

Thai Youth's Leadership Code: Characteristics of Leadership from the Perspective of Thai Youth

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Abstract

The purpose of this study were: 1) to define the characteristics of leadership from the perspective of Thai Youth and 2) to investigate the Thai Youth Leadership Code by using Leadership Code Model. This study is qualitative research using Descriptive Methodology. The informants of the study are 16 Thai youth leaders (15 – 24 years old) who had participated in any oversea high school exchange student program to represent group identity. The data was collected by in-depth interview using key questions to define physical traits, style, situation, competencies, results, and brand of leadership. Data was analyzed following the Leadership Code Model which have 5 rules of leadership and 2 dimensions of time and attention. The findings indicated that Leadership from youth's perspectives can be classified as Personal Proficiency, Executor and Strategist respectively. The context of time has been found in Near-term operational dimension and the context of attention has been found in Organization dimension. Youth's Leadership prioritizes developing themselves first while the meaning of the organization is their society. In conclusion, this study found that the Leadership Code Model is the decent baseline for organizational leadership study rather than society, and is incomplete for youth's leadership evaluation. The recommendation is to conceptualize Youth's Leadership Code Model that is appropriate for youth's leadership study.

Keywords: Leadership, Youth, Leadership Code, Characteristics

Introduction

Youth development is a global issue that draws a lot of attention. Whether it is to develop young people with both hard skills; knowledge, profession skills, and teachable abilities, and soft skills; personal attributes, social skills, and emotional intelligent. It is necessary to provide a learning balance between academic skills and

social skills because all those skills are helpful for young people to live and work effectively in today's society that would lead to further nation's development.

In the fast changing world, it is a very challenge for young people to strive for higher education in order to reach the work requirements. This issue has been concerned in Thailand also, where young people are still experiencing a failure in career life or even during the high school years. Focusing on developing the academic skills in school are not enough for the young generation. There are other skills that critical for their career and future life such as communication skills, critical thinking, decision making, time management, language skills, teamwork, leadership etc. (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009) that young people should be cultivated at an early age as the development basis for learning other skills.

There are various development program for youth to be a better learner in school or an effective worker in organization, one of which is youth leadership development that has become increasingly popular nowadays. Meanwhile, there is ambiguity in the meaning of youth leadership. What is the suitable definition? What is the difference between leadership in youth and adult? Therefore, understanding the leadership in youth should be the first thing to do before creating the development program. (Woyach and Cox,1996)

In addition, the development of youth leadership should begin with a study of youth's perspective on leadership in order to know the meaning and characteristics of youth leaders from their point of view. (van Linden and Fertman,1998) By using the Leadership Code model (Ulrich, Smallwood and Sweetman, 2008) to define characteristics of youth leaders who live in the same society and culture, including similar personal experiences that influence their perspectives. Because of the meaning and characteristics of youth leadership are varied in each group context, the youth leadership in one society may not decent for another society.

What leadership characteristics are mentioned by youth? After decoding the youth leadership, it demonstrated the understanding of youth towards leadership styles and how they value the youth leadership. Which can be analyzed from the study results by using the Rules of Leadership as a framework to classify the leadership styles, and to indicate the uniqueness of youth leadership.

Youth Leadership

There are multiple researches on leadership. Mostly, focused in adult leadership or leadership in organization. There are some scholars who gave the meaning of youth leadership. In general, it is similar to adult leadership. Leadership in youth is narrower and more specifically than adult leadership. For example, the National Order of the Arrow (1992) implies that leadership in youth is the ability to lead oneself or work together with others for the ultimate goal or vision. On the other hand, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education (1990) is defined as the

ability to bring self and to work with others, but not necessarily to influence other people's actions.

Moreover, leadership in youth is the ability to point out people to action, influence the opinions and behaviors of others, and be a role model. (Wehmeyer, Agran and Hughes, 1998) Similar to the Adolescent Employment Readiness Center, Children's Hospital (n.d.) has suggested that youth leadership is the ability to analyze their strengths and weaknesses, be able to set their own goals and lives, and have self-confidence. This includes the ability to identify resources and use resources in their communities, not the only person who will live independently, but encourage community cooperation and make change in social also.

Sipe, Ma and Gambone (1998) describe that there are 3 types of the youth leadership role: 1) Formal role is a team or group leader who leads others group member in any activity or task. 2) Informal role is the facilitator of activity planning, regulation, and group management, as well as the provision of tools or materials. 3) Representation is representative on behalf of the group, such as fundraising activities.

In this study, the meaning of Youth Leadership is the ability of the youth to know and understand themselves. Have the ability to bring themselves and others to work together for the purposes of the work. Know how to manage people and their resources. Be responsible for the community, be able to support others and make changes in the community or society in a good way. Leadership in youth does not always need to be a leader of the group, but can be determined by roles within the group and personal qualities.

Leadership Code

This study used Leadership Code Model as a conceptual framework to define the characteristics of youth leadership. According to the Leadership Code Study (Ulrich, Smallwood and Sweetman, 2008), using 6 key questions to studied and defined the Leadership Code of top leaders from global business organizations such as Nike, Nokia, Microsoft, Cisco, Walmart and others. The purposes were to help leaders become better leaders and to help those who are leadership developers work better in organization.

6 key questions:

- 1) Physical traits: Who is a leader?
- 2) Style: How do you behave as a leader?
- 3) Situation: When and where do you focus on the person or the task?
- 4) Competencies: What exactly do leaders know and do?
- 5) Results: Why does leadership matter?

6) Brand: For whom are you leading?

The results were summarized into a model called “Leadership Code” which has 5 rules of leadership that leaders must know and understand at least the base knowledge of these rules to be an effective leader in organization. There are 2 dimensions of time that leaders take to think and take action in short term or long term, and attention that leaders focus on individual or organization. In each rule also refers to a leadership characteristic and style that will be used to classify youth leadership style or what we call youth’s leadership code in this research. (Figure 1)

5 rules of Leadership:

Rule 1: *Shape the future* is to see where we are going in the future. (The Strategist)

Rule 2: *Make things happen* is to create a work with the strategy. (The Executor)

Rule 3: *Engage today’s talent* is to know how to manage people properly. (The Talent managers)

Rule 4: *Build the next generation* is to develop the next generation for the future. (The Human capital developers)

Rule 5: *Invest in yourself* is to learn to develop your own talents. (The Personal proficiency)

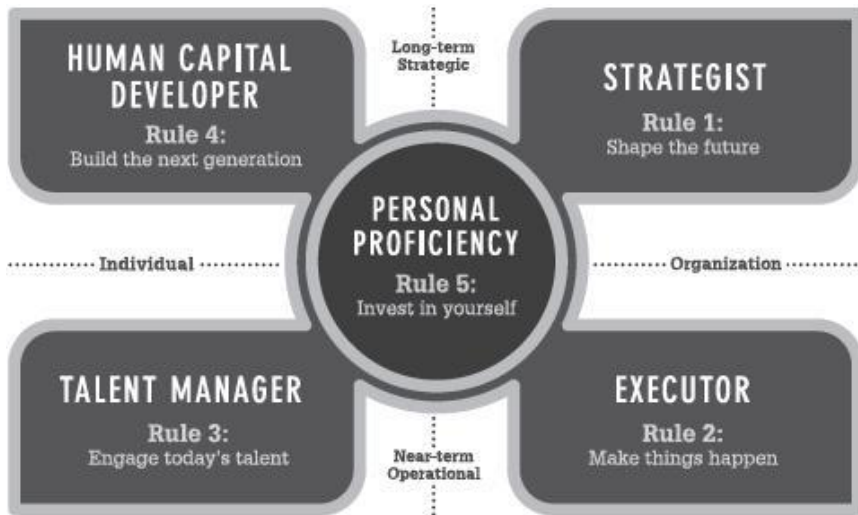


Figure 1: The Leadership Code Model (Ulrich, Smallwood and Sweetman, 2008, P.14)

Research design and Methods

This research is to study youth leadership by using Leadership Code Model as a conceptual framework. The researcher used key questions to define the characteristics of youth leadership through the perspective in order to getting insight information of Thai youth who currently live in Bangkok, Thailand by in-depth interview Thai youth leaders (aged 15-24) that allow them to reflect their views on physical traits, style, situation, competencies, results, and brand of leadership.

In order to understand the situation of the leadership role, and to represent the unique perspective of the group, The informants were selected from the youth leader who have leadership roles in any activities whether in academic, athletic or volunteer activities such as the student president, class representative, captain of the sport team, and the show manager etc., and who had participated in any long-term international exchange students program in any countries for an academic year (during the year 2010 – 2017). This group of participants can reflect their unique perspective on leadership through personal experiences, especially the experience gained from participating in the High school exchange students program that represent the identity of this youth group. (Sussman, 2002)

Informants selection process were enabling young people to sign up and answer basic demographic information, leadership roles, and countries participating in High school exchange program to selected variety informants of ages, leadership roles (formal, informal roles and participants) and the various activities; academic, athletics, recreational and volunteering in order to define the common and difference characteristics of leadership among diverse factors.

The study begins the demographic questionnaire by asking about their background, family, school, work, personal interests and experience from high school exchange student program to understand the context and influence of their ideas. The primary information were used for the In-depth interview combined with 6 key questions to gain insights about youth perspective on leadership characteristics and styles that can be conclude as a youth's leadership code of this research.

The selected Leadership Code model is the showcase example of how to define a youth leadership characteristic from their perspective, and investigate the characteristics by following 5 rules of leadership accompany with dimension of time and attention. This means that the results of this research are only a study of the leadership characteristic of this informants group, which may be different or similar to other youth group in another social context or different personal experience.

In addition to creating the youth's leadership code, this study aims to investigate the leadership code model that derived from leadership studies in adult by implementing in youth leadership studies. The results of this research can also demonstrate the similarity or differentiation of leadership criteria between adults and youth.

Results

The selected informants were 16 Thai youth Leaders (aged 15-24), 5 were male and 11 were female. (Table 1) Out of these 16 youth leaders who had participated in long-term international exchange students program, 7 of them were participated in the United States of America, 2 were in Japan, others 7 were in Russia, Germany, Italy, Norway, Republic of Latvia, Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica.

Aged	Male	Female
16	-	1
17	1	-
20	-	1
21	1	2
22	-	2
23	1	2
24	2	3
Total	5	11

According to the table 1, there are more female youth leaders than males. The missing age range from 18-19 year olds can be understood as transitional age from high school to university when Thai youth are more focused on the freshman activities from their seniors, and adjusted themselves to new educational system in university.

These 16 informants are the youth who have leadership roles in any school or outerschool activities which some of them might have many leadership roles at the time. In other words, the youth have a multifaceted leadership role, based on their abilities and interests such as the youth who have leadership roles in the student council also have a role in preserving music, sports and other extracurricular activities. Therefore, the leadership roles in this study can be classified following Sipe, Ma and Gambone study (1998). (Table 2)

Formal Roles	Informal Roles	Representation
School/University president Class/Faculty president Art/Music club leader Sport team captain	Student council member Club/Sport team manager Rural development camp volunteer	Arts and Crafts competition Athletes representative University cheerleader Journalist contest

Sports news facebook page editor Research team leader Startup business owner	Student art gallery crew Academic camp staff National Chemistry Olympiad liaison Charity concert crew	Outstanding Youth Award Thai exchange student representative
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The perspective on Leadership Characteristics

The results from In-depth Interview were categorized following the 6 key questions from the Leadership Code Model which are physical traits, style, situation, competencies, results, and brand of leadership. Each feature was grouped to reflect on the unique idea of youth leaders that reflected from their identity and personal experiences, including the researcher observations on the youth informants that were grouped by ranking based on their opinions. (Table 3)

Table 3: Thai youth's perspective on each leadership characteristic	
Physical traits	Overlooked the physical appearances Given the importance of leadership personalities Communicated effectively Other abstract attributes influenced by social norms
Style	Focus on people management Focus on teamwork Use the voting method Work in sequence
Situation	Look at the overview and plan first Making a rational decision Being decisive leader Being flexible and adaptable leader Take into account the impact on the followers
Competencies	Planning skill Communication skill Psychological skill Tactical skill
Results	Trustworthy Collaboration Happy work place Effectively work
Brand * Followers' behavior reflection	Responsive and effective followers Responsive with ineffective followers Unresponsive followers

1) Physical traits: Who is the leader?

The concrete physical, appearances and personalities of leadership that can be seen from the outside that reflects the image and opinion from the perspective of youth. Most of the informants believes that good leaders have to be from the inside out, so they overlooked the physical appearances but more focus on the behaviors. However, they accepted that personality is important for leaders to provide creditability and effective communication, speaking fluently with proper voice tone, directly visualize, and persuasive ability. Some of the informants mentioned about other abstract attributes influenced by social norms such as polite, humility, mercy, and honesty etc.

2) Style: How do you behave as a leader?

The behaviors or working style of the leader that the youth behaved when they take the role of leadership. Mostly, the informants focus on managing people, distributing jobs according to each individual's skills, thus saving time and work more efficiently. Secondly, they were more likely to work as a team, brainstorming and finding common agreements before starting the tasks could reduce conflicts within the team. Surprisingly, all the informants who had participated in High school exchange program in The United States mention that they always uses the voting method to make decision, and to be fair to everyone. Only a few said that they like their followers to work in order that they were assigned. They only have responsibility on their task and unable to interfere with others.

3) Situation: When and where do you focus on the person or the task?

The way of working that leader focus in each situation, person or task. The informants explains how they begin the task by look at the overview and plan first whether it is the content of the work or the people management. When started operating, it is the time to make a rational decision which depends on the situation. Occasionally, some jobs need leaders who are decisive who not hesitate to decide whether to go either way. At the same time, flexibility and adaptability were needed for leader who can handle any immediate situation and understand the various circumstances. Including take into account the impact on the followers to balance the positive and negative effects on both followers and tasks as much as possible by not leaving anyone behind.

4) Competencies: What exactly do leaders know and do?

There are several competencies and skills that leaders should possess, but the informants of this study focused on top 4 needed skills that leader should know and master. The first skill they mentioned were the ability to plan in advance, not only planning for the roadmap but also provide an individual plan for each task, including backup plan. The communication skills were often mentioned during the interview, they focus on speaking, listening, and presenting what the leaders want to convey to their followers, including the ability to communicate persuasively. So the skill that follows is the psychological skill that will be used to understand others. As a leader,

understanding individual needs and conditions are important in order to lead someone. Another skill mentioned was tactical skill, the leaders know how to behave, and how to use authority in circumstances.

5) Results: Why does leadership matter?

The importance or effect of leadership showed as a result on tasks. The informant opinions about the positive results that occur after the effective leadership are trustworthy which take time to build. Once the follower believes in the leader, the followers are willing to be supportive in any work. Good leadership cause collaboration in work. When we have trust in the team, there will be more cooperation which creates mutual agreement and makes everyone want to be part of the work. Collaboration between leaders and followers creates a happy work place that is conducive to effective work.

6) Brand: For whom are you leading?

The followers' behavior reflection on the leadership brand that the informants give an example on how their followers behave while working together, and how they response to the leader that can be categorize in 3 types. The first type is responsive and effective followers, who have the ability to understand the task, to be able to share the ideas, and to be responsible on the task by themselves. This type of followers always willing to support the leader in anyway. The second type is responsive with ineffective followers, who being able to understand some part of the task, but cannot take the responsibility and handle the task by themselves. This type of follower will have to stay on track and ask for task explanation more than usual which may cause damage or delays on the task. And last type of followers who have been activated but not showing any responsibility in the tasks assigned, this type of followers call unresponsive followers which impeding others' work and overall task accomplishments.

The criteria of youth leaders in this study do not allowed them to reflect on their leadership brand because of the different experiences and roles of leadership between youth and adults, so youth are unable to reflect the brand of the leadership. This raises the question of what is the youth leadership, due to the limitations of this study, there is ambiguity in the characteristics and definitions of youth leaders. Therefore the research asked the informants to define youth leadership characteristics from their point of views that can be define as follows.

The youth leadership characteristics from the perspective of Thai youth

1) Make changes in society – Focused on making change and development in their society, such as creating a movement or campaigning that youth raised up for their own society.

2) Being confident and think different - The courage to express the thought of the youth in order to be creative and different from the original idea. Dare to think outside the box.

3) Understanding the modern world and stay wisely - Understand the modern world that is constantly changing. Keep up to date. Cognizant of adults, listen carefully and think critically.

4) Develop themselves before develop others - They believed that self-development enable them to be able to help or develop others.

5) Be a prototype, idol, or youth icon - Because of the impersonating behavior of the youth, good youth leaders should be role models or idols in a good way for other youth.

6) Not everyone can be a leader, but everyone can develop a leadership - They believe that having leadership leads them to succeed, even if all youth are not leaders, but everyone is able to develop the skills and characteristics of leadership in some way.

Findings and Discussion:

The finding of youth leadership characteristics in this study shows that how youth defined and valued the meaning of the youth leadership. These can be used to classify leadership Characteristics from the Leadership Code model by considering the leadership characteristics that youth informants mentioned from their perspective about physical traits, style, situation, competencies, and results first, then considered the characteristic of youth leadership with 5 rules of leadership characteristics from the model. (Ulrich, D., Smallwood, N., and Sweetman, K., 2008) (Table 4)

Table 4: 5 Rules of Leadership Characteristics vs. Youth Leadership Characteristics	
5 Rules of Leadership Characteristics	Youth Leadership Characteristics
<u>Rule 1: The Strategist</u> Have point of view about the future Invite savviest outsiders inside Engage the organization – no one know enough Create strategic traction within the organization	Look at the overview and plan first Planning skill Psychological skill Tactical skill Being confident and think different
<u>Rule 2: The Executor</u> Make change happen Follow a decision protocol Ensure accountability Build Teams Ensure technical proficiency	Focus on teamwork Use the voting method Work in sequence Making a rational decision Take into account the impact on the followers

	Make changes in society
<u>Rule 3: The Talent managers</u> Effective communication Create aligned direction Strengthen others Provide people with the resources to cope Create a positive work environment Have fun at work	Communicated effectively Communication skill
<u>Rule 4: The Human capital developers</u> Map the workforce Create a firm and employee brand Help people manage their careers Find and develop next-generation talent Encourage networks and relationships	Focus on people management
<u>Rule 5: The Personal proficiency</u> Practice clear thinking Know yourself Tolerate stress Demonstrate learning agility Tend to your own character and integrity Take care of yourself Have personal energy and passion	Given the importance of leadership personalities Being decisive leader Being flexible and adaptable leader Understanding the modern world and stay wisely Develop themselves before develop others Be a prototype, idol, or youth icon Not everyone can be a leader, but everyone can develop a leadership

When compared youth leadership characteristics with 5 rules of leadership, it was found that youth leadership was classified as **The Personal proficiency** who focused on understand and invest in themselves, find their personally proficient, and develop themselves before develop the others and society. In fact, it is good that young people prioritize with self-development, because they are in the age of learning and gaining experiences for the future life. Finding out their capabilities would help the youth set future goals, and know what they really want in life. They believed that if they developed well, they will have the strength and ability to help others and their society. (Wehmeyer, Agran and Hughes, 1998)

In order to make change in the society, the youth leadership was classified as **The Executor** who knows how to achieve the goal, and who have rational decision making processes that take into account the effects on many aspects, especially the impact on

the followers. When we were young, it is possible that we were more likely to work as a team, rather than working alone, either in school or university or even in the future, working in a company or organization. Teamwork training would allowed young people to work effectively with others without conflict. (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009) When they know how to build a team in order to reach the goal, they will be a great leader of a powerful team.

The first rules of leadership is the leaders who can designs the future plan, so the youth with this ability were classified as **The Strategist**.

From the perspective of youth informants on an effective leadership characteristics, they mentioned about the abilities to plan systematically, think critically and to imagine what will happen in the future. These abilities are the basis for leaders that should learn and practice professionally, future visibility leaders will figure out the way to cope with what will happen in advance. Leaders need to be open to the different ideas of others to find the best strategy, and leaders must learn other skills to use in that strategy such as planning skill, psychological skill, and tactical skill. This type of leader must be confident and able to think differently.

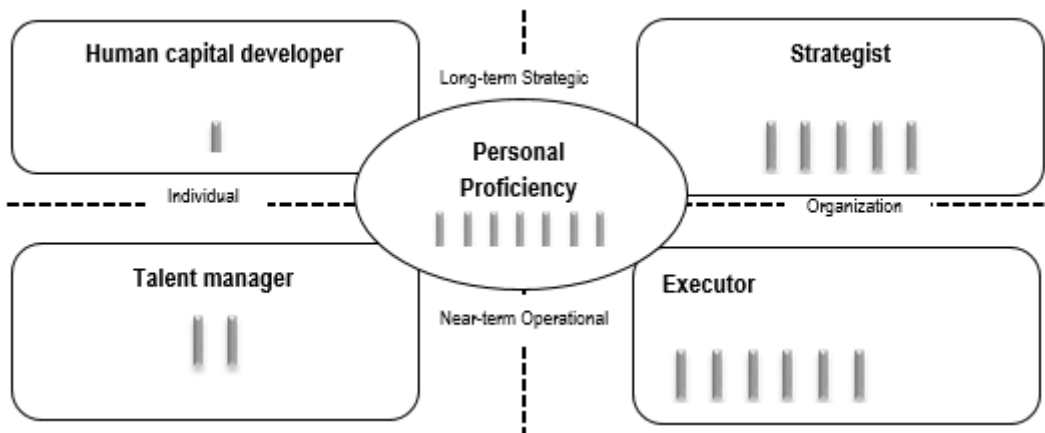


Figure 2: Youth Leadership Characteristics in Leadership Code Model

In considering the dimension of time, youth are characterized by **Near-term Operational**, i.e., the role of youth leadership is overlapping, and often changes in the context of individual youth. A youth leader's tasks could be characterized as a one-time or a session task, such as presiding over a student's academic year, being a charity music concert crew, or representing a school athlete for a season.

The dimension of attention found that youth leaders focused on **The Organization**, although most of them focused on self-development, but it was for the team or the others. Saying that young people like to work as a team, whether small or large teams, every youth leaders wanted to create or change something at the end, and that is their society. So the meaning of the organization of the youth is the society itself.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

In conclusion, the results of this study describe the characteristics of youth leadership from the perspective of youth. Using leadership models is a framework for the study, which results in the description of each leadership characteristics, however, it not indicated that youth leaders must have the following characteristics. This is a study on viewpoints of specific youth group who reflect on the individual's identity and personal experience, which allow us to understand how young people are knowledgeable about leadership, their feelings and their opinions toward effective leadership.

Research on leadership code model has found that there were differences in context between leadership in adults and youth, therefore this study findings cannot used to conceptualize models of youth leadership completely. The Leadership Code Model are more decent with the organizational leadership study rather than society which identified by the youth informants. However, this study provides useful findings for study of youth leadership, and conceptualize the suitable youth leadership models in the future research.

In addition, the results of this study also remarked on the cultural dimension as the youth were Thai exchange student in foreign country for a period of time that may be possible to reflect the similarity of the thought which influenced from another culture that could be found in further study.

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