Management of Change in a Self-Access Learning Centre

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The management of self-access centres is an interesting and challenging job; in fact, it is so challenging that managers of such centres often have to consider whether they want merely to maintain the existing state or, since change will not come overnight or without sustained effort, persist with the long-term extra work involved in being leaders for change. This paper aims to show how, after a decade in existence, major changes were initiated and implemented in the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC) at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). In doing so, it is hoped that it can serve as a useful example to managers of other self-access centres who are contemplating change.

What is a self-access learning centre?

A self-access centre is seen as a place where language learners come to take charge of their own learning by using self-access materials and services provided in the centre to improve their target language skills. Therefore, the main purposes of most centres are to support independent learning and help learners improve their target language. Each centre may be a unit in a language institute, a school of languages, or a school of liberal arts; the centre may be managed by a group of people or even one person.

Gardner & Miller (1999) indicate that a self-access centre has two major functions: first, it provides self-study language-learning materials which independent learners can use to satisfy their own needs and wants; second, it prepares learners for greater independence by encouraging the development of individualized strategies as well as reflection on, and taking responsibility for, learning. They emphasize that a centre offers language-learning opportunities that would not be possible in formal lessons; it may also offer some kinds of simulation of a native-speaker environment where learners can choose to immerse themselves in their target language, interact with authentic materials and perhaps also talk to native or near-native speakers.

Running a self-access centre

According to Gardner & Miller (1999), the task of management is about operating an organizational unit in a way which makes the best use of its resources in order to achieve its goals. Therefore, a major task of a manager is to run the centre in a way which optimizes the use of its resources so that it can help learners practise independent learning and improve their target language proficiency. Gardner & Miller also state that the management of a self-access centre involves ensuring support for learners and staff development. Management of resources and support for learners and staff development are now discussed in more detail.

Management of resources

Language learners come to a self-access centre to practise independent learning and improve their language skills; therefore, a crucial job of the centre is to provide self-access language materials to serve their needs. Gardner & Miller (1999) clarify the management of resources as the manager's responsibility to find a way to collect

information about the needs, goals and achievement of learners, including the learners' perceptions of current resources. Moreover, information about uses, the amount of time learners spend using the current resources and the effectiveness of these resources need to be considered so the centre can provide the right materials for learners. Furthermore, the requirements of the taught courses in the institution where the self-access centre is located should be addressed. Finally, the manager has to reconsider the capability of production of in-house materials or making use of sources of published materials. In Sheerin's (1996) opinion, students must be able to use self-access materials in the centre on their own. They should also be able to find materials which are at their level easily and the materials should satisfy their perceived needs. Moreover, students should be able to evaluate their own work by checking what they have done against a key, model answers or various other forms of feedback provided.

Support for learners
Gardner & Miller (1999) define learners in a self-access centre as absolutely different from students in a language class. Firstly, the range of differences in the ability, proficiency level, motivation and time available of learners who come to such centres is much wider than among students in a normal language class. In addition, teachers in a class can take control over learning activities whereas, in a self-access centre, there is likely to be no teacher control over learning activities that students choose. The responsibility of the self-access centre is to help learners define their goals and find ways to persuade them to experiment with materials more widely; the following activities are examples of learner-support work that Gardner & Miller (1999) suggest:
- providing orientation sessions;
- providing counselling services for individual learners;
- providing workshops for skills or particular materials;
- providing individual learners with pathways or guidelines through materials;
- forming learners into study groups;
- assigning learners to a mentor;
- recording attendance;
- accrediting self-access work.

Staff development
Since most self-access centres are managed by a group of people, it is the manager's responsibility to make sure that support staff feel included in the aims of the centre and that their work contributes to the achievement of the centre (Gardner & Miller, 1999). Consequently, the manager needs to consider how to involve staff in the decision-making process; the procedures for defining standards of work; the requirements of each position (job description, working hours and responsibility); the rewards of each position; assessment or feedback given; and the procedures for staff to make complaints.

A manager or a leader?
Wynn & Guditus (1984) state that managers typically involve themselves in maintaining existing structures and procedures while leaders are defined as more dynamic people who are constantly looking for ways of moving forward. They must

respond effectively to the real and perceived needs of individuals as well as to the goals of the organization. West-Burnham (1992) claims that no leader has ever been regarded as great because of his/her ability to maintain the existing state. He sees leaders as managers of change who welcome the challenge and facilitate the changes of others (learners and staff). He mentions that there is a great deal of overlap between the roles of managers and leaders and that it is probably more fruitful to see them as two aspects of a single role. Woolls (1994) supports West-Burnham by using the term 'leader manager'.

This paper will now focus its attention on a self-access centre where major changes have been initiated and managed over several years, that of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT).

KMUTT's Self Access Learning Centre
Organization
The self-access centre at KMUTT is called the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC). It was established by teachers of English in 1991 as a unit in the then Department of Languages (now, the Department of Language Studies) in the School of Liberal Arts. Although a manager was selected to deal with the management of the centre, some decisions had to be approved by the department. Many years later, the centre was reorganized as a separate unit of the School of Liberal Arts. The committee of the centre included the administrative committee and the SALC staff. This was the beginning of more freedom for the SALC management because the Head of the centre could plan the work and budget instead of waiting for the budget managed by the Department of Languages.

At present, the centre is organized as one of the three units run by the Centre for Information and Learning (CIL) in the School of Liberal Arts (the other two being the Resource Centre and the Learning Technology Unit). The administrative committee of the CIL is made up of the Head of the CIL (chairperson), the Dean and Vice Deans (advisors), representatives from all departments of the faculty and a secretary. The Head of the SALC and the secretary take more responsibility than in their previous jobs as, respectively, the Head and secretary of the CIL. The SALC staff includes the Head of the SALC, a secretary, a material designer and two associate secretaries. The computer staff of the Learning Technology Unit support the SALC. This new organization is remarkably beneficial to the Self-Access Learning Centre, especially to its development, because the administrative committee works collaboratively with the centre, giving advice on policy and the budget as well as supporting all the centre's work. However, the centre has complete freedom to run itself according to its policy and plans. The Learning Technology Unit's team is also of great assistance to the centre by offering help with computer work. This is as Sheerin (2002) suggests; that is, one way of making the most of the centre is involving people in its management.

Objectives
The objectives of the SALC are as follows:
- To promote and support self-access learning and teaching
- To provide services for the university's students and staff in language learning
- To put self-access theories into practice

- To offer help, information and practical advice to those who want to set up a self-access centre in their own educational institutions

Accordingly, the major mission of the centre is to provide self-access learning services for the university's students and staff in order to enable them to practise their English language skills independently according to their needs and learning styles.

Users
There are three groups of users who come to the centre in order to practise independent learning and improve their language skills: undergraduates, postgraduates and the university's staff. Since the School of Liberal Arts is responsible for teaching English to students of all faculties in the university and the use of the centre is integrated into the English curriculum, about 150 users come to the centre every day. In addition, a lot of teachers from schools, colleges and universities throughout Thailand and overseas visit the centre regularly in order to study and exchange experience and ideas about setting up and managing self-access centres. From 2002 to 2007, visitors to the centre numbered 2,648; these were mostly Thai teachers but there were also 65 foreign teachers from overseas.

How change was initiated and implemented at the SALC
The influence of globalization has made English the most widely utilized international language, one that many workplaces in Thailand require their employees to use as a means of communication. Thus, a lot of graduates find it hard to get a good job if they cannot achieve this requirement; therefore, increasing numbers of students come to the SALC in order to improve their English. However, those students do not have much time to spend there because they are science and engineering students, most of whose time is devoted to their major subjects. Although the university's staff are also required to improve their English skills and many of them come to the centre, they have limited time to spend in the centre. Thus, in order to deal with the urgent needs and limited time of its users, the SALC needed to be radically changed.

Accordingly, in 2002, the Head of the centre decided to be a leader manager taking on the extra work involved in being a leader of change rather than merely maintaining the existing state. Innovations made include producing self-access learning materials, designing a pathway index programme, counselling, organising an annual self-access festival, forming special interest groups for learners, providing workshops and designing an electronic SALC (E-SALC) programme. These developments in the SALC exemplify management for change, and they are now described in more detail.

Management of resources
In-house materials and materials adaptation
Since the materials in the centre had been produced and purchased over ten years ago, they were old and out of date. Hence, the centre proposed two new projects in 2003: in-house materials production and materials adaptation. For in-house materials, one part-time expert was employed to produce learner training materials for note-taking, summary writing, speed reading and so on. Scholarships were offered to two master's degree students in the then Department of Applied Linguistics (now, the Department of Language Studies) to work on materials adaptation. In 2004, the three-year project of producing more in-house materials was approved and one full-time teacher was

employed as a material designer. By 2008, these in-house materials will have been evaluated and then there will be more paper-based and online materials for users. The capability of designing its own materials is one crucial role of the centre; otherwise, the centre would have to pay a lot of money purchasing new materials every year and, unfortunately, those materials might not be suitable for its users.

Pathway index programme
The centre is organized and divided into five rooms including various 'corners', for listening, CALL (computer assisted language learning), video (listening through films), reading for pleasure, self-instructional reading, cassette friends (speaking), grammar, writing, study abroad and so on. All the materials in the centre are classified into skills for each corner. Before 2002, there was a problem accessing materials because there were so many materials in each corner that students could not easily find the material they wanted. Though there were placement tests provided in some corners (i.e. the listening and self-instructional reading corners) to enable learners to access materials at the right level, some learners came to the centre with their own specific purposes. Therefore, they did not need to do the placement tests. For example, they might want to search for some grammar points to help them edit their written work or practise talking on the phone or giving directions. In such cases, the centre could not serve their needs properly and rapidly because there was no support system to help them find the materials they wanted within a short time. Moreover, Susan Sheerin, an expert in self-access learning from Sussex University, UK, was invited to evaluate the centre in May 2002. She reiterated that most of the materials in the centre were not user-friendly in the sense that they were not easily accessible.

Therefore, in 2003, the centre proposed a four-year project of a pathway index programme in order to employ technology to facilitate the accessing system. Financial support was offered by the School of Liberal Arts and the university. Two teachers of English who were studying a master's degree programme in the faculty were offered scholarships to work for the project under the supervision of the centre's advisor as well as the Head and the secretary; the work involved analyzing all the materials in the centre in terms of skills, sub-skills, titles, functions, structures, lexis and examples of language use. The computer technician used Microsoft Office Access to design the programme, which provided a database of all the centre's materials.

Since 2004, students and staff of the university have been able to find materials in the centre more easily through the pathway index programme. After the SALC website was designed, the programme could be accessed more conveniently through the website (it can be reached at http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/salc). This means that, at present, by typing skills, sub-skills, titles, functions, structures or key words into the programme, learners can easily find materials they want to use. Although this programme may be seen as only a catalogue, it is an initial step towards further improvement. Moreover, a barcode system is employed to facilitate the use of materials in the centre. In order to run this system, the centre's staff have to remove the former codes of all the centre's materials and replace them with barcodes. This task takes a lot of time and energy as these materials have been designed and purchased since 1991; in addition, this job has to be done continually because new materials are designed or purchased every year.

E-SALC (My English)
Since technology is the only way to enable students who have limited time on a university campus to use the centre's services to improve their English anytime and anywhere, the committee for improving students' English language skills of the university led by the former dean of the School of Liberal Arts and the academic vice dean proposed the E-SALC project (also known as *My English*) to the university in 2005. When the project was approved, Hayo Reinders, who was, at the time, Head of the Self-Access Centre at Auckland University, New Zealand, was invited to work with the committee, the centre staff, and the postgraduates from the Department of Computer Engineering to design the E-SALC. Materials in the centre, including online materials, were selected and analyzed; a short description of each material was written and put into the E-SALC programme. Tests were also designed to motivate learners to assess their progress. Fortunately, the pathway index programme had already been conducted; analyzing and writing the descriptions of the centre's materials were much easier and took less time than they would have done without this programme. The piloting and evaluating stages had already been done.

Now, university students and staff can access the virtual centre or E-SALC anytime and anywhere (at http://www.kmutt.ac.th/myenglish or at http://myenglish.kmutt.ac.th) to set their goals, plan their studies, find suitable resources, implement their plans, record their studies, take tests, chat and get help from their teachers or the SALC staff online. Besides, by accessing the programme, teachers of taught courses can observe their students' learning plans, learning records and progress. They can facilitate their students' independent learning by giving advice including feedback via the programme's online counselling and chatting modes. In addition, at the time of writing, the CALL corner is being expanded and 116 computers are being installed in order to provide more equipment for online self-access learning.

Management of learners
Although the SALC has always provided students with some support, there were still a lot of students and staff who did not know how they could make use of the centre effectively to improve their English. Regular counselling services and orientation sessions were offered but not enough were available for a large number of students. Moreover, the numbers of visitors from schools, colleges and universities in Thailand and overseas have increased. Accordingly, the centre needs further changes, especially a support system. The following are examples of activities the centre offers users to support their independent learning.

Providing a new style of orientation session
In 2002, an English-language brochure introducing the location and services of the SALC was designed and distributed to users and visitors together with the previous Thai version. PowerPoint and video introductions to the centre were also produced to facilitate the orientation session. Therefore, the new orientation session is more meaningful and interesting.

Providing counselling services
In 2002, the counselling service was restarted by Head of the SALC working as a counsellor. Then, some other volunteers including the centre's advisors also offered counselling services to individual learners through learner profiles, which included a

needs analysis form, a learner contract and a learning reflection form. Therefore, individual learners were encouraged to take charge of their own learning by analyzing their needs, setting their goals, planning their self-study, implementing their plans and assessing their strengths, weaknesses and progress. In addition, the Head of the Department of Language Studies regularly asks teachers in the department to be counsellors of the centre. At present, learners can consult the centre's counsellors both in the centre and online through the E-SALC programme.

Providing workshops for skills or particular materials
Workshops for the university's students and staff are organized regularly. TOEFL exam preparation was the first workshop organized by the centre, in collaboration with a private language school in 2002. Nowadays, the centre provides more workshops, on such matters as job hunting, studying abroad and the E-SALC. The E-SALC workshop is run to enable learners and teachers of English to make use of the centre more effectively both within the centre itself as well as online.

Forming study groups for learners
Special interest groups
Reading and speaking groups have been functioning as special interest groups since 2003. The Head of the SALC formed the reading group and was a group leader at the starting period. Students who joined this group chose to read whatever they wanted to and presented what they had read and learned from reading passages. Presentation and discussion skills were also taught. Alternatively, students might select and read the same graded readers and then listen to the storyteller through cassette tapes which come together with the books. Apart from reading, members of the group learned grammar and new words in context. Two teachers, who were native speakers of English, volunteered to be the group leaders and facilitate the speaking groups, and the Head of the Department of Languages asked other teachers to run additional such groups. Topics introduced by all the group leaders were posted on the notice board; therefore, students who were interested in practising speaking could sign up to join appropriate sessions.

Now, some other teachers of English and postgraduates from the faculty's master's degree programme in Applied Linguistics and foreign students from other faculties in the university have volunteered to run over ten other special interest groups (a grammar clinic, movies, public speaking, writing, dictionaries, news, German, Japanese, Chinese, radio and TOEIC preparation, etc.). The Head of the Department of Language Studies has also asked native speakers of English to be group leaders. These special groups serve a lot of students for their specific purposes. There are more and more students who join these groups. From 2006 to 2007, the centre served 1,290 students with various special groups. The university's staff also join the groups; especially popular is the Chinese group, whose students and staff can be seen participating happily in the same group.

SALC Festival
The SALC Festival is an activity which aims to encourage students who are interested in the same English skills to join in the activity in order to improve their English. The festival has been organized since 2002. The first festival focused on reading skills. Throughout the year, students were motivated to read the first story in the famous *Harry Potter* series, and hundreds of questions about the story were prepared. When students

went to the centre, picked up a question and answered it correctly, they would get a prize from the centre. On 14th February, 2002, a Harry Potter Quiz was organized. Twenty-one teams of students, with three students in each team, joined the quiz. The three winning teams were offered scholarships and SALC certificates. Apart from the Harry Potter Quiz, there were a book fair and a quiz game about the SALC. The evaluation of the festival showed that 99.34% of the students and teachers who answered the evaluation forms wanted the centre to organize the festival again.

The second festival was organized in 2003, when the competitions focused on speaking, writing and singing contests and a SALC Big Fan contest including a performance and a book fair. The evaluation of the festival showed that 100% of the participating students and teachers agreed to have it again. Therefore, the third festival was organized in 2004, and reading, listening and story-telling contests were added. Again, 100% of the participants stated that they wanted the centre to organize the festival again. This is why the SALC Festival is now organized every year.

The number of scholarships has been increased for both the university's staff and students, including a singing contest for staff and an academic competition for students, such as one on technological design requiring students to present the machines or gadgets they have designed in their English classes. Students from primary and secondary schools are also invited to join the competitions. Teachers from the Departments of Language Studies and Engineering are invited to be referees in the competitions. This activity makes more students and staff know about the centre and motivates them to come and use its services. Because of this activity, a new network between the centre and teachers of the Department of Engineering has been created. Hopefully, it will involve more people in the process of running the centre. Besides, the activity encourages the centre to expand its help and services to the communities near the university campus. It is the beginning stage of the collaboration among self-access learning centres in order to strengthen all the centres. The following activities are the first two types of collaborative work initiated due to the SALC Festival.

An open house and workshops
Apart from regularly presenting and sharing ideas about setting up and managing a self-access centre to groups of visitors from schools, colleges and universities throughout Thailand and overseas, an open house and workshops are organized annually. Teachers from schools and universities nearby were invited to join an open house and self-access learning discussion in 2002. A workshop on independent learning was organized for high school students in 2003. The centre also collaborated with Thailand TESOL (a teachers' organization) and the university's School of Liberal Arts, organizing self-access learning workshops on various topics for teachers of English throughout Thailand. In 2003, the topics were material adaptation and self-access learning; in 2004, the topic was preparing and supporting learners in their self-access work; in 2005, it was twenty-five years of self-access and learner independence; and, in 2006, there was an open house. From 2002-2005, the Head of the centre also worked for Thailand TESOL as chairperson of the Self-Access Learning Special Interest Group (SAL-SIG), running a group discussion on self-access learning for SAL-SIG members during the annual meeting of the Thailand TESOL international conference. A seminar on self-access learning is being organized in 2008 in order to motivate teachers who run a self-access

centre to participate and share their experience managing their centres and show what innovations they have implemented.

Setting up a reading corner
In March 2007, the centre was supported by the university to set up a reading corner for Prarachathan Thaplamu School, one of the tsunami victim schools in Pang-Nga, in the south of Thailand. Reading materials including learner profiles and record sheets were provided. A workshop for teachers of the school was also offered in order to train them to use the corner effectively. Evaluation of the use of the corner is in progress.

Accrediting self-access work
The centre accredits students who participate well in special interest groups and SALC Festivals; it offers certificates and scholarships to the winners of each competition of the festivals and the best participants of the special interest groups. The centre is planning to accredit students for their self-access learning, especially students who work systematically for a period of time with one of the centre's counsellors.

Staff development
Aims of the centre and decision-making process
The first innovation initiated by the Head of the Centre in 2002 was changing the secretary's and the associate secretaries' roles from taking responsibility for only secretarial work to dealing collaboratively with the centre's decision-making process in order to make sure that the support staff feel included in the centre's mission. Currently, an academic year plan and a budget or a financial year plan are set up and proposed to the administrative committee by all the centre's staff.

Requirements of each position
In addition to general secretarial work, in 2002, the secretarial staff were trained to be coordinators of academic work, including the speaking and reading special interest groups, the pathway index project and self-access learning workshops. Then they reported the results and problems of their work to the Head of the centre instead of having every single piece of work planned by her.

Nowadays, each staff member takes responsibility for academic and administrative tasks. The secretary of the centre works for the Centre for Information and Learning (CIL) as a secretary of the centre taking care of the financial and secretarial work of the three aforementioned units of the centre. For the SALC part of her job, she takes care of the centre's website, the E-SALC programme, financial work, self-assessment and other crucial activities of the centre such as the 2008 SALC seminar on sharing ideas about managing self-access centres. The material designer designs in-house materials and manages other academic work for the centre such as counselling and chatting services both in the centre and online through the E-SALC. One of the associate secretaries deals with the database of materials, training and taking care of postgraduates who have scholarships to work for the centre. Another associate secretary does the secretarial work and takes care of running special interest groups and the SALC Festival. The Head is in charge of all the centre's work and the CIL.

Rewards of each position
For staff development, the secretarial staff have a chance to leave the office for an hour a week in order to practise English by using self-access materials in the centre. In addition, in 2003, the secretary was encouraged to attend a course in Applied Linguistics on setting up and managing self-access learning centres. She was finally supported to further her studies for a master's degree in Resource-Based Learning (RBL) or Self-Access Learning in the university's former Department of Applied Linguistics.

Standards of work, assessment or feedback and complaints
Every month, a staff meeting is organized to provide a chance for the SALC staff to discuss ways to assess the quality of their previous and future work. In addition, the Head of the centre spends this time giving feedback on their work while the secretaries can make use of the meeting session to reveal the results of their work and to make complaints. Then problem-solving and suggestions for improvement are discussed among the staff in a friendly environment. Once a semester, a meeting for the administrative committee is set up in order to report all work done and to consult each other on crucial problems.

Conclusion
Setting up a self-access centre is not simple; moreover, maintaining and developing it is even more difficult and complicated. Gardner & Miller (1999) assert that a clear picture of the operation of a self-access centre is not only to show its success but also to identify areas which need further improvement. They add that, if managers consider themselves not just maintainers of the existing state but leaders looking for challenging new approaches as well as greater efficiency and effectiveness, they need to conduct serious evaluations of their self-access operations. Moreover, Sheerin (2002) proclaims that making the most of a centre concerns involvement, integration and interest; accordingly, contributions from upper executives, colleagues, staff and students are needed. These people can help the centre to set policy, decide on its aims, produce materials, support students, design or re-design the centre's layout, evaluate the centre and so on. She also suggests the integration of learner training and development of self-access learning into curriculums, courses and classroom work. In order to achieve a centre's goals, she emphasizes that self-access learning should be integrated into the institutional culture. In addition, the centre should interest teachers and learners as well as entire institutes. Otherwise, fewer and fewer people are likely to want to support a centre's work; thus, Sheerin's (2002) advice for self-access centres is 'Keep Yourself Visible'.

As Head of the self-access learning centre described in this paper, my own view is that asking for a budget or manpower to help maintain or develop a centre does not easily work if the centre starts by merely requesting these things. On the other hand, a centre can achieve its goals if its staff show initiative by doing something for their centre themselves. Then, help and support are more likely to be offered from others.

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