Short Communication

Organizational Diagnosis of a Regional Medical Sciences Center in Northern Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to elaborate on the current situation of a regional medical sciences center in Northern Thailand through the perspectives of their staff during a time of political disturbance within the central government. A modified Six-Box Model has been applied. Staff at the center identified six elements or areas, which have been focused on. Problems or issues concerning Organizational Purpose, Structure, Relationship, Reward System, Leadership and Helpful Mechanisms were scrutinized. Helpful Mechanisms were found to have the smallest gap score and the highest actual situation score in the organization, with medium Concern. The Reward System showed the widest gap with high Concern. By utilizing the model to ensure the organization can achieve its goals, a Reward System should be designed and implemented. The model is not particularly difficult to comprehend and is useful in visualizing the organization through the perspectives of the workforce, without the use of technical terminology. Approaches should be developed to minimize the gaps of each element from the Six-Box Model.

Keywords: organizational diagnosis, management, Thailand

INTRODUCTION

A regional medical sciences center is located in Nakhon Sawan province which is situated in the north of Thailand. The center is known as Nakhon Sawan Regional Medical Sciences Center (NSRMSC). It is a branch of Thai national reference laboratory, under authority of the Ministry of Public Health. It works closely with other health care providers as well as other medical research laboratories in Northern region. It provides clinical testing, and special or rare disease investigation testing to other public sectors i.e. Provincial Health Office, Disease Control and Prevention Office in Northern region, district and community hospitals or with other private health offices. The center has also served as an outbreak investigation laboratory for the region. [1]

For decades, the center has rarely employed a comprehensive approach to analyze the organizational situation from its staff's point of view ever since the ministry decentralized power. In the future, the center would be responsible and accountable for its own development, progress and prosperity.

The center is referred as the organization. The terms are used interchangeably in this study. The ongoing political conflict in Thailand has disrupted the center's operations since the last quarter of 2013. To improve the organization during this political instability, organizational development could be used to apply, handle operations and communication among its staff. To be able to do such things, the organization needs to learn about its current situation and how to deal with organizational problems. These problems include appropriate decision making from top management, communication and coordination among staff members. [2]

Approach Used: Six-Box Model

Previously, there was not sufficient data to understand the current organizational situation with regards to the perspective of the staff while political instability continued at the central government. The authors did not initiate the study because of anyone's particular expertise in management. They primarily discussed any existing and up-to-date information while carrying out this research study rather than immediately start to test any hypothesis.

The authors have used a modified Six-Box Model of Weisbord [3] to obtain information from all the staff at the medical sciences center during the period of political instability, which has been going on for more than 12 months. One of the authors has worked in collaboration with another regional medical sciences center along with its counterpart, the Thai National Institute of Health. The authors utilized the modified model to assess the organization, known as organizational diagnosis. [4] 50 members of staff received a guided survey, which assessed their perception of the situation at the medical center. 26 (52%) completed surveys were obtained and the averages of the different categories were analyzed. From an organizational perspective, one must remember that the diagnosis does not always mean something is wrong with an organization. [5] The diagnosis could lead to a broader understanding of organizational development. The Six-Box Model consisted of six categories: Organizational Purposes, Organizational Structure, Organizational Relationship, Reward System, Organizational Leadership and Helpful Mechanisms. The box is a generic approach and is usually used across a broad range of organizations in both public and private sectors. [4]

There are other organizational development models that can be used to assess the organization. For example, 7S Model of Mckinsey, Hornstein and Tichy Model, Six-Box Model or Weisbord's Model and Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model. 7S Mckinsey is a good approach and interrelates seven essential categories. However, finding interconnecting links between the various categories is complicated. [6] The Hornstein and Tichy Model consist of nine categories that include what factors have strong and weak effects on people. The model uses a table matrix and group work within the organization. [4] The Nadler-Tushman's Congruence Model is comprehensive but takes a long time to implement, does not directly approach group dynamics and has a cause and effect relationship. [7,8] The Weisbord Six-Box Model is one of the common used models [9] and can be especially helpful when conducting time-critical research. It is also relatively less complicated than the previously mentioned models. The researchers are able to systemically lay out the organization by visualizing it as a whole without the use of jargon. Nevertheless, the model has a drawback in that it does not provide any connection between each category and in-depth analysis through statistical modeling should be obtained. [10]

Other more popular models used in the public and private sectors are SWOT and Balance Score Cards (BSC). The center occasionally uses these for decision making or other strategic management problems, but they have not been used while the central government has been in turmoil. Both SWOT and BSC need input from top management in addition to thorough external and internal analysis. They take more staff time and are more complicated than the Six-Box Model. However, both of them and the Six-Box Model require the judgment of the organization's staff, which is subjective. The SWOT framework can simplify the external and internal environment by making them more manageable. [11] Other medical sciences centers in the northeast of the country also use them. [12]

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From this preliminary organizational study through the Six-Box Model, it can be seen that there is a disparity between the expected indicator value and the actual situation score. The data in Table 1 is the average score for each category. Reward System had the highest gap score (3.4) and level of Concern while the Helpful Mechanisms category had the smallest gap score (1.9) and the highest actual situation score (8.1). Both Organizational Purpose and Leadership had similar actual situation and gap scores (7.5 & 7.4 and 2.5 & 2.6, respectively) but had different levels of Concern. The organization has lots of rules and regulations that staffs are required to follow. In addition, guidance tools and systems are available for NSRMSC personnel, especially for the professional staff i.e. medical scientists. Nevertheless, regional center systems are far too complicated for everyone who works either inside or outside the laboratory to comprehend. Daily management is rather

routine and is not distinguished from other activities.

Six-box six-categories in health laboratory context
Organizational Purpose: Weisbord [3] and other management experts [13] mentioned that the purpose of organizations has covered goals: goal clarity, goal fit and goal agreement, mission, strategy and objectives. Therefore, the goals should be clearly defined to the staff in order that they can be achieved. The Purpose is the first important category as it is a shared value and belief among employees. The staff here, in general, clearly understand the organizational goals, purposes and objectives and hence gave it a score of 7.5 (Table 1) and a low level of Concern. The organization posts official notices for the public and its employees to access via its website and any interested persons know what the center does since it is well communicated. There are well-defined vision statements, mission statements, strategies and objectives. Sometimes, the purpose and goals may not be well reflected in the implementation and organizational practices.

Purpose needs to be set by top management and staff should be able to engage from below. [14] The goals are assumed to have been agreed upon because the output is generally ubiquitous. However, agreeing the goals needs to be conducted with staff participation, staff representatives and/or new staff in order to develop official purpose at the early stages of employment. Moreover, strategic planning could be added on the center's policy in the website as other administrative documents.
Organizational Structure: The authors found the NSRMSC's organizational structure to be traditional and tall, which means it has a small or narrow span of control. [15,16] Employees perform routine

jobs and do similar tasks across the organization. Most of them are highly trained and so require minimal guidance or direction when carrying out their duties. [17] Employees or subordinates are usually available for supervisors. The structure is also vertical, functional and hierarchical, which reflects the central style of command. The small span of control in such a hierarchical structure could result in routine problems. When problems do occur, the decision is made at a high level of the organization which results in top management being directed away from essential and potentially more critical issues. [18] This type of structure has the potential to limit innovation, creativity or accountability of middle managers. However, supervisors in this kind of structure prefer to have large and wide spans of control [19] as opposed to less hierarchy, which could happen in the lowest level of work at the center.

An organizational structure diagram is posted at the main office building, which indicates rank or position of top management. This is normal at all centers because it is one indicator of quality management requirements. However, not all positions are on the diagram. The staff who participated in the study gave high scores for this category, scoring 8.0 for low Concern. One drawback is that the Director of the center is usually posted for only a few years and leaves when they are relocated or when their term comes to an end. Their employment could be extended within the ministry or central government. Another drawback is that top management are also required to travel to field sites within or outside the region and are therefore sometimes absent from the center.

An organization is self-sustaining as Porter and Powell mentioned in the Handbook of Organization Studies. [20] The same is true with NSRMSC whereby working under the ministry as a public and research institute, it receives a large proportion of its budget from the ministry, especially to pay for all its human resources. Therefore, the center needs to follow the ministry's certain directions, guidance, rules and regulations, even if its power has been decentralized. There are further complicated factors involved when working with public clients and other collaborators who are other sources of income and who have their own rules that need to be followed along with those of the ministry.

Organizational Relationship: Teamwork in an organization produces a series of activities that allows tasks to get done. An essential skill is required effective communication, which leads to a positive relationship among teams. Furthermore, management functions would become more efficient through effective communication. [16] The organizational relationship has average actual situation score of 7.2 and a gap score 2.8 (Table 1). Teamwork between the administration unit and clinical sciences teams needs improving. Logistics/maintenance and Thai NIH are often not in sync with the department or the ministry. This area is of high Concern because the organization needs to work in the field with other organizations such as external clients (private or public) and this collaboration would increase co-ordination as well as understanding. If this were to continue, it would take too long for the organization to take the initiative and make a decision on particular important tasks.

Having worked with other public or private organizations i.e. general hospitals, district hospitals, community hospitals, Tambon health promoting hospitals, provincial public health offices etc., the organization needs to approach problems tactfully as some government offices are very conservative. As a consequence, they have many different perspectives, especially

about the political instability in the central government.

Communication in an organizational relationship is a tool used to accomplish goals and objectives. [20] It affects relationships not only among individual staff members, but also the cohesion of other units. Since data and information need to pass through different groups accurately, it is critical that even if the information is unclassified, it be conveyed correctly. Clinical science teams and administration teams have diverse areas of knowledge and skills but would perform better if the challenges with regard to organizational relationships had been handled properly. However, their actual situation score is not low even with a high level of Concern (Table1). Synergy across teams can allow an organization to achieve its goals [13] but if synergy fails, internal communication could be traced and the cause of the miscommunication can be pinpointed.

Table 1. Average output from modified Six-Box Model used at the center

Organizational area	Expected indicator and score (maximum 10)	Actual situation score (10)	Gap	Concern Low/Medium High	Problems or issues mentioned
1. Organizational Purpose	Clearly defined, staff understand and practical to implement toward goal	7.5	2.5	L	Some staff do not understand the goals and purposes even if they are posted on the website.
2. Organizational Structure	Developed structure for governance and management of projects/studies and their roles	8.0	2.0	L	Workforce problem, high staff turnover, staff who remain need to cover for leavers, complicated job descriptions or overlap with others. Not sufficient staff to perform routine jobs when urgent task occurs i.e. outbreak investigation or ad-hoc activities.
3. Organizational Relationship	Effective communication, coordination and teamwork	7.2	2.8	H	Miscommunication occurred often between staff, especially when delegating. Communication needs improving. Staff do not understand when delegated the same task. Sometimes, the center is not in sync with the NIH or the department.
4. Reward System	Explicit policy/system and practice for performance evaluation, incentives and staff development	6.6	3.4	H	There is an existing format for personnel evaluation. However, taking turns in getting promoted each year does not encourage or motivate highly competent staff. Staff morale is also decreased by such a policy. There is no clear incentive system that informs staff of who gets awards and on what basis. In addition, award system is sometimes arbitrary. Overtime pay and compensation is rarely offered.
5. Organizational Leadership	Staff at different levels can assess the situation and take initiative to bring change	7.4	2.6	M	In general, staff do not provide input for change because supervisors or top management do not want to make any changes.
6. Helpful Mechanisms	Available approach/method/ tool/expert on administrative, management and financial systems to support staff and projects/studies	8.1	1.9	M	There are tools, methods or approaches available for staff to utilize in their work but some staff do not understand how to use them.

Reward System: Employees of the organization are rewarded based on their annual performance evaluation or by accomplishing certain tasks. An individual's contribution to success in a team is considered in the reward system. Additionally, if the team performs well, it will also be rewarded under this reward system. Those individuals who receive rewards tend to be highly committed employees, which is normally a precursor to overall staff commitment. [21] The center has written a policy and system and has put into practice a method to evaluate staff performance along with official reward announcements at least once a year. The gap score of this category is the widest (3.4) with the lowest situation score (6.6) and the

highest level of Concern. Awards, rewards, overtime and compensation paid are incentives.

However, the current method of personnel evaluation has a few important drawbacks, which may affect staff motivation and morale. For example, two staff members who perform the same job description could potentially get different pay rises at the end of the year. Management give discretionary pay rises in turn as opposed to the more beneficial method of evaluation through individual competency and output. Little has been done about staff receiving what they deserve and if unfairness remains, this could breed mediocrity and generate much criticism in the organization. Therefore, the fairness issue should be a top priority. [22] Moreover, if the budget is not sufficient, politics and power come into play with the result that pay rises may be delayed or not happen altogether. In general, staffs always receive an annual pay rise. Overtime and compensation pay are subjective and depend on each situation, as analyzed by top management [23] stated that reward systems affect staff attitude, perception and behavior in various ways and can have an impact on staff absenteeism, turnover and performance.

Organizational Leadership: An individual does not need to have a formal leadership position in order to exhibit leadership behavior. One can have a role as an informal or unofficial leader to achieve team success as a formal leader. [23] An issue with leadership can have cross cutting effects on all other areas of organizational development. A leader focuses on doing the right thing more than doing the thing right. [24] However, there are various things that a leader cannot control, especially when it comes to factors outside the organization. Nevertheless, the effect that good or bad leadership can have on an organization's

performance is substantial. Leaders in the organization are at different levels like in Larsson and Hyllengrens' study. [25] When issues or problems occur, personnel holding top management positions have to assess the situation and should make decisions by taking the initiative to bring change to the organization.

The gap and the actual situation scores for Organizational Leadership are similar to those of Purpose (Table 1) but the level of Concern is higher than for Purpose. Staffs at the center have more chance to speak their minds than at other centers. They also can initiate ideas from their tasks. However, the center is limited by the need for approval and sometimes legal guidance from upper management e.g. when considering a lawsuit concerning a private sector, the center is left to decide on the next step. Rules and regulations regarding the case have limited the stewardship of leaders in the organization. Ivancevich [23] noted on the Fiedler Contingency Model that Fiedler thought leaders need to change their style in various situations. The model is one of the most famous models used in researching work settings. The present top leader in the organization, the Director, has utilized the model and tried to find the optimal leader-member relationship for the center task structure but the least preferred co-worker questionnaire has never been used. One important drawback of the top leader here is that the person holding this position changes every three to four years. Some top leaders can settle down quickly but some cannot adjust well to their positions in different parts of the country. This is because they have to work with and supervise local staff and as a result take time to learn about the corporate culture, as well as complete the tasks that they need to accomplish over the coming years.

Helpful Mechanisms: There are plenty of tools available for working on projects and

clinical studies. They help handle issues in both formal and informal ways. Policies are regarded as one form of Helpful Mechanisms. Other examples of Helpful Mechanisms that are useful to operational activities are data and information security systems, quality management tools, work instructions and standard operating procedures. These mechanisms are considered useful and helpful when they can assist in coordination among units or sub-units outside the office. However, the ministry's complicated rules and regulations do not fit well with joint research operations in the center, which has its own methods and procedures when issues occur. There are procedures for monitoring and evaluating from the medical sciences department at the ministry, but their effectiveness and efficiency are not evaluated. The gap score between what is expected and what the actual situation is the least among the six categories (1.9) with the best actual situation score (8.1), which can be attributed to there being many existing helpful tools. The Concern is moderate, which may be due to the rigid rules and ambiguities involved with working at the center. The mechanisms cut across the other five categories that may not be linked to each other. Implementation and control measures should be considered to help decrease the gap along with further participation or surveys to find out optimized intervention or how and what mechanisms are needed.

CONCLUSION

The model used in this paper has provided quick and concise information about the organization. It organized data for us and interested readers. It helped increase the understanding and gave better ideas of where to initiate and improve matters in the organization. Cause and effect linkages between each category are not mentioned as the organization has far more complicated problems and issues to deal with. From this study, problems were found in every category, with problems in the Reward System the most critical. The Organizational Structure and Helpful Mechanism were least problematic with a low level of Concern. However, it must be noted that the study did not receive viewpoints from all staff and therefore could miss various important issues in the organization. If the organization does not allow this model to be adopted, further empirical study could be conducted on other areas of the organization.

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