THE LEADER BEHAVIOUR OF THE

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT HEADS IN THAI

TEACHERS' COLLEGES FROM THE

STANDPOINT OF SITUATIONAL

LEADERSHIP THEORY

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PREFACE

The research project was carried out with the kind cooperation of eighteen academic departments in eight teachers' colleges in Thailand. The teachers' colleges are administered under the Teachers' College Act of 1975 and are government institutions under the aegis of the Department of Teacher Education, Ministry of Education, whose headquarters are located in Bangkok. At present the major objectives of the colleges are to provide education, produce teachers up to bachelor degree level, promote professional and academic status of teachers and educational administrators, and support cultural and academic activities for the community.

The Thai teachers' colleges are not autonomous institutions but are strictly controlled in terms of general educational policy, fiscal policy and the teacher education curriculum by the Ministry of Education. In all there are thirty six such colleges located throughout the country, six in the Bangkok metropolis and the remaining thirty in the provinces.

From the outset, the researcher realised that the study would present more than the usual difficulties associated with research in the field. Firstly, leader behaviour is often viewed as a deeply sensitive issue because it involves some examination of leaders' personal traits; secondly, it is seen

as encouraging possible criticisms of leaders' behaviours by subordinates; and, thirdly, many leaders have misgivings about classifications into categories such as autocratic, democratic, effective and ineffective. Furthermore, the Thai situation was more likely to be complicated by traditional and cultural factors than had been the case in the researcher's previous (1979) Australian study. Long distance travel from Australia to Thailand, internal travel in Thailand, enervating climatic conditions and problems of grappling with the Thai language, all added to the vicissitudes of on-going field research. Despite these difficulties it was felt that the field research should be attempted in view of its generally acknowledged dearth not only in Thailand but also in the West.

At no time was there any suggestion of trying to identify "good" or "bad" academic department heads as far as leadership qualities were concerned, nor were any criticisms of their work intended. The major purpose was to identify patterns of leadership style using Hersey and Blanchard's (1977) Situational Leadership Theory as the basic framework and to attempt explanations for the perceptions of the various leadership styles. As no previous empirical research in the field using the situational leadership theory approach in Thailand's educational system could be located by the researcher, this study took on the semblance of a pilot project and this could in part account for some tentativeness and hesitancy on the part of the researcher.

Advice, help and cooperation to the researcher by the Thais were outstanding; hospitality and generosity embarrassingly overwhelming, especially considering that a "farang" (foreigner) was in their midst intent on investigating phenomena of some personal sensitivity. There was keen awareness by the researcher of his many Western biases and attempts to compensate for them were continually being made, although such attempts to achieve scientific objectivity may not always have transcended his own cultural perspectives.

All opinions, interpretations, results and conclusions offered in this research are the researcher's own and do not necessarily reflect any official Thai policies or position. If any criticisms have been stated, implied or inferred, they arise from his interpretations of the data presented and under no circumstances are meant as personal criticisms of colleges, departments, ministries and institutions generally, or of Thai colleagues particularly, for whom the researcher has the highest respect. Throughout the project the researcher has tried to maintain the requested anonymity of all participating persons.

Finally, the researcher alone bears full responsibility for all statements made and for any errors in, and inadequacies of, the study.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine leader behaviour, particularly leadership styles, of academic department heads in Thai teachers' colleges using as a basic framework the Situational Leadership Theory as developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1977) at the Centre for Leadership Studies, Ohio University. Situational Leadership Theory is based on a curvilinear, as opposed to a simple linear, relationship between task and relationship behaviour and maturity of followers. The theory attempts to provide leaders with some understanding of the relationship between effective styles of leadership and the maturity level of their followers.

The study further attempted to investigate a number of other variables thought likely to influence choices of leadership styles. Such variables included Thai cultural traits, religious tenets, Western education and length of experience in position held.

Specific questions the study attempts to answer are:

1. What, if any, are the formally promulgated leadership tasks of academic department heads in Thai teachers' colleges?
2. What, in the absence of formally promulgated leadership tasks, are the expected and customary tasks in Thai teachers' colleges?
3. What are the actual leadership tasks academic department heads are undertaking?

4. How are academic department heads appointed, for example, by seniority of service, by academic qualifications, by administrative qualifications, by popular vote, or by other means?
5. What is the general maturity level of individuals or groups of individuals in each academic department?
6. How do academic department heads perceive their own leadership behaviour in respect of:
 - a. leadership style;
 - b. style range; and,
 - c. style adaptabilityin terms of Situational Leadership Theory?
7. How do academic department members perceive the leadership behaviour of their own department head in respect of:
 - a. leadership style
 - b. style range
 - c. style adaptabilityin terms of Situational Leadership Theory?
8. How does the leadership behaviour of an academic department head as self-perceived compare with the academic department head's leadership behaviour as perceived by his department members with particular reference to:
 - a. compatibility and incompatibility in:
 - (i) leadership style
 - (ii) style range
 - (iii) style adaptability?

9. Is it possible to identify particular patterns of basic and supporting leadership styles amongst academic department heads?
10. Is it possible to identify particular cultural traits as significant influences on leadership styles amongst academic department heads?

The general thesis is that the choice of leadership styles of academic department heads will be restricted and will reflect the usually conservative and hierarchial nature of Thai administrative behaviour as depicted in the Thai literature.

The research was undertaken in the field during five main residential phases in Thailand during the period July 1980 to September 1983. Eight randomly selected Thai teachers' colleges and eighteen randomly selected academic departments were used in the study. Instruments used to gather data were questionnaires devised by the researcher and the Leader Effectiveness and Adaptability Descriptions (LEAD - Self and LEAD - Other) as developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1974). In addition, observations by the researcher using an Observation Schedule, interviews and discussions with subjects were other methods used to gather data. Thai literature particularly on customs and traditions, both by Thai and Western scholars was a further major source of data especially where it impinged on leadership behaviour. College documents provided information as to the organisational structure of colleges and duties of academic department heads.

All eighteen academic department heads responded to the instruments and questionnaires whilst ninety four of the one hundred and ten sampled staff (85%) responded. Sixty eight persons, resident in Thailand, but not part of the selected sample, were also interviewed.

College documents afforded detailed descriptions of the tasks of the academic department head and implied that the head was free, within college policy, to develop administrative procedures as the head saw fit. Leadership styles were not in any way prescribed.

Department heads' self-perceptions (LEAD - Self) of their leadership styles supported the general thesis of restricted styles indicating a "safe" or somewhat conservative balance between democratic and autocratic leader behaviour.

Department staff members, however, attributed a wider range of leadership styles to their academic heads (LEAD - Other) indicating a potential for greater flexibility in adopting appropriate leadership styles to meet particular leadership situations. One notable feature was the emphasis on a delegating leadership style which had not been postulated.

Cultural and other possible influences on leadership style were difficult to isolate and identify, hence no particular patterns of variables were found that could adequately explain various choices of leadership styles.

Certain weaknesses in the study are acknowledged, particularly in the data collection related to maturity levels and power bases of authority. Western biases of the researcher particularly in relation to administrative and leadership theory may have flavoured analyses of results and conclusions, although a number of measures were adopted to try to minimise these. In some cases insufficient opportunity to observe departments in action proved a limiting factor in attempting to explain leader behaviour.

The research would have to be regarded as a pilot study only and its conclusions tentative. Although the department heads were observed as being generally effective in their leader behaviour in their daily work where their staff members were assumedly of limited range of maturity levels (moderately high to high), the non choice of all four possible leadership styles in the LEAD instruments indicates a strong potential that in real-life situations where staff members encompass all four maturity levels (low, moderately low, moderately high, high) much of their leader behaviour would be inappropriate and thus ineffective.

The study recommends the development of leader behaviour measuring instruments more attuned to the Thai situation and a more structured and systematised investigation of situational variables other than maturity levels of followers.

The study confirms Yukl's (1981 : 169) view that:

...the situational theories are complex, imprecisely formulated, and difficult to test. Adequate empirical verification has not been achieved yet for any of these theories. At present, they are more useful for suggesting potentially important variables to investigate than as a source of definitive explanations about leadership effectiveness.

CERTIFICATE

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Geoff H. Browne.

Geoff H. Browne.

..... Thailand has no middle management resource pool. That's the main difficulty here. Family-owned operations which characterised most of the early business empires in Asia were usually one-man 'fiefdoms'. As they grew, expanding in both power and territory, the owners envisaged two solutions; bring in more family or decentralize and go professional. In America, more so than in Europe and Asia, where economic and technological development accelerated at a much faster rate, the development of management skills was of primary concern

In Thailand, we are very lucky. The 'uniqueness' of our culture encourages us to look at life and examine the priorities we assign to it from different perspectives either materially or spiritually. We don't have to wait until confronting death to ask ourselves what is more important; wealth or the good deeds we have done

Dr. V. Roengpithya,

The Nation Review, Bangkok 12 August, 1983, p.12.