Developing the potential of Thai elected local executives for socio-economic change in the next decade

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Abstract

This research project is based on primary data from the field regarding ways of improving the skills of the elected officials in Yasothon province. The recommended model of potential development is what I call “OTSE.” (1.1) O means the elected executives should improve by means of Orientation. (1.2) T means improvement by Training. (1.3) S represents improvement by Study tours. (1.4) E means improvement by Education. The suggested patterns of skill improvement should be training activities consisting of (2.1) public spirit, (2.2) accountability, (2.3) achievement-based management, (2.4) network coordination, (2.5) creative thinking, (2.6) leadership, (2.7) human relations, (2.8) changed management, (2.9) flexibility, (10) negotiation, (2.11) communications, and (2.12) teamwork. The suggested formats of potential development of the elected executives in Yasothon should be “JKV and JKK” forms. “JKV” stands for “Jab-Khaen-Vao” (hand-shaking discussions) and “JKK” stands for “Jab-Khao-Kooy” (knee-touching discussions). The new managerial TAO forms in Yasothon should be “people-centric management.”

Key word: Orientation, Training, Study Tour Model, Education, Training, People-Centric Management.

Introduction

Change is a constant process. The Lord Buddha, founder of Buddhism, taught that everything in the world is a-nit-change (impermanent, unstable, changing). Local administration and socio-economic change in Thailand are no exception. Thailand has a long history of change in local government structure. During the first period of Thai history, known as the Sukhothai period (1257-1378), there were many local city states, such as Chiang Mai and Pha Yao in the north, and Nakhon Si Thammarat and Pattani in the south.
The second period of Thai history was that of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1350-1767), which lasted for 417 years. During this time there were still many local city states controlling their own territories, including Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Pha Yao in the north; Khorat and Phimai in the northeast; and Nakhon Si Thammarat, Chaiya, Talang, and Pattani in the south.

During the current period of Thai history, known as Ratanakosin, and centered in Bangkok, King Mongkut (Rama IV, r. 1851-1868) was the first Chakri Dynasty king to embark seriously on reform based on Western models. His reforms and foreign policy were continued by his son, King Chulalongkorn, (Rama V, r. 1868 - 1910). Modern Thailand can be said to be a product of the comprehensive and progressive reforms of his reign (National Identity Board 2000: 24-5). King Rama V reformed the state administrative structure by making it more centralized. The main policy of centralization was based on the primary goals of national solidarity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, as well as the secondary goal of unification to prevent colonization by Britain and France.

In local government, theoretically, the first sukhapiban (sanitary district) was established in 1897 during the reign of King Rama V. In 1905, the second local government, sukhapiban tachalom, was organized in Samut Sakorn province. In practice, however, the Sukhapiban Krungtheb and Sukhapiban Tachalom were administrated by the Metropolitan Ministry and the governor of Samut Sakorn, respectively (Thanate Charoenmuang, 2005: 89-90).

Thai politics became more westernized after the Khanarat (the People’s Party) took power from King Rama VII in 1932. The absolute monarchy was abolished and the king had to rule under constitutional law (Morell & Samudavanija, 1981: ch.3) Since 1932 the Thai constitution has been changed 16 times.

At present, Thai political culture is modernized only in form, while the content is still underdeveloped (Pit Sompong, 1994:153). Morell & Samudavanija (1981: 42) have referred to local government in Thailand as “internal colonialism” because, although theoretically the central government in Bangkok delegates powers to the local governmental units, in practice many local governments are under the control of the central government.
There are several forms of local government in Thailand, including Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs), Municipalities, and Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs). Municipalities are divided into three levels: sub-district municipalities, town municipalities, and city municipalities. They were established under the 1933 Municipal Act. Even though a municipality has its own mayor and municipal council, some activities are under the control of the provincial government. Today there are 1838 sub-district municipalities, 145 town municipalities, and 27 city municipalities.

Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs) are another type of local government in Thailand. PAOs originated in 1955 under the regime of Prime Minister Phibun Songkram. In the beginning, PAOs were controlled by the provincial governors and provincial committees, but at present they are more independent than they were in the past. Some PAO administrators have more responsibility for their budget than some provincial governors. There are currently 76 PAOs.

Tambon (Sub-district) Administrative Organizations (TAOs) are the grassroots-level local governments in Thailand. The TAO idea was conceived in 1956 by Phibun Songkram. For 20 years, TAOs were similar to many other administrative units in Thailand, in that they had no powers. The first jobs for TAOs were rural development programs during the dry season, which were created during the administration of Prime Minister Krukrit Pramoj in 1975. Krukrit, head of the Social Action Party (SAP), had a popular policy called ngoen-pun (shifted money) to develop local roads and canals. From 1976 until 1994 TAOs had no other activities.

TAOs were reorganized in 1994 under the government of Democrat Party Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai. The 1994 TAO Act was the first that prescribed the juristic person status of organizations. Under the Act, TAOs can manage public services more independently and efficiently than they could in the past. The Act has been modified five times, with the latest revision in 2003. At present, there are 5765 Tambon Administrative Organizations.

Decentralization has been a major political policy of the central government and it was prescribed in the Constitutions of 1997 and 2007, as well as in the Decentralization Act of 1999. The Act identified 245 functions that were to be transferred from central and regional government agencies to local administrative
organizations (PAOs, Municipalities, and TAOs). The given time-frames of transformation were four years and 10 years, with 2011 as the final year. There were many procedures and plans for decentralization (Nanthawat Boramanant, 2009: 415-455). The key persons who could play major roles are elected local executives, especially the chief executive of the TAO.

The model of potential development of the Chief Executives of the TAOs in Yasothon: the OTSE Model

Potential is a latent ability or competency which is hidden inside oneself. The tacit potential can be accumulated by the learning development process. Learning is an important activity in human resource development. The CETAOs (Chief Executives of Tambon Administrative Organizations) in Yasothon develop their abilities through lifelong learning. The Yasothon lifelong learning is the “OTSE” model. Figure 1 below shows the model of CETAOs’ potential development.

![Figure 1. Yasothon CETAOs’ Potential Development Model](image)

The above model shows that “OTSE” is a holistic model which is composed of various steps or processes.

1.) O stands for **Orientation**, which is the initial step in development for the new CETAOs in Yasothon. Orientation is the process by which new chief executives learn important TAO values and norms, form working relationships, and learn how to function in their jobs. They have to learn the skills and behaviors necessary to perform their jobs.
effectively. The study found that 57.30% of the CETAOs in Yasothon were newcomers. All of the newcomers walked into their new managerial jobs without any guidance. They said, “The chief administrators (palad) did not recommend anything, but simply said, “It’s up to you” or “Do whatever you like.” The new CETAOs suggested that the Yasothon Provincial Office for Local Administration should collaborate with some universities to organize orientation sessions before they begin working at their posts.

2.) T stands for **Training**, which is an important process in developing human potential. The study found that 64.28 percent of CETAOs in Yasothon need in-service training, especially pre-service training. The most popular topic of training was in the area of their authority or powers, followed by leadership, changed management, and achievement-based management.

Over the next decade, TAO will become much more complex. In the past decade there were some delegated public services for which TAOs could not solve management problems. More public services tasks will be transferred to TAOs in the coming year; consequently, TAO human resources must be trained to handle these new tasks. The study found that 48.50% of CETAOs in Yasothon had never been trained in network coordination and 47.10% had never been trained in negotiation. These findings indicate that CETAOs in Yasothon need to be developed.

From the researcher’s observation, the highest priority subject for potential development should be the CETAOs’ conscience, or sense of right and wrong. This includes topics such as having an interest in public welfare or the good of the community, accountability, and a commitment to team work.

3.) S stands for the **Study Tour Model** in developing the CETAOs. Study tours are useful activities through which employees accumulate more experience. Study tours are potential development activities outside of the office. In the business sector, firms using external experiences recognize this concern and thus articulate the link between the competencies needed by the manager on the job (Jackson and others 2009:299). The study indicated that 47.10% of the CETAOs in Yasothon had never taken a study tour during the time that they ran their organizations. What should be done? The researcher suggests that the CETAOs should take the opportunity at last once a year to visit the most successful TAO in each province.
4.) **E** means developing potential by **Education.** Education is the process of learning. Education usually means long training in schools or institutions. In the first decade of the transformation to decentralization (1998-2004), when basic public services were transferred to local government, primary education was one of the public affairs transferred to TAOs. The school teachers protested the government’s policy and only a few teachers agreed to transfer. The main argument of the teachers was the CETOAs’ education. The teachers pointed out that most of the CETOAs had a certificate in primary education. Since then, the Department of Local Administration has created a project for local human resources development in education. The Department signed an MOU with Khon Kaen University in 2005 aiming to educate local human resources in higher degree programs in local government. The program has been operating since then.

The first group of students who received Master degrees in local government from Khon Kaen University in 2007 was comprised of 1320 graduates. The present group is the eighth. In the case of Yasothon, many CETOAs got more benefit from this project and 35.70% of CETOAs earned a Bachelor’s degree and 15.71% a Master’s degree in local government. Some have been studying at the graduate level. From the researcher’s observation, the CETOAs who received primary and secondary certificates were different in many ways from those who graduated with a degree. The differences include personal characteristics, such as decision-making and management style. The CETOAs with degrees are smarter and more self-confident than those with lower certification. Some CETOAs suggested that the Yasothon Provincial Office for Local Administration and the CETOAs group should have a connecting program with local colleges or universities to organize continuing education programs which would be lifelong education. Courses would be job-specific; the TAOs would choose instructors; and college credit might be granted, making it possible for CETOAs to earn a college degree.

**The Pattern of CETOAs’ Potential Development in Yasothon: Training**

Yasothon is a province in northeast Thailand, 531 kilometers from Bangkok. It occupies a territory of about 4161 square kilometers. It has a population of 539164, ranking it 46th of 77 in the kingdom (Alpha Research, 2011:543). The provinces bordering on Yasothon are Roi Et and Mukdahan to the north, Amnart Chareon to the east, Ubon Ratchathani to the south, and Sisaket to the west. Governmentally, Yasothon has one PAO, one town Municipality, 16 Tambon Municipalities, and 70 Tambon Administrative Organizations (Department of Local Administration: 2554).
Training is the best activity for CETAOs’ potential development in Yasothon. It is aimed to change or improve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of CETAOS. Training is intended to increase the expertise of CETAOs in a particular area. In the case of Yasothon, the training should be organized in two categories: 1) knowledge and attitudes, and 2) skills. The knowledge and attitude category consists of (1) public spirit, (2) accountability, (3) flexibility, and (4) creative thinking. These topics are aimed at cultivating public-mindedness in the CETAOs. The data from the field indicates that 72.29% of the CETAOs have never been trained in these areas. All are eager to join the training courses. They suggested that the courses should be run as in-service training during the second week of their appointment.

The patterns of training which the CETAOs in Yasothon suggested to the organizations had of two methods. The first is the *puscha-wisatchana* or question-and-answer method. The second is the case study method. According to the “*puscha-wisatchana*” method, the trainees (CETAOs) are divided into two groups: the “*puscha* team” or the question team and the “*wisatchana* team” or the answer team. The “*puscha* team” consists of the newcomers or the CETAOs who are novices. The “*wisatchana* team” should be the expert CETAOs who have more experience. The second method of training is that of case studies. Each case study is based on actual events involving real problems in a TAO. The CETAOs will be trained to learn analytical and problem-solving skills.

The training courses for potential development skills of the CETAOs in Yasothon were prioritized as follows: (1) network coordination, (2) negotiation, (3) communication, (4) teamwork, (5) human Relationships, (6) changed management, (7) achievement-based management, and (8) leadership. The percentage of CETAOs who have never been trained in network coordination is shown above. The second topic of training which is necessary for changing in the next decade is Negotiation; 47.10% of the CETAOs have never been trained in this field. The third is communications, which will be very complicated in the next decade. The CETAOs must be well prepared in communications with people and organizations. The field data showed that 42.80% of the CETAOs in Yasothon need to be trained in this field.

The fourth subject is team-work, in which 37.10% of the CETAOs need to be trained. Because organizations in the next decade will be more complex, teamwork in organizations and good teams will be necessary to solve problems. The fifth topic is human
relationships. It was found that 34.20% of the CETAOs in Yasothon need to be trained in human relationships. The sixth topic is changed management and achievement based management; in both 27.10% of the CETAOs have no training. The last topic is leadership. Non-participant observation reveals that most of the CETAOs in Yasothon need to be trained in leadership, as only 15.71% of the CETAOs have been trained in this field.

The form of CETAOs’ potential development in Yasothon: people-centric management

People-centric management means the CETAOs have to work with the people in the community. People are independent human beings. They are not the workers in the TAO. They are not subordinate and are not under the chain of command of the CETAOs and so working with them can be difficult. The CETAOs need more experience, more strategies, and higher competency. People-centric management needs high-potentiality development skills practice. In the office, CETAOs are the heads of organizations, but in the community CETAOs and people are friends and equals.

How do you work with people? In the case of Yasothon, the cultural environment is all-important. The TAO is a local rural organization. Usually there are about four to 10 villages in a Tambon. Each village has 70 to 200 household families. Yasothon villages are organized by a kinship and wat (Buddhist temple) relationship. The social distance in each village is very close; social contact is face-to-face. The closest relationship of Yasothon people is kinship. The common word of kinship is “Poh-Mae-phi-nong” meaning dad, mom, older sibling, younger sibling. Whenever you use these terms in speaking to others, you will be accepted as one of the kin group. Some kin groups, however, are tighter than others.

Thai local executives are elected politicians. In the case of CETAOs in Yasothon, all are elected by the people in their Tambon. Most are familiar with working with people in everyday life. But administrative jobs in public organizations involve public benefits which will affect individual interest. This will be the problem to solve. The CETAOs must take the side of the public or people in solving problems. The best strategy in coping with community conflict is brotherhood relationship. The CETAOs have to play the roles of “Poh-Mae-phi-nong.” In some cases, the TAOs’ policies, projects or plans could not implement public goals because of public protest. In the case of Yasothon, the CETAOs suggested having “jab-khaen-wao” (hand-shaking discussions) and “jab-khao-kooy” (knee-touching discussions).
The JKV \((jab-khaen-vao)\) and JKK \((jab-khao-kooy)\) are forms of group
discussion/dialogue in the “Poh-Mae-phi-nong” atmosphere. Culturally, CETAOs are highly
respectful of the Yasothon community. JKV & JKK are friendly and appreciative inquiries,
similar to interpersonal knowledge sharing. The CETAOs and the people have mutual respect
for one another. The JKV & JKK are processes of mutual trust. As described above, basic
potential development involves working effectively with many people in the community,
which is a new managerial form of management of the CETAOs in Yasothon, known as
“people-centric management.”

References


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