

PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE OTOP PROJECT: A CASE STUDY OF HERBAL COSMETICS ENTREPRENEURS

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ABSTRACT

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This article explores the approach of human resource development context within an OTOP project: a case study of herbal cosmetics entrepreneurs. In terms of field studies aiming for developing products, the problem lies in unawareness of importance of learning from external experiences within the same cluster. There was also the problem of entrepreneur network development among the OTOP herbal cosmetics group, which lacks continuity. In addition, there is a problem of developing a new generation to continue the business, insofar as all the accumulated knowledge and local wisdom are rarely transferred to young people these days. The recommendations concerning human resource development context are to do effective field study, which must include a preliminary consideration by the entrepreneurs of the type, form, and size of the OTOP enterprise, and consideration of suitable model for field study in order to study and utilize the knowledge in the development of their own business. Moreover, the government sector should support network development among the OTOP entrepreneurs within the herbal cosmetics cluster by pointing to the benefit of such a network and supporting the entrepreneurs in the development of network. The government should also support new generation development projects in the OTOP herbal products field to ensure that the new generation will absorb the local wisdom and existing resources in their community, understanding them as assets which can generate income in the future.

Keywords: Human resource development; OTOP; herbal cosmetics; social development

1. INTRODUCTION

The “One Tambon, One Product” policy has been crucial to the development of the rural Thai economy since it became a national priority in 2001. The government found OTOP project to support the local revitalization process, to make strong and self-reliant community, and to encourage the participation of people in the generation of income and job opportunity by utilizing local resources and wisdom to develop unique products and services with added value. The government is aware of the importance of this project in driving the local economy and community. This project is linked to the 20-year national strategy, as well as the 12th National Economic and Society Development Plan, as one of the mechanisms to empower people in multi dimension, to boost the national economic capacity, and to strengthen community. The OTOP policy aims to support valuable products for the economy and national demand, while also stimulating human resource development context to nurture the foundations of sustainable development in other areas of the country.

The rationale of the OTOP policy is not only to develop product or service in order to improve the grassroots economy, but also to focus on the process of human context. The quality of human resource can ensure the competency and vision of local community leader, who can motivate the local people to creatively revitalize their economy. In other words, this level of development is the highest goal of OTOP, as the true force of regional development is the human resource, who are, ideally, brave and even visionary as leaders of the development process. Human resource should be developed in the direction of innovative agriculture, commerce, tourism, and other dimensions, if all the goals of human resource development context are to be fulfilled.

In the herbal cosmetics products cluster, approach of human resource development is a determining factor for its achievement. As health business and herbal cosmetics product clusters are growing and expanding continuously, they become an opportunity for a new generation of entrepreneurs who seek to develop product from Thai herbs. However, OTOP herbal cosmetics entrepreneurs face human resource development problems, because OTOP project is the local business in the local community area. The latest technical knowledge about herbal extracts for cosmetics, the complex cosmetics manufacturing process, and modern business administration are still inaccessible to entrepreneurs in the countryside. Hence, OTOP entrepreneurs should pay attention to human resource development to increase the efficiency and profitability of their business. Furthermore, this study could be applied to other types of OTOP products. The approach of human resource development in this cluster is applicable anywhere in the OTOP business, and it will increase the competence of entrepreneurs and members of community enterprises. It will lead to self-improvement, human capital, and sustainable businesses. This study also offers recommendations to increase the ability of OTOP entrepreneurs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of human resource development is to cultivate competent community leader with the vision to encourage local people to creatively take on challenges. In other words, this level of development is the highest goal of OTOP, as the true force of regional development depends on the visionary quality of human resource. In order to ensure a natural process of development, human resource must be innovatively developed in the dimensions of agriculture, commerce, tourism, and other areas. Nadler and Wiggs (1989) explained that human resource development is a systematic planning process to enhance human resource’s potential, knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and behavior. Hence, Nadler and Wiggs proposed the approach to enhance human resource’s potential through three elements of training, education, and development. Similarly, Mathis and Jackson (2007) defined human resource development as the development of staff for improvement and enhancement of required skills for their current job requirement, to ensure their ability to deal with variety of tasks. This will be beneficial for both the companies and the staffs themselves. It could also help improve organizational competency and the ability to adapt in the changing environment.

Regarding the OTOP entrepreneurs’ competency, Yamazaki (2010) conducted a study called “A Comparative Analysis of One Village, One Product (OVOP) and its Replicability in International Development,” and stressed that the Thai OTOP program focuses on product development more than other dimensions of the goals of OTOP. It could be deemed that the previous OTOP policy faced the important problem of increasing the entrepreneurs’ competency, while developing unique, high quality the product, which is a part of human capital development that will stay with the community forever. Therefore, suitable supporting policy from the government and private sector play an important role in the sustainable development of OTOP project. A study by Trakarnsirinont et al. (2007, as cited in Konthong, 2018) of a human resource development project related to the cycle of OTOP products in Chiang Mai province found that the community enterprises can develop in a sustainable way if their foundation is strong in three dimensions: committing to become self-reliant and the

human resource development: focusing on agriculture as the foundation of the community; and professional administration, according to the example of 5-star successful entrepreneurs. Therefore, it is possible that the government sector should change its role from commander to facilitator and partner of entrepreneurs, providing support and assistance to ensure the strength and confidence of the entrepreneurs.

Regarding OTOP human resource development, the Community Enterprise Research and Development Center, Faculty of Economics, Chiang Mai University conducted a case study of the sustainable development of community enterprise in the upper northern region of the country (Punnarong et al., 2011). The researchers identified the CD Model of business development, which consists of the elements and principles to achieve administrative success. One of the factors is labor (L). The researchers proposed that the government formulate an OTOP labor policy to promote human resource development. The activity might include a curriculum focused on community products to apply local wisdom within the vocational institution, along with training by local experts to increase the pool of skilled labor for the community enterprise; teaching the new generation to utilize local wisdom in the production process; conservation of wisdom family as a legacy for future generations; and job creation, such as hiring youths during semester breaks, and elders or labors who are available in some season. There is also a study by Noknoi and Langthaekun (2015) on community businesses and successful human resource management strategies. Their findings were that successful entrepreneurs planned their human resource according to production plan. They focused on hiring part-time local employees, which makes for more flexibility than with full-time employees. Regarding training and development, most entrepreneurs emphasized the training of required skills in order to reduce errors. Training can be conducted by internal and external organization. Regarding relationship maintenance with employees, most entrepreneurs treated their employees like family members and take care of them well.

As for the OTOP Organizations' management, there is a study by Ananlertsakul and Jiyajan (2018). They conducted the study of the organizational management model for increasing the potential operation. It was a case study on herbal product (non-food) from OTOP community enterprises in southern Thailand, and it showed that, in a good model of community enterprise administration, the entrepreneur must designate the structure of responsibility and set up clear power distributions. The group must formulate a business plan and decide on the strategic direction, as well as providing clear control of the process in all its aspects. Administration should focus on participation and control according to the rule of the group and human resource development. Furthermore, it was also found that the leader of the group and the organizational culture are highly influential on the community enterprises' operations.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes the qualitative research approach, including documentary research, in-depth interview, and focus group to generate a conceptual framework which is used to analyze policies by connecting the relationship between the content and the related literature. The conclusion was reached in the form of a descriptive analysis. The researchers conducted in-depth interview with 18 participants. The sample groups in the in-depth interview involved specialists in public policy, entrepreneur development, related government agencies in the implementation of OTOP project, local experts and related scholars. We also had a focus group which consisted of 12 OTOP entrepreneurs in the herbal cosmetics cluster. The key informants were selected purposively from specialists who know the OTOP program well and are involved in promotion of herbal cosmetics products clusters.

In addition, this research uses the conceptual framework derived from the OVOP process (One Village, One Product: OVOP), which was originated by Morihiko Hiramatsu in Oita Prefecture, Japan, in 1979. This concept is a foundation of regional development policy, as Hiramatsu's goal was to inspire communities to produce valuable and quality products which can generate income for the villagers and boost the local economy.

Moreover, the concept of OVOP became an inspiration to local leaders and human resource development (Igusa, 2008). Conceptual framework in this study applied Hiramatsu's model, especially regarding developing human resource, which requires effective field study, network developments within the community, and the development of a new generation of community leaders, as the framework of analysis about the problems and recommendations of human resource development context within the OTOP project of Thailand.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the principle of OVOP (One Village, One Product) to the analysis of problem and recommendation for the human resource development context within the OTOP project, in the case of herbal cosmetics entrepreneurs, there are three key issues in the framework related to the human resource development context as following.

4.1 Initial field study for product development

A field study can be immensely beneficial for the knowledge, understanding, relationship, and teamwork. Such a study can motivate mutual learning and the sharing of experiences and opinion which can produce better techniques and solutions. However, field studies are often more like entertaining tourist activities, without a clear objective. Field studies should enable entrepreneurs to observe the action for some purposes in a short period of time. It should be one of the activities to develop human resource through new experiences and the observation of the best practices which encourage learning from external organizations (Puvitayaphan, 2011).

Therefore, the development of OTOP herbal cosmetics entrepreneurs should allow the entrepreneurs to have experiences and gain knowledge which are not limited by the framework of their own products. Instead, field study should encourage learning of related process of manufacturing and sales. The entrepreneurs must be ready to learn and attend training for professional development.

The researcher then conducted in-depth interview with the OTOP entrepreneurs in herbal cosmetics who had previous experience in attending a field study of organizations related to cosmetics manufacturing, such as the Chao Phraya Aphaiphubet Hospital and the Giffarine factory, which are successful enterprises in this field. The key informants also attended training in packaging development. Some of them deemed that field studies at such factories were not be useful, due to their large scale of production, as the SMEs or community enterprise could not replicate such companies' operations. However, field study at smaller outfits allows for discussion of technical matters on a smaller, more relevant scale, and might contribute to a clearer understanding and sharing.

Meanwhile, the networker of International OVOP Policy Association deemed that OTOP entrepreneurs in rural areas rarely participate in field studies, but they might learn within their own community, especially when the local administrative organization finalized their budget and they could bring villagers and members of community enterprises on such field trips. Some entrepreneurs are still not aware of the benefits of learning from external organization. They also lack a network of similar entrepreneurs who could learn from each other.

As for the organization related to OTOP entrepreneurs' development, the Director of the Planning Division at the Community Development Department in the Ministry of Interior explained that the OTOP project provided learning centers for field study called "OTOP school" which exist in five locations; Phatthalung, Ang Thong, Saraburi, Khon Kaen, and Chiang Mai. The OTOP schools are there to enable OTOP entrepreneurs who are already strong to teach developing entrepreneurs. Such interactions encourage the creation of databases and various networks focused on the collective development of products. The focus group has revealed that technological advancements have enabled some rural entrepreneurs to learn about the outside world from online media such as Facebook or YouTube, and then to develop their product from the knowledge they've gained online, instead of from field studies which require a budget for transportation.

It is clear that field study that focused on product development is an important opportunity for OTOP entrepreneurs, who can pursue ways to continue developing their products after that educational excursion.

4.2 Network development

The development of work techniques and problem-solving in same form which transfer as the organization or group culture is not different from a country which shuts down its external communication. Administration only within the same conceptual framework, using the familiar, convenient resources, facilities, and internal information, can be an obstacle to development. Therefore, network development can solve this problem by allowing individuals and organizations to share information, including lessons and experiences, with those outside their organization. This should decrease redundancy and increase coordination and mutual benefits, as the door to the external world has been opened (Kanjanaangsinon, 2000).

Regarding the benefit of joining a network, OTOP entrepreneurs in the herbal cosmetics cluster have found that networking helps them to lower the raw materials costs and to exchange production resources. Some raw materials can be bought in a large batch, and owners can share the purchases with the same network of suppliers, especially the herbal ingredients which should not be stored for long, as their quality declines. The entrepreneurs could thus exchange and trade from the network.

The focus group of OTOP entrepreneurs in the herbal cluster revealed that modern businesses should learn from each other and share information. Furthermore, there should be networks from the government sector to support roadshows within and outside the local area, such as agriculture fairs, community development products fairs, public health products fairs, etc. Apart from providing venues for roadshows, networking with government agencies assists enterprises in other dimensions. For example, the Office of District Agriculture can help with herbal farming. The public health office can provide knowledge of herbs. The sub district agricultural office can aid in the purchase of machinery for processing. Moreover, private networks can also help in conservation the environment and with product development.

Networks between entrepreneurs and government agencies responsible for supporting OTOP herbal products will ensure that they receive benefits in multiple ways, including capital, knowledge, production recommendations, packaging development, and more. As for their role in human resource development, the Community Development Department has appointed OTOP traders who are local members of the province mediators who look after the OTOP groups, as in finding markets for products which are hard to sell locally. The responsibilities of OTOP trader also include product development. These traders provide continuous training of entrepreneurs to increase their knowledge of manufacturing, marketing, creating a story, and packaging development.

The Director of the Planning Division in the Community Development Department of the Ministry of Interior emphasizes that the network of OTOP entrepreneurs exists at the district, provincial, regional, and national level, and is sometimes separated in the cluster network, according to one's products, such as food, beverages, herbs, items for daily use, etc. There are also informal networks with a variety of connections. The Community Development Department in the Ministry of Interior has attempted to develop a network in the form of sub clusters such as herbal cosmetics, and has invited OTOP entrepreneurs who are committed to improvement to participate in the training, design, and development of products and branding. This form of sub clusters allows more specificity. The Community Development Department supports this activity because it generates more sub cluster networks. The entrepreneurs within these sub network share their knowledge and continue to develop. Furthermore, the Office of SMEs Promotion (OSMEP) has provided activity for network development among the herbal products entrepreneurs. The OSMEP appointed Rajamangala University of Technology in Thanyaburi to implement the project to support the herbal products entrepreneurs network cluster. Its success in 2017 and 2018 took the form of greater economic value, income distribution, more spending, and the continuous development of local products. Network development among entrepreneurs with similar products proved to be an excellent way to encourage coordination for further business and entrepreneur development.

It is clear that coordination among the OTOP entrepreneurs helps them in manufacturing and marketing activities, especially regarding the relationships within the network which can become a sustainable alliance of business development. This contributes to creating new channels to bring the products into the market. The OTOP entrepreneurs should seek their business partners from various sources, such as alliances of suppliers who provide raw materials, as this helps to reduce the cost of raw materials. It will be beneficial to both partners as the overall profits will increase. Likewise, such coordination can occur in the production process, which will also contribute to lower costs and higher profits.

The form of interaction between networks should be reciprocal, rather than unilateral. The more interaction among the members, the closer they become, and their connections will strengthen as they learn more from each other.

However, the government should act as the facilitator of networks' development, rather than as the formal networks' founder, since networks founded by the state are usually connected to the policies and implementations of government agencies. When the network is based on the traditional framework of using the state's mechanisms to swiftly drive the concrete operations, most of the members in the network do not necessarily share backgrounds, needs, ideas, understanding, or perspectives in joining network prior to their participation. The state network is thus in a temporary role which usually involves a lack of continuity, and it eventually fades. But, the networks which occur naturally from the experience of working together and solving problems make for strong, lasting connections. The government can facilitate participation in the networks of herbal processing or the OTOP herbal cosmetics entrepreneurs, in order to encourage the sharing of knowledge regarding production, maintaining the proper level of important ingredients in the herbs, product and raw materials storage, business administration, and distribution networks. This will result in the development of higher quality, more accepted, and better selling herbal products.

4.3 Developing the new generation of community leaders

Any successful organization faces problems when they have not developed a new generation of leaders to continue the business. It is crucial to recruit young staff members with suitable qualifications, knowledge, ability, and experience to continue the mission of the veteran members who will retire.

According to in-depth interviews and the focus group, it was found that the OTOP entrepreneurs in herbal cosmetics lack a new generation of leaders because most people in rural areas seek work in a big city. They usually refuse to continue working in the community after graduation. Moreover, the knowledge and local wisdom of herbs generally fades away with the retirement of the older generation, as the new generation hardly pays attention to what their elders can impart regarding local business. This trend might be partly reversed by disseminating the medical benefits of Thai herbs online. If younger people begin to understand these benefits and to use such products, some of them might decide to stay in their rural hometown and to continue with the business.

Developing a new generation of entrepreneurs is immensely important to the human resource development of the country. As the new generation can not only continue the operations, but they could also apply the new technologies and integrate modern administration with a greater understanding of the market and consumer trends. They could switch from the regular mode of production to creating their own brands, cultivating herbal farms, controlling sales and marketing, and develop the story to add value to the herbal plants. Young people are more comfortable than older ones in rural areas with planning and recording data by using various online applications.

In addition, young people should have plentiful opportunities to learn from field studies. In order for them to remain in the local community, there must be incentives such as funding to support the continuous administration of activity for knowledge management. The channels to generate income for the new generation of entrepreneurs are also very important.

Therefore, the government should formulate policies and initiate project to support young entrepreneurs. In 2019, the Community Development Department implemented the Young OTOP project to promote the development of a new generation of OTOP entrepreneurs, as well as those who manufacture OTOP products. However, these initiatives have focused on improving the design of decorative product, souvenir, and utility product, while there is no youth group to participate in OTOP herbal products development.

The state must seek those who are interested in the cluster of herbs, and give opportunities to rural youth in the form of startup businesses and a new generation of community enterprises or as OTOP entrepreneurs. By ensuring that young people in such areas can make a decent income as laborers, salespeople, managers, or owners, these regions can achieve financial stability via capital accumulation. A key benefit is working in a specific market which accepts products exclusively from them.

5. CONCLUSION

Developing the capacities of OTOP entrepreneurs in the cluster of herbal cosmetics will help them to gain wider experiences and knowledge which are not limited to the products' framework. Such businesspeople should participate in the field study to understand the process related to manufacturing and sales. The entrepreneurs must be ready to learn and to participate in the field study and training. The in-depth interview revealed that most entrepreneurs have participated in herbal cosmetics production. However, some entrepreneurs felt that field study at factories is not suitable to them because such sites are much larger than their own, so they cannot really apply the approaches of such enterprises. Field study at small organizations might be more beneficial, as it will allow consulting on the same technical scale as what they are familiar with. Therefore, it is obvious that some entrepreneurs have not realized the benefit of learning from external experiences and lack the network development among the entrepreneurs of the same product cluster who could mutually exchange and learn from each other through the field study for product development. It is vital that OTOP entrepreneurs in the herbal cosmetics cluster learn from others in the same sector.

Regarding network development, OTOP entrepreneurs in this sector know that networking could help them to lower the cost of raw materials and to easily exchange production resources. Some raw materials can be purchased together, or from the network of the same cluster, especially herbal ingredients which should not be stored too long. This problem can be solved when entrepreneurs could trade within their network. The focus group of OTOP entrepreneurs in the herbs cluster have stressed that modern businesses must involve constant learning and exchanging, which corresponds to the OTOP Action Plan, 2019-2022 (National OTOP Committee, 2019). OTOP entrepreneurs can find business allies by joining a suppliers' alliance and groups that sell goods or raw materials to entrepreneurs. Being able to deal with suppliers in the form of mutual businesses can help entrepreneurs reduce the cost of their products and raw materials, and the partners will enjoy higher profits. There should also be a network of agencies that support distribution channels through the shops in events. A network with government agencies that are responsible for promoting OTOP herbal products will also help with other aspects of administration, such as capital, institutional knowledge, recommendations regarding manufacturing, and product development.

Coordination among the OTOP entrepreneurs will mutually benefit them in both manufacturing and marketing. Close ties in the network will result in sustainable friendship for building business together. It can lead to the creation of new channel to enter the market. Government agencies should be the facilitator, rather than the founder of formal networks. Government networks are generally connected to state policies, administration, and the existing framework which emphasize the state-driven mechanism and fast, concrete results. However, networks which develop naturally from similar work and problems tend to be stronger and longer lasting. The government should only help them to meet in the same cluster of herbal processing or OTOP herbal cosmetics groups.

Regarding the new generation of rural community leaders, the focus group and in-depth interview revealed that OTOP entrepreneurs in the cluster of herbal cosmetics are facing the problem of young people with no desire to stay in their hometown after they finish high school or college. Calling for attention requires publicizing of social enterprise, or the business which focus on Thai herbs and health care with Thai herbs. There could be new communication channels, all of which might result in the awareness among the new generation of the benefits of herb, and becoming new generation of herb entrepreneurs. It could take time to develop the new generation of community's leader.

Developing the new generation of entrepreneurs is hugely important to the national human resource development, as they will continue the business while also apply the technology with the understanding of market and consumer's trend. They will improve the administration by introducing innovation and data management for faster adaptation. The study by Vaseenonta et al. (2007) on the new generation and sustainable development in rural communities is very relevant. This study proposed that, in order to encourage young people to stay in their local community, entrepreneurs should prepare them by looking for those who are related to the basic enterprise administration. The new generation should receive opportunity to learn from various resources. In order for them to stay in the local community, there must be supporting factors for them to survive there, such as the fund to support administration for continuous knowledge management activities, or the channel to generate income for the new generation who are interested in the community enterprise or herbs. Government agencies might seek those who are interested in the herb cluster, and open opportunity for the local youth in the form of startups. There could be the support for OTOP entrepreneurs, by encouraging the new generation to access the channel of income, such as income from being the new generation of OTOP entrepreneurs.

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the OTOP's focus on human resource, there should be development of local community leaders who have abilities and vision, in order to motivate local residents to achieve the mutual goals of the community.

6.1 Effective field study

First, the entrepreneurs must discuss the characteristic, type, and size of OTOP enterprises before considering suitable models to visit to learn from via field studies. They should study the similarity and difference from the field studies, and analyze the strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat before using the result to develop their own enterprise. On the other hand, technological progress also makes possible the option of using online media to learn from suitable models.

6.2 Network development

In this matter, the state's role should be as facilitator or supporter, and the entrepreneurs as well as people will create and develop the existing network themselves. Network development must be done by the entrepreneurs. Consequently, such networks will originate from the shared need, idea, understanding, or perspective before they join forces to create a strong and sustainable network.

Therefore, the State should promote network development among entrepreneurs by highlighting benefits of developing the network to sell products nationwide and in other product clusters (Khanthichote and Rodyim, 2015) and to connect elements in the supply chain as well as by providing information and technology related to exchanging knowledge about manufacturing, storing raw materials, conducting administration, and developing product standards, etc.

6.3 Developing the new generation of community leader

The entrepreneurs and the state should together raise awareness among young people in rural areas about OTOP herbal products, and should promote youth development project. The new generation should realize the value of local wisdom and resources, which can be converted into future income. The new generation of leaders can start in OTOP schools. But, such schools give just short-term training, which differ from the OVOP schools that require at least two years of study. The school should be developed into the

prototype, and its curriculum and degrees should be confirmed by the Ministry of Education. The content might be related to the sufficiency economy theory, or the case study in different business administration of both the successful and failed case. This will be a combination of business administration and the administration of social enterprise at the same time. In this way, a new generation with the capacity to develop the OTOP program will be nurtured.

The relevant government agencies should provide support to create a new generation of leaders within the herbal cosmetics cluster by providing funds to support OTOP startup and motivating young businesspeople to develop herbal cosmetic products by using the resources and wisdom in their community.

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