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**Preparing Thai Private
Universities for ASEAN
Economic Community (AEC) in
2015**

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Preparing Thai Private Universities for ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015

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Abstract

In this study, we examine the critical conditions and the process on private higher education in Thailand. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 and the development of knowledge-based economy have been causing a dramatic change to the character of a higher education in Thailand. The major purpose is to reform and to reconstruct the higher private education in Thailand in order to make it more global competitive. If Thai private universities need to survive, obviously they should define an exact goal with clear responsibilities; share an internal support for determined goal and immune issues regarding the private universities to progress in their systems. In addition, the executives and managers team of Thai private universities for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) develop their universities by upgrading the existing staffs with a policy of granting scholarships for the ongoing academic study and retraining. Moreover, these ASEAN team should recruit a new, highly efficient staffs who are able to imply and are able to adapt a different working environment from what they have encountered earlier. Since a lot of time is required for implementing these organizational improvements, as the consequence, the President of each university is actively canvassing and researching new methods and ideas for advance development ideas.

Keywords: Higher education, Thai private universities, ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

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Brief History of Thai Higher Education

The Thai higher education system is dominated by the public sector, whereas the private sector has existed for centuries in elementary-secondary education, vocational education, and social welfare (Praphamontriphong, 2010). Unlike its public previous sector, the private sector is formalized due to the exceeding demand for higher education which public universities could not accommodate. The 1969 Private College Act was promulgated, bestowing “college” status upon the first six private institutions (Bangkok College, Pattana College, DhurakijPundit College, Kirk College, Sripatum College, and Thai Chamber of Commerce College). Originally, these were only restricted to associate’s degrees, but later the permission was extended with legitimized system allowing them to be able to offer bachelor’s degrees (Praphamontriphong, 2010). In Thailand, the Private Higher Education Act along with ministerial regulations have been reauthorized gradually through the legal process; private higher education institutions have been slowly given a certain degree of institutional autonomy degrees (Praphamontriphong, 2010).

By the political economic events, there is a growth of Thai private higher education during the 1990s to the early 2000s. In addition, the 1997 Asian economic crisis forced Thailand to open itself to trade under the conditions of the International Monetary Fund (Praphamontriphong, 2010; Phongpaichit and Baker, 2008). Also during 1997 to 2000, the democratic government promulgated many laws concerning economic liberalization; among those laws was the 1998 Student Loan Funds Act. Accordingly, a route of opportunity was opened to private providers, especially for “proprietary” institutions. Furthermore, during 2001 to 2006, the Thai-rak-Thai government, with strong political and economic networks, had promoted various national policies supporting the private sector, not just only in education but also in other areas as well (Praphamontriphong, 2010; Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004). Under the process of this government, the 2003 Private Higher Education Act was reauthorized with much more flexible regulations than the previous laws.

In Thailand, the Private Higher Education Act and government student loan programs are among the most important factors affecting the expansion of private higher education. Although competition for funding is increasingly aggressive, small demand-absorbing colleges are slowly merging and closing. Thai private higher education has demonstrated various and globally relevant combinations of conflict(s), competition(s), and cooperation(s) in both; inter and intra sector higher education (Praphamontriphong, 2010).

2. ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

On 8 August 1967, the five Foreign Ministers; Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, gathered together in the main hall of the Department of Foreign Affairs Building in Bangkok, Thailand agreeing to sign a document. By virtue of that document, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was originated (www.wikipedia.org). Due to the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, since neighboring countries are progressing, it reinforces Thailand to increase its competitiveness in human

resources as well. As the consequence, the Ministry of Education agreed and manifested that Thailand requires a reform educational system. According to Thailand's education system, many critics claim that the over-abundant knowledge of too many subject fields provided to students may withdraw the efficiency and capability in child's learning ability. Additionally, the Ministry of Education admitted that in the past Thailand had never exhibited an apparent, explicit study plan which could directly relate to the country's development. Due to this ambiguous direction, Thai students have been forced to study in all fields which subsequently do not match with labor market demand, resulting in unemployment in the later period. (Chanchokpong, 2012).

3. Challenges for Thai Leadership in Higher Education

Apparently, in order to prepare Faculty and Administrators in Thai Private universities for ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, policy-creators at these private universities need to increase more attention, shaping directly to focus on the development of system capacities. By focusing on this change, it does represent a global response to the widening gap between the traditional capabilities of educational systems and emerging demands of the information age (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). The executive teams should seek to meet global education goals (e.g. computer literacy, English proficiency, problem-solving capacity, social responsibility) (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). Moreover, Thai private universities might consider these factors as challenge since they transform themselves to meet the demands of dynamic environment and an increasing complex.

Challenge # 1: Removing Boundaries: Thai private universities are facing the challenge of removing the boundaries between higher education institutions and their external publics because of the greater communication and the increasingly technological usage. Thus, private universities might alter their public image into a Networked University, a rich-in-communication and into a much more accessible environment (Hanna, 2003).

Challenge # 2: Redesigning and Personalizing Student Support Services: Traditional higher education has been focusing on the product or core program design rather than on the process or the specific customization of programs designed to meet individual student needs (Hanna, 2003). However, for ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, the tendency of a higher number of students will involve in working part-time jobs in order to meet their goals, therefore, Thai private universities should provide some customized and some convenience programs and services for appropriate requirements. The concerns for these students are that they frequently require a multiplicity of complex career requirements based on their family responsibilities, in addition, they will be a congestion in cities. Thus, these might lead to Adult Professional Programs and lead to www.mylearning.com or www.myuniversity.com (Hanna, 2003) or block courses on weekends or long holidays.

Challenge # 3: Emphasizing Connected and Lifelong Learning. In the industrialized world, many industries are finding that their core business practices and production processes are in a fast changing pace, subsequently,

the basic requirements are for the potential workers who are able to adopt, adapt and adjust some practical knowledge for resolving both the expected and unexpected problems. (Hanna, 2003). So, Thai private universities are being pressured to be more responsible to the demand of workforce. Thus, these Thai private universities should concentrate on helping students to know how to learn and how to apply what they learn and use it practically to the real situations in order to increase the value skills for their students.

Challenge # 4: Investing in Technologically Competent Faculty. In this information era, the full-time faculty and staff are concerned about applying the technology for communication. Thai private universities seriously need to bring their faculty and staff members along in both using learning technologies and experimenting with learning environments as multiple modes of enabling interaction among students and teachers will be critical (Hanna, 2003). If Thai private universities want to gain more attractions from the students in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), they should invest in technologically competent faculty.

Challenge # 5: Building Strategic Alliances with Industries: Companies show more interest in forming alliances with universities. The uncertainty of innovation, globalization of market and rapid change of consumers have created a situation where single company cannot keep competitiveness without cooperation with other organizations (Qin and Fei,2011). Many companies have begun to construct blue ocean strategy by applying innovation to their products or services. As a key source of innovation, universities have played an important role in innovation system. Accordingly, an increasing trend is for companies to collaborate with universities (Geiger, 2004). Nowadays, more companies realize that they cannot sustain success in the competitive marketplace if they only rely on themselves, by cooperating with universities, industry companies can acquire complementary resource and realize technology or product innovation (Qin and Fei,2011). Moreover, Industry companies and universities might broaden their mission to include certification and degree options for employees. The corporation with hundreds of learning strategic alliances is becoming a commonplace (Hanna, 2003).

Challenge # 6: Measuring Program Quality: Improvements and changes have no meaning without measurement. Academic measurement should be flexible, responsive, timeliness, efficiency and applicatory. If Thai private universities choose to improve, choose to move their performance to higher levels in the competition among universities in ASEAN, then a program is compulsory. That program, however the universities present them, require two fundamental factors; a focus on the money and measurements of productivity and quality. Firstly, it is the money since the flow of finance comes to the institution in an endless variety of ways, from tuition and fees to grants and contracts, from gifts and endowment to patent and license fees, all these sources nourish the academic enterprise (Lombardi, 2000).

While Thai private universities want to get as much dollars as possible, they also want to utilize the money in the most effective ways. This requires the measurement of performance in quality and productivity. In fact, a small amount of superb quality at great expense does not make a great university;

neither does a large amount of poor quality at low expense, since the goal is high quality and high productivity. The universities must measure these things, but measure them in as simple as a way possible (Lombardi, 2000). In the end of 1990s, institutions in the United States have begun to adopt and follow planning process suggested by the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, which emphasized on results of oriented goals and activities that focus on customers and markets, leadership and strategic planning. These results need to link to student to develop diverse perspectives and approaches to problem-solving, in gaining critical thinking skills for out of the workplace that will define successful academic programs in the future (Hanna, 2003).

Challenge # 7: Transforming Bureaucracy and Culture: Most Thai private universities have bureaucracy decision making processes. This might not be appropriate in the new digital environment of ASEAN. If most Thai private universities want performance management to really take hold in their organizations, take visible steps to move the organization toward a performance-based culture. In Academic bureaucracies, their primary purpose is to educate students and to coordinate research. In reality, academic bureaucracies serve to feather the nests of professors, keep out inconvenient criticisms, maintain "in-group" mentalities, and enforce ideological and methodological uniformity and conformism. In many bureaucracies in all sectors, routine becomes a substitute for effort, self-promotion becomes a substitute for cooperation and morality is reduced to institutional efficiency. (Walter, 2011).

4. Method

4.1 Research context

We conducted this study at private universities in Thailand, which includes the pressures to increase efficiency on the increasingly complex environment. With the decline of student numbers since 2005, also due to the increase of both national and international competition, a lot of activities and projects were launched in several directions to regain lost students and to secure the university's income. The situation at present is that the university has developed different strategic priorities and is searching for a new mission that is able to capture all the priorities into an integration as a whole.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

This study collects principals from the fifteen private universities. Each interview typically lasted from one to two hours. A researcher observed and conducted focus group interviews with executives or managers. We employed thematic analysis of the data focusing specially on two areas: obstacles and change strategies. In addition, other questions in the group interview includes such as:

- the leaders' profile;
- the major areas of focus in their role;
- the most influence impact possibly observed from daily work ;
- the critical internal condition that impact on Academic team for ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

- the critical internal processes that impact on Academic team for ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

4.3 Sampling

In terms of demographic characteristics, of the 15 leaders who identified themselves as executives, middle and senior managers in 15 private universities in Thailand, which most are female (9/15). The respondents are divided almost equally between the two age groups 40–50 and 51–65 years of age. In terms of their disciplinary background, most have a background in the Business (5/15) followed by Education (4/15), Engineering (3/15) and Law (1/15), Nurse (1/15) and Publish Health (1/15). About half of the participants have been performing their work for more than 7 years and the rest 30% have been performing from three to six years.

5. Result

Table 1. Highest ranking areas and activities for executives, middle or senior managers.

Ranking	Item	Percentage
1	Developing policy	(7*12 = 84) 30
2	Strategic planning	(6*11 = 66) 24
3	Networking within the University	(5*11 = 55) 20
4	Managing relationships with senior staff	(4*8 = 32) 12
5	Managing other staff	(3*7 = 21) 8
6	Developing organizational processes	(2*6 = 12) 4
7	Identifying new opportunities	(1*6 = 6) 2
Total		276 100

Table 2. Highest ranking influences on daily work for executive, middle or senior managers

Ranking	Item	Percentage
1	Clarifying strategic directions	(5*12 = 60) 41
2	Growing pressure to generate new income	(4*10 = 40) 27
3	Finding and retaining high quality staff	(3*9 = 27) 18
4	Managing pressures for continuous change	(2*7 = 14) 9
5	Maintaining a specific institutional image	(1*7 = 7) 5
	Total	148 100

When comparing the survey through the fifteen universities; seven important critical influencing Academic team for ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). They were divided into critical internal conditions and critical internal processes as shown in Fig. 1:



Fig 1: The Critical internal Process and Critical Internal Conditions on ASEAN Academic Team, adapted from Jitse et al (2009).

The critical internal condition is described and is followed by the critical internal processes accordingly.

The critical internal condition

Critical internal conditions are considered as the enabling factors that should be replaced in order to prepare Academic team of Thai private universities for ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) which hereinafter called "ASEAN Academic Team". Four critical conditions were derived from this studied-case data.

a) A clear defined goal

A clear defined goal was found important to enable effective executive or managers of private universities to prepare university to the ASEAN community. ASEAN Academic Team which has a clear goal is easy to coordinate their activities and moves their will powers in a common direction. By having clear goals, most of professors or academic staffs know what they are striving to achieve. These professor or academic staffs are much more motivated to achieve each of their goals if they have a reason to achieve those goals. In addition, by having detailed goal plans, people increase both their productivity and performance, because people outlining each step that is necessary to achieve a goal is critical to starting and executing goal plans. Moreover, a clear defined goal will be able to enhance a team's capacity to monitor and feedback on progress as well as to enable them to engage in an adaptive dynamic environments such as ASEAN Community.

b) Shared internal support for goal

A shared internal support for goal ASEAN Academic Team was found to be another factor influencing the emergence of successful team. In some projects, the lack of internal support for the team goal was found to result in

team members ‘just doing their job.’ Goal sharing depended on setting one or more goals of a qualitative or quantitative nature and paying a lump sum award to those responsible for the goal when it was met. For example a quality goal may worth a certain fixed dollar amount or a percentage of base salary of the employees focusing on the goals. Other advantages of share internal support for goal team included:

- more information and knowledge is focused on the issue
- better understanding and acceptance of the final decision

c) Autonomy

Teams which had a high degree of autonomy were more flexible in making decisions and coordinating their activities, as they did not rely on the approval of external decision makers. Autonomy is the degree to which a job provides an employee with the discretion and independence to schedule their work and determine how it is to be done. Higher levels of autonomy on the job have been shown to increase job satisfaction, and in some cases, motivation to perform the job. In traditional organizations, only those employees at higher levels had autonomy, however, in recent years, many organizations have made use of teams in the workplace in which many of them operate autonomously.

The success of such teams depends greatly on the team members, including their professional capabilities and collaborations in working. Often, such autonomous teams can greatly enhance an organization's ability to be creative, flexible, and innovative. However, working with too much autonomy by individuals could have some flaws, since working individually prohibits these people to communicate and exchange their ideas, resulting in poor performances and poor teamwork which directly affects the reduction in productivity. Additionally, without supervision the team may pursue goals that are different from those of the organization. Thus, periodic meetings and supervision from a manager may be necessary to avoid problems associated with too much autonomy (*Simmering, 2012*).

d) A clear defined responsibility

Having specified roles and responsibilities in an organization is essential in maintaining proper records. Without academic staffs designated in roles with specific responsibilities, a university may find itself in trouble when unable to increase either funding or students. Universities also need academic staffs to be responsible for determining and distributing the compensation and benefits of all workers in the organization. If responsibilities were clearly defined, teams were found to be more effective in coordinating their collective inputs. However, the ability to *balance team and individual responsibilities* is essential and is needed to be offset by a sense of shared responsibility for team outcomes.

Table 3. Highest ranking of the critical internal condition on ASEAN Academic Team

Ranking	Item	Percentage
1	A clear defined goal	(4*12 = 48) 47
2	Shared internal support for goal	(3*10 = 30) 29
3	Autonomy	(2* 8 = 16) 16
4	A clear defined responsibility	(1* 8 = 8) 8
	TOTAL	102 100

The critical internal processes.

Critical internal processes relate on the critical internal conditions described above, but it will be fostered and developed within the team rather than to be influenced by team design. Consequently, three critical internal processes were identified.

a) Information sharing

Information sharing within the team was found to be essential to develop a common understanding of the team task among the members. Openly sharing information within the team seemed to be a deliberate process in the interest of member's goal attainment and to develop of trust between team members. Members' information-sharing strategies can influence task outcomes (e.g., group decision quality) and social outcomes (e.g., member relations). Moreover, information sharing will aim team member to take advantage of unique knowledge and expertise of their members.

b) Coordinating activities

Coordinating activities is the internal process which aims team members to organize and to plan their individual activities to a collective team goal. It helps to improve the efficiency of operations by avoiding overlapping efforts and duplication of work. Integration and balancing of individual efforts provide a smooth and harmonious team work. Additionally, coordination is a creative force which makes possible a total result which is greater than the sum of individual achievements, which is demonstrated as the synergetic effect coordination. By combining together different departments and sections into one entity, coordinating activities ensures the stability and growth of an organization, allowing the executives to see the enterprise as a whole instead of narrow sectional goals. Most of executives and managers of Thai private universities experiences support the widely held view that were trusted among collaborative team members which grows beneath individual's contributions.

c) Performance Management

Performance management focuses on results rather than behaviors and activities. It identifies organizational goals, results needed to achieve those goals, measures of effectiveness or efficiency (outcomes) toward the goals, and means (drivers) to achieve the goals. An effective performance improvement process must follow a systems-based approach while looking at the outcomes and the drivers, otherwise, the effort may produce a flawed picture. For example, laying off staff will likely produce short-term profits. However, the organization may eventually experience reduced productivity, resulting in long-term profit loss (McNamara, 2012)

Table 4. Highest ranking of the critical internal processes on ASEAN Academic Team

Ranking	Item		Percentage
1	Information sharing	(3*13 = 39)	58
2	Coordinating activities	(2* 10 = 20)	29
3	Performance Management	(1* 9 = 9)	13
TOTAL		68	100

6. Discussion

The purpose of this paper is to explore the critical internal processes and critical internal conditions which confront ASEAN Academic Team at Thai private universities for opening their universities to ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. This study allows us to gain and to understand the critical process and condition that could possibly influences the success or failure of ASEAN academic team. Our data supports that the allocated of responsibilities, a clear defined goal as essential factors to prepare university in the dynamic competitive environment of ASEAN 2015. In addition, performance management is necessary to support the professors or academic staffs for successful teamwork, paralleling with our finding that a level of autonomy is essential for ASEAN Academic Team.

7. Implications for Practice and Development in Higher Education

As noted in the introductions, Higher Education institutions seem to struggle with the pressures of adapting in environmental change for ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. In order for Academic team to work effectively, it seems that Thai private universities need to approach team development in a different way than traditional conceptions of a team. The focus would probably shift to investing not only in developing team skills of the workforce as a whole, but also to facilitate the conditions conducive for the emergence of successful team and the formation of informal networks of expertise.

8. My Opinions

From my observations, the only key to succeed is that the executive or managers of Thai private universities must have qualities of creativities in both atmosphere and relationship in order to achieve the goal among the ASEAN Academic Team member. Comprehensive in goals would enable the team member to be well-prepared and would possible portray a potential work skills.

The more they observe this goal clearly, the more they are accepted and respected by the staff in their universities since the team members, rely on such characteristics as relationship building and trust. In addition, this academic team needs to set up a small team for developing university goals and creating visions: mission, valued outcomes and valued conditions to the staff of this team in order to have the same vision or purpose of developing the university. Executives or managers of Thai private universities need to trust this ASEAN Academic Team, professor and the academic staff and give them a full liberty to run their own activities. From my observation, the staff can bring their best to their work only if they engaged between the members. The staffs should feel free to both expose and explore the feelings, the viewpoints of the member, in order to form a solid relationship between members for the objective goals.

When an organization has just begun, the spontaneity with order could exist if the members pay attention in creating connections. If the staffs are permitted to access one another with information, they can easily perform the work to the succeeding point of work. As the new activities do not come from “top-down planning” but rather from the interests of employees who work closely to identify business needs. At this point, I think it will allow everyone in the team to interact with one another on some simple, straightforward ideas on the interaction and purpose of developing the university for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Even though, the group may seem chaotic due to the merging of individual’s perspectives with both expected and unexpected conditions, still the key to process lies within the “deeper order.” The member should apparently avoid the surface issues by paying attentions to every little details but instead the member should focus on practical deep down details for a full stream of “deep order” to realize the exactness of the issue.

Meanwhile, I strongly believed that the executives or the managers of Thai private universities must periodically evaluate the outcome of purpose. Whenever the outcome does not reflect the purpose of developing the university for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the executives or managers must withdraw the freedom and push their power to adapt or to plan the activities for their staff. (Executives or managers inherit both power bases, individual and departmental, and they can exceed their power for developing their universities). As the staffs are literally human beings; therefore, the receiving and providing goals for themselves and their environment is compulsory. Any issue concerning about the priority of staff rights; the behaviors, the budget the developments purposes for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) should be observed carefully by the executives or managers to avoid and to prevent any unexpected outcome.

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