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# Constructivist community leaders for community development: The lesson learning for the public service

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## Article Info

## Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explain community leadership, to identify the factors influencing leadership ability of constructivist leaders, and further to construct an explanatory model of constructivist community leadership from the empirical data collected under the seven multi-method research approach. At the overall level, it was found that the constructivist ability of the leaders was at a high level $\overline{\chi} = 4.46$ with a deviation of sixty. The study on the factors and the influential levels of variables indicate that problem, intrinsic motivations, conflict in the community and interaction of the community leaders and members affected the performance of the constructivist community leaders at a statistically significant level .001 with $R^2 = .630$. The aforementioned influences affected at 63.00 percent and forecasted the constructivist leaders up to 63.00 percent with the SD of 24.0. The model of the constructivist community leaders and the index showed correspondence with $p = .056$. The study reveals the possibility of applying the constructivist theory to the Public Administration field.

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## Introduction

Under the responsibility of the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority, the biggest local authority in Thailand, the communities in the Bangkok Metropolitan area confront no less than 9 main problems which are yet to be solved. These are problems such as narcotics, socio-cultural issues, environment and disasters, economy and career, Bangkok structure of community commission system, accommodation, health, education, corruption and government operation efficiency, including the community leaders as the key to the community development in terms of running various activities in the community. However, the community has not yet been developed effectively as people in the community have to first realize their own problems and figure out solutions themselves. That needs the support or intervention of government policy and public service. This means the community leader needs to respond and act properly as a constructive leader. He/she needs to take responsibility in his/her work taking four core principles into account (Pigg, 1999; Northouse, 2018). They are: (1) the function of the community leader toward the planned community's achievement; (2) the function of the community leader to make members participate in the community; (3) the function of the community leader in cooperation with the other organizations for the efficiency and effectiveness of community development; and (4) the function of the community leader in leadership self-development and improvement of community development.

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If the community leader possesses constructivist leadership or ability, the community will be driven for its effectiveness (Lauckner, Paterson & Krupa, 2012). The Is attribute of the characteristic of constructivist leadership is that the leader must express his/her intellectually constructivist or creative ideas through the synthesis of the situations that are community problems and conflicts, the community leader's interaction, the internal inspiration of the community, and community activities leading to new experiences for community development. This is the essence for the development procedure derived from the needs of the community and for the foundation of society. Such leader should concentrate on community problem management from all angles of community needs through the participation of the community members in clarifying the community problem solving and setting the community development goal. However, community development depends not only on the community's own efforts but also on the success of the government's public service to the community which could be work in line of Public Administration. On the other hand, the government's local authority can enable the development of community through the community leadership's ability in solving problem of community (Mansoor & Williams 2018).

## Conceptualization

### Theoretical Concepts, Variables and Structural Equation Model

#### Leadership

Leadership characteristic is work behavior to achieve common goals of humans and organizations. Leadership is one of the dynamic components for organizational change. This change implies that a leader influences and encourages followers to work more efficiently, in addition to the impact on organizational effectiveness. Further, successful leadership depends on the ability to apply acquired skills (Trewatha & Newport, 1982). The most successful community demands community members' support that contributes to the sustainability in terms of health and economic development together with attention to all seven types of capital, i.e. natural capital, cultural capital, human capital, social capital, political capital, financial and infrastructure capital. These drive the role of community economic development (Flora & Flora, 2008).

It is found that community leaders are recognized by the people in the community, and are influential regarding the decision making on miscellaneous issues (Chuanchom, Popichit, & Prasitwisate, 2015; Keiwngam, 2013). To clarify, community leadership impacts on the members of the community concerning how the problems are to be solved and how the community should be developed. Thus, the experience of the community leaders on the subject of managing conflict in the community is important for the achievement of its development. This reflects the wisdom or new idea of the leaders who have experience working in the community.

Laknapichonchat, Meesomboon, & Sirichodok (2008) studied social administration and the strengthening of urban communities and found that the strong community is accepted by society. This element will eventually affect the community development. As regards this, there are four social actions:

reasonable action in the way of values, reasonable action method, the actions that inherit the practice, and the actions of emotions.

#### Constructivist theory

One needs to realize the philosophy of science in doing constructivist research. Constructivist theory is the theory of self-knowledge in that individuals learn by interacting with a different approach from old experiences. The structure of existing intelligence and the internal motives are more fundamental. They also rely on environmental information or instruction from the outside (Driver & Bell, 1986; Noddings, 1990; Von Glasersfeild, 1987) discussed the cognitive conflict that occurs when a person is confronted with a problematic situation. It is the motivation for reflection which leads to the creation of a cognitive restructure that can solve the problematic situation or manage conflicts and is used as a tool for solving problems. Cobb, Wood & Yackel (1991) discussed the basic assumptions of cognitive learning. They are (1) cognitive conflict and curiosity, which are two main mechanisms that motivate people to learn, (2) friends' interaction / the environment / people as the main components of cognitive conflict, (3) intellectual conflict leads to reflection activities, (4) reflection is the element of reflection for cognitive restructuring, (5) clauses 1, 2, 3, and 4 are the circuits. All are taken into consideration from the experience of the learned person. They additionally empower the individuals who learn to control their own experiences through the learning process (Biggs & Telfer, 1987).

The concept of constructivist theory reveals different ideas of creating knowledge based on the fundamental concept that emerges from the report by Piaget (1968) and Vygotsky (1934). To elaborate, the truths are varieties to be seen differently as various truth sets. So, it is not just one set of truths that can be rational-generalized at all. Thus, to understand truth better, three sub-concepts are needed to be employed in this research. These are cognitive constructivism, social constructivism, and constructivist realism (Piaget, 1968; Vygotsky, 1934; Wallner, 1994).

#### Cognitive constructivism

There are philosophical foundations of the constructivist theory originating from an attempt to link old experiences with new ones. It is the pragmatic knowledge that comes from deliberation based on the psychological basis of learning that influences this conceptual basis (Piaget, 1968). Piaget's theory is divided into two parts; ages and stages. The practical learning management is that we have to "build" knowledge through experience. These experiences will motivate the learner to construct an intellectual structure called schemas.

Chaput (2001) studied Post-Piagetian constructivism for grounded knowledge acquisition. He has proposed a founding of constructivist learning architecture (CLA). It is a form of knowledge base and uses the principle of creativity/ the principle of hierarchy and self-organizing maps (SOM).

Giesen (2009) discussed constructivism in that it is a holistic approach to teaching and learning, which identifies creativity with strategic structures that relates to each member, to gain knowledge and experience of knowledge from what the person desires, and the attributes of each person's enthusiasm.

Moallem (2001) applied the theory of constructivism,

popularity and purpose of learning in the course of web-based design. The impact on practice appears to be that of the design process as well as the development in this course by applying structural design principles and command writing styles. This is what makes students more enthusiastic and to have a better understanding of the problems of web-based design.

From the review of relevant literature, it can be summarized that the theory of constructivism is principally applied in the cognitive constructivism group as dynamism, rather than believing that truth is in the mind of a person without change though in different places. People construct what is called reality at least through the meaning of truth, which is based on personal experience in the different context of each person.

*Social constructivism*

Vygotsky (1934) believed that society and culture are the intellectual tools needed to develop the style and quality of intelligence. There is a pattern and rate of development that is more defined in Piaget's theory. In other words, adults or senior people, such as parents and teachers, will be a link to social and cultural tools. Children will develop in groups of society through the use of appropriate technology. It should be possible to link relationships rather than to separate learners from others. Teachers should construct a context for learning where students can become enthusiastic through interesting activities.

Taghipour (2014) discussed the application of the concept of social constructivism to fundamentalist theories in health care research including a review of evidence. The hypothesis of such qualitative research is the nature of truth is Ontology/Metaphysics which asks questions about the truth from the truth-seeker's perspective.

Lauckner, Paterson and Krupa (2012) discussed the application of creativity in a community. Regarding a case study of how to build understanding of community development process, it is found that physical therapists who work in the community for community development will have to apply the concept and principle of constructivism. The positive result is that people in the community receive better care and better health.

Schoeneman (2015) discussed the community collaboration in Virginia Legal Aid Programs considering a constructivist grounded theory investigation. The constructivist is naturalistic and highlights the compatibility of this approach to research with the problem-solving orientation of social work practice.

*Constructivist realism*

Constructivist Realism (sometimes called Constructive Realism) (Wallner, 1994) helps one understands the real constructivist or constructive worlds differently under the different contexts. The constructivism of reality is more important now than in the past as most of the researchers adapt it to education as well as in psychology. The cognitive analysis is based on the concept of creativity especially at the community level, which has been researched very little.

*Latent variables and the observable components, and the Structural Equation Model*

Regarding a new experience in the wisdom of community leaders, the structural equation model (SEM) is a statistical method to be properly applied to examine the relationship between latent variables and the observable components. The significant feature of SEM is that it must be a linear equation. To clarify, simultaneous relations have to be taken into consideration. The relationship between variables can be seen in Figure 1.

In summary, all seven latent variables, in figure 1, comprise the observable components. They are as follows: (1) the situation of community problem (the observable components are drug addict, social and cultural, environment and disaster, economy and occupation, structure of community committee system, residence, health, education, and corruption) (The Federation of Community Organizations Bangkok [FCOB], 2011); (2) the interaction of community leaders with the members (the observable five components are expectations, feedback, support, and modeling, information) (Law, 2009); (3) the conflict in the community (the observable components are potential opposition, cognition of conflict, behavior, and outcome of conflict) (Stephen & Timothy, 2003); (4) intrinsic motivations in the community (the observable components are needs, driver, and desires, which reflect the motives within the community) (Hodgetts &Hegar, 2008); (5) the community activities (the observable components of the community activities are drug addict in community activities, social and cultural community activities, environmental and disaster community activities, economic community activity, structure and system of community committee's activities, health community activities, education community activities, and anti-corruption community activities); (6) the cognitive restructuring or the new intellectual structure of community leaders (the observable components are artifacts, new wisdom relevant to the solving of community problems which is meaningful, reflecting the situation of community problems) (Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus 2001); and (7) the experiences of leaders in using of the constructivist wisdom (the observable components are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experiment, which reflect the new experience). Hence, the use of the wisdom of community leaders is based on the aforementioned concept (Bergsteiner, Avery & Neumann, 2010).
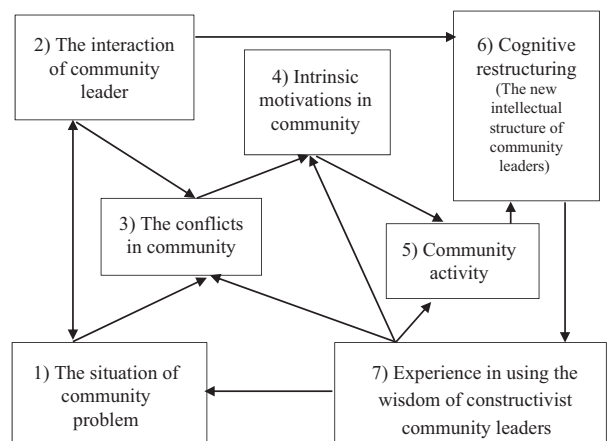


**Figure 1** The structural equation model of seven latent variables from literature review

## Research Methods

This research relies on the seven multi-methods which is an integrated effort using both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. All methods not only represent the research techniques but also the research processes that are integrated (Morse & Niehaus, 2009), along with the basic philosophy of combining multiple research approaches. To fit the survey method, the population used in this study was 2,055 community leaders and 335 samples selected from population groups. These included the groups of district offices from 6 types of communities in 50 districts of Bangkok (Yamane, 1973 Figure 2 is a compilation of the seven multi-methods.

The research's seven multi-methods were used to collect the information and empirical data for the better understanding of the community phenomena. In other words, the documentary method helps comply rich background information for contributing to questionnaires of survey. The survey helps gain opinions of the leaders and community members about the community problems and development situation. The focus group helps check the draft approach of community development in the future. The self-assessment of community leaders helps the researcher get ideas about how the leaders perceive themselves in community activity. The benchmarking is rich in drawing the comparison of information about the community status to see which ones stand at which levels of achievement. Furthermore, the case study method helps



**Figure 2** The research's seven multi-methods

confirm the best practices of community development activities that benefits the researcher for understanding the latent variables and their observable variables in the reality.

### Data Analysis

Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) is a software program deployed to fit structural equation models (SEM). It was used to examine the correspondence of the model and the index of the constructivist leaders from the empirical data and then to analyze data by the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). This conducts not only descriptive and inferential analyses, but also Cronbach's alpha reliability test. The model of goodness of fit test is a popular leadership model developed from the assessment of the ability of the community leaders so as to acknowledge its consistency with the empirical data collected by the survey. It shows by the indices that: $p > .05$; CFI > .9; RMSEA < .06 (Kline, 2011).

## Results

### Leadership Ability (Exercising of Characteristic and the Expression of Behavior) of the Constructivist Community Leaders
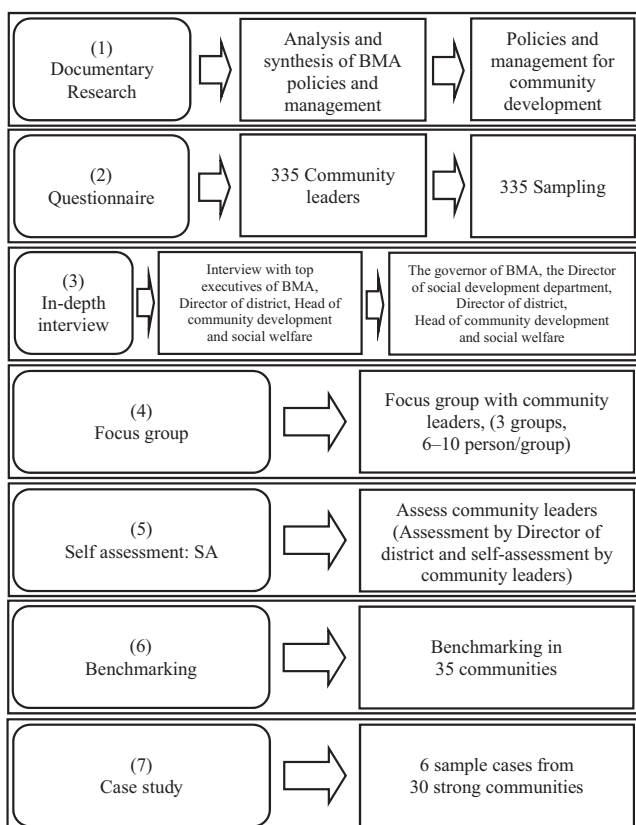
The constructivist community leader, considered as the most popular, is revealed by an assessment of the ability of community leaders. Generally, the mean was at a high level of 4.46, with the standard deviation of .60. To elaborate, the ability of constructivist community leaders in leadership was found to be the highest at an average of 4.58, with the standard deviation of .57 (the 1st rank). The ability of constructivist community leaders in terms of knowledge was at a high level with an average of 4.47, with the standard deviation of .59 (the 2nd rank). The ability of constructivist community leaders in relation to management and administration was at a high level with an average of 4.43, with the standard deviation of .60 (the 3rd rank). The ability of constructivist community leaders concerning community development was at a high level with an average of 4.39, with the standard deviation of .62 (the 4th rank).

### Symmetry or concordance of the model and index measuring the constructivist leaders of the community leaders developed from the empirical data

The model of goodness of the fittest is a popular leadership model developed by the empirical survey of 335 community leaders. The indices indicate $p = .650$; CFI = 1.00; and RMSEA = .000. This is consistent with the empirical data regarding the statistic values and concepts.

The model of constructivist community leaders has been modified with a path analysis. This is a way to arrive at a new causal model. The research is based on the basic knowledge, theory and research involved under the analysis with the AMOS program as mentioned before, so that all statistics passed conditionally.

As a result of the analysis of the paths, the equations are referred to as structural equations, which can be explained as follows.

Explanation of the figure 3

For: A = Problematic situation of the community; B = Community interaction; C = Community conflict; D = Intrinsic motivations of community; E = Community activity; F = Cognitive restructuring.

And: (1) the variable A is a community problem that is influenced by the G variable. The structural equation can be constructed as follows: $A = 0.38g + e_5$; (2) the variable B is the interaction of the community influenced by variable A; $B = 0.52a + e_1$; (3) the variable C is a community conflict influenced by variables A, B, G; $C = 0.24a + 0.29b + 0.22g + e_2$; (4) the variable D is the intrinsic motivations of community influenced by the variables C, G; $D = 0.12c + 0.40g + e_7$; (5) the variable E is the community activity influenced by the variables C, D, G; $E = 0.08c + 0.33d + 0.38g + e_3$; (6) the variable F is the cognitive restructuring influenced by E variables; $F = 0.43e + e_4$; and (7) the variable G is the newly created experience that has been influenced by the F variable; $G = 0.71f + e_6$.

Concerning the review of the relevant literature aforementioned, the seven latent variables are the situation of community problem, interaction of community leaders, community conflict, intrinsic motivations of community, community activity, cognitive restructuring, and a new experience in the wisdom of community leaders; and a number of their observable components. This is deployed as a statistical method to examine the relationships between latent variables and observed components by the empirical data analysis.
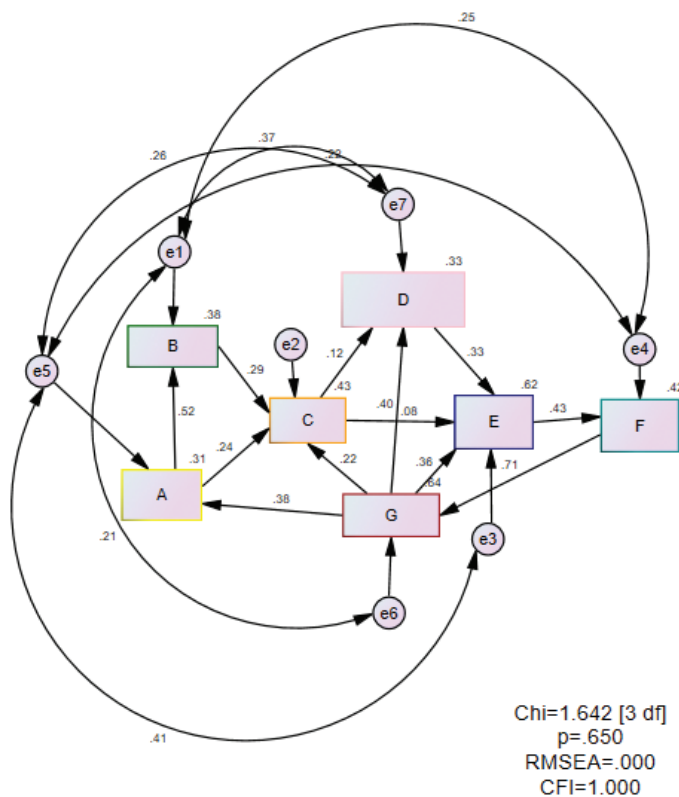


**Figure 3**    The structural equation model analysis of the constructivist community leaders from the empirical data

## Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The research result is derived from the seven multi-methods through the integration of the multiple research approaches (Morse & Niehaus, 2009), by studying the ability (*exercising* of characteristic and the expression of behavior) of the constructivist community leader in 6 types of communities in 50 districts of Bangkok. The findings of leadership ability of the constructivist community leaders are significant in the understanding of the real world (Biggs & Telfe, 1987). Notably, the invention model by the researcher can be applied to the Public Administration field as the study is considered pioneering, especially in Thailand. The findings of constructivist community leaders who are the constructivist leaders demonstrate their cognitive operational capacities in the development of community management. The constructivist aspect of community leader matches the socio-cultural elements between two or more actors.

Constructivism is a concept generally used in the field of educational study. The researcher has applied it in the sphere of the Public Administration discipline. The researcher uses multi-methods research to review the accuracy of data.

The findings regarding the development of the general community reveal that the acceleration in terms of the development of individuals, especially constructivist community leaders, should be carried out as follows: (1) promoting community leaders in the area of new intellectual structures; (2) promoting community leaders in addressing community problems; (3) promoting community leaders in community activities; (4) promoting community leaders in the area of new intellectual experiences and structures; and (5) promoting community leaders about motivation within the community.

All of these recommendations would enrich a person, making them more intelligent, and develop a community leader to become a truly qualified person. In addition, the community development should be focused on both human development and the community's physical development. Community development work with government public service support is of great importance for the development of any country in that the problem of community development lies closely in the leader's constructivist intellectual capacities.

## Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflicts of interest.

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