

LEADERSHIP OF DEANS IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN THAILAND, MALAYSIA, AND SINGAPORE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY AND MODEL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. The objectives of this study are: to explore the leadership practices of the deans in private universities in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore in terms of vision, ethics, reality, and courage; to compare these practices, to determine which of these practices relate to leadership effectiveness of the deans; and, to construct a hypothesized model of dean leadership in the perspective of the three countries. The research methodology employed both qualitative and quantitative methods for the collection of descriptive data. Six deans from private universities, two from each country, were interviewed. The emerging themes from the interviews were grouped according to the four leadership dimensions of vision, ethics, reality and courage. Thirty-four deans who were not interviewed answered two sets of questionnaires: the leadership practices questionnaire, which consisted of 40 items, and the leadership effectiveness questionnaire, which consisted of 31 items. The emerging themes from the interview and the findings from the questionnaires were used as bases for the construction of hypothesized model of dean leadership in the perspective of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Findings show that certain leadership practices exercised by the deans in the three countries can be universally endorsed and certain practices are culturally specific.

Keywords: Private University, Leadership, Leadership Diamond Model, Vision, Ethics, Reality, Courage, Leadership Arenas, Leadership Practices, Leadership Effectiveness

Introduction

Leadership is the foundation for all organizations, whether corporate, non-profit, government or higher education institutions. Leadership is a high calling and responsibility, upon which all else the organization is or does rests (Di Frances, 2005). Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish the objectives of the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent (Clark, 1997). According to Koestenbaum, leadership is the art of combining results and heart (2002).

In recent years, leadership studies and issues have gained importance not only in business but also in the academia. However, most of these studies have focused on general issues rather than in the contexts of culture within which leadership is exercised and have been based mostly on Western theories that are often transferred across cultures with relatively little concern for their cultural validity (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). In addition, a number of leadership studies in higher education focus on the traits and skills of academic leaders; however, these have missed important ingredients needed to lead in the 21st century. Koestenbaum contends that today's leadership must convey a concept that is simple as it is fundamental: quality products and services must be supported by quality people (2002). In terms of academic leadership productivity, they are quality graduates and services.

The role of private universities in the recent years has gained momentum due largely to the increasing demands for quality education that cannot be met by the public sector. This trend is felt not only in Southeast Asian countries but in the western countries as well, thus studies on leadership of deans in private universities should be pursued.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to explore the leadership practices of deans in private universities in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore in terms of vision, ethics, reality and courage, to compare these practices, to determine which of these practices relate to leadership effectiveness of the deans in the three countries and to construct a hypothesized model of dean leadership in the perspective of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

Theoretical Framework

The Leadership Diamond Theory of Leadership Greatness by Peter Koestenbaum served as the grounded theory for the research design. The Leadership Diamond Model focuses on the four leadership dimensions or strategies that leaders