

East-West Training Center for Excellence: The Quest for Revitalization

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Abstract

Mr. Chanchai Issara, Director of East-West Training Center for Excellent concerned about the rising of many problems that the Center faced. They were growing other establishments for training service for both public and private sectors, Thai workforce was changing including three generations who have values and behavior different. Furthermore, there was the worrisome perception that the government sector from which the Center had drawn the majority of its course participants seemed to be according to the Center less recognition credence as a training venue of choice for public-sector staff members. With these challenges, Mr. Issara and his team had since 2007 taken a number of steps to position themselves for a competitive environment that was far less accommodating than the environment of years past when the Center had dominated the Thai market for training and development service. Now with the Board's renewed push to further improve the Center, Mr. Issara felt that this was an opportunity to review what had been done. Would the steps that he had already been

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suffice to restore the Center's competitive vitality and long-term survival? Or had he and his team merely scratch the surface of what would be required to arrest the Center's descent from the lofty heights that had long been its almost exclusive preserve?

Keywords: Training, Human Resource, Knowledge Management

ศูนย์ฝึกอบรมอีส-เวสต์ เพื่อความเป็นเลิศ

บุญอนันต์ ทินัยทรัพย์

บทคัดย่อ

ชาญชัย อิศระ ผู้อำนวยการศูนย์ฝึกอบรมอีส-เวสต์ เพื่อความเป็นเลิศ พบว่า ศูนย์ฝึกอบรมดังกล่าวเจอปัญหาหลายอย่างที่มีผลกระทบในการบริหารจัดการศูนย์ โดยประเด็นที่เกิดขึ้นตั้งแต่การมีศูนย์ฝึกอบรมอื่น ๆ เกิดขึ้นมากมาย ซึ่งทำหน้าที่ในการอบรมเพิ่มพูนความรู้ ทักษะความสามารถให้กับหน่วยงานที่เป็นทั้งรัฐและเอกชน ประเด็นพนักงานที่ทำงานในองค์การมีหลายเจเนอเรชันซึ่งคนแต่ละกลุ่มจะมีแนวคิดค่านิยม ทัศนคติ และพฤติกรรมการทำงานที่แตกต่างกัน ซึ่งมีผลต่อการฝึกอบรมที่ต้องมีความหลากหลาย เมื่อการฝึกอบรมมีหน่วยงานให้บริการมากขึ้น ประกอบกับความต้องการของผู้ต้องการอบรมมีหลากหลายมากขึ้น จึงถือเป็นความท้าทายของศูนย์ฝึกอบรมอีส-เวสต์ ที่จะต้องพยายามตอบสนองความต้องการของผู้เรียน ซึ่งทำให้ผู้อำนวยการศูนย์มีความกังวลใจว่า จะหาวิธีการหรือแนวทางอย่างไรที่จะทำให้ศูนย์ฝึกอบรมแห่งนี้ สามารถแข่งขันในระยะยาวได้ และบุคลากรของศูนย์ดังกล่าว ควรจะมีบทบาทเพิ่มเติมหรือเปลี่ยนแปลงไปอย่างไรเพื่อจะได้แข่งขันและพัฒนาตนเองเพื่อความอยู่รอดได้

คำสำคัญ: ฝึกอบรม ทรัพยากรมนุษย์ การจัดการความรู้

In March 2011, Mr. Chanchai Issara, Director of East-West Training Center for Excellence was mentally reviewing the actions that he and his staff had taken over the past several years to revitalize the organization and restore its competitive vitality, profitability, and reputation – all of which had been under assault in consequence of an increasingly difficult task environment. In recent years, the impacts of increased globalization of the Thai economy, as well as heightened competition from training institutions with *perceived* superior quality course offerings, had resulted in the siphoning off of part of the Center's customer base. This has been occurring at the same time that challenging economic conditions in Thailand and more limited public-sector training budgets were converging to precipitate negative impacts on enrollments in the Center's courses and programs. Further, there was the worrisome perception that the government sector from which the Center had historically drawn the majority of its course participants seemed to be according the Center less recognition and credence as a the "training venue of choice" for public-sector staff members.

In the face of these challenges, Mr. Issara and his staff had since 2007 taken a number of steps to position themselves for a competitive environment that was far less accommodating than the environment of years past when the Center had dominated the Thai market for training and development services. Now with the Board's renewed push to further improve the Center, Mr. Issara felt that this was an opportune time to review what had been done thus far, with the aim of determining whether the Center was on the right track, and what else might need to be done. Would the steps that he had already taken suffice to restore the Center's competitive vitality and long-term survival? Or, had he and his staff merely scratched the surface of what would be required to arrest the Center's descent from the lofty heights that had long been its almost exclusive preserve? Much depended on the ultimate effectiveness of his actions -- including quite possibly his continued tenure as head of the institution.

Brief Overview of the East-West Training Center for Excellence

The East-West Training Center for Excellence had been established in 1966, with the purpose of providing training to the public, private, and

state enterprise sectors, transferring new knowledge to upper-level administrators, and providing consulting services to organizations who needed assistance. Over the years, the Center had played an important role in developing professional management administrators in the public sector. Indeed, throughout most of its 45 years of existence, professional administrators in the public and other sectors had regarded the Center as the national leader in training and development, the foremost institution of its kind in the nation. This was reflected in the fact that, at one point or another (and sometimes at *multiple* points), the overwhelming majority of all high-level officers in the country had pursued advanced training in various types of courses or programs at the Center. Not only had the institution provided participants with high-quality training over the years, but also virtually unparalleled opportunities for professional networking and cooperation for their mutual benefit.

Operational Profile and Competitive Challenges

Traditionally, the most popular courses offerings had been project planning and management, 21st century negotiation, sufficiency economy, effective conflict management for relationship excellence in the workplace. As shown in Table 1 below, in-house training had yielded the largest portion of revenue during the 2009-2010 time period, followed by training programs for the general public. Further, while private sector organizations constituted the largest segment of organizations utilizing the Center in 2009-2010 (51.5%), public sector organizations were close behind at 42.6% (see Table 2). However, as also shown in Table 2, state enterprises sent the Center the largest number of participants, on average, and also had the largest overall budgets for training. State enterprises tended to subscribe to a larger percentage of courses for higher- and middle-level managers than either public- or private- sector organizations, while the proportion of courses aimed at the operational level was highest for public-sector organizations (See Table 3).

Table 1: Tuition revenues for Training Courses in 2009-2010

Type of Training	Number of Training Courses	Value of Training Courses US (Dollars)
In-house training	63	\$2,360,000
Customized training	12	\$315,600
Public training	40	\$470,520

Table 2: Characteristics of Users of Training Service 2009-2010

	Type of Organizations			Totals
	Public Sector	State Enterprise	Private Sector	
Number of organizations	72 (42.6%)	10 (5.9%)	87(51.5%)	169 (100%)
Average number of participants in the training courses	4,218	4,876	1,441	10,535
Average budget for training	\$340,946	\$1,334,945	\$369,235	\$2,045,126

Table 3: Levels of Training by Type of Organization 2009-2010

Level of Training Courses	Type of Organization		
	Public Sector (%)	State Enterprise (%)	Private Sector (%)
Training courses for higher level managers	26.8%	34.8%	28.3%
Training courses for middle managers	35.7%	39.1%	36.7%
Training courses for operational employees	37.5%	26.1%	35.4%

It was thus a matter of some concern to both the Board and the Center Director that beginning around 2006-07, the Center had seemed to be losing its competitive edge. While still highly regarded, its erstwhile stature as the automatic training venue of choice for public sector organizations began to come under serious competitive pressure -- a fact that had begun to be reflected in the number of courses offered, the average number of participants per course, and the income generated from its training services. For example, the Personnel Management Association of Thailand (PMAT) was one of many training services that had become a serious threat to the East-West Center. Moreover, among the other establishments that had grown to become formidable competitors for training services for both the public and private sectors were the well-regard training centers at Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, and Kasetsart universities. In the private sector, the Hay Group and the Boston Consulting Group posed a strong and growing threat. It was these changed competitive circumstances -- i.e., from being the "training venue of choice" to being just one of many equally good training establishments -- that had prompted Mr. Issara's initial endeavors, at the Board's behest, to identify the root cause(s) of the problem and fix it/them

Historically, the training that had been provided to public-sector organizations had focused on upper-level government officers, although in recent years training course subscriptions for middle- and operational-level employees had surpassed those of the upper level. The training was aimed at elevating their overall competence, advancing their skill sets in areas pertinent to the job responsibilities, and equipping them to manage in a thoroughly professional manner. However, limited budgets in the public sector in recent years, along with the effects of the so-called "Hamburger Crisis" that had originated in the West, had precipitated a dramatic decline in financial support for such training. Concurrently with the public-sector budget "crunch" were the enrollment-depressing impacts of both globalization and the higher-than-normal unemployment rate in the Thai economy.

The net effect of all these environmental developments had been a gradual decline in the number of persons enrolling to attend various courses at the Center. Governmental agencies and organizations, for example, had been in recent years sending, on average, 10-15% fewer participants for training courses, a development that was particularly

worrisome, given the erstwhile importance of public sector training business to the Center's overall enrollment and profitability. What public-sector clients lacked in terms of the size of their training budgets, they more than made up for with their sheer numbers – e.g., 72 clients organizations from the public sector *versus* just 10 clients from the larger-budget state enterprise organizations.

Public Policy and Demographic Challenges and Opportunities

There had also been an awareness that the Thai workforce was changing. For example, there were three generations in the typical organization's workforce – “baby boomers,” “generation X'ers,” and “generation Y'ers.” In concert with trends in societies around the globe, the ways in these demographic groups worked, as well as the values and mores underlying their workplace behavior, were very different – often fueling intergenerational friction in the workplace. The entire employment environment was on the verge of a dramatic upheaval – an upheaval that many observers believed would go deeper than past changes because the desire for change was not limited to just young people, but was widespread across generations. Practically the entire society was in transition, even though the nature and direction of the transition were not always apparent. These developments had suggested the continuing need to think in terms of beginning to do things differently.

In addition, the new Prime Minister, Ms. Yingluck Shinawatra, had come into office with a bevy of new policy plans aimed at stimulating the country's economy. These ranged from increasing the labor minimum wage to 300 baht a day, to increasing the salary of a bachelor's degree holders to 15,000 baht per month, to extending tax credits to make it easier for people to buy the first car and first house, to providing a free tablet to every primary- and secondary-school student, to providing consumption stimulants to increase product demand, to decreasing bank interest rates to facilitate increased economic activity across the economy, to extending tax credits to companies that invested in the staff development. The new government's intention to upgrade workforce skills in preparation for the heightened competitive environment that the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) would engender, had the potential to augur especially well for training establishments such as the East-West Center for Training Excellence. More specifically, the deepening of cooperation between the

private sector and educational institutions could potentially portend a dramatic increase in organizational interest in and commitment to staff training in order to produce people with high-quality labor market skills.

For reasons of both needing to address any deficiencies and being positioned to take advantage of increased demand for staff training that might be coming, there had been the recognition that improvements were needed in the Center's internal operations. For example, among the approximately 18 staff members, there was an overlapping of duties and responsibilities in many jobs, in part because of unclear or imprecise job descriptions. This had prompted the initiative a couple of years earlier to review the organizational structure, with a view to determining whether structural adjustments were indicated to enhance the Center's ability to compete with better organized and more efficient competitors.

The Initiation of the Quest to Revitalize the Center

In response to these challenges, in mid-2007, Mr. Issara had held a series of meetings with his Unit heads to obtain their input and suggestions concerning what steps the Center needed to take to begin to effect a turnaround in its fortunes. More specifically, he sought to surface ideas about how the Center could begin generating greater profits through both retaining its current clientele base and tapping new markets. The result was a discussion that were both provocative and wide-ranging -- embracing observations and suggestions concerning the Center's current functioning and operations, to the changes in training customers' needs and expectations, to changing characteristics of the workforce, to the need for the Center to take a more aggressive approach *via* improved marketing and public relations, to the suggestion that the Center do a systematic assessment of its strengths and the areas in which it needed to improve, and so on.

One of the concrete outcomes of this series of staff meetings was a fairly comprehensive review of the Center's operations and policies. This was undertaken in order to obtain a kind of "baseline" measure of where the Center stood on some essential operational parameters of great importance to its ability to attract and serve its customer base with the level of excellence that they had come to expect, and demand, of the Center and its competitors.

The Review of Current Operations and Policies

In the administration and conduct of all their training programs, whether public training (e.g., organizational strategy, leadership development, training the trainer, and team building) or customized training (i.e., course that were specially designed to meet the needs of particular clients), the Center had continually strived for high standards of quality and service. In this connection, the Center had long ago promulgated a series of administrative and operational policies and practices aimed at sustaining its reputation as a first-class training institution that was second to none. Among these policies and practices were the following:

- *Class Readiness Checks Prior to the Launch of Each Course.* Instructors undertake both a review of class materials and a check of classroom equipment no later than 24 hours before classes began to ensure that nothing was missing, inoperable or out of date. If any piece of equipment needed to be replaced or repaired, the instructor would notify the Center to ensure its readiness for class.
- *Participant Readiness Checks Prior to the Launch of Each Course.* The staff would confirm class particulars (class location, start time, maximum size, etc.) with course participants no later than 5 days prior to the beginning of a course. Any discovered discrepancies or issues between the Center's plans for the course and the participant's understanding would be either communicated directly to the Center by the participants or brought to the attention of the appropriate Center personnel by the instructor. The Center would then strive to ensure that the matter was resolved before the course began.
- *Participant Feedback on Courses and Corrective Action, When Needed.* Course evaluation forms were distributed by staff to all participants at the end of the class, with appropriate steps taken to ensure the integrity of the completed forms once course participants submitted them – for example, the envelop was sealed, with the staff member's signed across the seal, and given it to the representative of the Evaluation Unit. The Director would review all evaluations and results of the follow-up calls

to participants, and subsequently would make the information available to the instructor. If these documents indicated that the instructor was in need of remediation or disciplinary action, the Center would first give the instructor an opportunity to make the appropriate corrections or modifications -- failing which the matter was escalated, potentially all the way to terminating the instructor-center relationship when necessary.

- *Codes Governing Staff Conduct and Appearance.* As representatives of the Center, all staff members were expected to maintain the highest levels of professionalism in their interaction with each other, with customers and with the public. Standards of conduct, dress, and hygiene were promulgated and enforced. For example, behavior indicative of personal bias, prejudice, or other manifestations of inappropriate conduct in the workplace were not to be tolerated.
- *Means and Procedures for Effective Communication.* The Center's customers could contact the Center whenever they wished to schedule a class, ask a question, or provide feedback about an experience with the Center or its staff. All customers receiving courses were given contact information.

In the course of this review of the Center's operations and policies, the Unit heads had articulated a number of concerns and ideas that soon led to a decision to undertake a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the Center in order to make further progress on the challenge of revitalization. For example, Mr. Manom Pornsawan, head of the Finance and Procurement Unit, opined that, first, there were inaccurate statements in some of the above-mentioned Center policies and that, second, restructuring of the Center should take place in order to answer questions from the Board. Mr. Suriya Muangmai, head of the Evaluation Unit pointed out that an increasing number of competitor organizations presented training customers with a wider variety of training centers from which they could obtain the training services they desired. Additionally, he continued, it was thought that many customers increasingly wanted to try something new, to experience other organizations' approaches to designing and delivering the courses of interest. The characteristics of the workforce were changing and, therefore, the Center

needed to adjust its roles, functions, and service in order to survive. Ms. Orawan Chansuk, Unit Head of Management of Administration Unit, made the case for a more aggressive Center with vigorous public relations to undergird and facilitate the Center's competitive presence in the marketplace. But, she maintained, the first order of business should be systematic research to identify the Center's strengths, as well as the areas in need of improvement.

Findings of the Research Study on the Center

Toward the end of this series of meetings with Unit heads, the Director had decided to pursue the suggestion for a more in-depth study by hiring a consulting firm to conduct research on the Center. One focus of the research -- which occurred during the period, October 1, 2007 through March 31, 2008 -- was the systematic examination of the Center's operations and structure in order to determine ways that the Center could work more efficiently. A second focus was the determination of customers' training needs and the factors that influenced their selection of the Center as the provider of those training needs, with a view to devising a service strategy that would enable the Center to better compete.¹

Factors That Influenced Past Customers' Choice of the Center. Among the core findings from the survey component of the research had been the following: (a) most former customers of the Center (about 77%) had made a conscious decision to seek the required services from outside their home organizations, as opposed to having the training conducted by staff members in their Human Resources Unit; (b) the overwhelming majority of those who had desired externally delivered training courses (77.6%) did not conduct an comprehensive search for candidate training organizations, but rather made contact with training services of which they already had knowledge; (c) some organizations (61.4%) had solicited proposals from the Center's competitors to conduct the training for them before selecting the East-West Center, and d) approximately 50% of the respondents had attended training courses at East-West Training Center.

With respect to the question of how prospective customers ended up contacting the Center to inquire about training courses and programs, it was found that some organizations arrived at the decision to utilize training services provided by outsider organizations through a search on the Internet. Others were made aware of candidate training firms,

including the Center, through the receipt of brochures describing courses and programs of interest.

The research revealed that past customers of the Center's training courses and program had selected the East-West Center for several reasons. These ranged from the Center's visibility in the business to the perceived quality of both its course offerings and its faculty,² to its flexibility in designing and adjusting the curricula to address customers' needs, to the attractive, colorful, and concise brochures describing and depicting the Center and its offerings. Particularly influential in their selection of the Center for their training requirements, according to many respondents, were the facts that the Center was well-known, offered superior customer-centric service, and engaged an impressive roster of professional instructors, many of whom were famous in their respective fields of endeavor and expertise. On this latter factor, professional caliber of the faculty, respondents rated Center faculty as "highly academic," "well-known," and "expert," describing them as excellent lecturers, discussion leaders, and motivators who encouraged the participants to learn and continuously better themselves. They were further lauded as having the ability to transfer knowledge to the participants, using a variety of instructional methods.

The consultants had produced a series of recommendations for the consideration of Mr. Issara and his staff. Among these were stepped-up public relations efforts (to make more prospective customers aware of the Center's many years in servicing the training needs of various types of organizations, especially those in the public sector); an increased marketing effort (to attract more business from the Center's traditional customer base and to bring in new ones); a rebranding exercise (so that the Center's expertise in its core area truly differentiated it from others in the marketplace); and, a concerted effort to build more networks (in order to have many areas of contact that could help the Center *proactively* identify new training opportunities). The basic thrust of all the recommendations was toward encouraging more customers to send their people to the Center to brush up on existing skills and knowledge and master new ones.

Reactions to the Consulting Team's Report

With the consulting team's report in hand, Mr. Issara had called another meeting of his Unit heads to gather their reactions to the report

and to map out a plan of action in response to the recommendations. What to do next, how to improve the Center in order to be more competitive with others, what to change, how to prepare the Center for the challenges of the next decade – these were the topical issues that he placed before his direct reports to obtain their ideas and suggestions. The Unit heads responded with a number of insightful observations and proposals.

Ms. Chansuk, head of the Management and Administration Unit had begun by stating that the consultants had been right on track in pointing to the Center's lack of adequate public relations and the need for rebranding. In her view, these two areas should be the first priority as they had the potential to enable the Center to attract more customers by reaching the target market *en masse*, stimulating awareness of the Center's services, and burnishing the Center's image in the market. A strong public relations initiative that conveyed a more professional image could have a huge impact on how prospective customers viewed the Center and engender an enhanced level of credibility. Similarly rebranding could yield a more polished, professional look and help sharpen understanding of the Center's business and operating philosophy and principles.

Continuing, she had asserted that the Center needed a easy-to-remember, simple slogan – and perhaps a new name – that would compel lingly convey in a few words the distinctive competences of which the Center wanted widespread awareness. If the Center were to focus on building a brand that had a stellar reputation and that was grounded in producing excellent quality services, prospective customers would have complete confidence in bringing their training requirements to the Center. Finally, she concluded, the consultants' recommendation concerning more aggressive and widespread networking activities could raise the Center's business profile, thereby potentially boosting the Center's reputation and generating new leads.

Mrs. Siriporn, head of the Training Service Unit, had picked up on another area that the consultants had covered in their report – i.e., training methods. Most training programs in the Center made use of a limited number of techniques for knowledge and building skills. These were mostly lecturers, discussion, and case study discussion. Table 4 below contains the mean number of each instructional technique used in Center

courses, along with the standard deviation for instructional modality. These statistics are based on respondents' answer to a question concerning how many of each instructional technique they each customarily used in their individual courses. The consultants had pointed out in their report that one of the findings from their survey was that former customers of the Center's programs and courses felt that learning could be enhanced – and customers increased -- through use of a wider array of teaching techniques. The ones that were mentioned by survey respondents were actual-work while training, games and simulations, study tours, role-playing exercises, audiovisuals, and e-training.³

Table 4 Instructional Techniques in Use at the Training Center

Instructional Techniques		
	Mean (x)	Standard Deviation
1. Case study	4.01	0.81
2. Discussion	4.07	0.82
3. Lecture	3.69	0.90
4. Games	3.45	0.77
5. Visiting organizations in Thailand	3.57	0.85
6. Role-play	3.12	1.20
7. VDO	3.14	0.86
8. e-training	3.20	0.99
9. Visiting organizations Abroad	3.40	1.07

These techniques, Mrs. Siriporn had argued, helped to train the participants to meet the expectations of the real world, to develop better problem-solving skills, and to actively learn, and to share their experiences with others. In her opinion, the Center very much needed to place more emphasize on these less frequently utilized methods of training in order to convey the message that the Center was up to date on all the various ways of imparting knowledge and building skills. This, in turn, would make the Center more attractive and enable it to attract more participants.

Subsequent New Initiatives and Organizational Restructuring

Structural Changes. Soon after the consultants' initial research on the Center's service strategy, the consultants had been asked by Center director, Mr. Issara, to evaluate the appropriateness and functioning of

the Center's organizational structure. This research was conducted during the period, April 2008 through January 2009, and was grounded in the consultants' understanding of the Center's vision and mission. The Center's vision at the time was to be excellent in training services in order to develop talented employees with the administrative skill needed to further advance the continued development and growth of the Thai nation and society. With a mission of providing high-quality executive training for the public and private sectors while maintaining the highest standards, the Center sought continuous modernization and improvement in its curricula, as well as ongoing collaboration with other training centers abroad.

However, the *functional* structure in place at the outset of the consultants' research (see Figure 1 below) was suffering from a host of problems including --

- an all-time low level of employee morale, manifested by the facts most of the staff were actively seeking alternative employment and sickness records were extremely high
- supervisory frustration about the one-way flow of information (i.e., top-down), resulting in the feeling by Unit heads that their advice and suggestions were not welcome, as well as poor communication and coordination among the Center's Units
- a lack of sufficient administrative "infrastructure" (i.e., rules, procedures, policies, systems) to facilitate coordinated team effort among the Units and prevent every Unit "flying off in their own direction."⁴ As one staff person described it, "The right hand did not know what the left hand was doing. . . . There was not enough 'glue' and no focus on working effectively using joint team effort."

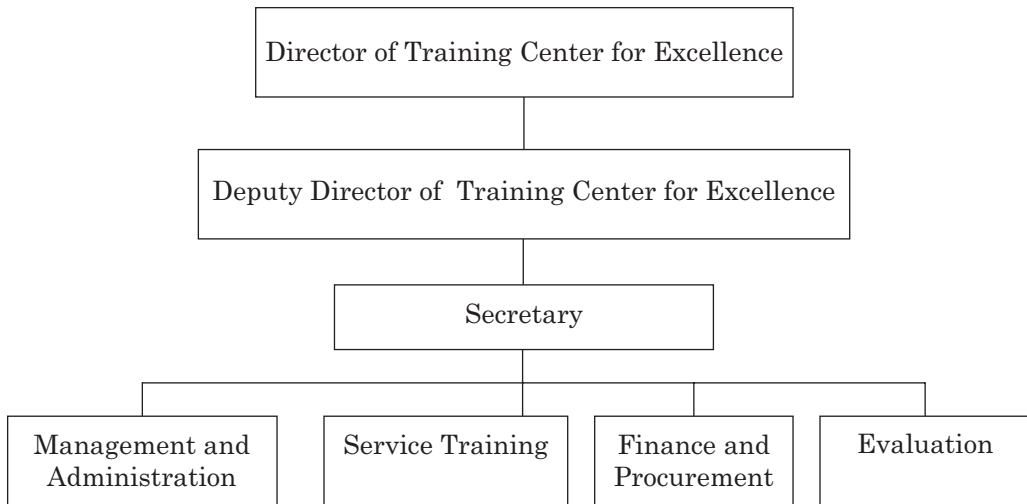


Figure 1: The Pre-2009 Organizational Structure of the Training Center for Excellence

To get a better understanding of the Center's internal functioning and structural issues, the research team had held interviews with the four Unit Heads and conducted a focus group with the employees in each Unit. They sought to learn how the staff worked, the nature of any adjustment problems that individuals may have had and to identify any personal issues, attitudes, or motivations. The focus group was also employed because the consulting team had been made aware that the Center staff liked to give their opinions about various topics (e.g., how to improve the Center) and propose solutions to the problems that they faced. Indeed, over the course of the focus group sessions, the consulting team learned that the staff found the methodology very helpful in giving them access to information such as the direction of the Center (e.g., possible new services that were under consideration for a future offering), as well as in keeping them abreast of new developments in their particular Units.

Following the completion of the interviews and focus groups, the consultants had come forward with a revamped organizational structure. As can be seen in Figure 2 below, the new structure involved the creation of several new positions and specialized Units. The new positions added were a Learning Development Manager and three new Project Managers specialized by training market segments. The new specialized units added

were the Marketing/Public Relations Unit and the MIS Unit. Notably, the responsibility for all the functions concerned with participant recruitment, participant tracking, and actual delivery of training courses – i.e., Marketing/Public Relations, MIS, Training Service Unit, and Project Management -- were placed under the coordinative supervision of the Learning Development Manager. The Secretary of the Center retained oversight responsibility for the support staff functions administration, planning, finance, and program and course evaluation.⁵

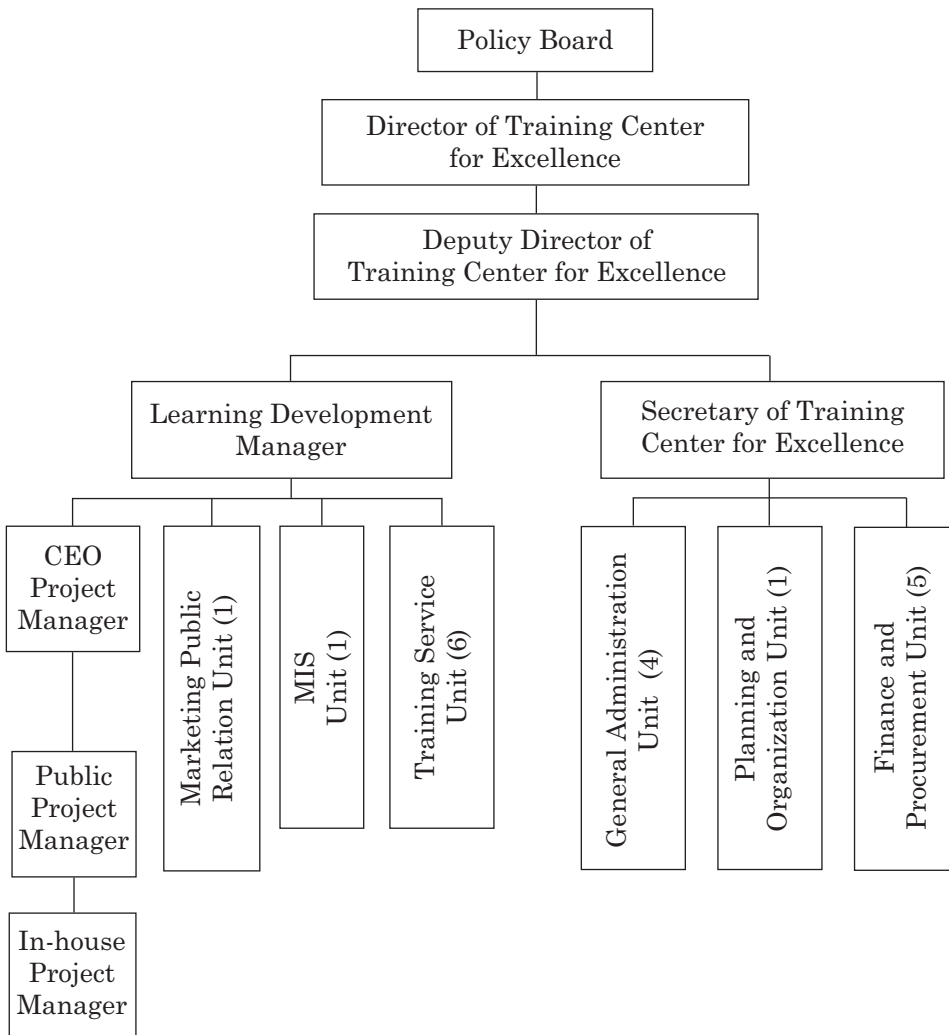


Figure 2: The Post-2009 Organizational Structure of the East-West Training Center for Excellence

The consulting team had touted the strengths and advantages of the new structure in several areas. First, they averred, the structure offered greater flexibility of management because the work in each unit had clearer job descriptions than before. Second, the incorporation of a combined Marketing and Public Relations Unit was aimed at filling the void in these areas that had been surfaced during the first round of research several months earlier. These two additions were to be the mechanism for the Center's increase in its customer base and its cultivation of completely new markets.

Mission and Strategy Changes. Accompanying the new structure had been several adjustments in the Center's *raison d'être*. That is, while the vision of being a center of excellence in training service remained in force, the mission underwent subtle, but important refinement. To wit, in lieu of promoting itself as merely a venue for high-quality training of mostly public-sector employees, the Center under the new mission was to be a *center of excellence for development administration training*. In specifying a particular training niche, the Center aimed to differentiate itself from other competitors who postured themselves as basically high-quality, but nonetheless "generalist" – organizations prepared to deliver training to any and every body with a training need. The accompanying new strategy was multi-faceted – i.e., providing excellent service, engaging in continuous development of training programs, and managing the organizational system efficiently.

The operating philosophy that was to undergird these new strategic directions and structural changes were also several. First, the Center was to work more aggressively in pursuit of its performance targets in order to survive and further develop. Among other imperatives, this meant:

- 1) cooperating with industry's demand for more training skills so that employees could develop themselves for higher positions;
- 2) using professional staff to handle all kinds of professional training;
- 3) transacting with special groups (e.g., senior employees) for the design and delivery of training geared toward their special needs, including the need to remain current with new technology in their organizations;
- 4) collecting information regarding manpower demand in industry and commerce, so that the Center could offer modern training

- programs to fit their needs; and,
- 5) setting up a resource network to aid the Center in maximizing training service opportunities in its traditional markets and in tapping new training market segments.

The recommendations of the consulting team had been, for the most part, well received by the Director and staff of the Center. However, a few staff members were heard to criticize the consultant's failure to push for the addition of a *Strategic Planning Unit* and a *Customer Service Unit*. These staff felt that having a truly Strategic Planning Unit and placing it on par with the other several units under the supervision of the Learning Development Manager would provide the kind of in-depth planning expertise and specific guidance that the Marketing/Public Relations Unit would need to go "head to head" with the increasing number of equally aggressive competitors. Likewise, these commentators held that the inclusion of a Customer Service Unit would provide a one-stop focal point of assistance to customers with issues that would best be handled by persons outside the functions that marketed, delivered, and supervised training courses and services.

Other Changes. In March 2010, approximately a year after the structural change, Mr. Issara announced at a call meeting of his Unit heads that the Board had requested that the Center implement a *knowledge management* program in yet another effort to effect improvements at the Center. It was the Board's view that in the context of increasingly difficult economic times, knowledge management might be another way to help to sustain the Center. A systematic tool to gather, organize, share, and analyze knowledge in terms of resources, documents, and people skills, knowledge management had been found to yield many advantages by organizations that had implemented the concept. Among the cited ones were higher levels of innovation, improved customer service, reduced knowledge loss (as, for example, when employees left the organization), and increased productivity and better performance. These benefits were touted as having an impact on the way an organization "thought" and operated to achieve its objectives – e.g., in providing quality services.

The Board had further requested that the Director set up a knowledge management committee to organize the Center's work and to ensure that it made the most effective use of the time, skills and knowledge of

management staff. In this way, the Board had averred, the committee members were more likely to be able to secure and retain the commitment and enthusiasm of all their members.⁶

In reaction, the staff had made several observations and raised a number of questions. For instance, Ms. Orawan, head of the Management and Administration Unit, thought that the knowledge management concept to be a good one that many organizations had implemented with good effect. However, she voiced the thoughts of the majority of the staff when she pointed out that Director needed to more fully explain what knowledge management was and exactly why the Center was being encouraged to implement it, lest the staff become unwilling and uncooperative. Further, she had pointed out, the knowledge management concept was part and parcel of the *learning organization* and therefore the Center should address whether the concepts and practices facilitating the emergence of the Center as a *learning organization* should be an integral part of the implementation of the knowledge management concept.

Both concepts -- knowledge management and the related concept of learning organization that had emerged during the discussion -- had caught everyone's imagination. These were acknowledged as exciting and potentially valuable enablers of the Center's future vitality. However, the one issue that gave the staff much pause to reflect further was that of *cultural compatibility*. Indeed, some staff members predicted that these two concepts would never work in Thai culture. They offered two reasons for this prediction. First, knowledge management or learning organization referred to building people their learning through reading, which enabled them to be more adaptive and work more productively. For this to happen, people would have to make commitments to pursue learning at all times. However, a core attribute of Thai people was their preference for the spoken word, as opposed to the written word -- which placed them at a disadvantage with respect to mastering the art of *thinking critically* and *solving problems with unadulterated logic*.

Second, Thai people tended to chafe under a lot of rules and regulations. They preferred to do things in their own individual way, not rigidly follow some prescribed system. Successful implementation of either concept would hinge on the Center's ability to overcome these cultural impediments. For these reasons, it was decided that everyone should ponder the matter further and pursue the discussion at the next meeting.

Continuation of the Quest to Revitalize the Center

In November 2010, with the Center's long-term prospects for continued vitality still largely an open question, despite all the aforementioned initiatives that Mr. Issara and his staff had undertaken, the Board had asked Mr. Issara to perform an *organizational audit* on the Center, with a view to developing an improved understanding of the Center's pluses and minuses. Such a self-assessment on the entire organization had never been undertaken in the 44 years of the organization's existence. Hence, in the Board's view, such an effort was well past due. In compliance, an evaluation committee comprised of five Center staff members was set up by the Director and charged with identifying the Center's strengths and weaknesses, preparatory to developing a self-assessment report containing a comprehensive evaluation of the Center.

As shown in Table 5 below, the Center's nation-wide reputation as a top-quality training institution, along with the professionalism and team working disposition of the staff, were noted as two of the Center's strongest points. On the other hand, improvements in technology (so that adequate customer databases could be developed), a performance management system that included individual development plans, and more frequent customer need assessments – these were among the main areas where the need for improvement was indicated.

Table 5 Evaluation of East-West Training Center for Excellence

Evaluation	Evaluation
<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Center had successfully worked in concert with the philosophy and vision of the Center, including completing all the activity plans and creating a team to work toward their mission. 2. Training programs were conducted by the Center which was well recognized in Thailand. All instructors were well-known and expert in their area. All staff in the Center were professional, willing to work, responsible worked as a team and had a service mind. 3. The budget allocations for employee professional development were sufficient. All employees were encouraged to develop themselves continuously by attending seminars, and site visiting. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Improvements</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Center needs to add programs such as corporate social responsibility training programs to serve the needs of society in general. 2. To meet customers' needs, the Center needs to survey and analyze those needs yearly. Also needed is a faculty database to keep track who was specialized in what area. 3. To help improve staff member performance, the Center needs to have an individual development plan for each staff member. 4. To have all staff learn something new, the Center should provide the knowledge to all staff about knowledge management, as well as utilize webboards, newsletter, and e-mail to promote the concept. 5. The Center needed to invest more in the technology in order to have a database and work more efficiently. 6. To improve the training programs, the committee suggested that the Center survey customers on an annual basis, with the aim of keeping the Center's course and program offerings current and able to meet the customers' needs.

Once completed, the self-assessment had enabled Center staff to see more clearly where improvements were needed. It was felt that the exercise could serve as a focal point for further deliberations on additional steps and initiatives that the Director and the staff might contemplate taking to maximize the Center's long-term competitive prospects.

Where to From Here?

Despite all the steps that Mr. Issara and his staff had taken over the course of the past four years, the Center could not be said to have reversed its decline and turned things around. Among other evidence of continuing problems, the competition was still siphoning off customers who for years had been patrons of the Center's training courses and programs, even as the Center was still finding it difficult to identify and make inroads into new segments in the training market. Indeed, as he concluded his mental review of all that had been done in the attempt to restore the Center's competitive vitality and ensure its survival, the Director was forced to acknowledge to himself that, at best, the initiatives to date may have merely slowed the pace of deterioration in the Center's competitive posture. Had they overlooked something in their quest to find the right levers to effect a turnaround, he wondered. Failure was not an option, he knew. But, he was at wit's end as to what else he and his staff could do. He had to come up with something concrete and feasible soon, as the Board's patience seemed to be growing thin.

Endnotes

- ¹ The consulting firm's research spanned the period, October 1, 2007 through March 31, 2008, and consisted, first, of questionnaires distributed to former customers to identify customers' need and the factors that led to their choice of the East-West Training Center for Excellence to fill those needs. In the second phase of the research, interviews were held with 10 executive directors who had previously attended training programs at the Center.
- ² According to the survey, the respondents particularly recommended the Center for training in two areas: Behavioral curriculum and technical curriculum. The behavioral curriculum consisted of courses in self-development, management development for leaders, leadership, psychology, organizational behavior adaptation, creative thinking, and mind mapping. The technical curriculum consisted of courses in the philosophy of "*Sufficiency Economy*" as applied to industry, effective presentation skills, project management, strategic organization projects, key performance indicators, change management, and data analysis.
- ³ The specific *additional* training techniques mentioned by survey respondents were actual-work-while-training, games and simulations, study tours, role-playing exercises, audiovisuals, and e-training. Actual-work-while-training allowed trainees to go at their own pace and practice what they learned as their course of study progressed. It also facilitated mastery of course material at a specified level, encouraged active trainer involvement, and provided immediate feedback to the trainees. Games and simulations presented participants realistic challenges and entailed developing analytical, strategic, interpersonal, and decision-making skills. The employment of e-training to train employees was becoming increasingly common among organizations. Multi media training programs often featured text, graphics, sound, pictures, videos, simulations, and hypertext links that enabled trainees to structure their own learning experience. Collectively, these techniques helped to train participants to meet the expectations and demands of "real world" organizations and work,

encouraged active learning, improved their problem-solving abilities, and facilitated the sharing of experiences with others.

- ⁴ As shown in Figure 1 in the case, the pre-2009 organizational structure was a purely functional one, with the Center divided into four specialist Units that were responsible for their own designated tasks relative to the overall Center task of providing training services. Each Unit devised its own plans and established work processes for the Center. The job responsibilities of each unit were as presented below.
- Secretary: Prepare and manage correspondence, reports and documents; organize and coordinate meetings and conferences; distribute minutes of meetings; implement and maintain office systems; set up work procedures; communicate verbally and in writing to answer inquires and provide information; liaise with other departments; and, manage office work.
 - Management and Administrative Unit: Provide support for the Center's operation, daily paper work, and payroll matters (the information had to be checked for accuracy and compiled into a complete report).
 - Service Training Unit: Provide support and training; review and approve purchase orders of purchasing assistants and buyers (e.g., check for accuracy and optimum pricing and delivery); develop and implement purchasing and contract management instructions, policies and procedures; negotiate with vendors concerning improved pricing, product quality and delivery; participate in the development of specification for services equipment, products, supplies; and, conduct meetings, prepare and present reports, and provide information to identify purchasing requirement.
 - Evaluation Unit: Study Center jobs to gain a thorough understanding of the requirements of each. Evaluate each job based on an agreed-upon job evaluation scheme.
- ⁵ The Center employed a total of 18 people, including the director and deputy director. Their job descriptions entailed the following duties and responsibilities:
- Secretary: Perform administrative work as needed; determine; perform human resource planning and establish Unit budgets; coordinate internally and externally; evaluate job performance; and, advise and coach staff and foster improvements in staff performance and in their knowledge of administrative and business principles.
 - General Administration: Perform the typical administrative duties – e.g., take care of the paper work and various kinds of documents; undertake public relations activities (e.g., attend meetings with important stakeholders); devise appropriate rules and regulations; maintain the accounting and finance systems and control the budget; prepare the annual report on the Center's operating performance; and, in general, maintain a smooth and efficient business operation.
 - Planning and Organizational Development: Develop new curricula; take care of the training team, evaluate the training programs; and, implement and oversee programs that would increase efficiency, strengthen employees' knowledge and abilities, improve leadership and maintain the overall health of the center. Additionally, they were to work with top management in diagnosing problems and setting company goals, then create training programs to meet those goals (often incorporating behavioral science to enhance employee satisfaction and productivity). They also would help personnel to adjust to new procedures during times of change.
 - MIS: Set up and maintain VDO projectors, overhead projectors, and slide projectors; take pictures; design websites; and, plan, organize, direct, control, and evaluate the operation of the information system.
 - Accounting and Finance: Draft the Center's budget; maintain the accounting and finance systems; apply accounting and finance principles to track, report and control the Center's financial condition; and, prepare accurate and timely financial information, reports, and statements.
 - Training Services: Coordinate training-related activities; write invitation letters; take care of training rooms; develop the training curriculum; prepare training materials; identify training and development needs using a variety of methods; and, oversee recruitment and induction processes, delivery of training courses and workshops, and delivery of in-house and public training. The Unit was to keep up to date with developments in training programs, monitor,

manage, and maintain the training budget.

- Marketing and Public Relations: Plan, develop and implement public relation strategies, liaising with and answering enquiries from media, individuals and other organization; and, prepare and supervise the production of publicity brochures. The Marketing office of the Unit was to provide analysis of all sales activities and marketing campaigns, design research projects, analyze marketing metrics for identifying cause-effect relationship, develop surveys to determine customer perceptions and needs.
- ⁶ Well-organised committees were considered to need four features in order to be a mechanism for the betterment of the Center: strong leadership, effective meetings, delegation, and broad involvement. In such committees, the chairperson had clear responsibilities concerning the committee's work and carefully planned how and when their responsibilities would be carried out. Meetings were well-planned with a clear agenda and agreed-upon guidelines for how time, contributions and decisions were managed. Minutes were taken with notes of agreed-upon actions taken forward. The committee delegated responsibilities to honorary officers, sub-committees and working groups, as appropriate, to make efficient use of time and skills. All committee members were encouraged to make active contributions to meetings and were willing and able to take on responsibility for actions, as appropriate to their skills and experience.