

Leadership and Organizational Change: A Case on Strategic Communication Workshop on Problem-based Learning for the Tourism Authority of Thailand

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Abstract

The case depicted Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) as an entity facing with changes in Organizational Management. The 17 managers from 13 work units, were selected to attend the 3-day Strategic Communication workshop. These participants were liased with the researcher in the analysis and synthesis of the organizational policies and performances based on several tools of thinking: Problem-based Learning, Critical Creativity, and the Feedback Model.

Keywords: Strategic Communication, Problem-based Learning, Critical Creativity, and Organizational Audit with Feedback Communication Model

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ภาวะผู้นำและการเปลี่ยนแปลงขององค์กร: เวิร์คช็อป การปฏิบัติการทางการสื่อสารเชิงกลยุทธ์ด้วยการเรียนรู้ จากปัญหา: กรณีการท่องเที่ยวแห่งประเทศไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนำเสนอกรณีศึกษาขององค์กรของการท่องเที่ยวแห่งประเทศไทยในฐานะองค์กรที่ต้องเผชิญหน้ากับการเปลี่ยนแปลงของภูมิทัศน์องค์กร ดังนั้น นักวิจัยและผู้บริหาร 17 คนจาก 13 แผนกขององค์กรได้เข้าร่วมเวิร์คช็อปการปฏิบัติการทางการสื่อสารกลยุทธ์เพื่อระดมสมองในการวิเคราะห์สังเคราะห์ปัญหาขององค์กรภายใต้การเปลี่ยนแปลงบนฐานของเครื่องมือทางความคิดว่าด้วยการเรียนรู้จากปัญหา การตรวจสอบวินิจฉัยองค์กรด้วยตัวแบบการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับทางการสื่อสาร และแนวคิดความคิดสร้างสรรค์เชิงวิพากษ์ตลอดเวลาสามวัน

คำสำคัญ: การสื่อสารเชิงกลยุทธ์ การเรียนรู้จากปัญหา ความคิดสร้างเชิงวิพากษ์ การตรวจสอบองค์กรด้วยตัวแบบการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับทางการสื่อสาร

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A few minutes before 9 o'clock on July 26th, 2014, in front of the room 803, Siam Building, at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), a group of 17 nominated senior managers from¹ 13 key Departments and Sections of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) gathered on special purpose. After signing her name on the registration form with the following title on top, "Lists of Participants of Strategic Communication Workshop on Facing Organizational Change with Problem-based Learning (PBL)", Montira Prakongpan, Chief of the Policy Planning Section, paused to wonder silently, "What will this three-day offsite workshop bring about, and how could it be beneficial for the organization, especially during all these turbulent years at TAT?"

Genesis of the Strategic Communication Workshop

In 2011, in compliance with the requirements of the State Enterprise Performance Appraisal (SEPA) promulgated by the Thai government, TAT had conducted research studies for an Organizational Diagnosis and System Audit pursuant to drafting and developing its *Organizational Blueprint for Change: The 2012-2016 TAT's State Enterprise Planning Scheme*. From the research findings, two major alarming factors were identified as critical threats to organizational success and resilience. The first factor concerned the overall system of organizational management and its symptomatic lack of work system integration. The second was about the hurdles confronted by human resources management as they strove to standardize the mechanism for assessing functional competency and career development plans -- objectives that had been attempted but not yet accomplished. As a result, TAT had decided that it was time to pursue with renewed seriousness its goal of transforming the organization into an effective Learning Organization.²

It had been felt that one strategic way to achieve such a super-ordinate goal was to invest more in resource management, and that empowerment of employees through education was a must. TAT had already been working collaboratively with their university partners, including Higher Education Institutes like NIDA, in the co-creation of training programs. With the recent working landscape of TAT continuously changing due to the volatility of economic, social, and political conditions of the global economy in general, and of Thailand in particular, several training programs were periodically launched to enhance each individual TAT employee's learning, and especially

to capture the learning of managers at all levels in the facade of change overtime.

Particularly noteworthy was the fact that this about-to-be-launched Strategic Communication (*Stratcom*) workshop was not identical to the other training programs previously held by TAT. As noted by Prasatporn Yuwattana, the TAT-NIDA Coordinator for Specialized Training Workshops, earlier training programs had been mostly lecture-based, descriptive, reflecting mostly one-way communication. By contrast, this new Stratcom workshop was something more akin to coaching, rather than training. The workshop was specially designed by the case writer, performing as workshop facilitator with full advocacy from the Human Resources Department of TAT and the NIDA Training Center.

Workshop Design: Objectives and Structure

Designed as a 3-day learning odyssey with 3-hour morning and afternoon sessions, the workshop embraced a two-fold key objective. First, it intended not merely to identify and grasp knowledge of how each participant perceived his or her problems and working situation, but rather to arm them to become the change agents and management teams of the future with communication capabilities of the highest order. Second, in view of the first objective, the primary goal was to imbue participants with a genuine understanding of the roles of Stratcom as a key tool in organizational operation and an integral part of the organizational problem-solving process. *Integration problems were indeed, from the eyes of the workshop facilitator, communication problems.* Hence, the workshop was designed with special focus put on using a strategic organizational communication approach in parallel with the PBL method (*see Exhibit One*).

The strategic communication approach defined: Organizational communication was deemed strategic in two senses. Organizations were the outcome of strategic choices about design and operational issues. These choices created situations that employees encountered at work. Employees then had to make their own strategic choices about how to manage those situations. This workshop was about the choices and choice-making behaviors of members in the *formal* TAT organization. As such, it concentrated on communication because it was through communication that employees obtained information, made sense of the situations they encountered, and decided how to act. *And, from the perspective of the workshop facilitator, it*

was by communicating that employees translated their choices into action. The PBL frame was used to enhance the quality of participants' learning and thinking with respect to exploring paths to the analysis of their organization terrains and communication-related problems.

Workshop Kickoff

The workshop started with facilitator and her team of three workshop assistants, distributing the 24-page Stratcom worksheet to all participants. This worksheet contained instructions, guidelines, concept definitions, and the questions designed to promote critical thinking in participants through the analysis of their information environments. The facilitator then conducted the worksheet briefing by providing an explanation and description of the workshop rationale, intended results, guidelines, definitions of strategic communication and PBL, and workshop constraints.

The participants were then sorted into three workgroups by the facilitator, using their main lines of expertise and functionality as criteria. Each group was then instructed to get started by conceptualizing a work atmosphere facilitative of task accomplishment, including "*putting the right man on the right job*". Each participant had to self-analyze his or her own qualities, strengths, and constraints and report back shortly to the group. This exercise led to the subsequent appointment or assignment of discrete roles for each group member: Leader, Secretary, Devil's Advocate, Observer, and Spokesperson.

Ongoing Activities during the Workshop

Following these initial activities, as workgroups would work on each task in the Stratcom worksheet, the facilitator, visited with each group, rendering advice and mentoring. The brainstorming communication technique, *Piggybacking*,³ was extensively used to draw out and build upon individual participant viewpoints, ideas, opinions, and thoughts. From the outset, and throughout the discussions, the facilitator strove to help build an environment conducive to ongoing dialogues with and among all participants by using and promoting the principle of *Sensitive Communication*. At its core, the principle embraced the notion that all disagreements were welcome insofar as they manifested mutual respect and avoided destructive abrasiveness. The abbreviated formula for Sensitive Communication – *observe, connect, and request* – was emphasized. At the end of each 3-hour session, consensus

outcomes reached during the discussions would be summarized by the facilitator.

Denouement of the Workshop

On the last day of the workshop, participants were charged with presenting their crystallized thoughts to the class, and helping each other memorialize and wrap up the totality of lessons learnt and insights developed during the workshop. Lastly, the facilitator would debrief the group on the perceived overall efficiency, effectiveness, and outcomes of the workshop. In this connection, data that had been gathered on all problems of the firm and the Stratcom approach to addressing those problems proposed by the participants, under the guidance of the facilitator, were fed back to the workshop participants and TAT as an organization.

Building Capabilities in Strategic Communication and Problem-Based Learning

As scholars and practitioners alike had long observed, the challenges of change, at both the individual and organizational levels, were often difficult and stressful. Indeed, even merely *talking* about the imperatives, processes, and individually impactful outcomes of change was rarely easy. This was the terrain on which workshop participants and facilitator alike found themselves at the outset of the first day of the workshop. The following chronicle of that session and subsequent ones through the finale sheds light on the processes by which strategic communication and problem-based learning were brought to bear to help this group of TAT employees equip themselves for the magnitude of organizational change that their organization expected them to understand, support, and lead.

Day One / Morning Session: Ice-breaking and Initial Problem Perceptions

At the outset of the first day of the workshop, after the group activities of role assignments had been conducted, efforts were then made by the facilitator and all three group leaders to encourage participants to be open and ready to talk about their roles and responsibilities, their perceptions on organizational situations, and their day-to-day performance audits. In this undertaking, the Stratcom principles -- "*free flow of open information climate, learn to agree to disagree through the Sensitive Communication*" mindset -- and codes of conduct were emphasized by the facilitator.

After being voted into the position of leader for Group One, Essara Sarttra, Assistant Director for Policy and Planning Group, softly yet firmly, explained to the facilitator that:

Please know that we, even senior in terms of service years as we are, middle-management. And we the tactical-level have finite resources that limit what role we can have here.

Some participants nodded in agreement with Essara's statement. "Does he want to say he is aware of problems or a solution to the problem but has too little power to make necessary changes?" the facilitator thought to herself. But, she nevertheless moved on without probing further into the statement here at the outset of the workshop. Instead, the facilitator asked all participants to take a brief retrospective approach to survey the organization's historical context.

According to Rangsan Suwannarak, Chief of the Exhibitions and Special Media Section, with 26 years of service, TAT was founded in 1960 as the "Tourism Promotion Organization," or TPO. As such, the TPO performed the prestigious role of the sole "National Tourism Organization" (NTO) of the Kingdom of Thailand, with the exclusive responsibilities to manage the whole tourism sector of the country. From Rangsan's perspective, the organizational culture of TAT used to be informal and less bureaucratic. He stated that:

We used to be "small and beautiful." We [have] moved three times in our history. From the old building situated in the old zone of Bangkok to the Grand building where we are working now. Things have changed so much and also the ways[sic] we have undergone changes overtime. In the old days, if I needed a signature from the big boss, it could be easy. No sweat. When the boss [was] passing by, I once could get his signature signed with paper placed on my back, I mean it literally, on my back. We just addressed each other as "Bro" or "Sis". No entitlement was needed.

Anchalee Vatjanarat, Chief of the Central Region Offices Coordination Section, and Group Two Leader, joined in recounting tales from TAT's history to the present day. From the slogan and promotional campaigns, *Exotic Thailand*, to *Amazing Thailand*, they had lured millions of tourists from all over the world to come to visit and experience Thailand. From its

modest beginnings in the early 20th Century, with approximately 90,000 visitors in 1950s, the Thai travel and tourism industry had grown to become a major social and economic force in the Thai economy. By the year 2013, some 26.7 international tourist arrivals (up nearly 19.54 per cent over 2012) were contributing an estimated 1.67 thousand billion baht (about 1,670 billion Thai Baht or about \$US 56 billion) to the Thai national economy⁴.

With approximately two million Thais employed directly or indirectly in travel and tourism-related professions, tourism was proving to be a powerful creator of jobs across all sectors of the Thai economy. This bespoke the effectiveness and efficiency of the TAT organizational entity with a just handful of employees⁵. Anchalee explained that behind the scene of this success were the combined efforts of individuals working together within the TAT culture of filial styles of work life. She continued her reminiscence of the glory of the past:

Working here [meant] we belong[ed] to the same family, same roof. We learnt to help each other. Job descriptions [weren't always] necessary. One could graduate with Law's degree but become [the] HR [manager], or with a degree in Education but turn out to be the head of administration. It [didn't] matter from which field you graduated. Come [aboard], and TAT would teach you all[you need to know] to reach your hidden potentiality.

Essara Sarttra, Group One Leader, stated that a strong sense of organizational pride could once be felt among employees at all levels. For over 50 consecutive years, both employees and external stakeholders of TAT -- including a wide spectrum of tour operators, tourism agencies, hotels, restaurants, airlines, tourism associations, government bodies, and state regulators --had perceived TAT as the leading organization in Tourism Promotion. The organization kept expanding in both structural and processual complexity and sophistication, with the TAT brand and logo widely recognized and accepted both domestically and internationally.

Alas, participants noted, soon enough, TAT's destiny changed -- particularly with the establishment of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) in the year 2002. The newly founded MOTS functioned with powerful governing offices—the Office of the Prime Minister, the Office of the Permanent Secretary, and the Office of Sports and Recreational

Development -- and was responsible for the promotion, support, and development of tourism industry, sports sector and sports education. TAT continued to exist but with a decreased degree of organizational leverage. As an autonomous-in-theory entity, TAT now fell under the supervision and direct regulation of the MOTS, with the mandate that it gear itself towards becoming the professional Modern Marketing entity for Tourism, nothing else.

Sirima Yuviengjaya, Chief of the Internal Advertising Strategies section, with 20 years of service, and Devil's Advocate to Group Two, attempted to characterize the overall situation regarding TAT's state of change by simply saying that:

Changes are happening faster and harder than ever, making related organizational change the primary and continuous challenge for all levels of management at TAT. It is an ongoing, ever-changing journey with multiple destinations and no real endpoints. It then takes real focus and fortitude [just] to survive, much less prosper.

With the new vision set for the organization, "To be an excellent organization in Modern Marketing that plays the key role in mobilizing the Economy and Society of Thailand", things were never again to be the same as before. TAT soon found itself being forced to learn the art and science of change management – and in mostly the hard way. Jurairat Chaitaweessap, Chief of the South Asia and South Pacific Marketing Integration Section, with 19 years of service to TAT, and the Spokesperson and Secretary to Group One, described the difficulties encountered in handling the challenges in her new career path:

All of the sudden, we must all learn to gain more professionalism in marketing, which surely requires specialization and expertise, rather than merely direct daily experiences. Problems, challenges, errors, mistakes, surprises then start to emerge and make up the scene as we have to force ourselves to become professional marketers. As soon as the political winds started to change direction, we [had] to be able to activate the plan and significantly strengthen our positioning in the market.

Suttuthep Noktess, Chief of the Radio Section, who with 27 years of service was the longest serving employee, stated matter-of-factly with a deep voice that resonated across the room:

Alas, we need to stay alert to all disruptions. . . .[I]t means you have to learn new skills. You have to be all in or else leave the boat and get drowned.

When all workgroups and class discussion came to a saturation point on the topic of TAT history, the facilitator decided to move to the next topic.

Day One/Morning Session (continued): Participant Images of the Status Quo

To be strategic, and most effective, explained the facilitator, managers must get to know their organizational culture before embarking on any analysis of the impacts of change upon the organization. Participants at this point were therefore encouraged to think about their organizational culture in the context of some of the challenges facing the organization. Theeraphong Phichitkawin, Assistant Director of the Marketing, Information Technology Group, with 21 service years, and Group Three's Devil Advocate, had earlier mentioned *TAT's House Model* (see *Exhibit Two*). This model, named *SPIRITS*, reflected TAT's organizational vision, missions, and values. In so doing, he expressed his reservations about *SPIRITS*, given the difficulties encountered to date in its enactment.

Our core values placed the importance on becoming an Excellence Center in Tourism Management, with Modern Marketing as our strength, through Value Creation and Operational Excellence. All are good in principle, but we do have a lot more to do.

In striving to validate and express its core values, TAT set forth missions covering the four major goals that were established: 1) to promote Strategic Partnerships with all constituents and stakeholders in the tourism sector, 2) to excel as Intelligence Center for Tourism Sector, 3) to excel in Modern Marketing Professionalism, and 4) to achieve Operational Excellence. About this, Theeraphong then quietly observed that:

It seems like some of us tend to resist change because of ten change creates problems that require solutions, and sometimes those solutions require a lot of extra work. If we could

not achieve even one of our key missions right now, stop thinking about securing our vision in the future.

A number of challenges that TAT had been confronting for years were raised and discussed among the workgroups. The facilitator, while walking around coaching each group, and taking notes on her personal memo, could deduce bits and pieces of facts, foremost among which was the groups-wide consensus that the challenges facing TAT now were complex and multi-dimensional, involving both domestic and international aspects⁶.

Because these challenges and problems were not being addressed in a vacuum, participant groups were next asked to conduct a **Stakeholder Analysis of TAT**. The task was to identify all parties and constituencies involved, affecting, or being affected by the TAT performances. Either investigating from the inside-out or outside-in standpoints of organization analysis, participants were encouraged to communicate and exchange their viewpoints with their group members through critical self-reflection, team examination and group discussion.

In handling the tasks, participants of each group helped one another in the generation of TAT's stakeholders' lists. These were divided into two major groups: 1) the internal groups, i.e., the employees and staff of TAT, and 2) the external groups, which comprised a diversity of groups, namely,

- i. government bodies, e.g., Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Resources and Environment,
- ii. the broad spectrum of Tourism Promotion Associations, e.g., Thai Eco Tourism & Adventure Travel Association (TEATA), The Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA), The Association of Domestic Travel (ADT), The Association of Thai Tour Operators (ATTO), etc.,
- iii. the private sector of individual tour operators,
- iv. the targeted groups of both domestic and foreign tourists,
- v. local communities,
- vi. the public at large, and
- vii. competitors.

Choosing to talk about the external groups first, Anchalee, Group Two Leader, pointed out that since the establishment of the MOTS, the Ministry itself had become one of TAT's primary stakeholders. The perceived relationship between the two entities, TAT and MOTS reflected a symbiosis.

Anchalee, in expressing her concerns and worries, allowed that:

We were cooperative, we needed to [be]. We used to coach them at first and form informal relationships. When they did not understand a thing, they could call us and ask. In the beginning, I think that they perceived TAT as specialists in Tourism. But as time passed by, they have become stronger, more self-reliant and talented. It is [now] a quasi-collaborative and quasi-competitive form of relationship between us. Things now are more formal, which means it is harder to cooperate.

Pratrawadee Ratanakosum, Assistant Director of the Head Office Audit Group, Internal Audit Office, also expressed her thoughts about employees' unclear picture of TAT, as well as the public's confusion about TAT's position in Thai society:

All I [can] say is that we employees of TAT do not much understand clearly about the directions of TAT since the establishment of MOTS. I believe most of our stakeholders, till now, do not fully understand today's TAT role.

In fact, when talking about the current status of TAT and the possibility of its being merged under the umbrella of MOTS in the future, participants displayed a lingering ambivalence filled with doubts and uncertainty. In a moment of silence among the mixed assortment of feelings displayed, some participants expressed anxiety, while others showed eagerness and excitement about the issue of a possible TAT-MOTS merger. Montira, Spokesperson of Group Two, whose thoughts were always delivered with a tactful style and mannerism, advanced the following thought:

Politically, there [are] high possibilities for TAT to be merged with the MOTS in the future. Merging with the MTS doesn't grind me down, anyway. But I could see lots of frustration around here.

Anchalee, agreed with Montira by adding more information to the point:

In fact, MOTS have all the resources needed. They are in charge of monitoring and developing the tourist attractions throughout the Kingdom of Thailand. In fact, it would be great [for] our country if we, TAT, having 35 offices in the country and

MTS, having their offices operated in 76 provinces throughout the country, have learnt to trust as strategic partners. Of course, they would see us as alliance, but not a strategic one as it should have always been There are cases where the people under the roof of MTSP have more authorized power than TAT people. The Director of Tourism and Promotion in a province is, by rank, more powerful than our Director of TAT at the same provincial level. That is the problem.

Vachirachai Sirisumpan, Assistant Director, TAT Dubai Office, with 15 service years, and Secretary to Group Two, voiced his opinion with a decidedly neutral tone of voice:

But so far TAT has been able to adjust. Things just do take time. I am content as long as I can see that things are progressing and not in a way that affects the structure of our salary and fringe benefits.

Moving to the analysis of other groups of TAT stakeholders, several participants had voiced the major stream of change, that is, the perceived decreasing roles of governmental sectors, and the increasingly roles of public sectors in mobilizing the tourism sector of the country.

Phantajit Promkutkawe, Chief of Marketing Development and Promotion section for the United States section, and Group Three Leader, shared her thoughtful opinion about the changing roles of the private sectors and in particular, the group of Tourism Associations that were more eager, leveraged and cohesive:

The private sectors and the Tourism Associations have become stronger and powerful players in the tourism markets, both outbound and inbound. They used to rely on TAT as [their] primary source of information about the tourism industry of the country. But it seems likely that now some of them could function on their own without relying on or asking for our favors or assistance as before. Some even surpassed our services and products offered to the tourists. In fact, TAT has maintained a positive relationship and mutually beneficial types of connections with them. We try not to see them as our competitors.

The discussion then moved on to the main targeted groups of TAT: the tourist groups. Statistically, as Group Three pointed out, according to *World Economic Forum: The Travel & Tourism Competitive Index*, in 2011, Singapore scored highest in the Asian Region, followed by Malaysia, and Thailand. According to Sichard Wattaro, Assistant Director of TAT's Shanghai (China) Office, with 18 years of service to TAT, and Group Three Spokesperson, the tourists were also changeful and varied in terms of their lifestyles, beliefs, values, preferences on sojourning experiences, and expectations regarding the overall value of destinations. TAT needed to keep up with the pace and be mindful of the diversity and pluralism in tourists' tastes. Sichard elaborated:

The tastes of the tourists, both domestically and internationally, have been changing and [are] always in flux. They need something more authentic, exotic, or trendy and worthy of experiencing. They do not need something like a Tourist Bubble where authenticity of the sojourning was destroyed with something unreal and unrepresentative of the typical Thai culture.

Anchalee, rerouting the discussion to talk about what was happening in the domestic context with Thai tourists, allowed that:

For the Thai tourists, the matter of quality and price is what they [are] mostly concerned [about]. We have had complaints that our tourism packages were not really "Thai-tourist friendly."

The flow of discussion continued on to the point that participants began talking about the perceived roles of communities involved in the tourism sectors of Thailand at large, and lastly, about the public at large. Regarding communities, TAT had operated with a decentralization policy in handling the local communities. The shift to focus more on the promotion of community participation and community relations was apparent, yet not easy for TAT. Jurairat Chaitaweessap, South Asia and South Pacific Marketing Integration Section, with 19 service years at TAT, and Spokesperson for Group One, shared his views about TAT's attempts to come up with initiatives in the promotion of local tourism. She said:

Recently we tried to promote new tourist spots in the 10 small provinces, which . . . previously were considered as minor towns with no popular tourist attractions. . . . The examples

of these provinces on our list are Trad, Prae, Burirum, Samutsongkram, Leoi, etc.

Anchalee, Group One Leader, also raised an issue pertaining to the challenges in community handling:

It is very challenging to talk about communities now as they are so diverse [with respect to] the local culture and readiness in being and becoming tourist destinations. They also come up with different interests. Different regions, different interests.

All work groups continued talking about the public. It was likely that there existed the shared consensus of the general public that TAT possessed a strong culture with strong brand management, and still maintained its reputation and professionalism as an organization generating massive income for the nation for over half a century. And then, eventually, all groups had finally come to talk about the internal group of TAT's stakeholder: their employees. With all changes perceived, it seemed like TAT's employees had learnt that ability to adjust was key to experience their organizational environments amidst changes.

Day One/Afternoon Session: Tapping Organizational Realities

In the afternoon session of the first day of the workshop, the facilitator explained that organizations were not buildings, but rather *people* and their *communication*. Organizations had needs to be met, the most important of which were control and coordination. Viewing one's organization as systems of control and coordination helped employees at all levels understand the complex communication processes taking place.

The facilitator then moved on to stimulate participants' critical thinking by asking them to conduct further sense-making of their organization in general, and of each individual's functions in particular. In reference to the **Organization Diagram worksheet**, the facilitator explained by asking the participants to dissect their organization and look into the essence of the grid of organization features and how each feature interacted with others. This conceptual grid contained the 3X3 dimensions of organizations (see *Exhibit Three*). The first three dimensions consisted of the individual level, the process level and the organizational level. The other three dimensions

of the organization were the elements of goal, design, and management --in interaction with the first three dimensions.

As participants absorbed the nature of the assignment and began to talk about their organization in reference to the 3X3 model, Suttuthep Noktess, Chief - Radio Section, and Observer to Group One, commented to the facilitator that:

It looks very complicated, but it helps us to think more systematically about our organization as [a] grid.

Showing agreement with what Suttuthep had stated, the facilitator just pointed to the Two Questions under this section of the worksheet: 1) *What are the perceived biggest problems facing TAT right now?* and 2) *Why might your experiences not make you any wiser?* The facilitator then requested all work groups to interpret the 3X3 Model and reflect on how the model made sense to them with respect to addressing these two questions. Two and a half hours were allotted for group discussion. The secretary of each group was requested to summarize the individual group's responses and present a 10-minute oral report of the gist of the group's discussion to the facilitator. Hence, the last half hour of the session was reserved for the oral briefings by the group secretaries.

All three groups spent the full allocated time plunging into the questions and sharing their perceptions and interpretations of the task. As they did so, the facilitator observed how the threads of conversation were weaving and, again, could not help but thinking to herself: *Seems like at many times during their careers, these managers have felt powerless because they simply did not understand the events that taking place around them!* In due course, as the secretary of each group presented the summary of each group discussion to the facilitator, certain key messages stood out:

According to Group One, as presented by Jurairat, South Asia and South Pacific Marketing Integration Section, the three perceived biggest problems were: 1) political interference by powerful politicians, 2) human resource management problems in career advancement and promotion policies and new member recruitment, and 3) overlapping processes among different work units. To relate to the question, *Why might experiences not make the management wiser?*, Jurairat replied that it was because of work overload, stress, ignorance to problems, and limited power to fight against

systems. Moreover, Jurairat murmured, but loud enough for the facilitator to hear:

May be it is the nature of human beings not to be able to [foresee] the future and what is lying ahead of us. According to 3x3 Model, the Management[is] the most important. They must be responsible for everything.

According to Group Two, as presented by Montira, Chief of the Policy Planning Section, the three biggest problems were: 1) political interference from powerful politicians, 2) diminished employee morale as TAT faced all of its planned and unplanned changes, and 3) lack of integration in terms of data and information among work unit and in terms of networking with multi-stakeholders in the Tourism sector. In interpreting the question, *Why might experiences not make the management wiser?*, Montira grinned and then said:

We think that to be foolish is the best teacher. In every bad experience, we can extract the good lessons learnt. We might not be wiser from experiences, but we can learn to become a better manager, if we don't think we are wise already and stop learning and get trapped by our past successes...We think that the 3x3 Model is very complex. We need more time to look into the grid and its 9 quadrants. But we think organization is about communication, structure, context, people, and events.

Group Three had Sichard, Assistant Director of the TAT Shanghai Office, and spokesperson for the group, present the group's conclusions. Group Three's perceived biggest problems were reported as: 1) political interference from powerful politicians, 2) the overlapping processes among different work units, and 3) communication problems. In answering the question about *why experiences might not make the management wiser*, Sichard briefly said, "Because we do have communication problems, both with ourselves and with others!"

The session was concluded with the facilitator's recapitulation of the key points. At the end of the first day of the Stratcom workshop, the facilitator wrapped up with a summary of what the day's discussions had yielded with respect to the history of TAT, the Stakeholder Analysis of TAT, and the 3x3 Model. Special attempts were made to highlight the values of strategic communication and problem-based learning.

Day Two/Morning Session: Organizational Audit through Feedback Communication

At nine o'clock sharp, the facilitator launched the morning session of Day Two by reiterating the key points from Day One, after which she immediately moved to explain **The Feedback Communication Model**(see *Exhibit Four*) as the next PBL learning tool. As explained by the facilitator, *Strategic Feedback could be conducted in the four forms of communication: 1) Criticisms, 2) Suggestions, 3) Advice, and 4) Compliments.* To explicate, whereas *Criticisms* meant that some perceived state of the organization's being, or its performance, was deemed undesirable and in strong need of change, *Suggestions* meant the situation was undesirable, but organization could live with it, whereas *Advice* meant the situation was good but still needed to be changed; and, *Compliments* literally meant the situations was good and could remain as it was.

The participants were then assigned to do an organization survey and explore organizational performances and events before the application of the four forms of feedback. Each group was asked to share how each member perceived TAT's situation by citing a number of emergent events, incidents, and/or issues, and to present each as a case in point for discussion. This could be done, as explained by the facilitator, either from the perspectives of each functional unit, or from broader and more generic viewpoints.

Thereafter, anecdote after anecdote were cited and thrown into the discussion in support of each group's analysis of the organization as a whole or of particular functions. The discussion that ensued yielded a plenitude of points of view, reflecting both similarities and differences in the way participants viewed their realities, including contradictions found in some exerted voices from each group.

In terms of *Criticisms*, all groups came to raise and cite the same perceived problems and reached consensus on, once again, the criticality of the power and politics issue. TAT policy-driven operations had oftentimes been politically interfered with by powerful politicians, as well as by the mass media. In fact, since organizations existed within socio-cultural contexts, the prevailing beliefs, values, and expectations that people brought into contact with organizations influenced organizational communication. TAT was no exception.

Montira, Devil's Advocate and Spokesperson for Group Two, seemed to articulate the opinion that:

This is indeed a state of art, yet impossible here, to “managing-up” with your own big boss and those powerful players in this country. It is the way things had always been that the eyes could not raise above the eyebrow. The culture thing of Thailand and of Asia [is such that] probably seniority counts. We have tried to fight against the interference from outside. But we have to know that it is extremely hard to fight against deep-rooted systems. We should not be discouraged, though.

Anchalee, Group Two Leader, stated that:

We have dealt with ethical issues [that] we should learn to curb. Corruption is the name of the game. It is the self-defeating game where everyone involved, except the politicians, ends up losing. Sometimes, we pretend not to know what is going on. I think we are losing our money, resources, opportunities, and of course, accountability.

Among other often cited issues embodying Criticism that were raised by all groups were problems of lack of work unit integration and poor internal communication. Another severe and recurring problem facing TAT was the unethical and unprofessional conduct (in essence, malpractice) of certain private tourism operators, e.g., overcharged tourist packages and services, poor quality of services, and unauthorized and exploitative use of the official logo of TAT. According to Krungsri Waysarat, Chief of the International Advertising Support Section, with 18 years of service, some of these undesirable incidents happened, especially the unauthorized use of TAT's logo, due, in part, to the organization's ineffective systems of monitoring and surveillance. Krungsri said:

This is truly a crisis negatively affecting the credibility and reputation of TAT. When there was such negative news reported in the newspapers' coverage relating to logo scandals happened in the tourism sector, people both inside and outside the organization attempted to make sense of what was happening. The reputation of TAT was already affected, no matter what truth lies behind. These are recurring problems, and we still have these problems unsolved. We have to admit

that our monitoring systems were not adequately effective.

In terms of *Suggestions*, participants readily identified several, as it was easier to voice Suggestions than to level Criticisms. Group One and Group Two shared some views in common: TAT was in need of more effective internal communication and inter-departmental communication to integrate data and information on tourism in the country. Phantajit, Chief of the Marketing Development and Promotion for the United States section, and Group Three Leader, concurred and elaborated:

Integration problems are real. We have seen duplicated jobs and duplicated roles in some departments. We need to communicate more among [ourselves] and learn to solicit and understand the needs of our peers working in the different sections but without duplication in both scope and budgeting of work.

From Montira's perspective, it was fairly normal for a relatively large organization like TAT to be very rule and bureaucratically ridden. She stated:

How could the management, especially the CEO, effectuate change that was essential to the longevity of the organization? I think so many rules are not updated and [and therefore can be] considered as great barriers to the effectiveness and speed of our work process.

In terms of *Advice*, some participants expressed the desire to see TAT people engaged more and keep up with the pace in terms of learning and being able to grapple with all the uncertainties and roadblocks facing TAT's operations. Directing his comment to the facilitator for the first time during the workshop, Chalor Disataporn, Chief of the Affairs Relations Section, with 22 service years with TAT, averred that:

To let go of old practices, processes, and mindsets while gravitating towards new ones in preparing for changes is crucial to TAT's survival.

With respect to the final communication element, *Compliments*, it was interesting that all three work groups came to form agreement that the people and their culture were considered the best assets of TAT. Anchalee, Group Two Leader, stated with a smile on her face:

I am proud to be [a member of] “The People of TAT.” We treat each other with respect and dignity. That is the key to our survival and the reason why I have been working all through these rough years.

After all forms of strategic feedback had been exhaustively identified by the participants, the facilitator then wrapped up Day Two’s morning session of the workshop.

Day Two/Afternoon Session: Towards the Desired Situation with Critical Creativity

At the outset of the afternoon session of Day Two, the facilitator kicked off by providing a summary of the first day discussion, as well as the Day Two morning session, and learning extracted there from. The facilitator also linked back to select issues raised in the morning session. The facilitator then explained the next tool, called the **Critical Creativity Approach** (see *Exhibit Five*), and pointed out that it was another tool for combining two modes of thinking, Critical Thinking and Creative Thinking, into one. *Critical thinking entailed thinking about change and what needed to be changed and Creative thinking was about generating new ideas or imaginatively connecting the seemingly unconnected*, she explained.

The core question posed to stimulate the participants’ cognitive and intellectual abilities was: *What was tempting to be changed?* This had to be conducted in relation to the **Four P’s Dimensions**. As explained by the facilitator, *the Four Ps covered the four domains of organizational operations: 1) Procedures, 2) Processes, 3) Products or Services, and 4) People*. Once showing understanding of the question, the Four Ps, and the concept of Critical Creativity, participants were then asked to, once again, brainstorm – this time about solutions to all problems earlier raised and discussed, especially about what exactly needed to be changed in reference to the Criticisms, Suggestions, and Advice articulated during the previous session.

At this time, participants –now being more familiar with the pressures of the workshop and with the personalities, traits, and styles of their peers and the facilitator -- were eager to continue their discussion on what needed to be changed in relation to the Four P’s Model. After the passage of approximately two hours of time, it seemed that all groups had answers to share with the facilitator.

Starting with the People dimension, Phantajit, Group Three Leader, expressed her opinion that:

We should always keep abreast of what is going on in the global world. Complacency and lack of actions is often bad for business. Change is painful. We must be much more prepared to push initiatives through, if necessary. Managing organizational change is a continual sharpening of the saw. We must never stop [learning] new things by sharpening what we used to think we know and to see how the old knowledge and new forms of knowledge merge or even contradict. As of now, I think we are not slow to respond, but our responses are not [very] strategic. We are self-paralyzed by our ways of thinking and behaving.”

Jurairat Chaitaweasap, the spokesperson for Group Two, reminded the group of the criticality of the concepts of corporate governance and democracy in workplace.

I would like to see the TAT people to be more attached to TAT's SPIRIT and aligned with concept of good governance in the workplace, especially the people at the top. They should have “courage under fire” to voice their minds in order to achieve [a] more just, sound, and democratic climate in the organization.

Montira, the Spokesperson for Group Two, stating what was on her mind, elaborated:

We must consistently monitor our results, discuss them at [a] broad level, and use them as a spur for action sooner rather than later. The way that we can best prepare our organization is to transform [our] thinking and put [ourselves] in a mindset that makes us want to embrace change through sufficient [and] sensitive communication.

In terms of Procedure and Process, Sirima Yuviengjaya, Devil's Advocate to Group One, stepped forward to share what was on her mind, as she had had troubles working and coordinating with the other work units. She said:

I would like to see more structural adjustment where work would [no longer] be overlapped and duplicated. I think we, different units, should talk and consult one another more often. I do mean that more integrity of work and alignment of scopes of work between work units and department is needed.

Group Two Leader, Phantajit, also talked about the need for TAT to be more autonomous and eventually independent. She explained the rationale as follows:

Now, TAT totally depends on the budget allocation from the government. We would like to see TAT become more autonomous and economically viable through self-generation of income, rather than depending on the allocated budget, [with] no actual power to generate income or revenues for [ourselves].

Pairat Tumsen, Chief of the Domestic Events Section, expressed his concerns about the organizational structure:

I think that sometimes the lower-ranking managers have no realistic options and authority because no adequate resources are available [to them]. Some higher-ranking managers act like bureaucrats. This indeed does paralyze the company's climate and work process.

Essara, Group One Leader, raised the issue of human resources management:

We need professional HR [managers] who have more specialization and know-how in making things right . . . for TAT's resources management. Career pathing is important. We should hire more HR specialists.

In terms of Products and Services, Srichard, the Spokesperson of Group Three, contributed the thought that:

We consider ourselves as creative workers. We need to let ideas breathe, instead of being judgmental and squashing creativity. We must be prepared to champion our ideas. We need to cope with some of the constraints of the tourism sector.

Krungsri Waysarat, Chief of the International Advertising Support Section, was quite positive in expressing what she saw as needing to be changed:

Our organization constantly needs innovative programs, for both revenue reasons and reputational reasons, to reach out more effectively to the whole community of Tourism and build the reputation of our organization.

Suttuthep, Observer of Group One, strongly agreeing with the proposal made by Jurairat, Spokesperson of Group One, and of the South Asia and South Pacific Marketing Integration Section, allowed that:

We have done exceptionally well in the past, implementing what we knew needed to be done when we were an independent organization. Now we need to emphasize more on our service. We need to see TAT as an Excellence Center and transform [ourselves] to be a consulting firm for Tourism in the Region.

At the end of Day Two, the facilitator recapitulated key points of the day and of Day One. Before the workshop adjourned at 4:30 pm, the facilitator took a couple of minutes to make the last statement of the day:

Knowledge is everywhere, but what you do learn matters most. What you learn about you yourself, your assumptions towards life and work, and about others is through the use of communication. All forms of knowledge about communication are applicable knowledge, which if properly applied, could yield a lot of useful data to the organization. As managers, you have to be good at both producing thoughts and communicating them. Sawasdee and see you tomorrow.

Day Three/Presentation and Debriefing: The Workshop as Organization in Miniature

Day Three began in the morning with each group having an hour in which to present their final thoughts concerning all lessons they had learnt and discussed during the past two days of the Stratcom Workshop. After each group presentation, the facilitator wrapped up by synthesizing what was presented. It took the whole morning session to accommodate the presentations of all workgroups.

After lunch, the facilitator debriefed, once again emphasizing that organizational change involved a complex process of communication among a wide range of stakeholders in and around organization. It was critical that a wide array of organizational participants, particularly, leaders and managers, be informed about the change and be part of the decision-making process. It was also vital that an organization's management be seen as clearly understanding their organizational problems, supporting appropriate change efforts, and being prepared to deal with all forms of organizational changes, be they planned, unplanned, desirable, or undesirable. The facilitator, in emphasizing the roles of communication, advised:

You should encourage open communication between working units or departments and be aware of the problems and risks as soon as possible. Such awareness of problems and risks is dependent upon continuous reappraisal of how your business environment might change. We need real-time peer reviews. In addition to the peer review of experts, you have the peer review of all colleagues similar to what we have had for the past two days of Stratcom workshop.

Pausing for a moment, the facilitator continued:

One of the greatest risks of organization is about communication. People are so busy doing things within their functional silos that they have too few opportunities to get together, to talk, to proactively listen, and to share the lessons learnt and unlearnt. We have to give them the information. We need to do it with consistency. Communicating and being consistent over time builds up trust among employees and all stakeholders. Communicating is one of the key platforms that the whole workforce could get behind: they would know they are part of the evolving systems, solving the bigger problems. And they were part of the solutions. Today's Solution may become tomorrow's problems. So learn from the problems. Communicate more. No more prevarication. Emphasize drawbacks, learn, and communicate.

By the end of the workshop, the participants had reached a consensus that managing change was an all-encompassing process by which an organization endeavored to confront or overcome challenges or seize new

opportunities. It sought to do so by perpetually transforming the organization from the current state to a state deemed more desirable through tapping new or improved ideas, suggestions, and work processes. There was no single best way to manage change but critical to the success of *any* change initiative was the necessity of all managers first learning to become effective communicators and critical thinkers in order to become *bona fide* change agents capable of leading the change process in all its gyrations and complexity.

It was then that Montira, smiling in the realization of what the workshop had brought about, articulated what could be considered the epilogue to what all agreed had been an insightful and enriching learning experience:

If you ever want to manage and lead in ways that could build and maintain robust systems and processes that cascade responsibility and learning throughout the organizations, especially when facing changes, then problem-based learning is essential. In addition, strategic communication is nothing more or less than the applicable knowledge, mindset, and skills vital to organizational performance.

Addendum of Exhibits

Exhibit One: Problem-based Learning (PBL)

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is an instructional method of hands-on, active learning shared on the investigation and resolution of real-world problems. It emphasizes the interactions between instructor and learner in co-learning. It is an instructional approach that has been used successfully over 30 years and continues to gain acceptance in multiple disciplines. It is an instructional learner-centered approach that empowers learners to integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skill to develop a viable solution to a defined problem. It emphasizes the fact that true learning deals with motivation, feedback, and reinforcement as key to such learning process, and which cannot be successful without the right communicative tools used for knowledge acquisition, application, and integration. Notably, the proponents of PBL believe that, as a strategy,

- it develops critical thinking and creative skills,
- it improves problem-solving skills,
- it increases motivation and helps learners learn to transfer knowledge to new situations.

Characteristics of PBL include:

- Learning is driven by challenging, open-ended problems with no single “right” answer
- Problems/Cases are context specific
- Students work as self-directed, active investigators, and problem-solvers in small collaborative groups, typically involving about five persons
- Key problems are identified and solutions are agreed upon and implemented
- Instructor adopts the role of facilitator of learning, guiding the learning process, and promoting an environment of inquiry.

Source: Savery, J.R. (2006). Overview of problem-based learning: Definitions and distinctions. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-based Learning*. Retrieved on June, 2013 from www.worldIQ.com

Exhibit Two: TAT's House Model



Source: The 2012-2016 TAT's State Enterprise Planning Scheme, Tourism Authority of Thailand, p. 3).

Exhibit Three: The 3x3 Model

Organizational Perspective

The matrix of Nine Performance Variables: at 3 performance levels:
 organization, work process, and individual performance.

		THE THREE PERFORMANCE NEEDS		
		Goals	Design	Management
THE THREE LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE	Organization Level	Organization Goals	Organization Design	Organization Management
	Process Level	Process Goals	Process Design	Process Management
	Job/Performer Level	Job Goals	Job Design	Job Management

Source: Nine Performance Variables, Rummler&Brache, 1995

Exhibit Four: The Feedback Model

<p>ADVICE (+, -):</p> <p>“ I thought it was good, but it needs to change”</p>	<p>COMPLIMENT (+,+)</p> <p>“I thought it was good and it can stay as it is in future”</p>
<p>CRITICISM (-, -)</p> <p>“I thought it was bad and it has to change”</p>	<p>SUGGESTION (-,+)</p> <p>“I thought it was bad but I can live with it”</p>

Source: Krogerus, M. & Tschappeler, R. (2011). The Decision Book: Fifty models for strategic thinking. London: PROFILE BOOKS.

Exhibit Five: Nature of Critical Creativity for Workplace

Critical Creativity: It recognizes that critical and creative thinking are fundamental to an individual's becoming successful learners through a problem-solving thought process using both modes of thoughts. Whereas *Critical Thinking* emphasizes Evaluation & Assessment, Analysis and Description, Categorization and Classification, Reasoning through Logics, Identification, and Interpretation, *Creative Thinking* is based on Openness to Novelty, Idea Generation, Curiosity, Invention, Imagination, Reasoning by metaphor & Analogy, Divergent Thinking, and Playfulness. When combined, individuals – whether students or organizational employees or managers -- would be able to engage themselves with the following features of thoughts: Elaboration, Awareness of Environment, Synthesis, Integration, Combination, Complexity, and Abstraction. Retrieved on September, 2013 from www.australiacurriculum.edu.au

Nature of Critical Creativity for Workplace

- **Is practically useful**
- ✓ **To enrich participants' established practises**
- ✓ **Seek to improve their scope and capability for organisational problem solving**
- **Acknowledge ideas developed from many viewpoints**
- **To create diversity**
- **To encourage judgment to be undertaken locally**

Exhibit Six: Comparative Statistics on Foreign Tourists Visiting Thailand during 2012-2013

Statistics on Foreign Tourists Visiting Thailand during 2012 -2013			
Continents	Year 2013 Numbers of Tourists (Million)	Year 2012 Numbers of Tourists (Million)	Increase (%)
<i>East Asia</i>	16.0	12.5	28.4
<i>Europe</i>	6.3	5.6	11.6
<i>America</i>	1.1	1	2.1
<i>South Asia</i>	1.3	1.2	4.6
<i>Oceania</i>	1.02	1.04	-1.7
<i>Middle East</i>	0.62	0.60	3.6
<i>Africa</i>	0.16	0.15	5.5
Total	26.5	22.09	19.6

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2015

References

- Krogerus, M. & Tschappeler, R. (2011). *The Decision Book: Fifty models for strategic thinking*. London: PROFILE BOOKS.
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- Senge, Peter. (2005). *The Fifth Discipline*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
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Endnotes

- ¹ Completed Lists of TAT's participants:
Pratrawadee Ratanakosum, Assistant Director of Head Office Audit Group, Internal Audit Office.
Chalor Disataporn, Chief of Affairs Relations Section.
Essara Sarttra, Assistant Director for Policy and Planning Group.
Montira Prakongpan, Chief of Policy Planning Section
Theeraphong Phichitkawin, Assistant Director for Marketing, Information Technology group.
Pairat Tumsen, Chief of Domestic Events Section.
Anchalee Vatjanarat, Chief of Central Region Offices, Coordination Section.
Sichard Wttaro, Assistant Director, TAT Shanghai Office, Republic of China.
Jurairai Chaitaweasap, South Asia and South Pacific Marketing Integration Section.
Vachirachai Sirisumpan, Assistant Director, TAT Dubai Office.
Phantajit Promkutkawe, Chief, The Marketing development and Promotion section for United States Section.
Sirima Yuviengjaya, Chief of Internal Advertising Strategies Section.
Krungsri Waysarat, Chief of International Advertising Support Section.
Patchara Anongchanya, Chief of Domestic Advertising Strategies Section.
Suttuthep Noktess, Chief Radio Section.
Rangsak Suwannarak, Chief of Exhibitions and Special Media Section.
- ² The concept of Learning Organization was originally based on Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*, which emphasized the systematic way an organization could become a Learning Organization. The model involved the pyramid-shaped approach to becoming a Learning Organization, comprising five key features: Systems Thinking as Basis of organization, mental models, individual mastery, team, and vision.
- ³ Piggybacking: A technique that can be used in conjunction with brainstorming. This technique is simply to build on someone's else idea to produce yet another idea. It's often done by working in a sequential order: one person starts with a brainstormed idea, then the next person has to piggyback until all or most possible variations are exhausted. (Lewicki, Hiam, & Olander, 2007).
- ⁴ Retrieved on August, 2014 From Ministry of Tourism and Sports at www.MOTS.com
- ⁵ As of 2013, the numbers of TAT employees were 901 (the data from Human Resources Department, 2014)
- ⁶ For the domestic issues, challenges were: 1) Structural problems in Tourism Industry, 2) More rules and regulations governing the Tourism sector, 3) Policy-related problems in its integration, 4) Instability of Thai politics, 5) Competition in the region and the upcoming of AEC in 2015, and 6) Government's Policy on Tourism. For the international issues, participants raised the following issues as critical to TAT's operation: 1) Technological Changes, 2) Financial Crises, 3) Demographic Structure, 4) International Rules and Regulations governing Tourism, 5) Fierce Competition in the Tourism Sector, 6) Consumers' Behaviors, and 7) Lack of Safety in Traveling.