Innovative Evaluation of the Outsourced Counselling Services in a Business School

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ABSTRACT
Through appreciating the expectations and needs of the students and staff and the changing needs of such group of stakeholders in view of educational reforms and organizational changes, we shall examine the expected changes in structure and organizational framework for the implementation of counseling services under the widely adapted Australian approach of Comprehensive Counselling Programme (Aluede, 2006). The key questions to be raised are as follows:
1. What will be the expectations of students and teaching staff in such programmes? How will expectations be satisfied in the programme objectives?
2. What should be the innovative structure for the delivery of Counselling services and related services?
3. Will the services provided by the new counseling centre be adequate, appropriate and suitable for the development of healthy lifestyle, and provide a balanced education for life?

Keywords: Comprehensive Counselling programme, education for life, expectations of students and teaching staff

1.0 Introduction
Hang Seng Management College (HSMC), is a new post-secondary college registered under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance Cap 320 in 2010 to offer degree level programmes. HSMC is currently embarking on a long term development plan with the goal of becoming a leading private university (HSMC, 2010a). As the contract for services provided by a government-subsidized NGO counseling services providers (NGOs) expired in 2012 August, HSMC invited for tenders to be submitted for such services thereafter. Since an appropriate structure for monitoring of the delivery of counseling and related services is essential (Aluede, 2006, Aluede et. al, 2007). This study will evaluate the outsourced Counselling Services and related services provided by NGO. Such reviews were carried out from the perspective of educational management and the approach of Comprehensive Counselling Programme (Aluede, 2006). To evaluate the effectiveness and to validate to the measure adopted by the HK Education Bureau in measuring the Nine Aspects of Performance of First-Degree Graduates Performance, this study requests for the response of its current year students for comparision with the result from previous survey conducted by Education Bureau (EMB, 2006). This project also assesses the response of Post Secondary Institution toward the Whole School Approach of Developmental Guidance and the appropriate structure for the implementation of such initiatives of the Education Bureau (the then Education Department) and the Education Commission.
1.1 Definitions of Guidance, individual and group counseling

The term ‘guidance’ is used to refer to programmes which facilitate students’ educational, vocational and personal-social development (Young, 1994). From a broader perspective, guidance, which is a process which helps students toward self-development and the making of informed choices (Miller et al., 1978; Milner, 1980), includes all educational activities in schools, ranging from individual guidance given by teachers to the whole school curriculum (Hui, 1998). Counselling, under the umbrella of guidance, is one of the services offered for students with problems.

In the schools setting of Secondary Education in Hong Kong, the term ‘guidance’ is used to refer to all guidance, counselling and pastoral services (Hui, 1998). In tertiary education systems, such services will be offered by different helping professionals such as professional counsellors and consultant psychiatric. They included counselling services, careers counselling and personal growth workshops (Surtees, Pharoah & Waimwright, 1998) and services with the aims to create and promote a caring learning environment for whole person development (Hang Seng Management College, 2010b).

2.0 Research Methods

Since this study focused on a comparison of students’ and teachers’ perceptions of counseling services to be provided by outsourced organization, a quantitative methodology was adopted. Questionnaire was designed to identify the pattern of the key attributes of different aspects of performance of the current year students of HSMC, including (A) Work Attitude, (B) Inter-personal Skills, (C) Analytical and Problem-solving Abilities, (D) Management Skills, respectively. The responses of the Students, Teaching staff and Counsellor were evaluated.

3.0 Results and Analysis

![Figure 1: Bar Chart of Rating of Key Aspects of Performance of First Degree Students](image-url)
Sources:
* Average Scores of all members of HSMC from current survey (May 2012)
+ Survey on Opinions of Employers on Major Aspects of Performance of Publicly – funded First-Degree Graduates in Year 2006 (Average Scores rated by Employers)
# Survey on Opinions of Employers on Major Aspects of Performance of Publicly – funded First-Degree Graduates in Year 2003 (Average Scores rated by Employers)
  Responses rated on a Likert 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Very important) to 5 (Not important at all)

Current survey reveals that the Performance Aspect of Inter-personal Skills was perceived by members of HSMC a little bit more important than the other three aspects of performance. Such pattern was a little not in line with the increasing demand for a relatively highly level of Work Attitude as reflected in the Surveys of 2003 and 2006. The comparison of other aspects will be discussed from the following two aspects.

3.1 Organizational culture influence

Good matching of pattern between Counsellor and teaching staff might be an indication of the influence of goal in the Mission Statement of “provide a balanced education for life” demanding such substantial coverage of general education (30% - 37%). Student’s rating was in the order of:
1) Analytical & Problem-solving skills,
2) Management skills,
3) Interpersonal skills, and
4) Work attitude.

3.2 Specific nature of the business education programme

Let us examine how the benefits to be expected from the programme for nurturing major aspects of Life Skills Learning be compromised by the outsourcing to government-subsidized NGO as part of the development plan. The programme requirements was specified in its course aims as “demonstrating effective social and interpersonal skills in acting as a team member …” (HSMC, 2011b). However, the existing concept and method of the delivery might be too traditional and conservative. Students’ responses regarding the aspect of Work attitude suggest that the attribute “Initiative and Drive” is low. They may be reflecting the case that students’ non-attainment of such learning outcomes of acting as a team member. As both interpersonal skills and work attitude are very essential aspects of the performance in the commercial world. Thus the mechanism influencing the delivery of programme needs to be reviewed.

In adopting the existing practice of outsourcing, personal growth programme will not be integrated with the Curriculum. The counseling services provider and School of Business will working individually according to their own programme plans as before. The benefits of cost saving of operating and monitoring of the counseling services will compromise with the above inefficiency from traditional approach of educational management.

4.0 Discussion

In determining the appropriate structure for the delivery of Counselling services and related services, Hui (1997, 1998) and (Aluede, 2006, Aluede et. al, 2007) assert that the importance of involvement of the whole organization. Aluede (2006) emphasizes the overall design of the curriculum for the benefit of the student’s total development, school guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive
counseling service and system support for the effective delivery system of services (Aluede, 2006, Aluede et. al, 2007). As the self – correcting systems of guidance system was designed based on the interrelatedness of programme components, assessment will be conducted for ensuring meeting needs of students. Gysbers (2000) point out that what is lacking “is a structure, a “coherent” and a “systematic” way to organize guidance activities in schools (Yuen et. al, 2000, p. 19-41).

Hui (1998) asserts that the Comprehensive guidance and counselling programme may provide Hong Kong schools with a viable organizational framework for our future development along the lines of Whole School Approach. Such programme emphasizes school guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive counselling service and system support (Hui 1998).

From findings in this study, problem-solving ability and the ability to implement solution, was essential in demonstrating the ability to the “acquire a sense of competence, a capacity for problem solving and decision making”. Such measures of ability in making changes could facilitate the design of school guidance curriculum and individual student planning (Allen-Mearers, 2004). With a better understanding in the progress of development in such attributes, Counsellors could give appropriate advice in their individual planning. The future directions and patterns of personal growth activities would be moving toward integrated of activities with curriculum and structure for implementation. Consequently, the innovative monitoring systems should be designed and adjusted accordingly for matching with the patterns of actual services to be delivered, rather than on the norm of fulfillment of quota or other performance indicators set under the contract for services.

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendation

It is recommended that a new position of Director of Students Affairs Office is needed to take the lead in the setting up and monitoring of Counselling services. Future directions and focus should be initiated by the Director of Students Affairs Office and monitored by executive staff. For proper monitoring delivery of Counselling services, the Recruitment of Full Time Student Development Officer who serves directly reporting to the Director is also recommended. Such position should be responsible for personal development programs / training workshops; with the aims to:

- co-ordinate Student Orientation Program;
- administrate Community Service Program; and
- serve as secretary to various committees and working groups in liaison with various sub-committees.

The existing practice of adopting the functional posts of Head of Student Services and Activities and Chairman of Pastor Sub-committee would not be appropriate. The effectiveness and practicality of the liaison role of Personal Tutor with the Pastor care Sub-committee members was questionable. Thus, the role of Personal Tutors as the first contact point in cases of emergency might not be appropriate.

The identification of aims, goals is helpful in developing a curriculum which is essential for the development of student’s full potentials. Co-learning with teachers will be considered in the implementation for designing developmental learning experiences. How can effective delivery system be designed innovatively and maintained up-to-date in view of the ongoing process of educational reforms if such services are outsourced? Outsourcing will only be acceptable as a transitional arrangement and during the developmental stage of the new campus project.
References

Books, Periodicals and Reports

Unpublished Materials

Author’s Background

Mr. Vincent Lau is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Department of Accounting and Finance in the Hong Kong Buddhist College. He earns an MBA from Charles Sturt U., Australia and a Master of Social Science in Youth Counselling from the HK Baptist University. At present, he is completing his Ed.D. programme from the HK Management Association. He also acts as the Course Developer of some courses of Bachelor of Business Administration (Honours) in Accounting. He teaches auditing and accounting in Hang Seng Management College and other tertiary institutions in Hong Kong such as VTC - Institute of Professional Education And Knowledge (PEAK). His research interest lies in the areas of accounting education, educational management and counseling. He holds membership with various professional bodies such as the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Association of International Accountants.