

The Relationship between Personal Characters and the Organizational Performance of a Learning Organization: A Case Study of the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand

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Abstract

The objectives of this research are to study the personal characters of human capital at the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, and examine the relationship between personal characters and the organizational performance of the learning organization. The population consists of 45 persons who work at the school of agriculture and cooperatives. The sample size consists of 37 persons who work for the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 29 of whom work as academic staff and 8 as support staff. The primary data were collected by questionnaire while the secondary data were collected from the official documents and website. Descriptive statistics was applied. The inferential statistics used multiple regressions. The estimated parameters were applied by Ordinary Least Square (OLS), t-test, F-test and the Coefficient of Determination (R^2). The results show that the majority of employees were females, 45 years old or older who hold a doctoral degree and have associate professor positions. Most of them are also government officers and have been involved with the school for over 20 years. Five personal traits of character have positive relationship with innovation; creating capacity, personal commitment to lead the organization toward becoming a learning organization, sharing opinions with co-workers, personal learning and studying for job success, and personal skills analyzing problems for job improvement in the future.

Keywords: Personal characters, organizational performance, learning organization.

1. Introduction

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) was officially established by Royal Charter on 5 September 1978 as Thailand's eleventh state university. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX) graciously bestowed the university its name in honor of King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII), who once held the title "Prince Sukhothai Thammara" prior his accession to the throne (www.stou.ac.th). On 24 October 1978, His Majesty issued royal mandates appointing the first University Council and appointing Professor Dr. Wichit Srisa-an as the first president, effective from January 1978. After approximately two years of preparation, STOU received its first academic class on 1 December 1980. STOU began with three faculties: Educational Studies, Liberal Arts and Management Science. From 1979 to 1984, STOU had no home campus of its own, so it had to share space with such agencies as the National Education Commission, Thai Airways, the Faculty of Economics of Chulalongkorn University, and the Ministry of University Affairs.

In 1981, Mr. Monkol Kanjanapas donated to the university a 30-rai section of land located in the Pakkret district in Nonthaburi province. The university then bought more land, bringing the total area to approximately 135 rai. Construction at this site began in 1982, and the university began operating from the new location on 9 December 1984. At its founding, STOU was the first university in Southeast Asia to use distance learning. This new system of learning has expanded the role of higher education in Thailand by engaging learners who previously had no opportunity to further their education. It has enabled the development of individuals and communities throughout Thailand and beyond.

The School of Agriculture and Cooperatives is one of twelve schools that make up Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. At that time it was established, the school of agriculture and cooperatives had only 2 academic majors – agricultural extension and cooperatives extension. The program was founded on the conviction that since agriculture has been the livelihood of Thai people for times immemorial, economic development in Thailand is tied to development of the country's agricultural potential. The school continues to rely on this philosophy in teaching students subjects such as agricultural production methods, agricultural technology, and the formation and management of agricultural cooperatives. In addition, the school aims to give students a solid understanding of Thailand's natural resources and resources for conservation through agricultural practices.

Today, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University School of Agriculture and Cooperatives, has three main functions: (i) distant teaching, (ii) research, and (iii) social services. It has 45 employees divided into 2 categories; academic and service staff. The 37 academics staff comprises associate professors, assistant professors and lecturers. The 8 employees in the academic service staff consist of the chief of secretary and officers. Since its establishment in 1982, the school of agriculture and cooperatives has had to face major changes in global, societal and economic environment. Dynamic education requires the school to adjust to these changes. This is especially true of its human capital. They, themselves, have to adopt the concept of Learning Organization (LO), adjust to it and develop themselves toward it. This research focuses on the organizational performance of the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand, in relation to the traits of character of its human capital. More specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

1. study the personal character traits of the human capital at the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives; and
2. examine the relationship between personal character traits and the organizational performance of the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives as a learning organization.

2. Literature Review

- *Learning Organization Theory*

In his work, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organization*, Senge (1990), determined that a learning organization depends upon the mastery of five dimensions which are : (i) systems thinking, (ii) personal mastery, (iii) mental models, (iv) shared vision, and (v) team learning. This requires an understanding of the whole as well as the components, not unlike the way a doctor should understand the human body. Some of the key elements here are recognizing the complexity of the organization and having a long-term focus. Senge (1990) advocates the use of system maps that show how the systems connect. System thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively. Senge (1990) describes personal mastery as a process where an individual strives to enhance his vision and focus his energy and be in a constant state of

learning. Human capital in an organization should be able to consistently realize the results that matter most deeply to it. It should be done that by becoming committed to their own lifelong learning. Mental models refer to "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (p. 95). These must be recognized and challenged so as to allow for new ideas and changes. Shared vision can be a powerful motivator. A leader's vision does not necessarily become shared by those below him. The key here is to pass on a picture of the future. To influence using dialogue, commitment, and enthusiasm, is preferable to trying to dictate everything. Storytelling is one possible tool that can be used here. According to Senge (1990), building a shared vision is what leaders in an organization should rely upon to inspire the organization. Team learning, the stage at which team members think together in order to achieve common goals, builds on a shared vision and adds the element of collaboration. Effective dialogue is the beginning state of team learning to enter into a genuine "thinking together".

Senge (1990), also describes the learning organization as a place where people continually expand their capacity to create results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. In other words, a learning organization functions as human beings cooperating in dynamic systems that are in a state of continuous adaptation and improvement. The concept of the learning organization has received considerable attention recently in literature as firms became increasingly encouraged to leverage learning to gain competitive advantage (Ellinger, Ellinger, Yang, & Elowton, 2002). Learning organization theorists have made the claim that organizational performance effectiveness should be improved by adopting the features described as components of a learning organization (Senge, 1996; Elolton & Kaiser, 2000).

According to Watkins and Marsick (1993), learning in organizations has four tiers which are society, organization, team learning, and employee. Senge's (1990) learning on the other hand has three tiers, which are organization, team learning, and employee. Westbrook's (2002) learning, however, has only two tiers; organization and employee. Employees need to learn from experience and incorporate the learning as feedback into their work tasks. Work-related learning is defined as "the formal and informal education and training adults completed at work or at home to assist them in their current and/or future employment" (Westbrook, 2002, p. 19). The learning organization is underpinned by the logic of the human capital theory, which assumes that the more you have learned (or the higher capacity you have for learning), the more of an asset you will be for your organization. In a human capital formulation, workers are compensated for the use of their critical thinking through higher wages and a higher position (Mojab & Gorman, 2003). The concept of the learning organization is that the successful organization must continually adapt and learn in order to respond to changes in environment and grow.

- Relationship between Learning Organization and Organizational Performance

Adelzadeh, P. et. al. (2014). examined the relationship between the learning and organizational performance at the State University of Tabriz, Islamic Azad Universities and Higher Education Institutes. Their research results show the relationship between personal, group and organization learning level and organizational performance. Also, organization learning level is affected by continuous learning interaction and team learning. In their research work, they determined the significance of the relationship between learning leadership and learning levels in organization. In the case of the relationship between organization relations with environment and learning levels it is high. Kontoghiorghes, C. et. al. (2005) investigated the relationship between learning organization dimension and change

adaptation, innovation and bottom-line organizational performance. They found that the learning organization dimension was the key success factor to get into rapid change adoption, quick product or service introduction, and bottom-line organizational performance. They also found that it was so important to be concerned with open communication and information sharing, risk taking and new idea promotion which are key success factors to learning organization. This is also the case with organizational information, facts, timing as well as the resource availability to conduct a job in organization in order to be professional manner.

Haley, K. and Yuhfen, D. (2011) sought to explain the library human capitals behavior following the concept of learning organization, leadership development, as well as employment development. They used Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) as the data collecting tool and applied a multivariate analysis of the variance as the data analysis tool. The findings of their research show the significant impact of leadership training and workplace training on the learning organization. The number of leadership and workplace training hours were significantly correlated to the DLOQ higher score. Organizational leaders' skills and leaders' behavior had a strong influence on the organizations' moving towards becoming learning organizations. The number of leadership training hours provided the leadership skills in their organization. In addition, enhancing and developing their leadership skills led to the implementation of learning organization concept. Based on the results, it was obviously that leadership training and workplace training had strongly influenced the learning organization's characteristics.

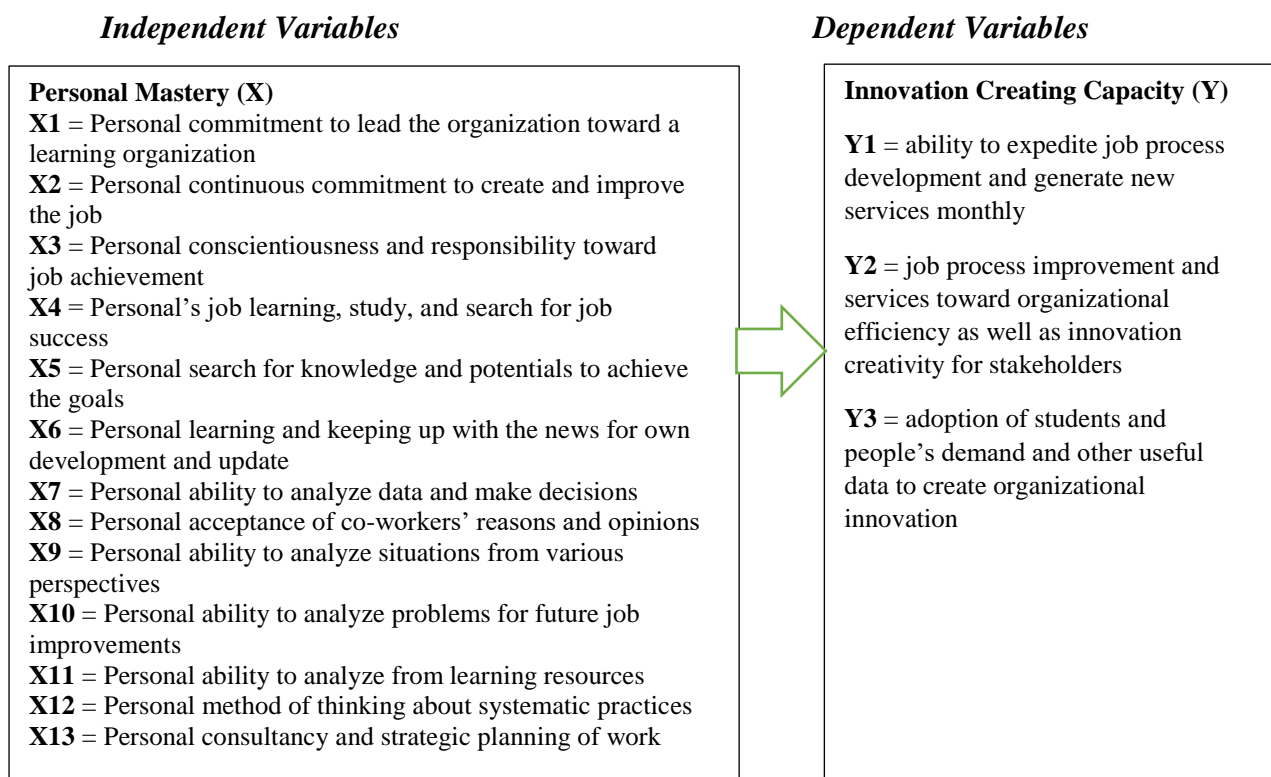
Furthermore, libraries as organizations should encourage and support training in order to improve the characteristics of learning organizations. The implementation practically would lead to the growth of their human capital. Also it is better return of human capital investment. The researchers concluded that moving in the direction of continuous learning and change would be the way for a learning organization to be able to integrate people and the organizational structure to reach this goal. Moralesa, V.J., Montesa, F.L., and Joverb, V. A., (2007) investigated human capital behavior in large and small and medium enterprise (SMEs). They collected primary data from 401 Spanish firms and studied the influence of personal mastery on organizational performance through organizational learning and innovation. They also studied the direct and indirect influence of personal mastery on organizational performance through capabilities of organizational learning and innovation. The results reveal that (i) there was a significant influence of personal mastery on the direct and indirect organizational performances in terms of organizational learning and innovation; (ii) there was a positively significant direct influence and indirect influence of organizational learning on the organizational performance in terms of organizational innovation; and (iii) there was a positive influence of organization innovation on organization performance.

Rajapathirana, J., and Hui, Y. (2018) studied the relationship between innovation capability, innovation type, and firm performance at insurance companies in China. Their aim was to explore the relationship among innovations capacity, innovation type as well as the different viewpoints of firm performances which included innovation, market and financial performance. They developed a research framework by surveying 379 senior managers in insurance businesses and explored the relationship among innovations capacity, innovation type as well as the different viewpoints of firm performances, which included innovation and market and financial performance. They determined that the insurance business had been faced with economic, political, regulatory, legal, social, and technological challenges that created high competition, slowed business expansion and resulted in an excess of capital in China insurance companies.

Advances in communication technology have raised the risk of cyber-attacks and led to the transformation of life style of human live and the risks they face, which they need to alleviate with various insurance products. With the global communication change, insurance companies really needed to adopt their business models and be consistent with those changes. In this high competitive market and changing global economy, innovation was thus considered the key success factor. The researchers concluded that there was a significant relationship between innovation capabilities, innovation efforts and firm performance. Moreover, effective management of innovation capability could deliver more effective innovation outcomes in the insurance industry, which eventually led to the better organizational performance and organizational benefits.

Conceptual Framework

Based on Sege’s (1990) five disciplines of a learning organization as expounded above, the conceptual framework can be expressed as follows:



3. Research Methodology

The School of Agriculture and Cooperatives is divided into six divisions, which are (i) agricultural extension, (ii) crop production management, (iii) animal production management, (iv) agribusiness management, (v) forestry and environment management, and (vi) cooperatives and a total of 39 employees work for it (29 as academics and 8 as academic service staff. In light of these numbers, the sample size focused full-time academic and academic service staffs and consisted of 37 employees, 29 academics and 8 persons staff members (2 faculty members were on leave for higher education).

The primary data collection was done via questionnaires and secondary data was collected from official documents and websites. Descriptive statistics was used as arithmetic means and standard deviations while inferential statistics applied multiple regressions. The estimated parameters was applied by Ordinary Least Square (OLS), t-test, F-test as well as the Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the profile of the all the employees of the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives.

Table 1: Profile of Human Capital of the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives

General Information About the Human Capital	Number	Percentage
1. Gender		
Male	15	40.54
Female	22	59.46
Total	37	100.00
2. Age		
Less than 25 Years Old	0	0
25-34 Years Old	6	16.22
35-44 Years Old	12	32.43
More than 45 Years Old	19	51.35
Total	37	100.00
3. Educational Level		
Bachelor Degree	0	0
Master Degree	14	37.84
Doctoral Degree	23	62.16
Post-Doctoral Degree	0	0
Total	37	100.00
4. Position		
Lecturer	9	24.00
Assistant Professor	10	27.00
Associate Professor	18	49.00
Professor	0	0
Total	37	100.00
5. Status		
Government Servant	18	49.00
Officer	19	51.00
Total	37	100.00
6. Duration of Employment		
Less than 2 Years	1	2.70
2-5 Years	5	13.52
6-9 Years	7	18.92
10 – 15 Years	5	13.51
16 – 20 Years	4	10.81
21 – 25 Years	8	21.62
More than 25 Years	7	18.92
Total	37	100.00

As shown in Table 1, 15 employees are males (40.54%) and 22 females (59.46%). A majority of them were more than 45 years old (19 persons accounting for 51.35 percent). Those aged between 33-44 years old accounted for 32.43 percent and the 25-34 years old ones for 16.22 percent. A majority of the employees earned doctoral degrees (23 persons accounted for 62.16 percent) and 14 persons had a master degree (37.84%). A majority of the employees earned the position of associate professor (18 accounting for 49.00 percent), followed by that of assistant professor (10 persons accounting for 27.00 percent) and lecturer (9 accounting for 24 percent). 18 of the staff members are government servants (49.00%) and 19 officers (51.00%). 8 of them have been with the school for more than 20 years (21.62% of the staff), 4 for more than 15 years (10.81%), 7 for more than 25 years (18.92%), 5 for more than 10 years (13.51%), 7 for 6 to 9 years (18.92%), and the others between 2 to 5 years.

Table 2 shows the relationship between personal characters and organizational performance of the school of agriculture and cooperatives.

Table 2: Relationship between Personal Characters and Innovation Creating Capacity Y1

Dependent Variable: Y1			
Independent Variables	Estimated Parameters	T-Value	P-Value
(Constant)	-14.619	-24.9	0.0001**
X1	2.816	62.603	0.0001**
X2	-0.774	-10.048	0.062
X3	-1.239	-10.583	0.0877
X4	2.842	32.561	0.0001**
X5	-0.109	-2.489	0.013
X6	-0.957	-21.722	0.045
X7	-1.283	-0.16	0.153
X8	3.454	34.338	0.0001**
X9	-1.022	-24.431	0.541
X10	2.982	69.534	0.0001**
X11	-1.475	-26.302	0.0976
X12	-3.828	-40.746	0.0654
X13	1.043	36.154	0.0001**
F = 1478			
R-Square = .979			

**Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Computed by the author for this study

As Table 2 shows, personal character traits X1, X4, X8, X10.X13 of the employees of the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives have a positive relationship with innovation creating capacity to expedite job process development and generate new services monthly (Y1). These personal character traits were the personal commitment to lead the organization toward a learning organization (X1), the personal’s job learning, study, searching for job success (X4), the personal acceptance of co-workers’ reasons and opinions (X8), the personal skills analyzing problems for job improvement in the future (X10), and the personal consultancy and strategic planning of work (X13).

Table 3: Relationship between Personal Characters and Innovation Creating Capacity Y2

Dependent Variable: Y2			
Independent Variables	Estimated Parameters	T-Value	P-Value
(Constant)	-30.114	-151.401	0.0001**
X1	1.731	97.061	0.00001**
X2	0.586	19.79	0.00001**
X3	-5.245	-116.436	0.216
X4	6.049	197.504	0.00001**
X5	1.037	70.341	0.00001**
X6	0.647	31.749	0.00001**
X7	-0.33	-36.377	0.168
X8	4.844	134.166	0.00001**
X9	-0.99	-64.563	0.175
X10	3.342	205.8	0.00001**
X11	-1.181	-48.76	0.116
X12	-5.721	-177.694	0.124
X13	2.317	213.307	0.00001**
F = 158.692			
R-Square = .99			

**Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Computed by the author for this study

As Table 3 shows that personal traits of character X1, X2, X4, X5, X6, X8, X10, and X13 have a positive relationship with Innovation creating capacity of job process improvement and services toward organizational efficiency as well as innovation creativity for stakeholders (Y2). In addition to those already mentioned, these personal character traits include the personal commitment to create and improve the job continuously (X2), the personal search for knowledge and potentials to achieve the goals (X5), and the personal learning and keeping up with the news for own development and update (X6).

Table 4: Relationship between Personal Characters and Innovation Creating Capacity Y3

Dependent Variable: Y3			
Independent Variables	Estimated Parameters	T-Value	P-Value
(Constant)	-28.543	0.796	0.00001**
X1	2.074	0.071	0.0001**
X2	0.657	0.118	0.0001**
X3	-4.019	0.18	0.126
X4	5.803	0.123	0.0001**
X5	0.852	0.059	0.0001**
X6	-0.589	0.082	0.123
X7	0.32	0.036	0.0001**
X8	4.626	0.144	0.0001**
X9	-1.039	0.061	0.114
X10	3.632	0.065	0.0001**
X11	-1.277	0.097	0.112
X12	-6.115	0.129	0.11
X13	1.731	0.043	0.0001**
F = 966.52			
R-Square = 0.985			

**Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Computed by the author for this study

Table 4 shows that personal traits of character X1, X2, X4, X5, X8, X10, and X13 have a positive relationship with the innovation creating capacity of adoption of students and people's demand and other useful data to create the organizational innovation (Y3). Employees, working at the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives have been with the university for a long time and almost all of them have a lot of experience as they are more than 45 years old. In order to lead the school toward becoming a complete learning organization, the school needs to take into consideration all the personal traits of character of the employees and encourage them to generate innovation creating capacity.

In terms of personal mastery, since the people working as academic staff at the School of Agriculture and Cooperatives, have gained work experience of more than 20 years, they have a long-term focus and the system map of their work lead to the creativity of innovation. This finding is consistent with Senge (1990), Yang, & Elowton, (2002), whose studies show a positive relationship between innovation creating capacity expediting job process development and generating new services monthly. This also includes the personal commitment to lead the organization toward learning organization. This reflects the solid organizational management of the school. These research outcomes are consistent with the work of Adelzadeh, P. et. al. (2014), Kontoghiorghes, C. et. al. (2005), and Haley, K. and Yuhfen, D. (2011). Also the research outcome shows a positive relationship between innovation creating capacity improving the job process and services toward organizational efficiency and the personal skills analyzing problems for job improvement. This is consistent with Haley, K. and Yuhfen, D. (2011), and Moralesa, V.J., Montesa, F.L., and Joverb, V. A., (2007).

The research result shows a positive relationship between innovation creating capacity adopting students and people's demand and other useful data to create the organizational innovation and the personal searching for knowledge and potentials to achieve the goals. This research outcome is consistent with Rajapathirana, J., and Hui, Y. (2018).

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List of Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable	Variable Name
X1	the personal searching for knowledge and potentials to achieve the goal
X2	the personal commitment to create and improve the job continuously
X3	the personal conscious mind of job responsibility toward the job's achievement
X4	the personal's job learning, study, searching for job successfulness
X5	the personal searching for knowledge and potentials to achieve the goal
X6	the personal learning and catching up the news for their own develop and update
X7	the personal data analysis and job decision
X8	the personal admitted to co-workers' reasons and opinion
X9	the personal ability of situations' analysis from several aspects
X10	the personal skills of problem analysis to job improvement in the future
X11	the personal ability of data analysis from learning resources widely
X12	the personal method of thinking to systematic practices
X13	The personal consultancy and strategic planning of work

List of Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Variable Name
Y1	the ability of job process development expedite and generate the new services monthly
Y2	the job process improvement and services toward organizational efficiency as well as innovation creativity for steak holders
Y3	the adoption of students and people demand and other useful data to create the organizational innovation