The Modified Delphi Technique for Developing Competency Model: Case Study of the Theravada Buddhist Monks in Thailand

Sallaya Ratanopas

National Institute for Development Administration (NIDA)
118 Moo 3, Serithai Road, Klong-Chan, Bangkapi
Bangkok, THAILAND 10240

Contact details: sallayar@yahoo.com or at +6681-818-7003

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The Modified Delphi Technique for Developing Competency Model:  
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Sallaya Ratanopas  
National Institute for Development Administration (NIDA)  
Bangkok, Thailand

The practice of HRD is dominated by positive intentions for improving the expertise and performance of individuals, work groups, work processes, and the overall organization (Swanson & Holton III, 2001). Attributes to that is definitely competency which is considered a linkage to many other areas of HRD. Competency has been acknowledged in human resources field as an important tool for both human resource management and development. It is widely used in business environment and applied in government context. There are a number of approaches to constructing a competency model. Common data collection methods include direct observation, job analysis interviews, review of job descriptions, competency model formatting, questionnaires, and focus group. Rather than direct observation, critical incident technique, or job competency assessment method are alternatives (Kormanik, Lehner & Winnick, 2009). Whatever the approach taken, competency study generally and similarly takes lots of effort, resources and time. The more data and information, the more insightful, the more reliable the results will be but the longer the study, the more outdate the results will be from reality. The dilemma of competency study is therefore to find a good balance between optimal and practical input and reliable and valid output. Delphi technique comes into the picture as an effective tool and process to expedite data collection while maintaining integrity of the study.

Why Competency Model?

History of Competency

Originally, the concept of competency was emerged in 1970s when David C. McClelland presented a seminal paper on “Testing for competence rather than intelligence” in 1973 that started the competency movement in the U.S.A. (Adams, 1997). The focal point of the study was U.S. foreign service information officers and
Massachusetts human services workers. McClelland developed an alternative type of test based on an analysis of what it takes to do certain jobs. This study pioneered research that compares people who are successful performers with people who are less successful. The study identified characteristics associated with success in predicting job performance beyond a traditional means of testing for performance through knowledge or aptitude exams (Smith, 2008). The competency study was progressed with contribution of McBer Company and Richard E. Boyatzis who pushed competency to Human Resource and gave first definition to competency. They developed the behavioral interview methods for collecting critical incidences of superior performers (Smith, 2008). In brief, the US study identifies what people do who are exceptional performers and focus on personal attributes.

On the other side, U.K. government with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) studied competency based on a different approach and dealt with functions involved in particular jobs and the minimum standard of competence required for each job focusing on performance in carrying out tasks.

They therefore use different methods: behavioral event interviews versus functional analysis (Wedchayanon, 2006). Each approach has different objectives. US approach focuses on organization while the U.K. approach focuses on national qualifications.

**Definition of Competency**

There are many scholars giving definitions to competency. In 1992, Boam & Sparrow defined competency as “the set of behavior patterns that the incumbent needs to bring to a position in order to perform its tasks and functions with competence” (p.17). Spencer & Spencer (1993) defined competency as employee’s ability to perform the skills required for a specific job. They defined competency as an underlying characteristic of an individual that is casually related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation and identified five types of competency characteristics including motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge and skills. For Lucia & Lepsinger (1999), competencies are a descriptive tool that identifies the skills, knowledge, personal characteristics, and behavior needed to
effectively perform a role in the organization and help the business meet its strategic objectives (cited in McLean, 2006). Dubois & Rothwell (2004) defined competency that includes more characteristics including knowledge, skills, aspects of self-concept and self-image, social motives, traits, thought patterns, mind-sets, and ways of thinking, feeling and acting, values and so on. For McLean (2006), competencies are captured as KSAs- knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In summary, competency can be defined as knowledge, skills and attributes that make a person deliver a superior performance than others in the designated jobs and duties. The effectiveness and efficiency value of competencies is that it produces sustainable above average returns.

The most important point is that competency must be observed, described, and verified so it can be measured (Green, 1999 in Dubois & Rothwell, 2004). It must be shown as an action that can be seen by using behavioral indicators, a statement of an action, or set of actions, that one would expect to observe when a person successfully uses a competency to perform work. Competencies are closely correlated with effective job performance, can be measured and evaluated, and can be obtained and improved through training and development opportunities (Kormanik, Lehner & Winnick, 2009). It is to note that there is no universal competency definition that can be used across the world, across industries, across organizations as appropriate behaviors linked to a competency differ depending on the culture in which that competency is grounded (Dubois & Rothwell, 2004).

Competency Model

A competency model is a written description of the competencies required for fully successful or exemplary performance in a job category, work team, department, division, or organization (Dubois & Rothwell, 2004). It can be demonstrated in many ways, one of which is to identify the behaviors or tangible results (outcomes) produced by their use in the context of the work performed. A competency model for an occupational role might focus on general, technical, or local competencies. Practice shows that a general competency model typically includes nine to 12 competencies for a specific occupational role (Kormanik, Lehner & Winnick, 2009).

Using general competency models for particular occupational roles is increasingly commonplace in organizations. It helps to strategically prepare the workplace for future organizational challenges. Competency models and individual competency descriptions are powerful tools to communicate expectations, to understand the desired end results. They provide a common language for success and a framework for thinking about excellence. As such, a competency model contains description of the competencies an individual needs for superior performance in all aspects of an occupational role (Kormanik, Lehner & Winnick, 2009).

To promote good understanding of a competency at large, it should focus on a level of generality, have visible dimensions, be simple and brief, be user friendly, label the dimensions, be clear, and be future orientation (Boam & Sparrow, 1992). It should be followed by actions that provide consistency and purpose (Murray, 2003).

Competency Model Development

There are many means to formulate competency model but none can be considered perfect as there are pros and cons of each means. The easiest and fastest way is to pick off the shelf i.e. Career Architect Portfolio Sort Cards, but the result cannot be customized to the individual organization context. The customized model can be achieved by traditional means and by developing own model which requires commitment, time and resources. Various means for competency model development are present. Dubois (1993) suggested that five methods can be utilized to crate competency models including 1) Job Competence Assessment Method, 2) Modified Job Competence Assessment Method, 3) Generic Model Overlay Method, 4) Customized Generic Model Method, and 5) Flexible Job Competency Model Method (Cited in Newhard, 2010).

All in all, to get a competency model is not an easy task. Since competency studies consume large amounts of time, money, and energy, organizations that could not
guarantee a return on investment might not be willing to take the risk (Newhard, 2010).

**Why Delphi?**

**History of Delphi**

Olaf Helmer and Norman Dalkey were pioneers in Delphi research while they were hired by the Rand Corporation in the 1950s (Buckley, 1995). They originally developed the Delphi technique for a U.S. sponsored military project (Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007) for the purpose of predicting the likely consequences of a widespread nuclear attack on the U.S.A. (Howze & Dalrymple, 2004). They named it after the ancient Greek temple where the oracle could be found (Grisham, 2008). From Greek mythology, the oracle at Delphi was consulted to forecast the future so that correct and timely decisions could be made before embarking upon a major course of action (Loo, 2002).

**Philosophy and Purpose**

Dalkey (1972), one of the pioneers of the Delphi technique wrote that:

“When faced with an issue where the best information obtainable is the judgment of knowledgeable individuals, and where the most knowledgeable group report a wide diversity of answers, the old rule that two heads are better than one, or more practically, several heads are better than one, turns out to be well founded. The n-heads rule is a simple truism. The group as a whole encompasses at least as much (and usually more) information than any single number. This simple truism is the heart of the Delphi approach to uncertain questions.”

Linstone & Turoff, (1975) defined Delphi as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem. Through this perspective, Delphi acts as a formal intervention to integrate knowledge of experts through
structured communications that enable an analysis of complex social reality. Essentially it structures and facilitates group communication that focus over a series of iterations, interspersed with feedback to collect and distill judgments until a group consensus can be achieved about some future direction (Loo, 2002; Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007).

Applications

The Delphi technique for collecting and synthesizing expert judgments has been used in thousands of studies around the world and the technique is by now very well known (Gordon, 2007). It is growing in popularity as a research methodology (Howze & Dalrymple, 2004) and it is applied in an incredibly wide range of disciplines and topics (Grisham, 2008).

In Emerald database, journals only, the search on “Delphi” yielded 1794 results on the subject. In Sage journals, it yielded 2576 results, of which 281 appeared from the search “Delphi and Competencies”. The Delphi has its origins in military, was expanded to the American business community, and has been widely accepted throughout the world in many industrial sectors including health care, defense, business, education, information technology, transportation and engineering (Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007). To exemplify the variety of researches using Delphi, examples are illustrated in the table 2:

Table 2: Samples of Researches Using Delphi
Although the above examples demonstrate that the use of Delphi in research is an accepted practice, it is not appropriate for all research activities. It is not a substitute for other scientific testing, but rather an option for complex and intertwined subjects that cross over disciplinary boundaries (Grisham, 2008). Delphi technique works especially well when the goal is to improve understanding of problems, opportunities, solutions, or to develop forecasts (Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007).

Linstone & Turoff (2002 quoted in Grisham, 2008) suggested one or more of the following properties could lead to the need for employing Delphi:

- The problem does not lend itself to precise analytical techniques but can benefit from subjective judgments on a collective basis.
- The individual needed to contribute to the examination of a broad or complex problem have no history of adequate communication and may represent diverse backgrounds with respect to experience or expertise.
- More individuals are needed than can effectively interact in a face-to-face exchange.
- Time and cost make frequent group meetings infeasible.
- The efficiency of face-to-face meetings can be increased by a supplemental group communication process.
- Disagreements among individuals are so severe or politically unpalatable that the communication process must be refereed and/or anonymity assured.
- The heterogeneity of the participants must be preserved to assure validity of the results, i.e. avoidance of domination by quantity or by strength of personality (“bandwagon effect”).

Features and Advantages

According to Dalkey (1972), in general, the Delphi procedures have three features: (1) anonymity, (2) controlled feedback, and (3) statistical group response. He also stated that within these three basic features, it is, of course, possible to have many variations.

Anonymity of Delphi panelists - In Delphi, the experts do not know who other experts are during the process (Grisham, 2008). The epistemological foundation of the Delphi is to reduce the effects of personal bias. This is done by assuring that all expert feedback is anonymous. By doing so, the technique captures the opinions, experiences, and knowledge of each panelist. Personal knowledge is harvested while interpersonal interaction biases are stripped away (Grisham, 2008). Additionally, it allows panelists to refine their views in light of the progress of the group’s work from round to round. It allows panelists to make change without losing face of changing their standpoint. It eliminates the usual biases such as gender, racial, ethnic and age and power differences. Anonymity of responses allows consensus to take place without the undue influence of rank, power, personality or persuasive speaking (Hatcher & Colton, 2007).
Controlled feedback – the process informs panelists of the other panelist’s perspectives, and provides the opportunity for panelists to clarify or change their views. The sequence of rounds between which the summary of results of the previous round is communicated is a device for reducing noise (Dalkey, 1972).

Statistical aggregation of group response – it allows for a quantitative analysis and interpretation of data. This is a way of reducing group pressure for conformity. The statistical group response is a device to assure that the opinion of every member is represented in the final response (Dalkey, 1972).

Loo (2002) identifies four advantages of Delphi. Firstly, idea generation in Delphi is individual based, anonymous and independent. Secondly, interpersonal conflicts and communication problems do not exist because panelists do not interact. Thirdly, travel to a central location is not required therefore travel costs and problem of coordination to get everyone at the same place at the same time are not factors. Lastly, multiple rounds in Delphi help to build upon earlier results and to maintain focus in the study.

Process

Olaf Halmer emphasizes the use of Delphi to supply “soft” data in the social sciences and to provide decision makers with ready access to specialized expertise, are of great importance. Therefore, they require considerable demands on the integrity of the method and of its practitioners” (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

The method is treated as an instrument stimulating credible debate that is independent of the subjective individual power of those who take part in it (Biloslav & Dolinsek, 2010). Its non-threatening process makes the technique suitable (Sun & Scott, 2005). The technique removes the possible bias when diverse groups of experts work together (Grisham, 2008).

It is suggested that Delphi is planned and executed in four distinct phases (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, Loo, 2002):

1. The exploration of the subject under discussion.
2. The process of reaching an understanding of how the group views the issue.
3. To bring out the underlying reasons for the differences and possibly to evaluate them.
4. All previously information has been initially analyzed and the evaluation has been fed back for consideration.

Design

From literature, design considerations can be summarized in following items: (1) selection of experts, (2) sample size, (3) methodological orientation, (4) number of rounds, and (5) mode of iteration. Considering all these helps to add rigor to the method.

First consideration is selection of experts or panelists. It is important to select panelists who have a balance between impartiality, and an interest in the topic. There are four requirements for the panelists: 1) knowledge and experience on the issues under investigation, 2) capacity and willingness to participate, 3) sufficient time to participate, and 4) effective communication skills (Alder & Ziglio, 1996 cited in Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn,2007).

Since expert opinion is sought, a purposive sample is necessary. Delphi panelists are typically selected, not for demographic representativeness, but for the perceived subject matter expertise that they can contribute to the topic. The panelists must be selected from stakeholders who will be directly affected, experts with relevant knowledge and experience, and facilitators in the field under study (Hatcher & Colton, 2007).

Second consideration is sample size. While there is no one sample size advocated, the literature suggests that Delphi panel size range from a few to 50 or more panelists (Hatcher & Colton, 2007). Rules-of-thumb suggests that 15-30 carefully selected SMEs could be used for a heterogeneous population and as few as five to ten for a homogeneous population (Loo, 2002). In Brockhoff’s (1975) study of Delphi performance, he suggested that for forecasting questions, groups with eleven were more accurate in their predictions than larger groups. For fact-finding questions,
groups with seven had a higher performance. Other studies have found that errors decreases with larger panels (Linstone & Toroff, 1975), however, large panels have more difficulty achieving agreement and are more difficult to administer. Linstone (1975) remarked that accuracy improved very slowly with large numbers and that a suitable size is seven (Hatcher & Colton, 2007).

A literature review reveals that Delphi in identifying competencies of various occupations has a range of 30-50 panelists (Birdir & Pearson, 2000). The careful selection of SMEs is a key factor that enables a researcher to confidently use a small panel (Loo, 2002).

Third consideration is methodological orientation. While Delphi is typically used as a quantitative technique (Rowe & Wright, 1999 cited in Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007), a researcher can use qualitative techniques with the Delphi. It is recommended that qualitative methods (e.g. using open-ended questions and free responses) be considered to complement the quantitative data (Loo, 2002). It can be a structured process within which one uses qualitative, quantitative or mixed research methods whatever is best fit to answer research questions (Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007).

Forth consideration is number of rounds. The number of rounds again is variable and dependent upon the purpose of the research. Delphi typically consists of three or more rounds. Each round consists of answering questions posed and is ended by a vote (Hatcher & Colton, 2007). Delbecq, Van de Ven & Gustafson (1975) suggest that a two or three iteration Delphi is sufficient for most research (cited in Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007). However, the questionnaire rounds continue until variation between rounds is minimal meaning the consensus finally emerges (Paliwoda, 1983). Brockhoff (1975) states that variance reduction, or consensus, almost always occurs in Delphi groups between the first and fifth rounds but the best results are already known by the third round (Hatcher & Colton, 2007).

Last consideration is mode of iteration. The Delphi exists in two distinct forms. The most common is the paper-and-pencil version which is commonly referred to as a “Delphi Exercise.” Another form, sometimes called a “Delphi Conference”, replaces
the monitor team by a computer which has been programmed to carry out the compilation of the group results. This latter approach has the advantage of eliminating the delay caused in summarizing each round of Delphi, thereby turning the process into a real-time communication system. This latter form is also labeled \textit{real-time Delphi} (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

Quick turnaround times help to keep enthusiasm alive and participation high. In addition, the on-line Delphi was proven to be an excellent tool in establishing content validity for an HRD-related construct (Hatcher & Colton, 2007). It offers flexibility and the capability to be easily implemented using the internet. The raw data is already in a digital format which eliminates the tedious task of transcription.

Delphi “fits” HRD research in particular over other related disciplines due to its dependence upon expert opinion. The reliance on expert opinion is a common method in HRD, for example, subject matter experts (SMEs) are used to establish valid tasks and competence standards (Hatcher & Colton, 2007). Delphi is an attractive technique for research as it is futuristic in nature and is appropriate and feasible for a multifaceted, intertwined and complex topic where quantitative hard data matters less but rather the richness of data from SMEs.

\textbf{Loopholes}

As any other research methods, Delphi is subject to criticism. Firstly, positivists, with their emphasis on large sample sizes, and preferable random samplings, would have a critical view of the relatively small, nonrandom samples typically used in Delphi studies (Loo, 2002). As Delphi panels are generally small, a few missing respondents can significantly lower the overall percentage response rate (Paliwoda, 1983).

Secondly, the technique will not yield exact numeric repeatable results (Grisham, 2008). Responses from different panels to the same question can differ substantially therefore reliability of measures obtained from judgments is questionable. The use of open-ended questions can make it difficult to assess measurement reliability and validity (Loo, 2002).
Perhaps it is the opinion aspect that gives the impression of lack of scientific basis for positive decision making (Buckley, 1995). The consensus achieved in later rounds might be due more to conform than to a genuine converging consensus of opinions (Loo, 2002).

Thirdly, the process can be quite time consuming since the questionnaires require serial and sequential steps, with several rounds and with unavoidable time delays between them (Gordon, 2007; Paliwoda, 1983).

**Why Theravada Buddhist Monks in Thailand?**

In Thailand, competency has been used by Thai HR practitioners for almost 10 years and has been widely distributed when the Office of the Civil Service Commission has adopted this practice for Thai government officers (OCSC, 2010) after it had been introduced in the Department of Skill Development. Nevertheless, the competency has never been studied for Theravada Buddhist monks who are spiritual leaders of Thai people.

**The Past**

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy country located at the centre of the Indochina peninsula in Southeast Asia. The country is traditionally considered to be the Buddhist Kingdom since Sukhothai period which was founded in the year 1238.

The Thai culture incorporates beliefs and characteristics indigenous to the area coupled with influence from other countries i.e. India, China. It is highly characterized by Buddhism. Although there is total religious freedom in Thailand and all major religions can be found in practice, Theravada Buddhism has been considered the national religion. While there are significant local and regional variations, the Theravada school provides most of the major themes of Thai Buddhism. His Majesty the King is constitutionally stipulated to be a Buddhist and the upholder of Buddhism. Since the old days, Buddhism has established itself in Thailand and has enriched the
lives of the Thais in all their aspects. In addition to the land of smiles, the country is also known as the land of yellow robes.

Temples, especially in rural areas, were social centers i.e. school, home for disadvantaged, hospital, temporary accommodation for travelers, clubhouse, entertainment complex, dispute court, cultural centers, main storage house, government administration centers and ritual sites and many other functions they could serve (Phra Rajavaramuni, 1984). Buddhism in Thailand is represented primarily by the presence of Buddhist monks, who serve as officiants on ceremonial occasions, as well as being responsible for preserving and conveying the teachings of the Buddha. The monks follow a strict way of life far from material attachment and observe 227 monastic rules including five major precepts. They are well respected by Thai people for their purity, dedication and wisdom (Phra Rajavaramuni, 1984) and are expected to be "friends, philosophers, and guides" of the people. Indeed, in the life of the average Thai Buddhists, from the cradle to the grave, monks are persons to whom they constantly turn for moral support (Kusalasaya, 2006).

The community of monks is called Sangha. The Sangha is the longest lasting institution in the world that no one institution is comparable. This Buddhist institution has dated back for thousands years. What holds the Sangha together is Vinaya - the order that makes the Sangha adorable. Therefore, Sangha is not just a group of people living together but is meant to be a group of people with similar attitudes and behaviors, with same behavioral types. In Buddhist history, Buddha established the Sangha to help society. He wanted the monks to develop themselves in physical, verbal, mental and wisdom before developing others (Netnimitr, 2010).

The Present

Currently, 95% of population of Thailand are Buddhists (The Largest Buddhist Communities, 2012). Thai society has changed from rural community where monks took important roles to an complex urban community as we see today. In the old days, the Sangha blended in with lay people as part of their way of life so that there was no necessity to pinpoint the importance of the Sangha. Nowadays, especially in urban areas, people are quite distant to monks. They see the monks as useless or
even a problem (Phra Paisal Visalo, 1999). The temples and monks have gradually lost their roles, status and meaning in the society, not only in a broad perspective but even in the preliminary propagation role. The monks have lost their role significantly (Phra Rajavaramuni, 1984).

Modern Thai people do not forget temples and monks. However, they cannot imagine how temples and monks play roles in their life or how temples and monks have a potential room to play in their life. The question is how the monks can transform their influential roles in the village to be as meaningful in today’s modern society? In this context, do the monks understand the changes occurring around them?

In the past, temples and monks provided a variety of services. Nowadays, the services required from them have reduced. The monks are in the process of adjusting their roles and services to satisfy the society. If they fail to do so, they automatically limit their services to lay people until people might forget there are temples and monks in this society (Eawsriwong, 2000).

Phra Rajavaramuni (1987), currently in the title of Phra Bhramagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto), one of the most respectable scholar monks, stated that western influences are claimed to be the cause of declination which might not be true. Rather is the disconnection because the monks, strictly framed by conservative traditions, are disconnected to those influences, do not understand and do not speak similar language as lay. The spiritual leading role of monks includes the intellectual part. If people perceive that monks lack intellect, they will limit their interaction and monks become meaningless.

The Thai Sangha Council does not encourage changes. On the contrary, they have delayed changes. As a result, the monks cannot be solid support to society as it was (Phra Paisal Visalo, 1999). In the context of modern Thai society, the weak point is that it does not prepare for real Buddhist followers to be able to adapt themselves with changing situations. It is not suitable in context and not aligned with expectation of Buddhism, Sangha and society in both quality and quantity aspects. Owing to these shortcomings, it has affected Thai Sangha in a way that it cannot produce
good-quality Buddhist followers. There are no well learned ones, not good to be both intellectual and spiritual leadership. If Thai Sangha does not adapt and respond to the fast changing social situations, the Buddhism and Sangha Organization will be much weaker than ever (Phramaha Thammarat, 2009). The deterioration of Sangha, considering either the lowering quality and ability of Buddhist monks or the inappropriate behaviors of the monks, is a problem that has shaken Buddhist institution and Thai society as a whole (Phra Paisal Visalo, 1999).

Since the year 2004 until the latest report of 2010, data from Office of National Buddhism shows that there are more than 300,000 monks and novices in Thailand. However, the actual numbers are less in reality (Boonnoon, 2008). This is caused by education system that has affected ordination traditions to short-term of five to seven days and with decreasing trend (The Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, 2007). In addition to the quantity issue of the monks, the quality issue becomes even more important. In general, the quality of the monks has dropped significantly compared to the past (Boonnoon, 2008).

Phra Rajavaramuni (1987) stated that when Sangha maintained good practices, in personal conduct and for public services, the social view and perception towards religion was good and the monks were well respected. On the contrary, when Sangha deviated from good practices and failed to lead peaceful society, the status of monks deteriorated. In 1994, he recognized the changes needed and suggested that Sangha and government leaders need to understand Thai cultural base and to follow current thoughts and events in order to be capable to perform their duties effectively. Without both understandings, there is almost no possibility to solve the problems. Actually, only irrigation might not be enough and development becomes even more important. Problems are so ripe that expedite Sangha to see outward and improve own activities. To irrigate, if the persons in charge are not ready, they will not only fail to solve the problems but create additional damages which are more complicated and become unsolvable (Phra Dhammapitaka, 1994).

Associate Professor Dr. Samithipol Netnimitr (2010), lecturer at Graduate School of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and author of the book *Image of Sangha in Ariyavinaya: Way of Life and Roles of Sangha in Ariyavinaya* stated that the
monks should lead society and should not be the fruit of the society. However, Sangha education has been left behind for long time and the acquisition of modern knowledge has not been supported, this leads to the stage that the monks cannot lead people with wisdom and morality. Instead, the monks follow suit of common people who are stimulated by modernism, capitalism and consumerism (Phra Paisal Visalo, 1999).

The Future

The changing influence of Buddhist monks on Thai people and society has called for a global reform of Sangha. Unless monks change, the wider gap with Thai and the accelerated deterioration of Buddhism in Thailand. The change is irresistible but rather how and when. The Sangha needs to be reformed in two areas: the administration and the education. The latter is in real focus and priority particularly as it can lead to a better administration (Phra Paisal Visalo, 1999).

The sustainability of Buddhism attributes greatly to the four companies: Bhikkhus (male monks), Bhikkhunis (female monks), Upāsakas (male supporters) and Upāsikās (female supporters). How can we support the monks, the core of the four companies, in order for them to sustain usefully and meaningfully (Eawsriwong, 2000)? The problem is not to be analyzed and solved within the Sangha community only. It needs cooperation from society (Phra Paisal Visalo, 1999). All Buddhists can contribute to solving the problems.

We need to support good monks and ensure that they get praised and respected. Firstly, we need to know how good monks look like. We need to educate monks, novices and lay people on the ingredients of being good monks so we will not support the wrong ones. If and when we can identify good monks and bad monks, we can then find ways to support good monks (Wannapok, 2002).

Existing and available studies on Buddhist monks study misconducts and wrongdoings or focus on roles and duties of monks. However, we have little knowledge of what are needed in order to perform such roles and duties. If the monks are clear of what is expected from them, if they know what are the skills,
knowledge, attributes and behaviors of good monks that they can aim as role model, they will be able to adjust and develop themselves better, faster and in the right track.

In brief, the declining situation of Buddhism and the Sangha has been caused by many accumulated problems which have reduced the roles, narrowed the services and declined the credibility of the monks. As the Sangha and lay interrelate and support each other, the problems should not be addressed and resolved exclusively as internal matters of the Sangha but rather with the involvement of lay supporters. As Buddhist, the researcher cannot let go the situation, cannot wait and see the Buddhism gradually disappear from Thailand. As HR&OD scholar, the researcher believes fully that the knowledge in this field is beneficial and can help solving such problems. As HR practitioner, the research must be studied from the field and can be applied back to the field. If the monks possess the right competencies and can perform their duties better, they will not only be good for themselves at individual level but can rebuild the Sangha institution at a group level and ultimately can lead the Thai society to wisdom and morality at national level.

In today’s complex environment and changing expectations, the study helps to clarify what are needed for monks to be competent? It investigates knowledge, skills, attributes to be “competent” in the limit of and in relation with performance according to designated roles and duties, in the context of today and for the years to come.

**This research design**

Although the traditional HRD methodology for assessing the competencies needed by individuals in specific jobs is well established (Clardy, 2008) and Delphi technique is considered a solid and effective alternative, the study of competency of Theravada Buddhist monks holds specificities. Due to monastic traditions, characteristics and perspectives, the topic must be approached with sensitivity and care. In order to get full cooperation during the research and ultimately to have the result accepted by the Sangha at the end, the methodology must be non-arguable. It is necessary to design the study specifically customized to the context. The technical and debatable loopholes are to be diminished and the approach is to be diplomatically designed. The original Delphi is therefore modified and other additional research methods are
adopted and added-in where necessary and appropriate. To support this, Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn (2007) stated that the Delphi may be only one component of the research project and for PhD research, the Delphi results are often extended with a subsequent research phase.

With dyadic nature of this study, mixed methods seem to fit appropriately combining qualitative and quantitative research traditions. Mixed methods research is research in which quantitative and qualitative techniques are mixed in a single study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The purpose of the mixture is to obtain complementary strengths of each research type: the scientific attributes of quantitative approach and getting rationale through intensive and in-depth investigation and examination of qualitative approach.

This research intends to find competencies of the best practice monks, but the list can be found nowhere who they are. The process is then to start with the survey.

From 291116 monks in Thailand (ONAB, 2011), for practical administration of the survey, it will be difficult to sample monks from temples around Thailand, the population is monks studying in undergraduate and graduate levels at Mahachulalongkornrajivithayalai University and Mahamakut Buddhist University. This is a reasonable convenient sampling while maintaining diversity of sample group as the students are from provinces all over the country. One preliminary qualification required for participants is to have more than 5 years in the monkhood (years as novice excluded). The reason for such criteria is to ensure that the sampled monks have enough experience in performing their duties and to ensure that they possess similar minimum attributes contributing to confident generalization from the analyses. Yamane sampling technique will be used to calculate sample size at 95% confidence level. These monks will be surveyed to know who their three living idols are for each of the six monastic duties. With frequency analysis, the list of 18 living best practices (BPs) will emerge.

Second stage, we will conduct evident-based competency interviews with these 18 monks. Questions are: What skills and knowledge areas are required of a “competent” monk in each role? What responsibilities (task areas) distinguish a
competent monk from normal ones? What factors distinguish a respected best practice monk from those who are less successful? This qualitative method will emerge expected competencies of Buddhist monks. From interviews and transcription, discourse analysis will be performed to derive codes, categories and themes. It will allow competency model to emerge as well as proficiency levels and importance (Egan, 2002). Thus the questions for the Delphi panel are constructed from the result from these interviews and will appear in the questionnaire of next step.

To brainstorm and get consensus on the competency model in this study, Delphi technique applies as the next method. If anything is “true” about Delphi today, it is that in its design and use Delphi is more of an art than a science (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). While the Delphi method is flexible and superficially simple, the researcher needs to take into account many design considerations in order to successfully use the method. Two points to focus: 1) Establishing criteria for choosing expert panels and 2) Selecting appropriate research methods.

Establishing criteria for choosing expert panels. This includes selection of experts and sample size. In this study, Delphi will be comprised of 30 panelists. They are approached based on knowledge, experience and communication skills. They will be explained on the holistic view of the study, the Delphi process and the contribution requested to ensure that they are willing and have sufficient time to participate. The planned mix of panelists is as follows:

| Members of Sangha Supreme Council / Abbots | 8 |
| Scholars from Mahachulalongkornrajavithayalai University and Mahamakut Buddhist University | 7 |
| **Total Monks** | **15** |
| Representatives from Office of National Buddhism / Department of Religious Affairs | 2 |
| Scholars from universities | 5 |
| Representatives from Buddhist organizations | 8 |
| **Total Lays** | **15** |
| **Total Panelists** | **30** |
For selecting appropriate research methods, it includes methodological orientation, number of rounds and mode of iteration.

We will use quantitative and qualitative techniques in mixture. We will apply voting by 5-point Likert scale based on Taxonomy of performance (Swanson & Holton III, 2001): 1) Understand, 2) Operate, 3) Troubleshoot, 4) Improve, and 5) Invent. The voting will be followed by open-ended questions and free responses.

The scores of the panelists will be analyzed. Mean, mode, average, standard deviation, interquartile range, and skewness of the data will be calculated from the voting procedures for determination of consensus (Hatcher & Colton, 2007, Grisham, 2008). On subsequent rounds, those statistics will be provided (Grisham, 2008). In addition, panelists will be given their answers of the former rounds. Then panelists are asked to reassess their former session answers and to adjust them as they see fit and provide commentary. Each subsequent questionnaire is developed based on the results of the previous questionnaire. The process stops when the research question is answered or when consensus is reached or theoretical saturation is achieved, or when sufficient information has been exchanged (Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007).

As the normal first round questionnaire containing unstructured questions (Birdir & Pearson, 2000) is replaced by evident-based interviews, two rounds are expected in this study. However, if data is not saturated, additional rounds will be added. The process is illustrated in figure 1.
Select stakeholders who represent Thai People (Purposive samplings). Name list of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) at least 3 names for each role.

Name list of the living Best Practices (BPs) at least 3 names for each role.

Evident based competency interviews with BPs

List of actual competencies derived from BPs

Questionnaire I consolidated by researcher and calibrated by SMEs

Questionnaire II reviewed and calibrated by SMEs

Questionnaire N

Competency Model of Theravada Buddhist Monks in Thailand

Figure 1: Designed processes for the study of competencies of Theravada Buddhist Monks in Thailand

At the completion of this step, it is expected to have a competency model of Theravada Buddhist monks in Thailand as an outcome including definition, proficiency levels and importance.

To achieve high response rate and to accommodate panelists’ different style, both paper-and-pencil version and on-line Delphi will be used.

To conduct this research throughout the three steps, research ethics will be fully observed by ensuring no one is harmed or suffers adverse consequences from research activities through: violating disclosure agreements, breaking confidentiality, misrepresenting results, avoiding legal liability, deceiving participants. Rules of detachment and objectivity will be applied in all the process.
Conclusion

Research projects employing the Delphi method are fairly common in the doctoral literature. The process of successfully researching and submitting a doctoral thesis provides evidence (Grisham, 2008). In addition, the term appears in hundreds of articles, books and technical reports. Thousands of research projects, utilizing various modifications of the Delphi technique, have been undertaken in almost every field imaginable (Howze & Dalrymple, 2004).

Taking the subject of competencies of Theravada Buddhist monks, the Delphi Technique protocols and processes, the additional quantitative and qualitative methods adopted and the involvement of various Buddhist stakeholders, researcher is confident that the sensitivity and complexity of subject, the scope of the study in Thailand and heterogeneity of research methods make this study a rightsizing for doctoral research dissertation. The systematic research methods for the study of competency of Theravada Buddhist Monks in Thailand contribute to the reliability, validity and trustworthiness and serve to generate greater acceptance and wider impact to monastic society. The final results will be addressed with the ultimate goal to ignite changes. The competency model of Theravada Buddhist monks as expected outcome is a reflection and development tool for individual and organization i.e. the Sangha Council, Department of Religious Affairs, educators in universities to progress monks towards those expected competencies.

References


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