



Towards the 21st Century

by

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Much has happened since we last met, and as usual politicians and policemen were not the only ones with a lot on their hands. We at the HRI were also rather busy with the pressing business of human resources development, but I still found time to listen to friends and acquaintances expressing their support for our efforts, which persuades us to work yet harder.

Now in our fourteenth week we have accumulated a considerable body of information on HR. Don't worry if you missed some weeks. We may publish a bi-lingual, Thai and English collection of the articles sometime and we will also look into arranging Thai translations on a weekly basis. This would be of great help to those educators who I am told already use the columns as teaching materials in the classroom.

As an academic I am very excited by all the possibilities uncovered by this cooperation with the media. For example, Dr. John Butler wants to promote the best provincial school in Thailand, which is something he has in common with Brian Cahill of McCann-Erickson who is thinking about donating fax machines to provincial schools for educational purposes, which is something they both have in common with the HRI which can provide the teaching materials!

It is the kind of idea that the Ministry of Education would strangle to death with all its red tape and a good example of what the private sector can accomplish. No-one can afford to be complacent about human resources nor count on the government to come up with the goods.

I was fortunate enough last week to attend a special lecture in Bangkok given by Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Data Seri Anwar Ibrahim who I first met 4 years ago when he served as Minister of Education. It was quite a contrast to hear him tell of how in Malaysia the Education Ministry is considered one of the most important cabinet portfolios. In fact it is essential for politicians who aspire to the highest offices in Malaysia to first pass through the Ministry of Education or another human resources related ministry. This could hardly be said of Thailand. He has always struck me as having a great vision of Malaysia's future and the role that must be played by education. When you see how politicians from other countries in the region are taking steps to ensure their long-term competitiveness it is somewhat disheartening to consider what our own government is doing, and how our society neglects this vital ingredient in sustained development.

However, I am pleased to learn from former Deputy Prime Minister Amnuay Virawan that Thailand now has its own 'think tank' which is currently under his chairmanship. It is called the Institute of Policy Research for Development (IPRD), and may I say we have high hopes for it. I offer my support and hope that besides international cooperation the Institute will count human resource, agriculture and other sociological issues among its top priorities.

Anyway back on the subject of the busy week, I was very gratified to be honoured by a visit from the Lecturer's Council of State Universities seeking my opinions on the current status and future prospects for Thai universities. However, nice as it was to be consulted, I nevertheless had to give it to them straight. I told them that the situation was bad and that as for long-term strategies there don't seem to be any.

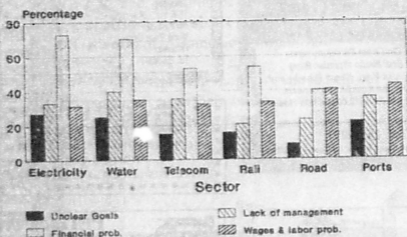
One of the most alarming aspects of the situation is how the universities are losing their academic staff to the private sector. It is increasingly difficult to attract young people into becoming professional academics. Meanwhile our current store of professors is ageing rapidly. According to HRI research, the average age of Ph.D. holding professors at Thammasat is over 45 and this probably holds true in all our universities. Our Rectors and Deans have not reacted to the situation because they are lacking in formal management training. Small wonder then that the heightened competition everywhere is overtaking our university system.

It would be a good idea for the Ministry of University Affairs to start by taking a look at the likes of Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. These countries are proving every day that they know how to take care of their resources of brainpower, while our own competitive advantage in this area is in rapid decline.

Finally, let me welcome Dr. Fredric Swierczek to our column. We have worked together successfully for many years particularly in relation to our shared interest in Vietnam. His views on privatization are vital not only to Thailand but across the region. I would also agree with Dr. Amnuay when he suggested that we should not only privatise state enterprises but other government organizations that deal with the public including hospitals - and universities! With such a lot to do I think we can all expect even busier days ahead!

See you next week!

Management problems in public sector infrastructure 1980-92



Source: World Bank