

LOCAL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT FOR RURAL COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

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Abstract- This paper aimed to examine influences of leadership qualities towards degree of strengths in the social, economic and political dimensions, of the selected communities in Lopburi Province, Chaiyaphum Province, Nakorn Srithammaraj and Phitsanulok Province, those of which represented the 4 regions of Thailand. Utilizing the quantitative approach, the collected samples included the leaders of different communities including village heads and leaders of community organizations. The path analysis was employed in order to establish a structural equation model for an identification of relationship among the leadership factors. The findings revealed direct influence of behaviors of leaders involving the communities' activities, abilities of leaders and leadership qualities on the rural communities' degree of strengths. Indirect influencing leadership factors included abilities of leaders and leadership qualities, with the latter being reported the most influential.

Index Terms- Empowerment, Factors, Leader, Rural Community

I. INTRODUCTION

Community strength is a degree to which members of a community are self-reliant. For each community to achieve self-reliance, community leaders are significant. One of key success factors of a community is community leaders. Effective leaders receive trust, respect, cooperation and confidence from community members (Kitti Tayakkhanon, 2000).

Successful community development work requires effective leaders to facilitate activities to be accomplished (Parichart Walaisathien, 2000). It is essential that community leaders should possess certain qualifications that influence upon members' acceptance and harmony, as well as having good practices, abilities and public concern (Samphan Techa-athik, 1997).

This paper aimed to examine influences of leadership qualities towards degree of strengths of the selected communities in the social, economic and political dimensions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Leadership

Leadership is among the fundamental factors for organizational growth and success. Leaders represent a linkage among each subordinate; or those who build security and establish direction for a working group of individuals towards achievement (DuBrin, 1998). The outstanding qualities of leadership also include ability to manage work priorities, willingness to cooperate with others, responsibility and result-driven characteristic, a clear vision, courage to take bold steps of solving problems, creative mind, self-confidence, strong personality, accountability or willingness to accept consequences of their decisions and actions, strong mental model too work in complex

situation, ability to inspire and motivate others and ability to put structure in place (Stogdill and Bass, 1974).

Ohio State Leadership Studies identified 2 significant behavioral dimensions of leadership qualities based on the study of effectiveness of leadership using the case study of the leaders of Ohio State University. These are (1) the consideration structure or people-oriented structure, represented by ability to trust on their subordinates and accept others' opinions, having care for well-being of and concern for their subordinates' needs, approachability and staying open to communication and consultation, building relationships of trust, and respecting others' opinions; (2) initiating structure, represented by the extent to which leaders define leader and group member roles in order to have tasks accomplished (Rangsan Prasertsri, 2001; Nonglak Sutthiwattanapong, 2002). Another theory of leadership was based on the study of leaders' behavior, the Michigan Leadership Studies, in order to prove association between a leader's behavior, group process and measurement of group working. The findings presented that the leaders possessed 2 types of behavior: (1) task-oriented behavior: the effective leaders value time and give emphasis on work facilitation, are typically less concerned with the idea of caring to and building relationship with subordinates; and (2) relationship-oriented behavior: the leaders value people and hold that fostering positive relationships is a priority.

2.2. Community

Community was defined as a social unit of any size that shares common values. It is a group of people who are connected through relationships and learning together, and who cooperate in order to achieve their common goals (Pravet Wasri, 1997; Manderson et al., 1992). Generally, a community is defined by 5

characteristics including people, common interests, a given geographical area, interaction, and relationship (Samphan Techa-athik, 1997). There are 3 types of community classified

- (1) by administration for example villages and municipalities;
- (2) by social activities for example agriculture- based communities and market centers; and
- (3) by degree of social relationship for example communities in rural and urbanized areas (Somsak Srisantisuk, 1993).

Community strength is identified by continuous actions of engaging, managing and empowering community members for positive changes in order to reduce poverty, solve problems and build a readiness for any future changes and crisis (Research and Development Institute, Khon Khaen University, 1997). Indicators of community strengths encompass

- (1) social strength for example drug- free community, strategy in conflict management and cooperation for community's activities;
- (2) economic strength, represented by community fund, business, co-operative, and community shops; and
- (3) political strength, proved by good governance and transparency of community administration and no vote- buying (Brieger, 2006).

Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework was established to demonstrate relationship among different variables of leadership qualities. This is shown in Fig. 1.

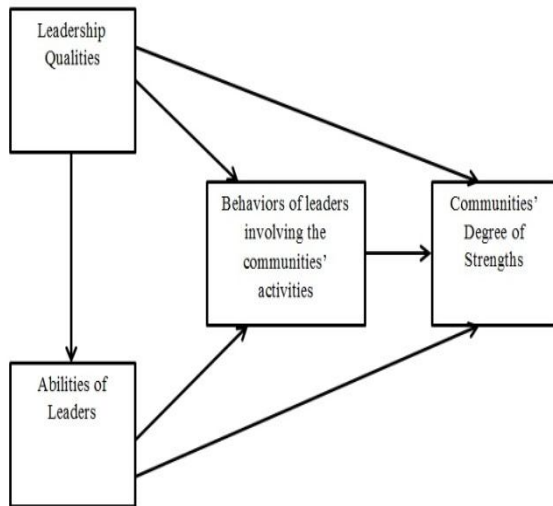


Fig.1. The Conceptual Framework

The assumptions were established as follows:

- (1) Communities' Degree of Strengths was dependent on behaviors of leaders involving the communities' activities, abilities of leaders and leadership qualities (CEMPOWER = B1BEHAVE + B2ABILITY + B3CHARAC).

- (2) Behaviors of leaders involving the communities' activities were dependent on abilities of leaders and leadership qualities (BEHAVE = B4ABILITY + B5CHARAC).

- (3) Abilities of leaders were dependent on leadership qualities (ABILITY = B6CHARAC).

III. DETAILS EXPERIMENTAL

3.1. Materials and Procedures

This exploratory study applied the quantitative method, with 2 types of sampling including purposive sampling and quota sampling. The sampling techniques were used with the populations classified by the provincial, district, sub-district and village levels. The selected provinces that represented each part of Thailand included Lopburi Province for the central part, Chaiyaphum Province for the northeastern part, Nakorn Srithammaraj for the southern part, and Phitsanulok Province for the northern part. Finally, a total of 150 samples were collected from 32 villages from the 4 provinces. These samples included 40 village heads and 110 leaders of community organizations. The path analysis was employed in order to understand direct, indirect and overall influences of each factor on the rural communities' degree of strengths.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Influencing Factors on the Communities' Degree of Strengths

The influencing factors on the rural communities' degree of strengths included (1) leadership qualities; (2) abilities of leaders; and (3) behaviors of leaders involving the communities' activities, as shown in Table 1. The study revealed that there was a high degree of relationship between the leadership qualities, behaviors of leaders involving the communities' activities, abilities of leaders and the rural communities' degree of strengths. These factors were not affected by multicollinearity.

Table1: Descriptive Analysis and Relationship Matrix among the Variables

Variables	CEMPOWER	CHARAC	BEHAVE	ABILITY
CEMPOWER		.62**	.50**	.30**
CHARAC			.32**	.32**
BEHAVE				.68**
ABILITY				
Mean	8.47	9.12	7.31	8.06
SD.	1.88	.99	1.71	1.63

* at a significance level of 0.05, ** at a significance level of 0.01

4.2. Structural Equation Analysis

Filling the path coefficient statistics, the structural equations were formulated as given in Table 2. A structural equation was also modeled as shown in Fig. 2, which provides explanations of possible causal relationships among a set of the rural community leadership variables. Table 3 also provides the direct, indirect and overall influencing factors on the rural communities' degree of strengths.

Table2: Path Coefficient Statistics

CEMPOWER =	.495BEHAVE**+	.267QUALEAD*+	.508LEADER**
	(3.868)	(2.065)	(5.012)
R2 = .471,	SEE = 1.309,	F = 18.100,	Significance of F = 0.000
BEHAVE =	.664QUALEAD**		
	(7.036)		
R2 = .460,	SEE = 1.173,	F = 60.609,	Significance of F = 0.000
QUALEAD =	.321LEADER**		
	(3.054)		
R2 = .103,	SEE = 1.396,	F = 9.325,	Significance of F = 0.003

Fig.2. The Structural Equation Model after the Path Analysis

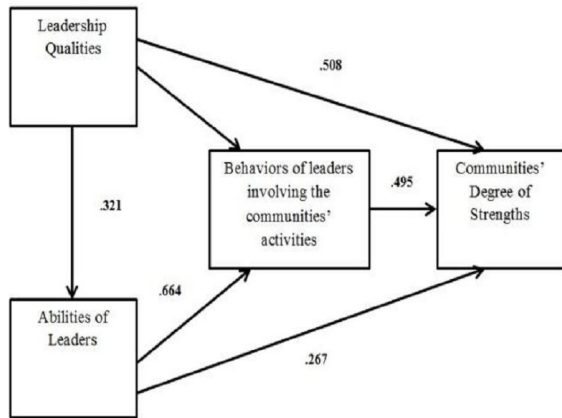


Table3: Direct, Indirect and Overall Influencing Factors on the Rural Communities' Degree of Strengths

Influencing factors on the rural communities' degree of strengths	Influences		
	Direct	Indirect	Overall
Behaviors of leaders involving the communities' activities	.495	-	.495
Abilities of Leaders	.267	.329	.596
Leadership Qualities	.508	.192	.700

The findings of this paper reported that behaviors of leaders involving the communities' activities, abilities of leaders and leadership qualities had a direct influence on the rural communities' degree of strengths. Furthermore, abilities of leaders and leadership qualities had an indirect influence on the rural communities' degree of strengths. Leadership qualities presented the most influential whereas abilities of leaders and behaviors of leaders involving

the communities' activities were the secondary influencing factors. These findings explain that the leaders play a significant role in encouraging the communities' members to participate in activities and empowering them. The notable leadership qualities also include honesty, dedication and maintaining good relationship, all which influence the communities' strengths.

A set of indirect influencing factors regards abilities of leaders, which can be viewed from willingness to cooperate with others in solving problems, to be open to others' feedbacks and to accept to admit their mistakes, as well as creating consoling moments. These qualities contribute to the communities' strengths.

CONCLUSIONS

Suggestions derived from the findings of this paper address the 3 main elements: leaders, members and the public sector, as follows:

1. Good community leaders should show dedication, public concern and sincerity, while possessing abilities to solve problems, raise internal and external funds, bring information to community members, gather them, and build harmony among them.
2. Strong unity of community members is essential for high degree of community strengths. Thus each member is required to participate in community activities by their affordability of time, in order that they will gradually be acquiring a comprehension in their roles and common goals of the community.
3. The public sector should provide a certain level of financial support to rural communities. Another necessary support includes a provision of trainings to community leaders and its members in managing teamwork, marketing and community shop management, by supplying the governmental experts for consultation and problem- solving. This is especially, essential for agriculture- based communities.

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