

**CORE COMPETENCY OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITY
SUPPORTING-LINE ADMINISTRATORS: AN ANALYSIS,
TECHNIQUES OF DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE
OF THE PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze and determine the core competency, methods of developing core competency, and the structure of a program for developing the core competency of public university supporting-line administrators by examining the core competency that is required for administrators to properly perform their tasks. The research includes a thorough study of five components necessary for successful job performance and is applicable to agencies in Thailand or a foreign country. Three mixed methodologies were used in conducting the study: document syntheses, quantitative research, and qualitative research. Document synthesis was accomplished initially. Quantitative research involved 300 copies of a questionnaire that were used to collect data from involved persons. The questionnaire was divided into 4 parts with 50 items and a reliability (alpha coefficient) of .90. Two hundred and forty two copies of the 300 questionnaires sent out were returned, an 81 percent return rate. For qualitative data collection, an in-depth interview with 11 experts was used. The three methodologies revealed the following results: 1) From a total of 10 core competencies obtained from synthesizing documents, the sample evaluated the necessity of each of core competency and found that the core

competencies necessary for public university supporting-line administrators consisted of 5 aspects, in order from the highest to the lowest mean: teamwork, planning and management, leadership, creative thinking, and ethics; 2) Nine techniques used to develop these 5 core competencies, in order from the highest to the lowest percentage, were apparent: workshop, training, lecture, supplementary activities, management games, recreational activities, role playing, brainstorming, and field trips; 3) For the structure of the program for developing core competency, which was obtained from in-depth interviews with experts, it was found that the experts expressed opinions about guidelines, methods, contents of development, and methods of assessing all the 5 core competencies. Additionally, they believed that a wide variety of different methods should be included in the new program. The experts considered that the contents must cover all competencies by training continuously in the form of 9 learning units for a total of 180 hours or approximately 5 weeks of training. In development, there must be an emphasis on leading to real practicability and there must be a variety of methods of assessing development by superiors, subordinates, work peers, and self-assessment, both before

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and after training. Also, there must be assessment criteria. Recommendations for further research were included.

Keywords: core competency, supporting-line administrators, public university

Introduction

Developing competency of personnel in an organization is regarded as one of the important missions of every organization. Competency is a significant factor in the development of an organization's personnel. Administering a university in accordance with its mission requires its administrators to have vision, knowledge, ability, and skills in administration. Supporting-line administrators are important people who help coordinate administration tasks and lead higher educational institutions to academic excellence and long-term self-reliance (Vijit Srisa-arn, 2001, p. 278). Nevertheless, it can be said that some supporting-line administrators have not continuously developed themselves. Personnel at all levels are important to the development of a university. If personnel at any level come to a standstill in their development for any reason, they will cause personnel at other levels to come to a standstill. Therefore, it can be seen that the personnel who make up the group of university supporting-line administrators need to undergo continuous development (Adulya Viriyavejakul, 2007, interview). Supporting-line administrators must be those who have competency in task administration: knowledge, ability, skills in administration in accordance with coordination in the same direction as senior administrators. Competency is an important factor of developing persons to be able to perform their tasks to achieve the goals.

The researcher, as a university task performer, deems that many public universities

have not yet determined the administrative core competency of their own supporting-line administrators. Many universities still have problems developing capable supporting-line administrators. Thus, the researcher became interested in conducting a study on developing the core competency of public university supporting-line administrators by analyzing the core competency of supporting-line administrators. The findings can be used to improve the efficiency and core competency of supporting-line administrators in public universities.

Purpose

This study aimed to analyze and determine the following components: core competency, methods of developing core competency, and the structure of a program for developing the core competency of public university supporting-line administrators.

Theoretical conceptual framework

The researcher studied applicable concepts and theories and used them as a research conceptual framework. The framework was made up of 5 parts: Part 1 was the six key managerial competencies of Hellrigel, Jackson and Slocum (2001, p. 14-24), comprising: 1) communication competency, 2) planning and administration competency, 3) teamwork competency, 4) strategic action competency, 5) global awareness competency, and 6) self-management competency. Part 2 was the concepts involving 5 factors of competency of McClelland (1973, p. 1-14), comprising: 1) skill, 2) knowledge, 3) self-concept, 4) trait and 5) motive. Part 3 was the three concepts involving the competency of the department level administrators of Delmont (2002), comprising: 1) leadership, 2) human relations, and 3) management. Part

4 was the five concepts involved in developing the core competency of the office of the Civil Servant Commission (2005, p. 11), comprising: 1) achievement motivation, 2) service mind, 3) expertise, 4) integrity, and 5) teamwork. And Part 5 was the four concepts involved in the development of the core competency of the Office of the Teacher Officials and Educational Personnel Commission (Faculty of Education, Mahasarakham University. 2006, p. 140-148), comprising: 1) achievement motivation, 2) teamwork, 3) service mind, and 4) self-development. The research theoretical conceptual framework could be summarized as shown in Figure 1 below:

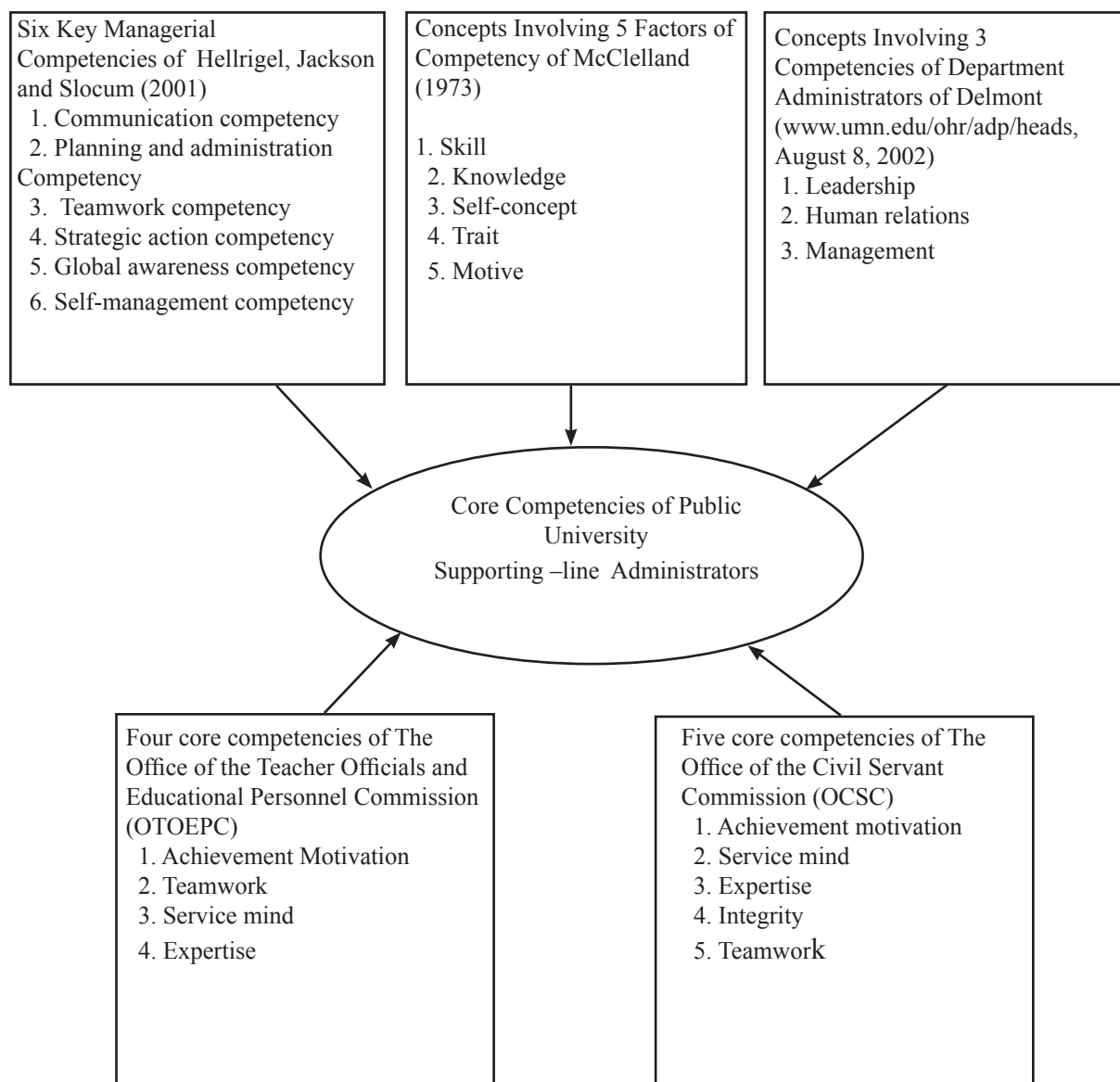


Figure 1: Theoretical Conceptual Framework of Developing Personnel Competencies Used as Research Base for Developing Core Competencies of Public University Supporting-line Administrators

Procedure

The population and sample

1. For the quantitative data collection, the population from whom the researcher collected data consisted of a group of executive administrators and a group of public university supporting-line administrators from 20 universities, with a total of 920 administrators, in the former group of universities under the direction of the Ministry of University Affairs. The sample size was determined by using the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970, pp. 608-609); and the questionnaire respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique with 15 administrators from each university, classified into 6 executive administrators from each university (3 vice presidents and 3 deans or office directors or institute directors or center directors), with a total of 120 administrators, and a group of public university supporting-line administrators, 9 administrators from each university (4 division directors and 5 faculty secretaries or office secretaries or institute secretaries or center secretaries), with a total of 180 administrators, totalling 300 administrators. Out of 300 copies of the questionnaire mailed to the respondents, 242 copies were returned, so that the sample consisted of 242 administrators.

2. For the in-depth interviews, the researcher selected the sample by using a purposive sampling technique, which resulted in 11 persons with knowledge and expertise in developing the competency of university or higher educational institution personnel.

The instruments used for collecting data were:

1. A questionnaire on the core competency necessary to determine the performance of supporting-line administrators, techniques and methods consisted of 50 items. The questionnaire was

pilot-tested with 30 Khon Kaen University executive administrators and supporting-line administrators in June 2007 with a reliability (alpha coefficient) of .90; the data were collected by coordination through the planning division director of each university from July to August 2007. A total of 242 copies were returned at an 81 percent return rate. All of these copies were complete and usable.

2. A 42-item in-depth structured interview form was used for the interview. The interviews were conducted with experts in developing personnel's competency involving core competency necessary for public university supporting line administrators, contents of development and methods, which should be used for development, and methods of assessing development of core competency in each aspect. A total of 11 experts served as interviewees. The experts were interviewed by the researcher himself from August to September 2007.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed by using the statistics of percentages, means and standard deviations. The interview data were analyzed and grouped according to their content. For the rating-scale data, means were interpreted (Boonchom Srisa-ard, 2003, pp. 160-162) as follows :

4.51 - 5.00 means necessary at the highest level

3.51 - 4.50 means necessary at a high level

2.51 - 3.50 means necessary at a medium level

1.50 - 2.50 means necessary at a low level

1.00 - 1.50 means necessary at the lowest level

Results

The data analysis results were as follows:

1. For the results of discovering the core competencies of public university supporting-line administrators from synthesizing the concepts of important persons or agencies in Thailand and foreign countries, 10 necessary core competencies were obtained. The researcher had the sample assess the 10 core competencies to determine the levels of necessity of each competency and then determined the means and standard deviations. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranks of Core Competencies of Public University Supporting –line Administrators

Core Competency Necessary to Have	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Necessity	Rank
1. Expertise	4.48	0.58	High	6
2. Achievement Intention	4.48	0.53	High	6
3. Conceptual Thinking	4.42	0.53	High	10
4. Communication and Coordination ability	4.46	0.56	High	8
5. Teamwork	4.67	0.48	Highest	1
6. Service Mind	4.45	0.53	High	9
7. Ethics	4.55	0.53	Highest	5
8. Leadership	4.65	0.50	Highest	3
9. Planning and Management	4.66	0.48	Highest	2
10. Creative Thinking	4.56	0.57	Highest	4

From Table 1, the sample believed that there were five core competencies that are necessary to have at the highest level and five competencies at a high level. The core competencies that are necessary to have at the highest level were in this order from the highest to the lowest mean: Teamwork, Planning and Management, Leadership, Creative Thinking, and Ethics.

2. For the results of finding out methods of developing core competencies of public university supporting-line administrators from analyzing concepts of respondents from 17 methods of development consisting of training, seminar, workshop, coaching, case study, brainstorming, lecture, continuing education, supplementary activities, buzz session, forum, field trip, recreational activities, sensitivity training, role playing, management games, and mentoring, it was found that the first three methods of developing each core competency, as considered by the sample, were in order from the highest to the lowest percentage, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentages of the methods which should be used for developing core competencies of public university supporting-line administrators

NO.	Core competency	The First 3 Methods of Development		
		Method 1	Method 2	Method 3
1	Teamwork	Workshop	Recreational activities	Training
	Percentage	55.79	43.80	38.43
2	Planning and Management	Training	Workshop	Field trip
	Percentage	49.59	48.35	40.50
3	Leadership	Role playing	Management games	Workshop
	Percentage	39.26	35.54	35.54
4	Creative thinking	Lecture	Brainstorming	Workshop
	Percentage	29.34	28.93	28.93
5	Ethics Lecture	Training	Supplementary	Activities
	Percentage	44.21	26.03	25.21

From Table 2, in examining the methods which should be used for developing each core competency, the first three methods are in order from the highest to the lowest percentage. The core competency in Teamwork in the first rank was workshop, and next were recreational activities and training. The core competency in Planning and Management in the first rank was training, and next were workshop and field trip. The core competency in Leadership in the first rank was role playing, and next were management games and workshop. The core competency in Creative Thinking in the first rank was lecture, and next were brainstorming and workshop. And the core competency in Ethics in the first rank was lecture, and next were training and supplementary activities.

3. The experts believed that the constructed training program for developing core competencies must have contents which cover development of all the five core competencies of public university supporting-line administrators, consisting of teamwork, planning and management, leadership, creative thinking, and ethics. Continuous training must be conducted in the form of nine learning units for a period of 180 training hours or for approximately 5 weeks in developing with an emphasis on leading to real practicability, and must use various methods of assessing development, as assessed by superiors, subordinates, work peers, and by themselves both before and after training, and there must also be criteria for assessments, Details are shown in Figure 2.

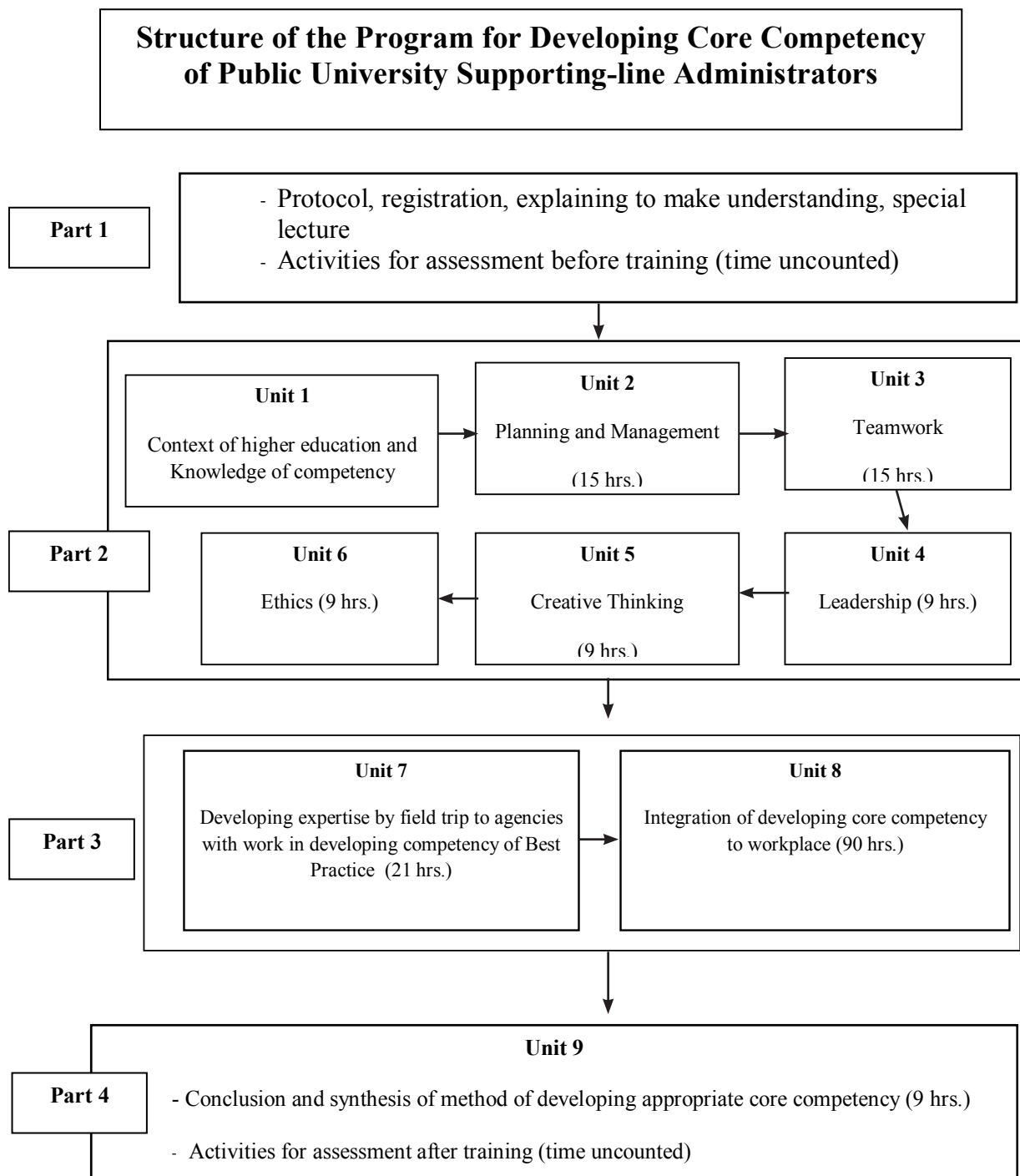


Figure 2: Structure of the Program for Developing Core Competency of Public University Supporting-line Administrators

Discussion

1. There must be 5 necessary core competencies of public university supporting-line administrators in this order from the highest to the lowest ranked mean: teamwork, planning and management, leadership, creative thinking, and ethics.

1.1 For the core competency in teamwork, current management under changing conditions in this age of globalization, more competitive work, competition against time to complete complex work, and having to rely on positive coordination, these factors may cause teamwork to play an important role and to be accepted as a model of management that creates the most benefits for persons and their organizations. Thus, it is necessary for public university supporting-line administrators to have knowledge and understanding of the principles of teamwork, techniques of teamwork, organizational communication, coordination, training in thinking together, and participation in problem-solving. The strengths of teamwork are transparency, trust in teamwork, and origination of sharing learning in the team. Teamwork is better than working alone (Somporn Pothinam. 2007, interview). Supporting-line administrators must be teamwork models and leaders in building the organizational culture of teamwork, must be able to communicate, to build participation, to build the climate for teamwork, to use their own strengths in work development, self-development, and profession development (Bowman. 2002, pp. 158-162) The organization must realize the importance of working-team. In a successful organization there is a working-team which is able to use techniques and resources efficiently and to achieve the goals of work of the organization. These findings are in congruence with the research work of Weller

(2001, pp. 73-81) who found that teamwork, as well as knowledge and skills, caused department heads to succeed in administering their departments. This is in accordance with Wright (2001, p. 20) who found that important strategies for follow-ups and being important successful drivers of an organization were working skills between persons or teamwork, and with Meisinger (2003, p. 8) who found that one of five important competencies was the strategy for helping one another in the team.

1.2 For the core competency in planning and management, planning is an intelligence process which considers determining a guideline for task performance. It has a foundation of decision-making based on the purposes. Knowledge and critical prediction can be the best selection of task performing method to determine the purposes, to make task performance projects, to determine guidelines, policy, and guidelines for task performance including techniques of operation to lead to achievement of the future organizational purposes. The core competency in this aspect is very necessary for the task performance of supporting-line administrators, particularly knowledge of planning and principles of management, knowledge of rules and regulations necessary to functional task performance; knowledge necessary to know in task performance, such as principles of planning, knowledge of management, principle of 4 Ms, and knowledge of specific functional tasks, for example, financial task performance, needs deep knowledge of finance, accounting, and inventory. These findings are in congruence with Delmont (2002, p. 49) who found that it was necessary for department heads to have managerial competency. And the findings are in accordance with Johnson (1998, pp. 24-33), who found that the performance evaluation of administrators must also have an evaluation

of their administrative behaviors. Boselie and Paauwe (2005, p. 550) found, in studying European companies, that those with expertise and capability of strategic management generally lead to efficient management and typically cause their agencies to be successful. The findings are congruent with Ozcelik & Ferman (2006, p. 72), who found that appropriate competency management could create work and could achieve the needs of the organization and of persons. This is in accordance with Hammond (2000, pp. 2 - 4), who revealed that the department head had to have self-preparedness to meet standards to be able to direct instructors, and had to have the capability of planning and determining guidelines for developing instructors' capabilities to initiate excellent performance.

1.3 For the core competency in leadership, the "leader" is an important factor of helping the organization to be successful or to fail, and to be able to compete with other organizations or not. At present, if any organization has a leader or an administrator with leadership, knowledge, ability, high experience, and high expertise, that organization can compete with other people/organizations and can be successful in achieving its established goals. Therefore, public university supporting-line administrators must have the quality of being a good leader. Having leadership may link very well with other competencies. Those with leadership can build faith, thrust, and acceptance to originate in their organizations. Leadership is the art of using influence on other people to make them willing and enthusiastic about their performance until success is achieved according to the group purposes. Their research results are in accordance with Rawiwan Phaokanha (2005, pp. 106-109) who found that Department-Head Administrators had to have the core competency in

leadership. Her finding is in congruence with the Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC) (2002, pp. 72-74) which found that the government officials, who were evaluated as to their administrative core competencies, had to have leadership competency. It is in congruence with Sunburg (2001 : 306-307) who revealed that competency, which was an important characteristic of the administrator, represented the leadership of the administrator. However, Smith and Steward (1999 : 29-36) examined perceptions of new department heads on the process of new role transaction. They recommended having a program for developing department heads before and while being in the position, and that there should be a program for developing leadership of department heads in order to prepare new department heads for their leadership role.

1.4 For the core competency in creative thinking, promoting everyone to have thinking development in order to be able to think, to think in the right direction, and to think creatively to use their thinking process to be useful to development of different tasks in planning and decision-making is important. Problem-solving and developing work systems or products for such outcomes may add more value which affects the increment of organizational potential and the increment of abilities to compete with other organizations. Creative thinking, which means ability to find new answers and the ability to lead to new things, including concepts, theories, and concrete or touchable products. Such things must be beneficial to all humankind, the wider the circle of influence, the better (Thanitson Chiraphonchai, 2007, interview). Core competency in this aspect is very necessary to administration of public university supporting-line administrators. They must learn the principles of creative thinking and applications of creative thinking concepts to generate the highest achievement. In the

process of thinking training, they must focus on new methods of improving themselves and create innovations in accordance with their thinking time. Therefore, universities should prescribe stimulators of creative thinking which include recognition, appreciation and rewards. Chiraphonchai's study results are in congruence with Khwanying Sriprasoetphap (2000, pp. 70-71) who found that educational technologists should have the necessary skill of creative thinking.

1.5 For the core competency of ethics, ethics is an important core competency for administrators at every level. Ethics is defined as a system of principles governing morality and acceptable conduct, and it is a requirement for those who wish to be recognized as successful in their work, in making a living, and being approved of by people and society as a whole. Ethics is regarded as a very important matter. Whenever a person, a group of people, society, and the country confront problems of people who lack ethics and morality, different problems arise. Public university supporting-line administrators are personnel with important roles in supporting university executive administrators to be able to manage their universities at full efficiency. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for the personnel in this group to be persons with high morality and ethics in performance, which will result in a university administration that is immaculate, fair, and transparent, according to good governance (Sivasit Chamchong, 2007, interview). These study results are in congruence with the Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC) (2005, p. 11) which found that competency in ethics is an important core competency. This is in accordance with the study conducted by Hellrigel, Jackson and Slocum (2001, pp. 14-24) who recommended "Six Key Managerial Competencies". One congruent competency

was self-management competency. To have this competency, it is necessary for the administrators to train themselves to maintain a high level of honesty, sincerity, morality, and ethics, according to the requirements of the organization.

2. As for the techniques and methods of developing core competency, it has been found that the methods of development, which should be used, are in this order from the highest to the lowest mean: training, supplementary activities, workshops, management games, recreational activities, buzz sessions, role playing, brainstorming, lectures, and field trips. These findings are in accordance with the study conducted by Rosen, Frust and Blackburn (2006, p. 229), who proposed that many organizations had goals of training for preparing real leaders and team members. There were recommendations for having practices and training for creating higher quality outcomes of the organization. It is also in accordance with Krasae Chanawong (2007, interview), who suggested that in a training operation there should be a variety of models and methods of development and consideration of the appropriateness of implementation in developing each competency to promote trainees to be able to perceive necessary skills more efficiently.

3. For the structure of the program for developing core competencies of public university supporting-line administrators, the experts recommended guidelines, methods, programs, contents of development, and methods of evaluating all the 5 core competencies. It was found that the model of development should have various methods, the contents should cover all competencies by training in continuity in the form of 9 learning units for 180 hours or approximately 5 weeks. The experts expressed their opinions about the program for developing

these core competencies, that the program should be divided into modules or learning units and that there should be field trips that could lead to real practicability in the agency (Thep Pongpanich, 2007, interview). An appropriate period of time for training should be 5 weeks. The program should be divided into learning units, beginning from studying general basic principles to cover all the content. This might be learned from resource persons or e-learning in intensive training, by dividing the content into topics for a period of approximately 7-10 days. After that, there should be a period when they have to learn by themselves, which might be in the form of shadowing or integration into real practices at some agencies for a period of approximately 2-3 weeks. Also, there should be field trips to agencies of best practices in terms of developing the personnel's competencies. After that, there should be an organization of summary and compilation of conceptual knowledge or synthesizing the body of knowledge gained. The body of knowledge should be presented to share learning in the group of trainees (Tanitson Chiraphonchai, 2007, interview). There should be a variety of methods of development, such as training in teamwork, determining simulations, coaching stories, field trips, workshops, sharing learning, and other methods (Somporn Pothinam, 2007, interview; Rangsana Niamsanit, 2007, interview; Sommai Saengngoen, 2007, interview). Examples of the methods of evaluating the development of the diversity of methods are authentic evaluation, evaluations by superiors, subordinates, and work peers in the 360° form and observations of behaviors before and after training (Sittisak Chansamut, 2007, interview; Phetchara Phuriwat, 2007, interview; Charoon Thawonchak, 2007, interview).

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for implementing the findings

1.1 It is recommended that public universities should develop the model and methods of developing the supporting-line administrators to have core competencies, as required by determining the content necessary for the development of each competency, methods of development, and methods of evaluating competency development outcomes.

1.2 Universities should implement the study results as a guideline for developing personnel's competencies by trying out the program and considering it as a road map for developing the personnel in the position of supporting-line administrator and in other positions by making plans for personnel development in the short-term, medium-term, and long-term.

2. Recommendations for further research

2.1 There should be research studies of other models of developing other competencies, such as regular work-line competencies of personnel as supporting-line administrators, and personnel in other university work-lines or agencies under other attachments.

2.2 There should be research studies of development models and methods of evaluation of each core competency, or regular work-line competencies of the personnel in other groups at universities or agencies.

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