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RESEARCH BRIEF

## Ethics of Public University Executives

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By pedagogical definition, “ethics” and “ethical principles” are concepts regarding the significant role of good conduct of, as well as the educational paradigms used by leaders in educational organizations (Kocabas, 2009). Ethics could also be defined as rules of behavior that emphasize the norms of civil society which distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior (Blocker, 1998), regulate forms of human behavior (Solomon, 1984), and a human behavior that governs professional associations (Babbie, 1979).

On the basis of these elements, ethics then requires membership in society to include adherence to socially acceptable norms. This membership extends to institutions of education where pedagogic scholars place the leadership of the institution as pivotal to an institution’s success and well-being (Katranci, Sungu, & Saglam 2015). For example, Smith (1974) asserted that good ethical behaviors of institutional leaders, such as good relationship building, planning and close cooperation, creating understanding and connections, encouragement for career and personal development, and building security and confidence among staff, are crucial to the success of an organization. From the standpoint of management, Hoy, C.J. Tarter, P. Forsyth. (1978) indicated that loyalty of subordinates may be predicted by the level of relationship building

and friendliness of superiors. Magnuson (1971), as cited by Jaroenchai (2001), stated that personal qualifications, such as thoughtfulness, justness, honesty, loyalty well-roundedness, consideration faithfulness, and friendship, are as equally important as being knowledgeable, assigning jobs well, working well with others, and having good job planning.

Leaders in educational institutions who have good ethical traits—for example, providing conducive working environments, practicing democratic leadership, practicing compromise, and practicing multidirectional communication—create teaching staff that are more inclined to producing higher learning proficiency among students. According to Gardiner and Tenuto (2015), ethical decision making creates improvement in organizations. Within the context of Thailand, personal discipline and a good work ethic of leaders of educational institutions are rated and valued very highly to create a good working environment (Sarnthong, 2005; Sianglam, 2006; Yuuphakdee, 2008).

This research discusses the qualities of good ethics in the context of Thailand, specifically the ethical practices among leaders in educational institutions within the kingdom. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data was derived from 198 university staff via a questionnaire. These

staff were mostly females, had a bachelor's degree (78.8%), were aged 31-40 years (48.5%), and were single (60.6%). Qualitative data was gained from university presidents and rectors through an in-depth interview method. Of every 10 presidents and rectors interviewed, nine were males. In terms of quantitative study, due to the unclear size of the sample studied, the Cochran Method (1953) was employed in the sample size calculation and the total sample was 396. From this, the quota sampling technique was further employed in the sample sampling from each university and the eventual size of the sample was 198. For the qualitative study, the purposive selection technique was used in data collection with 18 public university executives in Thailand.

A questionnaire on prescribed ethical behaviors for the executives of the public universities in Thailand was used as the tool in quantitative data collection. The instrument used in qualitative data collection was a non-structured interview guide covering various dimensions of ethics utilized by public university executives in managing their respective universities. Data were analyzed descriptively (i.e., means) and using content analysis.

Among the university staff interviewed, the quantitative results indicate that executives were perceived that they must be good role models to all their subordinates (mean: 4.20; higher mean suggests stronger agreement), prototypes of ethical standards (mean: 4.14), and that they must act rather than speak (mean: 4.13), and must behave appropriately in chaotic situations (mean: 4.12). The university presidents and rectors interviewed were found to have similar perspectives, saying that, aside from being good role models and ethical standard prototypes, public university executives' unethical behavior has to be given disciplinary action.

Data from the university staff further suggest that executives must ethically verify how the jobs assigned are beneficial to their subordinates and how the results of the job contribute and correspond to the goals, mission, and vision of the university (mean: 4.05). Moreover, the university staff viewed that executives must ensure that their subordinates adhere to the goals of the organization (mean: 4.03). Among the university presidents and rectors, creative

communication was regarded as highly essential for achieving the goals and tasks of the organization. In this light, they deemed it necessary that the executives of the organization must set a good example and be open to the views and ideas expressed by subordinates.

In terms of intra-organizational communication, the university staff agreed that executives must communicate with their subordinates about job performance and must encourage them to view different problems from different dimensions (mean: 4.20). These university staff tended to appreciate openness of communication between executives and subordinates and the "bottom-to-top" approach to communication. They felt that executives must brainstorm with their subordinates for three-fold reasons: 1) to provide the latter a chance to voice their opinions regarding matters affecting the university and themselves (mean: 3.97); 2) to help solve critical problems in management (mean: 3.98); and 3) to make their subordinates realize the value of seeking various techniques and methods used in management (mean: 3.98). The university presidents and rectors interviewed expressed not only the importance of intra-organization communication but also of sociocultural sensitivity and organizational culture, in which executives must view subordinates more as assets rather than labor. As such, these informants felt that university executives must seek to develop their subordinates to be well-rounded individuals.

Quantitative data from the university staff likewise suggests that executives must boost their subordinates' morale so that they perform well in their jobs (mean: 4.09) and must encourage their subordinates to seek various new approaches in accomplishing their jobs (mean: 4.05). The university staff felt that executives and their subordinates must work together in identifying the key factors for success, which will lead to the efficiency of implementing the organizational plan (mean: 4.05). Data suggest that executives were perceived by the university staff to have the responsibilities to promote to their subordinates the need to set up a personal development plan (mean: 4.06), to give advice to their subordinates for strengthening individual skills (mean: 4.03), and to continuously develop them to be more progressive in their career paths (mean: 4.08).

The university presidents and rectors interviewed agreed to the necessity for cooperation between university executives and subordinates, but they felt that the latter must be continually encouraged to be creative and to have teamwork in order to achieve the goals of the organization. They added that the Human Resources Department (HRD) of the university would be vital in meeting these goals. As such, they felt that HRD must be administered ethically, and that staff turnover has to be reduced as much as possible via compatible job assignments.

The university staff interviewed perceived that, for subordinates to self-actualize, executives should show their confidence in the staff's capability to accomplish the jobs assigned to them (mean: 4.03). However, the quantitative evidence indicates that executives must also have the trust (mean: 4.05) and acceptance, respect and confidence of their subordinates (mean: 4.02), and that executives—along with their subordinates and beneficiaries—must attempt to develop and maintain the trust among each other (mean: 3.91). The university presidents and rectors underscored the key roles of inspiration and confidence building in organizational development.

Quantitative evidence indicates that executives must be ethically as well as morally responsible for the results of their actions (mean: 4.12), must take ethics and morality into their decision-making (mean: 4.11), and must act in an ethical manner in order to make their subordinates as well as beneficiaries trust them (mean: 4.09). Subsequently, the university staff saw the need for executives to understand their own strengths as well as their own weaknesses (mean: 4.02), to confess when they do something wrong or inappropriate (mean: 4.02), to communicate the reasons when assigning and re-assigning jobs to their subordinates (mean: 4.00), and to collaborate with their subordinates and beneficiaries as the key drivers for change (mean: 4.00).

Qualitative evidence underscores that university presidents and rectors stated that the university executives of Thai public universities must be good role models for their staff. Executives must be ethical to be able to convey their messages creatively. They must know how to assign jobs as well as to function as effective mentors. They must be more than willing to

welcome the opinion of their subordinates. They must realize that the others' creative ideas are valuable. They must know how to put the right person in the right job. They must realize that the human resource is so essential to the organization that it must be always developed. Last but not least, the university presidents and rectors indicated that the university executives must make the staff confident in themselves and at the same time must know how to inspire staff members.

The results of the research discussed in this report may serve as a guide for the Thai Ministry of Education in implementing more appropriate education management policies and measurements to decrease unethical behavior in Thailand's public universities. Ethical behavior and decision making may also push these universities to higher levels of performance and staff integration. There is a need to understand the cultural contexts influencing professional ethical practices and outcomes when managing universities.

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