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Social entrepreneur competencies of social activists involved with children and youths: A case study of Nan province, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship is a well-integrated social movement which is composed of business and non-profit sectors. In Thai society, social entrepreneurs still lack competencies to certify practices. Therefore, this research aimed to: 1) explain motivation and social entrepreneur attributes and 2) assess the social entrepreneur competencies of activists with regard to children and youths in Nan province, Thailand.

Thirty-two social activists who actively worked on children and youth issues in Nan province were purposely selected from 35 social organizations active with children and youths. Data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. An in-depth interview using semi-structured questioning was conducted to explain social activists' motivation. Social entrepreneur attributes and social entrepreneur competencies were assessed using a self-assessment questionnaire.

The findings showed that participant's motivation was derived from: 1) beliefs in human dignity and rights, 2) experiences with a role model, 3) own experiences, and 4) gratitude to the nation. Regarding emotional intelligence and social skills, 59.4 percent of participants perceived having a high performance level in understanding emotional conditions when interacting with others and 84.4 percent perceived their ability to adapt and coordinate with others at a high level. On virtues and ethical issues, 96.9 percent viewed these two as significant and necessary for social entrepreneurs. Regarding social entrepreneur competencies, the average score for overall competency was at the master level ($\bar{X}=2.76$, $SD = 0.54$). The competency with the highest average score was learning ($\bar{X}=3.01$, $SD = 0.62$) followed by teamwork ($\bar{X}=3.00$, $SD = 0.61$). The competency with the lowest average score was fund raising at the apply level ($\bar{X}=2.34$, $SD = 0.73$).

Thus, a competency development model should be appropriately designed to increase social activist ability. Competency assessment should also be used to assess social activists in order to promote them to be effective social entrepreneurs.

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Introduction

Social entrepreneurship mainstreaming has been identified in the global society under the contextual conditions

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of social and environmental needs. Additionally, development support replacement has been driven by the seeds of good and earnest practitioners. Social enterprise, therefore, is a well-integrated social movement composed of business and non-profit sectors. As a social movement, it aims to solve community problems and provide new values for social sustainability (Nicholls, 2006). The original concepts of social entrepreneurship were in the form of individuals/organizations working on social issues. Presently, there is a conceptual process that stimulates business entrepreneurs who have targets for profits to realize, be aware of, and to pay more attention to society. They operate their business in such a form that society or the business sector drive social consciousness. Thus, the social enterprise mainstream is the best combination of humans, organization, and process.

Social entrepreneurs are activists who possess creative thoughts, visions, and a working network. These activists drive the social movement under organizations in the form of foundations, associations, non-government organizations (NGOs) or they may be under the control of the government sector. These organizations have goals and missions for societal aspects through methods of operation that mostly adopt traditional approaches which make their social movements encounter both success and failure because they lack business and managerial skills in particular (McBrearty, 2007). Social activists are asked for cost-effectiveness with regard to resource consumption (Phlainoi, 2008). Furthermore, these non-profit organizations are now encountering difficult circumstances as they attempt to prolong and sustain themselves while government sectors and other funding sources have imposed stricter funding considerations. These funding sources have also focused more on investment than welfare assistance (Ever & Laville, 2004).

Children and youths are easily persuaded, lured, or exploited and become victims in various forms. Significantly, they are always alienated from many social processes. As a result, they lack access to a learning process, and to participation in development, prevention, and solving social problems. If the problems are not solved, they become more severe with regard to children and youths with more complicated forms that are difficult to resolve. Hence, social activists or social entrepreneurs who work on child and youth issues have important roles in collaboration, sharing, and exchanging the situational information and problems of children and youths in various dimensions.

Nan province located in northern Thailand has many organizations and social activity implementers to solve social problems. These groups of people process social movement in various aspects and forms such as health, education, environment, and poverty social development. Social activists involved with children and youths in Nan province come from various organizations in the government, non-government, community-based, and individual sectors. They have strong and combined networking and relationships with the developed networking mechanism called the 'children and youth community' which is a semi-non-governmental organization.

Most projects have been funded by foreign grant sources to the leaders or organizations that lead to changes. These donor agencies have provided grants with conditions for project achievements, particularly with reference to creativeness, innovation, an investigation model, or new tactics by using a knowledge-based approach and learning process development to increase the life skills for children and youths. Some activist groups have been questioned by donors and investigated with regard to their management and performance which has reflected their ineffective and inefficient management as these are still key problems and need to be tackled. Hence, if we want to develop the capacity of social activists with regard to children and youths in Nan province to be highly competent entrepreneurs who can really achieve positive impacts for change that is relevant and appropriate to local contexts, we really need to understand their motivation and the actual level of social entrepreneurship competency.

Objectives

The research objectives were: 1) to explain the motivation and social entrepreneur attributes of activists with regard to child and youth issues in Nan province; and 2) to assess the social entrepreneur competencies of social activists with regard to children and youths.

Literature Review

Prabuddhanitisarn et al. (2005) conducted action research on child community development and situation assessment and the child and youth problem-solving process in northern Thailand. Their findings explained that child and youth problems were complicated, various, and dynamic. In addition, communities and social institutions were weak, which increased the number of affected children and youths living in difficult circumstances. They were victims of cultural consumerism with risk behaviors.

Phadphol et al. (2005) conducted participatory action research (PAR) to assess situations of children and youths, and built networking on child and youth problem prevention and elimination in Nan province. The research found that the activists with regard to children and youths started from accustomed partners or '*kallayanamit*' from both the government and non-government sectors who worked in the same issues. The finding proposed that a child community mechanism was still a small group of volunteers. These volunteers needed capacity building in various aspects and had even greater need for a joint process to network with people working in the child and youth network to gain greater power or develop a stronger movement to sustainably prevent and solve child and youth problems.

Based on the concepts of McClelland (1973) and Boyatzis (2008), the competency can be summarized into two categories (Figure 1). 1) Invisible competencies which need a long time to develop and include motivation, ideas, traits, social, emotional, virtue, and ethical attributes. These competencies can contribute to an individual being perceived as outstanding compared to other people. 2)

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