Perception of Administrative Styles
of Open and Distance Learning Institutions in Asia - A Comparative Study

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Abstract
This paper presents preliminary findings of a comparative study on the perceived administrative styles of open and distance learning institutions in Asia. This comparative study aims to address four questions as follows : (1) How do the perceived administrative styles of Asian open and distance learning institutions differ from each other, and from counterparts in other regions of the world? (2) How do issues of finance and funding influence the decision-making processes as well as the administrative styles of institutions? (3) How do related styles of administration affect the teaching and learning processes? and (4) How far do information and communication technologies influence administrative styles of institutions. This paper focuses on pertinent issues, which include government support and funding, perceived styles of administration, as well as application of information and communication technologies, in relation to managing open and distance learning institutions in today's context, where globalization, technological change and population aging converged (Tuijnman 1999) to produce a new situation.

Introduction

Open and distance learning play a significant role in human development by contributing to economic development, and fulfilling cultural as well as societal goals. In particular, nowadays, knowledge and learning are becoming increasingly central to work and everyday life (OECD 1995), the number of distance learning institutions has recently proliferated in different parts of the world to meet the growing demand of lifelong learning. As evidenced by the increasing number of institutions (public and private providers) and learners, there has been significant amount of resources being invested into the field. Moreover, the globalized economy and the changing technologies play significant parts to influence the way open and distance learning is organized. As OECD (1996 : 72) states : "instead of a supply-led and heavily institutionalized system, the new conditions allow for a demand-led client-driven approach, where learners can shop for education from diverse sources and in ways they themselves plan". In order to ensure 'value for money' and 'fitness for purpose', the design as well as organization of effective, flexible and innovative systems are major challenges for administrators of open and distance learning institutions in a world of change.

Managing Open and Distance Learning

It is well known that the core functions of managing an institution are : planning, organizing, motivating and controlling (Freeman 1997). Whilst for open and distance learning institutions, the management's main responsibility is designing and delivering courses for distance learners. All planning, funds, staff and other resources are devoted to this purpose (DistEdNet 1999).

Literature (DistEdNet 1999, Rumble 1999) and experts in the field suggest that open and

distance learning can best be managed as a system in order to ensure effective use of various human, technological and organizational elements. However, there is no single way of organizing an open and distance learning institution because there are different types of open and distance learning providers, which include Single-mode institutions, Dual-mode institutions, Mixed-mode institutions and Consortia.

In addition, open and distance learning is a method of education, which the learner is physically separated from the teacher. Teaching is conducted through face-to-face tutorials, course materials in text, audiotapes, video, computing facilities and so on. Hence, the planning, organizing and controlling of the development, production, distribution and use of the various forms of media is a significant part of the task facing administrators in open and distance learning.

Cultural Perspectives in Asia

National culture plays influential part in shaping organizational culture (Robbins1994), which has certain impact on leadership and organizational effectiveness (Cheng 1995). It is, therefore, imperative to have an understanding on the concept of culture in educational administration.

Most of the Asian cities and countries, which include China, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, South Korea and Singapore have all been influenced by the teachings of Confucius and hence are commonly referred to as Confucian or neo-Confucian societies. Some attributes shared by Confucian societies are hard work, thrift, perseverance, hierarchical ordering of relationships and scholarship (Hofstede and Bond 1988).

Nevertheless, while the teachings of Confucius are central to these societies, recognition should also be given to the influence of other philosophical approaches, such as Taoism, the legalist school, and the writings of military strategists. The influence of Confucism and the latter schools of thought on management strategies and practices in Asia has been significant. Many of those characteristics, such as the yin/yang principle, compromise, striving for total victory, flexibility, gathering intelligence and information, establishing Guanxi and so on, have been deeply ingrained in the mind-set of people in this region for thousands of years (Tung 1996)

However, culture does change and evolve over time (Tung 1996). As evidenced by the recent economic and technological development, organizations and their members have to continually work with and learn from people worldwide nowadays. In addition, as more organizations become transnational, business relationships will take place increasingly within networks of equals rather than within hierarchies of dominance and subordination. In other words, the globalized economy and changing technologies have changed the fundamental nature of the relations between nations and firms and through the social networks of individuals. There is also a conceptual shift : from a hierarchical perspective of cultural influence, compromise and adaptation, to one of collaborative cross-cultural learning (Bartholomew & Adler 1996).

It is interesting to see how Asian culture evolves over time in today's knowledge-based and ever-changing environment. In particular, how the changing Asian culture influences the

management and practices of open and distance learning in Asia.

The Study

In view of the changing phenomena mentioned in the above paragraphs, it is timely to mount the present study to look into the practice of open and distance learning in Asia. This comparative study aims to address the following research questions :

(1) How do the perceived administrative styles of Asian open and distance learning institutions differ from each other, and from counterparts in other regions of the world?

(2) How do issues of finance and funding influence the decision-making processes as well as the administrative styles of institutions?

(3) How do the styles of administration affect the teaching and learning processes?

(4) How far do information and communication technologies influence administrative styles of institutions?

Methodology

This study adopts a 4-stage procedure to collect data.

Stage 1 - An electronic forum lasting for two weeks was held in August 1998. It attracted 102 subscribers from 15 countries. However, there were just a few participants from Asia.

Stage 2 - In order to collect more views from colleagues in Asia, a qualitative questionnaire was sent to 69 Asian open and distance learning institutions in November 1998. 43 questionnaires were returned.

Stage 3 - Based on results of stages 1 and 2, a questionnaire evaluating the styles of leadership, as well as organizational culture of open and distance learning institutions was sent during April - May 1999. The questionnaire was designed with a view to collect quantitative and qualitative data from key management officials as well as staff at various levels of all Asian open and distance learning institutions. 115 replies were collected after sending out 482 questionnaires.

Stage 4 - There will be on-site interviews with key personnel of six selected Asian open and distance learning institutions to further explore pertinent issues resulting from previous findings.

Results

This paper reports summarized findings of stages 1 and 2. Analysis of Stage 3 findings,

which evaluate styles of leadership and organizational culture, is presently underway.
The following sections delineate three key issues; namely, funding, perceived administrative styles, as well as application of information and communication technologies, relating to the administration of open and distance learning institutions in Asia.

Funding

One of the important issues revealed in the electronic forum was that there had been insufficient government support in financing open and distance education. Although policy-makers consider open and distance learning as an investment in human resource development (Tuijnman 1999), discussants expressed that there had been a lack of evidence exhibiting contribution of open learning towards economic development at national level. In fact, most Asian open and distance learning institutions have to draw a high proportion of their income from student fees and donations. Funding for distance learning has to compete with other public priorities. Institutions have to keep down expenditure on student support. In turn, this greatly affects the quality of teaching and learning as well as the successful completion rates. The following table shows the different levels of government funding given to open and distance learning institutions in Asia.

Table 1: Funding Open and Distance Learning in Asia

Country	Level of Recurrent Government Funding Per Institution on Annual Basis
China	Varied About 50% government funding
Hong Kong	Self-financing (mainly from tuition fees, and donations)
India	Heavy government funding Mostly 100% government funding
Indonesia	Varied About 20-30% government funding
Iran	Varied About 25-40% government funding
Japan	About 75% government funding
Malaysia	Varied Some are government funded Some are self-financing
Philippines	Minimal government funding
Taiwan	About 30% government funding
Thailand	About 20% government funding Mainly self-financing

The differences in recurrent funding provided to institutions reflect a diversity of ideologies, needs, demands and approaches in the development of open and distance learning in various countries. As we know, open and distance learning is used in almost all sectors of education in Asia. For example, Mainland China and India, with a high percentage of

recurrent funding provided to institutions, make use of open and distance learning to improve literacy and numeracy rates, increase participation in technical and vocational skills and multiply participation in tertiary education to improve and sustain their development efforts. In Thailand and Indonesia, many students study tertiary level courses through open and distance learning. Whilst, in Malaysia and Singapore, institutions are engaged in delivering specialized programmes through the digital media (Dhanarajan 1997).

As shown in table 1, apart from China, India and Japan, most Asian governments allocate a minimal amount of recurrent funding to open and distance learning institutions. This illustrates the fact that Asian countries tend to draw a heavy reliance on private initiatives to meet growing demands in education. Crucial to this issue is whether Asian governments provide sufficient funding as well as support to open and distance learning in today's dynamic context despite the fact that there have been appeals calling for more government support (Lee & Lam 1993, Openlink 1999) towards open and distance learning.

Perceived Administrative Styles

Stages 1 and 2 findings show that open and distance learning institutions are commonly perceived as systems exhibiting bureaucratic and managerial styles. In the electronic forum, Prof R Dhanarajan   keynote paper indicated that open and distance learning institutions should be learner-centred systems comprising of three important components: (a) the programmes, courses, their design and development; (b) supporting the learners and their learning environment; and (c) staffing and their functions. In his view, finance, information systems, technology, research and quality assurance are important elements supporting these core functions. Also, he advocated systems demonstrating the philosophy of openness and empowerment of people, who should strike a balance between academic freedom and accountability to develop quality academic programmes and educational services. The following table summarizes respondents' perception about administrative styles of their respective institutions in Asia.

**Table 2: Perceived Administrative Styles
of Open and Distance Institutions in Asia**

Country	Perceived Administrative Styles of Open and Distance Learning Institutions in Asia
China	Directive & Bureaucratic
Hong Kong	Bureaucratic
India	Bureaucratic
Indonesia	Bureaucratic
Iran	No comment
Japan	Directive
Malaysia	No comment
Philippines	Directive
Taiwan	Mixed view
Thailand	Managerial

A large number of respondents perceive the administrative styles of their institutions as
irective and bureaucratic' followed by   anagerial',   ixed views', and   o comments'.
It is not surprising to see these findings because open and distance learning institutions are
complex   ystems' that perform services for large numbers of clients (Owen 1991). The
systems thinking ensures that organizational factors, which include human and
technological resources, support open and distance learning endeavours (Cookson 1998,
Rumble 1999). Moreover, educational institutions are prone to have bureaucratic and
decentralized structure (Mintzberg 1989). According to McNay (1995), cultures of
ureaucracy' and   anagerial' are common in higher education institutions.
Also, it is important to note that Asian countries have been highly influenced by
Confucianism. Chinese and Southeast Asian systems advocate a strict hierarchical structure
and, implicit but firm rules of propriety determining how people should behave in any
relationship structure they find themselves in (Westwood 1992). These findings indicate
general phenomena influenced by national and organizational cultures. Nevertheless, we
must point out that it is crucial for institutions to find the most appropriate strategic   it'
(McNay 1995) within their own contexts to achieve organizational effectiveness. It is
expected that a more in-depth and interesting picture can be drawn from stage 3 analysis,
which evaluates styles of leadership and organizational culture.

Application of Information and Communication Technologies

The electronic forum discussion reflected that the availability and applicability of
information and communication technologies would influence the structuring of
institutions, the flow and speed of information sharing as well as mode of teaching and
learning. Table 3 indicates that application of information and communication technologies
have been gaining importance as well as popularity in open and distance learning in Asia.

The above findings are highly positive. It is because information and communication
technologies have become part of our daily lives in developed countries. It is important
that open and distance learning institutions should put focus on building an enabling
learning infrastructure facilitated by technologies to provide learning synergies, which will
serve as a means to produce high quality educational outcomes (Kirkwood 1997).

Information and communication technologies also play a crucial role in streamlining
administrative procedures, and easing flow of communication in our work. As in other
fields, we believe that the application of technologies will influence the structure, culture
and administrative styles of open and distance learning institutions as well.

For developing countries, they may need to pay significant amount of costs, time and effort
to reach the   hird Generation' (a combination of computing, telecommunications and
the cognitive sciences) (Daniel 1996) of open and distance learning. Nevertheless, the
sooner they upgrade their systems, the better. It is because in many parts of the world we
are operating in a context, which calls for international efforts to facilitate a global
approach to learning (OECD 1995).

Table 3: Application of Information and Communication Technology

Country	Application / Role Information and Communication Technology
China	Varied progress in application of technologies Important role Improve effectiveness of work and quality of teaching
Hong Kong	Very important role Improve effectiveness of work and quality of Teaching
India	Supportive role Streamlining procedures Easing communication
Indonesia	Mixed views Important role Supportive role
Iran	Mixed views Remarkable role Not fully supportive
Japan	Mixed views Not widely used except for TV and radio Broadcasts Supportive role
Malaysia	No comments
Philippines	Important role
Taiwan	Supportive role
Thailand	Supportive role

Discussion and conclusion

The stages 1 and 2 results of this study reflect a number of concerns :

Lifelong Learning : Towards Strategic Human Resource Development

In today   global economic competition, we must regard lifelong learning as an instrument for raising the quality of life and workforce. Lifelong learning should be a key national priority (Tuijnman 1996).   We believe that open and distance learning certainly play a strategic role to meet the demands of lifelong learning as well as human resource development in an era, where globalization, technological change and population aging converged to produce a new situation (Tuijnman 1999).

Diversified Financial Framework

We propose to develop a diversified financial framework for open and distance learning. On one hand, governments should allocate sufficient setting-up costs (Ball 1994) to provide

an infrastructure for lifelong learning. On the other hand, in our fast-changing and knowledge-based contexts, the provision of open and distance learning should draw on shared resources rather than putting a heavy reliance on government support. We must recognize that government taxation can no longer be sufficient to cover the increasing diversified learning needs within modern societies. Therefore, governments of respective countries, individuals and corporations have increasing roles to play in providing a diversified financial framework for life-long learning activities (Tuijnman 1996).

Fitness of Institutional Framework and its Administrative Styles

This study illustrates that there are certain similarities and differences in western management theories and Asian culture as well as values. The literature review and analysis of current findings have generated further questions; such as (a) How best can we adapt the systems thinking to manage open and distance institutions in Asia? (b) Does 'bureaucratic' administrative style meet the institutional needs in today's dynamic context? (c) Is there a need to change the present way of administration, and, if so, how to do communicate the needs and implement the necessary changes in an effective manner? (d) Is Confucian value facilitating or deterring organizational development of open and distance institutions in Asia? (e) How best can we melt the   ixed pot of western management theories and Asian values' in order to find the right strategic   it' to meet future challenges? We believe that these are essential issues for open and distance learning institutions in Asia to consider in order to map institutional strategies for further development.

Strategic Application of Information and Communication Technologies

A technology strategy is central to the development of open and distance learning institutions. Our findings, which conform to forecasts made by experts (Daniel 1996), reflect that application of technologies takes an important role in the field. We should appreciate that new technologies have considerable potential to enhance the richness of interactions between students and give access to more resources for scholarship than ever before. Daniel (1996) states the knowledge media bring together the traditions of distance learning, as well as classroom teaching and encouraging a common focus on learning productivity. Therefore, open and distance learning institutions should incorporate an institution-wide technology strategy, and aim to play a leading role to deliver innovative learning initiatives with greater use of technologies.

This paper has identified that open and distance learning play a significant role in human resource development in today's context. It has proposed to establish a diversified financial framework, which calls for collaboration among government, employers, learners and the community, to contribute to the development of a learning society. The findings in relation to the perception of administrative styles of institutions have generated further questions with regard to cultural diversity and institutional change to meet societal needs for further development. Finally, this paper has elaborated the importance of developing as well as implementing information and communication technologies, which can provide competitive advantages in open and distance learning.

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