

Leadership Competencies Model for Middle Managers in Multinational Companies of the Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate, Thailand

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Abstract. *The purposes of this study were to investigate and construct the model of leadership competencies for the middle managers in the multinational companies of Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate of Thailand. The researcher used a mixed method model for the study, starting with a qualitative data collection using in-depth interview 16 HR experts and middle managers. For the quantitative part, questionnaire was used for the tool of data collection. There were 671 sets of questionnaire which were distributed to Thai HR experts and general managers to assure the competencies and the model. The findings of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) revealed that the competency model consisted of 8 important leadership competencies, they were: 1. Team Management and Development, 2. People Management and Development, 3. Leadership and Communication, 4. Strategic Thinking, 5. Innovation, 6. Business Acumen, 7. Strategic Planning, and 8. Networking. The developed model of this study is suggested to be a valuable tool for determining the leadership competencies for middle managers in the multinational companies of Thailand*

Keywords: competencies, leadership competencies, leadership, middle managers, multinational companies, Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate

Introduction

Business in the 21st century will be conducted by means of shifting boundaries. Most boundaries will be removed as a result of the globalization of economics, technologies and communication. The focus for human resources development and learning will be shifted accordingly. Over the last three years, the pace of change in the world seemed faster and faster. Recessions, technology, global mergers, terrorists, rapid changes in oil prices, and global alliances have occurred in Thailand. Thailand has emerged as one of the most competitive nations in Southeast Asia. However, the success does not only rely on the materials, but also the human resources. In today's borderless society, companies have to compete with everyone in the world. Most companies in Thailand believe that human resources are critical factors for improving and enhancing organizational performance outcomes.

Human Resource Development (HRD) is a process for developing and unleashing human expertise through organizational development and personal training and development for the purpose of improving performance (Swanson & Holton III, 2001, p.4). Likewise, HRD is emerging from its roots in training and development, and becoming a sophisticated academic discipline and field of practice centered on learning and performance in organizations (Yorks, 2005, p.5). The role of HRD expertise, therefore, is an integral element in the successful implementation of organizational strategy.

Purpose of the Study

1. To investigate the leadership competencies of middle managers in multinational companies at the Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate in Thailand.
2. To construct a model of leadership competencies for middle managers in multinational companies at the Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate in Thailand.

Research Questions

To guide the investigation and subsequent data analysis, the following research questions are postulated:

What are the leadership competencies of middle managers in multinational companies at the Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate of Thailand?

What is the leadership competencies model for middle managers in multinational companies at the Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate of Thailand?

Literature Review

Definition and competencies

There are numerous definitions of “Competency” proposed by the scholars, practitioners, and HRD professionals.

Many professors have proposed the definition of competency, such as:

Boyatzis (1982) defined competency broadly as “an underlying characteristic of a person”. It could be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge which he or she uses.

Spencer and Spencer (1993) defined competency as an underlying characteristics of an individual that is causally related to criterion referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or a situation.

Whiddett and Hollyforde (2003) defined competencies as behaviors that individuals demonstrate when undertaking job-relevant tasks effectively within a given organizational context.”

In the world of work, a “competency” is a definition of an important aspect of a staff member’s performance. Most jobs are performed most effectively if the person doing them deploys skills, knowledge and behavior or attitudes in combination. Different types of competencies can define each of these facets of performance. A competency is an underlying characteristic of a person, which enables him to deliver superior performance in a given job, role or a situation, as explained in Figure 1

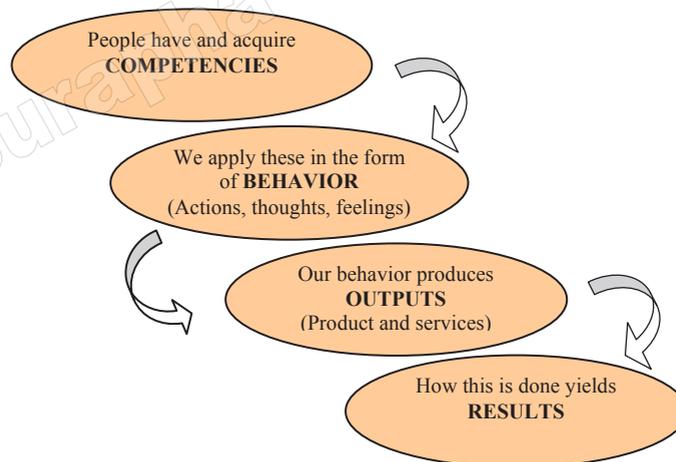


Figure 1 Defining competency in terms of behavior, outputs and results.

Source: Shermom, (2004, p.12).

1. Characteristics of Competency

In studying many different aspects of competency, Spencer and Spencer (1993) claimed that a competency is an individual underlying characteristic that are causally related to criterion-referenced effectiveness and/or superior performance in a job or situation (Spencer and Spencer, 1993:9). Spencer and Spencer (1993) categorized five types of competency characteristics as below.

1.1 Motives – The things a person consistently thinks about or wants that cause actions or goals and away from others, for example, Achievement –motivated people consistently set challenging goals

for themselves, take personal responsibility for accomplishing them, and use feedback to do better.

1.2 Traits – Physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations or information.

1.3 Self-Concept – A person's attitudes, values, or self-image. A person's values are respondent or reactive motives that predict what he or she will do in the short term and in situations where others are in charge.

1.4 Knowledge – Information a person has in specific content areas, for example, a surgeon's knowledge of nerves and muscles in the human body.

1.5 Skill – The ability to perform a certain physical or mental task.

Five types of competency characteristics are classified into two core groups. As illustrated in Figure 2, The Iceberg Model, knowledge and skill competencies as the first group tend to be visible, and on the surface. For the second group, characteristics of people, self-concept, trait, and motive competencies are more hidden, "deeper," and central to personality.

Surface knowledge and skill competencies are relatively easy to develop: training is the most cost-effective way to secure these employee abilities.

Core motive and trait competencies at the base of the personality iceberg are more difficult to assess and develop; therefore it is most cost-effective to select these for these characteristics.

Self-concept competencies lie somewhere in between attitudes and values, such as self-confidence (seeing one's self as a "Manager" instead of a "technical/professional") can be changed by training, psychotherapy, and/or positive developmental experiences with more time and difficulty.

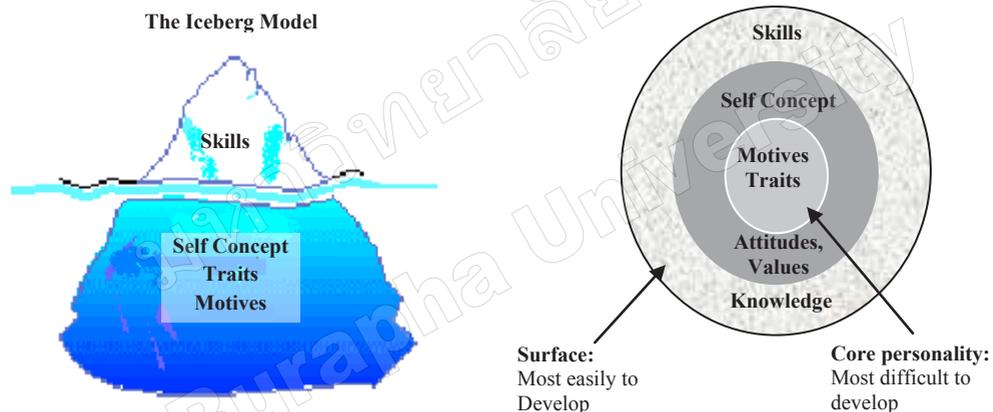


Figure 2 The Iceberg Model and Five types of competency characteristics

Source: Spencer & Spencer, (1993, p.11)

Leadership competency has been conceptualized by many authors. Bennis and Nanus (1986) identified four leadership competencies: 1. attention through vision; 2. meaning through communication; 3. trust through positioning; and 4. developing positive self-worth. Attention through vision creates a vision for the company and encourages people to work toward the vision by raising their self-confidence to perform. Meaning through communication is to communicate visions with others to make it clearly understood and accepted by others. Developing trust among personnel maintains organizational integrity, which leads to an effective organization. Leaders develop their positive self-worth by recognizing their strengths and compensating for weaknesses, continuously developing and improving their skills, and recognizing the fit between their strengths and weaknesses, and the organization's needs.

For the literature review of leadership competencies, it is clear that competencies have become a dominant method for the selecting, developing and directing the efforts of leaders in organizations. My current definition of competencies is that they are the qualities most strongly associated with advanced levels of leadership and desired outcomes in an organization.

Research Methodology and Data Collection Method

1. The Qualitative Method

There are four data collection methods in qualitative research: observation, interview, document analysis, and audio visual material (Creswell, 2003). The researcher selected the Behavioral Event Interview and document as the main data collection method. To identify the recent research and information regarding leadership competency practice in Thailand, the sources of literature for a review included Thai and English professional journals, reports, scholarly books and dissertations. The literature search was carried out mainly through computer databases, namely: Educational Research Information Center (ERIC), Business & Management Information (ABII), Emerald, Science Direct and Dissertation Abstract International (DAI).

The research was focus on the face-to-face interview method. Starting from interview question development, the researcher created an interview guide reviewed by HRD practitioner. The contents in the interview guide covered two categories in the leadership competencies area: (a) star approach and (b) practices in the present and the future. Again, broad open-ended questions would be formulated corresponding to each of the subject areas.

After the questions of the Behavioral Event Interview were developed, the next step is to make interview appointments. The researcher sent the interview establishment package to the selected participants to obtain their permission for interviews. During the structured interviewing, the researcher took interview notes, used a tape recorder and spent approximately two hours interviewing the HR managers. This analysis was conducted from Thai transcripts of the interviews and the results were interpreted in the narrative approach.

Demographic Data of Selected Key Informants

For the purposive sampling, the selected key participants in this study were those individuals: (1) who have been involved in implementing the core competency in their current company; (2) who have an understanding of leadership competency; (3) who are Thai or foreigners in the position of middle manager; and (4) who were based at the selected companies in the Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate.

As mentioned in the previous section, the top HR experts were chosen based on the following four criteria:

1. They were nominated by the Human Resource Club of each industrial estate;
2. They are executives of the private sector;
3. They have been working in the field of human resource development; and
4. They agreed to participate in the study and were willing to share their experience.

For the first criterion, the Human Resource Club announced the multinational companies list. The table below shows the number of HR experts in each category.

Selected HR	Position	Type of the Company	Gender	Education	Experience in HR
HR1	HR Manager	Textile Garment	Male	MBA	15 years
HR2	HR Manager	Kitchenware	Female	MBA	14 years
HR3	HR Director	Printed Circuit Assembly	Male	M.B.A	25 years
HR4	HR Manager	Petrochemical	Female	M.B.A	15 years
HR5	HR Manager	Auto Parts	Male	M.B.A	10 years
HR6	HR Manager	Auto Parts	Male	M.B.A	15 years
HR7	Plant Manager	Furniture	Male	M.P.A	20 years
HR8	HR Manager	Petrochemical	Female	M.B.A	25 years
HR9	General manager	General manager	Male	M.B.A	22 years

HR10	HR Manager	Gypsum	Female	M.B.A	18 years
HR11	HR Manager	Petrochemical	Female	B.B.A	13 years
HR12	HR Manager	Electronics	Female	M.B.A	10 years
HR13	HR Manager	Petrochemical	Female	Ph.D.	28 years
HR14	HR Manager	Petrochemical	Female	M.B.A	12 years
HR15	HR Manager	Petrochemical	Female	M.S.	23 years
HR16	HR Manager	Auto parts	Female	M.B.A	22 years

Table 1: Profile of the key informants

Table 1 shows that all selected informants were experts at Human Resource positions, with two in high positions at the factory, i.e., General Manager and Plant Manager. Ten informants were female, and six were male. Twelve of them had master's degrees. There was a doctoral degree and a bachelor's degree. Besides, the informants were diverse in their educational backgrounds, such as management and public administration.

During the Thai language semi-structured interviews, the researcher took interview notes, used a tape recorder and spent approximately one to two hours per interview. After completing the interview, the researcher took two or three weeks to transcribe the recorded data and further distributed such results to each key informant for review and approval. After that, the researcher reviewed and revised the confirmed results, and then organized the same answer according to each research question.

2. The Quantitative Method

To survey leadership competency in selected companies, the researcher developed a questionnaire to confirm the leadership competency check list and to reveal possibly new selected leadership competency. At first, 40 middle managers were selected to try out two different 351(EFA) and 671(CFA) questionnaires for surveying on two occasions. The questionnaires were mailed to the selected sample participants who were working at selected multinational companies of 12 industrial estates. The participants were selected in the pattern of stratified sampling. In addition to the questionnaire; the mailing included a cover letter, an addressed stamped envelope for return mailing. The cover letter explained the purpose of the survey, emphasized the importance of the research and assured confidentiality.

Data Analysis

In this study the researcher focused on both descriptive and statistical analysis that was used for data analysis based on the qualitative and quantitative approaches:

The Qualitative Method

The qualitative approach generates a mass of words from documents and interviews on which the researcher conducts the data analysis and interpretation. In this study, there are three generic processes of data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2003), as follows:

The researcher prepares the data analysis by transcribing interview answers from tape-recordings and interview notes.

The researcher reads all interview transcripts carefully in order to understand the leadership competencies as mentioned by each selected key participant.

The researcher organizes the data for easy retrieval and identifying codes. Coding is the crucial process of content analysis which describes the "units of meaning".

All organized data will be coded as leadership competencies categories based on research questions and the participants' answers.

To provide a variety of perceptions, 16 HR managers in 12 industrial estates were interviewed in-depth to explore their ideas about the important leadership competencies in their organizations. After completing the first round at interviewing, the researcher constructed the questions of the Behavioral Event Interview (BEI) for the second round of interviewing of the same group. With the answers of the second interview round of the sixteen HR managers in BEI, the researcher constructed the questionnaire.

The Quantitative Method

Based on statistical reports, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The data in the questionnaire were collected using nominal and interval scales. The total value of all questions of each respondent was analyzed and processed by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Quantitative analysis was conducted through SPSS Version 10.01 and LISREL 8.72 for, 1) the Descriptive Statistics through SPSS Version 10.01; 2) the Exploratory Factor Analysis by SPSS version 10.01 and 3) the Confirmatory Factor Analysis by LISREL 8.72.

Research Findings

This section presents data analysis of mixed methods research that consisted of analyzing the qualitative data using qualitative methods and the quantitative data using quantitative methods.

In addition, the section contained a report on the analysis results for the in-depth interviews and the survey data. Descriptions of interview responses were presented first. Then, the findings of survey responses were reported later according to the sequence of the two research questions.

Qualitative Finding Results

Findings from the qualitative methods

There were eight factors of leadership competencies as follows:

1. Business Acumen Competencies
 - Internal/External
 - Business Development
 - Budget Management
2. Leadership Competencies
 - Vision and Strategy
 - Ethics and Integrity
 - Accountability
3. Interpersonal Communication
 - Communication
 - Interpersonal
 - Networking
4. Analytical Thinking
 - Decision Making
 - Problem Solving
 - System Thinking
5. Teamwork
 - Team Building
 - Team Leadership
 - Managing Teams
6. Planning and Organizing
 - Time management
 - Analysis
 - Project Management
7. Innovation
 - Creative Thinking
 - Initiating
 - Project Management
8. Human Resource management
 - Employee Development
 - Coaching & Developing Others
 - Change Management

Quantitative Finding Results

Quantitative data collection was done by a self-administered questionnaire in the Thai language, as the Thai Language is the first language of the target population. The questionnaires were developed to examine factors of leadership competencies, and were based on the work of many scholars as reviewed in the literature. The questionnaire were divided into three sections, and each section was composed of multiple-choice items using 5 point Likert-style scales. Open-ended questions were provided at the end of each section for garnering qualitative data.

Response Rate

The questionnaires for EFA were responded by 351 respondents

The questionnaires for CFA were responded by 671 respondents

The response rate for the questionnaire was 77 percent. A total of 671 questionnaires were sent out and 520 were returned.

The results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The researcher handed out the questionnaires (Leadership Competencies Questionnaire- 8 Factors-72 items) to 38 of 40 middle managers. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was found to be .97.

The researcher handed out a second round by distributing the same questionnaire to 351 respondents. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was found to be .93.

Findings from EFA

1. Teamwork Competencies
 - Team Building
 - Team Leadership
 - Managing Teams
 - Designing Teams
2. People Development Competencies
 - Employee Development
 - Coaching & Developing Others
 - Change Management
 - Project Management
3. Leadership Communication Competencies
 - Communication
 - Interpersonal
 - Leadership
 - Accountability
 - Integrity
4. Analytical Thinking Competencies
 - Decision Making
 - Problem Solving
 - System Thinking
5. Innovation Competencies
 - Creative Thinking
 - Initiating
 - Ability to Learn
6. Business Acumen Competencies
 - Internal/External Organization
 - Business Development
 - Business Ethic
7. Planning and Administration
 - Visioning & Strategy
 - Analysis
 - Budget Management

- 8. Networking
 - Interpersonal Communication
 - Global Awareness
 - Collaboration

The results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

- The sample groups of middle managers of multinational companies were comprised mostly of males, totaling 77.50 %.

- The results of CFA are as follows:

CChi-Square	826.86
df	460
P-value	0.00000
RMSEA	0.039
CFI	0.99
GFI	0.91
AGFI	0.89

Table 2: Results of CFA

Table 2 presents the model fit indicators for the leadership competencies questionnaire used in this study.

Goodness of fit index (GFI) is 0.91; GFI value close to 1 indicates a perfect fit (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999).

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.99; according to Hu and Bentler (1999), the acceptable model fit is indicated by a CFI value of 0.90 or greater.

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.039; RMSEA values greater than .10 indicate poor fit.

The chi-square yields a statistic of 826.86 (df = 460)

P-value = 0.00000

df = 460

Findings from the quantitative methods- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

There were eight factors of leadership competencies as follows:

1. Team Management and Development
 - Team Building
 - Team Leadership
 - Managing Teams
 - System Thinking
 - Initiating
 - Project Management
 - Time management
2. People Management and Development
 - Employee Development
 - Coaching & Developing Others
 - Change Management
 - Initiating
 - Ability to Learn
 - Managing Teams
 - Project Management
3. Leadership and Communication
 - Communication
 - Vision and Strategy
 - Ethics and Integrity

- Accountability
- Interpersonal
- 4. Strategic Thinking
 - Decision Making
 - Problem Solving
 - System Thinking
 - Analysis
 - Vision and Strategy
- 5. Innovation
 - Creative Thinking
 - Initiating
 - Analysis
- 6. Business Acumen
 - Internal/External
 - Business Development
- 7. Strategic Planning
 - Business Development
 - Analysis
 - Budget Management
- 8. Networking
 - Networking
 - Interpersonal

Discussion

This section presents the survey results of the leadership competencies for middle managers in multinational companies of Thailand. Also, the findings from the literature review and interviews are discussed.

The results and discussion sections present my research findings and my analysis of those findings. Study findings of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis revealed all 8 important leadership competencies for middle managers in multinational companies at the Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate in Thailand were: 1. Team Management and Development, 2. People Management and Development, 3. Leadership and Communication, 4. Strategic Thinking, 5. Innovation, 6. Business Acumen, 7. Strategic Planning, and 8. Networking.

These eight leadership competencies from the CFA findings were compared with the leadership competencies cluster from the conceptual framework as shown in Table 3.

The Leadership Competencies Cluster from the CFA Findings	The Leadership Competencies Cluster from the Conceptual Framework
1. Team Management and Development	1. Analytical
2. People Management and Development	2. Business
3. Leadership and Communication	3. Interpersonal
4. Strategic Thinking	4. Leadership
5. Innovation	5. Technical
6. Business Acumen	6. Technological
7. Strategic Planning	7. Self-Management
8. Networking	8. Planning & Organizing
	9. Teamwork
	10. Innovation

Table 3: The comparison of the CFA findings and the conceptual framework.

The table above shows the leadership competencies from the CFA findings which are relevant to the conceptual framework as follows:

- Team Management and Development
- Leadership and Communication
- Innovation
- Business Acumen
- Strategic Planning

The researcher provides a discussion of the sources in the results for each leadership competency. Team Management and Development: Teamwork management and development are very crucial to working co-operatively, across cultures and organizational boundaries to achieve shared goals. In terms of the research, Tienphut (1998) conducted a research study called "The direction and the role of human resource management in the next century (2007)". The findings of the research were one of seven competencies that included "Teamwork".

People Management and Development: People management and development are key factors to manage an organization with effectiveness and efficiency. Nontakaew (2003) conducted research on "Management and development of human resource management competencies: A case study of industries in the Eastern Seaboard's Industrial Estate". The findings of the research were one of four competencies that included "The way to develop competencies of human resource managers in communication, specialization, team work, coordination, leadership and business skills".

Leadership and Communication: Leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal and communication is a two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange information, news, ideas and feelings but also create and share meaning. In general, communication is a means of connecting people or places. In business, it is a key function of management--an organization cannot operate without communication between levels, departments and employees. In terms of the research, Tienphut (1998) conducted a research study called "The direction and the role of human resource management in the next century (2007)". The findings of the research were two of seven competencies that included "Leadership" and "Communication".

Strategic Thinking: The ability to come up with effective plans in line with an organization's objectives within a particular economic situation. Strategic thinking helps business managers review policy issues, perform long term planning, set goals and determine priorities, and identify potential risks and opportunities. Kanitha Wangpol (2005), conducted research on "Leadership Competencies Model In Cement Thai Chemicals Co., Ltd". The findings of the research were one of ten competencies that included "Strategic Thinking".

Innovation: The process of translating an idea or invention into a good or service that creates value or for which customers will pay. Stewart L. Tubbs (2004), conducted research on "Leadership Competencies: Can they be Learned?" The findings of the research were one of seven competencies that included "Innovation and Creativity".

Business Acumen: Extensive experience in dealing with commercial matters that yields a prompt and appropriate response to issues that typically have a favorable outcome. In terms of research Kanitha Wangpol (2005), conducted research on "Leadership Competencies Model In Cement Thai Chemicals Co., Ltd". The findings of the research were one of two competencies that included "Business Acumen".

Strategic Planning: Systematic process of envisioning a desired future, and translating this vision into broadly defined goals or objectives and a sequence of steps to achieve them. In terms of research in the field of competency, three experts, Don Hellriegel, Susan E. Jackson, and John W. Slocum, called Leadership Competency as managerial competencies. The findings of the research were one of six competencies that included "Planning and Administration Competency".

Networking: Creating a group of acquaintances and associates and keeping it active through regular communication for mutual benefit. Rothwell, Sanders, & Soper, (1999) conducted research on "The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) Models for Workplace Learning

and Performance: Roles, Competencies, and Outputs.” The findings of the research were one of five competencies that included “Communication networks – is a part of Interpersonal Competencies”.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to current and potential middle managers, top managers and HR departments, educational institutions, and future researchers.

Recommendations for Current and Potential Middle Managers

First, current and potential managers need to be aware of the importance of leadership competency to their success in multinational companies, and should be more active and strategy-focused. They need to realize that they are playing important roles in enhancing communication between top managers and front-line employees, and effectively leading people to execute strategy and deliver quality outcomes.

Second, middle managers must actively acquire the important leadership competencies. They can access their current proficiency level regarding the leadership competencies found in the study.

Recommendations for Top Managers and HR Departments

First, top managers and HR departments need to recognize the importance of leadership competencies to the success of middle managers and the whole organization, and conduct projects to develop their own leadership competency models for middle managers. Top managers should be the leaders while HR departments need to administer the projects. The leadership competency model can be developed through a variety of approaches.

Recommendations for Educational Institutions

The findings of the study can be proposed and contained in the curriculum of undergraduate and graduate students.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

Many issues about the leadership competencies of middle managers remain unanswered because they are beyond the scope of this study.

Research on specific areas of leadership competency– This study investigated the overall picture of the leadership competency model, rather than a specific aspect of leadership competency. Future research should study specific aspects of the leadership competency model. Some of the topics for specific research are as follows:

- Needs of talented employees that may affect their selection and motivation;
- Differences in performance between talented and non-talented people;
- Factors, financial and non-financial, that affect the turnover rate of the talented employees;
- Specific aspects of the leadership competency model, such as Team management and Development, People management and Development, Strategic Planning, and Networking;
- Positive and negative effects of the implementation of leadership competency model; and
- Performance resulting from the implementation of leadership competency model at the organizational, departmental, and individual levels.

Thailand-wide Research – This study focused on Thai companies. Thus, it may represent the practice of leadership competency model throughout the country. Survey research should be conducted to investigate the practice of leadership competency among organizations in Thailand, factors affecting their decisions to implement leadership competency model projects, and how they manage their talents.

Comparative Study – Research may be conducted to compare similarities and differences between the practices of the leadership competency model between Thai-owned companies and foreign-owned companies, trading business and manufacturing business, public organizations and private organizations.

Conclusion

This study investigated the leadership competency model among sixteen listed companies on the Eastern Seaboard Industrial Estate in Thailand, aiming to conceptualize the leadership competencies model practices from the perspectives of the sixteen HR Managers who are experts in HR in multinational companies in Thailand.

The researchers should focus on how to manage the talented managers within the organization by focusing more on developing the existing employees than acquiring them from outside. The important starting point is to set up the factors or criteria to identify the employees with talents. The researchers also have the view that the selection process of talents by an organization is a crucial process.

The findings in this research can contribute to the understanding and practice of leadership competencies in organizations, as well as to create guidelines for future studies.

Most importantly, the researcher has proposed a model of Leadership Competencies for middle managers in multinational companies by setting the new name of “Paramat’s Leadership Competencies Model”. This model could be used as a guideline for other companies in the process of implementing the leadership competencies model in their organizations. Figure 3 is the proposed model.

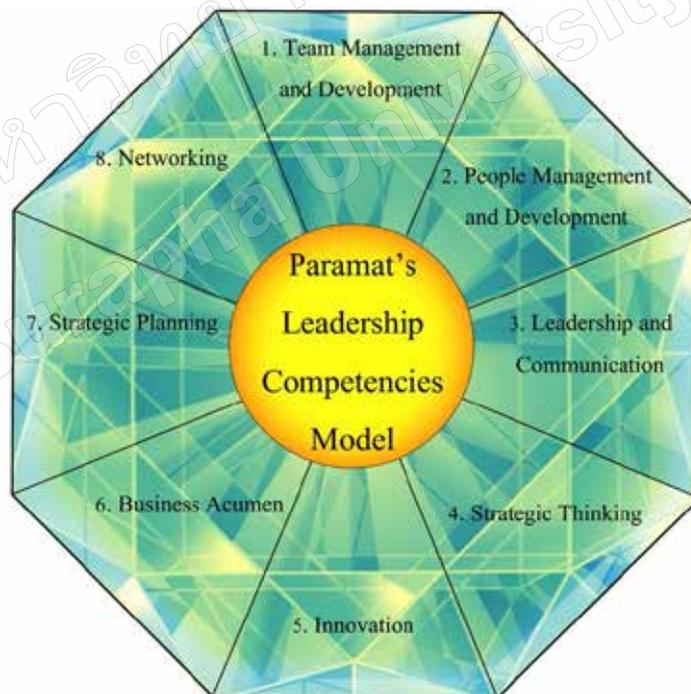


Figure 3 The proposed leadership competencies model created by Phra Paramat

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