

## THE SCENARIO OF A LEARNING SOCIETY MODEL TOWARD A POSITIVE PARADIGM SHIFT FOR COMMUNITIES

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**Abstract:** The study on the scenario of a learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities is a prospective qualitative research where the EDFR (Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research) technique is used. Research purposes are to 1) analyze and synthesize learning society models and a positive paradigm shift for communities from domestic and foreign literature, academic articles and relevant researches; 2) study opinions of experts on learning society development from relevant public and private agencies, positive paradigm of the communities, and, strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities; 3) develop a learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities; and 4) present the learning society model and the strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities. There are 4 research procedures based on the research objectives as follows: *Stage 1:* Analyze and synthesize learning society models in Thailand and foreign countries, as well as positive paradigm of the communities from literature, academic articles and relevant researches in Thailand and foreign countries from 2003 to present with respect to: 1) social contexts; 2) development direction and policies; 3) components of learning society; 4) relevant individuals and networks; 5) procedures or nature of activities; 6) non-formal education and leisure education activities; 7) success factors; 8) principle of practicing community; 9) problems and obstacles; 10) components leading to the successful implementation of learning society; 11) paradigm and positive paradigm shift for communities; and 12) strategies for the development of learning society. *Stage 2:* Study opinions of 42 experts on learning society development from relevant public and private agencies, positive paradigm of the communities, and, strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities using in-depth interview, study visit, Delphi Techniques questionnaires, focus group discussion, and so on. *Stage 3:* Develop a learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities, as well as strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities. *Stage 4:* Present the learning society model and the strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities: the components of learning society, the model of a learning society model, and the strategic plans for promotion of a

learning society model. Finally, it is hoped that the knowledge obtained through this study can effectively promote lifelong learning in all sectors of Thai society and transform the communities into ones of a learning society, guide the establishment of a learning society development strategies of agencies, communities and cities for the sustainable development of the country, and the findings can benefit individuals interested in conducting further research on the subject.

### Background and Significance of the Issue

Knowledge is a society's most valuable asset and one which needs to be efficiently and effectively managed. A society thrives and survives on the foundation laid by their wealth of knowledge. As knowledge is gained through learning, the current development initiative is geared towards transforming the society into a learning society (Office of the Education Council, 2008), which is defined as one engaged in a sustainable development strategy that promotes the unending learning of individuals – the smallest unit of the society (Holden & Connelly, 2004). A learning society comprises learners, resources, knowledge and knowledge management (Kulthorn Lertsuriyakul, 2008). Based on the foundation of knowledge, a learning society encourages its members to exchange knowledge with fellow members as well as those from outside societies on a regular, lifelong basis. This is achieved through instillation of values and creation of new learning culture.

Thailand is presently under the guidance of the 10<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (B.E. 2550-2554) which values “the development of the society towards sustainable happiness with emphasis on the balance among all aspects: economy, society, natural resources and environment”. Its key to successful implementation lies in the participation of all levels and sectors of the society. As for human quality and capability improvement, the plan prescribes development in the areas of intellect, knowledge, health and hygiene.

Similar to the national economic and social development plans, the National Education Act B.E. 2542 and its amendment the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) B.E. 2545 put an emphasis on lifelong learning as well. They encourage the society to participate in educational management and uninterrupted learning process and contents development as they are crucial to the creation of a learning society or a knowledge-based society. Its basis is that lifelong learning can be efficient only once non-formal education and informal education reforms are implemented and the same degree of significance as formal education is bestowed upon them.

Given the above strategies and the increasingly intense competition among the international community in

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all regards, the Constitution of the Royal Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2550, the National Education Act B.E. 2542 and its amendment the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) B.E. 2545 all carry stipulations concerning lifelong learning, educational enhancement and global competitiveness with the aim of transforming the Thai people into knowledge citizens and knowledge workers (Utai Dulayakasem, 2005). Further, the Non-Formal Education and Informal Education Act B.E. 2551 has put an emphasis on access to uninterrupted learning as well. This leads to proper development of manpower and a knowledge-based society with respect to the economy, the society, the environment, the security and the quality of life. This is not only consistent with national development strategies but also promotes the establishment of a network of partners synergizing to make education and lifelong learning available to the people.

While it is true that the national development strategies have provided a foundation on which Thailand can become a learning society, that private and public agencies at policy and implementation levels as well as the communities are actively and successfully pursuing the concept, a number of obstacles remain and they are yet to be resolved. Most agencies in Thailand have simply adopted the guidelines established by Knowledge Management Institute, Thailand Productivity Institute and twenty-seven agencies/communities recognized as model learning societies across the country (Office of the Education Council, 2008). They are without clearer directive frameworks towards learning society and appropriate learning activities and resources. Additionally, individuals responsible for the establishment of a learning society in an agency or a community are found to be uncertain of how to proceed or whether they are on the right course of development. This is particularly true for governmental agencies weary of sustainability or even feasibility of the learning society concept in Thailand. It is also consistent with the notion that "most new management theories are proven short-lived in Thailand" (Jiratcha Wichienpunya, 2005). The Thai society lacks diversity of learning systems and resources. The country's information technology system and computer networks used for the transfer of knowledge do not cover all parts of the country. There remain a great number of Thai people who are not properly educated and without means to pursue knowledge (Panom Pongpaiboon, 2007).

The Thai society of the present day is plagued with several obstacles to the concept of lifelong learning. For instance there are an unequal opportunity to access knowledge and learning resources, social discrepancy: Infrastructure, exclusive and public services and learning resources, and economic background differences. The wealth of knowledge available is significant to any person's personal and professional life (Kulthorn Lertsuriyakul, 2008). The circumstances above have led several agencies (e.g. Knowledge Management Institute, Thailand Productivity Institute, Office of Non-Formal Education and Informal education Promotion and private

consulting agencies) to conduct studies and establish measures with which to transform the Thai society into one of learning. Their shared missions are to achieve tangible results. Several communities have been officially recognized as model learning societies by Office of the Education Council for their successful implementation. Thailand's lifelong learning and learning society initiatives are aimed at integrating the two values into people's way of life and at responding to the different needs of various target groups. The learning environment, the network of partners and the joint responsibilities created will lead to a positive paradigm shift of the communities and the sustainable development of the country.

Humankind is coping with the intellectual crisis while battling changes on many fronts at global, national, community and individual levels at the same time. One needs to identify the truth in and the correlation of the consequence of everything. By doing so, one would be more prepared for the things to come and capable of enjoying a happier life amidst all changes in the world (Sirilak Yimprasart, 2005). A paradigm is the sum of thoughts, practices, values and way of life that is based on reality (Seri Pongpit, 2008). It comprises knowledge, relationship between an individual and knowledge; and, knowledge verification methods. Knowledge is the first stage of a person's memorization and recognition of thoughts, objects and incidents. It ranges from simple, independent items to more complex and correlated ones. A person learns, understands, analyzes, synthesizes, evaluates and uses knowledge (Bloom and others, 1966). A realistic perception of the world and all living creatures will provide a basis for a proper paradigm towards the nature and the world in this century. Lessons from past crises can help shape new paradigms to propel the societies forward in the right course (Sirilak Yimprasartporn, 2005).

In order to transform a country into a learning society, the members in that society must be aware of the significance and the necessity of learning, and, eager to learn and capable of creating learning processes of their own. They must have proper intellectual, analytical and problem-solving skills, as well as access to quality, diverse and flexible lifelong learning options that suit their interest and aptitude. Knowledge is a result of an individual understands of the environment and social contexts. It serves as the conceptual framework when an individual learns or attempts to understand matters.

Knowledge can be managed and adjusted to reflect changes in the world. It differs from an individual to another based on their own perception. More importantly, as knowledge is a key component of the learning society (Kulthorn Lertsuriyakul, 2004), it is imperative that we study, analyze and synthesize the positive paradigm of individuals and group of individuals in the society as a model for the resolution of problems and as a guideline for the conduct of life that reflects the fast changing times and circumstances. The abundance of models for the resolution of problems is a guarantee that a

paradigm will grow and become more and more mainstream in the society (Weera Somboon, 2002). New knowledge and learning processes can change a human intellectually and socially. They allow people to co-exist on the basis of balance. Community paradigm shifts from the past are good indicators of what may come in the future. They help reinforce positive thinking, action and learning for individuals, communities and the society at large, thereby contributing to the potentials of a society to become one of learning.

The researcher has studied principles, concepts and researches on learning society in Thailand (Nopmontol Sibmuenpiam, 2003; Sumalee Sangsri, 2005), and, those from foreign countries (Agneta Lantz & Christina Brage, 2006; Casey, 2006; Su, Ya-Hui, 2007; Kathia Castro Laszlo and Alexander Laszlo, 2007) to the conclusion that public and private Thai agencies remain without a proper learning society model that is developed from the synthesis of knowledge appropriate to the Thai social contexts and aimed at achieving actual positive paradigm shift for communities in a structured and procedural manner.

Therefore, it is the intention of this researcher to analyze and synthesize domestic and international knowledge on the learning society. The objective is to present a scenario of a learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities as it is believed that positive paradigm shifts can lead to resolution of social problems and crises. Past paradigms have led to more positive changes and improved quality of life. As a result, members of the society become more complete physically, mentally, intellectually, morally and culturally. They are able to co-exist with others more happily and to propel the society towards the true learning society status. This is consistent with the spirit of the National Education Act B.E. 2542, its amendment the National Education Act (Issue 2) B.E. 2545, and, the Non-Formal Education and Informal education Act B.E. 2551.

### Research Objectives

- 1) To analyze and synthesize learning society models and a positive paradigm shift for communities from domestic and foreign literature, academic articles and relevant researches.
- 2) To study opinions of experts on learning society development from relevant public and private agencies, positive paradigm of the communities, and, strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities.
- 3) To develop a learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities.
- 4) To present the learning society model and the strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities.

### Research Questions

- 1) What is the nature of the learning society model in Thailand and other countries? What are their components?
- 2) What is the nature of the learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities? What is its components?
- 3) What is a positive paradigm for communities? How is a paradigm shift achieved? How are these paradigms related to the concept of learning society?
- 4) Are the learning society model and the strategies for the development of learning society for a positive paradigm shift for communities derived from the research appropriate? What are their appropriate characteristics?

### Research Scope

#### 1. Population

The population used in this study can be classified into two groups: 1) Literature, academic articles and relevant researches in Thailand and in foreign countries from 2003 to present and 2) Learning society development experts (e.g. Executives of Office of Non-Formal Education and Informal Education Promotion, Directors of public community or society development agency, Knowledge managers from the private sector, Academicians and experts on learning society, Regional leaders, District level leaders, and Leaders of communities recognized as model learning societies).

#### 2. Subject of Interest

2.1 Analyze and synthesize learning society model and positive paradigm shift for communities from literature, academic articles and relevant researches in Thailand and foreign countries from 2003 to present with respect to 1) social contexts; 2) development direction and policies; 3) components of learning society (learning individuals, learning resources, knowledge and knowledge management); 4) relevant individuals and networks; 5) procedures or nature of activities (partnership, participation and performance); 6) non-formal education and informal education activities; 7) success factors; 8) principle of practicing community; 9) problems and obstacles; 10) components leading to the successful implementation of learning society; 11) paradigm and positive paradigm shift for communities; and, 12) strategies for the development of learning society.

2.2 Study opinions of experts on learning society development from relevant public and private agencies, positive paradigm of the communities, and, strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities

2.3 Develop a learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities

2.4 Present the learning society model and the strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities

**Research Definitions**

**Learning society:** The nature of an agency or a community engaged in single or multiple matters simultaneously. It involves preservation, nourishment, rehabilitation, protection, promotion, assistance, development, distribution and instillation through information technology, learning resources, local wisdoms and knowledge that allow members of the society to generate new knowledge and proper knowledge management system, to exchange the said knowledge with members of the same and other communities, as well as to best make life decisions. A learning society comprises learning individuals, learning resources, knowledge, and, knowledge management.

**Learning society model:** The visualization of components of a learning society, a positive paradigm shift, strategies for the development of learning society, and, the correlation among such components. A learning society model ensures balanced and sustainable development of a society.

**Positive paradigm shift:** The change of concepts, perceptions, practices, valuations and way of life of the people in a positive and creative manner as generally accepted by the majority. It leads to balanced and sustainable resolution of issues faced by individuals, communities and societies; and, propels the societies forward in the proper direction for the benefit of all members.

**Community:** A group of individuals residing within one locality. These members are interested in incidents occurring among themselves, meet and exchange opinions, and, share common behaviours. They are able to achieve basic requirements and resolve the majority of issues faced by their own community.

**Expected Benefits**

1. The knowledge on learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities obtained through this research can effectively

promote lifelong learning in all sectors of the Thai society and transform the communities into ones of learning.

2. The information obtained through the analysis and the synthesis of literature, academic articles and relevant researches in Thailand and foreign countries can benefit all parties (e.g. provincial governors, district officers, local administrators, branches of Office of Non-Formal Education and Informal education Promotion, and, relevant public and private agencies) in their effort to transform communities into ones of learning.
3. The presented learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities can guide the establishment of learning society development strategies of agencies, communities and cities for the sustainable development of the country.
4. The findings of this research can benefit individuals interested in conducting further researches on the subject.

**Relevant Literature and Researches**

Part 1: Policies and societal direction on non-formal education and informal education / Promotion of Thailand as a learning society

Part 2: Learning society concepts, theories, principles and processes

Part 3: Lifelong learning concepts, theories and principles

Part 4: Model concepts

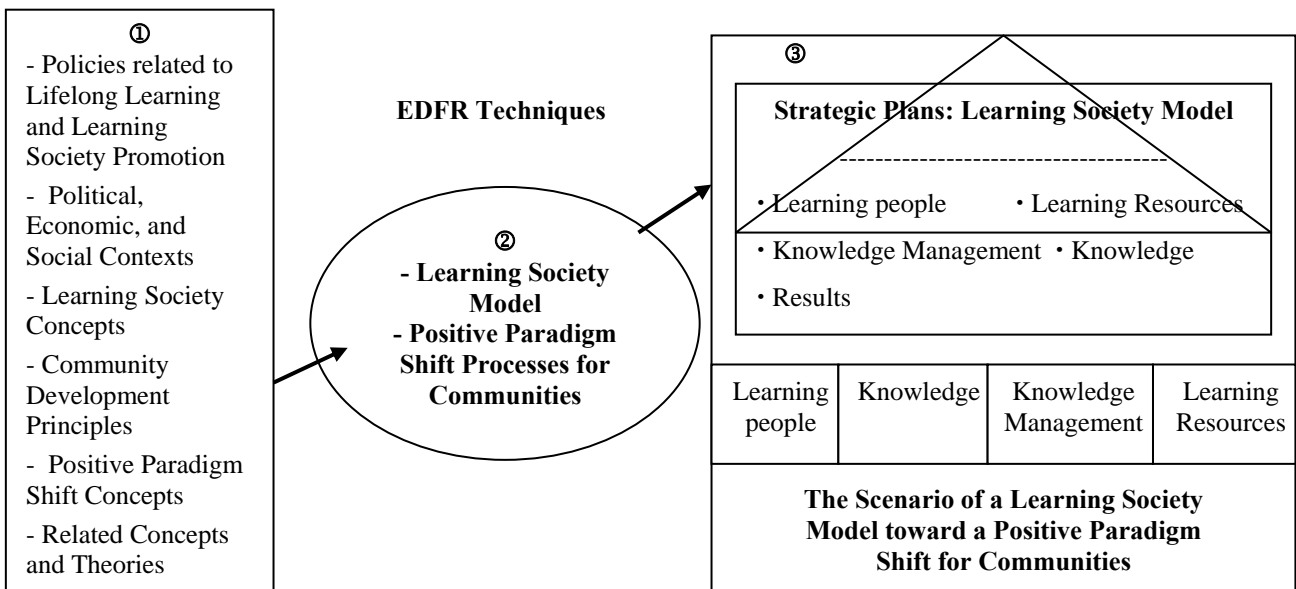
Part 5: Community concepts for the development of learning society

Part 6: Paradigm shift concepts

Part 7: Futures research concepts

Part 8: Relevant researches

**The Conceptual Framework**



### Research Procedures

The study is a prospective qualitative research where the EDFR (Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research) technique is used.

- Stage 1: Analyze and synthesize learning society models in Thailand and foreign countries, as well as positive paradigm of the communities
- Stage 2: Study opinions of experts on learning society development from relevant public and private agencies, positive paradigm of the communities, and strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities
- Stage 3: Develop a learning society model toward a positive paradigm shift for communities by identifying the scenario of learning society model, and, verifying and evaluating the learning society model as well as strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities
- Stage 4: Present the learning society model and the strategies for the development of learning society toward a positive paradigm shift for communities

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