

Abstract

In 1997 Thailand faced an economic crisis, primarily due to a foreign exchange induced recession. At this time of economic crisis, Thailand approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial assistance. Assistance would be provided only if the Thai Government agreed to reduce public spending, downsize the civil service, change the regulations designed to restrict foreign investment and ownership, and privatise some public enterprises. These requirements had a great impact upon all aspects of Thai society. This study investigates the impact of the imposed changes upon one part of the higher education sector, that of the Rajabhat Institutes.

The National Education Act introduced in 1999 was aimed at transforming all sectors of Thai education, provide all Thai people with increased opportunities for access to higher education, and transform Thailand into a learning society. In 2004 the Rajabhat University Act changed the former Rajabhat Institutes into Rajabhat Universities, providing them with greater autonomy, but with greater responsibility for their own futures.

This study investigates how these Acts changed policies, processes and practices in the six Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok. The six case studies investigate how these universities have coped with and managed change to meet the challenges of the present and the future. The focus is on policies and practices which have occurred since 2004 and how the Rajabhat Universities planned to meet the challenges of higher educational reform in Thailand, from the viewpoint of the President and Vice-Presidents of each university.

Analyses reveal that the six Rajabhat Universities were influenced by globalisation, economic, political-legal and technologies, which impacted upon their organisational culture and management style. Each of the universities can be considered as a Complex Adaptive System (CAS) in which change occurred in complex and unpredictable ways. The use of dissimilar leadership dimensions and the desire to differentiate their university from the others was found to be a recurring theme.