HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT IN TURBULENT TIME: DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND COVID-19 IN THAILAND

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Abstract

Higher education all over the world, including Thailand, is now in crisis. Thai universities have been struggling for survival for the past decade. They have been facing at least two major challenges: demographic change and disruptive technologies. These challenges led to a decreased number of new student enrollments. The present pandemic of COVID-19 is adding to existing challenges, makes them more complicated and severely affects the survival of universities, especially the autonomous universities. This time in our history could be called a turbulent time. To be able to respond to the current and future changes and be able to lead the university to overcome various problems and obstacles being faced, the president must have an essential leadership plus management knowledge and skills or competencies in managing the various changes that affect the university. Therefore, one of the most important questions that requires an answer is: what is the essential competency required of a Thai autonomous university president during these turbulent times and after the COVID-19 pandemic? This paper will propose the essential competencies for Thai autonomous university presidents in order for their institutions to survive during the turbulent times and after the pandemic of COVID-19.

Keyword: Higher education, management, Turbulent Time, disruptive technology, COVID-19, Challenges, Competency, University President, Thailand

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Introduction

Higher education all over the world has been struggling for survival during the past decades. The two major factors that continuously affect the operation of the universities seriously are demographic changes and disruptive technology. The decreased birth rate in Thailand has led to a decrease in the number of new enrollments. At the same time, Thailand is becoming an aging society that might create new types and ways of learning for elderly persons to continue their employment. The disruptive technology has led to the need for new skills and competencies to perform new types of jobs in business and many industries. A uuniversity degree is no longer a predominant factor for employment. Short courses and online learning, such as massive open online courses (MOOC), have become new major sources for skills development to respond to the new nature of work. It has also led to a decrease in the number of new enrollments. Universities have been competing for more students among themselves, both at national and international levels. It could be considered that the universities are now in the midst of a turbulent time. As a result of these challenges, a number of universities with a less competitive edge in many countries have closed. It has been reported that many universities and colleges have closed and many of them have undergone consolidation since 2016 (Education Dive Staff, 2019). Similar situations have been emerging in many countries. In Thailand, it was reported in 2017 that "Three quarters of universities are 'at risk of closure'" due to the falling number of new student enrollment. (Mala, 2017) At the same time, the Thai government has announced a policy of transforming public universities to become autonomous universities in addition to the present autonomous universities. This means that public universities have to be self-sufficient and able to stand on their own feet and rely less on government support, especially in the financial area. As a result of these rapid and continuously changes in these turbulent times, the management of Thai universities could be forced to change from the present traditional style of management to a business-oriented management model. Furthermore, the pandemic of COVID-19 that has spread to almost all counties around the world has been severely affecting universities. After temporarily being in lockdown for a certain period of time they have changed their learning and teaching methods, including learning media, to online learning, similar to MOOC or utilizing various electronic applications, such as Microsoft Teams or ZOOM Cloud Meetings. Many universities in the US, where the pandemic has been spreading very rapidly, have closed and changed from students attending classes to online learning (Foresman, 2020). A similar change is happening in many countries. Thailand has applied a similar measure as a preventive strategy for fighting the rapid pandemic of COVID19 (Yuvejwattana, 2020). These changes may change the pattern of teaching and learning, including the ways of managing the university fully or partly after the end of the great pandemic of 2020.

In managing a university, the president of the university is like a president or chief executive officer (CEO) of a company. With the above-mentioned challenges and changes in various contexts and environments during the turbulent times, the CEO has to be responsible for ensuring the survival and growth of his/her organization. To respond to the current and future changes and to be able to lead the university to overcome various problems and obstacles being faced, the president must have an essential and suitable leadership plus management knowledge and skills or competencies in managing the university at present and in the future. Therefore, it is interesting to find out what is the essential competency required for the Thai autonomous university president during these turbulent times and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper aims to study the essential leadership and management knowledge and skills or competency for a Thai autonomous university president in order for his institution to survive during the turbulent times and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The essence of the content of this paper includes: (1) introduction to state the problem and significance of the problem to be studied in the paper; (2) Thai higher education; (3) challenges to Thai higher education; (4) the essential competencies required for the president of a Thai autonomous university; (5) conclusions and implications.

Thai Higher Education

A brief history of Thailand. As a background for further in-depth study about the needed competencies for a Thai autonomous university president in this paper, a brief history of Thailand, as adapted from Joungtrakul, Na-Nan and Sanamthong (2018), is presented in this section. Thailand's official name is the Kingdom of Thailand. It was previously known as Siam. It was established as an independent country in 1238 (A Short History of Thailand, no date). Sukhothai was its first capital city from 1238 to 1378, and then moved to Ayutthaya as the second capital city from approximately 1350-1767. It was later moved to Thonburi as the third capital city from 1767 to 1782 and finally moved to Bangkok as the fourth capital city from 1782 to the present (Transparent Language, 2012). It is situated in the center of mainland South East Asia (Hafner, Keyes and Keyes, 2020). The border of Thailand connects with "Myanmar (Burma) to the west, Laos to the north and east, Cambodia to the southeast, and the Gulf of Thailand to the south. Peninsular Thailand stretches southward from the southwestern corner of the country along the eastern edge of the Malay Peninsula" (Hafner, Keyes and Keyes, 2020).

Major Thai cultural values. With a long history of for almost 800 years Thailand has accumulated its own unique cultural values. According to Komin (1990) the three most complicated Thai cultural values, some of which are difficult to understand, especially for foreigners are: "Face-saving," "Criticism-avoidance", an "Kreng jai" values.

Thai people take face saving very seriously and personally and it is related closely with criticism-avoidance. In order to save face of others, criticism of others of all ranks, especially in public, should be avoided, as revenge may occur in some foreseeable form. Komin (1990) warned that to make a person lose face "regardless of rank is to be avoided at all cost."(p. 160). Kreng jai is the concept of being considerate (Komin, 1990), to be aware of the feelings of other people and to show politeness, respect and consideration towards them (Hays, 2014a). It is the thought fulness of not wanting to put an undue burden on other people. The second cluster of Grateful relationship orientation is where the concept of "Bunkhun" is located. It is the concept of gratitude or repaying of a favor with a favor (Komin, 1990). It is instilled deeply in the Thai people and is very difficult to change. It is a very strong concept that the person who received a favor will feel being in debt to the person who confers the favor for their life time and sometimes it extends to the family members and even sometimes to the next generation. Piriyarangsan (1989) observed that some employers claim that to hire labor is to render Bunkhun in the form of giving income to employees.

Cultural values impose a strong impact on the management of an autonomous university, as mostly Western management strategies are applied in Thailand, including managing of a university. Therefore, understanding and adapting to Thai cultural values in making management decisions would be one of the factors that requires attention by a Thai university president. As Komin (1990, p. 262) asserted, "effective management cannot implement management theories wholesale from abroad. Effective leaders cannot choose their styles at will; what is feasible depends to a large extent on the cultural conditioning of the leader's subordinates." She also stressed that "culturally 'unfitted' management theories are of limited use and might to more harm than good" (p. 262).

The development of Thai education. Originally Thai education was available through informal practices. The two major sources of Thai education were the Buddhist temple for Thai men and a palace or the home or mansion of higher-ranking government officials (Hays, 2014b). It is a Thai cultural practice that men typically be ordained as a Buddhist monk to study the Dharma or Buddhist teaching in order to gain knowledge and experience in how to live a normal life in society. They must learn how to read and write in order to be able to learn the Dharma in the Buddhist Scriptures or Tripitaka. They also learn and train on Thai arts and crafts. After a certain period of time, normally three months during the Buddhist lent period they leave the monkhood, are called a "Pandit" and return to their normal life. Normally they get married and build up their family. Some of them who stay longer learn more from the Scriptures, both the theory and practice. Those who stay on would typically become an Abbot or a Senior monk, continuing to teach and preach for society. Some of them who leave the

monkhood with a high level of knowledge and skills would enter the government's civil service. Many Thais enter the monkhood early in life (i.e., when they are seven years old) to study in the temple and some of them stay on and become an abbot or a Senior monk. Many of them enter the government's service after leaving their monkhood. For Thai women, normally their parents would take them to be a servant in a palace or in the house of certain high-ranking government officials to learn how to cook and to take good care of the house in order to become a good housewife and a good wife. They also learn the various Thai cultures and traditions.

Formal education in Thailand began in 1871 when King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) established a school at the Royal Pages Barracks within the Grand Palace Compound. In 1899 the Civil Service Training School was established and later the name was changed to the Royal Pages School in 1902. In 1911 it was upgraded to higher education level and the name was changed to the Civil Service College of King Chulalongkorn and in 1917 it became Chulalongkorn University which is the first university in Thailand (History-Chulalongkorn University, no date). Education in Thailand at that time was still limited to certain groups of people (i.e., royal children and the children of higher-ranking government officials). It was not expanded to the general public when the first Thailand Primary Education Act of B.E. 2464 was promulgated in 1921 (Sangnapaboworn, no date). It was then expanded to the secondary education level and subsequently higher education was also expanded to correspond to the needs for edlabor and professionals by the implementation of the Economic and Social Development Plan since 1961 (Yothasmutr, 2008). From that time Thai higher education has expanded until the present time.

The current Thai higher education. As of February 2019, there were 156 universities in Thailand (Nakhon Sawan Rajabhat University, 2019). This number did not include the Military and Police Academy that also award degrees to their graduates. Thai universities are classified into five groups: autonomous (26), public (11), Rajabhat (38), Raja Mangala (9) and private universities (72). Autonomous universities rely on themselves in terms of their financial budget, while public universities are mainly financially supported by the government. Rajabhat and Raja Mangala universities are also financially supported by government. The objectives of Raja Mangala universities were originally to produce technical instructors and practical professionals in technical fields, while Rajabhat universities were aimed to be community development universities. However, they were later expanded to cover all fields of study, similar to the full public universities.

Thai autonomous university. The concept of an autonomous university was first implemented in Thailand in 1990 when Suranaree University of Technology was established in Korat (Suranaree University of Technology, no date). The major objectives

of an autonomous university are to promote efficiency and effectiveness in the practice of managing a university. The status of the university is changed to be autonomous and not being a normal government agency which is dependent on public funding. It is expected that the autonomous university is to be managed as an independent, businesslike organization. The Thai autonomous universities are established by the enactment of an Act for the establishment of each university. They are under the general supervision of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation. The university is controlled by its university council (cf. The Board of Trustees in an American university). The chairman and the expert members of the council, recruited from outside the university, are appointed by His Majesty the King of Thailand. To relieve financial burden, the Thai government has a policy to have all public universities to be transformed into autonomous universities and any new university to be established must be established as an autonomous university (Office of the Secretariat of the Education Council, 2017). Therefore, the remaining public universities have to be prepared to transform themselves to become autonomous universities. The main differences between an autonomous university and other types of public university is that it has to be able to be financially self-sufficient. The management of autonomous universities, especially the university president, must be able to lead the university to be able to stand on its own feet. It is considered to be one type of business organizations. In order to run the education business competing with private universities and all public universities in this turbulent time with minimal financial support from the government, a different kind of leadership and management competencies are required for the university president

The roles of the president of Thai autonomous university. The president plays a pivotal role in leading the university to be successful or a failure (Harper et al 2017). In Thailand the president of the university is recruited by the recruitment committee of the university council, the final selection is made by the council and the appointment is made by His Majesty the King of Thailand. The term of appointment is usually for four years, with a limitation of not more than two terms. The required qualifications of a Thai autonomous university are prescribed in the act for establishment of each university. Most of them are similar, stating that the president " must graduate with a degree or equivalent from a university or other higher education institute which is recognized by the university council and has taught or has experience in management for not less than five years in a university or other higher education institution which is recognized by the university council or has other management experience for not less than five years" (Office of State Council, 2013, p. 8). The differences are mostly the number of years required for teaching and management experience, most of them requiring five years, while some of them require four years. Most of them restrict the

management experience that must be in a university or higher education institutions which are recognized by the university council. Only a few of them are open for outside management experience. The president reports directly to the university council. The authority and duties of the president are as follows : (1) managing university by complying with laws, rules, regulations, procedures, specifications, including policies and objectives of the university; (2) controlling of personnel, finance, supplies, facilities and other assets of the university by complying with laws, regulations, procedures and specifications of the university; (3) making placement, appointment and termination of employees and workers, including personnel management according to the procedures of the university; (4) preparing a university development plan and act according to policies and plans, including making follow up and evaluation of various operations of the university; (5) procuring resources from various sources to support the operation of the mission of the university in order to achieve academic excellence; (6)representing the university in general activities; (7) presenting an annual report of the various operations of the university to the university council; (8) performing other duties according to the regulations and procedures of the university or as assigned by the university council (Office of State Council, 2013, p. 9). These are the major duties and responsibilities which are mostly contained in the act for establishing autonomous universities. In addition, the president of some autonomous universities also chairs the university academic council and personnel management committee.

Challenges to Thai Higher Education.

The autonomous universities in Thailand are facing similar challenges as universities across the world. This section presents the major challenges facing by Thai autonomous universities.

Demographic changes. The declining birth rate affects universities all over the world. In the US the total fertility rate has fallen by almost 20% since 2008 (Grawe, 2019). It was estimated that "the college-going population will drop by 15 percent between 2025 and 2029 and continue to decline by another percentage point or two thereafter" (Barshay, 2018). A similar trend is taking place in various countries in Europe (Santa, 2018). This trend is also occurring for Thailand, with "a sharp decline in birth rates, which fell from 6.2 births per woman in the early 1960s to 1.5 in 2017" (Mala, 2019). Thailand has already become an ageing society (Mala, 2019). It was argued that "fewer children means fewer students and less demand for higher education" (Mala, 2019). Competition in the university entrance examinations was very fierce during the past few decades. At present, however, the places available in universities are more than the numbers of students applying for entering the universities. The Council of University Presidents of Thailand (CUPT) revealed that in 2018 there were 300,000 seats available in its central

admission system, but only about 230,000 had applied for university placements (Mala, 2019). At present, Thai universities are not only competing fiercely among themselves, but also competing with overseas universities. An aging society may open opportunities for Thai universities to recruit students from elderly persons who continue working beyond the current retirement age. At the same time, it will affect the universities in terms of changing of their existing infrastructures and faculties to respond to the new needs of this group of people. The management of student enrollments will be one of the most challenging tasks of the president of Thai autonomous universities.

Disruptive technologies. Technology plays an important role in business and industries today. In higher education, it can create both threats and opportunities. If the university cannot use it as an opportunity, it becomes a threat. It has been argued that "the most important disruption that technology brings is the ability to be anywhere and anytime. For the current generation of learners, online is an essential part of learning (Schulz, no date). According to Sagenmüller (2020), disruptive digital technologies may affect universities in four ways: virtual reality (VR); collaboration platforms; augmented reality (AR): and artificial intelligence (AI). These disruptions could create various changes (Meyer, 2010) in all areas and functions of the universities that lead to changes in the way that the university is being managed. It would affect the management of Thai university as well (Mala, 2019). The areas that would be strongly affected include learning technology and student services. Improvement in the quality of graduates through the new learning technology and new programs would help increase the competitive advantage of the university. Diversifying programs and courses to the needs of students and employers would help the university to be able to compete internally and internationally.

COVID-19. The first case of COVID-19 infection can be traced back to 17 November 2019 in the city of Wuhan in Hubei province of the Peoples Republic of China (Davidson, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) was informed on 31 December 2019 (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2020). Outbreaks spread rapidly to other countries all over the world. According to the WHO report as of 11 May 2020, the total confirmed cases and deaths of all countries are 3,672,238 and 254,045 respectively (WHO, 2020). The pandemic of this virus is drastically affecting the daily life of people. The lockdown of countries and the preventive measures of wearing a mask, social distancing, prohibiting gatherings of big groups and stay-at-home orders were implemented. This led to the closure of businesses and various government agencies, leading to a large increase in the number of unemployed workers. These situations caused damage to the economic and social order of many countries and Thailand is not an exception. Schools and universities have been closed and teaching and learning has been changed to occur online. Many universities in the US have closed down and many of them have

announced that remote instruction will replace in-person classes (Foresman, 2020). Similar measures have been applied in other countries, including Thailand (Yuvejwattana, 2020). This will change the operation and management of universities in many ways, especially the teaching and learning methods and technologies. It will lead to a change in the human resource management of the university. These changes will be one of the big challenges for the president of the university, especially the autonomous university that is required to be self-sufficient.

Other challenges. Joungtrakul (2019) proposed eight external and eight internal challenges to Thai universities. The external challenges include: international competition; disruptive technologies; demographic changes; values change; national plans; education reforms; political environment; and local competition, while internal challenges include: enrollment decline; surplus resources; business competency; leadership competency; organizational politics; change management; corporate governance; and employee rights. Based on the current situation, the external challenges of disruptive technologies and demographic change will affect the university drastically and, at the same time, the internal challenges of enrollment decline and the rights of employees are seen to have a strong impact on the management of the Thai autonomous universities.

The needed competencies for the president of a Thai autonomous university.

The concept of competency. The simplest definition of competency is given by Government of Western Australia, Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (no date). It states that "Competency is the capability to apply or use the set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully perform 'critical work functions' or tasks in a defined work setting." McClelland is widely regard as the father of the competency movement (Adam, 1997). His idea articulated in his article entitled "Testing for Competence Rather Than for "Intelligence" published in the American Psychologist in January 1973 was very well accepted (McClelland, 1973). This article suggested that the concept of competency should be applied in human resource management. It was later applied in both government and business organizations (Adams, 1997; Lado and Wilson,1994). The concept of competency was also later applied in education and training as competency-based education (Nodine, 2016) and competency-based training (Hodge, 2007). In order to successfully manage the university by applying competency-based education, it is essential to apply the competency-based management in the university and that a model of competency for the president of the university, especially the autonomous university, is needed.

Studies related to competencies of a university president. Five recent research studies from 2016-2019 related to competencies needed for university leadership especially the university president during a period of rapid change was made. A comparison

of the competencies needed by university president from these studies is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: A comparison of competencies needed by a university president drawn from the five studies

Study	Competencies
1. AASCU (2016)	(1) Knowledge of the Academic Enterprise; (2) Business Enterprise Management; (3) Resource Development and Stewardship; (4) Formal and Informal Communication; (5) Positively Engage; (6) Relationship Development and Maintenance; (7) Climate Creation and Maintenance; (8) Integrity; (9) Servant Leader; (10) Continuous Self-Development; (11) Resilience; (12) Problem-Solving; (13) People and Team Development; (14) Strategic Vision; (15) Adversity Leadership; (16) Positive Expectations; (17) Achievement Orientation (AASCU, 2016)
2. Seefeld (2016)	(1) Communication; (2) Contextual Understanding; (3) Mission Mindedness; (4) Professional Development; (5) Change Leadership (Seefeld, 2016).
3. Selingo, Chheng and Clark (2017)	(1) Strategist; (2) Communication and storyteller; (3) Fundraiser; (4) Collaborator; (5) Financial and operational acumen; (6) Academic and intellectual leader (Selingo Chheng and Clark, 2017)
4. AACC (2018)	(1) Organizational Culture; (2) Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation: (3) Student Success; (4) Institutional Leadership; (5) Institutional Infrastructure; (6) Information and Analytics; (7) Advocacy and Mobilizing/Motivating Others; (8) Fund Raising and Relationship Cultivation; (8) Communications; (9) Collaboration; (10) Personal Traits and Abilities (AACC, 2018)
5. McLean (2019)	(1) Analytical; (2) Communication; (3) Student Affairs; (4) Behavioral; (5) External Relations; (6) Mission and Metrics; (7) Technology (McLean, 2019)

Source: AASCU (2016); Seefeld (2016); Selingo, Chheng, and Clark (2017); AACC (2018); McLean (2019)

From Table 1, the concepts of communication appear in all studies while leadership appears in four out of five studies. The concepts related to strategy and relationship management appear in three studies. The other competencies are spread over the five studies. It emphasizes that communication and leadership are the most essential competencies needed by university presidents in order to be successful in their positions. All competencies from these five studies may be used as a basis for

proposing a competency model for a Thai autonomous university president in the next section.

A proposed competencies needed by a Thai autonomous university president. Based on the five research studies reviewed above together with the knowledge of Thai higher education, including the history background of Thailand, plus the major Thai cultural values and challenges to Thai higher education, a set of competencies needed by the president of a Thai autonomous university in order to cope with the rapid change of society and technology disruption, including the effects of the pandemic of COVID-19 and other challenges in these turbulent times is proposed in Table 2.

Table 2: Needed competencies by Thai autonomous university

Competency	Components
1. Communication	Formal and Informal Communication (1); Communication (2); Communication and storyteller (3); Communications (4); Communication (5).
2. Leadership	Servant Leader, Adversity Leader (1); Change Leadership (2); Academic and intellectual leader (3); Institutional Leadership (4); Advocacy and Mobilizing/Motivating Others (4); Problem Solving (1)
3. Strategic Management	Strategic Vision (1); Mission Mindedness (2) Strategist (3); Mission and Metrics (5)
4. Relationship Management	Relationship Development and Maintenance (1); Fund Raising and Relationship Cultivation (4); External Relations (5); Collaborator (3); Collaboration (4)
5. Academic Business Management	Knowledge of the Academic Enterprise (1); Business Enterprise Management (1); Information and Analytics (4); Analytical (5); Technology (5); Contextual Understanding (2); Governance, Institutional Policy and Legislation (4); Institutional Infrastructure (4)
6. Human Capital Management	Climate Creation and Maintenance (1); Continuous Self-Development (1); People and Team Development (1); Professional Development (2); Organizational Culture (4)
7. Financial Management	Resource Development and Stewardship (1); Fundraiser (3); Financial and Operational Acumen (3); Fund Raising and Relationship Cultivation (4)

Table 2: Needed competencies by Thai autonomous university (Cont.)

Competency	Components
8. Enrollment Management	Student Success (4); Student Affairs (5)
9. Achievement Orientation	Positively Engage (1); Positive Expectations (1); Achievement Orientation (1); Personal Traits and Abilities (4); Behavioral (5); Integrity (1); Resilience (1)

Source: Proposed by authors.

Note: The number in parentheses are the number of the studies reviewed.

All competencies from the five studies may be categorized into nine groups, as shown in Table 2. Although these competencies are derived from the studies in the US, they are also considered relevant to Thai autonomous university presidents. The major justification is that the roles and responsibilities of the university president are similar in both countries. In addition, most of the faculty members and administrators of Thai universities are either graduates from Western universities, especially from the US and the UK or using the Western textbooks in their studies and research. The big differences are how these competencies are being applied and adapted to suit the Thai context, especially the Thai cultural values. In general practice, communication and leadership are the most important competencies for top management in any organization. This is especially true in the autonomous universities, as they have to be able to be self-sufficient. They have to communicate effectively with all university stakeholder groups, both internally and externally. They are required to lead different groups of people including management, academic, support staff, students and their parents. At the same time, management is very important as the presidents are required to manage the universities to be able to survive and grow in these turbulent times. Strategic management helps them to mobilize and integrate all required resources to achieve the university's vision and mission. All parts of management functions are taken into account in preparing strategic planning and management goals. Relationships with various groups of people at all levels, both internally and externally, are essential for the president, especially where supports are needed in various areas, especially in fundraising for the university. Academic business management is essential to the president, as Thai autonomous universities are transformed from public universities where a traditional public administration approach was utilized. Although they are required to comply with various laws and government regulations, it is essential for them to apply business-like management to be able to cope with various challenges in turbulent times. Human capital management and development competencies are essential for the university president, as they are managing the human capital developer

institutes. To achieve the university objectives, the president must be able to manage and develop people in their team, including administrators at the lower levels and academics, including all support staff effectively. Financial management will be more difficult for the autonomous university president, as government funding will be greatly decreased and they have to rely on their ability to gain support from various sources, including business, alumni and various activities for fundraising for the university. Enrollment management will be one of the most difficult tasks for the president, as the number of new enrollments will be continuously decreasing and the areas of student success and student affairs should be given more attention. The last competency that is essential for the Thai autonomous university president is the achievement orientation. In order to be successful and able to lead the Thai autonomous universities to survive and grow during the turbulent times they must have personal traits and abilities that are achievement oriented in order to achieve the university's organizational goals.

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion. It is concluded that a set of competencies possessed by the current incumbents of the Thai autonomous universities may not suit the situations that are changing rapidly all the time. Coupled with disruptive technologies, the speed of change is even faster and mostly unforeseeable. The effects of the pandemic of COVID-19 across the world could bring about various changes in almost all areas, including economic, social, political, legal, technologies, public health and the wellbeing of people. These changes could have a strong impact on management in both public and private sectors. Higher education is not an exception. Universities, especially autonomous universities, are required to adapt themselves to cope with the changes. More importantly they are required to plan and be ready for change and make favorable changes to their universities. The university president, especially the autonomous university presidents must have the required competencies to lead and manage the university efficiently and effectively. Due to the fact that the current set of competencies possessed by the current university presidents may not be able to cope with the new rapid changes, a new set of competencies needed by the Thai autonomous university president is proposed in Figure 1.
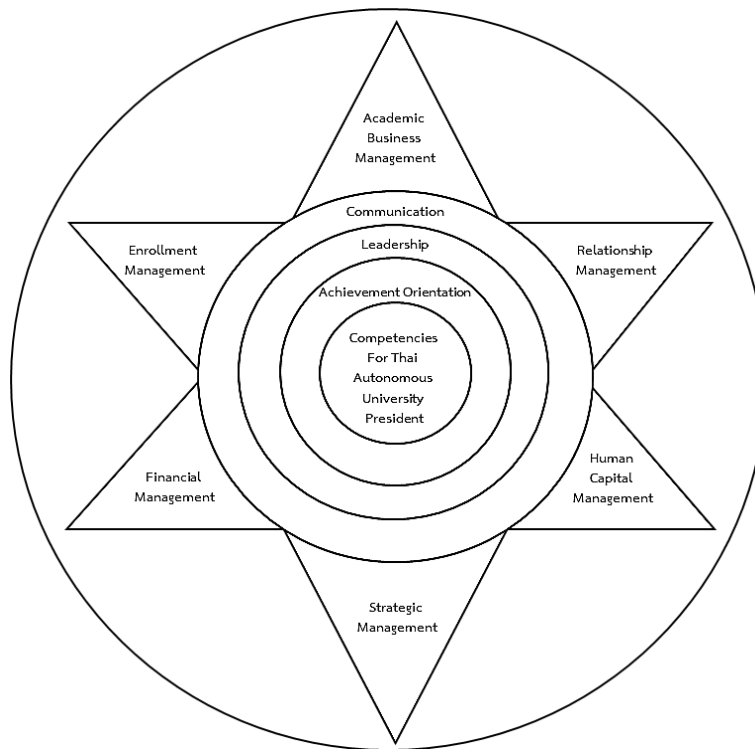
Figure 1: Competency Model for Thai Autonomous Universities.
Source: Proposed by the authors.

As shown in Figure 1, we propose a new competency model for Thai autonomous university presidents, comprised of nine essential competencies. The first as shown in the second circle is achievement orientation. This is the basic requirement, as they have to have a very strong determination that they must be successful in their jobs that will motivate them to achieve their personal goals that lead to the achievement of the organizational goals. The second is leadership competency. In order to be successful, they must be very strong leaders in order to lead their organization to success. The third is communication competency. Communication competency is very important, as they have to communicate via all types of communication with all the stakeholder groups of the university. The fourth competency is academic business management. In order to be successful, they have to manage the university as a businesslike organization, as the previous traditional public administration style of management may not prevail in this turbulent time. The fifth is strategic management. To support the needed academic business management, they have to practice strategic management in the businesslike style of strategic management that emphasizes the complete cycle of strategic management, especially the monitoring and evaluation and corrective actions parts of the business strategic management. The sixth competency is relationship management. The president must cultivate and maintain excellent relationships with all university stakeholder groups, especially for the fundraising purpose, as this task is essential because the university is not able to gain financial support from the government and it cannot rely solely on

enrollment fees as in the past. The seventh competency is human capital management. In addition to managing the university to produce an excellent quality of human capital for society, the president has to effectively manage their human capital in the university to be the important base for their production objectives. The eight competency is financial management. Along with human capital management and other competencies, financial management is very important as the university has to be self-sufficient and be able to stand on its own feet financially. The last competency in this model is enrollment management. Although the university may not be able to rely on its enrollment fees as in the past, this competency is still very essential, as the major objective of the university is to produce an excellent quality of human capital. Therefore, this competency is still relevant and changes in the focus of this competency are required to concentrate on how to help students to accomplish their learning goals. So, students' success should be one of the most important key factors in this competency. It is believed that the application of this competency model will help the Thai autofocus university presidents to be able to cope with the present turbulent time and after the pandemic of COVID-19 has receded.

Implications and Recommendations

Theoretical Implications. As a result of this study a new competency model for Thai autonomous university president was proposed for application and verification. The model added new competencies that are considered to be essential for Thai autonomous university president to be able to effectively lead and manage the university through the pandemic of COVID-19 and beyond.

Policy Implications. The Board of Trustee of the university could use this model as a basis for establishing a policy for recruitment and evaluation of performance of university president.

Practical Implications. A university president recruitment committee could use this model as a tool for recruitment of a new university president. The current university presidents could apply this model in their present job as well as for their self-development. This model could be used as a basis for training programs for future candidates of university president. It could be applied in various programs of higher education administration being taught in various universities as well.

Future Research Agenda. Based on the proposed competencies, a research study should be conducted to create and test the competencies required by the presidents of Thai autonomous universities.

Limitation of the Study. The model proposed in this study is based on a limited number of research studies. It should not be generalized prior to verify by an appropriate quantitative research study or other testing and verification methods.

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