



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Rationale

Traditional education has been based on producing knowledgeable persons and providing individuals with concepts, values and skills required to function reasonably well in the world. Accordingly, educational systems consist of primary schools, secondary schools, technical institutes and colleges and universities. Individuals who meet the standard of each level are permitted to graduate to the next one. In other words, learning is perceived as being terminal.

This perception is appropriate, as viewed by Boud (1981) however, only in a world of relative stability in which people can function reasonably well for the rest of their lives on the basis of what they have learned.

The new assumption about the purpose of education, on the other hand, is to produce autonomous lifelong learners. If lifelong learning is to be an organizing principle for all education, the primary mission must be the development of the skills of self-directed inquiry rather than the inculcation of subject matter content.

The field of Higher Education is not limited only to the physical boundaries and traditional missions and functions of a so-called “campus”. It has been wellknown for some decades that a branch of Higher Education has also extended into organizations such as industry and business under the department of Human Resource Development (HRD), which in practice is carrying out the functions of Higher Education. These functions include curriculum development, teaching and learning, research and evaluation and academic services. In other words, organizations in industry and business can become learning organizations through the functions of HRD.

Marquardt and Engel (1993) shared their view that the ability of organizations to compete globally will depend significantly on the quality and level of HRD in the organization. HRD is the ultimate key to executing the bold visions and strategies needed for global success. Organizations that compete globally must now compete for the most important resource -- talent. The difference between failure and success will depend on how well organizations select, train and manage their employees. Training must be the focus through which the nutrients enter into the organizational system. Training can provide translocation for the whole system.

Twenty years ago, educational theorists distinguished between two types of adult learning -- university education and skill-based training:

- University education is defined in terms of the goals the individual sets; training is defined by objectives set by the institution.
- University education can be judged only in the long-term; training has short-term, measurable results.
- University education is for use in multiple, open systems; training is for use in a single, confined system.

According to Aubrey and Cohen (1995), however, in today's organizations, learning is starting to resemble the university model more than the training model. Large organizations today are retooling their training systems in terms of learning. Learning at work is no longer focused only on short-term skills or limited in context. With rapid knowledge turnover and fast-changing careers, individuals have become the center of the learning system.

Marquardt and Reynolds (1994) emphasized that a growing number of organizations are aware that individual learning and traditional training programs and procedures are not an adequate response to their learning needs. Organizations have to increase their capacity to learn if they are to function successfully in an environment that includes continual mergers, rapid technological changes, massive social change, and increasing competition. To compete and survive, organizations now have to demonstrably increase their capacity to do the following:

- Accelerate the development of product and process innovation.
- Anticipate and adapt more readily to changing environmental factors.
- Become more proficient at learning from competitors and collaborators.
- Expedite the transfer of knowledge from one part of the organization to another.
- Learn more effectively from their mistakes.
- Make greater organizational use of employees at all levels.
- Shorten the time required to implement strategic changes.
- Stimulate continuous improvement in all areas.

Marquardt and Reynolds (1994) also pointed out that organizations achieving these accomplishments would gain a significant competitive advantage. Many workers recognize that they cannot learn all that they need for their jobs because the knowledge demands are growing exponentially. An organizational learning culture helps ease those feelings. In addition, if the organization supports continuous growth and learning, the possibility of becoming more self-actualized and fulfilled in one's work increases.

Even though the concept of the learning organization is quite new in Thailand, it is feasible for Thai organizations to become learning organizations. Such a possibility mainly depends on the vision of the organization's top leaders and how successfully the new system changes the behavior of constituencies.

Many organizations in both private and public sectors in Thailand have taken great interest in promoting a learning culture. One such organization is the Siam Commercial Bank, where the former president, Dr. Olarn Chaipravat, has introduced the learning organization concept. The bank has reorganized and implemented strategies that support the behavioral change towards becoming a learning organization.

From a study conducted by Sangjan (1997) of the employees of the Siam Commercial Bank, it can be concluded that creating a learning organization in

Thailand is possible, especially in the private sector whose top leaders totally support the concept.

Various strategies were used at the bank to initiate changes. The organization was flattened to meet customer needs. Although the system supported the structural changes, however, behavioral changes may take time due to the traditional educational system of rote memory learning rather than on capabilities of acquiring knowledge, creativity, and problem solving skills, which impacts the Thai personality for strengthening their self-learning.

An extensive review of definitions, principles, and theories as well as research findings from Thailand and abroad reveals few studies on learning organizations in Thailand. However, it is critical for Thai organizations to be aware of learning organization principles in order to survive in the knowledge society we have recently entered. Therefore, the following implications can be stressed:

1. To survive and prosper in the 21st century, Thai organizations must adopt a new way of managing, especially in their capacity to learn and change consciously and quickly. Developing a learning organization culture will help them remain competitive and learn faster. The transformation cannot be accomplished, however, without the change agent or a catalyst, which of course is the HRD function. In the learning organization, the role of HRD professionals is to encourage and facilitate widespread, spontaneous learning throughout the organization -- top down, bottom up, crisscross, or side by side.

2. HRD professionals must direct their efforts away from specific, task-oriented instruction and concentrate on promoting self-development and critical thinking skills.

3. From the definition of a learning organization, HRD professionals must provide learning opportunities at different levels, from rudimentary front-line training to middle management education to senior-leadership seminars.

4. To develop a learning organization, there must be commitment and leadership from top management. According to Kramlinger (1992), HRD professionals must work with the executives to encourage a learning organization by:

- Introducing the learning organization concept in the executive development courses
- Volunteering to serve as learning consultants for every business problem that requires people to change what they do
- Introducing the idea into the management development curriculum that will help them encourage learning at lower levels
- Teaching them more listening and negotiating skills so that every interaction with other departments becomes an act of learning
- Volunteering to facilitate sessions with managers and their subordinates to draw out good ideas from everyone
- Sponsoring cross-functional workshops on current business issues
- Rewriting all training materials to focus on outcomes involving quality and customer satisfaction
- Teaching courses that emphasize versatility, listening, problem solving and risk taking to build up the skill base necessary for independent learning
- Adding application modules to existing courses so that learners get experience in immediate application and a chance to share what they have learned
- Creating forums for employee ideas

5. There are many more strategies which HRD professionals can use depending on the organizations where they work. A review of the literature regarding learning organizations in Thailand suggests that it will be challenging for Thai researchers. Culture, which consists of values and the socialization process, does affect people's learning styles. To be an effective learning organization in the Thai culture, Thai values and the socialization processes have to be considered. Learning emphasizes team process and open communication. Systems thinking is also essential.

6. The five disciplines of Senge (1990) should be considered in developing a learning organization. These are systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision and team learning. The model for implementing strategies to build a learning organization in Thailand must be applicable for the Thai culture.

7. The learning organization is an exciting concept for HRD professionals. This is a chance to expand their role to include not only changing the threshold of skills in the organization, but also to become partners in the transformation of the entire organization.

Having reviewed the literature of concepts and theories of a learning organization, the researcher wishes to further study how much the concept of a learning organization is applicable to Thai organizations, especially in the public sector.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To study and analyze theories, principles and practices regarding a learning organization.
2. To develop an appropriate learning organization model via Human Resource Development (**HRD**) Unit for Thai organizations.
3. To test the validity of the model by a case study in Thai Airways International Public Company Limited via the Human Resource Development Department.

### **Scope of the Study**

The research is focused on the HRD Department as a higher educational unit to survey two types of organizations - service enterprises and higher education institutions.

1. Service enterprises, further categorized into 2 subsets:
  - 1.1 Thai public and private enterprises
  - 1.2 Multinational private enterprises

2. Thai higher education institutions as service organizations, further categorized into 2 subsets:

2.1 Public institutions

2.2 Private institutions

3. Selection of Thai

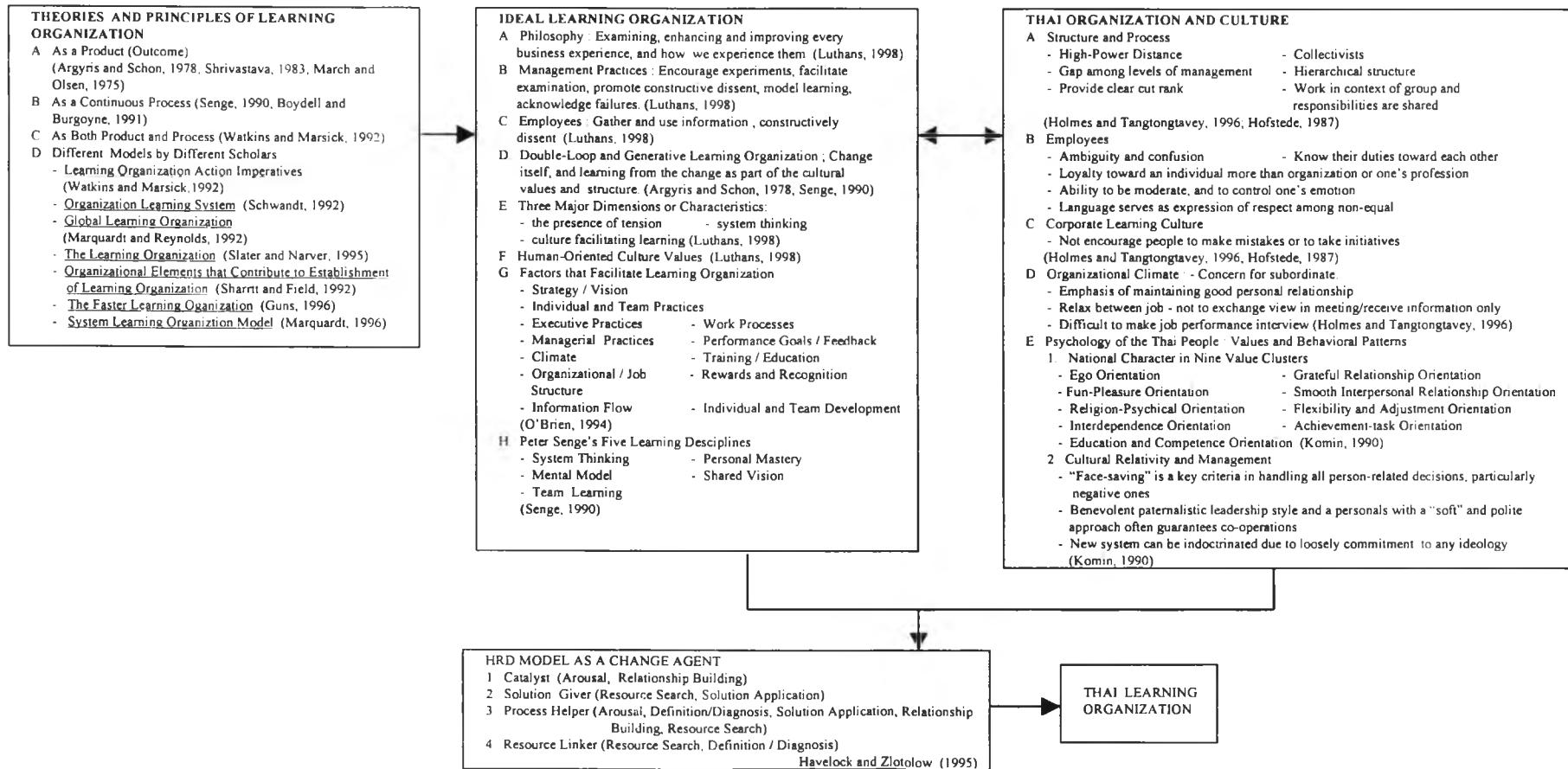
### **A Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Figure 1 shows a conceptual framework in developing a learning organization model via the HRD department. HRD acts as a change agent or as a catalyst to initiate changes. Theories and concepts of learning organizations, Thai culture and organizations, and the role of human resource functions must be clearly understood and integrated in order to develop a learning organization model.

To Goleman (1998), HRD functioning as a change agent is necessary for developing a learning organization model. The role of HRD is to encourage and facilitate learning in every direction of the organization -- top down, bottom up, crisscross, side by side and as partners. As a catalyst, HRD professionals must initiate or be able to manage change competently. They must recognize the need for change and remove barriers. They must challenge the status quo and enlist others in the pursuit of change. Finally, they must model the change expected of others.

Marquardt and Engel (1993) described HRD departments as education units or as extensions of higher education. HRD functions or departments can include anything from a single training activity to the entire system for achieving strategic goals within an organization. It is a very dynamic, multi-disciplined, and evolving field that draws upon education, management science, psychology, communication, economics, organizational behavior, philosophy, and sociology.

**Figure 1** A Conceptual Framework in Developing a Learning Organization Model Via Human Resource Development Unit





## **Definitions of Terms Used**

**Learning organization** is defined as a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together, as defined by Senge (1990).

**Human Resource Development (HRD)** as defined by Madden and Dean (1993) is planned, continuous efforts by management to improve employee competency levels and organizational performance through training, education, and development programs. The broad scope of the HRD function is reflected in its three components: training, education, and development.

**Training** includes those activities that serve to improve an individual's performance on a currently held job or one related to it. Showing a worker how to operate and a supervisor how to schedule daily production are examples of training.

**Education** consists of activities that are conducted to improve the overall competence of an individual in a specific direction and beyond the current job. Seminars designed to develop communication or leadership skills fall into this category. Training and education both focus on either currently held jobs or predetermined different jobs within the organization.

**Development** involves learning opportunities aimed at the individual's growth but not restricted to a specific present or future job. It prepares employees to keep pace with the organization as it changes and grows.

**Public enterprise or Public corporation** is created by and for a government agency to assist in the discharge of a public service (e.g. Airport Authority of Thailand), as defined in Dictionary of Business and Management (1993).

**Private enterprise** as defined in Dictionary of Business and Management (1993) is an organization of production in which the business is owned and operated by people who take risks and are motivated by the wish to make profit.

**Multinational enterprise (MNE) or Multinational business** as defined by Fleet and Peterson (1994), is a company primarily based in a single country but acquires some meaningful share of its resources or revenues from other countries.

**THAI or Thai Airways** is short for Thai Airways International Public Company Limited

**First-Line Manager** as defined by Bartol and Martin (1994) are managers at the lowest level of the hierarchy who are directly responsible for the work of operating (non-managerial) employees.

**Middle Manager** as defined by Bartol and Martin (1994) are managers located beneath the top levels of the hierarchy who are directly responsible for the work of managers at lower levels.

**Top Manager** as defined by Bartol and Martin (1994) are managers at the very top levels of the hierarchy who are ultimately responsible for the entire organization.

**Psychology of the Thai People** as defined by Komin (1990) is the Thai national character that has 9 value clusters according to their relative significant positions in the Thai cognitive system. They are:

1. Ego Orientation
2. Grateful Relationship Orientation
3. Smooth Interpersonal Relationship Orientation
4. Flexibility and Adjustment Orientation

5. Religio-Physical Orientation
6. Education and Competence Orientation
7. Interdependence Orientation
8. Fun - Pleasure Orientation
9. Achievement - Task Orientation

**Learning culture** is defined by McGill and Slocum Jr. (1993) as (1) openness to experience; (2) encouragement of responsible risk taking; and (3) willingness to acknowledge failures and learn from them. In a company with a learning culture, everyone -- management, employees, customers, and suppliers -- see opportunities to learn and grow.

### **Significance of the Study**

Globalization and the information society era have unavoidably affected Thai society. For Thai organizations or institutions to survive, they too must learn faster and adapt to the rapid changes in the environment. A learning organization is imperative at the present time. For an organization to survive, it must become knowledgeable and adaptive, which entails a process of change.

Learning organization models that have been developed for Western societies may not be effective for Thai organizations or institutions. Thus, although the concepts of a learning organization have been introduced in Thai organizations and institutions, a learning organization model that fits Thai culture could be more appropriate.

It is the intention of the researcher to develop an HRD model that will create a learning culture for Thai organizations and institutions.