Managing Change on Campus: Developing Leadership Skills of Students through University's Problems Assignment

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Abstract

The objective of this current study is to maximize students' leadership skills focusing on vision creation through the project assignment that relates to students' perspectives on campus problems. A total of one-hundred undergraduate students from three different cohorts who registered in leadership course at Faculty of Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon were participants in this present study. Results indicated that 41% of 12 groups from three cohorts could apply decision-making process as part of their brainstorming to choose the most important problem of their group. All of them could apply the concepts of change management to solve the problems effectively. Half of them (50%) were able to apply motivation theory as part of their change management plan. Also, results showed that 75% of them had properly selected the urgent and important problems to be solved while 25% of them failed to propose the realistic plans that could really make change happened in the university. Discussions and recommendations for a further study were also presented.

Keywords: Change management, Leadership skills development, University students

Introduction

The most important factor that can distinguisha leader from a manager is "challenging the status quo quality" (Daft, 2010), which refers to the ability of a leader to create vision that makes extraordinary things happento the organization. Despite scholars and academicians know that creating vision is a vital key to make a good leader, they fail to develop classroom activities and programs that are associated with vision development (Coles, 2014). Many instructors tend to heavily rely on "chalk and talk" teaching style whereas some are using a highly sophisticated technology as part of their instruction when teaching leadership course. Yet, many of them attempt to place their emphasis on delivering lectures relating to concepts and theories of leadership rather than balancing the lectures and activities that help create vision of their students. As a result, students who get a good grade in leadership course may not be a good leader in a real business world because they do not know exactly how to apply the concepts and theories into practice. In addition, the absence of relevant activities and assignments that help bring their potentials of leading others is the major driving force that fails exceptional students in leadership class in the real world (Andrews, 2016). This present study has realized this problem and attempted to fill the gap in this area by proposing the method that can help develop leadership skills of students as well asincrease an understanding of concepts and theories of leadership.

Even though administrators are responsible for solving problems in the university, receiving feedbacks regarding campus problems from university stakeholders are necessary.

As the administrators being overloaded with numerous responsibilities, they may overlook some problems that have been viewed customarily and habitually. In particular, the nature of university is perceived as a highly complex organization in which some problems have been hidden or ignored unintentionally. Thus, allowing stakeholders to be involved in identifying the problem is very useful and beneficial for the university to explore some neglected problems (Hornstein, 2008). Sarason (1990) pointed out that both internal and external stakeholders must be involved in the change efforts. However, students in many universities are not given the opportunities to share their ideas freely and constantly about university's problems as those universities lacks of processes, systems, and procedures to do so.Specifically, students of Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon have not been provided sufficient opportunities to share their ideas relating to campus improvement and development in an official manner. A recent study in business indicated that the failure to integrate leadership development and change management can cause the struggle to the organization (Quinn & Quinn, 2016). As a result, the researcher has recognized this gap and takenthe opportunity to encourage students' participations as well as perceptions on the campus problems through the leadership course taught by the researcher. As Beycioglu and Kondackci (2014) suggested that managing change in the educational institution should shift the focus on student outcomes rather than the change process per se, the researcher, therefore, strongly believes that this kind of instruction can enhance students' vision as part of essential skills for leadership. Hence, the objective of this present study is to maximize students' leadership skills especially vision creation through the project assignment that relates to students' perspectives on campus problems.

Literature Reviews

Changing people behaviors is not an easy task. There are numerous factors that can cause individuals to resist change such as uncertainty, habit, worry about individual loss, and incompatible with goals and interests of the organization (Robbins, DeCenzo, & Coulter, 2015). However, in order to change individual behaviors effectively, it is important to understand the change process which can be divided into three steps as follows: (Greenberg, 2011)

Step 1: Unfreezing. This step refers to the undesirable state of current behaviors that needs to be changed according to the consequences of changing business environment. A sense of urgency needs to be created to ensure that individuals realize and acknowledge the necessity of change. In this stage, existing behaviors of individuals must be removed by using some techniques of reinforcement. Encouraging newly desirable behaviors that is relevant to the current situation is recommended.

Step 2: Changing.This step relates to the desirable state in which an organization needs its people to modify their behaviors from a minor change like a revision of training program to a major change like organizational restructuring.

Step 3: Refreezing. This step occurs when new ways of operating are already in place and an organization needs to maintain this new behavior of individuals for the long-term benefits. Thus, reinforcement methods especially positive reinforcement and punishment are to be implemented to ensure the existence of this new behavior.

In addition to the change model proposed by Kurt Lewin, various organizations also apply the eight steps of change process developed by Kotter (1996) in order to succeed in an

ever-changing environment. The eight steps of leading change are comprised of the following steps: (Kotter International, 2017)

Step 1: Create a sense of urgency – helping others see the need and urgency of change by communicating to people in the organization about the current state of the organization and the opportunity that the organization can benefit from changing.

Step 2: Creating the guiding coalition – forming a group of people to work together by providing them sufficient power to lead the change.

Step 3: Form a strategic vision and initiatives – elaborate the clear picture of future that differs from the past, and how the organization can make that future happen through initiatives connected directly to the vision.

Step 4: Enlist volunteer army–making change happen in the organization requires the participation of people who are bought in and aware of urgency of driving change, and moving forward to the same way.

Step 5: Enable actions by removing barriers – some obstacles in the organization such as improper processes, structures, and procedures need to be removed in order to increase the opportunity to make the change to a reality.

Step 6: Generate short-term wins– encouraging and energizing individuals in the organization to keep moving to the change can be done by creating visible and unambiguous success.

Step 7: Sustain acceleration– the organization needs to stimulate its people tougher after the first success. Persistence to change efforts is a vital key to make vision come true.

Step 8: Institute change – create the linkage between the new behaviors and success and ensure that individuals in the organization keep doing the new behaviors until they replace their old behaviors.

Even though these steps are very useful for a leader to initiate change in the organization through the efforts and volunteers of people, making change in the organization always comes with the resistance. Hence, understanding techniques for reducing resistance to change is essential for a leader. Robbins, DeCenzo, and Coulter (2015) proposed techniques for reducing resistance to change as follows:

- *Education and communication* – this technique can help individuals see the reason of the change effort.
- *Participation* – this technique allows individuals who have been directly influenced by the change to get involved with the decision-making process. This technique provides individuals to express their feeling and enhance their commitment to the change effort.
- *Facilitation and support* – this technique helps individuals cope with the distress and nervousness related to the change effort.
- *Negotiation* – this technique refers to offering something in exchange to help minimize the resistance to the change effort.
- *Manipulation and co-optation*–this technique involves hidden attempts to influence people in the organization about change.
- *Coercion* – this technique involves the use of pressures or coercion on individuals who resist changing.

Methodology

A total of one-hundred undergraduate students from three different cohorts who registered in leadership course at Faculty of Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon were participants in this present study. Each cohort was asked to divide into 4 different groups to accomplish the change management assignment. There were about 7-8 students per group. All students in each group were required to find the most important campus problem of Faculty of Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon based on each student's perspective. Each student was asked to take the photo of problem and share it to his/her group members. Each group ultimately came up with 7-8 photos of campus problems. After sharing photos and information, all group members needed to apply brainstorming technique for decision making to make their final decision whether which photo (problem) should be selected as the most important of their group. Only one problem was to be chosen among several problems shared by group members.

Once the group had chosen its problem, the group would proceed to the second step of this assignment by searching for ways to solve this problem. Students needed to do the analysis to determine the driving force that made such problem occurred on campus. For example, smoking behavior of students, leaving food utensils before exiting the canteen, and improper behavior of using the toilet were listed as the most important problem needed to be solved urgently. Students also needed to interview individuals who were involved with these problems to find out what caused them to act in that way. Once interviews were completed, each group was required to apply the Kurt Lewin's change management model to describe what needed to be done in order to change individual behaviors that caused the problem. In addition, Kotter's eight steps change model was required to explain the process of change to solve this problem. Reinforcement theory was also needed to use as a management tool to remove undesirable behaviors and encourage satisfactory behaviors to solve the problem. Furthermore, students were asked to apply techniques to reduce resistance to change to ensure that their plans to solve campus problem would be implemented successfully.

Each group was required to prepare their changing plan report to solve the selected problem based on the majority of the group. PowerPoint presentation was conducted and delivered in the classroom of each cohort. After the presentation, changing plan proposals and reports were compiled by the instructor and submitted to the administration as the feedbacks from the university stakeholders.

Criteria to evaluate students' change management project assignments were based on the following principles: 1) the application of related concepts and theories including decision making process, change management model, eight steps of change model, techniques to reduce resistance to change, and motivation theory; 2) analysis of problems including urgency and importance, and attainability; and 3) an organization of presentation.

Results

In this section, list of campus problems based on students' perspectives was proposed. Table 1 indicated that among 12 groups of students from three different cohorts, the most important problems in students' perspectivescomprised of smoking behavior of students, insufficient numbers of seats in canteen, improper behaviors of using the toilet, the broken drinkable water tank, messy shoes in front of the classroom entrance, messy posters stickered in canteen area, dirty area nearby the campus entrance, and leaving food utensils before exiting the canteen. When grouped together, it could be concluded that there were 9

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important problems needed to be solved urgently. The first three problems that received attentions more than one group were smoking behavior of students, insufficient numbers of seats in canteen, and improper behaviors of using the toilet. Two groups from the different cohorts rated these three problems as the most important and urgent problems to be resolved.

Table 1 List of Selected Problems on Campus

Cohorts	Groups	Selected Problems
1	1	The broken drinkable water tank
	2	Messy shoes in front of the classroom entrance
	3	Improper behaviors of using the toilet
	4	Messy posters stickered in canteen area
2	1	Dirty area nearby the campus entrance
	2	Broken sports utilities and equipment
	3	Insufficient numbers of seats in canteen
	4	Smoking behavior of students
3	1	Insufficient numbers of seats in canteen
	2	Improper behaviors of using the toilet
	3	Leaving food utensils before exiting the canteen
	4	Smoking behavior of students

After checking the selected problem of each group from the different cohorts, the next step was to evaluate the understanding of students on change management concepts and theories implementation. Based on evaluation criteria including the application of related concepts and theories including decision making process, change management model, eight steps of change model, techniques to reduce resistance to change, and motivation theory; analysis of problems including urgency and importance, and attainability; and an organization of presentation. Results showed that 41% of 12 groupsfrom three cohorts applied decision-making process as part of their brainstorming to select the most important problem of their group. All of them applied the concepts of change management to solve the problems effectively. Half of them (50%) applied motivation theory as part of their change management plan. To look at analysis of problems in terms of urgency and importance, and attainability, results demonstrated that 75% of them had chosen the urgent and important problems to be solved while 25% of them failed to propose the realistic plans that could really make change happened in the university. For presentation organization, only 41% of them came up with the clear pictures and contents but still used the mismatched color that was unattractive. Hence, these groups of students received the good rate for their presentation. On the other hand, if a group of students failed to methodically organize their presentation in order but still had required information based on the criteria, that group was rated as "fair" for an organization of presentation. Based on these findings, this present study could be concluded that students who participated in this class assignment learned how to put concepts and theories of change into practice, and reflected their visions on how they saw things differently from the university administrators.

Table 2 Results of Evaluation

Cohorts	Groups	Theory Application			Analysis		Organization
1		**Decision**	**Change**	**Motivation**	**Urgency**	**Attainability**	
	1	X	√	√	√	√	**Good**
	2	√	√	X	X	√	**Good**
	3	X	√	√	√	√	**Good**
	4	√	√	X	X	√	**Fair**
2	**1**	X	√	√	√	√	**Fair**
	2	X	√	√	X	X	**Fair**
	3	X	√	√	√	X	**Good**
	4	X	√	√	√	√	**Fair**
3	**1**	√	√	X	√	√	**Good**
	2	X	√	X	√	X	**Fair**
	3	√	√	X	√	√	**Fair**
	4	√	√	X	√	√	**Fair**

Conclusions and Recommendations

This present study aimed to increase the leadership skills of RMUTP students through the assignment of change management. Results found that all of them could apply the concepts of change management to solve the problems effectively. This showed that students learned how to put concepts and theories of change into practice, and reflected their visions on how they saw things differently from the university administrators. This confirms Quinn and Quinn (2016) who suggested integrating leadership development and change management to make organizational success. This approach helps enhance students' qualities specifically vision as all students saw the different problems with their own lens, and learned how to solve the problem together by using related concepts and theories.

For the further studies, students should be encouraged to develop a realistic proposal or project that can be truly utilized to solve the campus problem rather than their brief plans. In addition, need assessment survey should be conducted to gather information about other undergraduate students' perspectives on campus problems. This method can help them gain more information about what needs to be fixed and changed. To help students implement their plans into practice, video clip recording should be conducted to view how successful they are on applying their plans and techniques into a reality. Also, this kind of activity should be replicated for other subjects or different topics of leadership.

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