Chapter 4

Using Knowledge Management to Create Self-Reliant Communities in Thailand

Chalard Chantarasombat
Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Boonchom Srisa-ard
Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Matthew H. S. Kuofie
University of Central Michigan, USA

Murray E. Jennex
San Diego State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Many look at knowledge management as an organizational initiative. However, can KM also be used to assist low technology situations such as rural villages? This paper describes the application of KM to the creation of a self-reliant community in Thailand. Changing demographics are threatening the ability of rural villages to sustain their viability as traditional methods of passing knowledge from one generation to the next are circumvented by the movement of the young to more urbanized areas of Thailand. KM is seen as a way of changing the traditional knowledge transfer process to something that assists those who remain in the villages. The KM approach investigated consisted of five stages: 1) Preparation, 2) Create motivation, awareness, promote participation, 3) Develop the KM plan, 4) Implement the KM plan, and 5) Evaluation. The approach was assessed and found to be successful by using eight organizations over an 8-month period.

INTRODUCTION

The world is experiencing fast economic, social and technological changes and global competition relies on knowledge. Society not only relies on funds, labor, natural resources and raw materials for creating production values but also needs knowledge for creating innovation and intellectual property. Development of this body of knowledge can affect competition and the strength of community, organization, and institute which are regarded as the foundation of the process of country development (Patthamasiriwat, 2004). Sharing this body
of knowledge improves the ability of knowledge workers to further innovate. An important element of knowledge management (KM) is the process of knowledge sharing (Kuo, 2005; Wichainpanya, 2005). Therefore, Thai society should promote knowledge creators and users to generate added value and competitive capability within a social context of improving Thai society, raising living standards, and general well being by using five religious principles. These five principles are morality, intelligence, right economy, right state, and strong society. These are in accordance with the National Plan for Economic and Social Development 9 (2002-2006). This plan determines development vision based on these five principles (Watthanasiritham, 2003).

In Thai society, the most important thing is not resources such as labor or money; the most important resource is knowledge. Thai society is constantly learning. KM and learning processes are very important. Management of the learning process for the community can help it discover and develop human potential until it can rely on itself. A strong Thai community which can rely on itself must support these four basic principles: 1) create reliability, 2) rehabilitate relationships, 3) develop management systems, and 4) learning process (Phongphit, Nanthasuwan, & Raekphinit, 2001).

All strong Thai communities and organizations must be ready to learn. Self-reliant communities in the Changwat (administrative province) of Maha Sarakham have various types of groups including cooperative groups, occupation groups and local wisdom groups. There are interesting areas of learning, particularly in the Tambon (sub-district) of Na kha and the Tambon (sub-district) of Pracha Phatthana in the Amphoe (district) of Wapi Pathum (Chantarasombat, 2004) These communities regard principles of community welfare and community enterprises as guidelines for self-reliance. They began activities by forming occupation groups, using available local raw materials to be transformed into products and using local wisdom to adjust to current situations. Thailand is attempting to create jobs and occupations for community people to rely on themselves. However, they still lack systematic KM/KM mechanisms to support the communities to work efficiently and continuously. Thus the researchers were interested in conducting this study to develop a KM model for self-reliant communities in the Changwat (administrative province) of Maha Sarakham by applying a mix of participatory research, quantitative and qualitative research techniques. If a Thai community successfully implements the KM model for self-reliant communities, the community becomes self-reliant and loves one another better than before the implementation.

This paper presents the lessons and experience gained in developing KM and KMS for building self-reliant communities in Thailand. The purpose of this paper is three-fold:

1. To develop a KM process model for creating self-reliant communities in Thailand,
2. To examine success and satisfaction with KM and KMS developed for creating self-reliant communities implementing the KM model
3. To identify success factors for KM and KMS for creating self-reliant communities.

BACKGROUND

Jennex (2005) defines KM as the practice of selectively applying knowledge from previous experiences of decision making to current and future decision making activities with the express purpose of improving the organization's effectiveness. Also, Jennex (2005) viewed a KM system, KMS, as that system created to facilitate the capture, storage, retrieval, transfer, and reuse of knowledge. The perception of KM and KMS is that they holistically combine organizational and technical solutions to achieve the goals of knowledge retention and reuse to ultimately