

## An Empirical Assessment of the Relationship between National Culture and Learning Capability in Organisations in Cambodia

Makararavy TY

School of Management, Shinawatra International University

E-mail: Makararavy@siu.ac.th

John WALSH (Corresponding Author)

School of Management, Shinawatra International University

E-mail: jwalsh@siu.ac.th

Pacapol ANURIT

School of Management, Shinawatra International University

E-mail: Pacapol@siu.ac.th

### Abstract

An intensely competitive world forces organizations to act ever more quickly. To enhance their capability to respond to change, organizations should seek to identify what are their core competencies and the competitive advantages which are their keys to success. The term "organizational learning" has become a term of interest to many academics and practitioners because this represents the organization's ability to change. Simultaneously, organizations have to consider the cultural context in environments in which they act. This paper assesses the relationship between national culture and learning capabilities of a sample of organizations in Cambodia. The survey questionnaire, which received 417 responses, related to national culture and organizational learning. The study found that national culture had strong relationships with learning capabilities of organizations in Cambodia. The paper concludes by following some recommendations for Cambodian organizations to take into consideration to strengthen their levels of performance.

**Keywords:** Cambodia, Empirical assessment, Learning capability, National culture, Relationship

### 1. Introduction

In Cambodian culture, the individual from the age of a child is not encouraged to ask a lot of questions since it is considered to be impolite and annoying for adults (Pearson, 2006). The teachers are supposed to know all and the students know nothing. This is clearly related to the long-term suppression of the interests of the peasant classes both in terms of economic activities (e.g. Scott, 1976: 195-6) and through the production of cultural values such as *chhap* poetry, which stresses the importance of following the wisdom of the state as manifested through religious and societal norms (cf. Chandler, 1996). As Althusser might have observed, both repressive and ideological state apparatus have been mobilized to reinforce these messages (Althusser, 2001, pp.85-127).

Pearson (2006) observed that, in Cambodian culture, the primary purpose of learning is to be able to 'do' something, so learning is viewed as the acquisition of tools and techniques in a classroom or workshop setting. Learning is the responsibility of the teacher, not the student. She found that everyone in Cambodia over 25 years of age experienced a didactic teaching methodology which actively suppressed independent and analytical thinking. This means that if someone can not answer the question will lead to 'loss of face', so questions (and especially 'why?') tend to be viewed as something negative, rather than helpful. It is different from much of Western culture where the children are encouraged to ask and do whatever they are curious to learn and to do.

In relation to this aspect of Cambodian culture, it is interesting to observe closely individual practices in the organization. Each organization is unique, varying not only in the quantity, quality and types of resources deployed and in the outputs produced, but also in its culture (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2000). One interesting area to study concerning the organization in Cambodia relates to the nature of organizational learning, since Cambodia has emerged from periods of genocide and command economy which all but destroyed all Cambodian institutions. This paper aims to determine whether culture has a close relationship with the learning performance of organizations in Cambodia. Moreover, it is believed that the performance of the organization depends on how it learns from its individual staff because an "organization is a group of people acting to achieve particular outcomes" (*ibid*: 16). In other words, if the staff (or human resources) cannot contribute to organizational learning, then the organization seems to be doomed in Cambodia.