



Knowledge Sharing Practices of Non-Profit Sector in Thailand: A Case Study at Mekong Institute

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Abstract

This research seeks to obtain a better understanding of knowledge sharing practices among professional staffs to enhance working efficiency in Mekong Institute as a Non-profit organization in Thailand. Meanwhile, the previous research provides some studies of barriers, intentions and behaviors of knowledge sharing for higher education and for-profit organization contexts, there has been a lack of study on knowledge sharing practices for non-profit-oriented organizations. In this study, mix-method research approach was used. Both program service and cooperative service employees took part in self-administered questionnaires and followed by in-depth interviews. The findings of this study highlight type of knowledge needs, level of frequency on knowledge sharing to colleagues, what barriers should be considered while sharing knowledge. The findings also indicate that professional staffs held strongly motivation to share their knowledge and experiences with colleagues voluntarily, desktop computer tool and share-folder network are an important material to sharing the knowledge. Most of them agree that time and information technology tools are the biggest obstacle for knowledge sharing practices. Thus, this research would be offered an insight and beneficial for professional staffs to overcome these barriers and enhance the knowledge sharing capacities within non-profit sectors.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, non-profit organizations, Mekong Institute, professional staffs



1. Introduction

The non-profit sector was named third sector with all the organizations are to creating social values (Borga, Lettieri et al., 2004). According to previous empirical evaluation, the non-profit organizations (NPOs) were indicated as important economic actors that it creates contributions significantly to a nation's cross domestic products, NPOs also provided opportunities for volunteer activities (Rathi, Given et al., 2016). Many previous studies stated that knowledge needs have to identify, storing, disseminate so as to promote non-profit organization successfully.

The study of Zapata and Mondragon indicated that most of NPOs were limited resources and time in order to strength their capacity (Zapata Cantu and Mondragon, 2016). At a result, they are looking for external resources to reciprocate NPO's lacking such as alliances, collaborative projects, consultancy, government training and committed volunteers (Rathi, M. Given et al., 2014). In term of knowledge sharing (KS), it means employees might contribute to knowledge application, innovation and ultimately the competitive advantage (Vij and Farooq, 2014). KS also is defined as a process so as to help facilitate the sharing knowledge for communities of practices to improve learning capacity and enhance the goals of achievement (Lin, 2006).

Mekong Institute (MI) is an intergovernmental organization as non-profit-oriented organization, founded by the six member countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) including Cambodia, P.R. China (Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Since 1996, MI has changed program in number of ways from primary capacity building method to a more holistic learning process through modular training (MI, 2016). MI has main functions to contribute the human resource development and capacity building to promote sustainable economic and social development and poverty alleviation; and enhance regional cooperation and integration (MI, 2011, MI, 2016). MI strategic plan (2016) proposed three goals for GMS regional development themes until 2020 follows: MI program is to improve agricultural profitability, and linkages among the public and private actors in agriculture; to capacity and a supportive environment for small and medium enterprises to address entire value chains; and the emergence and application of innovation and technological connectivity in the region (MI, 2016).

According to MI strategic plan (2016), MI emphasized to develop communications and knowledge management strategy to support program activities with institutional strengthening, capacity building and to increase the organization's profile in the region. KS practices are as monthly internal staff capacity building activities. This study is to examine comprehensively what KS behaviors, biggest sharing barriers which lacked academic evaluation in MI to KS practices within the organization.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: research objectives, relevant literature, research model, sampling and research methodology in the next session, research finding in the subsequent sections, discussion and conclusion in the last sections.

2. Research Objective

The aim of this study is to exam KS practices in term of NPOs in Thailand. The more specific research objectives of the study are as follows:

- Identify the type of knowledge needs that employees might share with their colleagues.
- Investigate the KS behaviors to sharing the knowledge among employees at NPOs; what factors impact to the behaviors of KS.



- Exam the level of frequency on usage the tools and technology to practice the KS at NPOs in Thailand.
- Explore the KS barriers and problems that were obstacle to promote the process of sharing knowledge.

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3. Literature review

Previous studies of KS have presented a wide range of dimensions which influence on KS practices in organization. These dimensions could be categorized as: organization culture, organizational structure, reward systems, motivation, interpersonal trust, management support, and information communication technology (Farooq, 2018). Existing literature indicated that there are many factors influence on KS behavior from individual level to organization level. Shabrina and Silvianita (2015) revealed that six factors including working culture, employee attitudes, sharing motivation, sharing opportunity, and communication and technology which become two dominant factors that inspire the creation of knowledge sharing behavior (Shabrina and Silvianita, 2015). Furthermore, the motivation of knowledge sharing intentions and attitudes in higher education institution identified organizational commitment and intrinsic reward have a significant influence on intrinsic motivation of knowledge sharing in Kuwait (Thuwaini Farhan Mohammad, A. Alajmi et al., 2018). Similarity, Islam and his colleagues concluded that PhD students at Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology have positive perception to share the knowledge with others; and they indicate with this study that these students believed KS as a tool to enhance and promote research skills at Japanese higher education context (Islam, Kunifuji et al., 2013).

In addition to online environment, the study of Hew and Hara illustrated through cross-case analysis found that seven motivators would be effect to KS following reciprocity, personal gain, altruism, commitment to the group, ease of technology use, and external goals (Hew and Hara, 2007). In term of knowledge sharing intentions in Vietnamese organization context, a study conducted by Dong, Gia Liem et al., 2010 basing on theory of reasoned action showed that social trust and sense of self-worth were impacted in the attitude toward KS behaviors, and subjective norm directly influence on intention to KS. They used to actual survey responses which revealed that KS is generally recognized as being a beneficial strategy in Vietnamese organization context (Dong, Gia Liem et al., 2010). In addition, a study investigated with 1056 participants at Colombian organizations context. This study examined two types of beliefs relating to KS is individual and collective beliefs that it is influence on KS intentions and behaviors. This research finding described that collective beliefs were “very good predictors” to KS; while individual beliefs were not “very good predictors” related to KS intentions and behaviors (Castaneda and Durán, 2018).

Most studies focused on knowledge management aspects, management of knowledge in competitive, for-profit industries, or knowledge as a tool to show both theory and application in business context (Bloice and Burnett, 2016). Meanwhile, there were not much previous studies about KS practices at NPOs in Thailand context. Sesbastien Matzkin (2008) illustrated that NPOs in Peru have medium and low levels of knowledge management awareness and this is one of first study to explore about knowledge management practices for NPOs as third sector (Sébastien Matzkin, 2008). Furthermore, barriers of KS presented through Bloice and Burnett’s study in 2016. This research identified that some main barriers were obstacle the process of sharing the knowledge at NPOs. Group barriers were namely individual KS barriers, organizational KS barriers, technical KS barriers, and other KS barriers (Bloice and Burnett, 2016).



4. Sample and research methodology

This study was used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The target population of this study comprises all of program and cooperative service including senior management team at Mekong Institute (MI), Thailand – an inter-governmental organization as a non-profit-oriented organization. There are 69 employees in total at MI. Random sampling method was used to select the sample for this research. A pilot study was examined with 5 participants to be requested their respondents and feedbacks. 45 hard copy surveys were sent to management, professional, and general support staffs at MI from 17 to 24 August, 2018. The survey structured three main parts: Part I is general information as gender, age, educational level, experience, and job functions; Part II was focused on kind of knowledge needs and KS behaviors; Part III was concentrated to investigate KS benefits, type of tools and usage tools to promote the sharing knowledge at MI. The survey was completed by 40 of the total target is 45 employees. The responses to close-ended questions on 5-points Likert scales, and then were analyzed using the descriptive analysis techniques of Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 24.0. In addition, 10 professional employees were conducted face-to-face interview including 2 senior managers, 3 program coordinators, 5 program and project officers from program department and cooperate service department. The interview is on-going at this time.

5. Findings

5.1 General findings

The table 1 indicates that the information of resplendent demographics including gender, age, educational level, job functions, and working experience. According to gender information, 42.5% is male, while 57.5% is female. Age group was categorized five items, the highest percentages (55%) of respondents were “26-35 years old”, followed by 30% of “36-45 years old” group, “25 years old and below” reached 7.5%. Similarity, 7.5% of “46-55 years old” group, 0% of respondent was 56 years and above.

Regarding educational level, the highest educational level of respondents was PhD’s degree with 2.5%. Meanwhile, most respondents have Master’s degree with 62.5%. Remaining is 35% of respondents to those who hold Bachelor’s degree. Below, the table 1 presents 40% of respondents have been working at program service, 60% of respondents who are working at cooperative service. In particularly, the findings illustrated that there were five levels of working experience at MI as follows: 1-5 years (37.5%), 6-10 years (37.5%), 11-15 years (7.5%), 16-20 years (7.5%), and 21 years and above (10%).

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of the sample according to demographic data

5.2 Type of Knowledge needs

The data showed that the clients, community, expert knowledge/experience from colleagues and documented knowledge were important type of knowledge needs at MI (Mean ≥ 3.65). The findings harmonize with those of previous study, while they categorized that knowledge about clients, experts and experiences grouped as community knowledge at NPOs context (Rathi, Given et al., 2016). In addition, Rathi and his colleagues (2016) concluded that documented knowledge belonged to type of recorded knowledge at NPOs that it is presented on the findings (Mean ≥ 3.85).



Table 2: Knowledge Needs

Measures	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	17	42.5
	Female	23	57.5
Age group	25 years old and below	3	7.5
	26-35 years old	22	55
	36-45 years old	12	30
	46-55 years old	3	7.5
	56 years old and above	0	0
Educational level	High school	0	0
	Bachelor's degree	14	35
	Master's degree	25	62.5
	PhD's degree	1	2.5
	Others	0	0
Job function	Program service	16	40
	Cooperate service	24	60
Working experience	1-5 years	15	37.5
	6-10 years	15	37.5
	11-15 years	3	7.5
	16-20 years	3	7.5
	21 years and above	4	10

Statements	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Knowledge about our clients/community and their needs.	40	3	5	3.85	0.770
Expert knowledge and experience from our staff/volunteers.	40	3	5	3.65	0.662
Documented knowledge about processes and procedures to the operation of our organization.	40	3	5	3.85	0.736
Knowledge about practical skills.	40	1	5	3.60	1.008
Knowledge about technical skills.	40	2	5	3.38	0.897

Valid N=40

5.3 Knowledge sharing behaviors

This session will be analyzed with 5 statements to examine what level of frequency about KS behaviors. It is obvious from table 3 that Cronbach's alpha for overall statement is 0.750. Thus, the measures within the questionnaire are reliable. Both KSB1 (Mean ≥ 3.40) and KSB2 (Mean ≥ 3.33) demonstrated that MI employees have level of frequency to sharing the knowledge was ≥ 3.33 relating to share their knowledge and experience with colleagues voluntarily or to those who are interested in the reciprocal exchange of knowledge. Next, the third highest mean score was 3.20 of the statement of "I do share my knowledge with my colleagues only when they encounter some professional problems". In contrast, the lowest mean scores were 2.17 and 2.13 for the statements of "I do share my knowledge with only those colleagues who hold high educational



degree” and “I do share my knowledge with only those colleagues who have a high level of knowledge and experience”.

Table 3: Knowledge Sharing Behaviors

Variables	Mean	Std. dev	Cronbach's alpha	Statement
KSB1	3.40	1.236	0.750	I do share my knowledge and experiences with my colleagues voluntarily
KSB2	3.33	0.944		I do share my knowledge and experiences with only those colleagues who are interested in the reciprocal exchange of knowledge
KSB3	3.20	1.018		I do share my knowledge with my colleagues only when they encounter some professional problems
KSB4	2.13	0.966		I do share my knowledge with only those colleagues who have a high level of knowledge and experience
KSB5	2.17	1.083		I do share my knowledge with only those colleagues who hold high educational degree
Valid N=40				

5.4 Knowledge sharing practices

This session described the frequency of usage tools and technology for KS practice at MI; and the level of agreements relating the conditions to KS and what kind of barriers were obstacle KS processes.

5.4.1 Usage of tools and technology for knowledge sharing practices

The table 4 indicates that Cronbach's alpha for all statement is 0.842. It is clearly to illustrate the questionnaire are reliable. The findings present that the highest mean score was 3.32 on 5 points of Likert scale for the statement of “I use desktop computer tool, share folder network to share knowledge with my colleagues”. The statement of “I use e-mail to share knowledge with my colleagues” was second highest mean score with 3.20. Meanwhile, the lowest mean scores were 2.10, 2.15, and 2.72 for the statement of “I use videoconferencing to share knowledge with my colleagues”, “I use teleconferencing/recording audio to share knowledge with my colleagues”, and “I use intranet network (including corporate portal) to share knowledge with my colleagues”



Table 4: Usage of Tools and Technology for KS practices

Variables	Mean	Std. dev	Cronbach's alpha	Statement
UTT1	3.20	1.043	0.842	I use e-mail to share knowledge with my colleagues
UTT2	3.32	1.207		I use desktop computer tool, share folder network to share knowledge with my colleagues
UTT3	2.72	1.109		I use intranet network (including corporate portal) to share knowledge with my colleagues
UTT4	2.10	1.057		I use videoconferencing to share knowledge with my colleagues
UTT5	2.15	1.122		I use teleconferencing/recording audio to share knowledge with my colleagues
Valid N=40				

5.4.2 Knowledge sharing barriers

The respondents were surveyed to discover what problems and barriers of KS at NPOs context. The findings from table 5 divided into two groups follows: Lack of sharing condition and KS barriers. All of statement with Cronbach's alpha is ≥ 0.782 to illustrate the questionnaire are reliable.

According to lack of sharing condition, the findings indicate that the highest mean score was 3.45 for the statement of "Lack of time". Second highest mean score was 3.00 of "Lack of IT/Technology" statement. The ranges of lowest mean score were 2.75 and 2.80 for the rest of these statements. KS barriers were presented by five statements. High mean score was the statement "Uncertainty regarding what knowledge is supposed to be shared" with 3.15, followed by 3.13 for the statement of "Fear of misunderstandings caused by the lack of face-to-face elements". The lowest mean scores were ranged 2.80, 2.83, and 2.97 for the statement is "Not yet having earned the right to post in the community", "Fear of receiving belittling responses", and "Fear of posting unimportant, irrelevant, or inaccurate knowledge".

Table 5: Knowledge sharing barriers

Variables	Mean	Std. dev	Cronbach's alpha	Statement
Lack of sharing condition				
LSC1	3.45	1.176	0.782	Lack of time
LSC2	3.00	1.155		Lack of IT/Technology
LSC3	2.80	1.159		Lack of benefits to oneself
LSC4	2.75	1.127		Lack of rewards and recognition
LSC5	2.80	1.043		Lack of knowledge relative to others



Knowledge sharing barrier				
KSB1	2.97	1.121	0.832	Fear of posting unimportant, irrelevant, or inaccurate knowledge
KSB2	3.15	1.075		Uncertainty regarding what knowledge is supposed to be shared
KSB3	2.80	1.043		Not yet having earned the right to post in the community
KSB4	2.83	1.174		Fear of receiving belittling responses
KSB5	3.13	1.042		Fear of misunderstandings caused by the lack of face-to-face elements

Valid N=40

6. Discussion

This study investigated the KS practices among professional staffs at MI as a NPO of six GMS countries located in Thailand. In Thailand context, several previous studies illustrated the role of knowledge management and knowledge sharing within for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. For instance, to improve hospital service quality at Thailand, knowledge management model is as a very useful tool to facilitate organizational learning, both “single-loop” and “double-loop” learning at non-profit private hospitals (MI, 2016).

The findings revealed that the professional employees at MI were needed awareness from community and documented knowledge with the highest mean score of 3.85 on 5-point Likert scale. Most of respondents reported that they are sharing their knowledge and experiences with my colleagues voluntarily. On the other hand, they do not agree that their knowledge will be shared with only those colleagues who have a high level of knowledge and experience. The respondents also presented MI employees used desktop computer tool, share folder network to share knowledge with their colleagues (the highest mean score is 3.32). In term of KS barriers, lack of time was become biggest barrier to promote the KS process at MI which indicated with 3.45 of mean score, followed by the statement of “Lack of IT/Technology” conditions with 3.00 of mean score. Moreover, KS barriers reported that the statement of “Uncertainty regarding what knowledge is supposed to be shared” with the highest mean score of 3.15 within 5 statements of questionnaire that demonstrated reliable by Cronbach’s alpha is 0.832.

7. Initial conclusion

This study has concluded initially basing on the research findings. Firstly, the study investigated and identified initially what type of knowledge needs for professional staff of Thailand NPOs. For instance, the community and expert knowledge/experience, documented knowledge were a critical knowledge for MI employees that they are expecting to receive from their colleagues. Secondly, the quantitative analysis presents level of frequency about KS behaviors. In detail, the findings offer a comprehensive picture of KS behaviors within “third sector” in Thailand that the employees have motivated to share knowledge and experiences with their colleagues voluntarily. Thirdly, computer tool, share folder network were important material to promote KS processes. And lastly, the study confirmed that time and uncertainly knowledge were the biggest obstacles for the sharing knowledge.

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