

Learning Society Network in The Local of The Northeast : The State of Development.

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of the present research were to study the developmental status of learning society network in the local of the Northeast. The findings show that : 1. The local people showed a “high” level of attitude and value toward life-long learning; but they showed a “low” level of awareness about the characteristics of learning society in their own community and the development of learning society network. Their communities are endowed with various learning resources but have been used at a “low” level of usage. 2. Regarding local knowledge management, it was found that the local people search for knowledge by means of study-tours and participating in workshop activities. Knowledge transfer was done by means of oral narration and demonstration. Their was a “highest” level of practice of storing and recording knowledge in individual persons; 3. The local learning-society model consists of 6 composite parts, i.e. forming a group, prescription of the structure of administration and management, the acquisition of knowledge and its development, recording and storing knowledge for future transmission, and supporting unit.

คำสำคัญ : เครือข่ายสังคมแห่งการเรียนรู้ การจัดการความรู้ เจตคติและค่านิยมต่อการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิต

Keywords : Learning Society Network, Knowledge Management, Attitude and Value toward Life-long Learning

Introduction

One of the visions in the National Economic and Social Development Plan No. 10 (2007 - 2011) is aiming toward becoming a “strong and quality society” for the sustainable nourishment for Thais. Thailand has yet to face changes in terms of education, society, economy, and politics, thus the impacts could become opportunities and limitations for its development. It has, therefore, recently, geared toward the self-reliant direction by trying to increase its competitive edge in today’s world with stronger system structure, as well as

building better knowledge base to anticipate and adapt to upcoming changes. There are 2 levels of building knowledge base, i.e. at a national level and at a local level. At the national level, a knowledge base can be developed in terms of a knowledge-based society, in which creativity and life-long learning were encouraged, thus the country’s new inventions were discovered and integrated into the production networks. Information technology and communication tools as well as international knowledge distribution, usage, and protection,

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would provide easy access to knowledge base to the mass. Knowledge would be used to increase people's authority and enhance their body and spirit. This would, in turn, create a sustainable society for all. At the local level, a learning society, which is a supportive social process to encourage learning for the local people through information technology, knowledge management system, and learning system, would be developed. In such society, knowledge would be transferred and shared among each sector. As a result, solutions and development plans were appropriately selected based on the existing creative energy and knowledge. Being a learning society also means that all parties within the society can both be the knowledge givers and receivers. Ultimately, the society would be a strong society with great quality, leading to the country's sustainable development.

The development of a learning society consists of 4 elements: 1) Developing "learning people" which is developing a life-long learning attitude and value among the local people; 2) Developing learning resources; 3) Developing knowledge; and 4) Managing knowledge. The authors believe that, locally, most societies are already, more or less, learning societies. However, in order to become a sustainable developed country, it is necessary to develop more learning society locally. This study aims to study the learning society networks by studying a life-long learning attitude and value, the awareness of characteristics of learning society in their own community, the development of learning society networks, learning sources and knowledge management in the local communities. The study was done in local communities, in Kalasin, Khon Kaen, and Nongbualamphoo provinces, to identify learning society characteristics and their strengths in order to promote them. Weaknesses were also identified for future improvements. In addition, the learning society network model were also analyzed and structured. Data was collected in June 2008 and during July to August 2009.

Methodology

The 12 criteria in selecting the target group were: 1) Strong culture and traditions existed; 2) Local people's participation was successfully achieved; 3) Local resources for learning purposes were promoted; 4) There was a reliable leader who played important roles in the community; 5) There were establishments for various learning sources provided for the people; 6) Volunteer groups, interest groups, and activities networks existed; 7) Enthusiastic and participating locals constantly joined activities; 8) Activities were created by locals; 9) There were knowledge transfer and sharing among the locals; 10) Knowledge management was implemented for control and development purposes; 11) Knowledge was used as a tool in problem solving and decision making process; and 12) The local's life-style was interesting and worth conserving. The target group was selected when at least 10 out of 12 criteria was met. Furthermore, interviews with directors of Non Formal Education Service Centers and supervisors in Educational Area that Tambon Administration Organization was selected to confirm again. The selected target groups, from Kalasin province were in Tambon Laoklang and Tambon Khongchai, while those from Khon Kaen and Nongbualamphu provinces were in Tambon Nawha, Amphur Phuwiang and Tambon Nonton, Amphur Muang, respectively.

The research study was divided into 2 phases. Phase I consisted of studying the attitude and value of the locals in the northeast toward life-long learning, as well as studying the local learning network model. The research tools were Attitude toward life-long learning Test, Value toward life-long learning Test, Awareness on characteristics of learning society Test, and Awareness on the development of learning society network Test. All of these Tests were measured in 4 scales, with the reliability between 0.91 – 0.94. Moreover, questionnaires were

used to identify learning sources and current knowledge management system in the local area. The survey was done according to each target group: TAO Group (Tambon Administrative Organization Group), Women’s Group, Farmers & Vocational Group, Village Philosopher Group, Village Headman Group and Monk Group .

Phase II consisted of creating the local learning society network model, according to the research results from Phase I and from analyzing data from the knowledge management of each target group. The draft of local learning society network model by target groups were then prepared and proposed to qualified community representatives. Focus group discussion was conducted to verify the research result and collect constructive comments relating to the nature of each community.

Conclusion & Discussion

From the total target group of 67 people, it was found that 34.50% were between 50-59 years old, followed by 60-69 years old and less than 30 years old, respectively. The samples were mostly male (77.60%) with elementary school diploma (40.30%), followed by high school diploma. The group who were providing the

most data was the TAO Group (23.90%). The research results are presented in the following sequence below:

1. Attitude and value toward life-long learning

Attitude toward life-long learning means local people’s opinion, based on their knowledge, understanding and realization regarding the benefits of life-long learning. The results from Attitude toward life-long learning Test and focus group discussion were used to analyze the total score and score of each group, with the 80% standard. This meant that the average scores higher than 48 would be rated ‘high’. The result indicated that the locals have positive attitude toward life-long learning, as shown in Table 1. Therefore, there was positive impact on individual’s learning behavior due to his enthusiasm and willingness to learn, which would occur all the time throughout his life. Attitude of the locals in the learning society were supposed to be encouraged and developed toward continuous life-long learning, which was in accordance with the research by Somsa & Wisak (1999) stating that level of education affected attitude and behavior shift of the locals in Chart Pan Phu Thai community, Moo Baan Nonhom, Tzmbon Nonhom, Amphur Muang, Sakolnakhon province.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitude and Value toward Life-Long Learning of Locals in Three Provinces in the Northeast

Topic	Three Provinces			Lao Klang TAO, Kalasin Province			Nawha TAO, Khon Kaen Province			Nonton TAO, Nong Bua Lamphu Province			80% Standard, Equals to Mean of
	Mean	Standard	Interpretati	Mean	Standard	Interpretati	Mean	Standard	Interpretati	Mean	Standard	Interpretati	
Attitude	55.48	4.80	high	54.39	4.23	high	56.50	4.66	high	55.59	5.49	high	48
Value	54.30	6.29	high	54.09	5.74	high	55.50	5.47	high	53.32	7.57	high	48

Value toward life-long learning means the local people’s fundamental believes toward life-long learning by giving those believes high priority and

applying them in their lifestyle. The results from Value toward life-long learning Test and focus group discussion were used to analyze the total score and score of each

group, with the 80% standard. This meant that the average scores higher than 48 would be rated 'high'. The result indicated that the locals held 'high' value toward life-long learning, as shown in Table 1. Table 2 illustrates their values in sequential order: 1) Life-long learning helps individual's self-improvement (Mean : 3.76); 2) Knowledge discovery should have no boundary and should be dynamic (Mean : 3.74); and 3) Life-long learning requires participation from all parties in the society (Mean : 3.67). The locals ranked their priority to the values that encourage life-long learning. Value is something that satisfies an individual. He must, then, embrace and adopt it as his belief or idea. Such value will remain in an individual as his belief until he finds new values that satisfy him more than the previous ones. When faced with an incident where he needs to make a decision, he will then recall such value to make the

preferred decision. Therefore, values can be viewed as a foundation of human behavior.

The success in developing learning society depends on developing the value toward life-long learning in the people, which was rated 'high' in the research. Thus supporting organizations in all sectors should encourage and build opportunities for knowledge sharing. This could be done by selective group participation depending on their values and interests, which have an influence on their learning behavior, without affecting their religious believes or rituals. As a result, they will adopt the life-long learning habit as their foundation behavior. In fact, the research by Somsak & Wisak (1999) indicated that education have insignificant influences on cultural believes and values. However, value in this research was defined as the values toward life-long learning which could be positively influenced by education.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Value toward Life-Long Learning of Locals in Three Provinces in the Northeast

No.	Topic	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Life-long learning helps individual's self-improvement	3.76	0.13	High
2	Knowledge is an important factor in life, work, and surviving in this changing world	3.64	0.06	High
3	Knowledge discovery should have no boundary and should be dynamic	3.74	0.17	High
4	When people have life-long learning habit, the society will develop into a learning society	3.57	0.14	High
5	Life-long learning helps with self-improvement and career advancement	3.58	0.11	High
6	Life-long learning requires participation from all parties in the society	3.67	0.09	High
7	People with life-long learning would be ready to adjust in a changing world	3.61	0.03	High

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Value toward Life-Long Learning of Locals in Three Provinces in the Northeast (Cont.)

No.	Topic	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
8	A person must seek for life-long learning everywhere and all the time	3.49	0.13	High
9	A person must know when to apply his knowledge wisely	3.53	0.11	High
10	A person must always be alert for new information and knowledge	3.65	0.16	High
11	People must have equal opportunity in getting education	3.51	0.04	High
12	Knowledge gives you power, meaning that people with knowledge can use it to their and the society's benefits	3.64	0.20	High
13	Developing life-long learning culture is a goal of a community	3.60	0.11	High
14	A person with life-long learning has a competitive edge	3.62	0.10	High
15	Investing in education yields worthiness and sustainable return	3.61	0.11	High
	Total	3.62	0.07	High

2. Awareness about the characteristics of learning society and the local learning resources in the Northeast

The awareness about the characteristics of learning society means the local people's awareness about cooperation among society members to create life-long learning and self-improvement which leads to career advancement and life quality improvement. This can be achieved by constantly seeking new knowledge and by having all sectors sharing resources. The researchers thus divided their focus into 2 topics: 1) Characteristics of Learning Society and 2) Development of Learning Society Networks. Table 3 shows the research results as follow: 1) Regarding the characteristics of learning society, there was a 'low' level of awareness about characteristics of learning society in their communities. The key common

characteristics were that the locals have access to the local resources and also can benefit from learning from other communities; 2) Regarding the development of learning society networks, there was also a 'low' level of awareness about the development of learning society network in their communities. Some suggestions for Tambon Laoklang, Amphur Khongchai, Kalasin province was "Developing Implementation Guidelines for Each Network. For Tambon Nonton, Amphur Muang, Nongbualamphu province the suggestions were "Analyzing and Recruiting for Participants in Learning Society Networks", "Constant Activity Outcome Evaluation", "Reporting Activity Progress to Members", "Rewarding Networks with Successful Activities", and "Exchanging Knowledge among Networks".

The research results were not in accordance with those by Apada (2005) which indicated a 'moderate'

level of awareness among members of organizations after studying about the existence of learning organizations. Since this research was conducted based on the locals in target communities, using the 80%

standard, which resulted in the 'low' level of awareness. This showed that, although the target group was selected according to the research standard, the existing conditions of learning society were still unclear.

Table 3. Characteristics of Learning Society and Development of Learning Society Network, displayed by Awareness of the Locals in the Northeast

Topic	Three Provinces			Three Provinces			Lao Klang TAO, Kalasin Province			Nawha TAO, Khon Kaen Province			80% Standard, Equals to Mean of
	Mean	Standard	Interpretation	Mean	Standard	Interpretation	Mean	Standard	Interpretation	Mean	Standard	Interpretation	
Characteristics of Learning Society	50.16	7.09	Low	50.74	6.71	Low	50.91	7.32	Low	48.82	7.37	Low	54.40
Development of Learning Society Network	38.24	7.01	Low	37.91	6.72	Low	39.73	6.85	Low	37.09	7.51	Low	41.60

The local learning resource means an establishment or an individual providing knowledge about self-improvement, career advancement, and life quality improvement. According to the research results, learning resources can be classified into 4 categories: 1) Individuals or groups of professional. At Tambon Nonton, Amphur Muang, Nongbualamphu province, the most common individual learning resources was construction workers (80%); 2) Natural and forest garden as a learning resource was water resources (80%), while the place that human to reinforcement were nature observation centers and botanic gardens (87.5%), which was available only in Tambon Nonton, Amphur Muang, Nongbualamphu province. The manmade media was local inventions (72%); and 4) Local activity-based learning resources were Tod Katin/Tod Phapa and Loi Kratong Events (92%).

It can be concluded that there were a variety of learning resources, which was in accordance with the research by Pasit (2000). Such research categorized

learning resources into 5 types: 1) Individual Resources, 2) Establishment Resources, 3) Natural Resources, 4) Cultural Resources, and 5) Documental Resources. Regarding the usage of learning resources, the study showed a 'low' level of overall usage (Mean : 2.88), while natural resources were used the most (Mean : 3.12), followed by local activity-based learning resources (Mean : 3.08). The most used individual resources were community leaders (Mean : 3.08), followed by teachers (Mean : 3.00).

3. Local knowledge management in the Northeast

Local knowledge management means the ability to manage knowledge, including knowledge creation and sharing, and promoting the process of learning and encouraging new inventions in the local region. The research results, shown in Table 25 – 28 in Neon et al. (2009), indicated that 1) the local people search for manufacturing knowledge by means of study-tours and participating in workshop activities, organized by public

or private organizations (75.90%), 2) The manufacturing knowledge transfer was done by means of oral narration and demonstration to group member (82.80%), 3) The locals transfer knowledge to other groups by means of demonstration (72.40%) and oral narration (69.00%), 4) Knowledge storing and recording was practiced by individuals (86.20%), 5) The locals were well-educated about health, economy, sociality, technology, and professions by means of knowledge transfer from government officials and from direct experience traditionally

From the interviews about knowledge management with Village Headman Group, Women's Group, and Farmer & Vocational Group the following topics were mentioned repetitively (Neon, 2009):

Tambon Laoklang, Amphur Khongchai, Kalasin province The locals had the traditional style of learning while the vocational learning was promoted, such as a silk-weaving group. Most of the locals were willing to learn and interested in building their careers. Government officials have organized trainings and workshops to educate them in the agricultural field. There was knowledge sharing within the group as well as occasional campaigns promoting public health, e.g. emerging infectious diseases, hemorrhagic fever, Dengue hemorrhagic fever prevention, etc. However, some learning topics were not evenly distributed to the locals because some groups were not have the time to share the knowledges

One of the prides of the locals in Tambon Laoklang was the fact that they have the traditional knowledge transfer. Weaving knowledge was shared among community members. Moreover, creating harmony and helping each other was also done through organizing annual religious events, learning about herbs in the community forest garden, and building the community learning center.

According to the interview, the knowledge which should be promoted include agriculture, organic fertilizer, knowledge transfer from older generation to the

younger ones, silk weaving, savings group management, retail shop management, and rice bank management.

Tambon Nawha, Amphur Phuviang, Khon Kaen province The locals mostly learnt from their parents. There were groups formed to transfer knowledge to several groups and youths, for their education and competency. Additional knowledge was also provided when required. Government officials were available to give useful advices. Additionally, community members were available to share knowledge, suggestions, and provide study-tours in other communities. Temples were considered as community centers where locals gathered for religious activities and learning resources. Most of the locals were enthusiastic about learning, yet spent only little time at the learning center because they had to focus on their jobs.

One of the prides, regarding current learning tradition, of the locals in Tambon Nawha was their willingness to learn, their enthusiasm to experience from the outside world, organic fertilization, silk weaving, Thai buffalo conservation group, and traditional and cultural events.

The interview results showed that the locals believed that learning to be promoted were organic fertilization, silk weaving, sufficient agriculture or New Agriculture Theory, establishments of text book or document center, continuous study or life-long learning promotion.

Tambon Nonton, Amphur Muang, Nongbualamphu province Most of the locals learned from many kinds of media, such as television, radio, publications, while there were also knowledge transfer from fathers to sons and knowledge sharing among groups. Government officials played a role in training and providing study-tours in successful communities. The observation was applied and customized to fit their community. There was reportedly a gap between the thinking of the older and younger generation, whereas

learning still occurred only in the limited group networks concerning local traditions. Traditional activities were organized and educated to the locals.

The learning tradition in Tambon Nonton which the locals took pride of was the learning of traditions and history about their community, the learning about agricultural product processing, knowledge about new media and technology. Learning helped provide more income. Knowledge transfer in the community included growing and taking care of rubber trees, while group activities included rice mill group. These activities benefited group members as well as encouraged knowledge transfer among them.

The locals believed that interesting learning topics were knowledge about cooking, fertilization, chemical substance usage, fodder making, renewable energy, vocation, agriculture, health, and group management, which would ensure member participation and harmony. Since there is a food processing group in the community, there were requests for knowledge about packaging, establishing community market, and establishing learning center. There should also be a stage or opportunity provided for the locals to display their local knowledge to the next generation, and for the youths to participate in those activities to reduce the gap between the two generations. Attitude of the locals would then be adjusted. Budget should also be allocated for the development of various learning resources.

It can be concluded that local knowledge management in the target area was in accordance with the study of learning networks and community management by Kobkarn (1995). The study indicated that the origin of a learning network started from family, relatives, group participation, traditional ritual participation, and temples. Chuchart (1995) also studied about learning networks about health among local

residents and found that the knowledge started from family, relative, and expanded to neighbors, both inside and outside the community. This research result was confirmed by a study by Passakorn (1995) which indicated that the key factors in the creation of community learning networks were groups and organization in the leading community, as well as the relationships among community members. The Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior has defined steps in knowledge improvement and management process as follow: 1) Knowledge Identification, 2) Knowledge Creation and Acquisition, 3) Knowledge Organization, 4) Knowledge Codification and Refinement, 5) Knowledge Access, 6) Knowledge Sharing, and 7) Learning.

4. Analyze & structure the local learning society model in the Northeast

The local learning society model means the participation process of community members to create life-long learning and self-improvement, leading to professional and personal development, by participation of all parties in the community.

The study results regarding attitude and value toward life-long learning was used to identify the Learning Person, awareness of learning society characteristics, learning resources in the community, as well as knowledge management in Tambon Laoklang, Amphur Kongchai, Kalasin province, Tambon Nawha, Amphur Phuwiang, Khon Kaen province, and Tambon Nonton, Amphur Muang, Nongbualamphu province. The results were quantitative data and interview data, which was analyzed and structured into a learning society model, then proposed to qualified persons in the community for additional suggestions.

The local learning-society model consists of 6 composite parts which are logically related, they are: 1) forming a group, 2) defining management

structure, 3) acquisition of knowledge, 4) knowledge development, 5) recording and storing knowledge for future transmission, and 6) supporting unit. Their relationships are relating in a horizontal structure, i.e. a group is formed by family members of many families who have common interest or expertise and share the same goal, which is to improve life quality by increasing productivity for more income. Group structure was created, while group leader was selected from a group of seniors who are experts in the field. Group committee were also assigned to organize group meeting with

members. The meeting consensus include decisions regarding production, production knowledge development, and production process. Product quality control was implemented as well as knowledge sharing among group members and study-tours in other community. Other suggested topics to focus on were their weakness in the recording, storing, and transferring knowledge process. Some groups were still dependant on the government's support in each process, while some can perform independently. Figure. 1 shows the local learning society model in the Northeast.

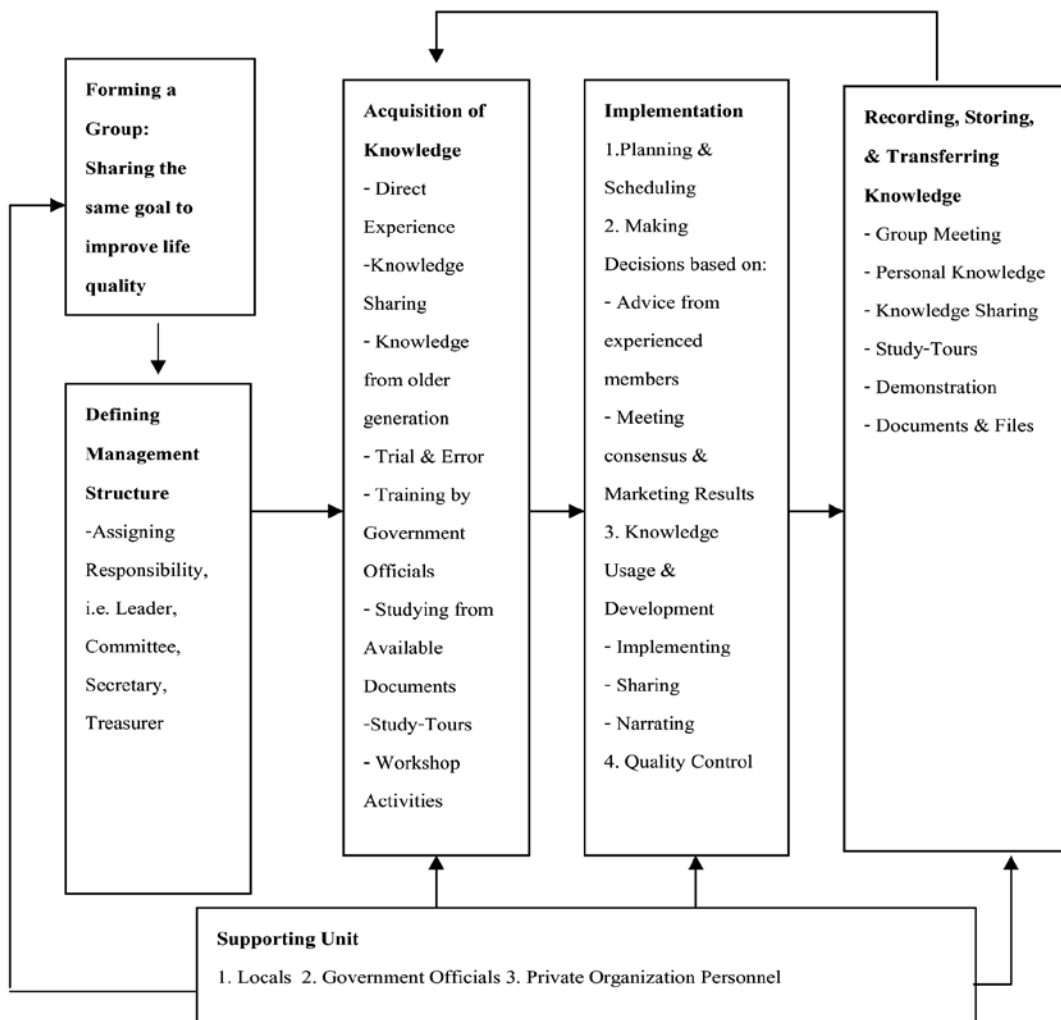


Figure 1. Local Learning Society Model in the Northeast

Suggestions for Implementation

According to the research results, suggestions for implementation are listed below:

1) One of the uncovered weaknesses in the learning society model was the knowledge recording process. In this matter, government officials can support them by giving advice or training on how to record knowledge as well as local knowledge management.

2) The model of learning society, strengths, and weaknesses found in this research should be distributed to the activity groups in the local area, for further improvements to become a better learning society.

3) Supporting units in the society including government organizations, e.g. Tambon Administration Organization, District Agriculture, District Livestock, District Community Development and Provincial Social Development can use the research results involving various vocational groups to identify strengths and weaknesses for their improvements.

Suggestions for Further Research

This research studied the existing learning society based on the natural social mechanism. Further research can be done to compare among communities, to identify key success factors contributing to those that are successful. Those factors can be used for intervention to develop more learning society, which would eventually become knowledge-based society. On the other hand, the results can also be used in the participatory action research for the development of local learning society.

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