

# Agricultural Development Communication for New Theory Concept of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej : The Influence of Farmer Communication Networks on the Adoption of the New Theory Concept

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the communication processes used in transferring the New Theory Concept to the target farmers, and factors affecting the adoption of the New Theory. Quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, including observation, group processes, in-depth interviewing, and questionnaire were used to study the applications of the New Theory Concept at two research sites in Petchaburi province and Chonburi Province. The findings showed that the communication networks had the influence on the adoption of the New Theory and the degree of the adoption depended on the communication network patterns.

**Key words:** New Theory Concept, communication network

## INTRODUCTION

The National Economic and Social Development Plan included the Economy of Self-Sufficiency of His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej as the guideline for the development and administration of the nation. The concept of self sufficiency adheres to the middle path enabling the country to weather crises and exists in security to achieve balanced sustainable quality development. The philosophy promotes organization and networks among the people and can be used as strategies for

the development of a given society, and of adjusting the structure of both rural and urban community. These strategies link development of rural and urban areas for mutual benefit and support organizations and networks among the people in taking a greater role in conducting the affairs and protecting the rights of their communities. Currently, organizations and networks of the people, private business, the government, and private development organizations have adapted themselves to closer relations and have formed networks concerned with particular areas and with particular problems that use technological

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systems such as the internet and mass media processes so as to facilitate communication among themselves in order to meet the need for holistic national development.

The study on agricultural development communication for the New Theory of King Bhumibol Adulyadej found that various kinds of media, i.e. mass media, people media, specific media, were used by many relevant agencies in order to transfer to the target farmers, content concerning with the New Theory, including principles, benefits, and practices, using various styles of presentation (Yenjabok *et al.*, 2005). Such communication types were used to inform the target farmers about the New Theory and enabling them to carry it out in practice. Not all agencies however successfully achieved their objectives because the farmers who received these communications had their own processes of perception, interpretation, understanding, and communication networks, and these affected their adoption of the New Theory.

The objectives of this study were:

1. To investigate the communication process applied for Theory transferring
2. To determine factor related to the adoption of the New Theory by farmers.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research study involved with the selection of sample group of target farmers in which detail of the selection was described by Yenjabok *et al.* (2005). Qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering were done through observation group process, in-depth interviews and questionnaire interview. Research framework of this study was also discussed previously by Yenjabok *et al.* (2005).

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

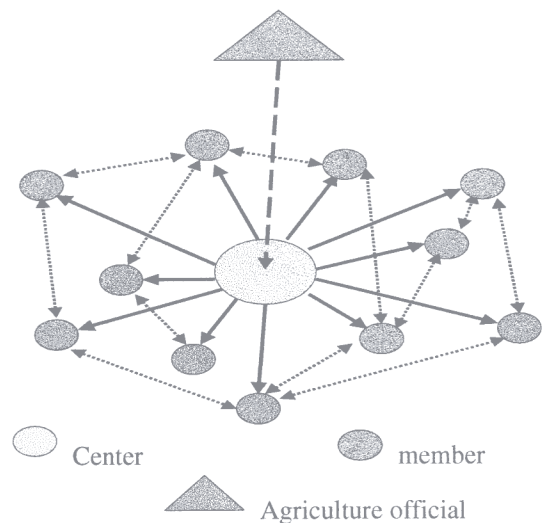
### The communication network among farmers adopting New Theory Concept

A communication network was a systematic grouping of farmers in a community for the purposes of sharing information on the New Theory and organizing groups activities related to New Theory agriculture. The analysis of communication types sought to reveal the relationships among community members in propagating information on the New Theory using interpersonal relationships as the main tool. In this study, two types of communication network were found among the target farmers as follows:

#### Single network

This study found that in the community of village number 6, Tambon Nong Kra-pu, Ban Lard District, Petchaburi Province, the network led by Mr. Suk Mungmee, which had other 10 members in a group was a single network (Figure 1).

In characterizing a single network, it was found that the network was started by and centered upon Mr. Suk Mungmee, who was the first in the community to adopt the New Theory Concept and who subsequently influenced other 10 members of the community to adopt the New Theory. Mr. Suk held meetings of members at his house, disseminated



**Figure 1** A horizontal communication of a single network having a farmer leader as the center.

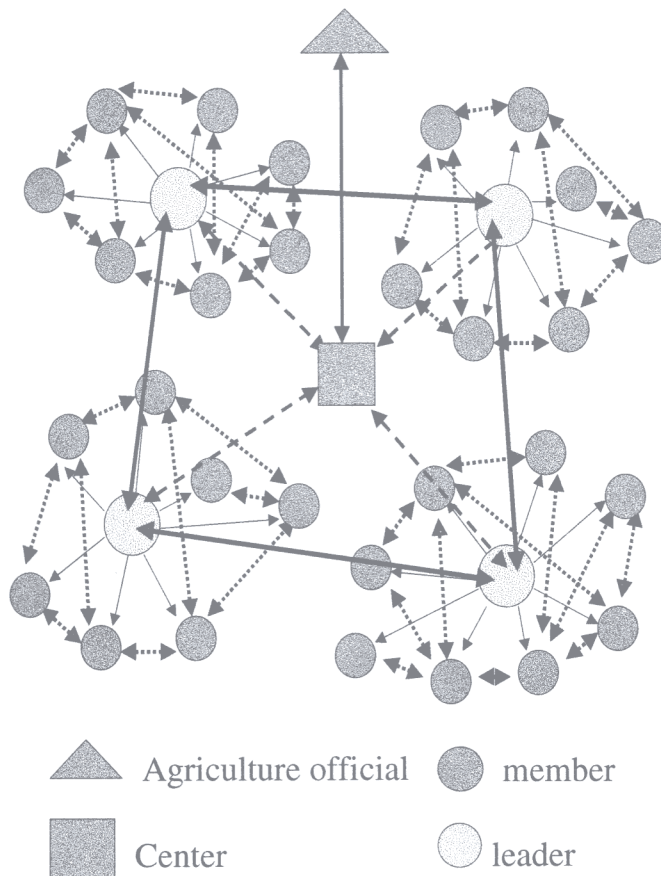
informations, organized group activities, and acted as the coordinating center to contact people outside the community. The informations flew horizontally with Mr. Suk who act as the network center as shown in Figure 1. The members were equal in their status and were allowed to exchange information freely within the group. Mr. Suk served as the center for information related to the New Theory and was the one who contacted agricultural officials and others related personnel outside the network and then relay the information he had obtained to other network members.

### Multiple network

This study also found that the New Theory communication network of village number 8 of Tambon Rai Mai Pattana, Cha-am District, Petchaburi

Province, which was centered upon by Mr. Chuan Buasod, can be described as multiple network (Figure 2). Mr Chuan, who had been the first in the community to adopt the New Theory, was instrumental in spreading it to other farmers. The households of this community however were dispersed into four clusters, and each of these became a sub-network. Each sub-network had their own leader who distributed information to other members of the sub-network. Leader of each sub network also interacted with each other and also with Mr.Chuan who served as the center of the multiple network. Therefore, leader of each sub network was also the member of the parent network.

Mr. Chuan Buasod, the center of the multiple network perform the function as coordinator. He also was the one who contacted agricultural officials and



**Figure 2** A multiple network of farmers who adopted the new Theory Concept, Petchaburi province.

other outsiders and passed the informations obtained to other members of the network. Mr Chuan held meetings of members at his house, disseminated informations, organized group activities, and act as the coordinating center for contact with people outside the community. Mr Chuan passed informations to Mr Lek, Mr Thiu, Mr Songkhram, and Mr Narong, the leaders of the four sub-networks, who, in turn, passed the informations to the members of their respective sub leaders.

### **Factors related to network formation and adoption of the New Theory**

With regard to the comparative study of target farmers in Petchaburi and Chonburi provinces, it can be noted that the factors which lead into the formation of different network were as follows:

■ The target farmers in Petchaburi province exhibited their network with their neighbors. They lived so close with one another and had a close social relations among other and this facilitated group formation. Meetings were held frequently and this assisted in group learning. When contacts were made with agricultural officials, the informations obtained were disseminated among the members of the network quickly. Thus, the network was vigorous and contributed to the development of its members.

■ The target farmers in Chonburi province did not form their network after adopting the New Theory Concept. Unlike the situation in Petchaburi, farmers who adopted the New Theory lived far from each other, and this made it rather difficult for them to organize group activities. They had no network center, and they lack communication among others. Due to the weakness of the network and poor communication resulted in unsuccessful extension of the New Theory Concept. Very often farmers took up other career apart from agriculture due to their financial needs.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the strength of the communication network within a group exerts a strong influence on whether the farmers continue to adopt with New Theory

agriculture or abandon it to take up other pursuits. Analysis showed the roles of communication networks to be as follows:

### **The roles of New Theory communication networks**

#### **The communication network's role in receiving media communications on the New Theory and in interpreting and understanding them**

The communication network facilitated increased media exposure by farmers. The mass medium in which farmers had the greatest exposure in the perception, persuasion, and adoption stage was television. The media most important in the adoption and implementation stage were personnal media, i.e., agricultural officials, who were very influential in gaining acceptance by the network, and specific media, i.e., training and demonstration activities, prepared and presented by agricultural extension officials and staff members of the New Theory centers. Different media exposure led to differing perceptions and interpretations of the New Theory by farmers.

#### **The communication network's role in information seeking**

The farmers' information seeking may proceed through many channels. The idea originated with His Majesty the King and has been developed through the Office of the Board of the Royal Development Projects Board and government agencies. These have devised New Theory projects and through their officers at the local level, make them available to target farmers and their networks.

The information seeking among farmers was found to be more active than in the past, when farmers increased their activeness in their intention and understanding before taking the concept into practice, which make it rather different from previous situation where farmer act as only audience. Presently, it can be pointed out that the role of the farmer in the communication process is, as great as, if not greater than, that of the sender, i.e., the

agricultural officials. Farmers seek informations from various sources: people media, such as tambon agricultural officials, and specific media, e.g., training programs and study trips. They seek out information on the New Theory that they can apply to improve their own capabilities.

### **The communication network's role as empowerment**

The communication network among the farmers originated with information exposure and information seeking, and as these increased, through such activities as biological fertilizer demonstrations, organizing and participating in training programs, and study trips, so did the farmers' knowledge and experience, and these they could put into practice in implementing the New Theory effectively. At the same time, their joining together to form networks increased their bargaining power with relevant agencies, and this further strengthened their networks.

### **The communication network's role as participatory communication**

The activities of the communication network included group discussions among members and meetings of members with development workers, agricultural officials, and researchers in order to develop solutions to agricultural problems in which all parties participated. All farmers in the network participated in guarding their interests, in learning, in gaining a comprehensive picture of problems, and in clarifying the expectations of both the individuals and the group through the process of group meetings. This study proceeded through a process of self-assessment by farmers of their role in New Theory communication networks and found that communication within the network enhanced their capability in learning and contributed to their gaining a full understanding of how the economy of self-sufficiency is related to the New Theory.

The processes of learning to change ways of thinking, of accepting the New Theory, and of exchanging knowledge and experience were carried

on by means of the community forum. At times, these forums were attended by few, as when many members were engaged in field work; at other times, many joined in the forums, when members were free, in the evening. The discussion in these forums was carried on in the simple language as the conversation among friends. The results were obtained after each forum, when the community discovered more about themselves and gained a broader vision of the present situation of the country such as the Eighth and Ninth of the National Economic and Social Development Plans, the Constitution of 1997, decentralization of authority, and lastly about the economy of self-sufficiency and the New Theory of His Majesty the King. They learned the true meaning of "capital" which does not only mean money, on the contrary, capital can be nature, society, culture, as well as ideas, but most importantly, they learned that the capital can mean human being. They learned about themselves and their neighbors. They began to look at themselves and discover their strengths. They learned how to think as a group and to assemble and integrate their thoughts. They learned how to work with others harmoniously as good friends, and encouraged one another in doing good deed. This gave them confidence and increased their strength. This learning process led to change in their ways of thinking and working and most important was the gaining of practical knowledge of the economy of self-sufficiency and the New Theory. They learned about the benefit of organic agriculture over the chemical agriculture which was the root that cause indebtedness of farmers. They learned the rational approaches to the real development, step-by-step and how to achieve welfare through mutual assistance, the need for having greater concern for nature and reviving traditional wisdom for use in their lives. They learned to think in terms of self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and sustainability

### **The role of communication network for innovation adoption process.**

In the communication networks studied, the



innovation adoption process was reduced from the five stages of Rogers, (Rogers, 1995) namely 1) knowledge, 2) persuasion, 3) decision making, 4) implementation, and 5) confirmation to three stages: 1) perception, persuasion, and acceptance, 2) implementation, and adoption 3) confirmation. The reason for this was the extremely high credibility of the message sender, the force of national policy support, and the efforts of government agencies toward better agricultural development. As a result, farmers, who were the receivers of the message, readily adopted the innovation, which is the New Theory. In addition, because the New Theory encourages farmer to adjust the practice to suits with their situation, the forms of implementation can be many and also varied. However, the study found that the groups of adopters were reduced from five, namely, 1) innovators, 2) early adopters, 3) majority adopters, 4) slow adopters, and 5) laggards (Rogers, 1995) to three groups: 1) innovators, those who were the network leaders, 2) early adopters, those who were the original members of the network, and 3) slow adopters, the majority, of those who joined the network later.

#### **The role of communication network in carrying on social activities**

Social interaction and activities were relevant to local culture, affirming and building relationships with family and neighbors in the community network; these included merit-making ceremonies, ordinations, weddings, labor exchanges, and the forming of working groups, such as brown rice producer co-operative groups.

In using community forums as a learning process, it was found that indebtedness was an important problem of the farmers, for it was often brought up as a topic of discussion in networks or when farmers came together. The sample farmers tended to deal with their debt problems through borrowing even though this is contrary to the New Theory. For by borrowing, the farmers fall once again into the situation where they are drowning in

debt and the endless cycle of poverty. It was also found that nearly all the sample farmers incurred debt for production, for other supplementary occupations, and for luxuries, such as liquor, beer, and cigarettes. The farmers were not conscious that spending money on these luxuries would lead them into debt, because they bought them regularly by habit but did not know their total expenditure on these items over the course of a year. By analyzing their incomes, expenses, and debts together acted as a stimulus to their reassessing their situation and taking steps to improve it. This led to change their way of thinking, to depend on nature, to live self-sufficiently, and to avoid the curse of debt, and this accords with the concept of the economy of self-sufficiency, which enables farmers to learn how to rely on themselves and live in balance with nature.

## **CONCLUSION**

“Agricultural Development Communication for the New Theory” requires understanding of the formation of communication networks among New Theory farmers because the communication processes within the network affected information exposure, perception, interpretation, information seeking, empowerment, participatory communication, and communication for innovation adoption. The strength of the communication network made New Theory development more effective, and this was in accord with the objectives of the national agriculture development plan which aims to foster sustainable agricultural development.

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