A STUDY OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY OF STUDENT LEADERS PARTICIPATING IN EXTRA – CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND

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Abstract: This study was conducted to assess leadership competency of student leaders who participate in extra-curricular activities throughout experiential learning approach provided by Assumption University of Thailand (Au). This study involved a sample of 242 student leaders of Au for the academic year 2008 taken from a population of 613 student leaders and in fact, there were 244 respondents who returned completed assessment using purposive random sampling technique. The instrument content was based on literature reviews and related researches. Assessments were used to identify two parts: demographic information and leadership competency in 5 dimensions of the Wagner's Leadership Competency Model (LCM) (2004), which apportions as follows: Self-Management, Leading Others, Task-Management, Innovation, and Social Responsibility as equally sustaining variables. The research found that the level of leadership competency of student leaders was at a strong level in all dimensions of Wagner's LCM.

Introduction

Extra-curricular activities or informal education are tools for educators and are used to enhance student development toward learning by doing, or experiential learning. References to the Thai educational Acts B.E. 2544, the law identifies types of education and furthermore, provides authorization to educational institutions in order to provide each or all types of education which could be listed as follows: formal, non-formal and informal education for learners, which focuses on the learner's interest, ability, potentialities, readiness and opportunities available from society, environment, media, or other sources of knowledge, by integration of in and out of classroom learning (Thai, National Education Act B.E., 2544), (Thai, Commission on Higher Education, 2007).

In relation to Assumption University of Thailand, the university provides all types of education through conducting teaching and learning among different curricula. The university provides extra-curricular activities for the individual interests of undergraduate students under the supervision of the Center for Student Leadership and Experiential Learning (CSLEL), under the Student Affairs Department, by advising, monitoring, and reflective activities for all kinds of student activities as informal education (Student Affairs Professional Guidelines, 2006). The Center for Student Leadership and Experiential Learning (CSLEL) has the responsibility to monitor, support and facilitate all undergraduate student extra-curricular activities, providing student development training programs, and to encourage students to become involved in extra-curricular activities as a form of experiential learning, which leads to student development in different areas (*Assumption University, 2009*), (Assumption University Student Affairs Department, 2000).

Experiential learning is education that people do as individuals in their lives, in education. Associated with each cluster are people who share aims and values that are more common than different. In experiential learning there are concerns based in four areas: (See Figure 1: left Experiential Learning Approaches, Weil, S. W. & McGill I., 1989) first, creating new routes into higher education, employment, training opportunities and professional bodies; second, concerning on bringing about change in structures, purposes and curricula of post-school education; third, based on group consciousness raising, community action and social change; and lastly those that concern personal growth, self-development, self-awareness and group effectiveness. The outcome of experiential learning may result in to two areas *(*See Figure 1: Right) Outcome of Experiential Learning (Weil, S. W. & McGill I., 1989). Firstly, personal development is a common outcome of experiential learning activities with awareness, confidence and empowerment. Secondly, competencies approaches of experiential learning claimed to improve communication skills, decision-making skills and network of contacts (Weil, S. W. & McGill I., 1989). With both outcomes

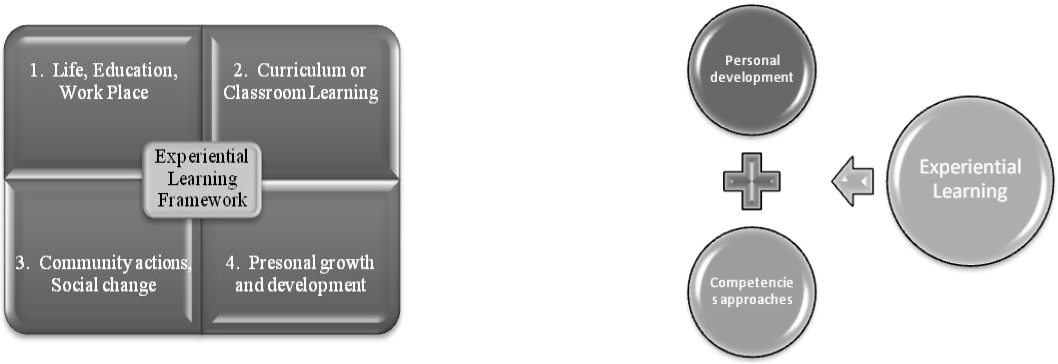

Figure 1: (left) Experiential Learning Approaches, (Right) Outcome of Experiential Learning (Weil, S. W. & McGill I., 1989).

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experiential learning can contribute to leadership competency development.

Wagner's Leadership Competency Model (LCM) was developed with the purpose to help students develop their skills, knowledge, and abilities in order to successfully function in current student roles and in the futures of their careers, which are considered in five areas: valuable skills, abilities, behaviors, attitudes and knowledge, in which leaders are expected to excel. Leadership competency can be described in five dimensions: self- management, leading others, task management, innovation and social responsibility (*See Figure 2:* Wagner's Leadership Competency Model). In terms of the self-management dimension which relates to leaders in the field of self-values, strengths, limitations, ability to control self emotions and behaviors, these enable leaders towards continuous learning and willingness to seek for necessary help, and they also are able to admit making wrong decisions. Leaders should be able to adjust themselves to various situations and be able to balance among personal lives and duties. The other leading dimension for leaders is to retrieve and motivate the potential of others to achieve joint goals. The task management dimension defines the leadership character to use knowledge and experience to lead others to reach the goals by engaging in problem solving, delegation, and time and resource management. Through the innovation dimension, leaders are involved in exploring and integrating diverse perspectives and recognizing unexpected opportunities. Lastly, the social responsibility dimension indicates that leaders should promote ethical standards along with personal, organizational and community responsibility among their group or organization. (Wagner, 2004)

Method

Participants

One group of participants was studied, student leaders (population 613, sample 244, from 10 undergraduate faculties At Au student leaders were identified with their type of activity units as: 62 (25.4%) were in student organizations and student council, 65 (26.6%) were in student committees from each department in Martin de Tours School of Management, and 117 (48%) were in clubs. Among the 244 samples had a position in student activity units as: 27 (11.1%) were president of student activity units, 38 (15.6%) were vice president of student activity units, 20 (8.2%) were being treasurer of student activity units, 16 (6.6%) were being secretary of student activity units, and 143(58.6.%) were being committee members of student activity units.

Instrumentation

In this study, the assessment was adopted to be the research instrument and the researcher used content analysis by synthesizing leadership competency in different dimensions of Wagner's LCM and adopted and modified Wagner's Leadership Competency Assessment Instrument (Wagner, 2004). The assessment was divided into two sections, described briefly as follows:

Part 1: Demographic information. This included categorized questions about the selected demographic variables: sex, age, student status, type of activity units, and position in student activity units, years of participating in extra-curricular activities, degree of playing roles as organizer in their unit's activities. This part served as reference information in this study.

Part 2: Assessment of leadership competency in 5 dimensions (25 dimensions concerned areas) namely: self-management, leading others, task-management, innovation, and social responsibility. All assessments were rated on a 6-point Likert-scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Slightly Disagree", "Slightly Agree", "Agree" and "Strongly Agree"; each

Figure 2: Wagner's Leadership Competency Model (Wagner, 2004)

point was scored 1 to 6.

Procedure

To ensure the quality of the instrument, the content of the research's assessment was validated by experts before it was distributed to the sample and the pilot test was distributed to 30 undergraduate students. Utilizing SPSS, the research's assessment was reliable, with an Alpha co-efficient of .9785. Based on the "stratified random sampling" and Krejcie and Morgan's abbreviated table of sample size (1970), the researcher randomly asked respondents to fill in assessment anonymously.

The collected data were statistically analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the respondents' demographic and assessment of leadership competency to meet the research's objective.

Results

Altogether, the main findings derived from the process of data analysis are summarized as follows:

1. Demographic Analysis

1.1 Gender: balanced proportion between male and female respondents as 50%: 50%.

1.2 Age: The research sample was at the age of "20 years old" as 31.6%.

1.3 Student status: The highest proportion of research sample was in "3rd year student" as 39.3%.

1.4 Type of activity units: Among the research sample identified there were from "Clubs" as 48%.

1.5 Position in student activity units: The highest proportion of research sample was taken their position in activity units as "Committee member" as 58.6%

1.6 Years of participating in extra-curricular activities: the research sample was described years of participating in extra-curricular activities was "only one year" as 43%.

1.7 Degree of playing roles as organizer in their activity unit' activities: Almost of the research sample was "always" being organizer in their activity unit' activities as 68.9%.

2. Leadership Competency Assessment

The second part of the research was the research assessment of student leaders' leadership competency by use of Wagner's Leadership Competency Model (LCM), (Wagner, 2004). Wagner's Leadership Competency Model which is separated in to 5 dimensions of assessment namely: Self-Management, Leading Others, Task-Management, Innovation, and Social Responsibility. The research findings are as follows:

2.1 Self-Management dimension, the average of student leaders resulted as *"strong"* in this dimension ($\bar{x}$ = 4.673, *SD* = 0.534), all of the concerned areas were *"strong"* as follows: Work Habits Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.725, *SD* = 0.656),Work Attitudes Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.713, *SD* = 0.682) and Management Area (*M* = 4.707, *SD* = 0.701).

2.2 Leading others dimension, the average of student leaders resulted as *"strong"* in this dimension ($\bar{x}$ = 4.547, *SD* = 0.558), all of the concerned areas were *"strong"* as follows: Interpersonal Awareness Area (*M* = 4.750, *SD* = 0.663), Communication Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.625, *SD* = 0.718) and Motivating Others Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.475, *SD* = 0.717).

2.3 Task-management dimension, the average of student leaders resulted as *"strong"* in this dimension ($\bar{x}$ = 4.550, *SD* = 0.554), all of the concerned areas were *"strong"* as follows: Managing Human Resources Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.693, *SD* = 0.657), Managing Information and Material Resources Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.570, *SD* = 0.692) and Executing Tasks Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.529, *SD* = 0.748).

2.4 Innovation dimension, the average of student leaders resulted as *"strong"* in this dimension ($\bar{x}$ = 4.521, *SD* = 0.573), all of the concerned areas were *"strong"* as follows: Integrating Perspectives Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.861, *SD* = 0.701), Enterprising Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.572, *SD* = 0.803) and Creativity Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.463, *SD* = 0.742).

2.5 Social responsibility dimension, the average of student leaders resulted *"strong"* in this dimension ($\bar{x}$ = 4.667, *SD* = 0.620), all of the concerned areas were *"strong"* as follows: Acting with Integrity Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.822, *SD* = 0.747), Ethical Process Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.740, *SD* = 0.782) and Leading Others Area ($\bar{x}$ = 4.674, *SD* = 0.734).

Conclusion

The assessment results of a study of leadership competency in student leaders participating in extra-curricular activities based on Assumption University student leaders in the academic year 2008 showed that student leaders was self determined in their behavior and were *strong* in all dimension of leadership competency, according to Wagner's Leadership Competency Model (LCM) (2004), as respectively: Self-Management Dimension ($\bar{x}$ = 4.673, *SD* = 0.534), Social Responsibility Dimension ($\bar{x}$ = 4.667, *SD* = 0.620) and Task-Management Dimension ($\bar{x}$ = 4.550, *SD* = 0.554).

In additional, by ranking the assessment results of student leaders in all concerned areas of leadership competency dimensions, the assessment results shows at the level of "Agree", meaning that the student leaders on average were self determined in their behavior and were *strong* in every dimensions concerned area of all leadership competency dimensions respectively: Integrating Perspectives ($\bar{x}$ = 4.861, *SD* = 0.701), Acting with Integrity($\bar{x}$ = 4.822, *SD* = 0.747), and Interpersonal Awareness($\bar{x}$ = 4.750, *SD* = 0. 0.663). On the other hand, the lowest assessment results in all concerned areas of leadership competency dimensions were shown respectively: Managing Change ($\bar{x}$ = 4.352, *SD* = 0.746), Forecasting ($\bar{x}$ = 4.357, *SD* = 0.774), and Influencing ($\bar{x}$ = 4.416, *SD* = 0.737).

The assessment results demonstrate that experiential learning in forms of extra-curricular activities that are provided by the Center for Student Leadership and Experiential Learning, Assumption University of Thailand may significantly influence student leaders to the self development of leadership competencies. The Thai

Commissioner on Higher Education (2007) states that educational institutions support for extra-curricular activities by providing elements such as budget, information, place, necessary equipment, advisory system, and experiential learning arrangement throughout student organizations and student activities units in order to enhance student development in every area, for example, emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual. Coincident with the study of Saengtien (2004), this study found that students who participate in extra-curricular activities provided by education institutions expressed their opinions concerning the effects of student activities performances at levels of all aspects such as intellectual, physical, mental, and emotional.

According to Weil and McGill (1989), experiential learning is education with learners acquiring their knowledge or self-development throughout experience from personal lives, in education, in institutions, work places, in communities' action, and social change. Also, Henry (1989) defined outcomes of experiential learning in two areas: firstly, a common outcome of experiential learning was personal development, such as awareness (self-awareness, awareness of others, and awareness of society), self-confidence, and self-respect. Second, competencies as another outcome of experiential learning approach referred to communication skills, decision-making skills, and personal network. Also Johnson (1991) developed an action theory in which experiential learning is emphasized, especially, on the influence of environments on individuals, especially within the context of social groups "experiencing" cooperative learning. Membership in a group will free a person to experiment with new behaviors, attitudes, and action theories, especially if the group is supportive and accepting.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to study leadership competency in student leaders participating in extra-curricular activities at Assumption University of Thailand in the academic year 2008. Therefore, two recommendations for future research will be discussed: recommendation for applications and recommendation for further research

1. Recommendation for applications

Recommendation for applications in student affairs unit in higher education institutions, Assumption University of Thailand, and other institutions may use this research's results to develop programs in training and in the advising process for student leaders by concentrating on lower result of dimensions concerned areas in order to support student development in terms of valuable skills, abilities, behaviors, attitudes and knowledge area of leaders. Students are not to master in every single concerned area but students may need to be aware of them in different areas. Therefore, students can be able to recognize these qualities. Such training and advising process will also help to prepare student leaders with complete leadership skills for their own future in the fast changing and globalizing world of 21st century.

2. Recommendation for further research

Recommendation for further research in terms of leadership competency of students was involved in 3 areas as follows: population and sample, research methodology and context. First recommendation is related to population and sample. Further researcher(s) may conduct the research by comparison of different populations and samples as follows: comparison between ordinary students and student leaders, in order to study different leadership competency; and comparison between institutions' student leaders, in order to study different leadership competency between institutions student leaders.

Second recommendation is related to research methodology area. Further researcher(s) may conduct research by using qualitative research methods to study students' leadership competency such as: employing focus groups among students, student leaders, lecturers, and stakeholders of the institution; and interviewing students, student leaders, lecturers, and stakeholders of the institution; and making observations of leadership competency of student leaders and/or students during the extra-curricular activities. The last recommendation is related to the content of student leadership. Further researcher(s) may study the effect of influence factors related to student and/or student leaders' leadership competency development such as: age, sex, student status, program of study, type of extra-curricular participation.

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