The Emergence of Appreciative Leadership in Thailand

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Introduction

Leadership is one of the most important topics for today's organizations. This is because organizations need more than just management to cope with the rapid changes of today's business environment. Organizations need to develop themselves not only to survive but also to sustain their leadership for the business. As a result, leadership becomes one of the key organizational competencies to develop. A leader who only knows how to act as a manager is much less likely to have the capability to build a positive working environment, to focus on vision and future value, and to inspire and motivate co-workers to move beyond their KPI targets. A leader who assumes the leadership role with the right competencies is more likely to create not only those success factors, but also to build a happier workplace and a higher performing organization.

With continuous changes of both the internal and external business environments, one would find it is difficult to hold on the previous limiting leadership concepts and styles as one would find in conservative types of organizations where directive style or only task-oriented behavior styles are predominant (Auppakarakul, 2012). With emerging development in human consciousness as well as in communication, organizations now need a new concept of leadership that would be more suited with today's organization.

As a lecturer of the leadership course for the MBA program, the author has noticed that Western leadership theories and models have been dominantly taught and used in Thai educational system and business sector such as transactional leadership and transformational leadership, situational leadership, and change leadership. However, cultural differences have different impacts on leadership attributes (House et. al., 2002), styles (Jogulu, 2010), and performances (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). Western leadership theories and models may not fit in with Thai or Eastern context. Thai culture is mainly influenced by Buddhism which focuses on the right mindset and mindfulness of people but those theories rarely pay attention on the leaders' right mindset based on Buddhism. Therefore, the development of a new Appreciative Leadership (AL) model is a good opportunity to connect Western knowledge and Thai culture together with the ultimate goal of increasing leader goodness, organizational performance, and Thai human capital.

What is Appreciative Leadership?

Appreciative leadership (AL) is still a new terminology in the field; therefore, a number of scholars have ventured definitions:

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Srivastva, Fry, & Cooperrider (1990) have described AL as "a scholar, colleague and sculptor of conversation that seeks to give new voice to the mystery, not mastery and wonder, not problems, of organizational life"(p.33).

Bushe (2001) has explained that appreciative leaders "are continually looking for instances where things are going right; where quality is increasing, where customers are being satisfied, where internal processes are being managed seamlessly and where wealth is being created"(p.155-156).

According to Riley, Holland, & Schiller (2002), AL is the combination of competencies and attributes of leaders' characteristics expressed in terms that are strongly relational and participative in style and beliefs.

Keefe & Pesut (2004) have explained that AL "involves appreciation, creativity, and awareness" (p.103).

For Mantel& Ludema (2004), an appreciative leader is a person who is able "to see the best in people and leverage their strengths to achieve significant and mutually valued goals"(p.324).

Lewis, et al. (2006) have indicated that "appreciative leaders are self-aware and incorporate new learning and they are willing to change the way they look at and define things"(p.97).

Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, & Rader (2010) define that "AL is the relational capacity to mobilize creative potential and turn it into positive power – to set in motion positive ripples of confidence, energy, enthusiasm, and performance – to make a positive difference in the world"(p.3).

Thus , AL should begin with the inner of individual level and then expand to team and organizational levels of leadership. Ultimately, it should also influence our society and the world. Hence, AL means "the ability to discover, gather, and amplify the existing strengths and successes of members, organizations and their communities in order to create positive and sustainable change for the organization and the world"(Auppakarakul, 2010, p.62-63).

In essence, to be an effective appreciative leader, a person has to have the ability to enhance one's mindfulness, nurture a positive thinking attitude, create more collaboration in his environment, and believe in partnership bonding. These abilities reflect four components of AL as proposed by Auppakarakul (2012).

Components of AL

AL encompasses four components (Auppakarakul, 2012) as shown in Figure 1 below:

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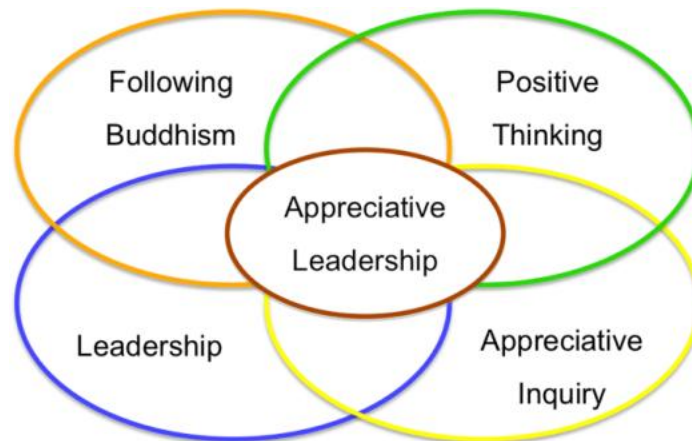
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Figure1: The four components of the Appreciative Leadership concept

Source: Auppakarakul A. (2012). The Development of Appreciative Leadership Concept: *AI-Summit Thailand Book: Leveraging Positive Change for Organization Development and Transformation in Thailand*, 70-77

The first component, <u>following Buddhism,</u> refers to thinking and behaving in "good" ways to oneself and others in everyday life. According to the Buddhist faith, following the key precepts of Buddhism helps one be good and kind and develop consciousness and self-awareness of leader's mindset. Consequently, it helps one better realize inner happiness and strengthens mindfulness. As a result, it creates positive affects toward others.

The second component, <u>positive thinking</u>, asserts that a positive mindset can help a person search for an opportunity to create positivity (Frederickson, 2009). It also helps a person be realistic in situations, apply emotional intelligence, and be filled with hope and a high level of confidence (Luthans, Luthan, Hodgetts, & Luthans, 2001).

The third component is <u>Appreciative Inquiry</u> (AI). The author has adopted and adapted the concept of "appreciative eye" (Hammond, 1998) to this model, which is at the root of AI, meaning searching and valuing the best and new potential in people (Cooperider & Whitney, 2005). Accordingly, a leader is better able to generate a constructive engagement or collaboration when leading others.

Finally, the fourth component is the act of <u>leadership </u>itself. In the spirit of AL, leadership refers to the relationship bonding process used to enhance partnership between the leader and others. This perspective is based on a "process-relational perspective of leadership" (Hay & Hodgkinson, 2006).

To establish and practice AL, a person needs to :   a) set up a positive awareness mindset by continuous telling and reminding oneself to be a good person at all times, b) pay more attention to a positive direction when thinking, talking, feeling and connecting

with people, c) then, visualize positive leadership images or positive scenarios that one expects to encounter during the day, d) always ask appreciative questions when confronted with negative and unexpected situations, and e) finally, build and expand positive thinking by co-creating opportunities for engagement and collaboration toward achieving organizational goals.

When a person establishes and practices those five guidelines on a daily basis, they can say that they are leading using appreciative strategy.

Opportunity for AI in Thailand

While engaging MBA students, leaders, and managers from various organizations in the understanding and use of the AL steps, the author discovered that there are many of opportunities for AL to grow in Thai businesses. During the last 3 years, the author had opportunities to conduct AL training courses for private and government organizations such as Advance Info Service (AIS), SC Asset, Tri Petch ISUZU Co. ltd., Prudential Life Assurance (Thailand) Public Co. Ltd., Zurich Pharmaceutical Thailand, Metropolitan Waterworks Authority (Thailand), and Faculty of Dentistry, Khon Kaen University. There were more than 500 participants who have joined the courses, most of whom were managers, senior managers, division managers, senior vice presidents, deans, faculty management team and members.

When asked "What leadership qualities participants of the AL courses would like to see from their leaders?" Most of the participants preferred to have leaders who listen to other's opinions, are creative, take initiative, are understanding, willing to help and motivate others.

When asked further, "What were the most important tasks they do as a leader?" Most of them identified the manager roles and functions such as planning, delegating, controlling, and problem solving, and direction. Only a few of them mentioned tasks related to employee engagement, empowerment, delegation, shared vision, inspiration, and people orientation- tasks that are associated with leadership roles.

The common misunderstanding of the leadership roles has shown that there are a lot of opportunities to extend AI to people and organizations in Thailand.

In addition, during the sessions most participants gave some valuable feedback about the AL model such as: "I have never seen leadership theories and models that base on Buddhist faith". "It is easy to practice". "It reminds me to focus on my self-awareness before paying attention to others". After trainings classes, they have been requested to report some feedback after applying AI in the individual and team levels. Some feedback was, for instance, "it helps me be happier when working because I focus on other's strengths rather than weaknesses", "I have more positive self-awareness when leading myself, my family, and my subordinates", "My subordinates are willing to talk to me frequently", "I noticed that my subordinates are happier and their performances have improved", and "My team works proactively rather than waiting for my orders". The feedback has illustrated that AL works well and creates positive impact to individual, team, and some organizational leadership levels.

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Therefore, AL development is so important for today's organizations. The understandings of the leadership roles and the AL can help people and organizations not only cope with a rapid change of working environments but also perform at higher level toward organizational goals.

With the author's inspiration to extend AL knowledge to both academic and practitioner fields in Thailand, the author has implement SOAR analysis as a tool for achievement. The information shown in each section has been summarized from author's observation and participants' feedback. There are some important opportunity points presented in Table 1.

Table 1: SOAR Analysis of AL in Thailand

Strengths	Opportunities
1. AL is based on Buddhism and Thai culture, so it is easy to understand and apply 2. AL is based on academic research 3. AL helps strengthen happiness work-life balance 4. AL enhances positive organizational development 5. AL has been implemented and accepted by many well- known organizations in Thailand	1. People in many organizations misunderstand leadership roles, so this is a good opportunity to educate and share AL to all type of organizations. 2. Many organizations pay more attention to leadership competencies for organizational success and sustainable growth 3. People themselves are more and more interested in individual leadership development
Aspirations	Results
1. To create a well-known Thai pioneer training center in AI and AL for the international business community 2. To make local knowledge available to global OD communities 3. To create a Thai research center in AI and AL for academic purposes	1. Enhance human capital for Thai society 2. Publish an AL article at least once a year 3. Open an AL course for MBA students to be offered once a year 4. Open AL public and in house training courses to be offered at least 6 times a year

As seen in the SOAR analysis presented in Table1, there exists a misunderstanding between manager and leadership roles. This provides an opportunity to render the proper understanding of leadership roles plus the AL concepts. Furthermore many organizations pay more attention and require more leadership development to enhance organizational leadership competencies toward the success and sustainable growth of organizations. Finally, it is also a response to the need of more and more people who are interested in developing their leadership potentials at the personal, team and organization levels.

In summary, leadership development is of essence for today's organizations. Dealing with today's changes requires new knowledge and innovative approaches. Leadership is not just management, not only for people at the top, and not charisma

(Kotter, 2013). Leadership is about the enhancement of capabilities to lead oneself, teams, and organizations into a better future. With a high level of business competition, leadership development must become a spotlight for today's organizations. AL in Thailand has more opportunities to be promoted in both academic and practitioner areas because of its strengths. AL is easy to understand and implement. It strengthens the happiness work-life balance. Moreover, AL has already been implemented and accepted in some parts or at some management levels by well-known organizations such as Advance Info Service (AIS), TOT, and SC Asset. Finally, AL enhances positive organizational development in term of motivation, collaboration, employee engagement, adaptability, and sustainability for the organization.

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