A STUDY OF FACTORS CORRELATING WITH THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS UNDER THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS OF BANGKOK.

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Introduction

The world is changing rapidly. Change has evolved from focus on economic development from an agrarian economy to an industrialized economy, from simple life to more complicated life. Therefore, people have to be awake to these changes and must try to improve their skills all the time. They cannot stop their learning simply because they have graduated from school or the university; if they would like to be successful, they must grow. They have to keep on learning from their experiences, environment, or their organization. As Lassey (1998) shows successful people are people who learn. Organizations are no different, successful organizations are learning organizations. Without learning, there is no improvement; and without improvement organizations stagnate.

There are many routes for organizational development, which can be used to improve an organization's quality. Learning organization models provide one administrative method that can be used to provide direction for organizational achievement not only for public organizations but also private organizations (Makasarnont, 1997). As Hoy and Miskel (2001) state, schools are service organizations that are committed to teaching and learning. Schools are, more than any other kind of organization, a learning organization. They should be places where participants continually expand their capacities to create and to achieve. If schools are to be effective learning organizations, they must find ways to create structures that continuously support teaching and learning and enhance organizational adaptation. Therefore the learning organization is the important thing that an administrator has to create in her/his school in order to give students an opportunity for learning continuously, based on the belief that the more people learn, the better they can perform when they grow up.

The study was conducted in five schools under the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok: Phraharuthai Convent (Sacred Heart Convent School), Praharuthai Swankalok, Phraharuthai Donmueng, Phraharuthai Pathanawej, and Phraharuthai Nonthaburi. Five factors were investigated which are: teacher and teamwork practices, technology and work systems, performance goals and feedback practices, motivation, executive and managerial practices.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the status of factors correlating with learning organization of schools under the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok.
2. To determine the status of learning organization of schools under the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok.
3. To determine the significant relationship between factors under study and school's learning organization.

Learning Organization Characteristics

In 1994 Marquardt & Reynolds identified 11 characters that learning organizations should have. These 11 characters are

1. *Appropriate structure*. This element includes a flat, streamlined, holistic structure. Such a structure maximizes contact, information flow, local responsibility, and collaboration within and outside the organization.

2. *Corporate learning culture.* This element represents a corporate culture where learning is highly valued, where risks are encouraged and rewarded, and all have responsibility for their own learning and the

learning of others. This is the organizational validation of efforts in the inner sphere of a global learning organization

3. *Empowerment*. This element includes capacity and power. Empowerment is given as close as possible to the point of interaction with the customer or client. Empowerment permits learning to happen through responsibility.

4. *Environment scanning***.** This is a description of comprehensive and considered scanning of the environment. Environmental scanning is done both within and outside the organization. Industry related, economic, political, and social data that will benefit the organization are the product of this effort.

5. *Knowledge creation and transfer***.** This element includes the continual creation of knowledge and the ongoing circulation process. In organizations that transfer information best, knowledge is gathered, coded, stored, and disseminated quickly and seamlessly across functions, levels, borders, and cultures.

6. *Learning technology***.** Learning technology includes all information technology. It specifically includes information technology, which increases information collection, analysis and distribution, and knowledge and skill development.

7. *Quality.* This is the commitment to continuous improvement. It also includes the continuous learning needed to attain total quality. Another dimension of quality in successful global learning organizations is the commitment of all employees to have personal mastery in areas beneficial to the organization.

8. *Strategy.* This element comprises conscious and deliberate planning from leadership and key structures within organizations to make learning, in its broadest sense, a "prime business" of the organization in which learning is seen as a principal driver.

9. *Supportive atmosphere.* Successful learning organizations do not neglect the development, growth, needs, and concerns as well as dreams of their individual employees. Employees are viewed as an important component of organizational strategy and operations. They are valued and nurtured.

10. *Teamwork and networking*. Learning organizations are committed to teamwork and team learning. Employees seek ways to work collaboratively with units of the organization and to network whenever possible with the resources outside the organization through global alliances, informal relationships, and so forth.

11. *Vision*. Vision is organization wide consensus and support for the future directions. It includes the mission, values, and beliefs of the organization. The common vision must be shared by and challenging to everyone in the organization.

According to Bennett & O'Brien (1994) they found the twelve key factors which influence an organization's ability to learn and change. These factors are :

1. Strategy/vision: An organization and its members must have a vision of where they want to go so that they can anticipate what they need to learn to get there. They must develop a broad strategy for reaching their goal so that they know if their learning is moving the organization toward their vision. Furthermore, if learning organization is to become integral to the company, the vision and strategy must support and promote it.

2. Executive Practices: Moving outward from that visionary core, the next building block consists of the practices of executives. What do the leaders say and do to support the vision of organizational learning? Do they hold people accountable for continuous learning and improvement? Do they inspire the rest of the organization to follow them toward the vision?

3. Managerial Practices: For any permanent change to occur, managers, those who support and supervise the day-to-day work of individuals and teams, must behave in accordance with the principles of continuous learning. In companies that take learning seriously, managers support their staffs' attempts to grow and develop. They help people integrate what they have learned. They also share the resulting insights and innovations with the executives, who can use this information to explore further improvements.

4. Climate: Supportive management practices feed into and are fed by another factor that affects continuous learning: the organization's climate. This is the sum of the values and attitudes of everyone in the organization regarding the way people are supposed to behave as they go about their business. A learning organization adopts a climate of openness and trust; people are unafraid to share their ideas and speak their minds. Barriers between managers and employees are eliminated and ideally, everybody works together to support the collective well-being.

5. Organization/Job Structure: An organization's structure can support continuous learning by allowing for fluid job descriptions that respond to the changing demands of the external environment, as well as to the needs of the organization itself. Practices such as rotating assignments and using self-directed, cross-functional work teams promote this flexibility. Bureaucratic policies and rules that inhibit or impede the flow of information must be kept to a minimum.

6. Information Flow: Learning-oriented companies use advanced technology to obtain and distribute information. Their computer systems promote easy communication among employees and ensure that all workers get company data relevant to their jobs.

7. Individual and Team Practices: Information is important in part because of its impact on individual and team practices in a learning organization. Shared knowledge can be a terrific asset. Organizations thrive when individuals and teams share learning, when they see mistakes as learning opportunities and not as reasons to blame or punish, when they take responsibility for their own learning , and when they discuss problems honestly, and work toward solutions.

8. Work Processes: An organization may encourage learning through its vision, through its information systems and so on, but does it actually incorporate the use of work processes that encourage continuous learning? For instance, does the company teach and practice some systematic problem-solving techniques? Does it promote learning from others through benchmarking studies?

9. Performance Goals/Feedback: The focal point of any business that intends to succeed must be its customers-what they want and need. Learning for the sake of learning is fruitless in the business world. The value of learning lies in its ability to help the organization better serve its customers.

10. Training/Education: Obviously, structured training and education efforts play a key role in transforming and organization/s practices. In a learning organization, formal training programs focus on helping people learn from their own and others' experience and become more creative problem solvers. Individual development-planning tools are available to everyone.

11. Individual/Team Development: Learning organizations seek ways to encourage their employees to develop individually, but at the same time, they promote the development of entire teams. Organizations can learn only if teams learn collectively, forming "communities of practice" that continuously reinvents their work.

12. Rewards/Recognition: The reward-and-recognition-system must support and encourage individual and organizational learning. This can take many forms, from honoring individual employees who take risks to offering a profit-sharing plan that benefits everyone when the organization learns and grows.

Two years following the above cited research, Watkins & Marsick (1996) developed a model of the learning organization around seven action imperatives that can be interpreted in terms of what must change to help schools become learning organizations. The seven action imperatives follow:

1. *Create continuous Learning Opportunities.* This means that learning is ongoing, strategically used, and grows out of the work itself. Administrators and teachers have many opportunities to consciously look at what they are learning from new initiatives. They can look at results as opportunities to learn why an initiative was not successful; and they can initiate projects to experiment with change. They can make it attractive for faculty members to serve as mentors. They can find ways to use technology better to help faculty gain new skills. Schools might also find ways to provide time, money, and other incentives for professional development.

2. *Promote Inquiry and Dialogue.* The key to this imperative is a culture in which people ask questions freely, are willing to put difficult issues on the table for discussion, and are open to giving and receiving feedback at all levels. Strategies to implement this action imperative include the use of dialogue and questioning in meetings and learning sessions.

3. *Encourage Collaboration and Team Learning.* The relevant action imperative for this level focuses on the spirit of collaboration and the skills that underpin the effective use of teams. People in schools frequently form groups, but they are not always encouraged to bring what they know to the general table. Strategies to implement this action imperative might include support for the effective functioning of teams that cross levels and groups.

4. *Create Systems to Capture and Share Learning.* Technology-based strategies that are used for this purpose focus on the use of software to capture ideas across dispersed teams and divisions and computerized documentation of changes in a particular area.

5. *Empower People toward a Collective Vision.* The primary criteria for success with this action imperative are the degree of alignment throughout the organization around the vision, and the degree to which everyone in the organization actively participates in creating and implementing the changes that follow from the vision.

6. *Connect the organization to its Environment.* Schools must function at both global and local levels. Schools can use benchmarking to see what other schools are doing to achieve excellence and to solve similar problems, and can scan their environment for new trends by using computer data based. Technology enables people in schools to move beyond their walls.

7. *Provide Strategic Leadership for Learning.* Leaders who model learning are key to the learning organization. They think strategically about how to use learning to move the organization in new directions. School leaders can routinely discuss development plans and opportunities with faculty and staff members, can make information available regarding opportunities for learning, and can seek resources to support faculty development
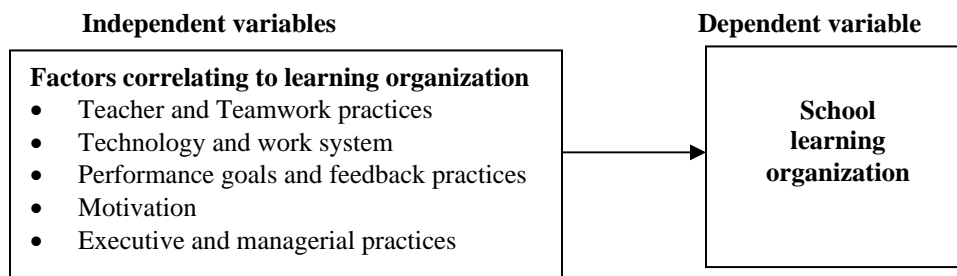
Conceptual framework

Independent variables   **Dependent variable**

Factors correlating to learning organization
- Teacher and Teamwork practices
- Technology and work system
- Performance goals and feedback practices
- Motivation
- Executive and managerial practices

School learning organization

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

The population of this study comprised of 628 teachers from five schools under the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok. A sample of teachers was chosen by using the table of Krejcie & Morgan (1970) using proportional sampling for obtaining the sample of teachers in each school. A total of 299 teachers were chosen from a population of 628 which was significant at the .05 level, then, selected the grouping of this sample by using stratified random sampling technique.

The questionnaires used in this study for collecting data from administrators and teachers were separated into two parts

Part I: The rating scale item measuring the factors correlating with learning   organizations in five dimensions.

Part II: The rating scale item measuring learning organization key factors.

Conclusion

In this research, it was found that all respondents' perceptions in the five schools which are run by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok toward factors correlating with learning organization and school learning organization agree that their schools are learning organizations at a high level. Moreover, all respondents also perceived that factors correlating with learning organizations, which composed teacher and teamwork practices; technology and work system; performance goals and feedback practices; motivation; and executive plus managerial practices in their schools were calibrated as being at the high level. Comparing five factors; motivation is the highest while technology and work system is the lowest. Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between factors under study and school learning organizations. All five factors, executive and managerial practices; technology and work system; performance goals and feedback practices; motivation; teachers; and teamwork practices had a substantially significant relation to the learning organization.

Discussion
Part I: The current status of factors under study and school learning organization are:

The study indicated that all the respondents' opinion toward status of factors correlating with learning organization and learning organization of schools under the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok are high which is in agreement with Sroinam (2004) who studied a development of the learning organization model in the secondary schools. Sroinam found that the level of administrative factor development and the level of learning organization in the northeastern secondary schools on average were very high. Similar findings were also found in the pilot study, by Boranmoon (2005), who studied factors affecting the learning organization in the Municipal Schools under Khon Kaen Municipality, Khon Kaen Province. It was found that the level of the opinions towards factors affecting the learning organization in these schools was at high for all factors.

One reason that can explain this close agreement is that Thai education has evolved to emphasize education reform and holistic development. It is possible that these factors can bring a school's learning organization to a high level. Furthermore, Thai society has recently been influenced by technology and the flow of information. These have helped schools improve and adapt so as to practice learning organization key tenets. These findings are in agreement with Hoy and Miskel (2001) who stated that schools should be places where participants continually expand their capacities to create and achieve. If schools are to be effective learning organizations, they must find ways to create structures that continuously support teaching and learning and enhance organization adaptation.

Part II: The relationship between the factors under study and school learning organization:

The administrators and teachers perceived a significant positive relationship at significance level 0.01 between factors under study and school learning organization. This agrees with Boranmoon (2005) who produced a thesis concerning factors affecting the learning organization in the Municipal Schools under Khon Kaen Municipality, Khon Kaen Province. He found that there was significant positive relation at the level of 0.01 between performance goal and feedback; optimum school structure; vision-mission and strategy; team and team administration; executive and managerial practices; technology and work system; instructional leadership; motivation; school climate and culture; and the learning organization.

Regarding this research study, the relationship between the factors under study and school learning organizations can be explained as follows:

2.1 Executive and managerial practices have a positive relation with learning organizations of schools under the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok. This agrees with Sroinam (2004) who found that executive and managerial practices have a high relation to learning organization in considering that being learning organization should change any school lacking the challenge needed for school improvement. Senge (1997) has identified five disciplines of a learning organization. He emphasized systematic thinking; because systems thinking can be a very powerful tool to facilitate the learning organization: This concept is supported by Morris -cited in Marquardt (1994)- who said that systems wide thinking is fundamental to the learning organization. Therefore the essential facet of school learning organizations depends on executive and managerial practice.

Regarding schools under the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Bangkok, executive and managerial practices should be promoted according to the viewpoint of respondents who answered the questionnaire. They agree that good executive and managerial practices have a high relation to the learning organization because the executive plays an important role in working systems arrangements, including supervision. Srivichairatana (2005) noted this same issue as being relevant. Srivichairatana held that a learning organization can be created by administrators who reduce incompetence in learning, and decrease or minimize the factors that adversely affect a low learning attitude in the organization. Furthermore, Popper and Lipshitz (2000) contend that leadership is the factor, which can affect organizational learning. Leaders can create organizational structure and shape the organizational culture; thus leadership actually affects the learning organization.

2.2 Technology and work systems have a positive relation to the learning organization, because, in the present day, knowledge-based society, technology and work systems have been playing an important role in the lives of people and society. Schools are the same. They have to provide suitable technology for teaching and learning. This is in line with Marquardt (1996) who presented steps in becoming a learning organization, one of sixteen steps which was acquiring and applying the best of technology to promote the best of learning. Organizations that lack information technology, and/or the capability of utilizing it, are at a severe disadvantage in the acquisition, storage, and transfer of knowledge. Technology also affects the quantity and quality of learning in an organization. Wakins & Marsick (1996) cited in Lunenburg (2004) said that one thing which must change to help schools become learning organizations is technology,

because it enables people in schools to move beyond the school walls. Dhamasiri (2000) found that the ability to learn faster becomes significant as well; as the ability to cooperate becomes more knowledge-based. Technological networks and information tools must be integrated in order to allow access to, and exchange of, information and learning.

2.3 Performance goals and feedback practices have a positive relation to learning organizations, because schools consider the development of these until such time as their goals are accomplished. Also they try to review them regularly. Moreover, the schools consider customers satisfaction and use it for their performance review. Schools have reliable systematic methods to measure improvement of school performance while giving and receiving feedback is the norm for team members: They are seen as an integral part of the role and of the understanding of each other's roles. Performance goals and feedback practices help schools developing into learning organizations. Similarly, Bennet & O'Brien (1994) stated performance goals/feedback comprise one of twelve factors influencing an organization's ability to learn and change. The focal point of any business that intends to succeed must be its customers i.e. what they want and need. Learning for the sake of learning is fruitless in the business world. The value of learning lies in its ability to help the organization better itself and to serve its customers. To build an organization that uses learning as a tool to achieve that end, look at how well one's performance goals and one's performance-appraisal system support the needs of customers. Do employee goals-the things for which they are rewarded and held accountable-focus on meeting customer requirements? Do employees get regular formal and informal feedback about how well they are meeting those goals?

2.4 Motivation has a positive relation to learning organization of schools under the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred heart of Jesus of Bangkok, because motivation is an important issue that encourages teachers and school board members to perform tasks freely with a high level responsibility which enables success achievement. School leaders should give members credit, respect, and acknowledgement, including an opportunity for training; assign teachers challenging work, which is possible to do; and encourage creative thinking for members. School administrators need to show admiration for members who do good work. This fits in with Sarattana's (2002) suggestion that school leaders should understand motivation patterns and apply them in an effective way. Marquardt (1994) also advised that a successful organization should not neglect the development, growth, needs, and concerns as well as dreams of their individual employees. They are viewed as an important component of organizational strategy and operations. They are to be valued and nurtured. Bennett & O'Brien (1994) state that rewards of recognition are one of twelve factors influence an organization's ability to learn and change. Reward-and-recognition-systems must support and encourage individual and organizational learning. This can take many forms, from honoring individual employees who take risks to offering a profit sharing plans in schools that benefit everyone when the organization learns and grows. Lussier (2001) also confirmed that one of the learning organization characteristics is an effective reward and appraisal system. According to Dhamasiri (2000) found that supportive managerial practices and climate will encourage employees to take risks. Mistakes or failures will be viewed as learning opportunities and new ideas should be encouraged and recognized. She also said that an organization's success depends on individual and team development. People need to grow and develop continually. Training is developmentally conceived to enhance the problem-solving capacity of the organization through individual and organizational self-development. Organizations need to support individuals and teams, through high quality development plans, which include formal and on-the-job learning opportunities.

2.5 In the findings of this study, teacher and teamwork practices have a positive relation to learning organization. This is because schools under the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok have become awakened to the level of education reform and quality assurance including external quality assessment. Regarding this reform; teachers and school's members have to understand their roles and responsibility clearly; be able to identify problems and solve those problems systematically and reasonably. They can learn from their mistakes; are enthusiastic in sharing opinions, teaching-learning methods and experiences with each other; including looking for new teaching methods. Bennett & O'Brien (1994) hold that team members have to exchange their knowledge because organizations thrive when individuals and teams share learning; when they see mistakes as learning opportunities and not as reasons to blame or punish; when they take responsibility for their own learning; and when they discuss problems honestly and work toward solutions. Melander (1993) also said that people in organizations must have the chance to learn from each other and draw joint conclusions about what needs to be done. Moreover, according to Srivichairatana (2005) if there are mistakes, there should be an attempt to find the real causes of the problems and take the opportunity to learn instead of blaming others or the environment or trying to

find the culprit. This was confirmed by Dhamasiri (2000) who stated that individuals and teams need to be encouraged to identify and solve problems in their work areas. In conflict situations, blaming is minimized so that people can openly and honestly discussing the issues and working towards solutions. People and groups are encouraged to analyze mistakes in order to learn how to do something better next time. Moreover, in the organization, they routinely ask one another for feedback on their performance so that they can continually improve their work. They also share their expertise and learn from one another through informal conversations and storytelling.

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