Leadership Development in the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) Scheme in Thailand

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Abstract: This study explored the leadership development of OTOP leaders. This study applied a qualitative research design using a case study as the research strategy. Purposive sampling was used to select the cases, which were three community producer groups who were awarded the OTOP Product Champion (OPC) status in 2010 for their five-star high quality durian crisps in the Eastern region of Thailand. A total of 19 participants were interviewed and observations were made in their villages. Analyses were carried out from multiple sources of data. A coding process was employed to answer the research questions. Ten categories emerged from the qualitative data analysis: leadership competency, development method, learning source of leadership, group member administration, quality of work operation, financial management of the OTOP group, welfare system for OTOP group members, activities for supporting group relationship, relationship between leader's business and group's business, and a good relationship with the public sector. The findings of this study are useful in at least three ways: (1) to make a contribution to knowledge in the field of HRD in which leadership has been found to be a vital factor for the success of the local OTOP schemes; (2) to be used as a guideline for HRD professionals both practically and academically in other local communities; and (3) to provide the local government authorities with a clear vision at the national level of the OTOP processes in successful cases.

Keywords: Leadership, Leadership Development, OTOP Leadership Development

Introduction

In 1997 many Asian countries were faced with an economic crisis. This crisis affected Thailand's society greatly, with an increase in unemployment and poverty, especially at the grassroots level. To deal with this problem, the Thai government created several projects designed to solve the economic crisis. One Tambon One Product (OTOP) was one of the projects that were established in 2001 in order to solve the economic problem. This project was designed to help local communities to be stronger in terms of becoming self-reliant and in job creation, as well as to increase incomes at the grassroots level. Local wisdom and resources have been employed to develop the quality of products and services with their own advantages and added value. At the same time as maintaining the Thai culture and way of life, the goods also meet the needs of the domestic and international markets (Community development department, 2010).

In addition, this project was referred to as adopting a holistic approach or "people-centered development" by the Eighth National Plan (1997-2001) to the Tenth National Plan

(2007-2011). The National OTOP Administrative Committee set three basic principles in order to provide a guideline for improving each community's economy, including training the local people to be self-reliant, and for helping them to take part in the sustainable process of regional development. The three principles of OTOP are being local yet global, fostering self-reliance and creativity, and focusing on Human Resource Development (HRD). These principles assisted villagers in raising their incomes throughout many communities.

In 2004, the National OTOP Administrative Committee also set up the conceptual framework for awarding the OTOP Product Champion (OPC). The OPC is a part of the government's OTOP promotion, aiming to select the best OTOP products from communities that have a high potential to make OTOP products which meet an international standard. To achieve this standard increases their capabilities in the international market competition. The criteria in selecting the OPC products are exportability, continuity and consistency of the product, standardization, and story of the product.

The OTOP products may be classified into five ranks or five stars in terms of quality. One star ranking is the lowest and five star ranking is the highest. As a result, it motivates the villagers to develop their products with a good quality for enhancing their distribution to be more competitive, both at the domestic and international levels. The OTOP products are classified into six categories, including beverages, textiles and garments, household goods and decorations, handicrafts and souvenirs, herbal products, and food (Community development department, 2010).

From these six categories, the researcher focused on food products, particularly the durian crisp which was a successful snack product from many OTOP groups' initiative in Thailand. The researcher was interested in this product because durian is considered as the king of fruit and Thailand was the world's largest producer of durian during the period from 2004-2009 which averaged about 683,410 tons per year (Office of Agricultural Economics, 2009). The Office of Agricultural Economics has also estimated that Thailand would produce durian average 632,459 tons in 2010 and the major production of durian came from the Eastern region of Thailand. The decreasing amount of production from 2009 to 2010 was because, in some years, there was a surplus supply of durian and it resulted in lower prices for fresh durian. Therefore, the fried durian process was suggested as one of the solutions to solve this problem and increased the product lines of durian in the Chantaburi market (Kitisupawattana, 2002). The durian crisp adds value to an agricultural product, because it achieves a better price, can be kept longer than fresh durian, and the taste is very good. Consequently, it has become a popular snack product that has increased the villagers' or OTOP group members' incomes.

Statement of the Problem

Any organization's success or failure depends on its leadership (Bass, 1990). Therefore, leadership development is a necessary issue to consider in most organizations in order to achieve organizational goals and it is widely recognized as crucial to the success of public and private sector organizations throughout the world (Hotho & Dowling, 2010). Den Hartog and Dickson (2004) argued that most management theories, including leadership theories, were developed in Western countries. Even though there are many research studies in the leadership field, there are few Thai OTOP leadership research studies, particularly the leadership development of OTOP products in Thailand. In addition, it has been found that most of the OTOP and SMEs research studies focused on their management, such as marketing products, aimed at the areas of policy and planning (Soonthonsamai &

Maimongkol, 2007). Because of differences in the country contexts, such as the culture, society and economics of a particular country, these variables may influence how leadership will be developed in each country. For this reason, the researcher was interested in studying empirically leadership development in the OTOP scheme in Thailand. The OTOP leadership development findings of this study were aimed at producing guidelines for leaders to share their knowledge systematically and this process of leadership was predicted to help leaders and their subordinates to be more self-reliant and develop themselves in the long term. In other words, the results of this study were expected to benefit other local communities who want to introduce a similar pattern of OTOP projects to develop their village's sustainability.

Research Questions

In order to fulfill the purpose of this research, two research questions were proposed:

1) What was the OTOP leadership development concept, as perceived by the leaders and key stakeholders in selected OTOP groups which produced 5-star products?; and

2) How did the leaders develop themselves and their subordinates in selected OTOP groups which produced 5-star products?

Literature Review

Concept of Leadership

Many scholars have studied leadership since ancient times. The leadership issue has interested the academic and managerial world for a long time (Ramachandran & Krishnan, 2009). Leadership is an important strategy for all organizations, as it is considered crucial for successful achievement of organizational goals, and some researchers have argued that it is the most critical ingredient (Lussier & Achua, 2007). Various leadership definitions have been proposed. For example, Burns (1978, p. 2) stated that "Replace this statement with a definition" Cohen (1990, p. 9) stated that "the art of leading people to achieve their highest performance and any task to accomplish, objective or project is leadership", while Rost (1993, p. 102) defined leadership as "the relationship between leaders and followers who work together, have the same influential purposes."

Effective leadership is the ability to inspire people to make a totally willing and voluntary commitment to accomplishing or even exceeding organizational goals (Goetsch, 2005, p. viii). Therefore, leaders or administrators are required to develop their skill set of leadership in order to perform their leadership roles effectively and to make the organization more successful. In order to understand how to develop leadership skills, the concept of leadership development will be discussed.

Concept of Leadership Development

Over the past few years, researchers who have studied leadership development have been strongly interested in both its academic and practical aspects (Day, 2001; McCauley, 2001; Pearce, 2007; Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004). It is becoming an increasing priority for business and government organizations (Amagoh, 2009). Amagoh (2009, p. 989) stated that "leadership development should be comprehensive and systematically integrated into the organizational culture in order to produce leaders who can deal adequately with organizational challenges."

Today, organizational achievement needs effective leadership as a core value and is mainly focused on leadership development more than in the past. Amagoh (2009, p. 990)

suggested that important to the success of any leadership development process is the ability to encourage participants to reflect on their learning experiences in order to promote the transfer of knowledge and skills to work in other contexts. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that leadership is not only defined as what is done by the leader, but also the process that created the leader, including the relationships established among leaders and collaborators, rather than just the leader's potential (Broome & Hughes, 2004). This study's purpose was to investigate empirically the leadership development processes in three communities which were producing high quality durian crisp products as part of the OTOP project in the Eastern region of Thailand.

Research Methodology

For this study, the researcher employed the social constructivism paradigm based on Guba's (1990) framework and a case study was applied as the research strategy.

The researcher used purposive sampling that is considered to be an appropriate sampling technique for the case study strategy (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). In this study, the researcher investigated the experience and process of how leaders develop themselves and their subordinates in order to achieve self-reliance and led their group to achieve a 5-star level of product quality. The sample group was identified to be the focus of the inquiry. Therefore, the selected sample was three cases of 2010 of 5-Star OTOP Product Champions (OPC), who processed durian fruit into durian crisps in the Eastern region of Thailand. These multiple cases helped the researcher identify the processes of developing leadership of leaders and subordinates.

Data Collection

A case study research strategy requires multiple sources of data-collection methods in order to increase the validity of the analysis of the realities under inquiry and to build an in-depth representation of the cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Swanson and Holton (1997) stated that the data collection is extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. The researcher generated an interview guideline by following Patton's (2002, pp. 348- 351) framework for types of interview questions.

Data Analysis

The tape-recorded data from the interviews were transcribed. Data analysis began immediately after data collection in order to simplify later data collection phases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Coding was used throughout the analysis, so as to classify the data and make them more appropriately retrievable at a later time (Stake, 1995, p. 32). The process of data analysis in this study was systematic and followed a standard format. In short, as coding proceeded, the researcher was able to organize the data into more meaningful phases. The initial list of codes was revised, new codes were generated and the final list of codes was used to code all the data. The researcher realized that coding is the way to organize the large amount of data, so that the researcher could pull together or cluster the segments that relate to particular research questions.

Findings and Discussion

The findings were derived from the data analysis of 19 participant interviews in three OTOP groups by using purposive sampling. There were ten categories for OTOP Leadership Development that emerged from the data analysis. The ten categories comprised OTOP leadership competency, development method, learning source of leadership, OTOP group member administration, quality of work operation, financial management of OTOP group, welfare system for OTOP group members, activities for supporting group relationship, relationship between leader's business and group's business and good relationship with public sector. Based on the data analysis and finding of this study as mentioned above, the two research questions were answered as follows.

Research Question One:

"What was the OTOP leadership development concept, as perceived by the leaders and key stakeholders in selected OTOP groups which produced 5-star products?"

It was found that there was no clear definition of leadership development. However, all participants had the same perspective of describing leadership development as being related to the individual traits of a leader, skills and behaviors of the leader, and the role of a leader in the administration of their OTOP group business. In other words, some leadership skills or competencies, such as communication, leading others, motivation, and a caring attitude were often mentioned. Consequently, leadership development, as perceived by leaders and stakeholders in this study, was expressed in terms of their leader's competencies. This finding was consistent with that of Broome and Hughes (2004), who confirmed that leadership development has embedded leadership competencies and is mainly conceptualized as a set of skills or competencies that are defined and achieved by combining knowledge and skills with experience (Casserley & Critchley, 2010). Based on many research studies mentioned above and her own research findings, the researcher defined and illustrated the concept of OTOP leadership development perceived by leaders and key stakeholders as "a *process of creating set of leadership competency through self-directed learning and experience that contribute to others' acceptance.*"

Research Question Two:

"How did the leaders develop themselves and their subordinates in selected OTOP groups which produced 5-star products?"

The researcher found that the categories used to describe the method of developing OTOP leadership were self-directed learning, learning from experience, education, training, field trips and seminars, mentoring and coaching. Furthermore, it was found that the leaders employed five methods to develop themselves, while their subordinates were developed by six methods, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table1. Development Methods for OTOP Leadership

Leader	Subordinate
1. Self-directed learning	1. Learning from experiences
2. Learning from experiences	2. Education
3. Education	3. Training
4. Training	4. Field trip and seminar
5. Field trip and seminar	5. Mentoring
	6. Coaching

Source: Proposed by the researcher (2015)

From Table 1 it was concluded that the leaders and subordinates of the three cases in this study were developed by four similar methods: learning from experiences, education, field trips and seminars, and training. Leadership development methods for leaders were different from the subordinates, in that self-directed learning was crucial for leadership development. The method by which the subordinates were developed for leadership was different from the leader's development, because the ability of a leader in coaching others was a competency whereby a generous leadership style had to be demonstrated. Coaching and mentoring were popular capacity-building tools, especially in the area of leadership development. This finding is consistent with that of Deans, Oakley, James, and Wrigley (2006), who stated that different leaders who were developing themselves and developing their subordinates employed outstanding ways to develop themselves, such as self-directed learning and training, while their subordinates were developed by methods such as mentoring and coaching.

Based on the abovementioned findings, the researcher proposed three approaches for OTOP group existence: (1) The Generous Leadership Style; (2) Financial management of the OTOP group: the group must not make a loss; and (3) OTOP Group Existence Model

The Generous Leadership Style

Two points about the generous leadership style of the OTOP group are expressed below:

The first important point was the leadership style of the OTOP group leader which emerged from the nine sub-categories of OTOP leadership competencies as follows: (1) leading others; (2) commitment to the achievement; (3) readiness; (4) boosting morale; (5) knowing business; (6) good communication skills; (7) dare to change; (8) being generous; and (9) sacrifice for the group. Generosity and sacrifice for the group were the critical competencies for connecting a strong relationship between a leader and the followers, which led the team to become more effective collaborators and to have a group existence.

Based on the nine competencies, the researcher identified and elaborated the concept of the "Generous Leadership Style". As a result of the empirical research of this study of OTOP leaders, the researcher's definition of leadership is stated as follows:

"It means the ability of leading, morale boosting and encouragement, and acts with subordinates by paying good attention, showing sympathy and taking care of them like members of a family. It requires the competencies of "being generous" and "sacrifice for the group."

The next important finding was concerned with OTOP leadership development methods of the OTOP group. It was shown in this study that there were seven methods for developing OTOP leadership: (1) self-directed learning; (2) learning from experiences; (3) education; (4) training; (5) field trips and seminars; (6) mentoring; and (7) coaching. The research

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study also found that both self-directed learning and learning from experience were critical methods for developing OTOP leadership, whereas self-directed learning was the beginning of other leadership development methods. In particular, OTOP group leaders who were named as "OTOP Business Starters" started learning by themselves - willingly learning or interested in what they wanted to study - and this approach involved an independent effort to search for knowledge. Self-learning is a process whereby a learner uses initiative in learning by herself, by considering her own needs for self-learning, setting the goal and learning media, contacting others, searching knowledge sources, selecting learning strategies to support the learning plan, and evaluating her own self-learning, whether she receives assistance from others or not (Knowles, 1975).

Financial management of the OTOP group

The second approach from the guidelines for the investigation of OTOP leadership development in Thailand, the researcher discovered impacts of the leadership development which resulted in a stronger and more sustainable OTOP group. The study's results were consistent with other research which demonstrated the key role of sustaining the community whose key attributes were members getting sufficient welfare for living, having the family and relative system with a close relationship, materially and mentally dependent members, cooperative members, acceptance of and conforming to the social rules or criteria, and members holding on to the values or mutual principles that were beneficial for the people, as well as the group (Saihu, 1991, as cited in Pholsri, 2010). These attributes were beneficial and became the guidelines for developing other OTOP groups. Specifically, the three leaders had a private business in producing durian crisps to support the group's business.

The researcher applied the concept of *"The group must not make a loss"*, which refers to the principle that the group leaders used to manage people wholeheartedly and for public benefit by sacrificing so much for the morale of the group members and for encouraging them in running the group business. Sometimes they spent their own capital to sustain the group or adopted the product which might not generate as much income as their own to prevent the group from making a loss and, consequently, maintain the morale of and encouragement for the group members, since the business of durian crisps required a high level of capital investment for the input costs. That is, raw durians at the time of the study had a rather high cost, whereas the group had a limited budget for each year's production. If they made a loss for one production, it would reduce the limited fund and even terminate it. Although the concept of *"The group must not make a loss"* could affect the leader negatively, it was profitable in the way that it made the group to become self-sufficient and sustainable. In other words, people in the group and the community had an occupation, a job plus a good relationship with others, thus boosting morale and encouragement to earn their livelihood and eventually causing affection, cooperation and assistance for one another.

According to His Majesty the King's speech context, He stated that *"our loss is our gain."* The context is accordance with the concept of *"The group must not make a loss."* The country will advance and the fact that people are living happily is priceless in financial value. This analogy is similar to the guideline of group administration that the group leaders have implemented. It involved running the private business of the leader along with the business of the group and the sacrifice of personal capital to assist and subsidize the group, based on the concept of *"The group must not make a loss"*, and provided mutual support between both businesses. A concept is a key mechanism that enables the group to create their own

product, which achieved a five-star award for meeting a high quality standard. Significantly, it brought about self-sufficiency of the group, as aimed by the government in attempts to promote self-reliant communities in a sustainable subsistence.

OTOP Group Existence Model

Based on her findings, the researcher developed an OTOP Group Existence Model, illustrated in Figure 1 below.

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                        │     Leadership Development       │
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                        │   The Generous Leadership Style  │
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┌────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌────────────┐ ┌────────────┐
│ OTOP   │ │Financial │ │ Welfare  │ │Activities│ │Relationship│ │   Good     │
│ group  │ │management│ │system for│ │   for    │ │  between   │ │relationship│
│ member │ │ of OTOP  │ │  OTOP    │ │supporting│ │  leader's  │ │with public │
│admini- │ │  group   │ │  group   │ │  group   │ │business and│ │  sector    │
│stration│ │          │ │ members  │ │relation- │ │  group's   │ │            │
│        │ │          │ │          │ │  ship    │ │  business  │ │            │
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                        │       OTOP Group Existence       │
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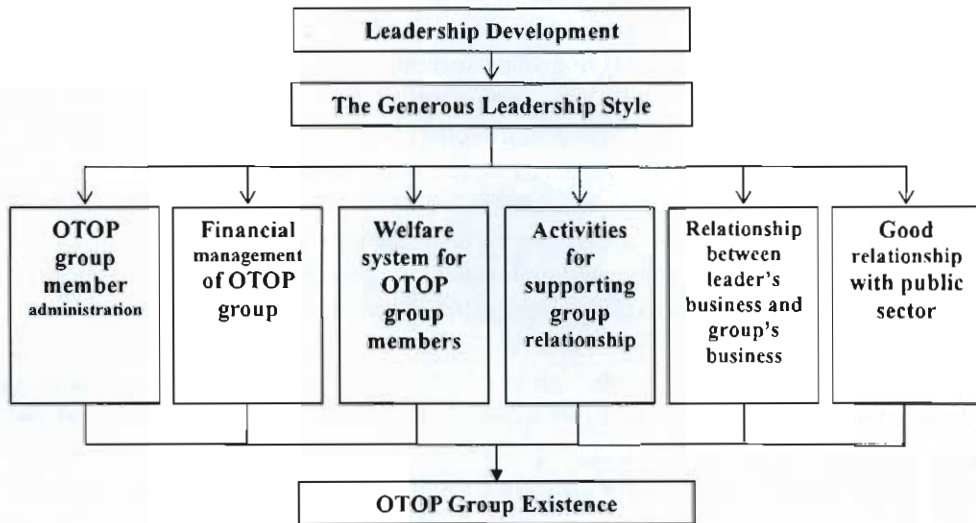
Figure 1. OTOP Group Existence Model

Source: Proposed by the researcher (2015)

As illustrated in Figure 1, it was found in this study that leadership development is most important for OTOP group success. Therefore, leaders developed themselves in many ways and adopted the generous leadership style, such as self-directed learning, learning from experiences and sacrificing for the group. When they used the generous leadership style, they included six components for OTOP group existence: (1) OTOP group member administration by having a close relationship with workers and creating long-term relationships with loving and caring for each other; (2) financial management of OTOP group with transparent financial management and honesty; (3) a welfare system for OTOP group members, including income, dividend and bonus; (4) participating in the group activities is advantageous in the way that it allows villagers to have part-time jobs and to have incomes from producing durian crisps for supporting group relationships; (5) building a relationship between leader's business and group's business; and (6) developing a good relationship with the public sector. It was found to be beneficial for group leaders to have their own durian crisps business for supporting the group's business. Finally, the leader needed to have a good relationship with the government officials who support the budget and training, thereby making the group stronger and sustainable. On the other hand, if a group cannot follow this model, they may become weak and collapse.

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In conclusion, there were several development methods for adopting The Generous Leadership Style, which were found to be critical for each OTOP group's existence. Managing an OTOP business group required not only leadership competencies, but also a management system, such as people management, financial management, benefits management, and group relationship management. In this study, it was found that financial management was especially important for an OTOP group existence and members' morale.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study's result of the key role of leadership development indicates that a developer or a stakeholder should realize and understand the people and the group's working lifestyle to develop their leadership and lead OTOP groups sustainably, because providing them with formal knowledge may not always be a successful guideline. To develop a group to be strong and sustainable, there needs to be a practical direction for learning and creating mutual cooperation. For this reason, further research studies should be conducted as follows:

1) Using mixed methods (i.e., quantitative as well as qualitative methodologies) to study the development model for OTOP leadership style that emerged from this study.

2) The researcher's results suggested there were two groups of OTOP operator: one is the strong group which refers to the group that has been set up for the sake of OTOP operation, it has a clear structure, rules and regulations with good member participation, members having incomes from groups, and an honest group leader, while the weak group lacks those characteristics. The researcher recommends that a study be conducted of the strong group and the weak group, using a qualitative research method, to study strong-weak group processes to gain more data for creating a more elaborated model of successful OTOP groups.

3) The researcher recommends that there should be a quantitative study to verify those components of leadership development that emerged in this study for their existence and relative importance in other samples in Thailand and overseas.

4) This study involved a case study research methodology to investigate a specific OTOP product, durian crisps. It is suggested that there should be studies to create a leadership development model in other communities which are producing different OTOP products in Thailand.

In conclusion, further research should to be conducted in other aspects of rural communities, with emphasis placed on leadership, change and development. In this way, the incomes and lifestyle of people living in rural communities may be increased and sustained in the future. This recommendation is consistent with the King's desire for Thailand to develop a "sufficiency economy".

Recommendations for Policymakers

The results of this study may be applied to develop and implement policies for supporting and enhancing the success of OTOP groups from both the government and private sectors, as follows: 1) The government officers who have responsibility for developing OTOP groups should pay more attention to build OTOP group strengths by developing leaders and subordinates prior to developing their product; 2) the OTOP development process should focus on developing the vital contribution of OTOP leadership competencies, including the importance of participation of all members to recognize their responsibility to the group; and 3) the government and private sectors should maximize the village members' incomes and

other benefits, as well as supporting the OTOP groups to become as self-reliant as possible. By assisting villagers to build a strong OTOP group, the OTOP group has the potential to extend and add value to OTOP products and move from reliance on the domestic market to the international market as well in the future.

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