Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences

journal homepage: http://kjss.kasetsart.org

Success factors of learning organization for community-based tourism management in Doi Inthanon national park, Thailand

Supawinee Songpornwanich[a],*, Dachanee Emphandhu[b,†], Yuraporn Sudharatna[c]

[a] The Graduate School, Kasetsart University, The Center for Advanced Studies in Tropical Natural, Bangkok 10900, Thailand
[b] Department of Conservation, Faculty of Forestry, Kasetsart University, Bangkok 10900, Thailand
[c] Kasetsart Business School, Kasetsart University, Bangkok 10900, Thailand

Article Info

Abstract

Community-based tourism (CBT) in national parks has been recognized by its increasing popularity but an issue also emerged regarding the aspect of learning organization to enhance management capacity to work with the park authority to meet sustainable tourism goals with mutual understanding of tourism standards and regulation. This research aimed to identify success factors of learning organization, evaluate three community-based tourism groups: Mae Klang Luang, Pa Mon, and Nong Lom located in Doi Inthanon National Parks based on those factors, and suggest an improvement of CBT based on the research results. Qualitative method was employed. Success factors were identified by literature reviews, followed by expert evaluation using Delphi technique. The results revealed 4 elements and 33 key success factors for community-based tourism learning organization (CBT-LO). The elements comprised of leader and members in organization, organization learning culture, communication, and knowledge management. The self-evaluations of CBT-LO performance based on the key success factors were carried out in focus group discussions. Each factor was discussed and a score was given. The weighting score method was used to calculate the overall CBT-LO performance for each CBT group. The evaluation results showed the organization leader and members and communication were their strengths while knowledge management was their weakness. Pa Mon was the best performance on CBT-LO while Mae Klang Luang and Nong Lom were ranked second and third, respectively. Action plans on improvement of CBT-LO were suggested.

© 2020 Kasetsart University.

Introduction

Several local communities adjacent to Thai national parks manage the community-based tourism (CBT) and use tourism resources in the parks. Even though national parks have certain laws and regulations that visitors must follow, local communities must assist the national park authority in visitor management and impact control. Tourism management in a national park is highly concerned with sustainability since a national park is designated not only for recreation and tourism purposes but essentially for protection of biodiversity and natural resources. Schianetz, Kavanagh, & Lockington (2007) noted that even though the CBT goal was to achieve sustainable tourism, creating tourism organizations that are adaptive to change and capable of learning how to improve sustainability continuously, is essential in accomplishing the sustainable goal. This is also recognized in Thailand CBT located in or

near national parks. Such local tourism organization is the main challenge because of rapid changes in CBT and its management. Local communities must knowingly adapt well to CBT changes since the management relies on the organization activities of planning, organizing, leading and controlling to achieve organization goals.

Kraleva (2011) referred to "learning organization (LO)" as a novel idea that could be used for tourism development that would in turn lead to sustainable tourism where the focus was on human development. Efficient organization also improves and enhances development of the CBT management sustainably (Hiwasaki, 2006; Liao, 2010). This is in accordance with the national development policy of Thailand 4.0, which officially announced that developing, improving, and augmenting the efficiency of human resource are key factors for development in the era of radical changes.

In Doi Inthanon National Park, members of local communities have created community-based tourism groups to deliver tourism programs and services in the park. The collaboration between communities and park authority in this matter has been seen as successful, but it also highlights some challenges of different ways of thinking and practices, organizational culture and knowledge management. These may reflect the weak point of local CBT organization in working with the park authority as well as in tourism management in the park. Little research has been undertaken about CBT regarding learning organization. Thus, this paper studies CBT in the aspect of learning organization. It aims to investigate the situation of CBT in Doi Inthanon National Park, develop success factors of LO to measure the performance of the CBT as learning organization, evaluate the performance of three Karen community-based tourism groups based on LO success factors relevant to tourism management, and suggest the improvement of CBT from research results.

Three CBT communities in Doi Inthanon national park, Chiangmai province were selected as study sites: Ban Mae Klang Luang, Ban Pha Mon and Ban Nong Lom. All study sites were located along the main 1009 highway. Ban Mae Klang Luang is located just off the road at kilometer 27 from the park entrance, Ban Pha Mon and Ban Nong Lom, are 7 to 10 kilometers from the main highway and can be reached by unsealed mountain road. The main attraction is the remarkable scene of rice paddy and mountain forest, beautiful natural resources within the park and the rich cultural resource of the Karen ethnic group. The CBT groups offer a variety of tourist activities which focus on learning and sharing experience with local people and natural resource-based activities such as hiking, bird watching, and waterfall viewing. Ban Mae Klang Luang receives mostly Thai tourists. Ban Pa Mon and Nong Lom receive more foreign tourists than Thai tourists as they have co-operated with a French tourism enterprise, which regularly sends foreign tourists to them (Table 1).

Literature Review

CBT is a tool of sustainable development (Gusti, 2012). CBT creates added values for tourism. It is part of sustainable tourism which improves quality of life, encourages local community participation and manages resources to ensure the sustainability of tourism (Charoensit & Emphandhu, 2018; Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen, & Duangsaeng, 2014; Saunsri, 2003). The CBT becomes an alternative type of tourism which emphasizes establishing local participation in community development, conserving natural and cultural resources and generating income for the local community (Saunsri, 2003).

Several CBT models near national parks use tourism resources in such parks and must manage sustainable tourism to minimize tourism impact because biodiversity and natural resource conservation are priorities of park management. Emphandhu and Poolpiphat (2006) suggested that the CBT management in Thailand's national parks was based on four factors for success, namely: (1) local involvement and support from national park authorities; (2) natural and cultural resource conservation; (3) social and economic development including involvement of local people in tourism management resulting in development of the local's society and economy; and (4) good tourism experience for visitors. Hiwasaki (2006) studied the CBT management surrounding Japan's protected areas. The study found that tourism was a tool to create a sense of ownership and empowerment among local people which, in turn, led to development of the society, economy and environment on the basis of collaboration between a community and a park authority. This supported a study by Masud (2017) of challenges in CBT management in collaboration with national parks in Malaysia. The key matters in this study were to employ tourism as a tool for preserving natural and cultural resources and developing community welfare, planning participatory tourism management, and focusing on distributing profits fairly.

Sudharatna (2010) defined learning organization from definitions which were given by several academicians as "the guidelines for sustainable organization management and the development of learning process to improve employee's capability in organization". In addition, Senge (1990) defined the learning organization as "an organization where people continuously expand their capability to create results they truly desire, new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, collective aspiration is set free, and people are continuously learning to achieve organization's goals". Definitions of learning organization convey the importance of learning organization for increasing efficiency of organization management. The concept of learning organization relates to the concept of a learning process which focuses on creative thinking and works of employees and the concept of sustainable development which focuses on humans.

Table 1 Information of Ban Mae Klang Luang, Ban Pa Mon, and Ban Nong Lom Tourism groups in Doi Inthanon National Park in year 2017

Tourism groups	Tourism management experience (years)	Members (people)	Number of tourists (people)	Tourism income (Baht)
Ban Mae Klang Luang	15	80	3,429	950,000
Ban Pa Mon	10	137	265	944,156
Ban Nong Lom	5	74	93	325,500

Source: Ban Mae Klang Luang, Ban Pha Mon and Ban Nong Lom CBT group, 2017

It should be noted that the concept of learning organization can fit well with the concept of CBT. The goal of CBT organization management is to develop humans whilst developing organization. This development process leads to a creation of learning society in an organization. The concept of learning organization and the concept of CBT focus on leaders and members of the organization as well as communication and culture of the organization to manage the task for certain goals. Indeed, knowledge management is also crucial in developing learning organization. Knowledge management for human development is recognized as a fundamental element of systematic thinking management (Panit, 2002). Several studies suggested the key success factors of learning organization include leaders and members of organization, organizational culture, organizational communication and knowledge management process (Natasa, 2011; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Popescu, Chivu, Ciocarlan-Chitucea, Popescu, & Georgel, 2011; Senge, 1990; Sonea, 2007; Sudharatna, 2010; Zehrer, 2011). From the definitions and concepts, the researcher defines "community-based tourism learning organization (CBT-LO)" as an organization which manages community-based tourism with the characteristics of learning organization in order to obtain sustainable tourism.

Methodology

This research employed qualitative approach emphasizing Participatory Action Research (PAR). The triangulation method of checking at least two sources of data was undertaken to assure data validity. Steps in research process are the following:

Development of Key Success Factors for CBT-LO

The key success factors and criteria for CBT-LO were developed by three steps: literature review, expert opinion and local community opinion. The first step was to draft the success indicators suggested from literature review. Second, 25 experts in CBT and tourism management in national parks from universities, government agencies, and NGOs were selected by snowball sampling techniques to give opinions on the appropriateness and the factor importance (W) rating from 1 to 5, where one is least important and five is the most. The Delphi technique using e-mail questionnaire was carried out to gain experts' opinions until reaching a consensus, which in this case was 3 rounds of e-mails. Afterward, the criteria comprised of four performance levels in tourism management related to the CBT-LO factors were given: 0 = no to low performance (0–25 %), 1 = low performance (>25–50 %), 2 = medium performance (>50–75 %), 3 = high performance (>75–100 %). Then, PAR was applied in the third step. Success factors and criteria were evaluated by Ban Huey Hee, the Karen CBT organization in Mae Hong Son province near Nam Tok Mae Surin national park. The focus group discussions were conducted with 32 members in the CBT group, asking their opinions on CBT-LO factors and criteria. Each success factor and criteria were also discussed regarding values of importance, appropriateness and possibility of being applied on-site within Karen cultural environment as well as the language difficulty. As a result, the language was simplified

and some criteria were slightly changed to reflect the real situation of CBT. Finally, the CBT-LO factors were tested by the Ban Huey Hee CBT group for validity measurement.

Evaluation of the Performance of Three Karen CBT Groups Based on CBT-LO Success

The next participatory action in PAR research was the self-evaluation of the CBT-LO performance. Key informants were 28, 30, and 16 members of the CBT groups from Ban Mae Klang Laung, Ban Pha Mon, and Ban Nong Lom, respectively, performing focus group discussions. Their understanding of the CBT-LO factors and criteria were discussed, and self-evaluation on the CBT-LO performance based on each key success factor was carried out. Then, the weighting score method was employed to get the CBT-LO performance of each CBT group. The score was interpreted into 4 levels of success as: 0.00–0.75 = Very low success in CBT-LO, needing serious improvement (VL), 0.76–1.50 = Low success in CBT-LO, needing much improvement (L), 1.51–2.25 = Medium success in CBT-LO, needing some improvement (M), and 2.26–3.00 = High success in CBT-LO (H), needing little improvement

At the final stage, the researcher conducted a focus group discussion at each village to share the research output of the CBT-LO performance. The same key informants were invited but other village members were also welcome to share their opinions. The shortcomings and their strengths were discussed. The SWOT analysis of CBT management was employed to help develop management actions. Suggestions for improving CBT management and their CBT groups towards learning organization were also delivered. The results were also shared with the leaders from the communities and National Park Authority to seek improvement of tourism management in the national park.

Results and Discussion

The results found 33 key success factors on CBT-LO in 4 elements: (1) leaders and community members in organization, (2) learning culture of the organization, (3) communication, and (4) knowledge management process (searching, sharing, utilizing, storing, and transferring). The result also showed that all elements were almost equally important. However, the most significant elements were leader and staff (W = 5), communication (W = 5), and parts of knowledge management, which were knowledge utilization and knowledge transfer (W = 5). Table 2 shows success factors, weighted score (W) and the results of CBT-LO performance of the three CBT groups.

The results from the local CBT group self-evaluation during focus group discussion found that among the three groups, Pa Mon performed best as CBT-LO with the score of 2.27 rated as high success for a learning organization, Mae Klang Laung was second, and Nong Lom the last with scores of 2.21 and 1.77, as medium success, respectively. For Pa Mon, continuing improvement of tourism products using their local wisdom, leader and team capacity, and knowledge sharing in utilizing rice production and rice field landscape to

develop new tourism product and activity can be seen as the outcome of becoming good learning organization. By having a good leader and members, they improvised learning environment and shared knowledge to create innovative tourism activities and adaptive management to be responsive

to the tourism market with respect to the tourism sustainability concept they hold on to. Communication with the park authority led to more ideas exchanged in tourism development between the two parties and made their CBT development become acceptable within the park.

Table 2 CBT-LO factors, weighting score (W) and CBT-LO performance of the three CBT groups in Doi Inthanon National Park

Elements and success factors of CBT-LO	CBT-LO performance-based			
	Mae Klang Luang	Pa Mon	Nong Lom	Average score
1. Leader and staff in organization (W = 5)	2.33	2.50	2.33	2.39
1.1 Leader encouraging the implementation of tourism group	3	2	2	2.33
1.2 Leader providing advanced / innovative thinking, flexible for adaptation and learning	2	2	2	2.00
1.3 Empowerment of members of tourism group in decision making	2	2	3	2.33
1.4 Leader supporting idea sharing among members	3	3	3	3.00
1.5 Group members having confidence in potential and ability of the group and themselves	2	3	2	2.33
1.6 Having team learning within group members	2	3	2	2.33
2. Organization learning culture (W = 4.8)	2.33	2.67	2.00	2.33
2.1 Establishing learning culture	2	2	2	2.00
2.2 Staff developing learning space into organization culture	2	3	2	2.33
2.3 Creative thinking	2	2	2	2.00
2.4 People who provided creative thinking to develop tourism	3	3	2	2.67
2.5 Establishing learning culture of organization according to community life	3	3	3	3.00
2.6 Having culture of transferring knowledge	2	3	1	2.00
3. Communication (W= 5)	2.67	2.67	2.33	2.56
3.1 Developing media for communication	3	3	2	2.67
3.2 Having constant communication within organization	3	3	3	3.00
3.3 Having constant communication with external agencies	2	2	2	2.00
4. Knowledge management				
4.1 Searching knowledge (W = 4.9)	2.25	1.75	1.5	1.83
4.1.1 Always searching new knowledge	2	2	2	2.00
4.1.2 Establishing new knowledge	2	2	1	1.67
4.1.3 Having knowledge connection	2	2	2	2.00
4.1.4 Having technology for searching knowledge	3	1	1	1.67
4.2 Sharing knowledge (W = 4.85)	2.75	3	2	2.58
4.2.1 Providing incentives to share knowledge	3	3	2	2.67
4.2.2 Having sufficient resource	3	3	2	2.67
4.2.3 Having system thinking for sharing	2	3	2	2.33
4.2.4 Sharing goal and ideology	3	3	2	2.67
4.3 Utilizing knowledge (W = 5)	2.00	2.25	1	1.75
4.3.1 Utilizing knowledge from database	2	2	1	1.67
4.3.2 Utilizing knowledge from network	2	3	1	2.00
4.3.3 Establishing system to access knowledge	2	2	1	1.67
4.3.4 Having concrete knowledge use	2	2	1	1.67
4.4 Storing knowledge (W = 4.95)	1.67	2.33	1.33	1.78
4.4.1 Having several methods in storing knowledge	2	2	1	1.67
4.4.2 Providing responsible staff for storing knowledge	1	3	2	2.00
4.4.3 Storing knowledge constantly	2	2	1	1.67
4.5 Transferring knowledge (W = 5)	1.67	1.67	1.33	1.56
4.5.1 Having suitable technology	2	1	1	1.33
4.5.2 Transferring knowledge to one another	2	3	2	2.33
4.5.3 Providing several ways to transfer knowledge	1	1	1	1.00
CBT-LO performance	2.21 (M)	2.27 (H)	1.77 (M)	2.08 (M)

Remark: Score 0.00–0.75 = Very Low success in CBT-LO, need serious improvement (VL)
            0.76–1.50 = Low success in CBT-LO, need much improvement (L)
            1.51–2.25 = Medium success in CBT-LO, need some improvement (M)
            2.26–3.00 = High success in CBT-LO (H)

Interesting results from the study showed knowledge sharing was the strongest LO factor found at Pa Mon and Mae Klang Luang CBT groups though they thought that it was less important than knowledge utilization and knowledge transfer. Both CBT groups have established both formal and informal protocol for knowledge sharing. Importantly, at Pa Mon, mutual vision and concept of sustainable tourism was repeatedly shared first before starting the agenda in every group meeting. Thus, all members understood the same vision, tourism goals and the concept well. Incentive to encourage knowledge sharing among members was constantly provided such as admiring the input of members who shared ideas to make them proud and confident. Sharing knowledge in Karen culture was also typical since their outstanding characteristics are kindness and openness. Pa Mon tourism group normally shared information, ideas, opinions, and knowledge they had gained through informal channels such as afternoon chats with friends and sharing ideas with youth by demonstration and persuasion for young people to get involved. Pa Mon also characterized other elements of learning culture and communication as well as good leaders and staff as learning organization. The results also highlighted the application of various channels in regular internal and external organization communication in the era of technological development.

Mae Klang Luang, the oldest local tourism group in Doi Inthanon, had long experience in knowledge sharing Initially, knowledge in CBT management was very poor. Thus, members of the group had to help each other by sharing ideas, information and new knowledge so that the group members would come up with ideas in tourism products and services. The tourist center built at Mae Klang Luang was not only for tourist information service but also the group's meeting room to learn and share ideas among members and outsiders.

In contrast to the sharing knowledge aspect, the most critical factors found in all tourism groups were also under the elements of knowledge management, particularly, searching new knowledge, utilizing, storing, and transferring knowledge. In general, communities realized the importance of knowledge management but did not perform very well especially on these factors. However, this is crucial for CBT operating in a national park since knowledge both from local wisdom and from the park, particularly scientific knowledge on "how to" in resource conservation, must be searched and exchanged until it is acceptable for utilization both by the park and local tourism groups and stored in the organization system.

Storing knowledge was not efficient in tourism groups except for Pa Mon. This can be explained in that most local people there typically stored knowledge in human memories and transferred knowledge within their clan instead of on written paper or put in digital files. It is likely that without proper storing and transferring knowledge, the local wisdom collected from former generations and good CBT management knowledge learned and approved by actual practices may soon disappear in future generation. However, for Pa Mon group it was not the case since it had an on-going opportunity to act as local researchers working with outsider researchers on several community research projects funded by Thailand Research Fund Institute (TRF). Thus, skills gradually developed through their research participation including several ways of sharing, utilizing, and storing knowledge. Nong Lom, on the other hand, with least experience in CBT would need strong improvement on knowledge management if they wanted CBT products be competitive.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study of CBT-LO identified 4 elements and 33 indicators for CBT-LO. Pa Mon had the best CBT-LO performance compared to Mae Klang Luang and Nong Lom tourism groups. The assessment results revealed that knowledge sharing, communication, and leaders and members of organization are CBT-LO's strengths. Critical factors included all knowledge management elements except knowledge sharing. Pa Mon with its increasing visitor numbers, tourism income, and manifest resource conservation showed CBT success with respect to their CBT-LO performance. Leaders and team, learning culture, as well as communication and sharing knowledge were the elements Pa Mon group possessed as success in CBT-LO. However, if the success is long-lasting, the element of knowledge management must be improved and well-grounded in the CBT organization. CBT should consider the development of groups towards learning organization since it can support sustainable CBT management. The results also suggested that communities should understand their organization strengths and weaknesses in tourism management and develop joint working environment with the national park based on learning organization concept.

Regarding recommendations for policy level, the government should support strongly developing CBT into CBT-LO platform particularly with regards to knowledge management so that they can be well prepared for fast track changes in the tourism sector and be able to compete with new products and new CBT enterprise. National park policy should recognize CBT within the park and integrate CBT into park tourism plan and implementation as well as support CBT to become learning organization. CBT-LO and national park would work well if they have the same knowledge and information and good two-way communication.

The management implication from this research is focused on developing CBT groups into better learning organization as following: (1) human and organizational development plan in capacity building of human resources, integrating learning culture into organizational culture, and designing the CBT group structure to ensure frequent knowledge sharing and learning; (2) new generation capability building in CBT-LO through local research participation and learning by doing with experienced adults so that young people's potential in CBT management will be enhanced; creating co-learning activities to foster adult and youth knowledge sharing atmosphere and (3) creating knowledge management plan, which involves establishing a simple database system to ensure easy access and retrieval, creating and acquiring new knowledge, and managing the knowledge transferring system for mutual learning and knowledge utilization.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

References

Charoensit, J., & Emphandhu, D. (2018). Analyzing the research gap on community based tourism in Thailand. *Damrong Journal of the Faculty of Archaeology, 17*(1), 176–203. [in Thai]

Emphandhu, D., & Poolpiphat, U. (2006). Strategic policy options for enhancing national park and local community linkage in tourism management of Thai national parks. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences, 27*(2), 347–362. [in Thai]

Gusti, K. S. (2012). Issues on Bali tourism development and community empowerment to support sustainable tourism development. *Procedia Economics and Finance, 4*(2), 413–422.

Hiwasaki, L. (2006). Community based tourism: A pathway to sustainability for Japan's Protected Areas. *Society and Natural Resources, 19*(8), 675–692.

Kontogeorgopoulos, N., Churyen, A., & Duangsaeng, V. (2014). Success factors in community-based tourism in Thailand: The role of luck, external support, and local leadership. *Tourism Planning & Development, 11*(1), 106–124.

Kraleva, N. (2011). Learning organizations: Prerequisite for successful tourism organizations. *UTMS Journal of Economics, 2*(1), 77–82.

Liao, S. H. (2010). System perspective of knowledge management, organizational learning, and organizational innovation. *Expert Systems with Applications, 37*(2), 1096–1103.

Masud, M. M. (2017). Community-based ecotourism management for sustainable development of marine protected areas in Malaysia. *Ocean & Coastal Management 136*, 104–112.

Natasa, K. (2011). Learning organizations: Prerequisite for successful tourism organizations. *UTMS Journal of Economics, 2*(1), 77–82.

Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (1995). Theory of organizational knowledge creation. In I. Nonaka & H. Takeuchi. *The knowledge-creating company: How Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation.* (pp. 284). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Popescu, D., Chivu, L., Ciocarlan-Chitucea, A., Popescu, D.-O., & Georgel, C. (2011). The learning organization challenges within the SMEs tourism field of activity. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *24*, 1098–1106.

Panit, V. (2002). *Knowledge management*. Retrieved from http://www.kmi.or.th/ https://kmi.or.th/kmknowledge/

Saunsri, P. (2003). *Community-based tourism handbook*. Bangkok, Thailand: Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project (REST Project).

Schianetz, K., Kavanagh, L., & Lockington, D. (2007). The learning tourism destination: The potential of a learning organization approach for improving the sustainability of tourism destinations. *Tourism Management, 28*(6), 1,485–1,496.

Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Currency Doubleday Press.

Sonea, C. (2007). Organizational change- cultural and structural aspects, in managerial challenges of the contemporary society. *Editura Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca, 20*, 264–273.

Sudharatna, Y. (2010). *Learning Organization*. Bangkok, Thailand: Chulalongkorn University Press. [in Thai]

Zehrer, A. (2011). Knowledge management in tourism - the application of Grant's knowledge management model to Austrian tourism organizations. *Tourism Review, 66*(3), 50–64.