

**A Candlelight for Enhancing Employee Engagement and
Quality Customer Service**

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Abstract

The study is an action research that employed strengths-based and whole brain literacy in enhancing employee engagement and quality customer service in service parts operations of an automobile company in Thailand. Through an ODI framework that was further implemented into translated into series of ODI activities using the Appreciative Inquiry model and Whole Brain Literacy, the researcher was able to facilitate the improvement of various areas in employee engagement such as: relationships between management and employees, better management support, better employee participation, respect and striving for excellence. Significant improvements in the quality of customer service were also attained in areas such as: professional communication, responsiveness to customer feedback, improved customer service availability, among others.

Key words: *quality customer service, employee engagement, whole brain literacy, appreciative inquiry, continuous development*

Introduction

As the researcher is one of the company employees who always wish to contribute good things to the company, therefore the researcher conducted the action research for organization development at the company focus group “Service Parts Supply and Dealer support Section”. The focus group consists of 35 employees, 3 management level, 11 senior supervisors, 11 officers and 10 sub-contractors.

The researcher pre-diagnosed the situations that the focus group should be aware of according to the world changing environment. As the world economic downturn especially in Europe and also the launching of AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) in the end of 2015, these challenges enhanced the researcher to concern about the focus group people and work. Therefore, the researcher selected the topic of enhancing Employee Engagement and Quality Customer Service at the focus group for the company to sustain both people and organization development to be the leader in the world market.

Current situation of the company and focus group

<u>STRENGTHS :</u> - Company well known brand - Large number of dealership - Good welfare for employees - Toyota Training center to develop employee skills and knowledge	<u>WEAKNESSES :</u> - Drop in service availability & reliability - Less work enjoyment and career accomplishment - Impolite and Ineffective communication
<u>OPPORTUNITIES :</u> - AEC enhance Toyota to increase vehicle & parts sales and opportunity to learn from regional countries - Enhance focal system to learn and develop new skills from AEC and technology upgrade	<u>THREATS :</u> - Natural disaster & counterfeit products - Fluctuating demand leads to insufficient parts stock to supply
<u>ASPIRATIONS :</u> - Leading Toyota company in Asia Pacific and the world in parts operation business	<u>RESULTS :</u> - No.1 customer service provider in Thailand and Asia Pacific

Figure 1 : SWOT & SOAR Analysis of company focus group

The researcher began the action research by diagnosing the current situation of the company and focus group by using SWOT & SOAR analysis through informal discussion and company information related to employee engagement and quality customer service .

According to the diagnosis, the company strengths are its strong brand loyalty, large number of dealership which enhanced both vehicle and parts sales as well as customer service availability throughout Thailand. Company good welfare such as attractive bonus, medical fees support, provident fund and education support also be the strengths of the company. Besides, the company also provides training program for employee skills and career development. According to the above strengths, the company could gain advantages and opportunities to boost sales and service expansion. And as the capacity for investment, the company could expand the businesses to support the launch of AEC and upgrade the operating system to be more advanced. In addition, employees could also gain benefits from the company growth and business expansion as well as system upgraded as they could learn and improve their knowledge and skills.

The company aimed to be the leader among the associated companies in the Asia Pacific in terms of Service Parts Operation in which the company is currently number 1 in terms of service parts operation in Asia Pacific. However, the weaknesses of the company and the focus group were the drop in service availability and reliability after upgrading the operating system to meet the global standard which then resulted in some disabilities and errors when compared to the previous system. Thus, it led to the drop in service availability and reliability as well as complaints from customer to the focus group. Consequently, it then impacted the employees resulting in less work enjoyment, impolite and ineffective communication with customers. Besides, the threats from natural disaster, counterfeit products and fluctuating demand could also have impact to the company businesses. Therefore, as the mentioned factors, the company and focus group should realize the situation to further enhance employee engagement and quality customer service for sustainable development of the company.

Research Objectives and Questions

The researcher set up research objectives and research questions in terms of employee engagement and quality customer service as following:

Research objectives	Research questions
1. To determine current situation of the focus group	1. What are the current situations of the focus group?
2. To identify & implement appropriate Organization Development Intervention	2. What are the appropriate Organization Development Intervention?
3. To determine the initial impact of Organization Development Intervention	3. Do the Organization Development Interventions have an impact?
4. To determine the difference between Pre & Post Organization Development Intervention	4. What are the differences between Pre & Post Organization Development Intervention?

Review of Literature

The researcher had reviewed the definition in terms of employee engagement and quality customer service to determine the factors and variables before conducting the pre-ODI diagnosis as followings,

Employee engagement refers to employees contributing to a friendly workplace environment , a sense of ownership, striving to work for excellence, employees career aspiration career aspiration ,and good career opportunities.

Quality customer service refers to availability of service, professional communication, information accuracy management for service reliability, continuous improvement in customer service, and customer relations.

After literature review of the research topic definition, the researcher studied the model to further develop the ODI Framework to enhance employee engagement and quality customer service.

The researcher selected an application of the “*Whole Brain Literacy model*” as shown in Figure 2, to apply the 4 brain quadrants to organization development framework. The brain consists of four quadrants. First is *I-Control (Front left)* quadrant, related to control, analysis and plan. Second is *I-Explore (Front right)* quadrant, related to future, exploration and creativity. Third is *I-Preserve (Rear right)* quadrant, related to past experience, preservation & relationship. The last quadrant is *I-Pursue (Rear left)* quadrant, related to action or pursue and determination.

The researcher then applied the definition of employee engagement and quality customer service to match with the four brain quadrants to pre-determine the appropriate Organization Development Intervention activities before diagnosis at the focus group.

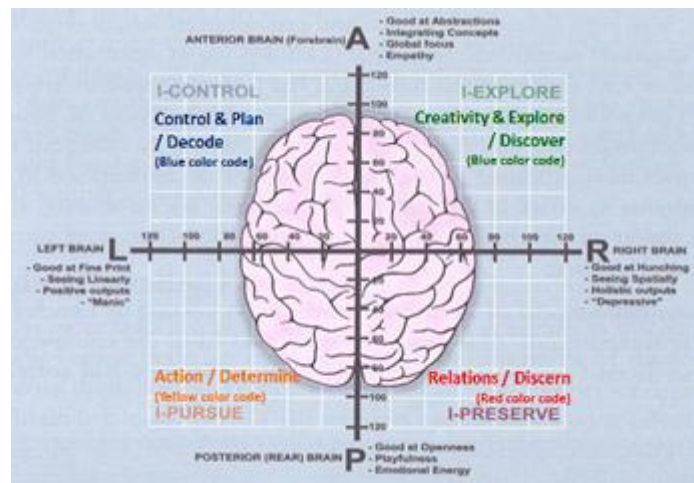


Figure 2 : Four Brain of Dudley Lynch
Source : Dudley, L. 2003

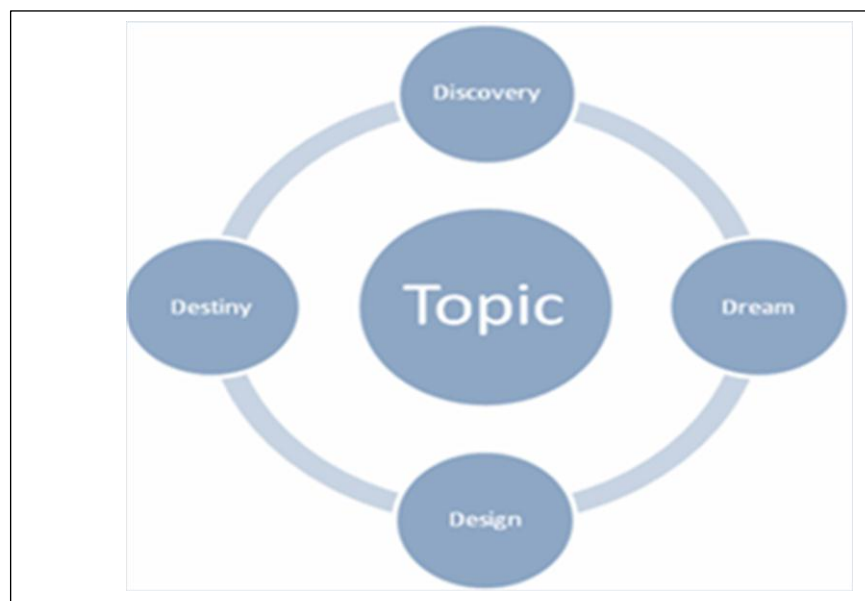


Figure 3. AI 4D Model

Source : Orem S.L.& Binkert J. & Clancy A.L, 2012

On the other hand, The "Appreciative Inquiry model" as shown in Figure 3, also been selected to ask the focus group to develop the organization development intervention ideas and activities according to the research topics. The Appreciative Inquiry model consists of 4 stages. The first stage is "Discovery" which the focus group would be questioned about the strengths of the focus group which then lead to the second stage "Dream". The focal system then would be questioned about their dream or what they expect to be in the future complying their strengths. Then the third stage is "Design", the

focus group would be asked what and how to do to achieve the dreams. And the last stage is “Destiny”, the focus group would be asked to implement what they designed to do.

Organization Development Intervention Process : (Pre ODI - ODI - Post ODI)

After reviewing the definition of the research topics and ODI models, the researcher began the process of Organization Development Intervention (ODI) which consists of three stages. First stage is Pre-ODI diagnosis, to determine the situation before implement ODI activity. Then second stage is ODI, to develop appropriate ODI activity or ideas. And the last stage is Post-ODI diagnosis, to diagnose the situation after ODI implementation.

Stage 1: Pre ODI Diagnosis (by Questionnaire Survey, Interview and Observation)

The researcher conducted pre ODI diagnosis through questionnaire survey as quantitative data analysis, Interview and observation as qualitative data analysis related to employee engagement at the focus group and quality customer service at the focus group and customers of the focus group. The findings of pre ODI diagnosis which the researcher concluded the areas that need to be implemented ODI for employee engagement and quality customer service are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 : Findings of areas needed to be improved

Employee Engagement	Quality Customer Service
1. Less sense of ownership and work enjoyment	1. Less service commitment to customer lead to lower service reliability
2. Less ideas & knowledge sharing	2. Lower service availability
3. Less sense of career success & opportunity	3. No clear standard and process to provide quality customer service
4. Employee workload	4. Complain from impolite communication & improper voice tone
5. Impolite & ineffective Communication	
6. No employee recognition	

Stage 2 : Organization Development Intervention (ODI)

Stage 2.1. Organization Development Intervention (ODI) Framework

The researcher used the information from pre ODI findings to develop ODI framework which integrated Whole Brain Literacy model with Appreciative Inquiry model, which also be called “Whole Brain Appreciative Coaching (WBAC) model” to develop ODI framework to enhance both employee engagement and quality customer service as shown in Figure 4. Accordingly, the researcher had synchronized the four stages of Appreciative Inquiry model with “*Toyota Way*” concept which consist two core pillars. First pillar is Continuous Improvement, consists of Challenge, Kaizen and

Genchi-Genbutsu. And the second pillar is “Respect for people”, consists of Respect and Teamwork.

According to the ODI framework, Whole Brain Literacy model which consists of four brain quadrants. First quadrant is *I-Control*, the researcher selected the ODI ideas of “Employee sense of ownership” to enhance employees to be responsible for their own works for service availability improvement and commit to work as promised to customers. The second ODI is “Standard Quality Customer Service” to enhance employee to meet the standard in providing information to the customers for highest customer satisfaction. The second brain quadrant is *I-Explore*, the researcher applied ODI ideas of “Employee self-development” to enhance employee sense of career success and opportunity. The second ODI is “Continuous Improvement in Customer Service” to enhance employee ideas and knowledge sharing, work enjoyment and sense of career success and opportunity as well as improve standard of quality customer service. The third brain quadrant is *I-Preserve*, the researcher applied ODI ideas of “Professional Communication and respect” to enhance employees polite and effective communication with each other and customers. The second ODI is “Awareness of good relationship among employees and customers” to enhance employees to aware of doing and communicating with each other and customers for good relationship among the focus group employees. The third ODI is “Customer feedback” to enhance customer to provide feedback to the focus group to improve quality customer service as well as ideas and knowledge sharing. The fourth brain quadrant is *I-Pursue*, the researcher applied ODI ideas of “Strive to work for excellence” to enhance employees work enjoyment and sense of career success and opportunity. The second ODI is “Teamwork” to enhance employee ideas and knowledge sharing and reduce workload. The third ODI is “Commit what promise to customers” to enhance employee sense of ownership, service availability and reliability to the customers.

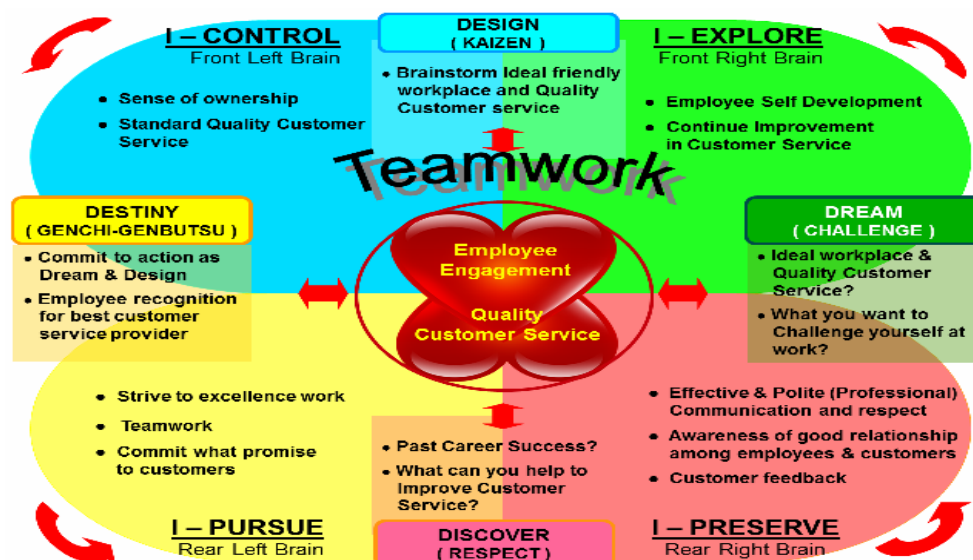
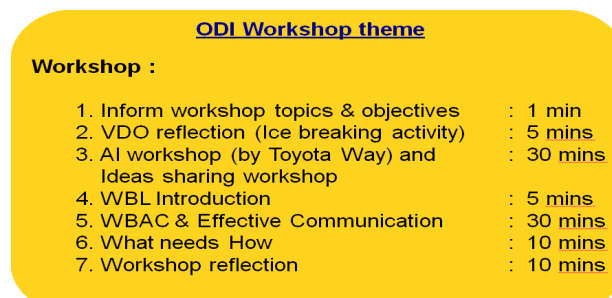


Figure 4. Organizational Development Intervention Framework (ODI Framework)

On the other hand, according to The Appreciative Inquiry model, the researcher applied Toyota Way concept to question the focus group according to the four stages. The first stage is “Discover”, the researcher synchronized with Toyota Way in terms of “Respect”

in which the researcher questioned the focus group about their past career success which related to employee engagement and what are the things that the focus group could help to improve customer service to discover the strengths of the focus group. The second stage is “*Dream*”, the researcher synchronized with Toyota Way in terms of “*Challenge*”. The researcher questioned the focus group employees about their individual ideal workplace and quality customer service as well as what they want to do to be challenged at work. The third stage is “*Design*”, the researcher synchronized with Toyota Way in terms of “*Kaizen*”. The researcher asked the focus group to brainstorm and select the ideal friendly workplace and quality customer service of the focus group. The final stage is “*Destiny*”, the researcher synchronized with Toyota Way in terms of “*Genchi Genbutsu*”. The researcher asked the focus group to commit to the action they designed in the design stage. Besides, the researcher would also ask the ideas for employee recognition program for best customer service provider, as well.

The researcher set up workshops at the focus group and customers of the focus group as the schedule shows in Figure 5.



ODI Workshop theme	
Workshop :	
1. Inform workshop topics & objectives	: 1 min
2. VDO reflection (Ice breaking activity)	: 5 mins
3. AI workshop (by Toyota Way) and Ideas sharing workshop	: 30 mins
4. WBL Introduction	: 5 mins
5. WBAC & Effective Communication	: 30 mins
6. What needs How	: 10 mins
7. Workshop reflection	: 10 mins

Figure 5. ODI workshop schedule

The objectives of the workshops were to let the focus group realize the way of working to enhance employee engagement and quality customer service. The focus group asked the focus group and customers of the focus group to brainstorm the ODI ideas as well as enhancing employee and customer relationship as shown in Figure 6.

Stage 2.2. Organization Development Intervention Workshops and Ideas:

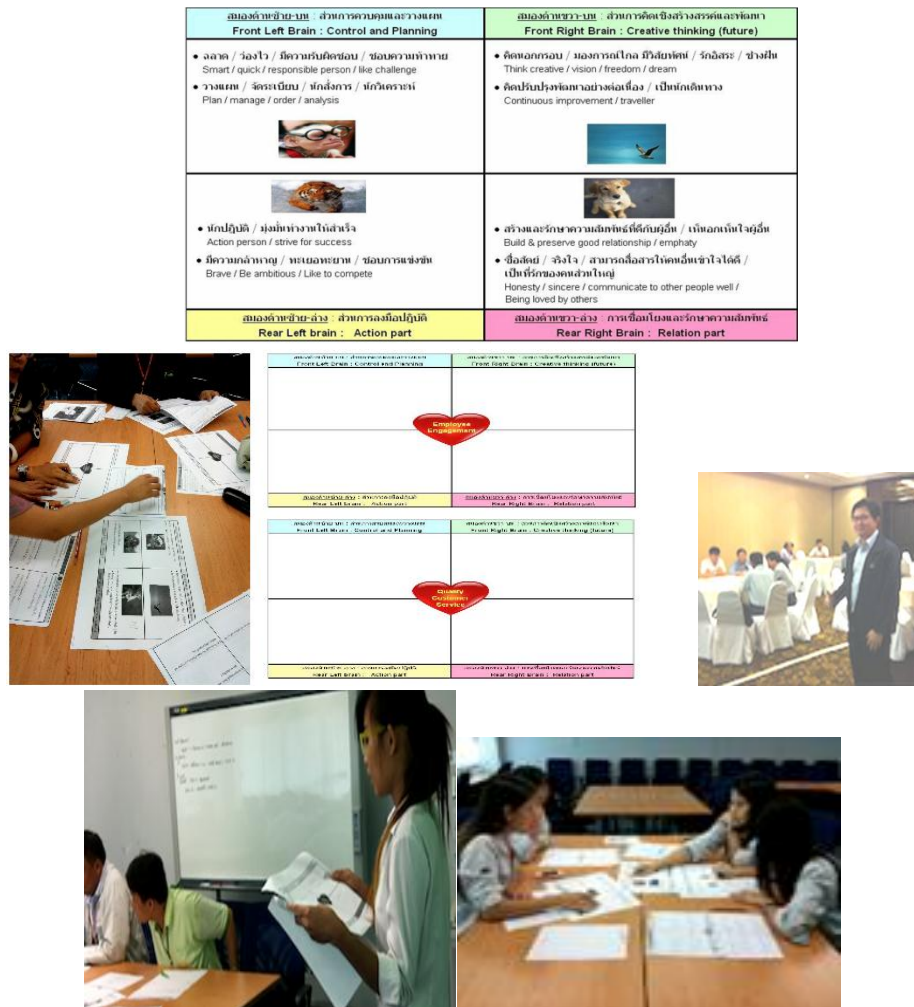


Figure 6. Organization Development Intervention workshops at focal system and customers of the focal system

After the ODI workshops, the researcher concluded and reported the ODI ideas to enhance employee engagement and quality customer service to Top management and employees of the focus group in which the ideas were grouped complying with the four quadrants of Whole Brain Literacy Framework as shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Organization Development Intervention ideas from workshops

On the one hand, according to the ODI ideas from the workshops to enhance employee engagement in the *I-Control* quadrant, the focus group would set a common goal to work in the same direction to reduce conflict while enhancing teamwork. For the *I-Explore* quadrant, the focus group would review training of new operating system for employee skills and knowledge for career development as well as set up relax place for employees to release stress from customer complaint. For *I-Preserve* quadrant, the focus group would be aware of good relationship among employees, polite communication and respect each other as well as set up activities to preserve and strengthen good relationship and work enjoyment such as birthday party or travelling upcountry. For the *I-Pursue* quadrant, the focus group would like to have employee reward and recognition program for best customer service provider.

The ODI ideas to enhance quality customer service in the *I-Control* quadrant, focused on setting Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) of service parts information and accuracy rate targets at 100% for employee work challenge and enjoyment. Moreover, employees would be motivated to have sense of ownership at work and provide quick customer service. Accordingly, the employees would also be motivated to have a meeting together to improve quality customer service. For the *I-Explore* quadrant, the focus group would also be aware of continuous improvement in quality customer service, learn new knowledge of related works and train new operating system for career development. For the *I-Preserve* quadrant, the focus group would also be aware of polite and effective communication with customers, love, care and support customers as the best. Besides, the focus group would also receive customer feedback to improve quality customer service for customer satisfaction. Finally, for the *I-Pursue* quadrant, focus group employees

would be motivated to come to work every day for service availability improvement and commit to work as promised to customers, strive to work for excellence and help each other to provide customer service as well as teamwork.

As part of the ODI workshops, the researcher developed “*ODI card*” for the focus group to review and realize what they need to do to enhance employee engagement and quality customer service. Moreover, the researcher also behave as a model to promote Corporate Social Responsibility activity participation to strengthen relationship among employees and make the focal system aware of love and care for each other and customers of the focus group, as shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8. ODI card and CSR activity participation

Stage 3 : Post ODI Diagnosis (by Questionnaire survey, Interview and Observation) :

After ODI workshops and activity implementation for 2 months, the researcher conducted post ODI diagnosis by using the same tools and survey questions used in pre-ODI diagnosis. The researcher determined the impact of the ODI framework and activities to the focal system and differences between pre and post ODI in terms of employee engagement and quality customer service as following:

Significant improvement areas in Employee Engagement

1. Better relationship among employees and management and friendly work environment.
2. Management support more on employee engagement such as Birthday cake and gift, overseas work opportunities of employees, and sub-contract officer promotion to be permanent employee program.
3. Employees had more active participation in company activities.

4. Employees respect and listen to each other more
5. Employees strived to work for excellence, help each other and have sense of ownership.

Areas that need to be improved to enhance Employee Engagement

1. Polite and effective communication to strengthen relationship & friendly work environment.
2. Teamwork for work enjoyment and reduce workload.
3. Employee recognition and reward for sense of career accomplishment, employee values and remain positive and patient when confront challenges.

The researcher determined the impact of ODI framework and activities to the focal system in terms of quality customer service as following:

Significant improvement areas of Quality Customer Service

1. Employees strive to work for excellent customer service for customer satisfaction.
2. Professional communication with customers and related functions.
3. Employees listen to customer feedback and improved in customer service availability.
4. Employees had more attempts to join a training program, and learn new knowledge and business development for quality customer service and career development.

Areas to need to be improved to enhance Quality Customer Service

1. Continue professional communication for customer relations and good cooperation
2. Teamwork for quality customer service and service availability, sense of ownership and service minds. What are service minds?
3. Efficient, effective and accurate information management to customers.
4. Efficient operating system & parts information inquiry system for quality customer service.
5. Service availability for quality customer service
6. Strengthen customer relationship by visit customers and receive feedback for improvement.

Data Analysis Configuration for Continuous Development: A candle light

After the conclusion of post ODI diagnosis in which some situations had been improved significantly and some situations need time for improvement and some were not improved, the researcher then developed “*Data Analysis Configuration for continuous development*” to be a process and cycle of continuing situation analysis in order to continue enhancing employee engagement and quality customer service as shown in Figure 9.

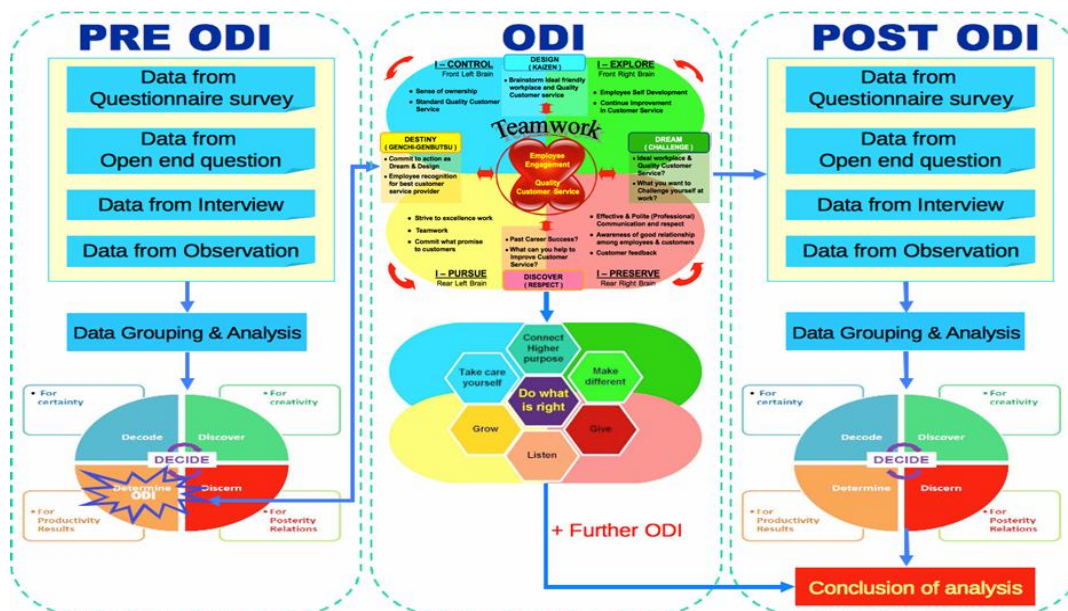


Figure 9 : Data Analysis Configuration for Continuous Development

The configuration consists of three stages in which the researcher applied and adjusted from Organization Development Intervention process as followings,

Stage 1 : Pre Organization Development Intervention (ODI) Analysis

The configuration would begin with Pre ODI analysis at the focal system by using questionnaire survey, open-ended question, interview and observation. Then the researcher would group the data and analyze the results to determine the appropriate ODI ideas by using “*Whole Brain Literacy Holistic Thinking Through Model*” as a framework which was developed by Tayko P., 2012 as shown in Figure 9.

Accordingly, the researcher would begin with the “*Decode*” quadrant to analyze the situations that had not been improved related to employee engagement and quality customer service by the previous ODI activities. Then the researcher and the focus group would brainstorm for the new ODI ideas for improvement in the “*Discover*” quadrant. After that, the researcher would determine the relation of the situations, problems and creative ODI ideas in the “*Discern*” quadrant which contribute to the selection of the appropriate ODI ideas to continue enhancing employee engagement and quality customer service in the “*Determine*” quadrant.

Stage 2 : Organization Development Intervention (ODI)

The researcher would communicate to the focus group about the previous ODI framework to enhance the focus group employees to realize what they need to do to continue enhancing employee engagement and quality customer service as well as to be a model framework to find out new ODI ideas to improve the areas that had not been improved from the previous ODI implementation. In addition, the researcher would also apply “*Whole Brain Literacy Wisdom – Seven choices to success Model*” to strengthen the ODI implementation at the focus group in which the model consists of connect higher purpose, make different, give, listen, grow, take care yourself and do what is right.

Accordingly, the researcher grouped the areas that need to be improved in terms of employee engagement and quality customer service and classified into quadrants according to “*Whole Brain Literacy (WBL) Holistic Thinking Through model*” and then combined with “*Whole Brain Literacy (WBL) Wisdom – Seven choices to succeed Model*” to develop the ODI Episode 2 Framework as shown in Figure 10.



Figure 10 : ODI Episode 2 Framework (WBL Holistic Thinking through combined with WBL wisdom : 7 choices to succeed)

According to the “*WBL Holistic Thinking Through Model*” in the ODI Episode 2 Framework, the ODI started with the “*Decode or I-Control*” quadrant which the researcher would enhance effective, efficient and accurate of information management and employees sense of ownership which are the areas that were not improved from the previous ODI implementation. For the ODI ideas in “*Discover or I-Explore*” quadrant, the researcher would continue enhancing employee creative and innovative thinking to develop or set up new activities to enhance employee engagement and quality customer service. For “*Discern or I-Preserve*” quadrant, the researcher would continue enhancing employees professional communication and respect as well as service minds to customers. And for “*Determine or I-Pursue*” quadrant, the researcher would enhance employee recognition and reward program, employees strive to work for excellence and teamwork.

And for “*WBL Wisdom – Seven choices to succeed Model*”, it would be doing all ODI activities in “*WBL Holistic Thinking Through Model*”. The researcher would enhance the focus group employees to realize and apply the seven choices to succeed when implementing ODI activities of the four quadrants.

Stage 3 : Post Organization Development Intervention (ODI) Analysis

The last stage of the configuration is Post ODI analysis. The researcher would diagnose the situation after ODI Episode 2 activities implementation by using the same questionnaire survey, open ended question, interview and observation as Pre-ODI analysis stage. Then the researcher would group data and analyze the data to determine the impact of ODI implementation through “*Whole Brain Literacy Holistic Thinking through Framework*” as shown in Figure 10.

According to the “*Data Analysis Configuration for Continuous Development*”, the researcher realized that the configuration would be the important process or way in which the researcher metaphor it as “*A candle light for enhancing employee engagement and quality customer service*”. In addition, the configuration could also be applied or extended to use in other situations or research topics as well.

Finally, according to employee engagement survey in the end of 2012 by the Human resource Department of the company, the focal system could gain 93% employee satisfaction (+18%) from 2011. Meanwhile, the focal system could also contribute good customer service which led the company to gain JD power number 1 reward in providing customer service for 5 years consecutively in 2012.

Above all, the researcher believes that “*Whole Brain Literacy model*” is one of the important models that could be extended to use as analysis tool and ODI framework for Organizational Development and Management. Moreover, it could be used as a tool to analyze people expression in words, sentences or actions based on the four brain quadrants which could enhance better understanding of people, more cooperation at work and bring peaceful to lives. Besides, Whole Brain Literacy model could also be combined with other models such as Appreciative Inquiry model which the researcher would like to confirm that the two models are also be the two candles light to continue enhancing Organization Development and Management.

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