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KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT & HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT TOWARDS THE ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (AEC 2015)

Sirichai PREUDHIKULPRADAB[1]

Abstract

The fast changing marketplaces, increasing customer expectations, aspiration for work-life balance, and the increasing exchange of international employees across different countries, the regionalization towards the ASEAN 2015 are unavoidable drivers of change that the 21st century business leader and manager has to focus on and attend to in order to further progress organization effectiveness, productivity and business results. This current and future flux of these driving forces critically influences the organization strategy, decision making processes, and the achievement of the organization's bottom-line. Thus, business leaders and managers are challenged to think and act differently and creatively. This research is an attempt to present baseline data that will help determine the next best steps for today's business leaders and managers to level themselves up to the challenges. This study presents (1) the competencies/skills are critical for the 21st century business practitioners in national, international and global village; (2) which competencies/skills are most urgent and needed for the industry; and (3) a set of recommendations for Organization Development Interventions in order to best hone the competencies/skills in view of the challenges. Data was gathered using on-line questionnaires which were distributed to the business practitioners holding current positions ranging from Assistant Managers, Directors up to the Top Executives level. Most of the respondents (n=218) came from the service industry. The major findings reveal that there are five areas which are the most critical competencies/skills required for Thai managers, namely: (1) English language communications skills; (2) innovative and ingenious practices in developing products and services; (3) hands-on execution of business/services for strategic planning and management; (4) process-learning which is a critical skill for coaching and empowerment in developing the human potential; and (5) the open-mindedness for the cultural diversities where business/services are. Lastly, the selection and design of talented and professional development programs need to veer away from the standard or prefabricated training program.

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Introduction

The critical success factors for today's organizations are being prioritized differently and vary according to the nature of organizations and/or industry. In spite of all these varying considerations for the various critical success factors, the shared common goal of these organizations is how to build and sustain high-performing organizations where the contribution of each individual person is a key fundamental.

A high-performing individual business leader and manager isn't just about having the most leading-age vision and a robust business plan, but more so it is the ability of the business leader and manager to quickly recognize the different change drivers ; recognize the gaps and set the priorities for the required critical set of competencies and skills needed for transformative learning and change vis- -vis the alignment of the business strategies and planning that will ensure the optimum delivery of learning opportunities leading to human capital development and talent management.

The 21st century business conditions and practices are constantly evolving and changing, requiring many organizations to revisit their internal company policies, business strategy and planning, HR/HRD practices as well as the implementation of new technologies.

Changing conditions of external factors are unavoidable. One can successfully make a leap to a better level of organization excellence by adaptation to the drivers of external changes or by bringing new ideas, practices, and skills to the organization and/or to the industry at large. The ASEAN Economic Community 2015 (AEC 2015) is one significant driver of change confronting and which has started to impact many companies and organizations operating in Thailand. AEC 2015 impels them to re-assess their current worldviews on how they can holistically manage and lead, not only from the revenue perspectives, but also the development of their employees who are engaged in the various business operations and activities to further organization growth and competitiveness.

Nowadays, some firms/organizations in the service industry have reported the experience of some shortfall of the competencies/skills of their current managers. The biggest challenge is how to identify, understand these gaps; prioritize them and further design into a development plan which when implemented would further strengthen, enhance, and enrich their managers' current set of competencies/skills so that they may even more contribute firm/organization's productivity and performance.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the priorities of Thai managers coming from the service industry as regards the critical set of competencies and skills they need .

2. To prioritize the top five critical set of competencies and skills needed within the next 12 months (2013-2014)

3. To propose a possible transformative learning and change program that would appropriately bridge the gap and further strengthen the required key critical competencies and skills.

Research Questions

1. What are the competencies/skills which Thai business leaders and managers view as most important?

2. Which of the identified core competencies/skills for individual development and holistic management need further development now in the next six months and 12 months?

3. Which are the top priority among the identified sub-competences/skills within the identified core competencies/skills for individual development and holistic management?

4. What possible organization development interventions could be considered in order to further develop the required competencies /skills required for business leaders and managers?

Definition of Terms

Technical competency is the set of competencies/skills covering financial management, innovation management, product and service management as well as crisis management.

Business management includes the set of general business managerial skills and abilities of leaders and managers to ensure the continuity of the business manage and accelerate priority issues while at the same time accomplishing the normal duties and the delivery of results and performance of their team.

Cultural and Diversity management involves the ability for cross cultural and effective communication skills which allow the business leader and manager to manage cross cultural issues and articulate ideas clearly using a second language (non-local language).

People management and development includes the set of abilities of the business leaders and managers to provide coaching that will ensure the development of their employees' thinking and action in becoming socially and ethically responsible as well as to achieve work-life balance.

Holistic management is the total approach primarily aiming at total well-being of employees, ranging from intellectual, professional, emotional, and spiritual growth. This total approach positively leads to improved organizational productivity, better satisfaction and happier employees and moreover leads to the broadening of the employees' perspectives to the different and bigger aspects of the organization matters.

Significance of Study

This study provides the 21st century business leaders and managers, especially those from the service industry, with both quantitative and qualitative data as well as insights on the existing status of the competencies and skills as viewed by current business leaders and managers (nationals or expatriates) working Thailand.

Moreover, this study shows how these required core competencies/skills needed by the business and leaders and managers are prioritized in view of positive transformation and change. Lastly, the study recommends appropriate Organization development interventions that could be utilized into a development plan to achieve greater productivity, effectiveness, and customer satisfaction as well.

Scope and Limitation

The scope of this research focused on businesses in the service industry such as insurance, hospitality, entertainment, advertising, business consulting, tourism, healthcare, leisure & recreation, audit firm, airline, hotel/resort, and media.

The respondents and main research targets were the business leaders and managers who are currently holding the mid-level & senior managerial positions, and those who are in the top executive levels. These are the assistant managers, managers, senior managers, directors, senior directors, managing directors, and the board of directors.

The questionnaire was in the English language and it did not have a corresponding Thai language translation. Thus, this may potentially result in varied understanding of the actual meaning of some of the questions due to the fact that English is a second language for Thai nationals.

Individual Development & Holistic Management

The success and sustainability of business performance, talent development, employee retention, and customer satisfaction are presently among the main concerns/ foci of business organizations. Consequently, the related key questions that organization and business leaders/managers often ask themselves in order to manage these concerns include: (1) What developmental programs and interventions would be appropriate for their organizations, employees and customers, and (2) How could they develop different programs that could deliver optimal benefits for all stakeholders? The answers to these questions are themselves

constantly evolving and varying as brought about by the constant and unpredictable changes in the business conditions and environments. Many researches have been done by organizational experts on individual development and holistic management with topics such as employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and employee retention, among many others. Whatever these various topics or studies are, the main concern always pertain to the main concern of the organization/company to better interact with customers and develop themselves and their employees in view of transformative learning and change. They are also concerned with the scope and depth of the individual development and holistic management program as well as considering which among the many concerns would be the right kind of focus for the 21st century business leaders/manager and organization today.

One of the innovative approaches to learning and development is the amount of researches pertaining to left and right brain development which have been done by psychologists and organization behavioral science experts. Some behavioral scientists and psychologists have even introduced rigorous assessment tools to quantify the functioning of the brain. These assessment tools are utilized for the purposes of allowing people to objectively understand their current thinking patterns and identify key potential areas for developing and transforming their thinking skills so that their actions are more meaningful and further lead to productivity and positive outcomes.

Dudley Lynch (2003) is one of the experts in human brain functioning. He introduced the framework of Human Brain Map with its four quadrants which are the left brain, right brain, anterior brain, and posterior brain. He further elaborated that each quadrant responds to specific event or situation differently, depending on the individual's primary orientation. Figure 1 illustrates the Lynch's Brain Map framework. He mapped out the various human brain functions into the four quadrants which he correspondingly named according to each quadrant's key behavioral characteristic. The Left-brain orientation of the human brain functioning is aimed at regulating and directing (I-control) and getting things done (I-pursue). The Right-brain orientation aims at connecting things together (I-explore and I-preserve). Looking into two Left-Brain spheres, the anterior left brain (I-control) is good at creating roadmap and logical frameworks while the posterior left brain (I-pursue) is highly mobile and has desire for super achieving goals. On the other hand, the anterior Right-Brain orientation (I-Explore) always searches for the unknown future and tends towards open-ended thinking while the posterior right brain (I-Preserve) is good at creating emotionally based situations that fosters good human relationships.

Furthermore, Lynch (2003) indicated that the anterior brain is future-oriented while posterior brain is past-oriented. Both parts are equally crucial for individual development. Each person iterates through each of the brain functioning over time as they think /reflect and act upon changing life situations and experiences. Lynch's Brain Map model then helps organization practitioners to look at the total picture of human brain functioning as key potential areas for consideration in furthering individual development, one that goes beyond the usual metrics and classifications resulting from Intelligence Quotient (IQ) results.
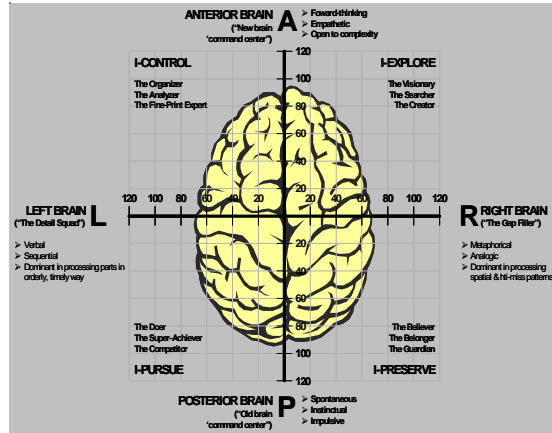
Figure 1. Dudley Lynch Brain Map ®

Source: Adopted from Lynch (2003), Brain Technologies Cooperation, USA Florida

In this study, the key critical success factors identified and prioritized for individual development and holistic management were correlated with human brain map of Lynch (2003). Developing and strengthening these core competencies and skills in preparation for the challenges of the upcoming AEC 2015 targets not only the levels of action/doing but places an equal importance to the levels of the individual's being and knowing. Every organization leader and manager needs to consider all these levels when assessing competencies and skills in view of individual development and holistic management.

The Four Critical Key Success Factors

Four critical key success factors for individual and holistic management and development consist of technical competencies, cultural and diversity management, business management, and people management and development respectively.

Technical competencies

Technical competency skills are essentials for business leaders and managers and these include financial management, innovation management, product/service management and crisis management. Technical competencies are classified as left-brain functions involving analysis, assessment, rationalization, and performance delivery.

Certo (2008) has articulated that one of the supervisory skills which is important for carrying out the tasks is technical skills. He further elaborated that technical skills are embedded into every type of job and when work procedures are created.

Technical competencies differ according to the nature of industry and jobs. For example, employees in business consulting firms need the technical expertise to write the business proposals, create value propositions for clients, and be savvy in project implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Business management

Profit is the usually comes to mind as far as the perception and understanding of business management is concerned. However, more than the acumen for profit making, the competency of business management is also concerned with furthering the personal interests and behaviors that allow one to pursue different and creative activities so as to create innovative business opportunities and bring on more customers for the business.

Business management is among crucial skills for the organization leaders and managers in order to be able to maintain organizational energy produce results and sustainability whether in times of economic certainty or uncertainty. Individuals compete and pursue organizational results when they feel competent, collectively work toward the common goals, are able to set the priorities, and manage expectations with their internal and external business counterparts.

The applications of business management, skills can be translated into the various sets of tasks, responsibilities, practices and results. Typically, many organizations define the scope of business management core competencies/skills either by organization structure and job descriptions. Business Management skills and competencies are functions of the left-brain orientation (Dudley 2003) which values getting things done or achieving results.

A person who is competent with business management skills is highly mobile, competitive, pragmatic and typically the doer. A person who demonstrates these skills typically demonstrates the ability to make things happen, is good at problem solving, and it possesses the sense of urgency. She/he can master the business plan, control the budget (Certo, 2008), maintain the key performance indicators (KPIs) and drive issue resolutions.

Cultural and sensitivity management

Cultural and sensitivity management is considered a soft skill oriented towards anterior right-brain orientation. This set of competencies and skills are essentials for cross-cultural business communication, high tolerance to the ambiguities/unknowns. Certo (2008) emphasized that in this 21st century, in the organizations both employees and managers level would most likely encounter customers and suppliers from cultures that are not their own. With that, the organization must be ready and be prepared for cultural differences.

As the organizations interact with externally stakeholders such as suppliers, suppliers and customers, the facilitation of different ideas and initiating creative

actions can be extremely difficult at times, especially dealing with personal interest, attitudes, perceptions and communication challenges.

With AEC 2015, it is expected that doors will be open to more intensive business interactions among different races, nationalities, and languages, among domestic and international organizations/firms. This is true both for their internal and external stakeholders such as increasing customers coming from various cultural practices and business contexts.

Today cultural and sensitivity management is widely acceptable and competencies/skills are mandated across the regional and global arena. These are translated into specific activities which form part of the employee development program. They include on-boarding sessions on cross-cultural teams for employees who may be assigned to work with cross cultural contexts, English language classes for employees whose jobs require them to use English as a medium for business communications. More mature organizations mandate cultural sensitivity management as a part of their leadership development program for managers and employees transact with international customers and suppliers.

People management and development

Business leaders and managers spend majority of their time dealing with concerns on people management and development. Anderson & Anderson (2010) has articulated that organization functioning is kept alive and mobilized when organizational employees are clear and own the organization contents, referred to as the organization strategies, structure, and mission.

People management and development is a cross-function of the posterior right-brain orientation for relationship management and anterior left-brain orientation for performance management. It is a people & value-centered approach and is crucial for the organization as it preserves nurtures and strengthens the motivation, satisfaction and perception employees and other stakeholders. Employees talk positively about the organization when they feel proud and are loyal as members of the organization. They seek to protect and promote its positive and competitive image for the customers. People management and development is correlated to brand building and management. It is now becoming a growing priority for business leaders and managers and provide considerable resources to invest in it.

Part of people management and development programs is facing the challenge of the growing awareness and need for health and stress management. Many organizations are adopting the concept of work-life balance programs (e.g. yoga, massage, flexible work-hours) in order to provide better opportunities to sustaining the health and wellness of both mind and body. Nowadays, the sources of motivation for productivity go beyond the standards (e.g., salary, bonus, medical care, insurance and etc.) and employees seek more opportunities as regards holistic well-being and care. An equation for motivation today is: motivation = compensation + X, where X includes all the non-monetary privileges and perks that the job has to offer.

It is also the organization's responsibility to continue fostering positive relationships and building trust with their employees. These employees deal with the customers and deliver expected outputs.

Thus, employees are not just considered as organizational assets, but they also embody and articulate the core values of the organization. This then creates an immense impact on the company's customers who patronize its products and services.

Furthermore, the organization also ensures that their employees are socially responsible and contributes to greater scheme of the whole system where the organization finds itself in (society, region, and community) and furthers its competitive lead with the brand it offers.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework as illustrated in Figure 2 shows the dynamic central core "Personal and Organization Purpose" from which the four critical key success factors revolve . These four critical key success factors are:

– Cultural and sensitivity management
– Technical competency
– Business management
– People management and development

The core of the framework is the "Personal and Organizational Purpose" (Tayko and Talmo, 2010). The central core is not just an the organization's expressed corporate vision/mission and strategy. The Personal and organizational purpose can be likened to a musical conductor who orchestrates the musicians (in this case, then   matched with the corresponding connection all the critical key success factors) into a meaningful harmony/congruence of choices and actions at personal and organization levels. Each of these key critical key success factors is with human brain functioning based on the Brain Map of Dudley Lynch (2003). As the person utilizes each of the quadrants through and with the personal and organizational purpose, a specific choice of action is decided.

The Personal and Organizational Purpose becomes the point of reference for reaching decisions such as life choices through the connection and interaction of the personal and organizational purpose with the internal and external realities confronting the individual and/or the organization.

Using this metaphor of the master musical conductor for the framework in this sense, gives dynamism to the personal and organizational processes which become generative from within, more allowing the person to re-calibrate with his/her inner personal choices and decisions and purpose vis-à-vis the organization's

purpose. This may require a letting go of paradigms/mindsets as one re-learns, synthesizes, and re- interprets and takes specific action on the emerging issues/ problems, including known/unknown opportunities and possibilities.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework

Source: Adapted from Dudley (2003), Brain Technologies

Thus taken holistically, the four critical key success factors correspondingly matched with the Human Brain functioning which interrelates with personal and organizational purposes as its point of reference for all its decisions and actions.

Research Methodology

The research was composed of total 15 questions - both close-ended and open-ended questions, ranging from demographic profiles of the respondents (e.g., age range, industry, position in the company, ranking, self-rating against the perceived current business conditions, and business outlook to personal insights pertaining to the research subject matter.

The various competencies were ranked according to the leader/manager's perception of the degree importance of the various skills set in the four critical competency success factors where the range of scores such as: 1=most important; 2=moderately important; and 3= least important. The other questions required the

respondents to prioritize the various competencies into a timeline (now, next 6, 12, 18 and 24 months).

The survey was designed purposefully based and derived from the conceptual framework.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was made possible using email where all the responses of the participating organizations and individuals were gathered utilizing the on-line survey/questionnaire through the SurveyMonkey.com website. Respondents may edit/change any of their responses to the online survey questionnaire prior to clicking the submission button. However, once submitted, the respondents could no longer retrieve nor edit their submitted on- line responses.

Data Analysis

Numerical values were defined for the variables. The results were summarized and analyzed using statistical frequency expressed in percentages. The qualitative data derived from the responses to open ended questions were utilized to tri-angulate the quantitative results.

Findings

The Key findings are presented into four parts: 1) demographic profiles of the respondents, 2) the perceived levels of the top three critical competencies/skills for organizational success, 3) the perceived levels of the respondents on the urgency of critical development needs for the betterment of organizational success and ability to adapt to changing environment and marketplaces, and 4) a set of recommendations for leveraging human potentials and capacity from the per-spectives of Dudley's Brain functioning framework.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The majority of respondents (n=218) were in the age range of 30-39years old (57.00 %.) The second largest group belonged to the age range of 40-49 years old (25.00 %.) as illustrated in the Figure 3.
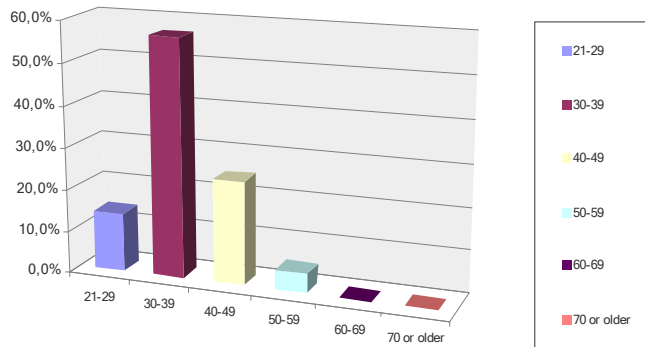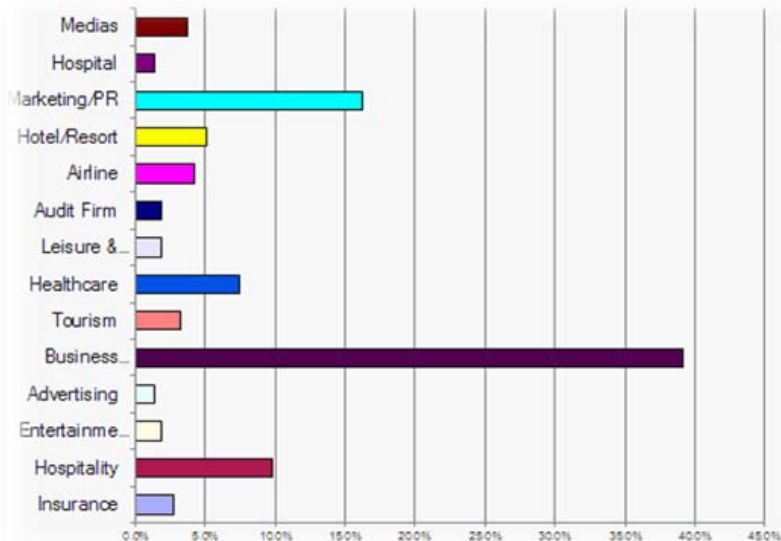
Figure 3. Age group of respondents

Most of respondents work in the Business consulting industry (39%) , followed by marketing/PR (16%), hospitality (10%), healthcare (7%), and hotel/resort (5%). Only 1-2% of the total number of the respondents belonged to the other industries such as the insurance, entertainment, tourism, audit firm, airline, and hospital as illustrated in the Figure 4.

As illustrated below in Figure 5, the majority of the respondents are employed as managers sand assistant managers (68%) while only 13% represented the senior managers.
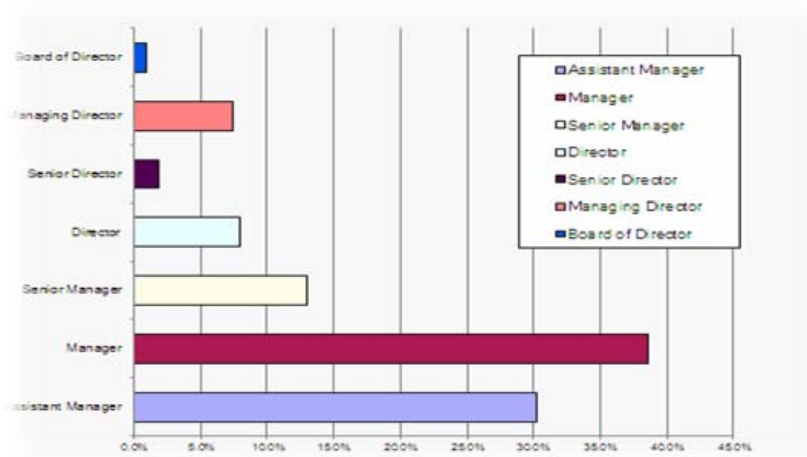
Top critical success factors

The respondents were asked to rate top critical factors in their business and/or industry. The overall responses indicated that top critical success factors were more than three; those are: 1) cultural diversity management, 2) sense of purpose and direction 3) passion for business services and 4) crisis management.
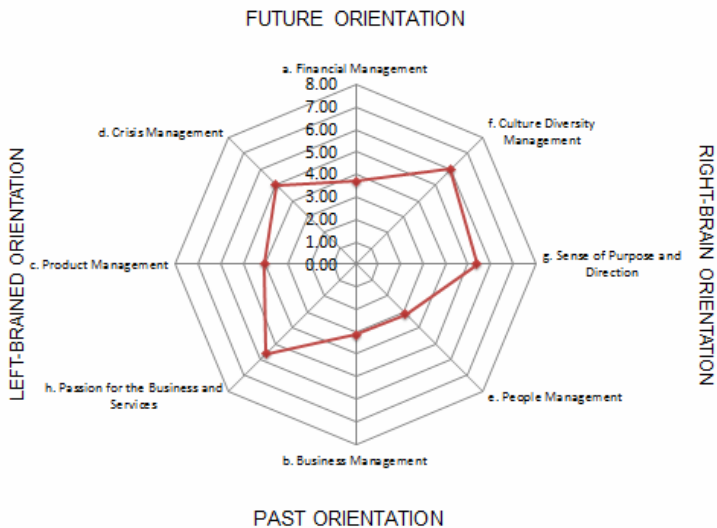

Figure 6. The spider web chart showing the top critical success factors for the current business and industry

When matching the results based on data gathered from the respondents with Dudley's' Brain Map® framework, the findings also showed that from the human brain functioning perspectives, top critical success factors primarily lean towards left-brain and right-brain orientation, with the emphasis on future-orientation. Future orientation corresponds to the anterior left and right brain orientation towards which the data is skewed. (Figure 6) Based on Dudley's Brain Map framework, future-orientation enables the organization to effectively cope with the unknown while ensuring organizational excellence and consistency.

Juxtaposed with the Brain Map®, how would these priorities matter when designed for individual development and holistic management?

Understanding which brain orientation isn't the main objective of article but looking at the brain orientations and juxtapose them with the specific set of actions for professional development matters a whole lot more when considering what matter the most for the 21st century holistic management to be able to development individuals, teams and drive productivity and organizational effectiveness. This is the mode of discussion of the findings as follows.

The results based on the data gathered from the questionnaires and as shown in Figure 6 The spider web chart shows that the green colored outline reveal the core competencies and skills that were ranked as most important and needed to be developed immediately in the next six months for service industry. These skills include: 1) English language skills; 2) Innovative practices in developing and managing products and services; 3) open-mindedness in viewing diverse culture where the business/services are located; 4) hands-on execution of business and service as critical for strategic planning and management; 5) work- life balance as a dimension of quality life in business and services; and 6) process learning as critical in coaching and empowering human potentials.

When these six most important competencies and skills are aligned along with the four quadrants of the Brain Map® as based from the research framework, it can be established that the business leaders/managers in the service industry have recognized the urgent need to develop competencies along the "left-brain" orientation.

These are the development programs on the people development and management (right brain posterior: I- preserve) and anterior right brain (I-explore) in terms of the competencies for Cultural & Diversity Management. Honing these skills and competencies means developing capacities for cultural sensitivity & diversity together with and the ability of organizations to sustain motivation, retain and develop talented employees, and increasing involvement in corporate social responsibility.
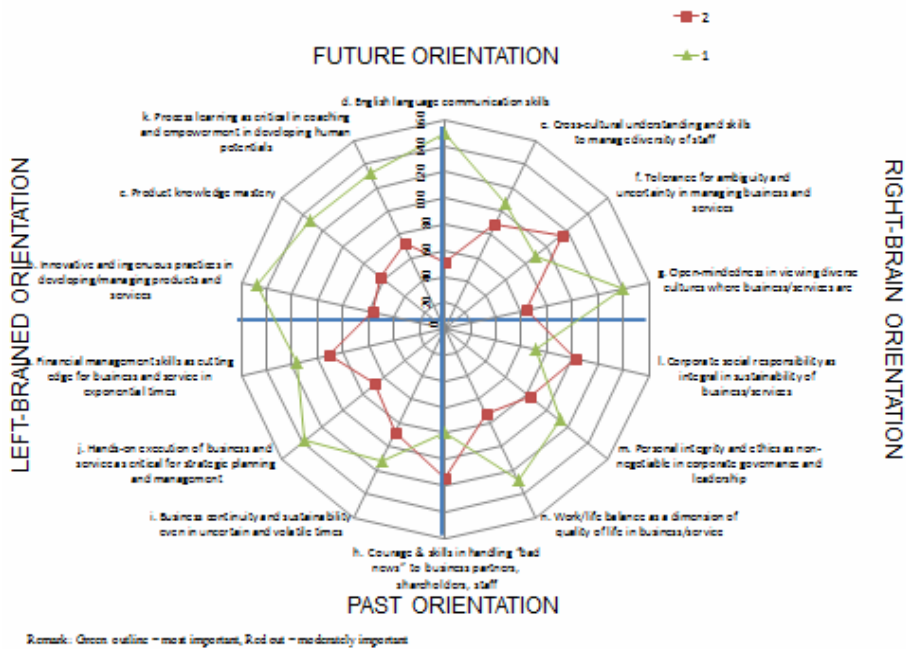
Figure 7: The spider web chart showing the skills and competencies that were ranked as moderately important.

The critical competencies/skills that were ranked as "moderately important" are shown in red outline as illustrated in Figure 7. These competencies and skills include: 1) tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty in managing business/services; 2) courage and skills in handling "bad news" to business partners, shareholders and staff; 3) corporate social responsibility as integral in the sustainability of business/service; and 4) financial management skills as cutting edge for business and service in exponential times. These moderately important skills are to be developed.

Another discovery from the results shows significant gaps that exist between the most important and moderately important rankings. From the data it can be implied that when the development of the skills considered "most important" is accomplished; the respondents/organizations also recognized the need for the development of the skills on right-brain orientation: anterior and posterior with the emphasis on encouraging employees in developing the skill in handing bad news and practicing personal integrity and ethics.

Organization leaders and managers also need to deliver business results such as meeting excellent financial performance for both stakeholders and shareholders. The 23.7% of the respondents felt that they are highly successful in leading and

managing the business/service while 71.6% felt that they are moderately successful in their areas of responsibilities. Looking towards the future, 54.9% of the respondents see the prospect of success in the next 2-5 years and are very confident in achieving their targets while the remaining 44% rated the prospects for the future as "moderate to least confidence" in achieving their business targets.

Technical competencies

There is a need to develop product/service management between now until next 6 months; while beyond six months, it is seen that the organizations should be investing in strengthening innovation and financial management. Crisis management was ranked as least important skill that needs to be developed and invested on for development in next 12 months.

Technical competencies are developed from the left-brain orientation. Based on the responses, the trend also indicated that the company/organization should invest in analytical skills development, with the emphasis on mathematics-based approaches to strengthen decision making and negotiation. Employees should be equipped with return-on-investment (R.O.I) mindsets when it comes to managing products and pursuing excellence in service.

While analytical competency is a much needed skill across different industries, the company/organization needs to begin leveraging its existing innovation capacity and manage the inconsistencies along the way in order to give the opportunity for the organization to grow and experience as it unlearns and re-learns the along the various challenging situations. Innovation need not be something that is totally new, but it also means the newness of innovation which is re-generated or crafted from its current status.

Considering the current reality of uncertainties arising from social changes, environmental changes, and the clashes of ideas and views in politics and business practices, the responses also showed that the organization/company should prepare itself for crisis management. Crisis management is not only about reactive problem solving on product and service issues, but more so it is the Proactive mindset and stance so that the company/organization is ready to confront or manage crisis caused by natural disasters; unconventional political demonstrations and many others factors and events which impact the ability to continue normal business.

The company/organization must have a set of concrete framework and a toolkit for crisis management that seeks to ensure maximum employee safety and prevent loss/damage business properties and utilities.

Cultural & diversity management

English language and literacy skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing skills) for effective communication were ranked as highest that needs attention and investment by more than 90% of respondents. This suggests that the success of the organization/company in competing in business arena also depends on the

ability of their employees to communicate fluently in the English language. The responses also indicated that this set of competencies/skills need to be addressed urgently within the next six months.

In terms of developmental activities, the respondents also suggested that learning by engaging employees with cross-cultural team experiences will give them the opportunity to develop and sharpen these skills and at the same time positively influence their mindset/perspectives towards the appreciation of cultural differences and further communication effectiveness.

Business management

More than 80% of the respondents have indicated that successful management of business results are derived from the ability of employees to master business issues and at the same time have the ability to discern and escalate the issues to key stakeholders and customers for corresponding resolutions. While issue management and escalation was ranked as the second most important competencies/skills, the respondents also suggested that the discipline in maintaining the execution of projects and tasks is also crucial, needing further skills development between now until next six months.

Business management as core competencies/skills is interdependent with the business acumen skills but more so it is related to the ability of the persons and organization to positively motivate others to accomplish tasks and deliver the desired results.

People management and development

More than 89% of the respondents strongly agreed that there is the need for the development now in the areas of employee coaching and empowerment as well as personal integrity and ethics - as an integral part of everyone's role and responsibility (Figure 8).

Encouraging the organizational members to participate in social responsibilities i.e., community service and development is an ideal but not viewed as critical and urgent when compared with the results obtained for employee coaching and empowerment, personal integrity and ethics and work-life balance which are priorities to be attended to within the next 6 months.

The focus on social responsibility, especially community services will be developed in the next 12 months as illustrated in Figure 9 indicated by the green bar with a circle.
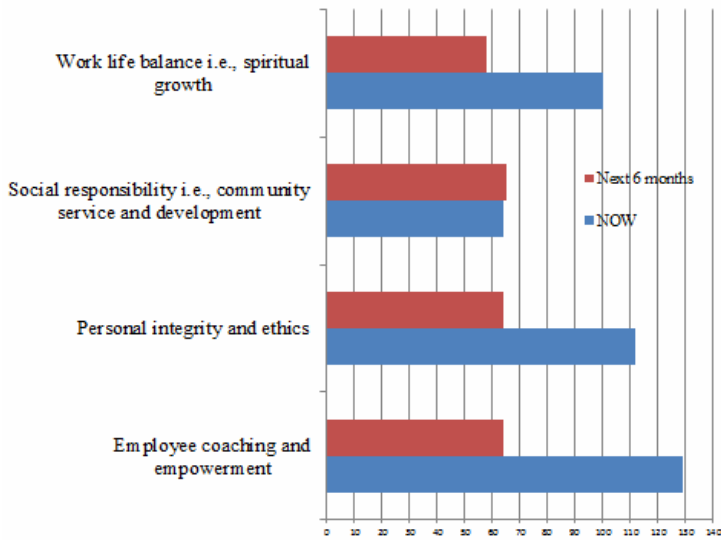
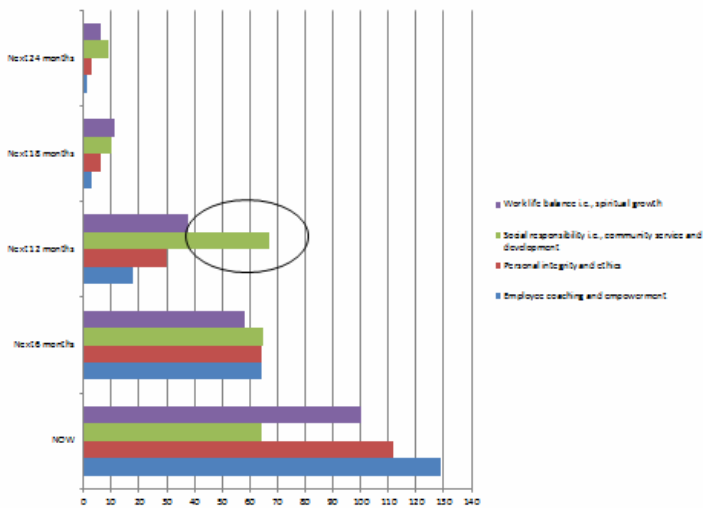*Figure 8: Bar Graph showing main area for people management and development between now & next 6 months*

Figure 9. Competencies to be developed in the next 12 months

Conclusion

General thoughts on the 21ˢᵗ century competencies and skills for business practitioners

Organization practitioners in the service industry shared additional feedback on the need for approaching the development of core competencies/skills by increasing organization capacity, most of which are concerned with enriching experiences for employees to unlearn and re-learn different business cases as part of the developmental and transformational programs intended for self-improvement and change.

Apart from the aforementioned competencies/skills (e.g., technical competencies, business management, cultural diversity management and people management and development), the findings also implied that the organizations should begin creating a culture of change as a strategy for strengthening the organizational capability and increasing its capacity for readiness for change.

Positive thinking for productive action was also a suggestion given by the leaders and managers as one developmental opportunity for the organization. Positive thinking is viewed as having inner connection with personal attitudes, mindset, and action at large. It is the fundamental development of one's personal purpose and finding its alignment with the organizational purpose.

Finally, as the organizations continue dealing with cross-cultural boundaries, organization practitioners felt that cross-cultural and diversity management should be translated into specific learning activities in school, starting at primary school level and beyond. That means that all levels of education should aim not only at preparing new generations to succeed only on the area of academic excellence, but also provide learning experiences so that the future workforce may be fully aware and ready they positively engage with peers, colleagues, institutions in their home country and across cultural boundaries.

Based on the findings, the 218 business practitioners recognized the need for the top five development changes programs for their organizations, namely : (1) cross-cultural and diversity management with the emphasis on improvement of English language proficiency particularly for Thai business practitioners; (2) driving innovation on product and service is felt as critical as the ability to master communication in the English language; (3) being more "hand-on" professionals could promote positive engagement while enabling business practitioners to initiate newer ideas when strategizing and conceptualizing the future state; (4) process learning as critical for coaching and empowering human potentials which increases observation skills for young business practitioners in terms of how they interact with peers, colleagues, bosses, suppliers and customers. Finally, being on purpose as individual persons with strong sense of connection with the organization and being able to process one's thinking holistically can positively re-shape the views and actions that impact organizational productivity and effectiveness.

Recommendations for Organization Development Interventions

The following recommendations are based on the survey findings and are aimed at multi-dimensional-levels for the development of the competencies and skills.

Level I: Individual: increase personal activities where one is given a chance to meet with different groups of people, races and traditions. Short-term overseas assignment (2-3 months) and/or overseas business trips (2 weeks) could broaden a person's perspectives and experiences. For English language skills development, start with writing everything in English regardless if there would be initial errors because eventually constant practice helps the person to begin activating right-brain development and enables him/her to overcome the personal comfort zone. Attending English courses that emphasize applied learning/workshop-based approach is highly recommended.

It is also recommended on the other hand, that when an English-native speaker communicates with a non-English speaker, the former must deem it better to simplify the words or try to make it as universal avoiding the use of slang and idioms that may cause a non-native speaker of English to misunderstand or not understand at all. For example, use simpler words like: "utilize" to "use", "prototype" to "sample", and "Café Americano" to "Black coffee". These simple practices could help the person manage better communication for actions and results..

Likewise, local people should avoid writing long sentences and/or complex sentences which may distort the original meaning by breaking them down into shorter sentences. The bullet point-based writing may be good start for local employees who first start English communication with English-native speaker.

With regards to the need for better work-life balance for spiritual growth , the person may start learning breathing techniques, meditation, and undergo a diet and exercise program for physical fitness.. Together with these, some activities may involve the visits to some remote areas to allow self to experience some quiet time to rejuvenate personal energies. These non-work related activities allow the person to revisit his/her "personal calling and values" from within; it is a process of reconnecting between self-purpose and calling along with looking at the current realities - "ways things are". This is not necessarily a practice of about letting go but how a person can make positive difference for self and others and at the same time continuing to be a happy and purposeful-driven person.

Level II: Team: Create work environments where everyone feels that the workplace truly promotes creativity and innovation and not just the compliance to rules and orders. The 100% +/- 20 rules may be employed where everyone is encouraged to add 20% creativity and innovation on the current standard (100%) while allowing self to make mistakes by subtracting 20%. Whenever employees perform at 100%, they are considered as highly successful performers and whenever employees perform at 80%, they are considered consistently good performers. By doing so, employees don't feel being watched when they make mistakes, but they are made to feel positively encouraged to make courses of actions and

corrections as they master their tasks. Most importantly, they feel trusted that they can manage to even deliver "bad news" or report mistake/errors to their managers while becoming more responsive and responsible to what they do.

Manager and subordinates may also consider employing projects-based activities for cross-learning between manager and subordinate. The goal is to allow self to see the challenges and the role from a different view/perspective. To begin with this, the manager employs "project thinking" where a subordinate acts as project manager and the manager acts as team member. The project manager gives feedback to team member and meanwhile seeks feedback from team members regarding matters/ things which could be improved. This creates a more hands-on experience for everyone in the team, helping one another to complete the whole perspective instead of being in "silo" kind of view.

It is recommended that with regards to product/service knowledge training sessions, emphasis should be given to the involvement of subordinates so that these learning sessions would provide opportunities for them to reflect on how they would like to unlearn, re-learn and learn,. Management of expectations is important as part of the delivery of the training. The 80/20 rule should be used where 20% is theory/content-based learning and 80% is experiential learning i.e. learning from actual cases. Any learning session pertaining to products matters and services should also be a venue for participants to feel that they can learn to master the issues in any problem solving situation.

Level III: Organization: Holistically, the organizational leaders at the senior and top management levels must create the right kind of work environment that promotes self-initiative that contributes to company's long-term competitiveness. In addition, regular company activities such annual outings maybe venues not only fun, entertainment, and interpersonal bonding but may also be a time to co-create the deeper meaning and sense of pride and commitment towards the company.

Cross-cultural and diversity-based lessons for leadership development programs should be built into the training package. Part of these learning strategies should also adopt "real-time" learning sessions where talented individuals spend some time working with cross-cultural individuals and teams from different organizations for the purpose of increasing the awareness of cross cultural realities and diversity management. HR/HRD managers may consider collaborative training programs developed from shared best practices in their industry in order to further enhance people capabilities and capacities.

Acknowledgments

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