Thai School Culture Change: A Content Analysis from Bangkok

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ABSTRACT

The study set out to conduct a content analysis of how an elite group of *Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment* (ONESQA) certified school administrators and teachers in the Bangkok metropolitan area viewed their school's culture in relation to change. From an in-depth content analysis of 24 individuals, it was determined that raising the awareness of change is urgently needed. However, change requires a strong transformation leadership team, who need to eliminate barriers to change. Also, when change happens, it must be 'frozen' in place. Finally, in Thai school culture, change requires patience and clarity.

Introduction

According to Tharp [1], culture is shared and learned, and transmitted across generations. Culture can also be adaptive, symbolic, and integrated, which is complicated to change. Also, a school's *culture* can be thought of as its *personality* [2], with *culture* and *climate* being used interchangeably when talking about a school's culture [3].

Furthermore, the National School Climate Council believes that the terms have different meanings, and added that school climate is the norms, expectations, and values that support an individual's social, emotional, and physical feelings concerning their safety [4]. However, a school's culture is part of a school's organizational growth, with norms and values, assumptions, and expectations [3]. School culture also entails the school's climate, its mission, and its vision [2]. Added to these are the school's daily routines, its rituals, ceremonies, norms, symbols, stories, values, and beliefs. School culture is also the tangible and intangible norms and values shared by members of a school that help shape the behaviors of teachers and school leaders. Kanawapee et al. [5] expanded on these perceptions and stated that in Thai school culture, teachers are looked up to for their wisdom and advice by the families and the local school's

community. Hallinger and Kantamara [6] later added that Thailand's national culture consists of a strongly hierarchical and bureaucratic society. Therefore, school culture also exists outside the school's local community.

School culture also is involved with sustaining the value and fascination of the educational process [7]. However, there are culturally grounded differences in people's responses to change, which derive from cultural values and norms that shape human behavior. This is especially true in Thailand where there is a strong traditional set of cultural norms and values [6]. In Indonesia, school culture has been attributed to how the school atmosphere is perceived, the student body's behavior, and the style and atmosphere surrounding the administrator's management [8]. It is also suggested that financial reports should be open to the parents and the school's community to enhance honesty and ethics.

Therefore, school culture, its climate, or its atmosphere involves many stakeholders. These include the school's administrators and teachers, policymakers, parents, and the local communities. All of these are, therefore, influencing each student's behaviors, motivations, and achievements [9]. However, in the centralized institutional culture of Thai schools, actual change implementation has to catch up to national

policies, with the actual change taking place over extended periods [6].

Therefore, school leaders and administrators must provide a positive climate and culture in which teachers and their students can share the best possible experiences and opportunities [10]. To achieve these goals, a teacher's knowledge about content, teaching methodologies, and discipline standards is crucial [11].

Literature Review

Organizational Culture (OC) Change

Organizational culture has been stated as being a fundamental characteristic of the educational system dues to its ability to shape thinking as well as its effect on teacher productivity and student academic performance [12]. Leadership has also been proven time and again as a mobilizer of individuals for specific purposes to achieve organizational goals and objectives [13]. OC also works as a leader's tool as it motivates the school's community members into a developmental trajectory, creating organizational conditions which contribute to learning outcomes and positive change. Moreover, school OC involves parent event participation, teacher activities, and the alignment of staff goals with those of the school organization [14].

However, in Thailand OC change is normally slow and gradual. However, occasionally OC change happens quickly due to unforeseen events such as political crises, environmental disasters, or even pandemics. Change can also come from either internal or external environments [15]. Therefore, school environments and culture must have flexible structures and mechanisms which allow OC adaptability.

Furthermore, Schein [16-17] also discussed OC as having three main elements. They were the organization's *people*, its *processes*, and its *technology*. Contributing to these factors were the organization's *artifacts*', *values*, and basic *assumptions*. Another model that can be used to effectively implement change is Lewin's 3-phase theory of change. Previously, Lewin [20-21] had

stated that necessary change in OC could be visualized by thinking about ice thawing (unfreezing), re-molding (change), and then re-freezing again (Table 1). This foundational concept in change management thereafter became known as the CATS Model or '*Changing As Three Steps*' [20-21].

Furthermore, after four decades of research, writing, and consulting, Kotter [22] has synthesized his findings of organizational change into eight steps (Figure 1). In these steps, they can be summarized as urgency, coalitions, strategy, volunteers, barrier removal, winning, acceleration, and organizational change (Table 1). The main takeaways are that change goes thru a succession of stages, each lasting long periods, with even trivial mistakes that can lead to a negative impact on change [23].

Furthermore, from a 73 study meta-analysis on leadership, five major personality dimensions were determined to be correlated to leadership. Ranked in importance, were surgency (.31), conscientiousness (.28), openness to experience (.24), with agreeableness weakly correlated (.08). In other words, people high in surgency are perceived as a leader—they work hard, and they bring about change. They are not too concerned about being well-liked and trying to please everyone, and they are stable or not overly emotional [24].


Figure 1. Kotter's 8-step Process for Leading Change Source: [22]

Lussier and Achua [25] also embraced the CATS Model in their textbook on leadership theory. They all outlined what they referred to as four-phased of the transformation process. These phases were identified as recognizing the need for change, creating a new vision, managing the transition, and finally, institutionalizing the change process.

Chen and Kanfer have also developed a model that discusses OC in the context of teams or groups [26-27] (Table 1).

School Culture (SC)

A successful school culture finds its' foundation from the individuals that adhere to and follow leaders who exhibit certain skills and leadership characteristics. Highlighting these, a recent study from the United Kingdom (UK) outlined the factors contributing to a school's culture and its success [28] (Figure 2). It was also emphasized that there is a strong correlation between behavior and achievement, with leadership being the key to behavior standards. Therefore, the most important task for school leaders is to create a culture ('the way we do things around here'), that is understood and subscribed to by the entire school community.
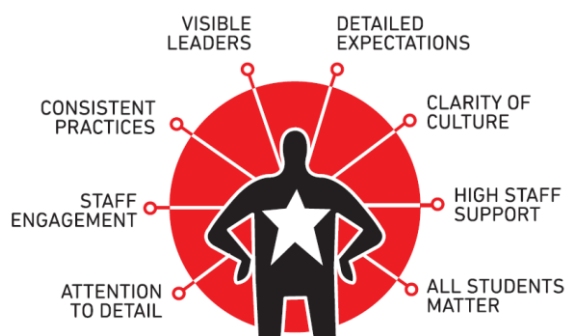
Figure 2. Commonly found features of the most successful UK schools Source: [28]

Sathe [29] has also added that school culture is influenced by the staff and student's cooperation, the decision-making processes, communication, engagement, and the perception and control of the organization. Moreover, true cooperation cannot

be achieved through regulation; it must happen through personal bonds.

This is consistent with other studies in which schools were examined as organizational culture, from which the critical importance of the principals, teachers, students, and parents attaining a shared sense of meaning that allows day-to-day activities to become routinized and taken for granted [30-32]. School cultures are also the shared orientations, values, norms, and prac-tices that hold an educational unit together (for better or worse). School culture also gives each school its distinctive identity, which normally resists change from the outside. School culture also helps school personnel understand the nature of their work and choose the correct approach to solving problems using well-established procedures. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the importance of school culture concerning the thoughts, beliefs, and conduct of school personnel, all of which have an impact on the school administration and development system. If the school culture is understood and can be applied to the environment, it will result in the school administration being successful and effective

Therefore, the transition to an effective school culture that is sustainable requires a step-by-step analysis of its processes. The analysis must be prepared and planned systematically to achieve a sustainable and continuously evolving school culture.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the theory related to organizational culture and change.
2. To identify the key characteristics of change.
3. To access how Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) Department of Education (DOE) administrators and teachers viewed the process of a school's culture and its change.

Table 1. The process of change

The change process	Lewin CATS Model [20-21]	Schein [16-17]	Chen & Kanfer [26-27]	Kotter [24]	Lussier and Achua [25]
1. **Unfreeze** - Breaking down the existing status quo before you can build up a new way of operating.	✓	✓			✓
2. **Change** (molding) – Individuals start resolving their uncertainty concerning change and look for new ways to do things.	✓				
3. **Refreeze** – After thawing the structure, the 'refreeze' occurs when a new stable organizational chart is put in place with consistent job descriptions. With a new sense of stability, employees feel confident and comfortable with the new ways of working.	✓	✓			✓
4.**Change or moving.**		✓			✓
5. Problem determination by senior management of the organization.			✓		
6. Team stakeholder participation in the change where the organization invites a team of consultants from both inside and outside the organization to study and analyze the change.			✓		
7. Data collection and analysis of operational problems. Stakeholders have then presented the information allowing them to reflect on it or take action.			✓		
8. Change is dependent on a plan which can find solutions, assess options, which leads to a decision on the best course of action.			✓		
9. Change requires organizational restructuring, cultural adaptation, technology improvement, creating incentives, etc.			✓		
10. The requirement for a stable organizational structure after a change has occurred with the cooperation of all stakeholders.	✓		✓		
11. Performance evaluations should be carried out regularly to recognize problems, obstacles, and potential problems so solutions can be promptly found and corrected.			✓		
12. Create a sense of urgency.				✓	✓
13. Create a guiding coalition of leaders.				✓	✓
14. Form a strategic vision and initiatives.				✓	
15. English a group of volunteers.				✓	
16. Enables action by removing barriers.				✓	
17. Create short-term wins.				✓	✓
18. Sustain acceleration.				✓	
19. Establish a culture of change.				✓	

Methods

The first phase of the study was concerned with an analysis of the literature and theory. From this, the results were synthesized and compiled into a conceptual framework for analyzing how a school's culture is most effectively changed.

Research Instrument

The research instrument was a structured interview developed from the numerous authors' investigation about organizational and school culture change. From this, a four-part survey was created consisting of four steps. They were:

Step 1: Raise awareness that change is urgently needed, Step 2: Build a strong transformational leadership team, Step 3: Remove barriers to change, and finally, Step 4. Keep the changes made. The developed structured interview was thereafter taken to three experts to examine the content validity and make suggestions as to the clarity and content of the items.

Ethics Clearance

Ethics approval for the study was obtained from our university's *Human Ethics Committee* before consultation with experts relating to the questionnaire's design [34].

Data Collection

The participants in the study included 24 educators who were under the supervision of the BMA Department of These included school administrators, personnel administration managers, and other teachers. The selection criteria used purposive selection methods to select eight small to big schools (Table 2). Additionally, each school had to be included on a list of educational institutions that had passed all three rounds of the educational quality assessment at a very high standard from Thailand's Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) (Public Organization) [33].

Table 2. ONESQA certified schools for the study

ONESGA Certified School	Students	Size
Prachaniwet Primary School	**1,634**	**big**
Phon Mani School	893	big
Jinda Bamrung School	797	middle
Wat Bueng Bue School	462	middle
Wat Kumthong School	420	middle
Wattai (Ratniramit) School	81	small
Wat Samphantawong School	249	small
Prachaniwet Primary School	110	small

Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of five-step *content analysis* [35 - 36], which is a method that can be used either quantitatively or qualitatively for analyzing written, verbal, or visual documentation systematically. Content analysis can be traced back to the 1950s and the study of mass communication [37].

The basic steps a researcher takes in approaching a content analysis is as follows:
1. Research question development for the study's
2. Qualitative analysis.
2. Population identification, definition, and sampling method (non-random sampling using purposive sampling in this study's case).
3. Selecting the study's research design. There are several tasks to be accomplished in this step, including choosing the units of analysis and the creation of a coding scheme.
4. Gathering data, with quality control being a major consideration when coding.
5. Interpreting the evidence, with the findings directly addressing the research questions (Adapted from Beck and Manuel [38].

Results

The research results were divided into 2 parts:
1) The results from the synthesis of the school culture change process;
2. The results from the interviews with experts on the school culture change process.

In Part 2's results from interviews with education experts to study the process of changing school culture, the research results are as follows.

Table 3. Sample of results from interviews with educational experts on school change

School culture change process	The Interviews' Synthesis
Step 1: Raise awareness that change is urgently needed. Four sub-steps as follows: 1.1 Communicate to relevant parties on the purpose of the change. **Question:** How do you communicate with school personnel about the purpose of the proposed change?	A meeting was held to clarify the necessary changes. Under the current Covid-19 pandemic situation, a 'meeting' can take place in many forms depending on the school size. Small schools may call a meeting together, but in larger schools, meetings may be somewhat limited and only held between supervisors, group leaders, or senior teachers. If an issue that needs to be addressed is urgent, we now use technology conferences using Line Group, Zoom, etc. In these forums, individuals can express their opinions and offer guidance on how the school should be run and what methods should be used as most appropriate in the school's context.
1.2 Oftentimes informing school administrators	Make it sound like things are going to be surprising and worth following by

of change that will affect their personnel requires convincing. **Question**: How do you persuade school personnel to change under the current school environment?	giving clear examples of new ideas that staff want to experiment with. Also, conversations need to be polite, friendly, and professional. Avoid using negative concepts or words. When suggesting a new idea, compare it to a similar idea elsewhere, and set a goal to do the idea better. Give reasons which may be linked to the importance of the school's policy vision.
1.3 Incentives to stimulate and support personnel, the need for change. **Question**: How do you stimulate and motivate staff to see the need for change?	There are multiple methods to do this. One is to provide empirical or real data supporting the necessity for the change. Another method is to suggest that the change is required by the BMA DOE. Another is to entice change by giving awards to those responsible for implementing the change. Finally, create a family-like work environment with an 'open-door policy' where staff can come and consult at any time.
1.4 Promotion of educational institutions that are successful in transforming. **Question:** How do you promote and recognize educational success and change?	A school can honor its staff by mentioning them in school meetings, at morning assembly at the flag pole ceremony, placing a notice on a board in front of their classroom in the hallway, etc. Use other internal and external public relations agencies.
Step 2: Build a strong transformational leadership team. Six sub-steps as follows: 2.1 Create a team that will lead change By defining a leader or a team leader who has the power and influence over others. Become a believer and agree to change and lead the team to success. **Question:** How do you create a team leader that can lead your team to success?	First, it is necessary to find a staff member who is appropriate for the task. Required characteristics include competence, suitability, and professional qualifications. Also, management needs to take into account the scope of the job that includes bringing out the best talents and skills of all staff members. When assigned individual tasks, everyone must accept their abilities and must be respected and supported.
2.2 Use planning meetings to assign workloads to the responsible person. **Question:** How do you plan your operations to bring about successful change in your school? **Question:** How do you assign responsibility for change to your school' personnel?	Once the policy is accepted, it provides a shared understanding of how the operation will be performed; Also, action plans can be presented to the school's administrator and then modified from the input. It can then be placed on the work schedule calendar Define the tasks and the purpose of the assignment. Any task to be assigned to personnel must be considered as appropriate or not, such as their competence, aptitude, and/or suitability. Understanding the assignee It is extremely important to make an assignment that the selected subordinates can understand and have the time to execute the plan. Administrators need to tell the staff member the purpose of the assignment and suggest methods and procedures to accomplish the task. They must also assign proposed action guidelines to ensure the chances of success For example, write a PDCA (*Plan, Do, Check, Action*) event card. Define the tasks and the purpose of the assignment. Any task to be assigned to personnel must be considered as appropriate or not, such as competence, aptitude, and/or suitability.
2.3 Empower personnel responsible to lead others to make important changes. **Question:** How do you select a person in your school to be responsible for making and leading change?	The assignment needs to focus on the individual's ability and aptitude for the task to succeed. Also, the assignee must agree to accept the work. Tasks can be subordinated and assigned by different functions with each individual having the freedom to be creative. If there are different opinions as to how a task is to be implemented, a vote can be taken for the best idea. Administrators must trust their personnel and have patience. Management also needs to allow people to make mistakes without blame, but instead with support and guidance.
2.4 Trying to encourage action. **Question:** How do you encourage school personnel to do their work with determination and dedication?	Lead by example. People are motivated by a leader's discipline, responsibility, and sacrifice. Communal or family-type living also can motivate others to action. Examples include living together as brothers and sisters, cooking, and eating together. Finally, there needs to be harmony. - Praise alone may not be enough. Management may offer additional gratitude to them. For morale and encouragement In which the gift should be something special that is made especially Can't buy anywhere It represents a valuable reward to people who reward the organization well, perhaps not at the price. But the management intended to make that special gift.
2.5 Staff confidence building.	There must be attention to detail. There must also be a clear guide as to how

Question: How does a leader develop a guideline for change that allows everyone to believe in them and the school?	to implement the change.
2.6 Performance evaluation. **Question:** How do you conduct a fair and honest staff performance and/or advancement assessment?	Focus on the other benefits outside of a raise in salary. An example might be career growth opportunities and development in fields outside their specialty or discipline (cross-training). An increase in academic standing or title might also be effective. Moreover, a clear evaluation of work is outlined by the assessment committee that everyone accepts. There should also be consistency in what is expected from supervisors, administrators, and fellow teachers without prejudice. Finally, an individual's positive strengths need to also be highlighted along with any possible deficiencies.
Step 3: Remove barriers to change. Three sub-steps as follows: 3.1 Authority to make changes and remove obstacles or risks to vision that lead to change. **Question:** How do you remove obstacles or risks to vision that lead to change? **Question:** Are you of the opinion that obstructions or risks to vision leading to change should be removed?	If a person is chosen to lead in the implementation of change, the supervisors and administrators need to eliminate unnecessary or redundant work. This ensures that the new work will be more efficient. Also, any new tasks should not be compulsory, with both sides agreeing to the assigned work. Finally, stress should be avoided if at all possible because small problems can lead to bigger problems.
3.2 Management support and encouragement for successful performance. **Question:** How do you support and encourage people to perform their work successfully?	Management funds the budget for the task adequately. Also, the promotion of knowledge, abilities, and skills is encouraged by additional education, training, meetings, and visits. Encourage/help solve problems throughout the assigned task.
Question: How do you communicate to create awareness to people of their progress in the performance of their assigned duties?	Accuracy of information and open communication leads to job satisfaction. At the end of the task, a completion ceremony dinner/lunch with management and a thank you gift is customary in Thailand.
Question: How do you encourage personnel morale when the scheduled changes are successfully implemented?	Supervisors must trust their staff when assigning them their tasks. Also, recognition and rewards for a job well done are necessary.
3.3 Initiating new leaders/management requires a certain level of accomplishment before moving to the next level. There must also be clear and easily attainable goals. Changes that are made should be made manifest in the form of success or victory commentary. Question: Do you have a step-by-step guideline for setting and achieving goals for success?	Thai teachers should use the *Plan, Do, Check, Action* (PDCA) quality cycle, with management exchanging knowledge on PLC because this activity helps to share problems. From this, all individuals can learn to discern, change, develop, manage, and jointly solve problems. This grows leadership and develops students. Goals must be clear and goals specified by day, month, or year.
Step 4.Keeping the changes made. Two sub-steps as follows: 4.1 Maintaining sustainability and sustaining change in the organization requires management to create plans and techniques for maintaining the changing condition with the complete cooperation of all stakeholders. **Question:** What methods would you suggest to sustain good change?	Create a happy working atmosphere, where there is camaraderie, affection, and unity. Have a clear action plan to make the work more efficient. Have long-term goals to support and encourage all personnel to know their roles and duties.
4.2 Constant change assessment concerning problems, obstacles, and challenges allows for a timely correction of problems. **Question:** Does this result in a lasting change or not?	Continuously assessing change to recognize the problems, obstacles, and drawbacks that can be corrected in a timely manner is a good thing as it results in lasting change. Therefore, any changes that are based on student interests further make the school successful.

Discussions

The results of the content analysis revealed that there are four steps related to how a Thai school implements change. They are as follows:

Raising Awareness

Raising awareness that change is urgently needed is a step that demonstrates the need for change [22]. This is because 'normal' or complacent people tend to be content with the warm and safe status quo. However, change infers future uncertainty that makes people uncomfortable and unconvinced, as most will attempt to avoid change. This is consistent with the writings of Lewin and Schein saying that the first phase of change consists of the unfreezing of the existing structure [18–21]. '*Unfreezing*' is a term that leaders should communicate to the people in the organization in preparation for change, such as informing that the change will be productive and beneficial to the organization. Finally, convincing individuals of the importance of change is also critical.

Transformational Leadership Team

In building a strong transformation leadership team, the team leader is like the captain of a ship, in which the captain steers the in the correct direction to its goal. A good team leader is not just a captain but also needs to know how to manage team members well. Therefore, powerful leaders should be able to lead a team that is ready to cope with change, who can also deal well with people who oppose change [22]. Leaders must also be enthusiastic, dedicated, act as role models, have credibility, and willing to work with others.

Barrier Elimination

In eliminating barriers to change, Kotter [22] said that leaders must always investigate what barriers are blocking the change and take immediate action to clear any identified obstacles. If the barriers are in the personnel management system, the problems must be corrected. If the obstacles are coming from a single individual or group, they must be convinced to change. When employees do make change happen, they must be quickly rewarded. Empowering broad-based action, modifying systems, organizational structures, or even defining activities or methods will remove obstacles or risks to the vision that leaders have in change. Finally, change generates feedback and is encouraged by leaders with rewards upon success [39].

Freeze Change

Finally, change that has been accomplished must not be undone. Therefore, change must be 'frozen'. In maintaining a sustainable environment for change, leaders must plan to establish a retention technique [20-21] [40].

Schein [16-17, 19] also added that post-dissolving behavior is part of a process step in which new behaviors must be learned. Changing old behavior to new behavior are desirous and harmonious characteristics. Also, Chen [26-27] said that to change sustainability in an organization requires the cooperation of all stakeholders, and the evaluation of the performance of the change should be carried out on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, becoming aware of problems, obstacles, and barriers allows for a timely and effective correction of the problems.

Finally, school culture changes require school managers to exercise patience. Change also requires a great effort which does not come easy. It requires cooperation from many parties and stakeholders. If these things happen, school quality and efficiency will increase allowing for the attainment of the established goals.

Conclusion

The study set out to conduct a content analysis of how an elite group of *Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment* (ONESQA) certified school administrators and teachers in the Bangkok metropolitan area viewed

their school's culture concerning change. From an in-depth content analysis of 24 individuals, it was determined that raising the awareness of change is urgently needed. However, change requires a strong transformation leadership team, who need to eliminate barriers to change. Also, when change happens, it must be 'frozen' in place. Finally, change requires patience.

Limitations and Future Studies

Even though every effort was made to assure statistical validity, the study is limited in that it was only conducted within eight BMA DOE schools in a single Thai urban metropolitan area. Other Thai regions such as Chiang Mai in the north might yield different results.

Also, based on the content analysis results, it is suggested that future studies concerning school culture examine how social media and learning management system technology can affect and accelerate change.

Acknowledgments

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