ความเป็นผู้นำในการนำพาสถาบันอุดมศึกษาไทยสู่ความเป็นนานาชาติ: เสียงสะท้อนจากหน่วยงาน

Leadership of Internationalisation at a Higher Education Institution in Thailand: Voices from Within

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยชิ้นนี้มุ่งศึกษามุมมองของผู้บริหารในการนำพาสถาบันอุดมศึกษาของรัฐแห่งหนึ่งของไทยสู่ความเป็นนานาชาติ ผู้วิจัยได้วิเคราะห์ความเป็นผู้นำซึ่งมีอิทธิพลต่อความพัฒนาความเป็นนานาชาติของสถาบันอุดมศึกษาโดยการสัมภาษณ์ผู้บริหาร คณาจารย์ และเจ้าหน้าที่อาวุโสที่สังกัดหลักสูตรนานาชาติ 3 แห่งแบบกึ่งโครงสร้าง (semi-structured interviews) นอกจากนี้ยังศึกษาวรรณกรรมที่เกี่ยวกับกลยุทธ์และปัจจัยสำคัญที่มีผลต่อความเป็นผู้นำ รวมถึงการพินิจบริบทเฉพาะทางวัฒนธรรมในระดับท้องถิ่นโดยเฉพาะสถาบันอุดมศึกษาในประเทศไทย งานวิจัยนี้กล่าวโดยสรุปว่า แม้ว่าสถาบันจะมีความก้าวหน้าในการก้าวเข้าสู่ความเป็นนานาชาติ ผู้บริหารมีกระบวนการการทำงานสู่ความเป็นนานาชาติที่ชัดเจนยิ่งขึ้น การให้ทุกกลุ่มงานมีส่วนร่วมและมีการบูรณาการให้มากขึ้น เพื่อให้ผู้ปฏิบัติงานรู้สึกว่าได้รับการเสริมพลัง มีแรงจูงใจในการทำงาน และมีความรู้สึกเป็นเจ้าของงานที่มุ่งสู่ความเป็นนานาชาติ

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Abstract

This study examines perceptions of the leadership of the internationalisation of one public higher education institution in Thailand. Based on documentary research and data from semi-structured interviews with senior leaders, lecturers and staff involved in 3 undergraduate international programmes (IP), it presents an analysis of the leadership dimensions which influence the progress of the internationalisation of higher education (IHE) of the institution in question. It situates the study within the dense global literature which addresses the strategies and factors considered crucial to effective IHE leadership, while addressing the unique local and cultural context of such an institution in Thailand. It concludes that while significant progress has been made in IHE by the institution in question, leaders should consider introducing greater clarity, inclusivity, and integration so that employees feel empowered and motivated to contribute towards, and 'own', the expansion of the internationalisation agenda. The study also determines that the dimension of 'situation' is paramount in terms of how leadership functions, and that bureaucracy, in particular, strongly influences leadership trends and models within the institution.

Keywords: Leadership, Internationalisation of higher education, Public higher education institution, Thailand

Introduction

The changes witnessed in the higher education (HE) sector over the last two decades have been nothing short of seismic. Universities have become more business-orientated, income-driven, and market-aware. New public management tools and approaches have been implemented in order to increase the efficiency of operations (Fry, 2018). Competition for greater standing in the world order of quality institutions has led to a greater emphasis on research publication outputs, with national, regional, and global rankings casting a strong influence over institutional strategies. Measures of success have become central to the mission of universities, across all contexts, in both developed and developing countries. As students have increasingly come to be seen as customers, so universities have developed human resources catering to the demands of high-quality educational services which deliver results. The pressures of competition and of financial security have driven universities to make changes which arguably transform their raison-d'etre. Traditionally perceived as bastions of society and representative of the 'public good' in most countries, the tertiary sector's role has become more blurred. Globalisation and the neoliberal world order have forced institutions to radically reposition their very function in society (De Wit, 2017).

The privatisation of the higher education sector and the emphasis on business performance has had a profound influence on the extent to which, and how, universities deliver 'internationalisation'. Student mobility programmes are seen to be

a key component of a university's internationalisation. Whether this refers to incoming or outgoing students, the economic as well as educational benefits of such movements of students are well-documented. International programmes in non-English speaking countries have proliferated, attracting students in-country who prefer not to study overseas as well as students from other countries. The higher fees attached to such programmes help to address the cuts to government funding which institutions have faced in recent years. IHE has also led to what is commonly referred to as 'internationalisation at home', where specific efforts are made to incorporate international dimensions into the curriculum and into the campus experience at large (Knight, 2010). IHE also encompasses student and academic personnel exchanges, and the drive towards research collaborations with international partners in the hope of publishing in top global journals. All these aforementioned dimensions of internationalisation feed into the modern university's imperative to enhance its institutional brand, market position and performance.

In order to move with the times, universities across the world have had to adapt working practices. More business-like approaches have required different skills and competencies. In many cases, institutions have recruited professionals from outside the higher education sector, often from industry, to inject a more corporate approach (Bolden et al., 2008). Alternatively, existing members of staff have been offered professional development in order to acquire new skills. Leaders across the world have had to

develop new ways of working, of designing international strategies, and of gaining the support of a complex range of stakeholders both within and outside the workplace. Leadership and buy-in into the IHE of any given institution is crucial for its implementation and success. However, leadership is required at many different levels within higher education. Even within faculties, there are department leaders, not to speak of the directors who lead on specific international programmes. Then, at the level of the academic, whose role is to teach and research as a scholar, there is an increasing expectation for such members to also contribute towards the international dimension, whether through embedding it within the curriculum, or through leading on specific international exchanges, visits or conferences and seminars.

Globalisation and increased mobility of academics and students has brought about a new international culture on university campuses. Major challenges, therefore, face leaders of IHE in institutions, from trying to navigate the changing academic culture, to ensuring the university carries out its moral responsibilities to society, and to managing competition in the local and global education market. Competing with these demands is management of people within the institution, the need to get people on board in an inclusive manner; to motivate and inspire. In many institutions, hierarchical and bureaucratic structures remain despite the rapid changes that have taken place. Engaging effectively with people to achieve change and productivity has never been more critical than in educational environments (Drew, 2010). As much of the literature

suggests, many academics need to feel empowered in order to contribute more positively to the internationalisation agenda. Integrated working is essential for progress and leaders are responsible for creating a unity of purpose and buy-in from a diverse range of actors within the institution. Without such skilled leadership, staff will feel disenfranchised and uninvolved, and unable to offer the support needed in terms of execution of IHE strategies. Leaders need to fully connect to, and understand the realities on the ground, and to listen to the different voices.

Thailand' s higher education sector is no different from any other in facing the challenges of how to effectively internationalise, and how to lead such a process. This paper studies the responses of key actors involved, at different levels and in different ways, in the process of IHE within one public Thai university. It seeks to give voice to those who are responsible for driving the agenda at senior levels, as well as those who are expected to follow such strategies. It sets out to determine the main opportunities for enhancing the internationalisation of such institutions, and to recommend areas for further research.

Research Objective

This research aims to respond to the following research questions:

1. How are leadership dimensions influencing the internationalisation of the institution?

2. What insights gained may enhance or hamper the leadership of the internationalisation process in university settings?

Theoretical Framework

The study will draw on Knight's (2010) definition of IHE as "a process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education". The theory of distributed leadership, expounded by Jones et al. (2014), is adopted to examine the perceptions of the participating actors of how effectively leaders are tapping into contextual factors and encouraging leadership networks for knowledge sharing. Distributed leadership has gained traction as a means of shifting away from reliance on traditional hierarchically structured decision-making. Woods et al. (2004) refer to an emphasis on groups of people rather than individuals and identify five variables for distributed leadership – a context of trust, a culture of respect for expertise, a process of change and development that involves many levels of engagement in collaborative activity and an agreed process to resolve conflict (Woods et al., 2004, p. 448). In this study, we will examine to what extent the theory of distributed leadership is applied within the Thai context, and how such an approach may encourage greater active participation and inclusive networks that can contribute towards progress in IHE. The research will focus on leadership specifically related to the management and administration of international programmes, and the manner in which bureaucracy influences the leadership process.

Instruments and Methods

This study draws on 13 semi-structured interviews with the deans, lecturers and senior administrative staff involved in 3 undergraduate international programmes and a senior leader in international affairs at a Thai public university. The aim was to investigate participants' perceptions of the roles of university leaders in the internationalisation processes and what they saw as practices that work, issues and challenges. Each hour-long interview was semi-structured based on a set of established questions relevant to two main groups – senior university leaders and leaders and lecturers involved at the faculty international programme level. Interviews were transcribed and coded to determine specific themes and sub-themes of the different leadership dimensions mentioned and discussed during the interviews. The thematic analysis also serves to highlight differences in responses depending on the roles of the respondents (Deans, lecturers, and administrative staff). While the study was set in Thailand it is anticipated that the findings may have implications for other university settings, especially in developing countries, given some similarities in the higher education environment globally.

Research Participants

The participants for this research came from three selected undergraduate international programmes (IPs) at the public Thai university under study. These programmes will remain anonymous, although the sharing of a certain level of detail is essential in order

to understand the evidence provided by the respondents. To ensure confidentiality, descriptions of these IPs will avoid overtly specific information related to the programme content itself. General details of the 3 IPs are provided below. The exclusion of postgraduate IPs in this research is due to the fact that the current roster of undergraduate degree programmes provides more choices than the postgraduate degrees in terms of sampling IPs in their varying stages of maturity and longevity. Variability in IPs' years of existence will provide rich comparative data in terms of developments or changes over time.

Three IPs, two (2) of which are social sciences degrees and one (1) natural science, were chosen based on the following criteria:

- programme is taught entirely through the medium of English
- programmes' existence are in varying stages within a 5- to 30 years span (natural science degree as the youngest at 5 years, and the 2 social science degrees at 15 years and 30 years)
- programme provides students with rich internship, research, and international exposure experiences
- has international student body (with at least 10-15% international students)
- faculty staff includes foreign lecturers

Table 1

Table of Participants

Research Participants	Number
Group 1 :University leaders	
Senior executive in International Affairs	1
Senior executive who previously held a role in International Affairs	1
Group 2 :Programme Managers and Faculty	
Dean of Faculty	2
Director of Programme	2
Deputy Director of Programme	2
Lecturers	4
Senior Student Recruitment and Administrative Staff	1
Total	13

Literature Review

The transformation of universities has inevitably led to a transformation in what kind of leadership is required to navigate such changes. For the purpose of this study, we will divide the literature into three main categories. Firstly, concepts of leadership and management from a social identity perspective, within the changing context of a more corporate higher education sector. Secondly, key challenges facing our leaders in terms of internationalising the institution, together with the skills and competencies considered essential to tackling these issues, and

thirdly, we will focus on the Thai context and the main trends and themes in the literature on leadership of IHE within Thailand.

De Wit (2017) claims that one of the major obstacles to the effective internationalisation of higher education is the lack of competent senior leadership. Undoubtedly, it is a challenging area during transformative times for the sector. Bolden et al. (2008; 2012) offer comprehensive studies of how leadership is viewed within the institutional context of UK universities, during times of great change. It establishes that there are two main kinds of leadership – that which belongs to academics and their leading role in their fields of teaching and research, and that of the managerial roles of those in charge of the processes, strategies, and professional services. Bolden et al. (2008; 2012) favour a social identity approach to leadership, where leaders are seen to be representing and supporting staff's interests. Importance is given to how effective leadership allows others to see a clear purpose in supporting the cause and in working towards a common vision. Their study suggests that academics, by nature critical, remain skeptical when it comes to the more managerial leadership styles and processes. These are practices which have been transposed from the private sector of course. According to this research, a shift towards creating a keener sense of identity and purpose would yield more benefits than a procedure-heavy approach which seems to give precedence to point scoring. Values and identities need to be at the heart of any effective leadership in such institutions, according to these authors, or the institution will risk alienating those it needs to implement many of

the internationalisation strategies. This work is representative of a substantial body of literature which focusses on leadership's role in galvanizing teams through a strong sense of purpose and identity. It provides us with a foundation on which insights from interviewees in this research can be explored later in the findings and analysis section.

The body of literature on leadership specific to IHE has grown in recent years, as the importance of strong and inclusive leadership has become more evident. Larsen and Al-Haque (2016) study the contradictions which sometimes exist, within leaders, between clashing ideals of what 'internationalisation' should represent. According to their findings, leaders feel the pressures of neoliberalism and the need to gain economic competitive advantage, especially when their own ideals of internationalisation as representing encounters with different beliefs and cultures are challenged. Altbach (2015) supports this notion that higher education leaders tend to tackle the internationalisation of their institutes for different reasons, ranging from the social and economic, to the cultural, academic, and political. Indeed, Steir (2004) refers to internationalisation as being bound to three ideologies: instrumentalism, educationalism, and idealism; higher education as a means to economic growth, higher education as engaging with difference leading to personal growth and finally the ideology that higher education should lead to a more equitable world. According to the author, most leaders adhere to the belief that IHE should aim at creating a more socially just world. This, of

course, presents deep tensions when the same leaders are faced with the neoliberal drive of IHE towards competition and commodification.

While these works examine the notions of how leadership is affected by views of internationalisation within an increasingly competitive and corporate environment, there is also an abundance of research which seeks to pinpoint the actual and concrete skills and competencies needed by leaders in order to successfully cope with driving the IHE agenda within and outside their institutions. Shiel and McKenzie (2008), for instance, offer a critical discussion of the actual skills and competencies that leaders of IHE require today to ensure internationalisation is an integrated process. There is a need for IHE leaders to keep abreast of international developments, to remain culturally aware, and to be able to act diplomatically, with effective negotiating and networking skills. Leaders need to be adept at connecting with others, to influence the IHE agenda internally, as well as to build partnerships internationally. The needs of leaders in international education in Australia and Europe form the basis of the study of Murray et al. (2014). Innovation skills and the ability to broker relationships are seen to be lacking and are considered as important leadership qualities to those surveyed in this report. Simon (2014) emphasizes how successful IHE leadership stems from the skillful creation and sustaining of a 'team responsibility' or set of 'collective action' (Bogotch & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2010). Leaders who work energetically with others, often including a wide range of players, in the internationalisation of their institutions, tend to

experience firm outcomes. This concept of inclusivity and integrated team working proves to be crucial in the findings of this paper.

Much of the literature on leadership skills for effective IHE also gives prominence to internationalisation strategies, and the importance of highly relevant and shared planning. Taylor (2004) presages much of the focus on strategy in the more recent literature in his assessment, two decades ago, of four US universities. The monitoring of such strategies and effective communication are highlighted as areas for improvement, even at the most internationally successful of institutions. Shiel (2007) describes the need for leaders to present a "persuasive and compelling rationale for change", embedded in a consultation process with staff, and resulting in the concrete output of a "strategy document and action plan". This is the bedrock of successful leadership of internationalisation – an integrated, inclusive, consultative approach which enjoys the 'buy-in' of both academic and administrative staff and which has, as a goal, a set of agreed and documented strategic steps.

Many scholars in Thailand have tackled the need for more effective leadership in a rapidly changing, more autonomous and accountable higher education sector. While still relatively scarce, works on leadership specifically in IHE in Thailand mirror those of the global literature. University autonomy in Thailand in recent decades has highlighted the need for a different kind of leader to those who went before. With new executive powers of finances, staffing and the curriculum, Lao (2015) draws attention to the

pressures of decision-making and the inexorable 'pull' of the international institutional rankings. Lao acknowledges that while "university leadership has been a major topic in discussions of university autonomy, critical examination of what leadership is and what it can be used for has been lacking". Her assessment of "limited leadership vision" is echoed elsewhere in the literature. Chaichankul (2006), in her case study of a Rajhabat University in Thailand, emphasizes how crucial the university president's role is in creating a compelling vision for the internationalisation of the institution. Clarity of communication. "articulation", is required, as well as advocacy and ability to implement, not only broad IHE strategies for the institution, but clear and concrete action plans which accompany these grand statements. This is supported by Sinjumpasak and Mhunpiew's (2022) study. As with other scholars writing on leadership in the Thai education sector, Sinjumpasak and Mhunpiew (2022) present their findings in the form of a proposed model as to how effective leadership should work in Thailand, in this case focusing on internationalisation strategies. The identification of key leadership factors is common to much of this approach. In this case, a lack of know-how of how IHE leadership should work is a striking feature of the findings. Fry (2018) describes the newfound autonomy of institutions in Thailand within the context of reform, also leading to the call for "a new set of competencies for teachers and administrators". It is also worth noting that perceptions of what 'makes a good leader' in IHE varies from context to context (Rhein, 2013). Rhein studies the trends in cross-cultural dimensions

of leadership in the context of internationalisaton and pertinently points out the role and "unique attributes of culture" in perceptions of educational leadership. From power distance to collectivism in Thai society, culture plays a role in how people view leadership. Indeed, perceptions of leadership vary from individual to individual regardless of culture at times, a fact that should inform any research, including that of this author, when respondents' views on IHE leadership are taken into account.

Results and Discussions

Analysis of the data from interviews gives rise to two key themes from the respondents' perceptions of the interplay between leadership roles and the institution's internationalisation agenda:

1. leadership style and decision- making, and internal relationship dynamics affecting IHE

2. external pressures affecting leadership of IHE

The overriding concerns of those interviewed was the manner in which leaders actually lead internationalisation of higher education initiatives. The style of decision- making and the way in which this affected the academic environment and working relationships within the universities was what many saw as determining the success of the institution's internationalisation agenda. In turn, this led to observations about the importance of decision- making continuity, inclusive and integrative communications within bureaucratic structures, and motivational qualities of leadership.

Another overarching theme is the role of external pressures acting on leaders in IHE, the tension between economic imperatives and the need for maintaining quality, as well as competition from other institutions both in Thailand and beyond its borders.

1. Leadership style, decision- making and internal relationship dynamics affecting IHE

Top-down leadership and continuity

When it comes to decision- making related to IHE strategies and priorities at the institution, all respondents attested to the top- down approach, where decisions are made at the top and to be executed by those down below the hierarchy. It was clear from all the respondents that leadership and decision-making of IHE remains the sole responsibility of the leader of the Faculty. One interviewee, when asked about the institution's position and role in terms of driving the IHE agenda, admitted that " I don't know what they are thinking and doing". Others responded largely to the same effect. Statements such as "all decisions are from the deans", "we have committees that can suggest but overall approval is with the dean, even strategies, priorities all with the dean," and " decisions are not translated to the lecturers' level, there is very little communication," emphasise a gulf between decisions made at the top level of the faculty and the rest of the teaching and administrative staff. Most foreign lecturers denied being consulted or being involved in anything other than their course teaching.

“The decisions are in the hands of the managers, the deans, which directions to go. I am just a foreigner here, so I just do my job as a teacher.”

Consistent with the aforementioned literature on cultural forces within higher education in Thailand, it was also claimed that the recruitment of leaders is frequently conducted through a patronage system, rather than being based on the individual’s specific experience, skills and competencies for the role, including leadership skills for internationalisation purposes. The institutional system of appointing leaders on a limited, often three-year basis is blamed for a lack of continuity when it comes to internationalisation policies. It was noted that international partnerships, which rely so heavily on a continuum of communication and trust, are often in danger of being upended with the arrival of each new leader. In a culture where personal contacts and networks are paramount, when one leader’s tenure ends, so do those connections. One respondent who has held several senior roles at both institutional and faculty level explained:

“What I can see as a problem is continuity. A lot of the networks or contacts are with me even now that I have left. So, to bridge understanding between the old team and the new team is most important. We keep the continuity of international affairs if we retain the friendships/relations”.

Another senior respondent spoke about the constant changes which hamper longer-term planning:

> When the dean changes, everything changes, so strategies, motivations change. One dean comes in and is asked to apply for funding and the next dean finds out there is no more funding. Funding has been reallocated. The major change comes from the leadership, constant adapting to new leadership... it's absolutely all about each dean's perspectives.

This confirms what we have already explored in the literature; social identity in leadership, as explored by Bolden et al (2008; 2012), extends to the continuation of successful leadership decisions. Continuity is one aspect of this social identity and remains key to the progress and longevity of international efforts in the higher education sector. Without more seamless transitions of leadership, the decision-making itself may come to be perceived as based more randomly on any given individual's whims or, in some cases, a desire to forge a new path 'just for the sake of it'. This skepticism by academics, noted earlier by Bolden et al. (2008), only deepens when it comes to the more managerial leadership styles and processes, compared to the academic or educational leadership approaches.

Bureaucracy and communication

From a distributed leadership theoretical perspective, bureaucracy only seems to hamper effective leadership and guidance. Indeed, the context of trust, respect, openness to processes of change, engagement in collaborative activity at different levels and agreed processes to resolve conflict, all seem to meet resistance when it comes to the bureaucratic barriers erected within institutions.

Greater integration within international programmes would lead to more powerful outcomes according to the respondents. Consultations with lecturers is claimed to be minimal, resulting in feelings of powerlessness and lack of ownership of the IHE process among faculty members. We are reminded of the call of Shiel and McKenzie (2008) and Murray et al. (2014) for leaders who are not only able to connect with people but also determined to broker such relationships in order to push forward the IHE agenda. Participants in the interviews were all of the view that a top-down leadership approach to IHE tends to be unproductive, cumbersome, inefficient and complicated. However, it was not always clear if this was seen as a personal failing of the leader or a symptom of the bureaucratic system itself. One respondent bemoaned the committee system for all decision-making related to a student exchange programme with a partner university in the US:

> I don't know why we have a lot of committees and are then kept waiting for these committees to convene and decide. Why make our process complicated? Why can we not have just a senior staff lead on this? (The university overseas) also has a process but they don't have committees.

The New Public Management reforms of Thai public higher education have evidently not succeeded in softening intransigent bureaucratic structures. Frustration with administrative processes, regulations and structures and the limited power of leaders to simplify, streamline or enact change, clearly frustrates some of the respondents. The difficulty to spearhead widespread

changes as a leader is seen as a cultural aspect which remains difficult to challenge, however pro- active the person is. One respondent from the natural sciences- focussed international programme was particularly candid about the way in which status and politics prevent a more effective leadership of IHE at the institution:

> It is the administrative side; they never stop and think about making it simpler. I don't see this changing in the future - it is the politics. It will be rare for anyone to initiate change. And if someone comes in who wants to change things, it will be hard work. People don't want to change their practice.

One must ask, at this point, whether the normative nature of Knight's (2010) definition and concept of IHE as "a process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post- secondary education" is relevant to all contexts. Integration is a key element of Knight' s concept and yet what integration actually means, and how it is interpreted by actors in different contexts, is less clear. Culturally, the concept of clear integration and well- defined delineations of roles coming together seamlessly for a unified purpose is a very administrative, efficient, and arguably Western approach. Not all cultures adhere to the same interpretation. Knight's definition leans towards the prescriptive, while the evidence of this research points to the constantly evolving processes of IHE as it develops through human interaction in unique, culturally specific environments. What is clear, however, from the voices on the ground, is that greater

integration should start with a leadership mindset which finds ways of overcoming the bureaucratic barriers and which seeks to share and listen before collective decisions are made.

Motivation, Inclusion and Empowerment

The research findings also endorsed the claim in the broader literature that the most successful institutions are the ones whose leaders support internationalisation by dynamically working with other key actors within their institution. When we apply Steir's (2004) three ideologies: instrumentalism, educationalism, and idealism to this study, it can be deduced that most respondents perceive leaders to prize economic necessity as well as educational values in IHE. However, the drive towards internationalisation within the institution in question is also perceived to be disparate and driven by separate, independent agendas, aligned to specific faculties and their own leaders' personal ambitions. One respondent somewhat frustratingly queried why faculties operate in such a manner, "in isolation of the other," suggesting that Steir's instrumentalism is paramount; "the reason is money". This experienced international exchange manager proceeded to explain how the financial pressures on each individual faculty prevent them from seeing beyond the confines of their own set-up. He called for a debate on how this system can be shaken up so that an integrated approach may serve a larger incoming group of international students:

> Often, lecturers are shielded from economic reasons to do better. Why? They think 'If I run an extra programme, I still have my job, why should I do anything differently? I don't

> get a bonus for it, and if I do better, I will not have incentives. We should be service-minded, thinking about how to best serve the students.

This view clearly suggests a lack of incentive within the profession for lecturers to get on board with supporting international programmes and activities. If we turn to the science-based international programme, data from this study also demonstrates a lack of incentive and motivation to compete in the field of international research publications. Comments such as "We only strive to get the bare minimum" and "No pressure and clear incentive to do more and to conduct more research publications" highlight a lack of clear guidance and leadership of what is evidently a significant aspect of the IHE agenda.

One of the foundations of the distributed leadership theory is based on a collective approach to problem-solving. It posits that a leadership system which empowers others together to lead and to make decisions also motivates individuals to engage with the given challenges or goals. A distributed leadership does not however sit easily within certain cultures. The root cause of de-motivated staff may be attributed to personal as well as structural reasons. The above respondent's claim that members of staff are not professionally motivated to do more for the internationalisation of their programmes, even for their own professional development and application for more senior professorial positions, seem to be a fair observation. But is the implied complacency the cause or can it be found in the structural limitations that not even a dean, for

example, can easily change? Much of the data garnered in this study supports the latter assertion. Respondents point to a top-down, non-consultative approach which is inherent in the structure of such institutions, and where only a few individuals are considered necessary to take things forward.

Integration, of course, starts with strong communication between diverse actors within the system. While most respondents shared the view that the institution has considerably stepped up its efforts to internationalise over the last decade, they remained reserved about how such progress and success was being shared. One respondent described how the university is involved in an increasing number of impressive projects, activities, and partnerships with "big players, with companies, with the UN (United Nations)". The drawback, however, is that "these are not being translated to the wider faculty, to all lecturers, so they will not know". Another lecturer from a social science international programme shared this suggestion to bring together unity and a collective approach to IHE:

> I think all departments are working in silos so I think there should be one driver, one platform where you can bring in expertise from all the different departments to bring all good projects, all expertise together because I think there are a lot of experts, but we all don't know who is doing what… We need to create a platform where faculty can share their own expertise and can bring in more collaborations.

Leadership style, decision-making and internal relationship dynamics can all be seen therefore as factors directly affecting IHE in the context in question. Interviewees, both leaders and academics highlight top- down leadership and continuity, bureaucracy and communication, as well as the importance of motivational and inclusive approaches towards more empowered and unified leadership as crucial for the internationalisation dimension of their work. However, participants were also acutely aware of, and equally eager to share, the external tensions affecting leadership at their institution.

2. External pressures affecting leadership of IHE

Balancing act of leaders: economic targets versus academic quality

The external pressures of leadership intricately influence the day-to-day leadership of IHE within institutions. Respondents invariably refer to both economic pressures and the need to maintain high-quality programmes, and express an understanding and, at times, sympathy, for these tensions faced by their leaders. The leaders themselves who were interviewed felt a strong responsibility to meet the economic demands of IHE through student recruitment. One leader, whose faculty was referred to as " self- funded" admitted to intense pressures to secure more incoming students. As with the other international programmes, students pay considerably higher fees than their counterparts on the Thai programmes, and as such, these programmes are dependent on good numbers year on year. The same respondent however

explains how such stringent economic targets demand “adjustments in policy changes and some requirements to be able to attract students” and “to manage that, in terms of quality”. This Dean sees his responsibility as both ensuring a steady income stream at all costs, while managing the potential fall-out from a lowering of admissions requirements. A senior administrative interviewee at the same faculty put it more forthrightly; “we lower our standard in order for us to get more students”. Seen from a distributive leadership perspective, such a top-down responsibility model can seem like a very lonely position for those whose culture and natural inclination is not to seek a sharing of the burden that such tensions may bring.

Other participants in this study, however, did not see the need for a compromise between the economic imperative and economic sustainability, and the actual quality of the programmes. A strong economic foundation was seen as essential before any question of quality, in several interviews. However, creative ways of designing new programmes, for example online or hybrid short courses, were mentioned as solutions to offering good quality services which meet ambitious economic targets. It was questioned whether leaders are equipped with the skills necessary to think out-of-the-box with such alternative high-quality education provision. While financial sustainability was acknowledged to be important, many respondents emphasized the relevance of the courses to the world of work as being crucial, and the need for leadership to be able to push for the swifter adaptation and revision of the

curriculum in order to keep up with rapid changes in the market in order to meet the needs of employers.

Leadership and competition: contrasting views from the top and below

Competition is a major and inevitable driver of IHE. International rankings have long been considered a controversial and yet ever-present force in institutional decision-making across the world. Respondents frequently alluded to how institutional bureaucracy is bent towards meeting a higher institutional ranking. One participant from the science international programme was critical of the way in which the intense pressure to publish in internationally accepted journals led to a plethora of "many dodgy things going on....they want to internationalise but they do in a Thai way, box-ticking, bureaucratic approach".

Interestingly, international rankings were frequently mentioned in the same breath as competition. Overall, interviewees in senior positions saw rankings in a more benevolent way, and as tools which were useful to motivate and also promote their programmes. Lecturers without such senior responsibilities for internationalisation, however, saw rankings as yet another bureaucratic and dubious machinery which placed extra pressure on their already busy work schedules, to produce research of international stature which would boost their faculty or institution's rankings. These contrasting views only serve to emphasise, once again, the complexity of interactions on the ground between actors bearing very diverse accountabilities and tasks, and the immense

challenge for any leader to create motivation and unity in such a real, socially dynamic world.

Essentially, it seems that effective leadership within IHE, from the perspective of those interviewed working on international programmes, would reflect a focus on a more inspired form of educational leadership which focusses on genuine motivation to enhance the quality of the professional outputs of academic staff, rather than an overtly administrative or managerial approach which addresses the more competitive demands. However, inspirational and motivational leadership alone is not enough. This is reflected mostly in the feedback from lecturers and mid-level leaders with regard to those holding senior leadership positions. One respondent called for a "CEO type" of leader "to determine and decide which directions we need to take". This person, recognizing the pressured demands of increased competition, preferred a shift away from the current "pragmatic and diplomatic" leadership towards "someone who can be transformative and change initiatives if needed". Another interviewee mentioned an aspiration for leaders who "see possibilities and make it happen, ones who strategically change and move forward". On the contrary, leaders at the top of the hierarchy seemed to hold a differing perspective on their ability to pro-actively lead and enact changes. One senior leader referred to his ability to "make it happen, things can be done quickly, new initiatives can happen every day, by talking to faculty and students". These contrasting views reflect the deep-seated social nature of how leadership, and indeed the processes of the internationalisation of

higher education itself, actually take places within a fluid environment of diverse and often clashing social identities and their associated perspectives. An objective assessment of how leadership works is challenging when perceptions of what constitutes strong and effective leadership are often subjective and reliant on so many factors tied to the social identity of the person interviewed. How self-perception of one's own leadership interacts and influences one's own leadership would be another fruitful and fascinating area of research, leaning more on a psycho-analytical approach of leadership.

Conclusion

This study faced certain limitations. Respondents at all levels were somewhat cautious when it came to fully speaking their minds, despite the complete confidentiality of the entire process. Given more time, interviews with students (both domestic and foreign) would have provided a valuable additional perspective. While this research has focused on administrative and managerial leadership of international programmes, further research on academic leadership related to the content of such programmes, and the specific relationship between managerial and academic leadership in IHE within a Thai institutional context, would yield new insights into how IHE as a social process is influenced by different forms of leadership.

The theory of distributive leadership selected for this study has focussed on leadership as a situated and social process. A follower according to this theoretical perspective is not a passive recipient of orders nor someone who delivers on another's decision. The follower also maintains a leadership role which may, at times, also influence the decisions of the actual leader. Another key dimension to this kind of leadership is the situation itself, whether connected to history, culture, the physical or policy environment, and the way in which the context may enable or constrain leadership. This study has therefore listened to the voices of those involved in one dimension of IHE, namely international programmes, within a Thai public university context, both leaders and so-called followers in highly dynamic and unique social situations. It is clear from the in-depth interviews that the aforementioned dimension of 'situation' is paramount in terms of how leadership functions. Bureaucracy strongly influences leadership trends and models within the institution, thus revealing how the actors in question interact at that very intersection between situation, culture and tradition, and the progressive demands of fast-moving internationalisation processes.

Specific social identities, varying roles, and seniority of those invited to participate naturally color and shape the responses. It is evident that all respondents acknowledge that significant progress has been made in the internationalisation of their institution over the last decade and more. Respondents shared strong views and emotions related to how IHE functions from the leadership

perspective, with a desire to see even greater strides being made in the delivery of powerful international experiences for both teachers and learners, as well as administrative teams.

Based on these observations, this study concludes that leaders within such institutions, by adopting a more distributive leadership approach, could involve and ensure highly constructive inputs from a broader set of individual leaders within a larger leadership team. Greater clarity, inclusivity and integration would lead to employees feeling more empowered and motivated to contribute towards and expand the internationalisation agenda. At the institutional level also, there is a need for a strategic push to bring people together so that all the accumulated knowledge, expertise, and experiences of the different aspects of internationalisation can be shared and utilised purposefully. Both at the institutional and faculty levels, leaders may consider legitimate ways of subtly challenging structures which hamper the efficiency of movement essential to work internationally. Leaders should also question their own motivations and reflect on what distributive actions would best serve their teams, to ensure a motivated collective effort in reaching new goals for a high-quality and truly international portfolio of services and activities. As one respondent pertinently observed “We need ajarns who can direct change rather than be constrained by what cannot be changed in the system”.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there were no conflicts of interest.

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