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Structural equation model of conflict management between the government and citizens regarding marine and coastal areas development projects in southernmost provinces of Thailand

Chaiya Kesarat*, Idsaratt Rinthaisong

Faculty of Management Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Songkhla 90110, Thailand

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Abstract

The purpose was to analyze a structural equation model of conflict management between the government and citizens regarding marine and coastal area development projects (MCP) in the southernmost provinces of Thailand (SPT). A questionnaire was filled out by 440 respondents (selected using disproportionate stratified sampling), based on a classification into roles of actors and types of project. A 5-rating scale questionnaire was used as a research instrument and consisted of 8 latent variables: attitude and role of government officials and people on the project; conflict management: economic, social, and environment; and perception of conflict: economic, social, and environment. There were 26 observed variables. The questionnaire components were tested for reliability before use (Cronbach's alpha was .82–.95). The results of the analysis showed that the structural equation model provided a good fit with the empirical data (χ^2/df = 3.00, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.068, 90 percent CI = 0.062, 0.073, and SRMR = 0.072). Furthermore, attitudes had a positive, direct effect on economic, social, and environmental conflict management between the government and citizens with effect coefficients of 0.95, 0.97, and 0.85, respectively. Attitudes had a negative, indirect effect on the economic, social, and environmental conflict perception with effect coefficients of -0.45, -0.62, and -0.38, respectively. This study indicated that the attitudes of the government and citizens toward the projects affected conflict management between the government and the citizens. The government should focus on helping the people in the area to understand the policies, each project's objectives, and the project benefits for the country. In order to obtain people's acceptance of and satisfaction in the projects, the government should give importance to the well-being of the citizens in the area, provide an opportunity for the citizens to participate in projects' operations, and listen to the people's opinions on the projects.

Introduction

Past and present National Economic and Social Development Plans have had a priority focus on the development of industrial and the urban sectors, leaving the agricultural or the rural sectors *a posteriori* in imbalance. Although, it is believed that this will distribute economic activity to rural areas as a result of economic growth (Chamarik, 2006; Santasombat, 1996), in fact, this has not been the case. The development is not distributed evenly resulting in the formation and expansion of human rights awareness in the local communities. Many claims have been raised regarding the mega projects which aim to facilitate living in urban areas, while causing serious emissions problems. Consequently, the treatment of pollution becomes a responsibility of not only the people who live in the urban

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: chaiyakesarat@gmail.com (C. Kesarat).

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area but of all Thai citizens who have to pay taxes to the government (Attakorn, 2010). Moreover, inequality in access to the resources is at the root of the conflict problem, leading to solicitation for changes in development to place more emphasis on the citizens, community, and the community's environment with the right to access and manage the community's resources and activities which can add value to the lifestyle of the people by building sustainable developments (Kumpeera, 2008; Wattanajareankit, 2008).

Past reports on human rights violations found that many projects have caused problems to society because most of the project activities were not derived from the real needs of the people (National Human Rights Commission [NHRC], 2009). The projects did not consider people's views and opinions. Although, public hearings were conducted to receive public comment, they were not effective. Partial information informed only some particular groups of people at the public hearing causing a lack of agreement and harmony between people in the community (Malaisri, 1998; NHRC, 2003; Southeast Asia Technology and Team Consulting Engineering and Management [SAT & TCEM], 2009; Team Consulting Engineering & Management [TCEM], 2005).

The facts mentioned earlier indicate that the conflict between the citizens and government resulted from the imbalance in the regional development plan strategy causing inevitable problems for the people. This study was conducted to develop a model of conflict management between the government and the citizens on marine and coastal areas development projects (MCP) in the southernmost provinces of Thailand (SPT), as this is a subject that has not been deeply studied previously to identify solutions to address the conflicts. The research will be very useful in the formulation of the National Development Plans and will help the government and citizens to reach satisfactory agreement leading to well-balanced and sustainable development and prosperity in the future.

Literature Review

Concepts of Conflict Management

Boonbonggarn (2005) proposed that one of the effective ways to resolve the conflict between the government and citizens is to develop and strengthen a civil society that is strong and independent. This is consistent with the findings of Skutsch (2000) who concluded that forming a group in the community makes the community stronger. However, Bruckmeier (2005) suggested that the solution for conflict is negotiation between the stakeholders, and this is one of the methods utilized in this research. From the literature review, it can be concluded that different researchers have different opinions and methods for solving conflict problems including civil society strengthening, using effective media, and public meetings or discussion. However, a method that all the previous studies have agreed to be the most effective way to solve the conflict problems between the government and citizens is by negotiations between the stakeholders.

Concepts of Conflict Perception

Robbins (1993) mentioned that the conflict is initiated when one party perceives that another party causes an adverse effect on them. This is considered as a potential opposition condition that creates opportunities for conflict to arise. However Mayer (2010) explained that conflict is perceived because of a disagreement among the parties involved who all have different needs and interests. This is consistent with the study of Serirat, Hirankitti, Suwannapirom, Sriwarom, and Prapawanon (1996) who suggested that conflict is perceived when each party has different views, interests, or targets. Thus, it can be concluded that the perception of conflict is caused when the parties involved believe that the situation may result in causing adverse effects for them.

Concepts of Project Implementations

Project implementation is how a project can be executed. The project can be divided into tasks which can be assigned to the sub-departments within the organization. The main response personal and the procedure to execute the assigned task can be inducted. The task and process measurement can help to keep the project meeting its milestones and achieving its goals (Morris, 1993; Stuckenbruck, 1988). As was mentioned above, the researcher agrees that the project implementation is very crucial for the project management. Therefore, project managers who have the power to make decisions on things related to the project should emphasize or give importance to project implementation. Thus, the project will be performed effectively and reach its goal. Conversely, if the project managers are not concerned with the importance of project implementation, this can cause adverse effects on the project or it will not successfully reach its goals. Stuckenbruck (1988) stated that consistent, effective communication by the project managers is one of the key factors for project success. Morris (1993) focused on both monetary and non-monetary factors as important keys for project success. He pointed out that the non-monetary investment such as investing in building a positive attitude of the workers can encourage teamwork and cooperation within the organization leading to project success.

Causal Factors Influencing Conflict Management

Relationship between conflict management and conflict perception

Variables for economy conflict management are factors influencing government spending effectiveness (Nye, Zelikow, & King, 1997; Zhang, Wang, & Chang, 2007), information technology (Nye et al., 1997; Morris, 1993), city management (Basiago, 1998; Pereira & Azevedo, 2011), and the satisfaction of the stakeholders (Pinto & Slevin, 1988). These factors have negative effects on the perception of economy conflict. This means that the more these factors are focused on, the less perception of economy conflict will arise.

Variables for social conflict management are factors influencing basic human rights (Nye et al., 1997), cultural development (Tjosvold, 1996), civil society development,

(Boonbonggarn, 2005; Skutsch, 2000), cooperation among stakeholders (Bruckmeier, 2005; Dinsmore, 1993), communications (Bruckmeier, 2005; Norton, 2005), and the values of the society (Morris, 1993). These factors have negative effects on the perception of social conflict. This means that the more these factors are focused on the less perception of social conflict will arise.

Variables for environmental conflict management are factors influencing the relationship between humans and the environment (Basiago, 1998; Pereira & Azevedo, 2001) which has a negative effect on the perception of environmental conflict. This means that the more the factors are focused on, the less perception of the environmental conflict will arise.

Relationship between attitude and conflict management

Norton (2005) studied executive leadership for effective management and found that different opinions lead to conflict. This result is consistent with Kazenbach and Smith (2006) who studied the wisdom of teams and reported that conflict in a team is caused from the different experiences, visions, aspects, values, and hopes, of the team members. This leads to stress and lack of motivation causing conflict between people which can become conflict in the team. Morris (1993) studied the strategy for mega project management and found that the project's members, including managers and workers, have the responsibility to build a positive working environment and attitude, encouraging cooperation and teamwork within the organization.

Relationship between role on the project and conflict management

Zasadzien and Midor (2010) studied the effects of balanced development concepts and found that society's roles in seeking balanced development are very important for the living quality of the people in that society. In other words, the manifest society's roles lead to better lives of the people in the society reducing the conflict problems in the society. Pereira and Azevedo (2011) studied the interdependence between sustainable development and economic growth and found that cooperation between the stakeholders, with planning, measuring, and implementing the working process, leads to sustainable development and the economic growth improving the quality of lives of the citizens and, thus, conflict is reduced.

From the review, the causal factors influencing conflict management include the relationship between conflict management and conflict perception, the relationship between attitude and conflict management, and the relationship between the role on the project and conflict management. The results from this study were used to classify the variables consisting of: economy conflict management (magec) including: government spending effectiveness (magec1), information technology (magec2), city management (magec3), and satisfaction of the stakeholders (magec4). Social conflict management (magso) include: basic human rights (magso5), cultural development (magso6), civil society development (magso7), cooperation of the stakeholders (magso8), communications (magso9), and value of the society (magso10). Environmental conflict management (magev) include the relationship between humans and the environment (magev11). These factors have negative effects on the perception of conflict (per) including: economy conflict perception (perec), social conflict perception (perso), and environmental conflict perception (perev). Attitude (att) included: beliefs (att1), feelings (att2), and behaviors (att3). These factors have positive effects on the economy, social, and environmental conflict management (magec, magso, magev, respectively). The role on the project (rol) include: project identification (rol1), project preparation (rol2), project implementation (rol3), project evaluation (rol4), and project termination and handover (rol5). These factors have positive effects on the economy, social, and environmental conflict management (magec, magso, magev, respectively). Finally, the model is provided in Figure 1.

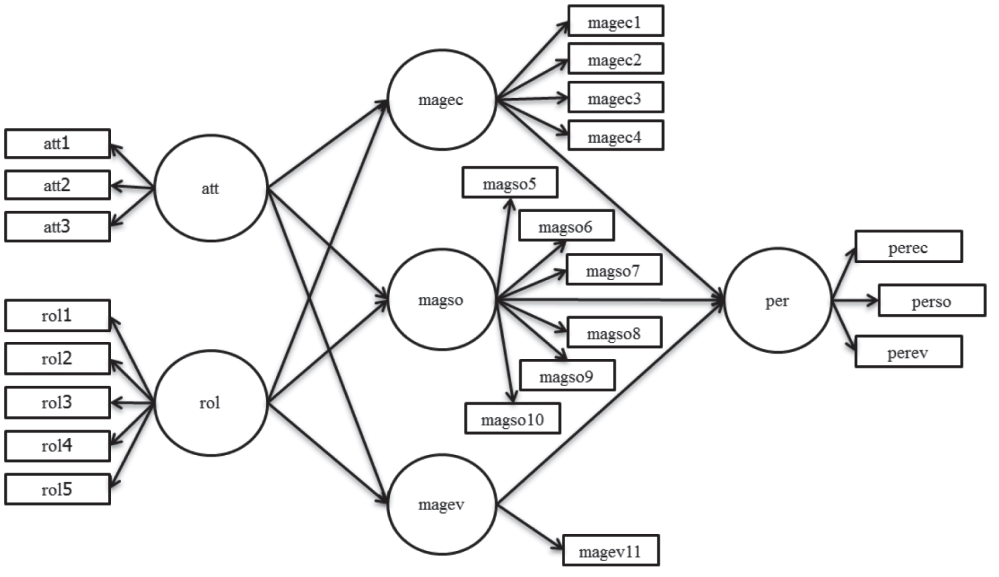

Figure 1 Model of causal factors influencing conflict management between the government and citizens on marine and coastal area development projects

Methodology

This study was a quantitative study. The study sample group of 440 people were selected from people living nearby the four marine and coastal areas development project area consisting of: (1) Thai-Malaysian pipeline separation plant in Chana district, Songkhla province; (2) power plant in Chana district, Songkhla province; (3) harbors in Songkhla and Satun provinces; and (4) reclamation and construction around or in the ocean area in Songkhla, Pattani, and Naratiwat provinces. The samples were selected using disproportionate stratified sampling. A sample of 200 is an appropriate sample number to be used for the structural equation model analysis and these were selected from each sample group (Kline, 2011). Therefore the researcher decided to collect equally 200 samples from each sample group. The stakeholders were classified into two categories: (1) relationship to the project, and (2) project type. A 5-rating scale questionnaire was used as a research tool consisting of eight latent variables which could be measured from the 26 observed variables. The eight latent variables were the variables for conflict management between the government and citizens and for conflict perception. The questions were tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficients before use. For the variables of conflict management between the government and citizens, Cronbach's alpha coefficient values of the variables were .87–.91 for attitude variables, .82–.95 for the roles of government and citizens, .84–.90 for the management of conflict related to the economy variable, .89–.92 for the social conflict variable, and .91 for environmental conflict variable. For the variable on the perception of conflict between the government and citizens the values were .91 for perception of conflict related to economy, .95 for the perception of social conflict, and .88 for the perception of the environmental conflict. The coefficient values indicated that the questions were suitable to be utilized as a tool for this study.

Statistical software was utilized for the data analysis and data processing. The analysis steps consisted of: (1) analysis of the statistical assumptions on the information distribution and the linear relationship of variables; and (2) analysis of the goodness-of-fit of the model and empirical data using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The statistical parameters for the confirmatory factor analysis are shown in Table 1.

Results

The results from this study were classified into three categories: (1) results of statistical assumption testing; (2) the measurement model; and (3) the structural equation model.

Results of Statistical Assumption Testing

The result of statistical assumption analysis showed that most of the data distributions had a positive skew and the distributions of all variables were in acceptable ranges (+1 to -1). Kurtosis indicated a normal distribution, with an acceptable value (+1 to -1). Therefore, the data were used without transformation. The correlations between variables was both positively and negatively correlated in the range from -.16 to .86 with statistical significance at .01.

Results of Measurement Model

Analysis of the measurement model showed that it provided good estimates for conflict management between government and citizens on MCPs in SPT. The goodness-of-fit analysis showed that the model had a very good fit with the empirical data, which was confirmed by the following values obtained from the statistical tests: $\chi^2/df = 1.86$, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.044, 90 percent confidence interval (CI) = 0.038, 0.050 and SRMR = 0.028. The analysis of the standardized factor loading indicated that the most important factor influencing conflict management was the relationship between humans and the environment which could be explained 100 percent by the model ($W = 1.00$, $R^2 = 1.00$). For this factor, the variability of error was set as 0 which means that there was no error in the measurement. Thus the factor can be explain 100 percent by the latent variables. The reliability of the measurement model for the latent variables ranged between .98 and 1.00, while the detected average variance values ranged between .68 and 1.00. It can be concluded that the structure of the measurement model of the latent variables was very reliable and that it could explain the variance of variables very well (see Figure 2).

Table 1 Correlation test for the structural equation model

Correlation test	Standard	Sources
Chi-square statistic: χ^2-test	Not significant ($p > .05$)	
χ^2/df	< 5.00	Schumacker and Lomax (2004)
Comparative fit index: CFI	≥ 0.93	Byrne (1994)
Standardized root mean square residual: SRMR	< 0.08	Hu and Bentler (1999)
Root mean square error of approximation: RMSEA	< 0.08	MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara (1996)

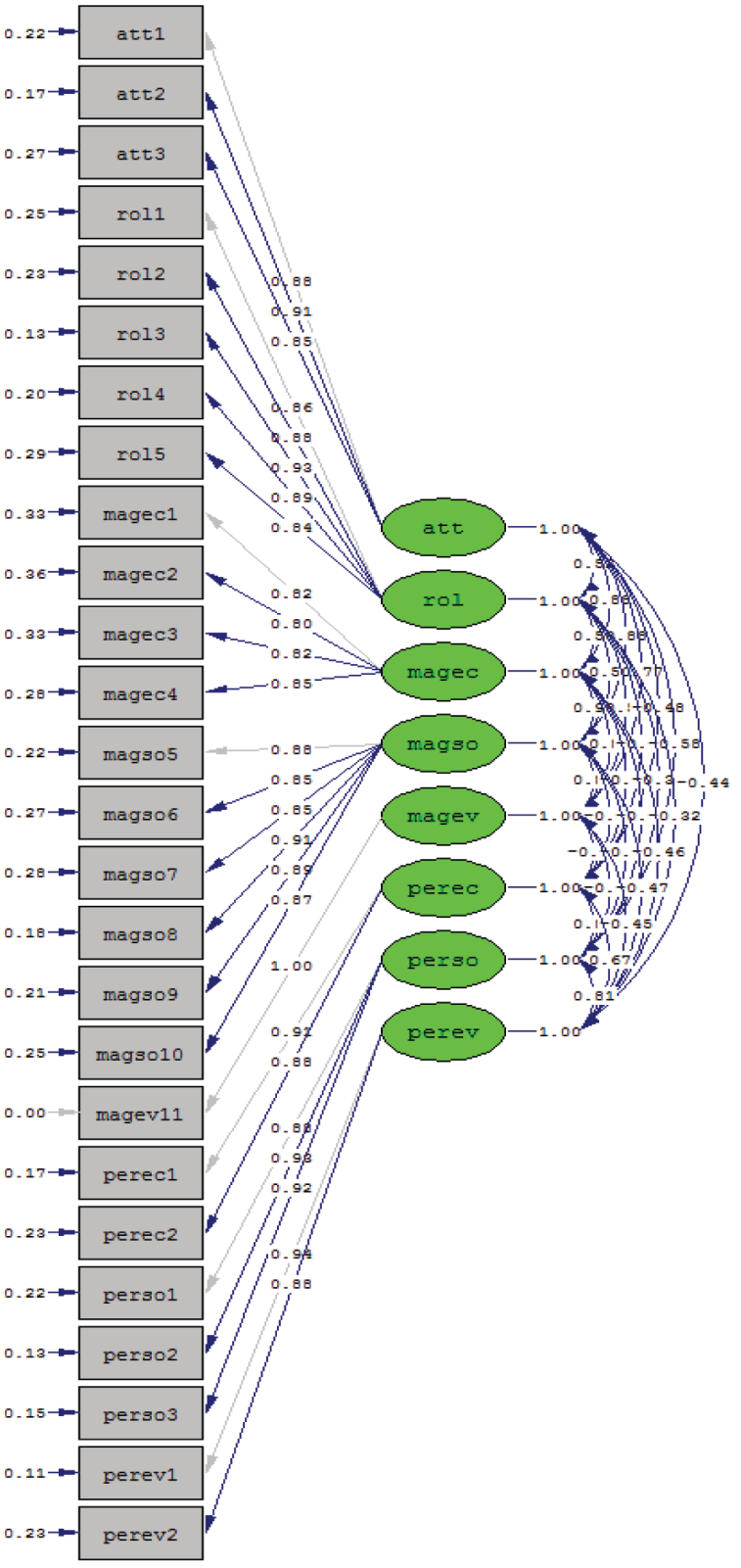

Figure 2 Measurement model fit with empirical data

Result of Structural Equation Model

The analysis of the structural equation model showed that it had a very good fit for conflict management between government and citizens on MCPs in SPT. Initially, the output showed that the model did not fit the empirical data. Based on the criteria for assessing CFA model fit, none of the figures in the fit criteria met the required threshold. However, after some suggested modifications, the model had an acceptable fit with the empirical data as confirmed by the following values obtained from statistical tests: χ^2/df = 3.00, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.068, 90 percent confidence interval (CI) = 0.062, 0.073 and SRMR = 0.072 (See Table 2 and Figure 3). The squared multiple correlation coefficients (R^2) indicate that the attitude (att) and the role (rol) of the government and citizens affected the implementation of the MCPs. These factors could explain the variance in conflict management between the government and citizens, related to the economy, social, and environmental for 95 percent, 96 percent, and 76 percent, respectively. The direct influence coefficients showed that conflict management between government and citizen related to the economy (magec), social (magso), and environment (magev) were positively and directly affected by the factors influencing the attitudes of the government and the citizens (att) with effect coefficients of 0.95, 0.97, and 0.85, respectively and were statistically significant at .05. This means that the positive attitudes of the government and citizens on the project have a positive impact on economic, social, and environmental conflict management between the government and the citizens. by the factors influencing the economic conflict management (magec) with an effect coefficient of -0.47 and statistical significance at 0.05. This means that the effective economic conflict management between the government and citizens reduced the perception of economic conflict. The perception of social conflict (perso) was the most positively affected by the perception of economic conflict (perec) with an effect coefficient of 0.62 and statistical significance at .05. This means a high perception of economic conflict leads to a high perception of social conflict. The perception of environmental conflict (perev) was negatively and directly affected the most by the factors influencing environmental conflict management (magev) between the government and the citizens with an effect coefficient of -0.45 and statistical significance at .05. This means effective environmental conflict management leads to a decrease in the perception of environmental conflict. The indirect effect coefficients revealed that the perceptions of conflict related to the economy, society, and the environment were negatively and indirectly affected the most by the factors influencing the attitudes of the government and citizens toward the project with the coefficients of -0.45, -0.62, and -0.38, respectively, and statistical significance at .05. This means that the positive attitude of the government and citizens toward the project reduces the perception of conflict (See Table 3).

Table 2 Correlation indices of the structural equation model used for the analysis

Index	Index values		Standard
	Unmodified model	Modified model	
χ^2/df	4.50	3.00	< 3.00
CFI	0.97	0.99	≥ 0.93
RMSEA (90% CI)	0.089 (0.084, 0.094)	0.068 (0.062, 0.073)	< 0.08
SRMR	0.11	0.072	< 0.08

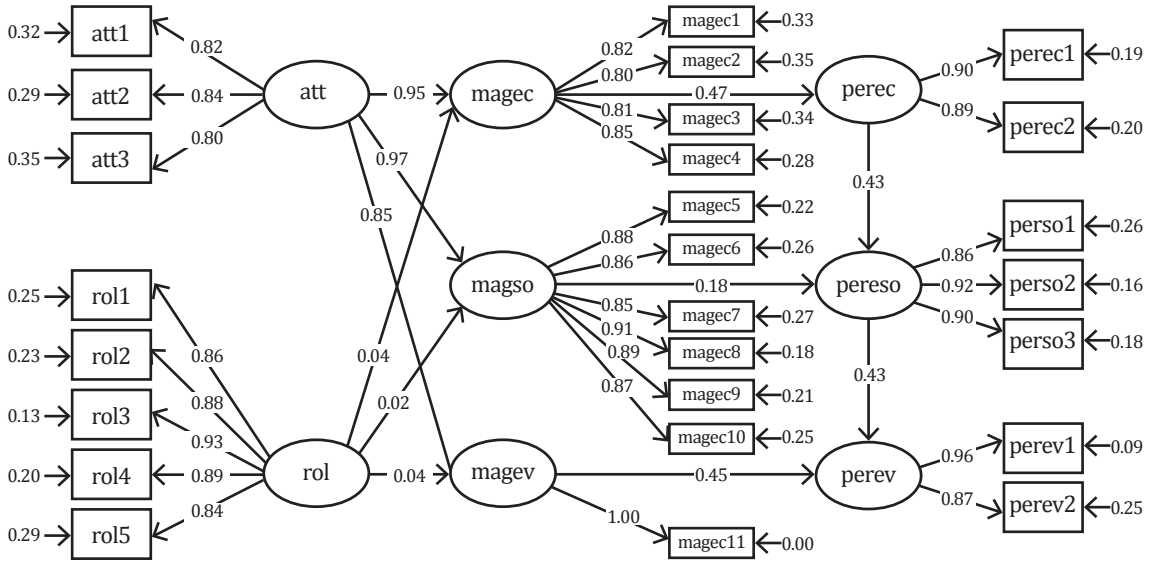

Figure 3 Modified structural equation model

Table 3 Direct and indirect effect coefficients of causal factors to output variables of structural equation model

Output variable	R^2	Causal factor																					
		att			rol			magec			magso			magev			perec			perev		
		DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
magec	0.95	0.95*	-	0.95*	0.04	-	0.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
magso	0.96	0.97*	-	0.97*	0.02	-	0.02	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
magev	0.76	0.85*	-	0.85*	0.04	-	0.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
perec	0.22	-	-0.45*	-0.45*	-	-0.02	-0.02	-0.47*	-	-0.47*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
perso	0.86	-	-0.62*	-0.62*	-	-0.02	-0.02	-	-0.29*	-0.29*	-0.18*	-	-0.18*	-	-0.20*	-0.20*	0.62*	-	0.62*	0.43*	-	0.43*
perev	0.20	-	-0.38*	-0.38*	-	-0.02	-0.02	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.45*	-	-0.45*	-	-	-	-	-	-

*$p < .05$

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the structural equation model of conflict management between the government and citizens regarding the marine and coastal areas development projects in the southernmost provinces of Thailand revealed that the model was a good fit with the empirical data. The economic, social, and environmental conflict management variables were positively and directly affected the most by the factors influencing the attitude of the government and citizens. That means that the positive attitudes of the government and citizens toward the project have a good effect on economic, social, and environmental conflict management. The result is consistent with Morris (1993) who studied the strategy for mega project management and reported that the positive attitude of the organization's members led to conflict resolution and project success. He also reported that positive attitudes can be built by the team leader and through the cooperation of the stakeholders. Kazenbach and Smith (2006) also reported that attitude is a cause of conflict and that the different experiences, visions, aspects, values, and hopes of the individuals are factors influencing the their attitude. The positive attitude of the individual leads to effective conflict management. Norton (2005) explained that a decrease of the gap in understanding and differences of opinion leads to a reduction of conflict.

The perception of economic conflict is directly negatively affected the most by the factors influencing the economic conflict management between the government and citizens. This means that effective economic conflict management results in a reduction in the perception of economic conflict. Thanadsillapakul (2009) found that the most important key for government operation is to protect the benefits of the state and to increase the well-being of its people. Zhang et al. (2007) mentioned that reasonable and responsive government is the most important factor influencing the effective public service benefits for the public as a whole. Moreover, the perception of social conflict is positively and directly affected the most by the factors influencing perception of economic conflict. This means that the more the perception of economic conflict, the more the perception of social conflict. The study also showed that the perception of economic conflict has a positive effect on the perception of social conflict. This means that the good economic status of the citizens (sufficient money and good jobs) leads to happiness and well-being in the society. This emphasizes results of Thanadsillapakul (2009) mentioned earlier that the most important key for government operation is to protect the benefits of the state and increase the well-being of its people.

The perception of environmental conflict is negatively and directly affected the most by the factors influencing environmental conflict management. This means that effective environmental conflict management leads to a decrease in the perception of environmental conflict. Several researchers reported that one of the causes of conflict is the environmental concern of the people that the projects may have adverse effects on the environment. This includes resources depletion, air pollution, noise pollution, sea resources depletion, sea animal and plant species destruction, and changes in the ecosystems of the coastal area (Malaisri, 1998; SAT & TCEM, 2009; Songrak, Anantasuk, Pondath-Anan, & Chukaew, 2011).

This indicates that effective environmental conflict management between the government and citizens can reduce the perception of environmental conflict.

The indirect effect coefficients revealed that the perceptions of the conflict related to the economy, society, and environment are negatively and indirectly affected the most by the factors influencing the attitude of the government and citizens toward the project. This means that a positive attitude of the government and citizens toward the project reduces the perceptions of economic, social, and environmental conflict. The study by Norton (2005) explained that decreasing the gap in understanding and the differences of opinion can lead to a reduction of conflict. This indicates that the government should focus on reduction of the gap in understanding and the differences of opinion of the people in the area in order to reduce the conflict.

In conclusion, the study found that the attitudes of the government and citizens toward the projects affected conflict management between the government and citizens. The government should focus on helping the people in the area to understand the policies, the project's objectives, and project benefits for the country. In order to obtain people's acceptance of and satisfaction with the projects, the government should give importance to the well-being of the citizens in the area, provide an opportunity for the citizens to participate in each project's operation, and listen to the people's opinions about the projects. In addition, the government should provide transparent information to the citizens. All these actions will help to increase the citizens' confidence and contribute to a positive attitude toward the projects. Thus, eventually the citizens will accept the projects and this will help reduce conflict in the region.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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