

**AN ACTION AGENDA  
FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS  
IN RESPONSE TO MARKETING ORIENTATION  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN  
THAILAND**

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**Abstract:** The objectives of this research are: 1) to identify the major challenges in higher education (HE); 2) to explore the application of marketing-oriented activities in HE; 3) to ascertain the perception and attitudes of educational leaders towards marketing orientation (MO) in higher education institutions (HEIs), Thailand; and 4) to propose an action agenda regarding MO for educational leaders of HEIs, Thailand. Qualitative research methods, i.e. the content analysis and semi-structured interview were employed. One hundred eighty books related to HE were chosen for content analysis. Assumption University, Ramkhamhaeng University, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, and Chulalongkorn University were selected as the sample universities representing private, open, autonomous, and public universities respectively. Four presidents or vice presidents from the above universities were interviewed by employing semi-structured interviews. The major findings are 1) the influences of MO and external drives have changed the context in which HEIs exist and therefore it calls for a strong and visionary leadership which can apply strategic long-term planning based on a business platform. 2) The practice of MO in HE showed a) HEIs were committed to create a good image in order to attract perspective students; b) HEIs focused on increasing the satisfaction of their niche markets; c) in order to design excellent programs, reforms in curriculum were conducted to satisfy the practical demand-driven context; d) self-accountable entrepreneurial and academic activities were employed to enlist financial support. 3) The leaders of HEIs, Thailand were aware of the importance of applying marketing techniques and strategies in HE; nevertheless, such techniques and strategies were only applied at a superficial level and certain areas, rather than at a strategic and holistic level. 4) Therefore, the action agenda proposed calls for a strategic perspective towards the application of MO by employing a holistic approach in HEIs, Thailand, which covers the levels of 1) Government 2) The public 3) The industry 4) The university and 5) Leadership. The significance of the study is the action agenda can be referred by all the stakeholders of HE in order to effectively respond to MO.

**Background of the Problem**

Higher education (HE), nowadays, has to operate within the increasingly challenging and complex environments. As Considine (2006) points out, universities currently

"face new environmental demands and significant internal complexities that appear to challenge their traditional modes of work and organization" and "the imperatives for change are essentially external and that the university system is being shocked by environmental transformation" (p. 255). As Kiranandana (referred on February 18, 2009) points out, on one hand, government in many countries around the world tends to decrease overall funding for public HE; on the other hand, there is a strong demand on quality of education -- world class universities. The decreasing public funding means university will have to be more self sustained in finance; in other words, university needs to step out of its ivory and to adjust itself to meet the needs of market.

Moreover, the global changes as the main power, drives the emergence of new economy based on knowledge and information. When knowledge and information become the basic elements of global economy, the globalization produces tremendous influence on knowledge content and the way of achieving it. Knowledge, in globalization, will no longer be the special power of academic field. As Cunningham, Ryan, Stedman, Tapsall, Bagdon, Flew, & Coaldrake (2000) put, traditional universities, used to be "the major providers of higher education" are "being challenged by non-traditional organizations, such as corporate and virtual providers." (p.1)

In addition, facing the contextual changes and challenges, HELs are forced to possess entrepreneurial spirit and marketing orientation (MO) in order to survive and compete. Hentschke & Caldwell (2005) states that "varieties of conditions or forces are increasingly favoring entrepreneurial behavior in education". They grouped these forces as "demand-increasing and supply-increasing". Increased demand for higher quality schooling is reflected by two aspects. On one hand, the dissatisfaction with schooling from the public has increased; and on the other hand, governments concern how they can produce learning in children, rather, educators' rules obedience. In the same time, along with the increases of schooling supply, most governments failed to provide the necessary increases in school funding. As a consequence, they are forced to cautiously encourage educators to pursue multiple sources of revenue for schooling, such as donations, sales and investments, etc., which therefore, attract more entrepreneurial leaders.

However, there are quite a number of debates about the marketing-oriented education in literature. As Thrupp and Willmott (2003) argue, education is regarded as a public good that is undermined by marketization and (new) managerialism, and, in turn (and with depressing irony), is undermining the very national competitiveness. Such processes and mechanisms are meant to enhance and encourage. Alvesson and Willmott (1996) also note that "marketing is perhaps the most visible and controversial of

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