

# Middle-Level Administrative Leadership to Lead Thai Original Public Autonomous Universities toward Excellence

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**Abstract.** This research article reported the results of a study on the administrative leadership process as it exists among the middle-level administrators of three original public autonomous universities in Thailand, related to leading the universities toward world class excellence. The study used a case study and grounded theory approach. The setting involved theoretical sampling that was used to identify 18 participants who were working as middle-level administrators at the three Thai original public autonomous universities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The data analysis was based on within-case analysis, followed by cross-case analysis of the interview transcripts. The findings are presented in sixteen conceptual categories related to the administrative leadership qualities that enhanced their university to excellence from the middle-level administrators' perspectives. The findings are summarized into four major categories: (1) The fundamentals of administration towards excellence of faculty and university; (2) the elements of administrative leadership procedure towards faculty excellence; (3) administrator's leadership skills towards the excellence of faculty; and (4) the procedure of instructor development. This study makes a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of administrative leadership of a university that contributes to achieving world class status, which is useful for policy makers, institutions, and individuals. It is especially important for the middle-level administrators who use the administrative leadership values to support its organization development, the appropriate administrative leadership process that contributes to the success of enhancing university toward world class excellence. Moreover, it also makes a significant contribution to the knowledge of the important role that deans play in Thai original public autonomous universities and, finally, it revealed the benefits for higher education development, as well as for the national human resource development (HRD).

**Keywords:** Administrative Leadership, University Administrators, Middle-level Administrators, Thai Original Public Autonomous Universities

## Introduction

Thailand is entering the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. It is necessary to prepare for development in several dimensions. HRD is the main target, since it is at the center of all kinds of development. Therefore, the tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007-2011) has focused on human quality development. The basis of knowledge and HRD is educational development, because education is one of the major activities of personal development (Joungtrakul, 2010). Higher education institutes play an important role in achieving this goal. In response to this issue, the tenth Thai Higher Education Development Plan (2008-2011) focused on enhancing the quality of Thai higher education to build and develop human resources to have quality and considerable competencies at an international standard (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2008). Accordingly, the sixth strategic goal of this Higher Education Development Plan is "to have at least five higher education institutions positioned in the world rankings" (p. 31), based on the criteria of the Times Higher Education Supplement (THE), because a world ranking is a measure of a higher education institute's success, and also represents the excellence of the institution (Bunsang, 2011).

For organizational success, the administrators are key persons (Rosen & Digh, 2001). The future success of a university depends partly on the institute's administrators (Tunheim & Manderscheid, 2007). Similarly, the quality and authority of the institute's administrators have a close relationship with the quality of the education institutes. These have more impact on the output and method in the operation of the education institutes (Pitugtham, 2006). Therefore, achieving the university's goals is the direct role of university administrators, including enhancing their university ranking. However, one of the basic problems of Thai higher education administrators is a deficiency of leadership (Cheaupalakit, 2002; Commission on Higher Education Board, 2008). Leadership is the administrator's capability to lead, rooted in virtually any individual and in every community, (Astin & Astin, 2000). Since, leadership is a process of attributing causation to individual social actors, it is one of the most important activities in terms of the management of an organization (Fairholm, 1998; Hogan & Kaiser, 2004). This suggests that the Thai universities' administrative leadership still needs continuous development. Thus, this study aimed to explore the appropriate form of the administrative leadership of the middle-level administrators of the public universities in Thailand by focusing on leading the university toward excellence.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the administrative leadership as a process, as it exists among the middle-level administrators of three original public autonomous universities in Thailand, relating to leading their universities toward world class excellence.

### **Research Questions**

The central research question of this study was "What are the leadership skills of middle level administrators of Thai original public autonomous universities that are appropriate to lead their university to excellence to international standards?"

The specific research questions were: (1) What are the methods of middle-level administrators of Thai original public autonomous universities to enhance their universities to achieve excellence?; (2) What are the methods of middle-level administrators of Thai original public autonomous universities for aligning people to enhance their universities towards excellence?; and (3) What are the methods of middle-level administrators of Thai original public autonomous universities for motivating and inspiring people to enhance their universities towards excellence?

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Concepts Developed Regarding Leadership**

Leadership has been defined many times in the literature by specialists taking a variety of approaches (Bass, 1990). On the one hand, leadership may be looked as the symbolic modes of action it produces, such as the instrumental modes of management, direction and control. Leadership may involve the structuring or restructuring of a situation and impact on the perceptions and expectations of group members (i.e., those being led) (Bass, 1990). Furthermore, leadership has also been defined as the relationship between leaders and followers or as a working relationship, where two or more people in differentiated work roles accomplish a goal held in common (Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Bass, 1990). Therefore, leadership is often cast in terms of a power or influence relationship (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Similarly, Nancy (1998) insisted that leadership involves relationships rather than simply a list of traits or a series of behaviors. These definitions view leadership as a connection that simultaneously manifests itself from the perspective of both the leader and the follower (Pierce & Newstrom, 2006), especially in the case of a long-term relationship or partnership between leaders and group members (Dubrin, Dalgish, & Miller, 2006).

On the other hand, leadership has also been defined as “a process”, whereby an individual directs, guides, influences or controls the thoughts, feelings or behaviors of other human beings for working together (Pairind, 1994; Astin & Astin, 2000; Inyan, 2008). Leadership as a process has been mentioned as one of the contemporary trends of leadership, and represents a composite of three major factors: leader, follower, and context (Pierce & Newstrom, 2008).

Overall, these definitions reveal that leadership is essentially a group phenomenon and occurs in situations which call for interaction between groups of people. A leader must have the ability to influence others and must have the ability to identify with the group he or she leads, and can also coordinate the actions of individuals towards a common goal (Hollander, 1992; Gilbert & Matviuk, 2008; Pierce & Newstrom, 2008). However, Yukl (1998) argued that the great variety of leadership definitions reflect real world differences, not just the views of scholars.

Currently, leadership refers to changing an organization. Therefore, it concentrates on creating a compelling vision of the future and developing farsighted strategies to produce the changes needed to achieve that vision (Daft, 2005). Based on this view, Kotter (1999) defines leadership as being composed of setting directions, aligning people, motivating, inspiring, as well as producing change (Kotter, 1999). Thus, leadership involves a set of processes needed to create or transform an organization, defining what the future should look like, aligning people with the organization’s vision, and inspiring them to make it happen (Kotter, 1990, 1999). Buytendijk (2009) maintained that establishing direction and producing change requires organizational commitment, and aligning, motivating, and inspiring people requires pushing the right buttons, so that people take the right actions. Furthermore, taking the right actions does not mean only within the organization, but also across all stakeholders.

This study is based on a definition of leadership in terms of the relationship between leaders and their stakeholders, especially their subordinates (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Furthermore, the researcher prefers to use a leadership definition which conceives it as a process, whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a goal (Northouse, 2004), focusing on change or development, based on a belief that leadership is ultimately concerned with fostering change (Astin & Astin, 2000). Specifically, Kotter (1990) proposed that leadership is an important process for administration, and maintained that, within a complex organization, leadership is achieved through three sub-processes: establishing direction, aligning people, as well as motivating and inspiring. Therefore, the leadership concept promoted by Kotter (1990, 1999) is adopted for this study, because Kotter’s (1990) ideas are crucial to understanding leadership in today’s academic environment which links leadership and management (Ramsden, 1998).

## Excellent University

Several countries, such as the USA, the UK and Australia focus continuously on developing the management of education by using university rankings as an instrument, as does Thailand (Foophanichaprug & Preedaporn, 2008), since university rankings are able to represent a university’s potential. In particular, world university rankings have become extraordinarily influential and serve as a serious evaluation tool, used by universities and governments alike (Mroz, 2010).

There is a variety of organizations, which have ranked the universities in the world. No one ranking can be accepted as definitive (Thakur, 2007). Most of those organizations have established similar criteria to represent the excellence of a university. As an overview, the criteria measure the excellence of teaching, research, academic publications, and internationalization. Mostly, teaching quality is a major criterion and research is a fundamental mark of university excellence (Taylor & Braddock, 2007), which involves research income, research quality, publications and citations. These can be noticed from the marks awarded to top universities, ranked by famous organizations.

This study focuses on the five criteria of the Times Higher Education Supplement (2011): (1) Teaching, which refers to the learning environment that is worth 30% of the overall ranking score; (2) Research, which refers to volume, income and reputation that are worth 30%; (3) Citations, which

refer to research influence that is worth 32.5%; (4) Industry income, which refers to innovation that is worth 2.5%; and (5) International mix, which refers to staff and students that are worth 5%. These categories were adopted to be the foundation of the questions developed in order to collect the data for this study. Reviewing these university rankings shows that they correlate closely with my research (Chalearnwongsak, 2008), as they require the acceptance of academics, and this is an important issue for universities who wish to be at the top of the world university rankings and want to build their academic performance standards.

## Research Design

Constructivism and an interpretive paradigm were employed in this study to generate theory or knowledge which is consistent with this study's goal. A qualitative research design is applied by using a case study and a grounded theory approach, since they are appropriate to explore a new body of knowledge from a real life context, which is the natural setting within a bounded system (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Stake, 1995; Soy, 1997; Creswell, 1998). In particular, multiple case studies were employed, because it is a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of the findings (Merriam, 1998). However, this study focused only on the three original public autonomous universities in Thailand, which were not world ranked universities. Hence, in order to ensure the future perspective from the present data, grounded theory was also adopted for achieving the goals of this study, because it is suitable for getting the sense of the participants, which is the applicable data for the future by building theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

## Selecting Cases and Participants

This study attempted to understand the administrative leadership within the three original public autonomous universities: Suranaree University of Technology, Walailak University, and Mae Fah Loung University. These original public autonomous universities were selected for their responses to the policy of Thai government which aims that all of Thai higher education institutes become autonomous universities in the future. In particular, the deans' perspectives were sought, rather than focusing on all universities in Thailand. Middle-level university administrators in this study referred to the persons who work in the administrative functions of faculties in a university as dean or head of faculty. Therefore, theoretical sampling was the sampling strategy, since it is suitable to investigate the in-depth information from the participants and to find manifestations of a theoretical construct of interest (Patton, 1990). The middle level of university administrators, such as deans, or head of faculty were the participants in this study, since they directly influence establishing the direction, aligning people, and motivating and inspiring those who work at the universities. The number of participants was five to seven persons from each university, totaling eighteen persons.

## Data Collection

Based on the case study strategy, the in-depth interview was the main data collection method with participants (Creswell, 1998) and the data extracted from documents were also the primary data source (Stake, 1995). The researcher played the major role in collecting the data. An interview guide and tape-recording were used at the interview. The interview guide helped the researcher to remain focused on the direction and scope of discourse in a lengthy interview. It also made the comparison of data across interview cases possible, because all issues under investigation were covered in each interview session. The model of Joungrakul (2010) and the guidelines of Maykut and Morehouse (1994) were used as the guidelines for the interview guide development processing. Preparing the questions for interview, the researcher used six types of appropriate questions (Patton, 1990), based on the administrative leadership concept of Kotter (1990, 1999), and the evaluation indicators of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. Ad-

ditionally, this study used document analysis as one of the data analysis methods. Documents used in this study broadly meant, not only formal policy documents or public records, but also anything written or produced about the context (Simons, 2009) of the original public autonomous universities' administrations. It included documents that formally represented the organization, such as annual reports, audit reports, equal opportunity statements, vision statements, rules and regulations, examination results and informal documents like newspapers, bulletins, and memos, all of which contained clues as to how the university operated and how the university envisaged itself. Written documents were searched for clues to understanding the culture, the values underlying policies, and the beliefs and attitudes of the writer. Furthermore, electronic documents on all websites, related with this study, such as website of OHEC, SUT, WU, MFU, were another kind of documentation in this study. The researcher also used data from up-to-date websites.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

The data management in this study began with transferring data from tape-recording to the computer files. When the researcher received some brief overall picture of the data, the computer software was applied to the data. The ATLAS.ti program version 6.2 was used for data analysis (Joungtrakul, 2008) and presentation. Subsequently, coding was conducted to explore the concepts, conceptual categories and themes. There were several types of coding that were used in this study, such as pattern coding, structural coding, descriptive coding, *in vivo* coding, and process coding (Saldana, 2009). Those conceptual categories that arose during analysis of the three cases were studied to look at the brief picture of the common themes and extracted. Next, drawing conclusions and verification occurred in order to develop a new body of knowledge by developing systematic and conceptually coherent explanations of findings. The findings are illustrated in tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and represented by description (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The data analysis followed the suggestions of Strauss and Corbin (1990), as it was an ongoing process during the time of the data collection until the end of the report writing. Within-case analyses and cross-case analyses were the basic methods of data analysis, following the concept of multiple case study analysis (Stake, 2006). It is an inductive system, starting by within-case analysis and followed by cross-case analysis (Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995). Within each case, the analysis is embedded analysis through the development of codes and themes, as the conceptual categories and themes, which are the central ideas having importance related to its issue, modified as the research progresses (Stake, 2010). Furthermore, indirect interpretation was used, followed by patterning and a search for a correlation between two or more themes in every case (Stake, 1995). Subsequently, thematic analysis across the cases (Creswell, 1998), which is cross-case analysis, by reading the report of each case and applying their findings to the research questions (Stake, 2006), was used to find the similarities and the differences among cases (Stake, 1995). Finally, naturalistic generalization was also adopted (Stake, 1995).

Additionally, this study was based on a grounded theory approach. Thus, the data analysis reflected principles of emergence: that is, giving participants a voice and following the data in terms of organizing it into concepts and constructs (Whiteley, 2011). Another important point of the analytical procedure is that the researcher used brackets to set apart participants' own commentary from the recorded words, in order to improve understanding (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Content analysis was adopted to analyze the documents.

### **Data Interpretation**

In this study, the intention of the researcher was to examine the real meanings. At the same time, the researcher attempted to elicit participants' views of their world, their work, and the situations they had experienced (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In order to reconstruct and understand participants' perceptions and interpretations, the researcher looked for intensive and rich descriptions of the cultural and topical arenas the researcher studied, including trying to develop an empathetic

understanding of the world of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Furthermore, the researcher provided a precise account of the information by requiring a debriefing between the researcher and some participants who were available to check the accuracy of the data with the participants or across different data sources.

### **Ethical Protocol**

The researcher obtained the informed consent from the participants before engaging in the research to protect participants' risk; the researcher attempted to avoid all political, social, and financial pressures and was sensitive to these conditions by "clearly explaining to subjects the rights and responsibilities of both the researcher and participants" (Berg, 2004, p. 59). The researcher used personal agreements to designate ownership of research data and changed each participant's real name to an alias.

### **Integrity and Trustworthiness**

The researcher applied the technique of triangulation to assure the credibility, since it aims to reduce misinterpretation through using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning and verify the repeatability of observation or interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Different sources of participation were used in data collection and cross-cases were used in the fieldwork and analysis to check with people who know of a related activity. Furthermore, multiple theories and other knowledge of leadership were used in the analysis and discussion process, including an audit trail which was built through the researcher's journal and other unitized data which the researcher described as part of the cross-cases analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Full descriptions were applied to give readers enough information to judge the applicability of the findings to another setting, to assure their transferability. Identifying any researcher bias (Creswell, 1998) in the data collection, data analysis, and report writing, especially for interpretation, was indicated by using bracketing. The researcher recorded detailed reflexive notes throughout the study and member checking was also adopted to ensure the credibility of the study. The researcher's advisers and co-advisers were employed to examine both the process and the product, for which they were considered to be the internal audit and the peer debriefing technique (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1998).

### **Findings**

The findings are presented as sixteen conceptual categories related to the administrative leadership to enhance university to excellence from the middle-level administrators' perspective. The sixteen components of the findings of this research were: (1) Perspective on excellence development; (2) Important responsibilities of university; (3) Frame of faculty performance; (4) Fundamental development towards excellence; (5) Principle of development toward excellence; (6) Dean's performance towards excellence; (7) General method of development towards excellence; (8) Research development of faculty; (9) Academic work development of faculty; (10) Internationalization development of faculty; (11) Instructor quality development of faculty; (12) Instructor's performance promotion; (13) Aligning people of faculty towards excellence; (14) Obstacle of development towards excellence; (15) Other conditions about development towards excellence; and (16) Effect of centralization management system. These findings emerged from voices of the participants and supported with evidence from document analysis.

There was a variety of concepts within each university's conceptual categories which have both similarities and differences. The researcher summarized these findings into four major categories to present the essence of what factors lead towards excellence of faculty: (1) The fundamentals of administration towards excellence of faculty and university; (2) The elements of administrative leadership procedure towards faculty excellence; (3) Administrator's leadership skills towards excellence of faculty; (4) The procedure of instructor development. The researcher selected the conceptual categories, consistent with each research question to answer the research questions (RQ), as follows.

## Response to the Research Questions

***RQ1: What are the methods of middle-level administrators of Thai original public autonomous universities to enhance their university to achieve excellence?***

There were six main descriptive groups of findings that were adopted to answer this research question: (1) General method of development towards excellence; (2) Research development method of faculty; (3) Academic work development method of faculty; (4) Internationalization development method of faculty; (5) Instructor quality development method of faculty; (6) Dean's performance towards achieving excellence.

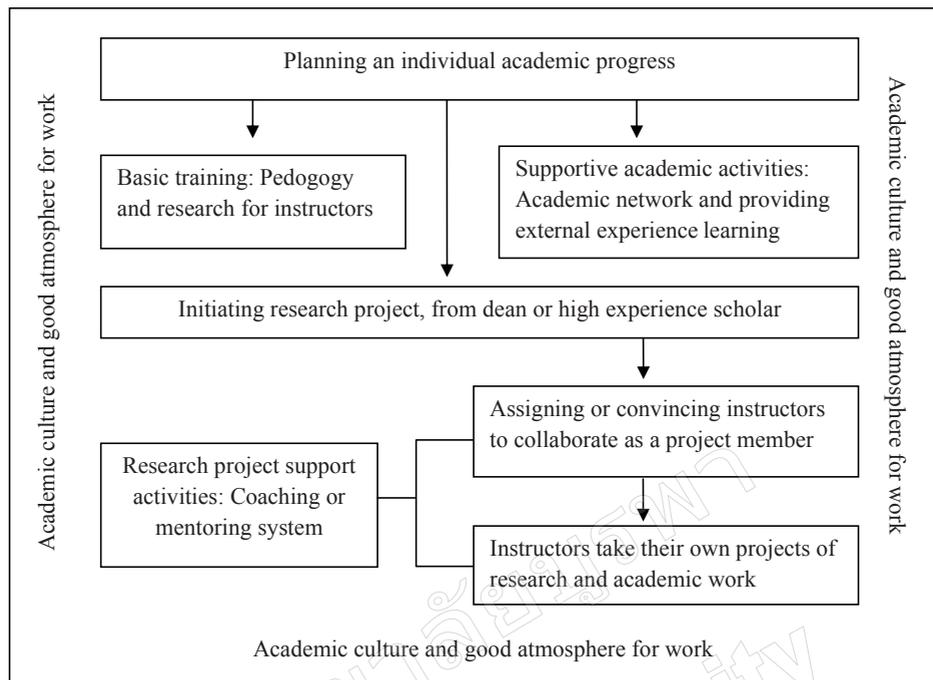
### **1. General Method of Development towards Excellence**

At the university level, the top administrator is expected to provide the goals and direction of the university clearly and announce it seriously, so that it is transferred to the levels below. Moreover, the university has to strongly support the resources of development, especially with a suitable budget and convenient financial management system. Furthermore, the university could explore or initiate the university identity better than others to be the direction of university development, in line with the benchmarking concept (Sakolsattayathorn, 2010). At the faculty level, deans and colleagues have to serve the goal and direction of the university by using the faculty development plan and follow up by establishing an active team to work and to invite groups with the same viewpoint to work together. Moreover, the dean has to promote the internal cooperation and work integration.

### **2. Research Development Method of Faculty**

Regarding developing the research of the faculty, the dean could establish a research culture within the faculty and cooperate with external partners to increase the opportunities for the instructors to conduct research. Moreover, the dean has to promote increasing number of researchers by establishing a research unit, after that by providing experts to be in charge of the research unit, and invite less experienced instructors to collaborate as members of the research unit. Thus, the instructors can get more research experience and enhance the research atmosphere.

Furthermore, the dean could establish a research network, which might begin with the personal contacts of the dean or some experts, in order to increase the chances for the instructors to receive more research information and to stimulate them to be more interested in conducting research and they can get a better idea. Also, there might occur the opportunity of receiving research funding and to be able to distribute the research results or other academic works. Additionally, the dean could introduce an instructor development procedure, as presented in Figure 1 below, which is presented as the important mechanism for developing the excellence of the faculty and university.



**Figure 1:** Instructor development procedure (Source: developed by Vipawan Klinhom, 2011)

The process of the instructor development starts with planning an individual academic progress which is composed of three academic activities: basic training, initiating research project and supportive academic activities. The output from initiating research project will be fed through the assigning of or convincing instructors to collaborate as a project member and follows by instructors taking their own project of research and academic work. Development process also offers research project support activities which comprise a coaching or mentoring system. The development process is operated under an academic culture and a good atmosphere for work. This process will make the instructor feel more confident to conduct research, because they do not walk alone. Moreover, to increase instructors' experience for conducting research, the deans have much research experience and could adopt their own network to pull the subordinates to cooperate and receive more experience in big research projects which they have established. The instructors might collaborate as members and the dean has to give them a chance to show their potential and then to let them continue the project by themselves.

### 3. Academic Work Development Method of Faculty

Regarding the administration in the faculty, the dean could persuade instructors with respect, such as by asking them for their cooperation, because they could work willingly more than by being ordered. Additionally, the dean should develop close relationships with subordinates or make close relations between groups of subordinates to help them work together more effectively and they can share experiences between or within groups about conducting their academic work. This would be an informal style, where the instructors might not be pressured and they can learn more informally. On the other hand, the use of a formal style could begin by establishing a committee to support the instructors when they have a problem.

#### 4. Internationalization Development Method of Faculty

There are several general methods which could be used. It could begin with signing an MOU with international organizations through the foreign units of the university; however, it could start first through contact with personnel within a faculty. A useful method would be to send exchange students to international institutes. At the same time, the faculty should consider about the time range of the semesters, because it could be a comfort for the student to study in both institutes. In general, a program could be benchmarked or flexible to serve the students. Moreover, the faculty could start to cooperate with universities in Asia, because it would save costs and be easier for students to live in other nearby countries, since they share a similar culture.

#### 5. Instructor Quality Development Method of Faculty

The method to develop instructor quality has to be satisfactory for each instructor. The first thing the deans could do is support the instructors for undertaking a doctoral degree, as well as providing a scholarship source. To improve the quality of teaching, research and academic work, the general method would be providing training for the new instructors operated by university regulators. However, specific programs could be provided by a faculty, such as conducting research for nursing. For individual persons, the accepted methods are providing a coach to give close advice and teach about conducting research and writing academic articles, who might be the expert who has more experience and enough time. Especially in a new university, where most instructors have less experience, the dean should initiate projects and invite new instructors to collaborate in that project to increase their experience.

#### 6. Dean's Performance towards Excellence

The success of research, academic work, internationalization, as well as instructors' quality of faculty really is closely tied with the dean's performance, since all are under the dean's responsibility. The emphasis of the deans' authority is data communication and searching for an external budget to support several developments within the faculty. Another important characteristic of the dean towards the excellence of faculty is being decisive, open minded and self reviewing. It means readiness to listen to a variety of opinions from everyone around them, including opinions of external people.

#### ***RQ2: What are the methods of middle-level administrators of Thai original public autonomous universities for aligning people to enhance their university toward excellence?***

Deans are expected to align people to serve for university missions and faculties' goal. The researcher found that aligning people in the university has some specific styles. Generally, it is still based on the work potentials of individuals, involving background, habit, work performance, spirit and willingness, including life goals of the individual. The background means both education, work experience, and also the private life. However, people alignment is not only placing those who have a high capacity for a suitable position, but those who are also ready to work. Thus, sometimes the alignment of people also depends on the situation. On the other hand, the most popular people alignment method of faculty in the cases studied was volunteering. Volunteering is "any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause. It was indicated that positive effects for life-satisfaction, self-esteem, self-rated health, and for educational and occupational achievement, functional ability, and mortality" (Wilson, 2000). That means not only does the dean consider the subordinates' capacity, but also has to be aware of their work satisfaction. Summarily, aligning people within faculties of universities opens up the idea of volunteering more so than ordering or commanding.

***RQ3: What are the methods of middle-level administrators of Thai original public autonomous universities for motivating and inspiring people to enhance their university toward excellence?***

The researcher answered this question as the methods of instructor's performance promotion. Mostly, it is not a tangible thing, such as money or physical rewards. It is an intangible thing, which relates the work process of the instructors that is satisfying to them. Normally, the individual work evaluation system is adopted as a major method to motivate or force the instructors to work for achieving the criteria provided by the university. However, the deans still have to provide other methods which are appropriate to their subordinates. Basically, the faculty administrators should realize that promoting the instructors' performance is attending to the instructors' benefit by establishing a balance between the instructors' benefit and the university's benefit, impartiality and integrity of administrators' behaviors.

Moreover, the dean should be concerned about a suitable work load for the instructors and the available manpower of the faculty. The advantageous methods to promote the instructors' performance in the faculty in this study might begin with a consideration of the background of each instructor and to adopt suitable methods for them. In addition, the dean might adopt the direct approach method to talk with them closely, which would be an advantage in understanding each other and solving the individual's problems. The other methods can be following up on job progress, convincing the instructors to work for achieving their goals, along with the freedom for initiation and work, encouraging work including using recognition for motivation. Furthermore, the dean should provide meetings and a mentoring system for the instructors, and the administrators could respect the instructors' way, trust in their performance and, at the same time, utilize team effort and administrators' sincerity to promote the instructors' work.

Finally, the interesting method of inspiring people towards excellence found in this study is giving the opportunity to gain external experience. As one participant explained, this method opens up the opportunity for the employee to observe others by themselves and it is believed to be better than informing by others. The most important thing is that when the employees gain experience, they will have new ideas which can be adopted for various other works. Another interesting idea is when they go out with their colleagues and upon their return they will share ideas and comment together and give solutions as to how they could improve the faculty, especially regarding its research culture. Furthermore, the dean could give opportunities for the instructors to share with professional networks to get a variety of information for the inspiration of new ideas for improving their work performance. Additionally, another advantageous method is providing a role model to be the instructors' idol, as it might make the instructors follow in the correct way for both their life's work and private life.

### **Implications**

This study is significant in the field for two reasons. First, it makes a contribution to the knowledge in the field of administrative leadership of a university that contributes to a world class university. This knowledge can be applied as a part of the organization development of the university through leadership development, and can be thought of as any educational policy specifically designed to foster the professional growth and capability of persons in or being prepared for management and executive roles in organizations. Second, its findings will be useful for scholars and professionals in the field of HRD by focusing on organization development, counseling and helping the universities' administrators to learn more about the administrative leadership skills that influence their administrative potential and organization development, and to develop and apply these skills for driving the university forward to reach the world class level. However, this knowledge is not in a stable form; therefore, the appropriate situation should be considered before application.

## Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations of this study. Firstly, the participants were restricted to the context of three original public autonomous universities in Thailand; therefore, generalization of the results to other universities and countries is unwarranted. Secondly, this study is intended to provide an initial understanding of the issues of administrative leadership as a key factor that affects university administration and development by focusing on enhancing university performance, rather than making generalizations for HRD professionals, educators, and researchers about leadership in general.

## Conclusion

This study explored the description of deans about the leadership process in terms of administration within a faculty leading to excellence in a university through an in-depth interview method and document analysis. The results of this study supported the relevance of important concepts which include establishing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring people, and university administration, especially in the Thai context. The findings conform to the concepts of Kotter (1990, 1999) in terms of leadership, and the concept of transformative leadership, including other motivation theories. The results from the present study indicate the importance of effort of faculty administrators to develop the human resources of their organization, especially the instructors, and administration under limited resources and the high expectations of all stakeholders. Therefore, deans, as heads of a faculty, are necessary to integrate different methods of administration and initiate new solutions through their leadership among different contexts of each university to move the universities forward to achieve excellence at the international standard.

Overall, the results of this study indicate the need for integration of a variety of concepts and styles of leadership to administer and develop the faculty and university, similar to the description of Feiner (2004), who stated that many effective leaders achieve results in very different styles and that there is no single correct style. At the same time, the appropriateness of the context of each place should be realized during operation and administrators should know how to flex their style to take account of changing situations (Feiner, 2004). It is wished that the conclusions and implementations of this study could be utilized as groundwork for any future study and practice of university administration in Thailand.

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