

# Collaboration of Public Services of Phayao Elderly School, Northern Thailand

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## ABSTRACT

*This research project studies collaboration of public services of Phayao Elderly People in the northern part of Thailand. The research questions are: 'Which factors that make the collaboration possible?', 'What are the processes of collaboration?' and 'What are the final results of the collaborations?' This research aims to investigating the conditions leading into the collaboration of the school, examining the collaboration process and studying the results arising from the collaboration. This is a qualitative research using the Phayao Elderly School as a case study. This school is the most successful elderly school in Thailand. Structured interviews and observations are used to understand the incidents as a framework for the interviews. Content analysis is also used to analyze recorded transcripts of the interviews. The findings of this research are: 1) The factors which led to the formation of the elderly school are the deteriorations of the elderly people's health, the increasing population of the elderly people, and the utilization of the elderly people's free time after retirement to maintain and improve their lifestyles. 2) A network of collaboration to ensure the implementation of the elderly school and 3) The school can encourage the integrity and self-esteem of the elderly people. The number of students is increasing every year. However, the funding for governmental collaboration has not increased.*

Keywords: Phayao Elderly school, collaboration

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini merupakan studi kolaborasi mengenai pelayanan publik di sekolah lansia Phayao di bagian utara Thailand. Pertanyaan penelitiannya adalah: Faktor-faktor manakah yang sangat mungkin mempengaruhi kolaborasi? Apa sajakah proses-proses dalam melakukan kolaborasi? Dan Apa hasil akhir dari kolaborasi tersebut? Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti kondisi yang mengarah pada kolaborasi di sekolah, memeriksa proses kolaborasi dan mempelajari hasil yang timbul dari kolaborasi ini. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan Sekolah lansia Phayao sebagai studi kasus. Sekolah ini merupakan sekolah tua yang paling sukses di Thailand. Wawancara terstruktur dan observasi digunakan untuk memahami peristiwa itu sebagai kerangka untuk wawancara. Analisis isi juga digunakan untuk menganalisis transkrip rekaman dari wawancara. Temuan dari penelitian ini adalah: 1) Faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan pembentukan sekolah Lansia adalah mengalami kerusakan kesehatan orang-orang lanjut usia itu, populasi yang semakin meningkat dari orang tua, dan pemanfaatan waktu luang orang-orang tua setelah pensiun untuk mempertahankan dan meningkatkan gaya hidup mereka. 2) Sebuah jaringan kerjasama untuk menjamin pelaksanaan sekolah Lansia, dan 3) Sekolah dapat mendorong integritas dan harga diri dari orang tua. Jumlah siswa meningkat setiap tahun. Namun, pendanaan untuk kolaborasi pemerintah tidak bertambah. Kata Kunci : Sekolah lansia Phayao, Kolaborasi

## **INTRODUCTION**

Issues of social, economic, political and technological globalization are a challenge to both developed and developing countries. There is a need to focus and accelerate the work to find ways to prevent and resolve many issues such as poverty, education, public health, equality, unemployment, inflation and energy shortages. The countries, whether developed or developing, such as Thailand are facing an increasing number of the elderly people. For Thai elderly, in 2009 there were 4.8 million people over the age of 60. By 2025, the figure will rise to 14.9 million people. (College of Population, 2011, online). Thailand has been preparing to cope with the demographic change for over nearly three decades, since 1982, as shown in the National Long-Term Plan for the Elderly. Most public services for the elderly have been operated by the government focus on social work, for example; housing and social service centers to help disadvantaged elderly people. In 2003, Thailand's Elderly Act acknowledged that people who are over 60 years of age will receive subsistence allowance of 500 baht per month. The projects for the elderly by Non-Governmental Organizations are also on the increase under the concept that the elderly people can rely on themselves even without the assistance of the government. Phayao Elderly School is the pioneer of

three elderly schools in Thailand.

This research aims to investigate the conditions that lead to the collaboration of the school, to know the collaboration process and to study the results arising from the collaboration. This is a qualitative research using the Phayao Elderly School as a case study. The school is the most successful elderly school in Thailand. Structured interviews and observations are used to understand the incidents as a framework for the interviews. Content analysis is also used to analyze recorded transcripts of interviews. The research project will provide empirical evidence as a model for the other elderly schools on which collaboration is shaped, to provide management structure as a result of the collaboration and to provide recommendations for further study on this topic.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The research collaboration of Public Services of Phayao Elderly People in the northern Thailand reviewed relevant research literature and theories as follows. The concept of collaboration is derived from two political Concepts, those are, Classic Liberalism and Civic Republicanism. The first approach focuses on personal benefit. The collaborative process is a collection of private or personal preferences in order to have the power to negotiate for their own interests. The second concept is broader than any personal benefit. Collaboration is a process of gathering various benefits based on mutual understanding, trust and compassion for one another. As Frederick W. Taylor and other scholars have focused on Max Weber's bureaucracy such as chain of command, delegation, formal structure and communication from top to bottom. Organizations in authoritarian state provide public services by that manner. However, with the lack of such rule, we see a more moderate view that looks like an intersection between states with a democratic system as American values and equality of participation. With the clash between these two values, the government seeks alternative management known as a network or intersectional collaboration to improve performance and quality of life. The theory of networks between organizations or sectors which means a combination of organizations has been stated since the 1960s. The federal public service is operated from within the state to local government and

communities to improve public services and reduce costs.

Merriam-Webster (online, 2011) defines the term collaboration as ‘to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor’ or ‘to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected’ or ‘working with others by sharing ideas’ or ‘in cooperation with the organization or to use as a tool to connect to each other.’ The scholars such as Robert Agranoff and Michael McGuire (2003 : 4) defines collaboration is a process that encourages organizations to work together. The objective is to improve the potential of a single organization. The collaboration also includes the search for innovative alternatives to resolve the limitations of existing knowledge such as time, budget, and competition. While Ring and Van de Ven (cited in Ann Marie Thomson, 2006: 23) define collaboration as the process which is free to interact through formal negotiations and non-formal rules to create a common structure, responsibilities and practices in relation to each other or decide on issues together. Such a process is the sharing of the best practices for mutual benefit. There are many scholars using the term ‘collaborative governance’, instead of collaboration as Sang Ok Choi and Heon-Hyung Lee (2001), Chris Ansell and Alison Gash (2007), Gerry Stoker (1998), means dominated by one or more agencies, collaboration with relevant non-governmental organization, decision-making-together process. In short, the meaning of ‘collaboration’ and ‘collaborative governance’ is not different. So, this research uses the word “collaboration” which means a process that encourages organizations to work together. The objective is to improve the potential of a single organization.

There are many reasons that lead organizations work together. The scholars have mentioned a great number of factors or conditions that lead to such collaboration. Michael McGuire (2006: 34) identifies the main factors that lead to an agreement. First, social change is one of the reasons, because today is the era of information society and IT (Information Age) which resulted in a structure to be able to spread across the scope and function of any organization. Diversity is very high and power is disrupted. The world’s needs and the freedom and the individual are very high, causing the era of networking and collaboration. Second, the current issues that government is facing will not be able to be managed

efficiently if only relying on one organization. Such current issues among other are solving poverty problem, health care, deforestation and exploitation of natural resources. Therefore, the governments need mechanisms that are different. They must be flexible. The collaboration between various sectors is formed to address these problems. As John M. Bryson and Others (2006: 45-46) identified, conditions which give rise to collaboration among the organizations are composed of three factors. First, the environmental factors which each organization cannot refuse to work with other organizations. Second, individual sector fails to solve public problems. Third, the direct antecedents of collaboration formation cause the collaboration to happen. When organizations work together to create an agreement; management agrees to achieve common goals effectively. In Sum, the conditions that lead organizations to work together are social change, dysfunctions of bureaucracy and the direct antecedents of collaboration formation.

Collaborative process is important and is the next step from the collaboration formation. Robert Agranoff & Michael McGuire (2006: 4) define 'collaborative process' as a process that encourages organizations to work together to resolve the problems which cannot be solved successfully by a single organization. Ann Marie Thomson and Ted Miller (2002) conducted research and found that there are four dimensions. The first factor concerns with the government. The government makes a decision together with the rules and regulations including the negotiation and agreement together. Second, the same as in the management dimension, the network involves a variety of different roles and support such as facilities, financial support to achieve common goals. Third, there are also dimensions of independence. There is a merging interest with the public. Fourth, the dimension of exchange is another important aspect. The organizations share the benefits of information, discussing them and building mutual trust. In addition, Peter Smith Ring and Van De Ven (cited in Ann Marie Thomson, James L. Perry, 2006: 22-23) presented a framework for the process of collaboration as follows : 1) to bargain mutual benefits with all parties 2) to establish a mutually acceptable agreement to be implemented in the future through various interactions 3) to implement the decision according to the agreement and 4) to

evaluate on the basis of the whole process. Also Robert Agranoff (2007: 26) and Michael McGuire (2006: 37) have outlined the process of cooperation, which is also supported by the concept of Peter Smith Ring and Van De Ven, as follows : 1) to recruit the right people and resources that are necessary to achieve the goals of the operation 2) to create a framework or planning for joint operations, and 3) to create an environment and conditions intended to benefit sharing among the parties. John M. Bryson and colleagues, (2006: 46-48) mention about collaborative process and divide the process into five areas of collaboration as follows 1) to establish a formal agreement on elements of the mission 2) to build leadership in the process of collaboration of the two types of leadership, having authority and access to resources and champions, being leaders committed to the operational cooperation 3) to establish a legitimacy 4) to build trust and hold the people to act together and 5) to plan as an indicator of future success.

In sum, the research uses the concept of collaboration that comes from Robert Agranoff & Michael McGuire, Ann Marie Thomson and Ted Miller, Peter Smith Ring and Van De Ven and John M. Bryson. The collaboration process includes 1) the dimension of management, in which, the network involves a variety of different roles and supports of organizations such as facilities, financial support and recruiting the right people and resources that are necessary to achieve the goals of the operation 2) the dimension of independence, in which, a merging interest with the public exists. 3) The dimension of exchange, in which, the organizations share the benefits of information, sharing and building mutual trust.

Article entitled “Collaboration between state and health NGOs in the Kyrgyz Republic” of the Alexander Pugachev (2007) studies cooperation between government and NGOs., factors that lead to cooperation, factors contributing to the success of the partnership, and problems of cooperation in public health research in the Kyrgyz Republic. The results showed that the lack of resources, including medical personnel and budget, and public health problems, including high birth rate, high adult mortality, and low longevity, are the most influencing factors. The NGOs are funded and accessible to the public and has been working with the community over the government. In addition, donors have no idea that

the cooperation between NGOs and governments are going to make up the partnership as the official word. Collaboration means that the two organizations work together with the same purpose. This role must be clearly defined and mutually agreed. It is important to have a good understanding between the fund and government on achieving the goal of solving problem. The difference between the organizational structure of NGOs and government can be the factors that will affect the success of the partnership. The results showed that understanding between NGOs and the state is an important factor affecting the success of the partnership as an understanding of common goals. Mutual understanding can also exist from the mutual exchange of the information, by means of conferences, seminars, trainings, and also the consultations that are contributed by the governmental agencies to the organizations.

An article from Alex Murdox (2006) entitled “The delivery of public service by the third sector examines the emergence and the development of contractual partnerships between the third sector and government”<sup>s</sup>. This article aims to study the organization of public services by third sector or non-profit organization including corporation and public interests, volunteer organization, and charities. The third sector plays a huge role in providing public services to the public because the service is economical and flexible. The article also points out issues of cooperation between the third sector and the state. This article points out that the role of third sector is good. It is flexible and quick. The service it gives to meet the public demand is quicker and more flexible than the government does.

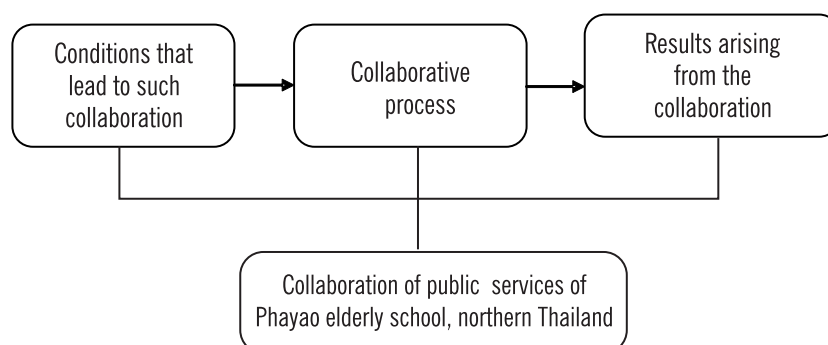


FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative research. A sample or case study is used in this study for the elderly school. The case study used purposive sampling to obtain information about the conditions that lead to cooperation, the collaborative process and the results of the collaboration because Phayao Elderly School is the most successful elderly school in Thailand. The structured interview was used as a framework for the interview with observations to understand the events. The structure of the content consisted of four main parts: general features of the data, the conditions that led to the collaboration of the elderly, the collaborative process and the results from the collaboration. The creation of this interview was intended as a tool to study the concept of the collaboration of Ann Marie Thomson, James L. Perry and Theodore K. Miller, John M. Bryson and Others, Robert Agranoff, Michael McGuire, Peter Smith Ring and Van De Ven. The structured interview was to examine the content validity by three academic professors in the public administration field. Data that was used were coming from various types of documents : general written texts, regulations, statistics and related information, research reports, academic research papers, theses and information from field research. Content analysis was used to analyze recorded transcripts of interviews.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This research project aims to investigate the conditions that led to the collaboration of the school, to study the collaboration process and to know the results arising from the collaboration of Phayao Elderly People in northern Thailand. The results showed that :

1. **Factors leading to the formation of the elderly school were as follows :**
  - a. The social change: in Thailand, a country in Southeast Asia, the number of elderly in 1990 is 7.36 percent. In 2000 the elderly increases to 9.38 percent. In 2010 the population is 11.89 percent and in 2020 the elderly will be 17.51 percent of the total of population. For the northern part of Thailand, the number of the elderly is the third largest in the country. The elderly usually has the deteriorations of memory



and physical health. The retired civil servants would like to utilize of the elderly people's free time after retirement to improve their lifestyle. And it is an alternative for the retired civil servants to benefit to local communities.

- b. The dysfunction of bureaucracy: most public services for the elderly operated by the government focus on social work, for example; housing, allowance and social service centers to help disadvantaged elderly people. A big budget will be increased in the near future. The elderly are receivers. The government does not encourage the community to help themselves. When the distribution of power from central to local government. Local governments provide public services focusing on infrastructure while providing quality of life projects are limited. Also the services do not comply with the requirements of the elderly.
- c. The direct antecedents of collaboration formation: the elderly school is not derived from the elderly clubs or other organizations. Since Mr. Pattana Sukasem, the principle, wants to spend his free time after retirement.

## **2. The collaborative process of the school**

### *a. The elderly school background*

Mr. Pattana Sukasem is the head of the school. The school is an NGO that was established in 2009. There are two types of committees at the elderly school. One is the Working Committee and another one is the Advisory Committee. The Working Committee consists of the retired civil servants and the government officials. While the Advisory Committee consists of marshals, president of the elderly association in Mae Chai district, municipal and district administrations, and president of the district culture council and abbots. There are four branches of the school as in the following districts : Muang district, Chun district, Chiang Kham district, Dok Kam Taai district. Most of the members are elderly women, and a few of them are under 60 years old.

The purposes of the school are : 1) to enhance the value and the wisdom of the elderly 2) to encourage the elderly to care for their own physical well-being and mental health. 3) to cultivate a culture of care for youth as they enter old age. It is supported financially by the Sub-district Ad-

ministrative Organization.

The school stimulates learning to improve the lives of the elderly under the self-sufficiency concept. The activities are defined from the beginning. They achieve the objectives in all respects and help themselves to improve the lives of the elderly. The school opens teaching and learning, similar to the school in the regular one. However, the school does not usually open on time because the elderly school is formed by volunteers. There are many activities such as the provision of traditional knowledge to the young, music therapy, art therapy, and laugh therapy, and religious and cultural tourism.

The collaborative process of the elderly school with the committee relies on the network. The school will communicate both formally and informally to lead to common agreement with the committees. However, the ad-hoc committee makes the school inefficient. They do their own works and have no time to join in the school meeting. Mr. Pattana usually goes to consult them informally. So, the committees are the facilitators and consultants, for example, lending locations, budget and recommendations.

The school has the relations with four learning centers in the districts of Phayao province in which abbots are the directors. The school recommends each agency to establish a learning organization and to improve quality of life for the elderly by considering the needs and the availability of local personnel in order to define projects for the agency. Agencies work together to exchange information. The communication between the agencies and the students is informal through visiting, and formal through the local radio.

The results from the collaboration of the school show that the school can create new identities for the elderly; and improve worth, dignity and health. It can be seen in the eyes of the members themselves as they increase in integrity and self-esteem. The numbers of students of the elderly school have increased every year. However, the problems that the school encountered are: 1) the committee from the government is not consistent in its support to the school. 2) the shortage of volunteer speakers are not always dependable because of the commitment with their own families.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research project studied collaboration of public services to the elderly people of the Phayao Elderly School in Phayao province in the northern part of Thailand, emphasizing the need for a unified, improved vision. Applying the proposed approach as described above, a final vision statement of the Phayao Elderly School is developed. For the proposed vision to be realized, the main requirement is related to the development of the senior-friendly collaborative services, to facilitate both their usage as elderly as well as supporting the interaction between seniors and stakeholders. In relation to the societal aspects, there is a need to enhance the positive perception of society of the elderly people who are viewed not as a socio-economic burden, but as a knowledgeable and experienced population segment that will give a great value to the society.

Agencies ought to work together to share information with each other which leads to mutual trust as John M. Bryson and colleagues (2006: 46-48) said that building trust and holding the people to act together is important for collaboration.

As determined by the results of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Attract further funding streams by using innovative techniques that are likely to attract donors.
2. Maintaining staff stability through motivation, leadership and encouraging peer mentoring/volunteering to support them.
3. Enhance older people's sense of self-worth through strengthening their personal abilities. Integrate volunteers fully into the multi-professional team and encourage a partnership among professionals and volunteers based on mutual acceptance and appraisal.
4. Inform younger generation about the health promotion program in order to enhance inter-generational interaction and to change negative old-age stereotypes.

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