Effects of Educational Levels and Ranks of Military on Political Skills of Thai Military Officers

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the interaction effects of educational levels and ranks of Thai military officers on political skills. Two-hundred self-administrated questionnaires called Political Skill Inventory (PSI) were distributed to both commissioned and non-commissioned military officers in a selected military unit by using simple random techniques. As of these numbers, only 176 questionnaires were returned with completion.The reliability of this scale showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85. The result of Two-way ANOVA shows no significant interaction between educational level and ranks of Thai military officers ($F_{education*ranks}$ (1,171) = .012, p>.05). For educational levels, the result shows no significant effect of educational levels on political skills of Thai military officers ($F_{education}$ (2,171) = .263, p>.05), indicating that political skills of Thai military officers are not dependent upon their educational levels. For ranks of Thai military officers, the finding also shows no significant effect of Thai military officers' ranks on political skills (F_{ranks} (1,171) = .457, p>.05), indicating that political skills of Thai military officers are not dependent upon their ranks.

Keywords: Political skill, Thai military officers, Educational levels, Ranks of Military

Introduction

In the past decade, numerous studies have widely investigated political skills and behaviors of employees in organizations (Jam, Khan, Zaidi, & Muzaffar, 2011). Political skill is defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ahearn et al., 2004: 311). Various studies indicated that political skill is positively related to employee and job performance (Chaudhry, Rehman, Ashraf, & Jaffri, 2012). Employees earned high job performance through their networking activities, which is one of political skill dimensions (Shi, Chen, & Zhou, 2011). Ferris et al. (2008) developed the political skill inventory to measure the political skill of about 700 employees in different organizations. Based on their findings, this study concluded that political skill can be broken down into four different dimensions as follows: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Among these four dimensions, a related study indicated that social astuteness was the strongest factor while assessing supervisors and their leadership effectiveness (Invacevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2014). Another study found that networking ability and apparent

sincerity reflect high political skill (Phillips & Gully, 2012). There are various studies confirmed that being sensitive to the needs and feelings of others is a vital key to survive in today's organizational environment. Working together in an organization requires politically skilled people to interact effectively in different social situations (Champoux, 2006). Whether Individuals are aware or not, political skills play a vital role for organizational goals achievement (Braddy & Campbell, 2013). By focusing on the utilization of political skill of leaders, Braddy and Campbell (2013) found that 'sincerity' was the most reliance skill whereas 'networking' was the least reliance skill. Surprisingly, they also found that female leaders slightly used each of these political skill practices greater than male leaders. In addition, the slightly greater utilization of political skill practice of upper-level leaders than middle-level leaders was also found. However, past studies apparently placed their emphasis on political skills of people in a private organization. Thus, this study attempts to investigate political skills of people in a governmental organization. Also, the type of governmental organization is selected to the military organization, which relies on command and control by nature. Moreover, this present study tends to examine the interaction effect of two factors that may have on political skills of military officers, and those factors consist of educational levels and military ranks. In other words, the main objective of this study is to investigate whether the practice of political skills of military officers is different based on educational levels and military ranks.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the interaction effects of educational levels and ranks of Thai military officers on political skills.

Hypothesis

Political skills of Thai military officers are dependent upon their educational levels and military ranks.

Scope of Study

Content: Independent variables in this study consist of educational levels and ranks of military officers. Dependent variable is political skill, which comprises of four dimensions: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity measured by Political Skill Inventory developed by Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewe (2005).

Population: Population is military officers of a selected military unit. Samples are drawn from non-commissioned and commissioned military officers using simple random sampling technique.

Period of Time: This study is conducted and collected data during May-July, 2014.

Research Methodology

This study was used quantitative approach to examine the interaction effects of educational levels and ranks of Thai military officers on political skills. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to both commissioned and non-commissioned military officers in a selected military unit. This research was restricted to reveal the name of this military organization to the public due to the confidentiality. Data were gathered from 200 military officers by using simple random technique. As of these numbers, only 176 questionnaires were returned with

completion. The response rate of completed questionnaire was 88%. A modified version of Political Skill Inventory (PSI) originally developed by Ferris et al. (2005) was used to evaluate political skills of Thai military officers. A modified version of PSI comprised of 18-item with a 5-point rating scale (1-5), which was different from the 7-point scale of original version.The total scale of PSI consists of five dimensions: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Participants were asked to rate each item of PSI to the extent in which each characteristic described them properly. The rating scales of PSI were 1 = "strongly disagree", 2 = "disagree", 3 = "neither agree nor disagree", 4 = "agree", and 5 = "strongly agree". To ensure the validity of this instrument, the index of item-objective congruence (IOC) was used to evaluate the content validity of each item of the scale. A total of 5 professors in organizational behaviors and management fields were asked to evaluate the score for each item. The IOC score of more than 0.5 deems to be acceptable. For this instrument, there was no item received a score less than 0.5. Moreover, the reliability of this scale was conducted, and showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, which was strongly acceptable. To test the hypothesis of this study, Two-way Analysis of Variance was used.

Results

As of 176 military officers who completed the questionnaires, there were 89 non-commissioned military officers (50.6%), and 87 commissioned military officers (49.4%). More than a half of them were educated at the undergraduate level (69.9%), and the rest of them were educated at below the undergraduate level (20.4%), and graduate level (9.7%), respectively.

Table 1 showed four dimensions of political skill. The total mean score of political skill was 3.99, which can be interpreted as a high level of political skill of Thai military officers. Based on the findings, 'apparent sincerity' dimension received the highest mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 4.08, S.D. = .600) compared to other political skill dimensions. The second highest mean score was 'social astuteness' dimension ($\bar{x}$ = 4.00, S.D. = .545) following by 'interpersonal influence' ($\bar{x}$ = 3.93, S.D. = .484), and 'networking ability' ($\bar{x}$ = 3.86, S.D. = .543), which is the lowest mean score of these four dimensions.

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation for Political Skills of Thai Military Officers (n = 176)

Political Skill Dimensions	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Ranking	Level
Social Astuteness	4.00	.545	2	"High"
Interpersonal Influence	3.93	.484	3	"High"
Networking Ability	3.86	.543	4	"High"
Apparent Sincerity	4.08	.495	1	"High"
Total	3.99	.600		"High"

The test for normality was not significant. The test for homogeneity of variance was not significant, *Levene F* (4, 171) = 1.679, p = .157, indicating that this assumption underlying the application of the Two-way ANOVA was met. An alpha level of .05 was used for the initial

12

analysis. A two-factor (2X3) Analysis of Variance was conducted to assess the interaction effect of educational level on political skills of non-commissioned and commissioned military officers. The two independent variables in this study are educational levels and ranks of Thai military officers. The dependent variable is political skills. The result of Two-way ANOVA shows no significant interaction between educational level and ranks of Thai military officers ($F_{education*ranks}$ (1,171) = .012, p>.05). As a result, the main effects of these two independent variables need to be proceeded for further evaluation respectively. For educational levels, the result shows no significant effect of educational levels on political skills of Thai military officers ($F_{education}$ (2,171) = .263, p>.05), indicating that political skills of Thai military officers are not dependent upon their educational levels. For ranks of Thai military officers, the finding also shows no significant effect of Thai military officers' ranks on political skills (F_{ranks} (1,171) = .457, p>.05), indicating that political skills of Thai military officers are not dependent upon their ranks(Table 2).

Table 2 Two-way Analysis of Variance for Political Skills

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Education	.182	2	.091	.263	.769
Ranks	.158	1	.158	.457	.500
Education*Ranks	.004	1	.004	.012	.911
Within (Error)	59.037	171	.345		
Total	2877.762	126			

Conclusion

This study aims to examine the interaction effects of educational levels and ranks of Thai military officers on political skills. A modified version of Political Skill Inventory (PSI) was used to collect data. This modified scale had Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, which was highly acceptable. Data were gathered from 200 Thai military officers by using simple random sampling technique, which questionnaires were distributed to non-commissioned and commissioned military officers at a selected military unit by drawing the name of participants from the list. Only 176 questionnaires were returned in completion. As of these, there were 89 non-commissioned military officers (50.6%), and 87 commissioned military officers (49.4%). More than a half of them were educated at the undergraduate level (69.9%), and the rest of them were educated at below the undergraduate level (20.4%), and graduate level (9.7%), respectively. The finding indicated a high level of political skill of Thai military officers as the mean score was 3.99. Result showed no significant interaction between educational level and ranks of Thai military officers on political skill of Thai military officers. This means that political skills of Thai military officers are not dependent upon their educational levels and military ranks.

Discussion

The finding showed that 'apparent sincerity' dimension obtained the highest mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 4.08, S.D. = .600) compared to other political skill dimensions. Apparent sincerity is a vital dimension in whether a social interaction will be successful (Champoux, 2006). This means that Thai military officers mostly perceived themselves or were perceived by others as genuine and honest in a social interaction. This is consistent with the findings of Braddy and Campbell (2013) in which 'sincerity' was found to be the most utilized political skill of leaders. This may be due to 'apparent sincerity' is the easiest practice for Thai military officers to employ and may be because the nature of their work as a military officer is required openness and honesty while working together with others in the organization. On the other hand, 'networking ability' was considered as the lowest political skill ($\bar{x}$ = 3.86, S.D. = .543) compared to other political skill dimensions. This means that Thai military officers attempt to build connections and alliances with other people inside and outside the organization, and use these opportunities to gain their own advantage in social interaction (Champoux, 2006). This finding supports the findings of Braddy and Campbell (2013) in which 'networking' was found to be the least utilized political skill of leaders. This may be because 'networking' is the most difficult practice to utilize due to time constraints and nature of organizations. 'Social astuteness' dimension earned the second highest mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 4.00, S.D. = .545), which means that Thai military officers were socially aware of their feelings and actions, and accurately views fluctuating social situations and directly notices other people's social behavior (Champoux, 2006). For 'interpersonal influence' received the third highest mean score of these four dimensions ($\bar{x}$ = 3.93, S.D. = .484), which means that Thai military officers were flexible to adjust their behaviors in varying social situations to achieve the goals. They try to use their interpersonal style to influence others to reach desired goals (Champoux, 2006).

Additionally, result indicated that there was no interaction between educational levels, ranks of military officers, and political skill. This finding is new knowledge in this area of study since no studies investigated the relationship between these two independent variables (educational levels and ranks of military officers) on political skill. This may be due to interaction effects of these two variables were not moderating variables. Political skills may be influenced by other variables such as personality and organizational culture (Shi, Chen, & Zhou, 2011). In sum, political skill is not dependent upon the interaction of educational levels and ranks of military officers.

Recommendation

Recommendation for further studies needs to test interaction effects of these two variables in other military units. The comparison study of the classifier of military groups should be conducted. Other variables such as gender, work experience, level of position should be investigated in the future research. The most appropriate recommendation for future study is to explore interaction effects of each dimension of political skill.

Acknowledgement

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