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Subtheme: 13.2 Understanding, reconciling, and managing diverse expectations between Faculty staff and Senior Executives in a University environment.

Title: Insights into diverse expectations between faculty staff and senior management in fulfilling the university's role in the triple helix model: empirical evidence from Thailand.

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Biography

Dr. Suteera Chanthes, Dr. Kesinee Muenthaisong and Dr. Sutana Thanyakhan and are full-time faculty members of Mahasarakham Business School (MBS) of Mahasarakham University (MSU), Thailand. The main author, Dr. Chanthes and the first co-author, Dr. Muenthaisong, are from the Department of Business Economics. The research interest of Dr Chanthes is the role of universities in contributing to the economic and social development of their regions. She is particularly interested in modeling the function of faculty members of staff in fulfilling this role of the university. Dr Muenthaisong is specialized in agricultural economics. Her research mainly looks into the analysis of economic factors influencing the production of agricultural products. Dr Thanyakhan is the Associate Dean of Mahasarakham Business School for International and Special Affairs. Her academic background is in the area of International Business Management. Her main area of expertise involves cross-border trades of agricultural products in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS).

Abstract:

The Triple Helix model of university-industry-government relations has been adopted internationally, in both developed and developing systems. By looking at the employment of this model in Thailand as an empirical evidence of the model adopted in developing system, this paper pays particular attention to the university part. It presents findings of an action research investigating the participation of faculty staff and senior management of a Thai public university, named Mahasarakham University in an initiative collaborated with the National Economic and Social Advisory Council of Thailand (NESAC) and firms from various key industries in Thai-Lao cross-border trades. Given that Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) are neighboring countries, the main objective of the initiative, which forms an empirical setting of the research, concerns the development of strategic approach to the building of Thai-Lao economic partnership within the context of the coming ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. The paper delivers insights into diverse views and expectations between faculty staff and senior management. Given the findings, this paper also discusses the ways in which understanding between these members of the university, whose roles are different in terms of the university management, could be reconciled in order that the university performance in the Triple Helix relation is enhanced.

Keywords:

University Environment, Triple Helix, Faculty Staff, Senior Management, Developing System

1. Introduction

The Triple Helix model refers to a knowledge transfer system involving academic-industry-government relations (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000). The model is developed with an emphasis on the government role acting as a mediator for educational institutions and public and private agents, with regard to the overlay network of communications and expectations among these agents in the innovation system (Drejer and Jørgensen, 2005). Taking into

account the overlay network, systematic institutional arrangements among these three bodies of involved agents are required.

Despite growing interest in the development of innovation systems and the involvement of universities playing the role of knowledge transfer facilitator, most literature to date comes from developed countries; also there has been little attention paid to the views and practices of individual academic members of the university (Gunasekara, 2006; Liefner and Schiller, 2008). To fill the missing part of the literature, Chantes and Taylor (2010) investigate the performance of academic members of Thai universities engaging in economic development as part of their academic service function.

Chantes and Taylor (2010) discover challenges of systematic academic management from operating, to departmental and institutional level. By using a grounded theory approach, the findings of their research are grounded in perspectives of academic members with diverse academic and professional backgrounds ranging from faculty staff to university managers at departmental and institutional levels. Emerging from the perspectives of these university members, they key challenge of the university engagement is the lack of systematic delivery of academic services performed as part of the engagement. This challenge leads to the lack of an interest of faculty staff in participating in service projects. Furthermore, this problem is found to be significantly caused by the different perspectives between the university managers and their faculty members of staff. That is to say, while university managers attempt to implement service policy of the university, they rarely utilize strategic management which could persuade their staff to actively perform service work with the university recognition. With this regard, they propose a strategic positioning of academic service in a university to initiates systematic services as presented in Figure 1.

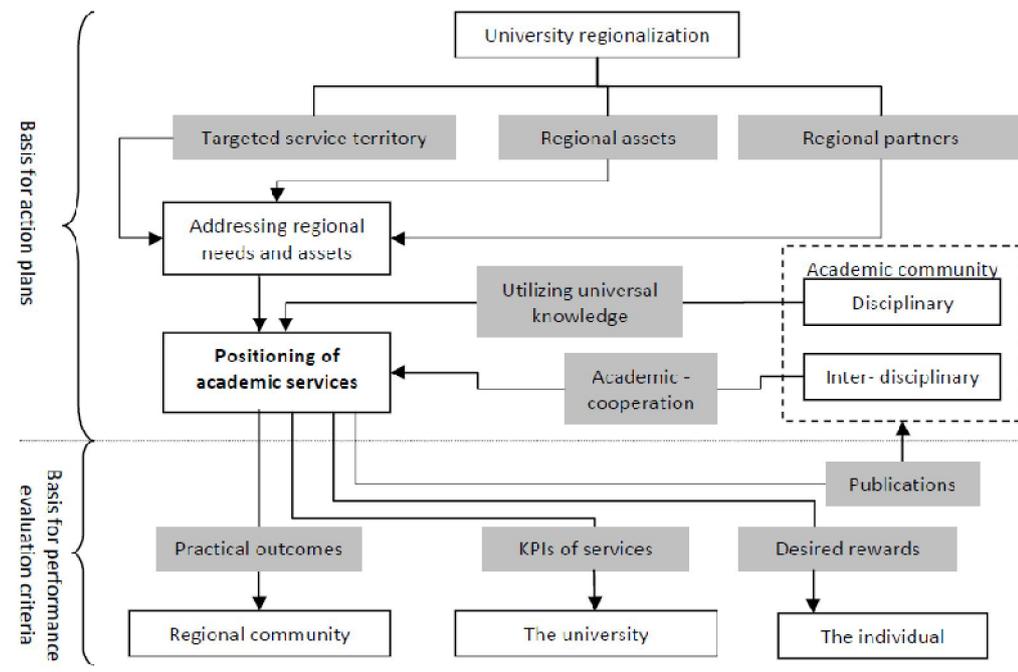


Figure 1. Strategic positioning of academic services in the university engagement (Chantes and Taylor, 2010).

By discussing their findings, they indicate four elements required for the engagement function of university including: (1) the planning of departmental productivity and function, (2) the planning of expected outcomes of knowledge service, (3) the projection of required resources, and (4) the promotion of systematic services delivered with the university's full recognition. These elements are proposed to be mutually understood by both faculty staff and the managers to promote systematic performance of the engagement function of their university. Nevertheless, empirical evidence is required to confirm the implication of the discussion in practice.

2. Research Methodology

To contribute to the knowledge given the state-of-the-art above, an investigation of understanding and actions of faculty staff and university managers participating in an empirical setting of university engagement is required. As recommended by Chantes and Taylor (2010), action research is preferable due to the investigation needs an intervention of the researcher in the observation setting (Miles and Huberman, 1994). According to Eden and Huxham (2002, p.254), the findings of action research are results from an involvement by the researcher with members of an organization over a matter that is of 'genuine concern to them'. With is regard, an action research undertaken for the period of nine months was formed and involved by the three authors, who also acted as the three researchers of the observation. The empirical setting of this research presents the character of the Triple Helix model. That is to say views and practices of faculty staff and managers were observed in an initiative involving three parties namely university, industry and government.

In details, this paper presents findings of a research observing faculty staff and university managers, at departmental and institutional levels of Mahasarakham University while they were participating in an initiative collaborated with the National Economic and Social Advisory Council of Thailand (NESAC) and firms from various key industries in Thai-Lao cross-border trades. The main objective of the initiative concerns the development of strategic approach to the building of Thai-Lao economic partnership within the context of the coming ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015.

The project began in June 2010. With respect to the university reputation as well as its location in the North-east of Thailand close to the country's border with Lao PDR, the NESAC asked Manasarakham Business School (MBS) of Mahasarakham University to take part in a project soon to become a roadmap for Thai-Lao cross-border economics development titled "The Development of Strategic Approach to the Building of Thai-Lao Economic Partnership". The role of MBS was to work together with firms in various industries and to investigate their needs given the coming of the AEC.

The initiative was over seen by the Chairman of Mahasarakham University Council and the Dean of MBS. The three authors of this paper together with six faculty staff were assigned to this 9-month project, beginning in June 2010 and ending in February 2011. While working for the project, the three authors also observed actions, ideas, perceptions and expectations of their colleagues, the Dean and the Chairman. Interviews were carried out throughout the project. Also, a range of government and institutional documents was analyzed as supplementary source of research data. A grounded theory approach was employed as the data analysis tool.

3. Findings and Discussions

There are three groups of ideas and expectations divided by different administrative levels of the participants observed. The perspectives of the Chairman indicate three aims of the university participating in the initiative: (1) connections building, (2) fund rising, and (3) promotion of the university reputation. Achieving the objectives, the Chairman made use of his connection with committees of the NESAC initially offering the university service in the forms of consulting service. After that, the responsibility to take care the accomplishment of the service offered was assigned to the manager at faculty level, or the Dean.

At faculty level, perspectives of the Dean point to different aims from the senior manager; the Dean focused on the ways in which the project could benefit the following: (1) key performance indicators (KPIs) of the Faculty, (2) the success of this 'ad-hoc' project assigned to the faculty by senior manager, and (3) individual professional objectives of participating staff. It can be seen that the Dean had to act as the mediator trying to balance the satisfactions of the university mission, the senior manager and faculty staff regarded as his colleagues.

For faculty staff, their perspectives mainly concerns the benefit of participating in initiative to the term of reference (TOR) indicated in their term-contract employment. Given the TOR, the activities of their work are to be classified into four categories, in association with the four key functions of the university, namely: (1) teaching, (2) research, (3) academic service, and (4) promotion of artistic and cultural affairs (ONEC, 1999). With regard to the initiative asking them to take part, this staff claimed to gain very little benefits to their TOR from the project. As a result, most of the participating staff claimed to have done only academic service function, which was seen to have the least benefit to the TOR compared to teaching and research functions.

Despite the project was accomplished eventually, most participating staff expressed their intention not to participate in future ad-hoc initiatives. This problem is caused by the lack of planning of departmental productivity and function in relation to the capabilities of faculty staff for ad-hoc project (Chanthes and Taylor, 2011). This could be claimed as an obstacle to the university playing role in working together with the government and industrial sectors concerning that they require practical outcomes being able promptly meet their needs.

4. Policy Implication and Directions for Further Research

This paper leads to reconsideration of the role of Faculty Deans, despite most literature to date indicates their role as the mediator in the engagement function of the university where university-industry-government relations have become the central interest. This paper has delivered insights into different perspectives concerning the performance of university in the Triple Helix relation; it is empirically seen that the mediator role of the Dean alone cannot reconcile diverse expectations of university members at different levels of the university organization. Given this implication, further research, action research preferred, observing empirical settings of initiatives where senior managers and government authorities are designed to work closer to both Faculty Deans and faculty staff at the operational level should be carried out.

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