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Leading at the Confluence of Tradition and Globalization:

The Challenge of Change in Thai Schools

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During the 1990's, Asia's politicians and bureaucrats were flush with the spoils of the economic boom. Despite the usual rhetoric of school reform was little urgency to press forward with the implementation of newly stated educational priorities. After all, education had been widely acknowledged as a building block of the region's rapid economic growth (Ohmae, 1995; Rohwer, 1996).

In short order, however, the recent economic crisis has highlighted weaknesses in Asia's institutional infrastructure. As O'Toole (1995) has noted, most social change comes from the outside-in, and there is already evidence the crisis may provide a positive catalyst for educational change. One indication was observed at a recent seminar on social and educational reform in Thailand:

> Mr. Amaret Sila-on and NEC [National Education Commission] Secretary-General Rung Kaewdaeng were in complete agreement that Thailand's decline in global competitiveness was mainly due to poor quality of education and graft. The IMD's (International Institute for Management Development) study said Thailand's education system did not live up to global economic challenges . . . . Several [seminar] participants also blamed the drop [in competitiveness] on inefficient public management and a lack of support from the decision-making level, saying despite high potential Thailand will regress further. (Bangkok Post, 1998a, p. 3)

Not only in Thailand, but throughout Asia, educational leaders face the challenge of fostering change in practices consonant with the needs of their rapidly developing societies. Yet, leading change has never traditionally formed a central role of Asian school leaders. Even in the U.S., where school reform has occupied the attention of leaders for the past two decades, knowledge of how to lead change in schools remains uneven. Evans (1996) has noted:

> Over the past few decades the knowledge base about . . . change has grown appreciably. Some scholars feel that we know more about innovation than we ever have (Miles, 1992, pp. 29-30). But

> although we have surely learned much, there remain two large gaps in our knowledge: training and implementation. (p. 4)

This observation is especially salient for school leaders in Asia. If the literature on educational change in the West evidences selective gaps, the indigenous knowledge base in Asian societies is thin at best (Cheng, 1995; Hallinger, 1995, 1999). Thus, despite the urgent need for educational reform, Asian scholars can offer relatively little advice on *how* best to foster change in the region's schools.

In this paper we explore the cultural context of educational change in Asia with a specific focus on one Asian society, Thailand. We assume that strategies for changing educational practice in Asian nations will be both similar and different from those discussed in the predominantly Western literature (e.g., Drucker, 1995; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 1990; Hall & Hord, 1987; Kotter, 1996; O'Toole, 1995; Rogers, & Shoemaker, 1982; Sarason, 1982, 1990; Senge, 1990). The purpose of this examination is to assist policymakers and practitioners rethink their roles in bringing about change in Thai schools as well as in Asia more generally. We hope the results will contribute to the growing discourse on leadership in different cultures contexts (Cheng, 1995; Hallinger, 1995; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1997; Heck, 1996).

Change as a Cultural Process

Over the past several decades, scholars have increasingly viewed organizational change as a *cultural* process (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 1990; Sarason, 1982, 1990). Use of the term "culture" generally entails reference to the assumptions, values, norms and practices of the organization (Evans, 1996; Schein, 1996). We concur in the importance

of understanding a school's particular culture. However, we further assert that a school's culture reflects its national culture and that understanding this broader construct is fundamental to understanding how social change occurs within a given nation.

To illustrate this point, we will explore the change process as it unfolds in the culture of Thailand. We begin with a brief discussion of the traditional Thai approach to leading change. Then we will analyze the cultural dimensions of the change process in Thai schools.

Traditions of Leading Change in Thai Schools

Like other areas of public administration in Thailand, the educational system is highly centralized (Hallinger, Chantarapanya, Sriboonma, & Kantamara, 1999; Ketudat, 1984; Meesing, 1979). In Thailand's educational system, participants assume that orders from above are orders for all concerned and should be followed accordingly. This has resulted in what even senior Ministry of Education official have acknowledged as a "compliance culture."

By way of example, let us relate an incident that occurred a few years ago at a workshop on managing change that was held in Thailand. During a break one participant, a veteran secondary school principal, approached the speaker. He said:

> "Excuse me, I think your workshop is very interesting, but I believe that leading change in our schools is not at all like what it appears to be in the USA. We don't spend a lot time talking to our staff and explaining why and how we are implementing something new. We don't need to deal with all of these individuals and their special needs. Here it is very easy to make change. We just tell our teachers, 'Do it.'"
>
> When I asked about their response, he said. "Well, of course, they do it. They have no choice." (personal communication, September 1995)

This reflects a cultural tendency for leaders in Thailand to treat change as an *event*. After announcing the adoption of a new policy or innovation, administrators tend to treat the change as completed. Treating the adoption of an innovation as a *fait accompli* has traditionally met the need of system leaders to appear “modern” without having to really change anything of substance.

Two recent developments have negated the functional utility of this cultural tendency. First, the normative practices associated with this compliance culture conflict with those embedded in a host of recently initiated “empowering" educational reforms. (e.g., school-based management, parent involvement). To the extent that these reforms are actually desired by policymakers, there will need to be a significant change in the assumptions that guide behavior in the cultural system.

Second, in the real world, the change process is both complex and protracted (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 1990; Hall, 1987; Senge, 1990) and only partially amenable to change by mandate. Indeed the current economic crisis has revealed the inherent weakness of this approach to achieving results beyond change in rhetoric. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Thai educators themselves share the view that very little ever changes in educational practice. Sykes, Floden and Wheeler (1997) note certain flaws in the traditional top-down approach favored within the Thai culture.

> The training model currently employed in Thailand tends to leave out . . . the follow up in the classroom to assist the teacher in actually using new approaches or methods. What can be centrally accomplished is the presentation of the new approach, but then teachers are left largely isolated and unsupported in actually implementing new practices. . . Such consequences mirror research findings in the U.S. and other countries which show that under such conditions most teachers do not

> implement the new practices or only partially implement them, with little resulting change in teaching. (1997, pp. 4-5)

We assert that Thai culture fosters two tendencies that undercut efforts to bring about change. By treating change as a matter of "adoption" Thai school leaders do not always take sufficient time to "make the case" for the new practice. They may also neglect to provide support to the efforts of teachers to learn and use new practices (Sykes et al., 1997; Wheeler, Gallagher, McDonough, & Sookpokakit-Namfa, 1997). We believe that these behavioral tendencies are rooted in the norms of Thai culture, some shared by other Asian cultures.

As we shall demonstrate, the Thai approach to leading change by *fiat* (i.e., order) is culturally viable. Moreover, it was functional in an era when Thailand was largely shielded from external influences and the pace and scope of change was limited. It is, however, far less likely to succeed now that Thailand has become integrated into an increasingly globalized context characterized by rapid change.

Contradictions between the traditional approach to leading change and the norms inherent in recent educational reforms -- school-based management, teacher empowerment, parental involvement, and social-constructivist teaching -- are readily apparent. Yet even in the face of these contradictions, it is unclear just how Thailand's school-level leaders might best approach the challenge of leading change. This apparent contradiction between *assumptions* about the nature of the change process and *strategies* for leading change reflects deeply embedded beliefs of Thai culture. This is where we begin our analysis.

A Cultural Perspective on Change in Thai Society

Understanding the change process in Thai schools must begin with an analysis of the cultural norms in which leaders work. For the purposes of this exploratory analysis, we drew upon two sources. First, we employed Hofstede's (1980) cultural maps of different nations. Second, we elaborated on this framework by incorporating specific norms acknowledged as central to Thai culture (e.g., see Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Mulder, 1996).

Hofstede defined culture as the *collective mental programming of the people in a social environment in which one grew up and collected one's life experiences* (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). Hofstede identifies four main dimensions by which national cultures differ: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism-Collectivism, and Masculinity-Femininity. We treat of these in turn.

High power distance. *Power distance* refers to "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organization within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 28). Thailand is a high power distance culture as reflected in its strongly hierarchical and bureaucratic society. Thai's learn to understand and accept their position in society from their earliest youth.

In fact, in order to function confidently Thai people must be able to identify their own particular social status in relation to others. One quite naturally differentiates his/her social status and treats others as juniors, seniors, or peers (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Mulder, 1996). Status differentiation is demonstrated by way of expressions in

language, gesture, and posture. Simple observation of virtually any social interaction quickly reveals an elaborate hierarchy of status.

Based on Buddhist teachings, Thais believe that they were born into their own status based on *karma* from previous lives. As a cultural characteristic, status differentiation traces back as far as the fifteenth century when Thailand employed the *sakdina* system. This system ranked every citizen by assigning a number or "dignity mark." The points ranged from 100,000 to 5 based on one's social status. Originally, these numbers were based on the size of land. *Na* means rice field, while *sakdi* means power. Thus, sakdina means power stemming from landholding (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Rabibhadana, 1975).

Although the sakdina system was abolished four hundred years later by King Chulalongkorn, two beliefs persist to the present. First, every Thai understands that he/she has a particular place in the cultural hierarchy. Second, Thai's generally accept that they should be content with that place (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995 This is the essence of what Hofstede refers to as high power distance.

Not surprisingly, seniority is an important factor in a high power distance culture. As explained by the National Identity Office (1991):

> Respect for elders is taught very early, however, and by the time a child walks he is aware of his position in the family hierarchy, a distinction that applies not only to the relationship between siblings of different ages. This same delineation of roles also applies to the wider world outside the family and will remain deeply ingrained throughout life, thus explaining the reluctance of younger Thai to oppose or otherwise confront a senior during their subsequent careers in business or government. (as cited in Taraseina, 1993, pp. 66-67)

This vertically aligned cultural system exerts great influence upon social relations in the workplace. Persons of lower status (i.e., age, position, seniority) naturally defer to

those of higher status, accepting differences in power as a normal feature of social relations. Thai's commonly show consideration or *greng jai* towards each other. *Greng jai means* "to be self-effacing, respectful, humble, and extremely considerate, as well as the wish to avoid embarrassing other people, intruding, or imposing upon them" (Servatamorn, 1977, p. 13).

Students *greng jai* their teacher by not asking questions, even when they do not understand the lesson. Teachers *greng jai* their principals when they politely accept orders – for example to implement a new curriculum or teaching method -- even if they do not understand or agree with them. A less experienced or younger member on a team may refrain from contributing new ideas at a meeting because he/she feels *greng jai* towards more senior colleagues who have already spoken. Or a young supervisor may *greng jai* a veteran teacher and fail to provide corrective feedback on weaknesses in class instruction.

Dakins (1988) describes how a young teacher feeling *greng jai* agreed to change her teaching method according to the supervisor's advice. However, in the supervisor's absence she would continue using her own teaching style which she strongly believed to be more suitable for her students. In the teacher's view, she was trying to compromise, while the supervisor thought of her as being dishonest and challenging her authority.

This highlights an additional cultural norm that influences change, s*ia naa. Sia naa* refers to the need to avoid making someone lose face or embarrassing them. While this is considered polite in most societies, Asian cultures – including Thailand – place a much more conscious and specific emphasis on "keeping one's face."

Take the same example of the teacher above. Another reason she feigned complied with her supervisor was because she did not want to *appear* stubborn by refusing to follow her advice. Complying with her supervisor represented a socially important means by which she could avoid making her supervisor *sia naa*.

In an interesting twist to this social dance, a person of lower status will often go to great lengths to avoid making another person *sia naa* by outperforming them. For example, in a hierarchical system, person of higher rank are supposed to know more and to perform better. But when they do not, others may go to great lengths to pretend that they do. The goal is to avoid having their superordinate *sia naa*.

High power distance markedly differentiates the "Thai way" of managing schools from normative practices found in Western societies. Thus, in the example given earlier, when the Thai principal tells his staff to "do it" he probably does receive a polite and quietly receptive response. This reflects the culturally legitimated beliefs about his authority as someone of higher status and rank. And his subordinates will, to varying degrees, put forth some *initial* effort to do as they are told. The problem is that in the case of complex innovations (e.g., a new math curriculum or IT), the initial instinct to comply will seldom survive the predictable difficulties inherent in the change process.

In Western cultures, people expect greater equality in social relations regardless of formal status and act accordingly. For example, an American principal's staff would typically respond to the same announcement of a curriculum change with a simple question, "Why?" This does not imply disagreement. Rather it reflects the staff's culturally legitimated belief that they have a *right* to know why they are expected to do

something, that they should have a *voice* in the decision, and that they will be able to "do it" better if they know why they are doing it.

High power distance provides both an advantage and an impediment to change leaders in Thailand. The principal is the key decision-maker for the school; even an assistant principal has little authority to make decisions without direct contact with the principal. Teacher will naturally accord their principal a high degree of respect. Thus, principal support for an innovation is even more important than in the West.

Principals can proceed with confidence that staff will listen with a polite ear to new proposals and also feel some obligation to comply. However, as noted earlier, this advantageous aspect of high power distance can lead Thai principals to underemphasize the important task of explaining the rationale for change. Thai principals will often interpret polite acceptance as support for the change rather than as the normative response of teachers to *greng jai* their superior. Thus, principals run the risk of proceeding to implementation without sufficient attention to building real interest and support for the change.

Low individualism/High collectivism. *Collectivism* pertains to "societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 51). In contrast, nations such as the United States, England, and Australia are highly *individualistic;* "the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 51). Thailand is a highly collectivist culture.

Thai people have a long history of being members of extended families. As an agricultural culture, collective work is common and expected. Consequently, Thai's work hard to build and maintain relationships among a wide and complex network of people (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995). Thai culture encourages interdependence instead of independence and a "We" consciousness prevails rather than an "I" consciousness.

The reference group is so important that Thai's try hard to avoid conflicts which might create uncomfortable and unpleasant feelings. Letting one's own feeling out in the open is difficult. Indeed it is hard for Thai's to understand how Americans can feel good after venting their feelings by shouting at each other or banging on a table at a meeting (Dakins, 1988).

Another cultural norm salient to Thai collectivism is *gumlung jai*: spirit or morale. *Gumlung jai* surfaces with surprising frequency in everyday discussions of Thai organizations. For example, it is quite common for a school administrator who has come under public criticism for some decision to receive *gumlung jai* from a group of supporters. These parents, teachers, and/or students come en mass bearing bouquets of flowers in a public show of moral support for their leader.

Gumlung jai reflects the strongly collective nature of Thai social relations and the strong bonds that tie people together. It is *a public act* of reciprocal support for the leader who has taken care of the staff during their times of need. This type of moral support has no direct counterpart within highly individualistic cultures.

Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1997) note that since Thailand is a community-based culture, change is fundamentally a group, not an individual, phenomenon. *Innovators* are neither accorded significant attention nor social status in

Thai culture. Indeed, for reasons suggested above with respect to both power distance and collectivism, people work hard to avoid standing out from their group. Therefore, a strategy of "sowing seeds of innovation" or fostering diversity of practice is a truly foreign notion within Thai culture.

Several scholars have made the case that the process of change is essentially one in which people make meaning of their work and life (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 1990). Thai's "make meaning" primarily by reference to their predominant groups – family, peers, colleagues. Therefore, change strategies must target the group as the primary point of leverage.

While the peer group is an important consideration in fostering change in Western cultures, the magnitude of difference in Asian cultures is large enough to require a qualitatively different approach. Again the strategy must start with how leaders make the case for change. In Thailand, they must create opportunities by which staff can come to a common understanding of the change proposal for their own setting.

This is reflected in a particularly common change tactic used by Thai principals. This is to send a group staff representatives to visit schools that are already implementing the innovation. Notably the underlying function of the school visitation is equal parts technical and social. The visit will often turn into an overnight expedition that allows staff to grow closer together even as they consider the technical features of implementation (see discussion of feminine culture below). This allows them to make sense of the new practices outside the "pressure" of a formal meeting. While this general practice is by means unique to Thailand, we assert that the role of the visitation and the manner in which it occurs are different and reflect the collectivist nature of the culture.

Unfortunately, as Sykes and colleagues (1998) observed above, this type of group focus on implementation too seldom extends farther into the change process. Similar group-based support mechanisms must be created as staff proceed towards training and classroom implementation. In their absence, the resources of the group are wasted and the efforts of individual teachers will slowly wither as they lose *sia gumlung jai* (lose their spirit).

High uncertainty avoidance. *Uncertainty avoidance* indicates the "extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and tries to avoid these situations by providing greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviors, and believing in absolute truths and the attainment of expertise" (Hofstede, 1980, 45). Thailand ranks high on uncertainty avoidance.

Thai people would rather maintain things the way they are than to take initiative, be different, or shake the ground. For Thai's, like the Japanese, "order depends on people's knowing and accepting their proper place or rank and on not disturbing 'the proper order' of things" (Hall & Hall, 1987, p. 45). As suggested earlier, innovation is neither encouraged, nor highly valued, and may even be regarded as undesirably disruptive. Even if a new practice holds potential for the organization, individuals will feel uncomfortable departing from accepted practice.

Thai's seek stability and routines and look for written rules and regulations as guidance for their actions. These provide them with solid ground and justification for their decisions. When confronted with an unfamiliar decision in the absence of an established norm, a written policy or access to a superordinate, Thai's often find themselves subject to "decision paralysis."

A corollary principle that for fostering change that Thai's themselves recommend is to apply constant pressure. As one principal put it, "Staff need to know that it's the supreme law of the land and then you have to apply constant pressure to them to comply."

At the same time, some Thai leaders also recognize the futility of this approach. Recently a reporter asked a senior administrator in one of the Ministries if he was being forced out by his political overseer. He replied: "Let anybody go on with the pressure as they like. But let him be reminded of the Buddhist principle of the impermanence of things. The person who uses pressure cannot be here forever" (The Nation, 1999). This highlights two potentially conflicting normative tendencies.

Although expertise is secondary to rank, Thai's also give great credence to experts and expert knowledge. Ordinary citizens are viewed – and view themselves – as incompetent compared with formal authorities. Again, this shapes the relatively low level of importance leaders place on providing information and building interest among staff as a foundation for change. It further reinforces a tendency to wait for orders and direction rather than striking out on one's own or trying a new approach.

Not surprisingly, Thai's also evince a tendency to look for and follow heroic leaders, those who display a quality referred to as *baramee. Baramee* is "personal power and strength derived from respect and loyalty" (Hallinger et al., in press; Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995). One earns *baramee* over time through experience, not from position. They have the moral authority to lead the group (Hallinger et al., in press). As Hall and Hall (1987) have observed with respect to leadership in Japanese culture:

> In the United States, a leader is usually someone with a strong ego, often with personal charisma, selected for his ability to make

> decisions, and to take responsibility with or without consulting his associates. This kind of 'take charge' leader who wants to put his stamp on the organization can be devastating to the Japanese because he destroys the sense of harmony and consensus that is vital to their performance. (p. 79)

The same holds true in Thailand. The heroic leader in Thai culture is intimately bound to the group, modest, sincere, and trustworthy. He/she reflects the essence of the group rather than a new direction in which the group wishes to go. Not surprisingly, entrepreneurial leadership is a scarce commodity within the culture.

Ambiguity and complexity are necessary adjuncts to change, thereby making high uncertainty avoidance a potentially challenging obstacle for Thai leaders (Evans, 1996). Thai change agents must find ways of reducing the complexity of change. Otherwise the anxiety experienced by the targets of change is likely to cause an overload of confusion and resistance.

Western prescriptions to "think big but start small" seem especially salient here (Fullan, 1990). Change leaders must proceed in small steps, trying to support the development of both confidence and competence. Building support among administrators and informal leaders who possess *baramee* is useful as it will create a foundation for acceptance among other staff. Clarifying the connection of new practices to tradition and specific reference to government policies may enable leaders to leverage cultural tendencies towards respect for authority and rules. Again, however, leaders must beware of the danger that culturally acceptable, compliance-oriented tactics will work too well and smother the true reactions of staff.

Low masculinity. Masculinity pertains to "societies in which social gender roles are clearly distinct, whereas femininity pertains to societies in which social gender roles

overlap" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 82-83). This dimension highlights the value people place on social relations versus productivity. Within a highly masculine culture, performance outcomes and productivity represent the top priorities. As a more feminine culture, Thai's place great value on maintaining harmonious social relations, even at the expense of accountability and productivity in the workplace. As Redmond has observed, in Thailand:

> Responsibility is a proud and cold word, capable of causing abysmal rents in the social fabric and frayed edges of tender feelings. An ethic of compassion, the inculcation of deference to superiors (kreng jai) and an ingrained desire for harmony and familiarity have created a communal security blanket. (1994, b2).

In terms of normative practices, Asian cultures have traditionally been willing to accept trade-offs in the attainment of cognitive and skill performance against goals of spirit and community. The result of these culturally-based variations is a fundamentally different approach to human relationships in Eastern societies. The quite different importance attached to reason and logic has manifest implications for how leaders relate to followers.

Current educational reforms in Thailand imported from abroad have begun to emphasize accountability. Yet, in Thai culture, the very notion of taking responsibility or being accountable is quite different from how it is conceived in the West.

> [Responsibility] signifies 'being the source or cause of something.' It means that one is 'capable of making moral or rational decisions on one's own. . ." These, in fact, are what it means to be a person in Western terms.
>
> Westerners are more committed to taking responsibility because it automatically brings with it the recognition and respect, regardless of consequent profit or loss, accorded to 'real persons'. . . But in Thailand, it is rank and its rewards that give a faint reading of responsibility into the bargain. The honour is not in the responsibility itself (let alone its fulfillment) but in the position that allows it to be borne. (Redmond, 1994, b2)

This tendency is readily apparent in the work roles of Thai principals. Compared with counterparts in Western nations, they spend a significant portion of the day outside the school building in community-building activities. Principals often find themselves drawn into a wide variety of external social rituals and functions simply as a function of their position (e.g., attending the weddings and funerals of family of staff members). Thai administrators report that such symbolic activities are critical to maintaining both vertical and lateral relationships within the institutional system and the community at-large.

The emphasis on social harmony over productivity is linked to another important social norm, *sanook. Sanook* is "the feeling of enjoyment, excitement or pleasure that one has taking part in work, play or any other activities" (Dakins, 1988, p. 51). Swierczek (1988) suggests, "Social aspects of work are important in Thailand because of the cultural value of working together in making the work fun" (p. 77). In the absence of a feeling of *sanook*, it will be difficult to engage the ongoing interest of staff. Indeed, this organizational stress will likely create resistance. Thus, increasing opportunities for staff to have fun -- *sanook* – is essential to obtaining the commitment of the group. Of course, danger lies in the tendency for staff to become complacent.

This dimension poses interesting problems and opportunities for the Thai change leader. The sacrifice of results in order to maintain a harmonious process is unacceptable in a globally competitive environment. Yet, to date concepts such as accountability have existed primarily at the level of rhetoric. Indeed as Redmond has observed, such terms are quite incompatible with this dimension of Thai culture.

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Implications for Leading Change in Thai Schools

In this article we have explored change as a cultural process. We focused on the educational change in Thailand because of the scarcity of scholarship on this topic in Thailand as well as in other Asian cultures. This analysis, though limited in scope has nonetheless yielded insights into the complexity of leading educational change in Thailand as it enters the global era. We believe that, to varying degrees, similarly complex interactions between traditional cultural norms and global educational practices are also evident in other East Asian countries (e.g., Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Philippines).

Notably this analysis highlight the extent to which the cultural norms of a nation represent both strengths and weaknesses when applied to the process of change. High power distance, for example, is both a strength and weakness. It provides a potential advantage through which Thai principals can gain staff attention and even initial compliance with orders. Moreover, the greater deference accorded to administrators in Thailand (and other Asian nations).

Yet, as we have sought to demonstrate, this apparent strength rapidly turns into a limitation *if the leader fails to take the necessary time to "make the case" for change.* The staff's cultural-determined tendency to politely comply with an administrative decree

simultaneously drives overt resistance to change underground. Leaders may proceed without realizing the extent of non-compliance or the nature of the real implementation problems. As Evans (1996) has eloquently noted, leaders must understand the causes of resistance to change if they are to have any chance at changing the classroom behaviors of teachers. Thus, this analysis suggests paradoxically that Asian school leaders should create ways of surfacing resistance, especially early in the change process.

Space limits us from extending the analysis into other interesting and practical aspects of change in Asian schools. However, the other cultural lend themselves to similar application. Here we would conclude with several change propositions that we believe worthy of empirical verification in Thailand and other Asian societies.

1. Target formal leaders and obtain their support early in the change process.
2. Formal leaders should counter traditional norms of deference (e.g., greng jai) by bringing staff resistance to the surface so they may address real concerns.
3. Obtain and cultivate the support of informal leaders -- those possessing *baramee* – as a means of accessing and leveraging the powerful social network of the group.
4. Use peer pressure and peer support, targeting staff groups, more so than individuals, as the primary focus for change.
5. Use formal authority selectively to reinforce expectations and standards consistent with implementation of the innovation.
6. Use cultural and organizational traditions and rituals to foster the group's spirit or *gumlung jai* even as staff are engaged in developing their technical competence.

7. Find ways to inject *sanook* – fun and celebration -- into the workplace while maintaining a focus on accountability targets.

This list is neither exhaustive nor entirely new to students of organizational change. Rather it reflects differences in nuance that derive from cultural interpretations of life in Thai organizations. It is the actual tactics that a leader would use to foster change that distinguish what we might call the "culturally appropriate" approach.

Moreover, we have barely touched perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this topic: the interaction between these traditional cultural norms and global change forces. The article has focused primarily on exploring how traditional norms influence the process of change. However, the effective change leader in Asian schools must be skilled both in negotiating the traditional culture *and* adept in the practices of the global educational culture (e.g., school-based decision-making, IT).

Experience suggests that the scarcity of this dual set of skills among Asian school leaders is exceeded only by the scarcity of knowledge in supply by academics. This compounds the already difficult tasks of educational reform. Yet, we believe that the prospects of developing this knowledge base holds fascinating challenges for those practitioners and scholars who are willing to accept the charge.

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