

# Improving Public School Performance through Vision-based Leadership

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While vision-based leadership, frequently referred to as transformational leadership in the education literature, is widely regarded as critical to successful organization transformation, little research has been conducted into the relationship between vision-based leadership and public school performance in Thailand. Derived from substantial literature, a model is proposed to investigate if vision attributes (brevity, clarity, future orientation, stability, challenge, abstractness, and desirability or ability to inspire) and content (relating to teacher and student satisfaction, and efficiency) are associated with higher public school performance, while taking into account Principal, Teacher, & Organizational Factors. Future research directions and managerial implications are also discussed.

Key Words: visionary leadership, vision, transformational, school performance

With the ever-changing rate, form and scope of global changes, governments in the Asia Pacific region are faced with increasing difficulty in putting their educational policies into practice (Caldwell, 1998; Cheng & Townsend, 2000; Dimmock & Walker, 1998; Fullan, 1990; Hallinger, 1998; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Murphy & Adam, 1998). With that in mind, leadership scholars around the world have long searched for the kind of leadership needed for organizations to survive and remain competitive, and for many of them, leadership with vision as a core component is the answer (Avery, 2004; Bass, 1990; Conger, 1991; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Kantabutra & Kantabutra, 2005; Tichy & Divanna, 1986). Educational leaders can no longer be passive, but will need to look ahead to the future and scan the environment for external forces of change impacting upon schools, a CEO-like function called "visioning" (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Leithwood, 1994).

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In particular, public schools are facing an increasingly competitive and dynamic educational environment, as well as numerous challenges, such as a general public demand for quality education. In academia, the importance of vision-based leadership, frequently referred to, or better known, as transformational leadership (e.g. Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Leithwood, Hallinger, & Colleagues, 2002), has also been widely discussed. Particularly relevant to education reform, vision has been asserted as the starting point of successful transformation process (e.g. Collins & Porras, 1994; Doz & Prahalad, 1987; Hunt, 1991; Kantabutra & Kantabutra, 2005; Kotter, 1990; Robbins & Duncan, 1988; Sashkin, 1988).

Overall, vision-based leadership has been studied in a wide variety of samples and industries, predominantly at the individual level rather than at the business-unit and organizational levels. Generally positive findings between vision-based leadership and individual follower performance, attitudes, and perceptions have been reported (Baum, Locke, & Kirkpatrick, 1998), with no published studies reporting a negative relation between charismatic/visionary leadership and individual performance.

At the business-unit level, two studies of corporate managers (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Howell & Avolio, 1993) reported significant relationships between

charismatic leadership and performance. At the organization level, a major study found positive relationships between characteristics of CEO visions and venture growth, as measured by sales, profits, employment, and net worth, thereby supporting the view that vision is critical to broader organizational success (Baum *et al.*, 1998). Later on, Kantabutra (2003) conducted another study that investigated effects of vision components and vision realization factors on Australian retail stores, generally positive findings were reported.

Internationally, a number of studies have examined the role of vision-based leadership in improving school performance (e.g. Hopkins & Ainscow, 1993; Stoll & Fink, 1992, 1994; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). However, there is little published research investigating the relationship between vision-based leadership and school performance in Thailand, although espousing a vision is widely regarded as critical to school performance here (e.g. Intasan, 2002; Sekkhunthod, 2002; Siriwat, 2002; Theppudthangkul, 2001). Since vision-based leadership appears to be widely recognized, and a major study conducted across 62 cultures, including the Thai culture, found that several attributes reflecting vision-based leadership are universally endorsed as contributing to outstanding leadership (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1999), I anticipate that vision-based leadership will be valid in the Thai public school system as well.

In this article, the literature on vision-based leadership, both in the corporate and educational sectors, is reviewed. The article, where leaders and followers are defined as school principals and teachers respectively, begins with three broad questions: (a) what is a vision?; (b) what are vision components?; (c) how could one espouse a vision to achieve superior performance outcomes? The literature on school performance measurement is also reviewed. Attempting to integrate many facets and levels of vision-based leadership, I then propose a new research model for further testing in Thai public schools. Relevant hypotheses are derived accordingly, and future research directions to test them are also discussed. This paper is concluded with managerial implications for public school leaders.

## Vision

Since much confusion exists as to what vision is, I attempt to define the term “vision” in this section. Two vision components are suggested in the literature: vision

attributes and vision content. Both components as well as their operational definitions are discussed in this section.

### *A Definition of Vision*

Research into vision is complicated by the fact that the concept of vision is not clearly defined in the literature, with definitions ranging from a goal-oriented mental construct (Seeley, 1992), a force field whose formative influence leaders can use to create a power, not a place (Wheatley, 1999), to vision being the force moulding meaning for people in an organization (Manasse, 1986). A vision to one could be a mission, goal or strategy to another (Kantabutra & Avery, 2002), the consequence of which impacts theorizing, practicing, and research in the broad leadership area. Avoiding the confusing definitional issue altogether, Baum *et al.* (1998) and Kantabutra (2003) opted to define the term vision as each leader defines it, arguing that it is the leader’s actual vision that guides his/her choices and actions. This pragmatic definitional approach makes much sense for two main reasons. First, each leader develops a vision in his/her own way, sometimes rationally and objectively, often intuitively and subjectively (Nanus, 1992). Second, visionary leadership can vary importantly from leader to leader in both the leader’s style, the content of the leader’s vision, and the context in which it takes root (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). With these points in mind, it is not realistic to prescribe a single standard definition for the idea of vision. Thus, in investigating any relationships between vision-based leadership and organizational performance, it is essential to consider the visionary tools that the leader actually employs, rather than a possibly unrelated theoretical definition. Baum *et al.*’s (1998) and Kantabutra’s (2003) approach of *adopting what individual leaders regard as a vision* offers a pragmatic way around the definitional confusion in the vision literature. Therefore, the approach is adopted in this paper.

### *Attributes of Vision*

Although many leadership and business strategy theorists have postulated various attributes that a vision should have, some commonly shared attributes can be identified. Common attributes include: *brevity* (Baum *et al.* 1998; Kantabutra & Avery, 2002; Locke, Kirkpartick, Wheeler, Schneider, Niles, Goldstein, Welsh, & Chah., 1991), *clarity* (Baum *et al.*, 1998; Jacobs & Jaques, 1990; Kantabutra & Avery, 2002; Locke *et al.*, 1991; Nanus, 1992;

Sashkin, 1988; Sims & Lorenzi, 1992; Williams-Brinkley, 1999), *future orientation* (Baum *et al.*, 1998; Jacobs & Jaques, 1990; Kantabutra & Avery, 2002; Kotter, 1990; Lipton, 1996; Locke *et al.*, 1991; Senge, 1990; Williams-Brinkley, 1999), *stability* (Baum *et al.*, 1998; Kantabutra & Avery, 2002; Locke *et al.*, 1991), *challenge* (Baum *et al.*, 1998; Kantabutra & Avery, 2002; Locke *et al.*, 1991; Nanus, 1992; Sashkin, 1988; Sims & Lorenzi, 1992), *abstractness* (Baum *et al.*, 1998; Kantabutra & Avery, 2002; Locke *et al.*, 1991), and *desirability or ability to inspire* (Baum *et al.*, 1998; Kantabutra & Avery, 2002; Locke *et al.*, 1991; Sashkin, 1988; Sims & Lorenzi, 1992; Williams-Brinkley, 1999). These commonly-shared attributes are proposed as effective vision attributes for the examination of vision-based leadership in a Thai public school setting.

In his attempt to develop a vision theory to fill in the gap of the prevailing vision-based leadership theories (e.g. Bass, 1990; Conger, 1991; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Tichy & Divanna, 1986; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989), Kantabutra (2003) asserted that the seven vision attributes interactively create a significant impact on overall organizational performance initially through follower satisfaction. A brief vision alone will not significantly impact overall performance because it may not be clear to followers as to what needs to be done (e.g. Conrad, 1990; Pace & Faules, 1989), or the brief vision may not challenge followers to do their best (Collins & Porras, 1996; Conger & Kanungo, 1987). A clear vision alone will not significantly impact follower satisfaction because it may be far too long, making it difficult for a leader to communicate it to make an impact (e.g. Kotter, 1995; Yukl, 1989). It also may not be abstract, thus putting the leader in a difficult situation to form a group to carry out the vision (Messick & Mackie, 1989). Moreover, abstractness reflects stability in the vision because it suggests to stakeholders no drastic change over time (e.g. Gabarro, 1987; Tichy & Devanna, 1986). An unstable vision points out to the followers a lack of leadership's integrity and commitment to the vision (Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Parikh & Neubauer, 1993), negatively affecting follower satisfaction. A brief, clear, abstract, challenging, and stable vision will not draw follower commitment in working toward the vision unless it is desirable or possess an ability to inspire (Morden, 1997). In addition, when a vision is not inspiring or desirable, it is difficult to develop a shared vision within the organization (Parikh & Neubauer, 1993), found to be critical to organizational performance (Kantabutra & Avery, 2005). An inspiring vision that is only clear, brief, abstract, challenging, and stable will have no power to attract

commitment from the followers because it does not offer a view of a better future (Nanus, 1992). Without a desirable future picture, followers cannot be emotionally drawn from where they presently are to work toward the vision (Senge, 1990). Therefore, combining all seven vision attributes is expected to influence a vision's effectiveness.

Empirically, visions characterized by the attributes of brevity, clarity, abstractness, challenge, future orientation, stability, and desirability or ability to inspire have been found to have an indirect relationship with customer satisfaction and a direct relationship with staff satisfaction (Kantabutra, 2003). Such visions were also found to play a significant role in nurturing a shared vision, critical for effective leadership (Kantabutra & Avery, 2005). A direct effect from the vision attributes on staff satisfaction, a leading indicator of overall organizational performance, endorses the similar finding on the direct effect from the seven vision attributes on organizational performance as measured by venture growth (Baum *et al.*, 1998).

Adapted from a previous study by Kantabutra (2003), operational definitions for the seven vision attributes adapted for the model are: (a) brevity is the degree to which a vision statement contains approximately 11-22 words; (b) clarity is the degree to which a vision statement directly points at a prime goal it wants to achieve; (c) abstractness is the degree to which a vision statement is not a one-time goal that can be met, resulting in the vision then being discarded; (d) challenge is the degree to which a vision statement motivates teachers to try their best to achieve a desirable outcome; (e) future orientation is the degree to which a vision statement indicates the long-term perspective of the school and the environment in which it functions; (f) stability is the degree to which a vision statement is unlikely to be changed by any market or technology change; and (g) desirability or ability to inspire is the degree to which a vision statement specifies a goal and how the goal directly benefits teachers.

An example of a vision statement characterized by the seven vision attributes is below.

*“To be the leading public school in Asia by providing the most rewarding learning experience to students at an affordable price.”*

This vision statement is brief and clear since it points directly at a prime goal and contains 21 words. It is also abstract because the prime goal is not a one-time goal that can be met, and the vision is then discarded. Aiming *to be the leading public school in Asia* is also future-oriented as it

indicates the long-term perspective of an organization and the future environment in which it functions. This vision is also stable. No matter how far it is projected into the future, the vision statement is unlikely to be affected by any market or technology change. This vision is also very challenging and desirable for organizational members.

### ***Vision Content***

Vision content plays a critical role in the visionary leadership process. Recently, Rafferty and Griffin (2004), drawing upon their study of a large Australian public sector organization, suggest that visions do not always create a positive impact on follower attitudes, and that one should distinguish between “strong” and “weak” visions as well as vision content to see their effectiveness. A successful strategic vision appears to take into account industry, customers, and an organization’s specific competitive environment in identifying an innovative competitive position in the industry (Pearson, 1989). Ideally the specific competitive business environment should differentiate the content of visions across organizations (Collins & Porras, 1994). For example, Williams-Brinkley (1999) argued that the focus of a healthcare vision should always be on customers, their families and staff. In an educational setting, customers can be referred to as students, while staff can be referred to as teachers. Therefore, *students and teacher satisfaction imageries* are proposed as relevant vision content for the present model, because it is expected that the more a school principal, or a top manager of a school, envisions satisfying students and teachers, the higher the school performance. Moreover, resources utilization has always been emphasized in the public school sector (Kantabutra & Kantabutra, 2005). Therefore, *school efficiency imagery* is included as the third component of vision content in this paper. The more a school principal envisions increasing school efficiency, the better the resources will be utilized and the better the school performance.

Adapting Kantabutra’s (2003) operational definitions, vision content proposed for the examination in the public school setting are operationalized as: (a) student satisfaction imagery is the degree to which a vision statement refers to increasing student satisfaction; (b) teacher satisfaction imagery is the degree to which a vision statement contains reference to increasing teacher satisfaction; and (c) efficiency imagery is the degree to which a vision statement contains reference to increasing school efficiency.

## **Vision Realization Variables**

Since (a) vision is only 10% of the visionary leadership process and its implementation is the rest (Jick, 2001), and (b) although studies (Baum *et al.*, 1998; Kantabutra, 2003) suggest that vision can have a direct impact on performance outcomes, three sets of intervening factors in the visionary leadership process are expected to operate: Leader, Follower and Organizational Factors. In a school setting, these factors can be referred to as Principal, Teacher, and Organizational Factors respectively. Relevant literature and operational definitions for each set of the factors are discussed below.

### ***Leader Factor***

Theoretically, the Leader Factor includes the variables of *vision communication* (e.g. Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1988), *passion for vision* (e.g. Kotter, 1996; Nanus, 1992), *behavioral consistency* (e.g. Bennis, 1984; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Lipton, 1996), *organizational alignment* (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Kotter, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 1987), *ability to exercise authority to implement vision plans* (e.g. Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985), *empowerment* (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Cowley & Domb, 1997), and *motivation* (e.g. Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Bass, 1985). Leaders need to perform these variables to realize their visions.

Once a vision has been developed, vision-based leaders communicate their vision to broaden support from stakeholders (Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987). They are also highly passionate about their vision, acting consistently with it (Kotter, 1996; Nanus, 1992). This is because if they preach one thing and act on another, follower satisfaction will suffer (Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Parikh & Neubauer, 1993). Vision-based leaders are also given authority to realign organizational systems to suit their vision (Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985). In redesigning the organizational systems, they facilitate the desired change and empower their followers to act consistently with their vision. In addition, vision-based leaders provide support and resources services to their followers in their pursuit of the vision (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Cowley & Domb, 1997). Lastly, vision-based leaders motivate their followers in times of difficulty (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Bass, 1985, Locke *et al.*, 1991), since they cannot carry out the vision alone.

How leaders realize their visions has been subject to scrutiny by leadership researchers. Among others, Baum *et*

al. (1998) found that visions created effects on organizational-level performance indirectly via vision communication, endorsing numerous theoretical assertions that visionary leaders communicate their vision (e.g. Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987). In testing his organizational simulation among Australian retailers, Kantabutra (2003) reported that retail store managers' visions enhanced staff satisfaction, particularly where the managers communicated their visions, were passionate about their visions, acted consistently with their visions, and motivated and empowered their staff to act on the visions. In addition, where store managers fully exercised their authority to turn their visions into reality, and aligned store management systems to suit their visions, staff satisfaction was enhanced. Staff satisfaction in turn affects overall organizational performance. In a school setting, Leithwood, Begley and Cousins (1992) found that effective school leaders clearly articulated their visions and that teachers and principals referred to the visions in making their daily decisions, making their behaviors consistent with the visions. They also further suggest that vision encompasses practices on the part of the leader aimed at identifying new opportunities for his/her school and developing, articulating and inspiring others with a vision of the future.

Operational definitions for the Leader Factor variables are: (a) vision communication is the degree to which a principal communicates his/her vision to his/her teachers via spoken, written, and technology-mediated channels; (b) passion for the vision is defined as the degree to which a principal is passionate about his/her vision; (c) behavioral consistency is defined as the degree to which a principal acts consistently with his/her vision; (d) organizational alignment is the degree to which a principal aligns teachers and school support systems to suit his/her vision; (e) ability to exercise authority is the degree to which a principal feels constrained to exercise his/her authority in implementing his/her school vision; (f) empowerment is the degree to which a principal empowers his/her teachers; and (g) motivation is the degree to which a principal energizes his/her teachers.

### ***The Follower Factor***

Without followers, a leader will find it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve his/her audacious goals. In the visionary leadership process, follower variables are particularly important when the challenge of gaining commitment from followers using a single vision is intensified in a global world. Theoretically, follower variables that form the Follower

Factor include the variables of *vision guiding* (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Lipton, 1996), *shared vision* (e.g. Reardon, 1991; Sashkin, 1985), and *emotional commitment to the vision* (e.g. Collins & Porras, 1994; Lipton, 1996).

A vision-based leader relies on followers who will accept and help execute the vision (Daft, 2005). Followers of a vision-based leader are not expected to be passive, but have a responsibility to participate in the group, work towards the vision and make their voices heard in influencing what is accomplished (Avery, 2004). Although each follower acts independently, everyone needs to proceed in the same direction. In doing so, followers' use of their leader's *vision in guiding their work* is important (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Lipton, 1996; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1990; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). One function of a vision is to facilitate decision-making, initiative, and discretion by followers at all levels (Yukl, 1989), impacting individual and collective performance outcomes.

In addition, many scholars (e.g. Avery, 2004; Kantabutra & Kantabutra, 2005; Reardon, 1991; Sashkin, 1985; Senge, 1990) assert that *vision needs to be shared* between leader and followers to make an impact on organizational performance. Follower *affective commitment* to a shared vision indeed has been a hallmark of the school effectiveness and improvement literature of the past two decades (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). When, sharing a vision, followers are emotionally committed, they will be willing, even eager, to commit voluntarily and completely to something that enables their own organization to grow and progress (Nanus, 1992). Therefore, whether and how followers are emotionally committed to their leader's vision could impact individual and collective performance outcomes. To improve school performance, numerous education scholars (e.g. Deal & Peterson, 1990; Larson-Knight, 2000; Sheppard & Brown, 2000) have also suggested that a shared vision may grow and be maintained over time within the culture of a school, thus becoming a guiding value frame for all school members.

Operational definitions for the Follower Factor are: (a) vision guiding is the degree to which a teacher uses his/her principal's vision to guide daily operations; (b) shared vision is the degree to which teacher personal visions are similar to their principal's vision; and (c) emotional commitment is the degree to which a teacher is emotionally committed to the principal's vision.

### ***The Organizational Factor***

A public school cannot operate efficiently and

effectively unless it is provided with sufficient financial and manpower support. Therefore, the Organizational Factor I propose here includes the variables of *financial and human resource support*, which managers are often said to require for realizing their visions (e.g. Cowley & Domb, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Locke *et al.*, 1991).

Vision-based leaders acquire support for their visions from both internal and external stakeholders (e.g. Cowley & Domb, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Locke *et al.*, 1991; Nanus, 1992). These stakeholders are, for example, workers and managers inside the organization, as well as customers, investors, and other important people outside the organization such as state government or other governing bodies. Middle and lower levels of management in particular must be involved, and financial as well as human resources must also be committed (Sashkin, 1985). This support acquisition is particularly relevant to public schools in Thailand, given that public schools are a major expenditure component for taxpayers in the country and the education sector has received the largest share of total public expenditure for the last decade (Kantabutra & Kantabutra, 2005).

Operational definitions for the Organizational Factor are: (a) financial support is the degree to which a principal has received sufficient financial support in implementing his/her vision plan; and (b) human resource support is the degree to which a principal has received sufficient human resource support in implementing his/her vision plan.

## Public School Performance Measurement

In examining a relationship between leadership and public school performance, systems of measurement need to be identified. Given that educational organizations generally have multiple objectives and multiple outputs, many of these objectives and outputs cannot be clearly measured or quantified. Developing systems of measurement of school performance is thus essential for performance-based school reform (Bifulco & Bretschneider, 2001), although it is notoriously difficult to do so (Monk, 1990). In an attempt to define public school systems of measurement of performance for this article, I examine and accordingly adopt customer satisfaction, student achievement, and employee satisfaction as well as school efficiency, the discussion of which is below.

*Customer satisfaction* has been one of the most frequently-cited, non-financial strategic performance measures (Gates, 2000). Drucker (1954) underlines the essence of keeping customer satisfied that a company's most important

asset is its customers. If they are satisfied, the company will simply prosper. Customer satisfaction is in fact a leading indicator of other critical measures of business performance such as customer loyalty, profit, market share, and growth (Anderson, Fornell & Lehman, 1994; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Buzzell & Gale, 1987; Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987; Hurley & Estelami, 1998; Rust & Zahorik, 1993).

Customer satisfaction, or student satisfaction here, alone cannot exhaustively explain school performance. Therefore, *student achievement* is proposed as another performance indicator in the proposed model (Hanushek, 1986; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979), given that educational scholars found that instructional outcomes are enhanced when staff members have clear goals and maintain a sense of common purpose (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Edmonds, 1979; Leithwood, 1994). In Thailand, the comprehensive national achievement test, or the Thai Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) can be used for measuring student achievement (Kantabutra & Kantabutra, 2005). The SAT is a test that measures verbal, numerical and analytical abilities, and the educational tool used to test the developed ability of students from their learning experience.

By nature, the customer satisfaction measure reflects business performance as perceived externally, and as the aggregated outcome of the whole service or product delivery process. Therefore, a key performance indicator for internally-perceived performance is needed. *Employee satisfaction* is adopted, given this reason. Employee satisfaction has been cited by many scholars as a performance indicator in business organizations (e.g. Anderson, 1984; Barbin & Boles, 1996; Tompkins, 1992; van Dyck, 1996; Yeung & Berman, 1997), given that there is a link between the level of employee satisfaction and business performance in most of the world's leading companies, and engaging the commitment of employees is a priority for organizations trying to achieve or sustain leadership in industries and markets (International Survey Research, 1997). This comes as no surprise since organizational leaders long recognize that they cannot achieve their vision without the focus and commitment of their entire workforce (Jones, 1996). More and more studies (e.g. International Survey Research, 1997; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Topolosky, 2000) suggest that increases in overall organizational productivity might be gained simply by paying attention to employees. In a school setting, Krug (1992) found that shared vision was one leadership area that was positively related to teacher satisfaction and student commitment to learning.

Since public schools are a major expenditure component

for taxpayers in each nation, the resulting efficiency is an important public policy issue (Mante & O'Brien, 2002). School efficiency is therefore commonly agreed as a critical performance indicator for policy makers (Bradley, Johnes, & Millington, 2001; Mante & O'Brien, 2002), because it provides guidelines on how schools can improve further (Soteriou, Karahanna, Papanastasiou, & Diakourakis, 1998; Mante & O'Brien, 2002). In Thailand, at least, school efficiency has been measured in terms of economic efficiency, and teaching and school administration efficiency (Kantabutra & Kantabutra, 2005). School inputs and outputs have not been taken into consideration in measuring a school's efficiency. In measuring school efficiency, input and output variables must be considered to evaluate whether schools have been maximizing student outcomes in the most efficient way by using their allocated resources (Coelli, Rao, & Battese, 1998; Fried, Lovell, & Schmidt, 1993). *School efficiency* is the last performance measure proposed for the model.

Operational definitions for teacher and student satisfaction are: (a) teacher satisfaction is the degree to which a teacher is satisfied with his/her job as measured by pay, fringe benefits, autonomy, task requirements, teacher policies, interaction, professional status, guidance, co-workers, recognition, and career advancement (Slavitt, Stamps, Piedmont, & Hasse, 1986); (b) student satisfaction is the degree to which a student is satisfied with overall educational experience as measured by excellence of instruction in major, ability to get desired classes, knowledgeable advisor, knowledgeable faculty, overall quality of instruction, worthiness of investment, advisor approachability, safe and secure campus, clear and reasonable requirements for major, availability of advisor, adequate computer labs, fair and unbiased faculty, and access to information (Elliot & Shin, 2002).

Student achievement is measured by student scores on analytical, verbal and numerical subjects (Kantabutra & Kantabutra, 2005). Lastly, school efficiency value can be derived from the following inputs and outputs (Kantabutra & Kantabutra, 2005). Inputs are teacher-student ratio, educational level of teachers, teaching experience, school size, and parents' education. Outputs are national test scores on verbal, numerical and analytical abilities, and attendance rate.

## Measurement Model

Based on the literature review above, a measurement model is derived. Since relationships among the various

characteristics of a vision and organizational performance, particularly in a public school setting in Thailand and elsewhere, are not yet well understood, Figure 1 depicts a model proposing a link between vision and public school performance derived from the vision, business strategy, leadership, education and performance literature.

Two domains of variables, vision attributes and content, shown in Figure 1, are represented in a vision main effects path model that has public school performance as measured by student and teacher satisfaction, student achievement, and efficiency as the outcome variable. The vision attributes domain includes individual variables of brevity, clarity, abstractness, future orientation, stability, inspiring, and challenge. The vision content domain encompasses the individual variables of teacher and student satisfaction, and efficiency imageries. Based on previous empirical evidence in the corporate world (Baum *et al.*, 1998; Kantabutra, 2003), vision attributes and content can be expected to have *direct effects*, as shown by the solid lines, on student and teacher satisfaction, student achievement, and efficiency.

However, a simple main-effects path model would suffer the limitations that the two vision domains do not necessarily afford an exhaustive explanation of public school performance, nor are student and teacher satisfaction, student achievement, and efficiency four complete indicators of public school performance. Hence, *indirect effects* are hypothesized to operate, represented by the dotted lines linking vision attributes and content to student and teacher satisfaction, student achievement, and efficiency via the three domain factors identified in the literature: Principal, Teacher and Organizational Factors. These three factors are proposed for testing as indirect-effect path variables, because (a) it is not clear from the literature whether they are direct or indirect-effect path variables and (b) having a vision alone is unlikely to maximize a positive impact on performance, unless leaders attempt to realize the vision through the three factors. By including the three factors, this proposed model closely represents an actual public school setting.

Since the literature continuously indicates that vision-based leadership can have positive effects on performance outcomes, a directional hypothesis is adopted for this model. The following hypotheses are advanced accordingly.

*Hypothesis 1:* Vision attributes of brevity, clarity, abstractness, challenge, future orientation, stability, and desirability or ability to inspire are directly associated with enhanced student and teacher satisfaction, student achievement, and school efficiency, taking into account

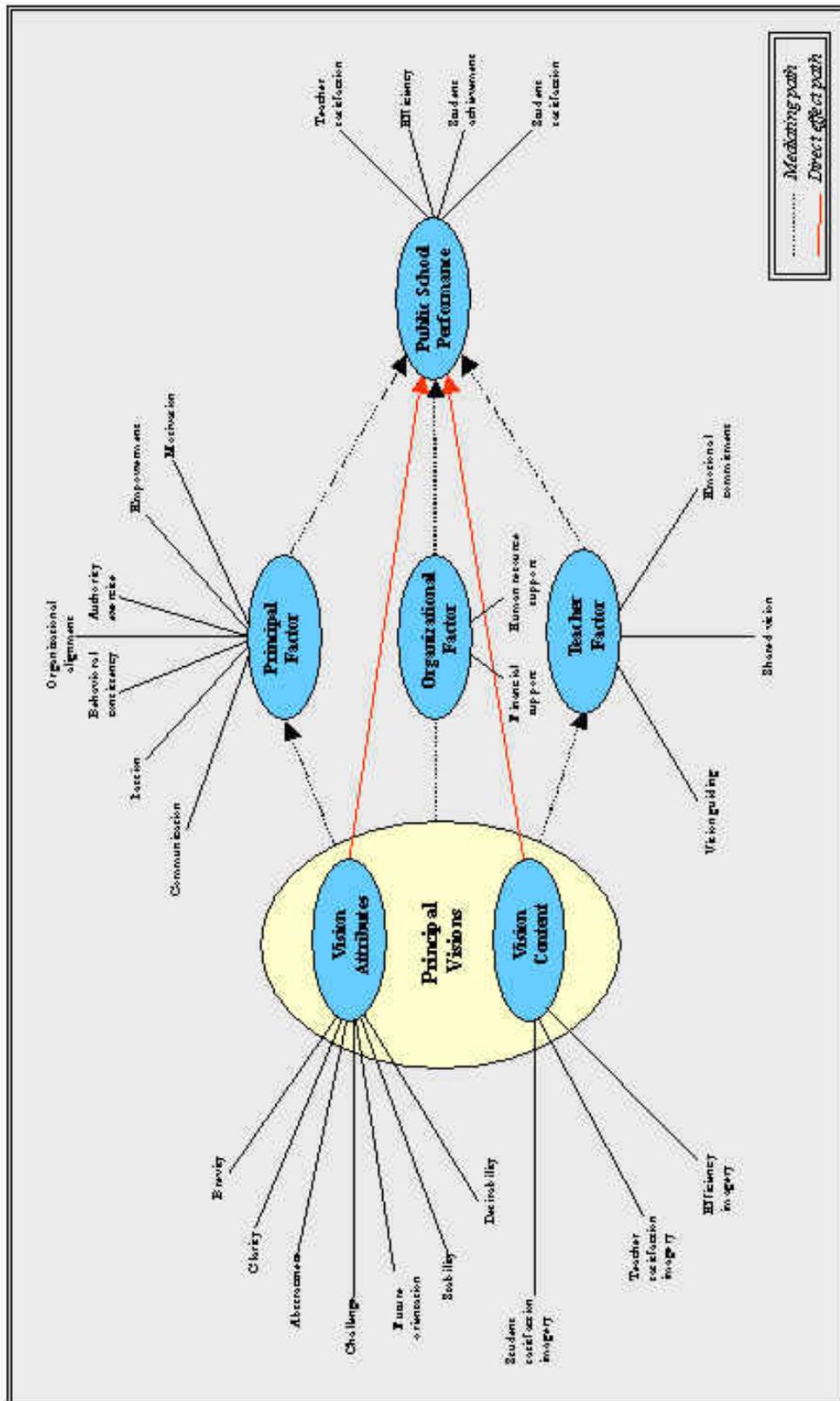


Figure 1. Vision-based leadership – public school performance measurement model

the intervening variables of Principal, Teacher, and Organizational Factors.

*Hypothesis 2:* Vision content of student and teacher satisfaction, and efficiency imageries are directly associated with enhanced student and teacher satisfaction, student achievement, and school efficiency, taking into account the intervening variables of Principal, Teacher, and Organizational Factors.

### **Future Research Directions**

Given that empirically school leaders can influence school effectiveness through adopting vision-based leadership, school leaders in Southeast Asia, at least, have not been aware of the essence of vision-based leadership for school improvement and how they can espouse it. Lending support to this view, Hallinger (2003) points out that developing nations in the Asia Pacific region need to develop their own knowledge base on school leadership, because their existing knowledge base is less mature than in the industrialized West (e.g. Bajunid, 1996; Cheng, 1995; Hallinger, 1995). When Thai school leaders, for example, receive leadership training, they generally learn Western-derived frameworks that usually lack even the mildest forms of cultural validation (Cheng, 1995; Swierczek, 1988). The cultural validation is much needed to enhance effectiveness of the leadership training, since countries in the Asia Pacific region are so diverse even among themselves and culturally different from their Western counterparts. The lack of cultural validation indicates a need to test the two hypotheses proposed above in Thailand as a starting point for other countries in the Asia Pacific region.

One critical area to test is whether visions characterized by brevity, clarity, abstractness, challenge, future orientation, stability, and desirability are associated with higher teacher and student satisfaction, student achievement, and efficiency than visions without these attributes. Similarly, one can test whether visions with teacher and student satisfaction, and efficiency imageries are associated with higher teacher and student satisfaction, student achievement, and efficiency than visions without. It would also be interesting to examine the extent to which vision affects teacher and student satisfaction, student achievement, and school efficiency through any or all of the proposed vision realization variables, namely Principal, Teacher, and Organizational Factors. Whether effective visions should have some or all of these characteristics, or

what the optimal mix should be, remains to be determined.

One of the challenges for researchers is the lack of agreement on defining vision. I have recommended adopting Baum *et al.*'s (1998) and Kantabutra's (2003) approach of using what individual leaders regard as their vision. In order to be able to compare these disparate visions, leadership researchers may need to employ independent raters to rank the vision statements according to a predefined set of operational definitions of vision attributes and content.

Another challenge for researchers is how to measure public school performance. I have included teacher and student satisfaction, student achievement, and efficiency measures as four broad performance measures. However, future researchers may want to expand the proposed model by adopting such hard measures as growth.

Lastly, Hallinger and Heck (1998) as well as Witziers, Bosker and Krüger (2003) stress the need to use multi-directional models in future research into the principal's role in school effectiveness. Adopting a longitudinal approach, future research may investigate reciprocal, causal relationships among the independent and dependent variables above, which may be multi-directional, change over time, and even be non-linear.

### **Managerial Implications**

If endorsed by future research, the proposed model will have significant practical implications, particularly for public school reform. Once effective vision components for public schools are known, public school principals can apply them to develop their visions to maximize school performance via teacher and student satisfaction, student achievement, and efficiency. The model suggests that visions that are brief, clear, abstract, challenging, future oriented, stable, and desirable, and those that contain a high level of teacher and student satisfaction, and efficiency imageries, will be more effective in enhancing teacher and student satisfaction, student achievement, and efficiency. School principals can not only strive to develop visions fitting the above characteristics, but are also advised to pay attention to the three vision realization factors of Principal, Teacher and Organizational Factors.

While waiting for the results of future research, I hope school principals seeking to maximize the effectiveness of their visions will find the guidelines presented in this paper useful, where they see a cultural fit. Visions need not only certain attributes, but appropriate content. I have suggested

that the content focus at least in part on measures of public school performance, particularly teacher and student satisfaction, and efficiency. These variables are often standard measures already collected via regular surveys.

Not only is developing a vision to maximize performance required, steps must be taken to realize the vision. I have provided three major themes for realizing a vision derived from the literature on the assumption that the relationship between visions and public school performance will be mediated by internal variables such as those stemmed from school principal, teacher and organization. Given that these variables have gained broad support in the empirical literature, schools leaders may refer to these variables as guidelines in improving their school performance.

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