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Soft skills of the administrators affecting the school effectiveness

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Abstract

Soft skills are essential skills required for a lot of occupations concerning communication and interpersonal skills in any work environment that can lead organisations to be successful and effective. In order to understand the soft skills and school effectiveness, this research tried to study the relationship between soft skills and school effectiveness and also investigated how soft skills affected school effectiveness. The participants consisted of 341 teachers of Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office, Nong Khai Province, Thailand. The 5-rating scale questionnaire was employed for data collection. The data were analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for percentage, mean, standard deviation, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis. The results indicated the relationship between the two variables that led to understand how to develop school effectiveness based on the soft skills of school administration.

Keywords: Soft skills, school effectiveness, administrators.

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1. Introduction

The current education management focuses on changes in learners to achieve the desired characteristics of being a person in the 21st century that focuses on students' knowledge, ability, skills in learning, pursuing learning and having life skills good to be able to live in a society with quality and completely human (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4). This is in accordance with the National Education Act (No. 3), BE 2553 (2010). The section 6 states that the educational management must be for developing the Thai people to be the perfect human including body, mind, wisdom, knowledge and virtue with ethics and culture in life. They should be able to live together with others happily. The school education is, therefore, an important process in producing students to meet the needs of society. Management in educational institutions is, therefore, an important process to take to that goal. School management is the primary task of the executives that have to formulate work procedures and guidelines systematically. Good executives must know how to choose the appropriate and effective management methods in order to accomplish goals. The administration must use both science and art because various operations are not just done by the administrators alone but there are also many other participants who have contributed to the successful work (Wong Anutaraj, 2011, p. 8). The school management for success and in accordance with the guidelines for educational reform, there are important factors for enhancing learning in schools, which consisted of an effective management system and participation.

One element of success in the management of the executives is the skills of the executives which caused the knowledge and expertise to be implemented until reaching the effectiveness. The skills of executives are necessary for education. Sirisuksil (2014) stated that soft skills of leadership are important to managers to be used in managing people in the organisation. The leaders with leadership skills in this area will have the ability to upgrade teacher quality to be in professionalism. This is supported by Wiwek (2013, p. 12) who indicated that there were five aspects of soft skills comprising: 1) teamwork 2) communication and presentation 3) critical thinking for creative problem solving 4) leadership ability and 5) professionalism and ethics. Soft skills aim to promote, coordinate and assemble all personnel to work together to achieve the vision, mission and goals of schools.

The administrators, therefore, have to have soft skills in managing the organisation to be successful and effective. The effectiveness of the school caused by social conditions, atmosphere and environment around the students is conducive to proper learning. In addition, the schools should have readiness in various resources to be able to manage education well. The students have knowledge, ability and skills in various fields in order to ensure the effective management process. The school effectiveness component is an implicit social system that requires external relations and internal processes with the conditions of the social education process. The school system will be stable when producing products that are acceptable and reach social needs (Edessa, 2017; Suriyo, 2009). In summary, the school effectiveness depends on the administrators and constraints of school administration. A way to help the management's performance to achieve the goals or objectives is the development of the school administrators. This is because the school administrator is the person who has the duty to achieve the school objectives and promote cooperation for working.

As a result, this research tries to study the soft skills of administrators affecting the effectiveness of schools under Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office, Thailand. Also, to know how do the soft skills of the administrators and the effectiveness of the school correlate. What skills can predict the effectiveness of schools? The results of this research will be useful and will be a guideline for school administrators to manage various aspects for the most effective school.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants in this research consisted of 341 teachers of Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office, Nong Khai Province, Thailand. The sample size was employed by Krejcie and Morgan table that calculated the sample by the proportion of teachers in each school. Then, stratified random sampling by school size was applied.

2.2. Measures

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire comprised three parts consisted of background data of the participants, predictor variables and criterion variable.

Part 1

It was the list to inquire general data of the participants that consisted of work position, school size and work experience.

Part 2

This part was a predictor variable measure that was soft skills. They composed of the rating scale questions that were created from document analysis and then synthesised by the variables. The questionnaire was employed to inquire the characteristics of administrator's soft skills with the reliability of 0.90. The characteristics of administrator's soft skills consisted of 1) communication and presentation (X_1) 2) leadership ability (X_2) 3) collaboration and teamwork (X_3) 4) critical thinking for creative problem solving (X_4) and 5) Professionalism and ethics (X_5).

Part 3

This part was a criterion variable measure that was school effectiveness. It composed of the rating scale questions that were created and belong to Hoy & Miskel (1991: 398). The questionnaire was employed to inquire the school effectiveness with the reliability of 0.92. The school effectiveness consisted of 1) The ability to produce students with high academic achievement (y_1) 2) Ability to develop students to have a positive attitude (y_1) 3) Ability to adjust and develop school (y_1) and 4) Ability to solve problems within the school (y_1).

2.3. Procedure and design

This study was a survey research collecting data by a questionnaire. The data were collected by mail after the researcher has sent the letters to the target schools. The questionnaires were proposed to the school administrators and teachers and defined the return date.

2.4. Statistical analysis

The data were analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences: SPSS. The descriptive statistics were applied for frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation. Pearson's product-moment correlation was applied to test the relationship between the schools administrators' soft skills and school effectiveness. Moreover, multiple regression analysis was employed to analyse how the soft skills of the administrators affect school effectiveness.

3. Results

3.1. The relationship between soft skills of the school administrators and school effectiveness

The Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient analysis indicated that soft skills of the school administrators under Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office positively correlated to

the school effectiveness highly with the statistical significance level of 0.01 The collaboration and teamwork was the highest relationship variable portrayed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pearson’s correlation coefficient between soft skills of the school administrators and school effectiveness of Nong Khai primary educational service area office

Soft skills of the school administrators	school effectiveness				
	Y ₁	Y ₂	Y ₃	Y ₄	Y ₀
X ₁	0.336**	0.389**	0.683**	0.696**	0.633**
X ₂	0.442**	0.603**	0.702**	0.704**	0.738**
X ₃	0.314**	0.450**	0.793**	0.802**	0.710**
X ₄	0.319**	0.382**	0.774**	0.795**	0.653**
X ₅	0.363**	0.381**	0.684**	0.701**	0.641**
X ₀	0.374**	0.494**	0.836**	0.851**	0.769**

3.2. The soft skills of the administrators affecting the school effectiveness

The multiple regression analysis showed that 1) the communication and presentation (X₁), 2) the leadership ability (X₂), 3) the collaboration and teamwork (X₃) and 4) the critical thinking for creative problem solving (X₄) affected the school effectiveness with the statistical significance level of 0.01. The leadership ability (X₂) was the best predictor variable with the standardised score of 0.805 as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. The regression coefficient of the predictors used to predict the effectiveness of schools under the Nong Khai primary educational service area office

	Raw score		Standardised ore		Sig.
	b	SE	β	t	
Constant (a)	0.914	0.137		6.121	0.000
1) the communication and presentation (X ₁)	0.433	0.036	0.450	12.040	0.000
2) the leadership ability (X ₂)	0.606	0.097	0.805	6.245	0.000
3) the collaboration and team work (X ₃)	-0.369	0.090	-0.477	-4.089	0.000
4) the critical thinking for creative problem solving (X ₄)	0.123	0.036	0.151	3.444	0.000

The regression coefficient of the predictors used to predict the effectiveness of schools under the Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office indicated that four predictors could predict the effectiveness of schools about 70.10%. The predicted equation of the effectiveness of schools was as follows:

The predictive equation of raw scores

$$\hat{Y} = 0.914 + 0.433(X_2) + 0.606(X_3) - 0.369(X_1) + 0.123(X_4)$$

The predictive equation of standardised scores

$$\hat{Z} = 0.450Z_{(X_2)} + 0.805Z_{(X_3)} - 0.477Z_{(X_1)} + 0.151Z_{(X_4)}$$

Table 3 The results of predictive variable analysis in forecasting the effectiveness of schools under the Nong Khai primary educational service area office

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	F	Sig.
1. (X ₂)	0.738	0.544	0.543	0.27283	404.888	0.000
2. (X ₂), (X ₃)	0.816	0.666	0.664	0.23395	336.841	0.000
3. (X ₂), (X ₃), (X ₁)	0.831	0.690	0.687	0.22566	250.115	0.000
4. (X ₂), (X ₃), (X ₁), (X ₄)	0.837	0.701	0.697	0.22211	196.595	0.000

4. Discussion and conclusion

4.1. The relationship between soft skills of the school administrators and school effectiveness.

The soft skills of the school administrators under Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office positively correlated to the school effectiveness highly with the statistical significance level of 0.01. The collaboration and teamwork was the highest relationship variable. This may be due to the schools under Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office have a working plan for achieving organisational goals. School administrators have skills in systematic educational management by adhering to good governance principles. There are promotion and development of learning activities that are appropriate to the school context. There are support and opportunity for personnel in the school to develop knowledge and ability to perform tasks. In addition, they are promoting and giving opportunities for parents and community to involve in education management and school development. The development and improvement of the operation was a systematic and continuous manner for the schools to be efficient and effective.

It has congruence with the concept of Purkey & Smith who organised a group of factors that show the effectiveness of the school in two aspects as follows: 1) Structure, namely, administration and distributed leadership power. There is stability in the performance of the teacher. There are clear and organised courses. There is teachers' development, participation and support from parents that are widely accepted by students including time for maximum learning and support from the local. 2) Processes include having a participatory planning system, having a team-like relationship with power, having rules and discipline and have communication and presentation (Purkey & Smith cited in Sararatana, 2005, p. 327). This is also consistent with the concept of Kiner (Kreitner cited in Sararatana, 2005, p. 333) who stated that the effectiveness of the organisation is the operation that achieves the organisation's goals. The systematic viewpoints that perceive organisational effectiveness are the level of the organisation's ability to provide valuable and scarce resources to the organisation system and the view that taking into account the satisfaction of the stakeholders of the organisation for team collaboration.

4.2. The soft skills of the administrators affecting the school effectiveness

The multiple regression analysis to create the predictive equation of the effectiveness of schools under the Nong Khai Primary Education Service Area Office by using Soft Skills of administrators as predictive variables found that the communication and presentation, the leadership ability, the collaboration and teamwork, and the critical thinking for creative problem solving were the best predictors of the school effectiveness with predicting power of 70.10%. Each predictor was also discussed as well.

4.2.1. The leadership ability

It was the best predictor variable for predicting the effectiveness of schools. This may be due to successful schools come from executives who act as effective leaders. Executive leadership is an important factor that is particularly important in the administration. The leaders with leadership will influence the effectiveness of the school by stimulating and directing the personnel in the school to

work together fully; therefore, it is very important to bring the school to success. This is consistent with Holton's concept (Halton cited in Sararatana, 2005, p. 324) that says elements that represent school effectiveness are identified into three large groups. Each group has sub-elements as follows: The elements of common aims consist of having clear goals, having shared values and beliefs and leadership. This is also consistent with Caldwell & Spinks who mentioned that the evaluation criteria for school effectiveness consisted of curriculum, decision, resources, leadership, atmosphere and outcome (Caldwell & Spinks, cited in Sararatana, 2005, pp 330–333). The results of this research are consistent with the research results of Please Phu Mali and others who studied on administrative factors affecting the effectiveness of small schools in the eastern region. The results of the study showed that administrative factors affecting the effectiveness of small schools in the eastern region were at a high level, namely, educational leadership and compliance policy. The effectiveness of small schools in the eastern region is at a high level. 2) Administrative factors that affected the effectiveness of small schools in the eastern region found that the best predictive power is policy compliance followed by participation factors, instructional management factors, educational leadership factors and factors of facilitating learning environments. All predictors could forecast the effectiveness of small schools in overall of 70.60% (Phu Mali et al., 2014, p. 112).

4.2.2. The collaboration and teamwork

It is a skill that affects the effectiveness of schools under the Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office. This may be due to the administrators have good school management. There are a clear management plan and clear goals. The school administrators use the resources that are effective and operate according to the steps of the quality management process. Moreover, the administrators accept and listen to different individual opinions of teachers. There is support for personnel in the school to work correctly and promote the development of teachers and personnel in schools to learn new methods and skills in working as a team. Furthermore, the school administrators also coordinate with all concerned parties efficiently, check, evaluate, develop and improve the operation of the school systematically. The results of this research are consistent with Panjaphonphol (2009, p. 6) who said that the administration is working to achieve the objectives by using resources for maximum benefit with means of implementing the administrative process. The executives must use authority, leadership, management skills and administrative knowledge.

This is consistent with Wiratnipawan (2009, p. 5) who said that management means the operation or implementation of any unit or personnel of the agency used to change, develop or create happiness, progress firmly and sustainably for the people and the nation. This is consistent with the results of Inara and others who studied the leadership styles of school administrators affecting the effectiveness of academic administration in schools under Bangkok Education Office, Lat Krabang District. The results showed that 1) the effectiveness of academic administration in schools under Bangkok Education Office, Lat Krabang District, overall is at a high level. 2) The leadership style of school administrators under Bangkok Education Office, Lat Krabang District found that the supportive leadership is at a high level followed by the achievement-oriented leadership, participatory leadership and command-order leadership, respectively. 3) Participatory variables could predict the effectiveness of academic administration in schools under Bangkok Education Office, Lat Krabang District for 10.40% (Inara et al., 2014, p. 129).

4.2.3. The communication and presentation

It is also a skill that affects the effectiveness of schools under the Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office. This may be because the administrators have used the process of sending messages to teachers, personnel and related persons.

They listen to the needs and opinions of teachers, personnel and participants. In addition, they can intentionally present information, vision and change for teachers, personnel and related persons to make them aware very well. In accordance with the concept of Benis (1971, cited in Dessler, 1986, pp. 68–69) who discussed the effectiveness of the organisation that it was able to adapt, change and

develop into a changing environment. Furthermore, it was the ability to integrate relationships among members in the organisation to combine power to be one of the same missions in the organisation by using the ability to integrate with communication. This corresponds to the Ministry of Education (2008, p. 9) that identifies five key competencies that must be implemented for executives, including communication capabilities. This result corresponded to Tillotson (1996, p. 64) who conducted a research on technical skills analysis of human skills and the conceptual skills of the students of the Texas Association of College and University Student Personnel Administrators. The research found that one important skill is communication skill.

4.2.4. The critical thinking for creative problem solving

It is also a skill that affects the effectiveness of schools under the Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office. This may be because executives learn the facts, analyse problems and solve problems of school administrators which affect school effectiveness. The executives are knowledgeable and have both skills and techniques for administrative problem-solving. The analytical thinking for creative problem solving is a process of resolving an unpleasant situation or being a step of achieving a need or objective by using creativity and critical thinking. Administrators will use creativity to think deeply and have a variety of problem-solving methods by learning the skills, methods, both theoretical and practical methods. The ability of school administrators to apply knowledge, concepts, methods and effective technology used in management to benefit teachers and students will make the school success. This result corresponded to the concept of Benis (Bennis, 1971, cited in Dessler, 1986, pp. 68–69) who discussed the effectiveness of the organisation that it was able to adapt, change and develop into a changing environment. Furthermore, it was the ability to integrate relationships among members in the organisation to combine power to be one of the same missions in the organisation as follows: 1) The ability to improve the organisation consisted of the ability to adapt to innovation, growth thinking, analysing, solving various problems and development. 2) Integration capability including satisfaction, atmosphere, conflict and communication.

The results of this research are consistent with the findings of McCurtain (1989, cited in Thanomkit, 2007, p. 60) who studied the ability of primary school administrators and the job effectiveness according to the perception of teachers in schools in Alameda, California United States. The research focused on the profession of school administrators by studying the relationship of the administrators' ability to influence the effectiveness of the school. The study indicated that very talented executives will affect school effectiveness at a high level. Successful executives must have high analytical skills for creative problem solving to be able to make teachers in school as well as students and communities aware of their abilities.

5. Recommendations

There should be a study of soft skills of administrators that affect the effectiveness of other affiliated schools. In addition, there should be a study of other administrative factors that affect school effectiveness under the Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office, such as budget factors atmospheric factors, decision-making factors, etc. This study will more clearly know other factors that affect school effectiveness. Moreover, further research should conduct qualitative research on soft skills of administrators that affect school effectiveness. This study may be at a school-level or province-level to get in-depth information and can be used this information for planning, improving and developing schools or related agencies. Finally, there should be a study of soft skills of the administrators that affect the effectiveness of the schools under Nong Khai Primary Educational Service Area Office to conduct research and development or Participatory Action Research to implement for the empirical results.

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