

# Empowerment: Mechanism to Develop Life Quality for Thai Persons with Disabilities

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## Abstract

Persons with disabilities are regarded as a group of “vulnerable persons” in the society because of their physical or mental health problems that lead to hardship for self-adjustment to the society. These problems put the disabled persons at risk as they are more vulnerable to all changes in their lives. Therefore, the disabled should receive special attention on living conditions and social welfare to improve their life equality in the society. Apart from receiving rehabilitation or welfare from the government and relevant agencies, under the “EQUAL” strategy, the disabled person should be empowered for their better life quality. Empowerment is defined as building of power for the disabled persons, both internally and externally. The programs to promote their internal competence such as knowledge, attitude toward self and society, and living skills should be provided through experiential learning. By doing so, the disabled persons are expected to apply those competences for better living and life quality. Complementarily, external empowerment such as support from family, self-help network, government and private agencies should be provided to develop various skills for the disabled persons, as well as adjustment of physical and social environment to serve needs of the disabled persons. Such empowerment schemes should aim for promotion of self-reliance and independent living that allow the disabled persons to use their knowledge and competences. As a result, the disabled persons will reduce external support and become more self-independent to achieve equal life quality in the era of disruptive changes.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Persons with Disabilities, Quality of Life

## Introduction

Thailand has altogether 12 National Economic and Social Development Plans, each of which lasts for 5 years. The National Economic and Social Development Plan aims to leverage life quality of the Thai people, especially what is so called “Well-being”. The word “Well-being” has been firstly mentioned in the 9<sup>th</sup> plan (2002-2006), expanding the development scope from its previous plan (1997-2001). The preceding 8<sup>th</sup> plan emphasized on having people as a center of development. The term well-being was defined as “good physical and mental conditions, being knowledgeable, having job, having sufficient income, living in a secured family and good environment under good governance” (Institute for Population and Social Research, 2018). Moreover, the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan (2017-2021) the term “Well-being” frames the “Sustainable Development Goals: SDGs” in accordance with the 20-Year National Strategic Plan. Under this plan, the principle of sufficient economy (i.e., income per capita determination, expenses on healthcare, happy family index, good environment, good governance for national security, increase economy competitiveness, and reduce income gap among people) was designated.

Based on Thailand's 20-Year National Strategic Plan and the 12<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan, it can be seen that human resources are still the main focus for the country development. However, Thailand's population structure consists of diverse groups such as children, working age, and seniors. Within each group there consists normal people, and persons with disabilities. The persons with disabilities are important for country development, alike the normal people. According to the database of registered persons with disabilities (as of October 31, 2018) there are 2,041, 159 or 3.08% of the whole population in Thailand (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2018).

In the past, the government put effort to life development for the disabled persons through the Life Promotion and Development for the Disabled Act, and the National Plan of Life Development for Persons with Disabilities. Many forms of support and development were implemented such as medical and occupational rehabilitation, medical expenses, education and alternative education for the disabled, job security and promotion for independent living, participation in social activities, legal assistance, consumption of information and facilitating technology, sign interpreter service, the use of service animal, adjustment of living environment, and living expenses for the disabled. All benefits abovementioned are mainly about provided by the government, in both national and local levels. However, these supportive schemes are similar to charity or donation. There was a call for different kind of support to promote independent living among persons with disabilities, so-called "Mutual Assistance."

In recent years there are more number of assistance schemes resulted from multi-party cooperation such as government agencies, private agencies, organizations for persons with disabilities, and local community. These supportive schemes are considered as external empowerment because those who initiated assistance are not the persons with disabilities. The disabled persons are thus in need of internal empowerment. To empower individual internal factors will be able to expand to a larger scale, and finally allows the persons with disabilities to achieve better quality of life (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2017).

In the past, the government determined empowerment strategies for individuals with disabilities, as well as organizations for the disabled persons to improve their life quality as started in the 4<sup>th</sup> National Plan for Life Development for Persons with Disabilities (2012-2016). An assessment of the plan was relatively successful. However, the strategy is needed to carry out in a sustainable manner. Therefore, the agenda of life development was still pushed in the 5<sup>th</sup> National Plan for Life Development for Persons with Disabilities (2017-2021). These drives can be witnessed that the empowerment is a significant factor to improve the life quality of the disabled persons. This academic paper, aims to review empowerment of life quality for persons with disabilities from the past to present. The empowerment for persons with disabilities in the contexts of internal factors, and external factors that enabled the disabled persons to achieve their potential and self-reliance in an equal way to the normal people.

### **Disabilities and Status of Thai Persons with Disabilities**

According to the World Health Organization declared indications of disabilities in the International Classification of Functioning, Disabilities, and Health that the status of disability is assessed by whether the person can participate in the activities that relates with body function, and social inclusion as similar to those of the persons without disabilities. The ICF defines that the capability in body functioning included 1) impairment of the body organs, 2) limited opportunity in participating activities like those normal people e.g., walking, eating, or bathing etc.; and 3) limits to participate in any social events e.g., segregation, prejudice, difficulty in traveling, working, and getting smaller payment. In

Thailand, those who are classified as disabled persons are aligned with the “Types and Classification of Disabilities (Issue 2 Year 2012). Disabilities are classified into 7 types, including visual disabilities, hearing or speaking disabilities, mobility or physical disabilities, mental health or behavior disabilities, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and autism (Institute for Population and Social Research, 2017).

The Institute for Population and Social Research (2017) stated that the census of disabled persons in Thailand was initially carried out by the National Statistical Office in 1974, and was conducted biannually. In 2002, the census was started to designate only for the disabled persons. The census also provided the figure of a proportion of the disabled persons with total population of Thailand. In the 1974 survey, there was only 0.5% disabled persons in Thailand. The number increases to 2.9% in 2007 and decreased to 2.2% (approximately 1.5 million) in 2012. The recent figure in 2017 shows that there were 3.08% (approximately 2 million) persons with disabilities in Thailand. Among these people, about 1/5 were mobility disabilities (1 million), followed by hearing disabilities (0.37 million), visual disabilities (0.2 million), mental or behavioral disabilities (0.15 million), intellectual disabilities (0.13 million), autism (0.012 million), and learning disabilities (0.011 million), respectively (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2018). In the near future, however, there is a tendency that the number and proportion of persons with disabilities will increase due to the higher number of elderly in Thailand. Another at risk group are those in the industry sector because they have higher chances of accident during work.

### **Disabilities: Vulnerability**

The main causes of vulnerability among persons with disabilities are mainly from personal and external problems, both of which are interrelated. Regarding the personal problem, their lives are always challenging because they may have physical disabilities that makes them difficult to move, or to accomplish daily routines. These physical disabilities lower their social immune. In addition, because of physical and health constraints, difficulty in earnings, and lack equal opportunity to participate in the social activities, they thus show vulnerability in adjusting themselves in the disruptive economic and social changes. The disabled persons also face social vulnerability. For example, they need special care, as compare to those normal people, from the government through a social welfare system. According to the National Constitution, it clearly states that due to human rights, the disabled persons are eligible to receive public welfare without prejudice in health, education, job or income, and opportunities to participate in social activities. If the state fails to provide welfare as regulated by the Constitution, it directly influences on their life quality. In sum, the disabled persons are the vulnerable group in the society. They need various kinds of assistance from the government and society, as well as empowerment and promotion on the competences for their better living.

### **Life Quality and Life Quality Development: From Past to Present**

Life quality refers to aspects of life, including economic, social, cultural, and so on. It needs both objective and subjective assessments to identify good life quality. For example, life quality of the individual is indicated by happiness and life satisfaction. These two indicators lead to well-being, or life quality of the person. Moreover, the individual can evaluate his/herself for the overall life quality (Mohit, 2013: 36). The WHOQOL Group (2004) defines life quality as a multidimensional perceptions of human beings, including physical aspect, mental aspect, social relationship, environmental aspect, and personal beliefs under culture, values, and life goals of each individual. To summarize, life quality is the state of well-being in accord to person's environment and society. The individual is satisfied with

his/her life, and receives responses to his/her needs that enables him/her to better living so he/she can contribute to the benefits of self, society, and nation.

### **Life Quality Development for the Disabled: From Past to Present**

The 1997 constitution is the first to determine equality among males, females, the disabled, and the fragile groups to have a good life quality and self-reliance. Additionally, the Life Promotion and Development Act 2007 declared promotion of competences in all aspects for better life quality of the disabled persons. (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2007: 2-3). In 2013, Thailand amended the Promotion and Development of Life Quality for Persons with Disabilities Act by adding Article 20/3 that designated the establishment of service center for person with disabilities. The service center has its role to survey and monitor status of problems among the disabled; develop database in the service area; provide services relevant to benefits, welfare, and assistance in responding to the requests by the disabled or related agencies; provide consultation or facilitate assistance for basic living, rehabilitation, job training, job application; provide assistance for assisting tools or equipment to serve individual needs, coordinate, screen, and transfer; provide assistance to those who are at risk of being disabled to access sufficient care; coordinate with government agencies to offer assistance to the right category of disability, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting of the welfare and life of the disabled persons (National Office for Empowerment of Persons with Disability, 2013).

In addition to the Promotion and Development of Life Quality for Persons with Disabilities Act (2007, 2013), Thailand has set a plan called “the National Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Plan”. Regarding the first National Life Development Plan for Persons with Disabilities (1997-2001), it emphasized on promoting equal health, job, and living standard to those normal people. The equal living was driven through rehabilitation of 4 schemes: health, education, occupation, and accessibility of social services. At the end of the plan, it was found that the state failed to provide sufficient coverage of all schemes to the target group (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2017).

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Life Development Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2002-2006), the government emphasized on the promotion of self-reliance for better life and life the life happily in the society. Under this plan, efforts were seen in development of law to protect rights for the disabled, law to empower organizations for the disabled, and law to provide opportunities to be part of the policy determination for the disabled persons.

In 2007 Thailand announced its 3<sup>rd</sup> National Life Development Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2007-2011), which was emphasized on development of legal mechanism to promote and develop life quality of the disabled. Major bills issued during this period were the Life Promotion and Development for Persons with Disabilities Act of 2007, Educational Services for Persons with Disabilities Act of 2008, the Mental Health Act of 2008. These bills were main mechanisms to develop life quality of persons with disabilities such as health, education, career, job, accessibility to technology and facilities, sign language interpreter, guided animal services, living allowance, modification of living environment, and assistant to the disabled person.

In 2012, the 4<sup>th</sup> National Life Development Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2012-2016) was implemented. This plan emphasized on independently inclusive living with society. The disabled persons could access all rights in an equal fashion to those normal people. Moreover, there was an amendment of the Life Quality Promotion and Development for Persons with Disabilities Act 2007 (2<sup>nd</sup> revision in 2013). This revised version added an establishment of the service center for the disabled. Also, the coverage on services was enhanced. To move all national plans for the disabled, in 2016 the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities determined area-based key indices for assessing life quality of the persons with

disabilities. The indices were used as the main mechanism to leverage life quality of the disabled at a provincial level under the project namely “Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities, Creation of Opportunities, and Equality in Society”. Seven indices including 1) rights and equality, 2) health condition, 3) education, 4) occupation, job, and income, 5) accessibility to the external world, 6) sports and recreation, and 7) facilities were used as assessment schemes (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2016: 17-19).

The results from the 1st to the 4th plans demonstrate that the government is essential in empowering life quality for the disabled. The activities done cover all dimensions of life as evidenced by law enforcement and 22,259 items on the support of facilities in government premises and buildings, 32,500 hired for the disabled (of which 3,846 were in the governmental sector), increasing monthly living expense from 500 baht to 800 baht (total recipients of 1,384,734), development of health benefits, building of 46 schools specialized for the disabled, 386,823 disabled students were in inclusive education program, allocating loan for 60,228 people to enable them work for a living, developing of sign language interpreting services with 649 registered sign interpreters, 780 trained assistants to the severe disabled person, setting up 22 service centers to take care of 5,961 disabled persons in the homes for persons with disabilities protection and development, remodeling more than 10,000 better homes tailored for the needs of the disabled persons, improving more than 1,234 ramps and walk paths, setting more than 210 TTRS stations to transmit signals from CAT telecom company limited, develop technology for facility improvement such as supporting robot and guided walker, setting up 77 provincial service centers for the disabled persons and another 1,010 for general disabled persons, promoting the establishment of 835 organizations for the disabled persons (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2017). It can be seen that the results from by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> national plan helps improving quality of life among persons with disabilities, as compared to the past. However, operations of these missions still need be continual. The main factors contributing to the operations are policy from the government, resources, and personnel. All of these affect the operations for developing quality of life for persons with disabilities. The most important factor is the disabled persons per se. They all still are receive-only persons begging assistance from the government and related agencies.

Currently Thailand is in the 5<sup>th</sup> National Life Development Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2017-2021), which determines its vision as “...the disabled persons can access to their rights, live independently and sustainable in the society...” (The EQUAL Strategy). The EQUAL strategy designates its plan for better quality of life among the persons with disabilities. These include empowerment, quality management, understanding, accessibility, and linkage. In all previous national plans for the disabled persons paid their focus on the equal quality of living, accessible to healthcare, appropriate welfare, good education, decent occupation, accessible to assistance from the government. The recent plan emphasizes on the empowerment of individual disabled persons, and organizations for the disabled. This emphasis aims to promote self-reliance that leads them to live happily with social members. The plan designated its mission under the EQUAL Strategy (Department of Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities, 2017). The strategy includes 1) empowering the disabled persons of all ages for full development that relevant to specific needs, 2) empowering and developing competence of the leader of the disabled to sustainably promote and develop better quality of life among the disabled, 3) promoting group gathering, establishing organizations for the disabled, supporting resources, knowledge, and good governance in operating organizations to promote quality of life, and participation in designating public policy for the disabled persons.

## **Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities: From Concepts and Theories to Practices**

The 5<sup>th</sup> National Life Development Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2017-2021) under the EQUAL Strategy, and the emphasis on empowerment of the disabled aims to establish self-reliance and equal quality of life among persons with disabilities. Empowerment is defined as building of the power, which is contextualized to the area and relevant stakeholders. Definitions of empowerment are given by many scholars such as follows:

Strzelecka (2017) defines empowerment as a process that enables individual to do and set environment that facilitates success, as determined by self-decision. Such empowerment can be witnessed from changes of intra-individual, inter-individual, or structure. Empowerment encourages individual to value their esteem, being more controlling, having alternatives that best suit their needs, being free to decide for goals of the individual and organization.

Hermansson & Martensson (2011) defines empowerment as a process that individual employs, in corporation with knowledge, ability, and confidence, to make meaningful decision. Empowerment is a social process to accept, promote, and develop the competence of the individual to find the means to achieve needs, wants, or solutions. This includes the ability to consume resources that are required to control or spend in different life activities.

Christens (2019) defines psychological empowerment as the way that an individual decides to manage his/her own life by adopting analytical perspective, criticism, political and social views, that relate to one's competence and society that they belong in running activities based on self-perception and self-competence.

UNESCO (1998, 12-13) defines empowerment as giving power to individual, which is internal strength and confidence to face rights to make decision in life options. This is the ability that influences on social process that affects individual life and social change direction.

Based on the definitions given, we can see that empowerment is a social process. It is the empowerment to the individual by building one's competence in terms of knowledge, responsive ability, and life management, including decision-making.

In Zimmerman's concept of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995, as cited in Hewitt & Wright, 2019) identifies 3 components of empowerment as follows:

- 1) Intrapersonal (or internal) Empowerment-this includes perceived control, self-efficacy, and motivation to control.
- 2) Interaction Component-this includes knowledge, understanding of the person in living with other members, understanding rules of respective society so that the person behaves in a proper way.
- 3) Behavioral component-this includes any actions that lead to expected results through participation of the community, opinion of the members, and problem-solving behaviors.

Conger & Kanungo (1988) states that empowerment leads to changes as follows:

- 1) Changes of perception: perception indicates description and confidence that reflect knowledge of how to control the individual to accept diversity, including self-control and self-efficacy. These two abilities ignite self-esteem, personal control, and self-efficacy.
- 2) Change of behavior: empowerment changes behavior that emphasizes on knowledge, skill, and competences that are resulted from the higher level of performance due to perception of the individual, and interaction between individual and environment.

From the idea of empowerment, it can be seen that empowerment relates to intrapersonal factor, and interpersonal factor that relevant to environment or field of life experience that influence on empowerment. In this section, I would like to propose theories relevant to empowerment as follows:

Theories relevant to intrapersonal factors is the learning theory of Thorndike (Thorndike, as cited in Curren, 2003). The Learning theory of Thorndike defines learning as the result of how an individual builds a bond between stimuli and response. Satisfaction from the responses leads to 3 learning laws including

Law of Readiness: that is when the individual feels that he/she is ready to perform and he/she performs. Then they are satisfied.

Law of Exercise: that is when the individual repeats actions, or practice again and again. This leads to be skillful in such actions or behaviors.

Law of Effect: that is when the individual performs and later receives positive consequence, he or she tends to perform such actions or behaviors again.

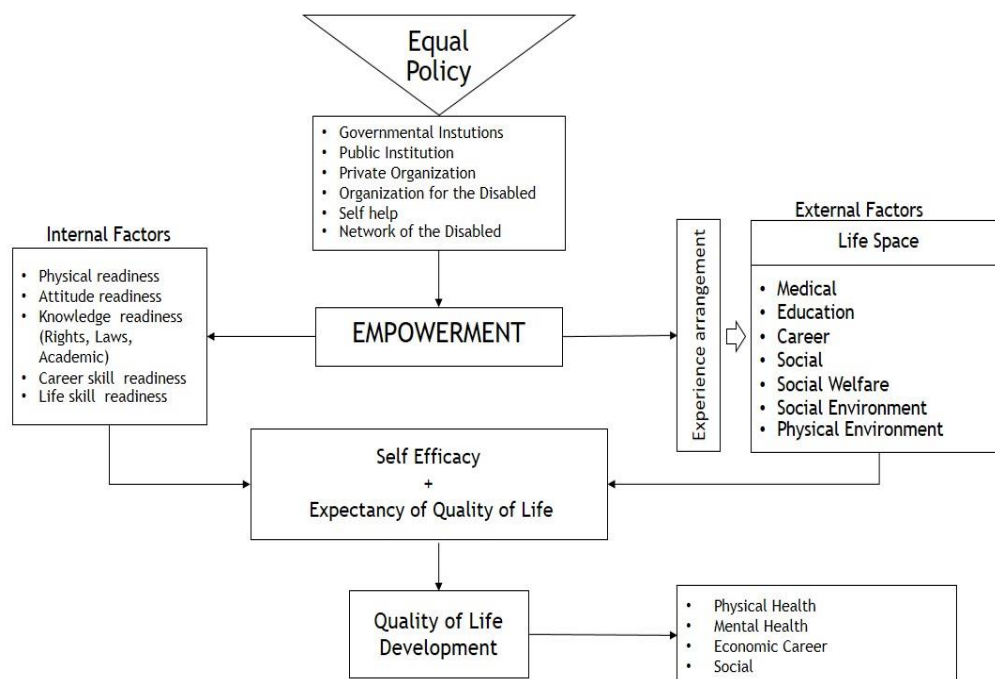
In empowering persons with disabilities we can apply the law of readiness through 1) provision of knowledge such as academic, laws relevant to the disabled, self-care, profession and occupation, self-management, networking and organizational management, 2) provision of affection such as training on positive attitude towards self and others. In addition, the law of exercise can be applied to empower by providing training sessions for the disabled including job training, academic training (English, computer, etc.) so they could use these to earn for living. The previous two laws lead to law of effect that once they accomplished they would have stronger determination to improve their life quality.

Another theory relevant to intrapersonal factor is the Self-Efficacy Theory of Albert Bandura (1997). This theory postulates that behavior is not only determined by environment, but it is also resulted from interaction of the individual. The individual interaction is in a pattern of reciprocal determinism with behavioral and environmental factors. The main concepts of the Self-Efficacy theory is self-perception and expectation toward the outcomes of the behavior. Perceived Self-Efficacy is the judgment about level that the individual can best perform, belief of self-capability. These influence on life living. Perceived Self-Efficacy leads to self-esteem that are from feeling, thoughts, motivation, and behavior. Outcome expectation is a belief that the individual assesses specific performed behavior. This leads to an expectation of the outcome that will be resulted from the behavior. High self-expectation person is more likely to be successful because such person is eager to perform, solve problem, and does not fear of failure. He/she would try hard to get everything done. In contrast, those who have low outcome expectation would avoid performing, or they will quit easily (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, empowerment is related to how to build confidence for the disabled to believe in their competence. They must believe that they can perform well, just like those normal people. Moreover, motivation support on positive outcome expectation should be encouraged. This will lead to leverage of life quality for persons with disabilities.

A theory relevant to empowerment of the external factors is the Field Theory of Lewin (Lewin, 1939, as cited in Ivancevic & Aidman, 2007), which states that learning results from instruction and thinking process to solve problems by adopting scientific method to help explain human behavior. Behavior is performed due to field of force. What is in an interest field will have positive energy, namely life space. What is beyond an interest will have negative energy. Human beings are surrounded by two types of environment: physical and psychological environments. These two environments build world perception based on personal experience, that leads to life space. And, the life space of each individual is different. According to the Field Theory, if you want to empower the disabled, relevant agencies such as Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development and Social Security, Ministry of Labor, and Ministry of Interior should act as principle bodies to develop life quality of the disabled. Supportive agencies such as Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, local government, the National Health Security Office, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, Private Agencies, and Organizations for the Disabled Persons need to participate in relevant activities to promote empowerment. This includes giving

knowledge on life quality development, building good attitude toward self and society, training on essential life skills. These training must be added into the disabled's life space, or natural environment of the disabled so that they could sustainably develop their life quality. Therefore, relevant agencies should support the disabled's satisfaction of these basic social necessities, both physically and mentally through their social environment and interaction with agencies and groups of people in the society. Apart from providing good experience for the disabled, the field theory emphasizes on group dynamics. The group dynamics are from interaction among group members through action, feeling, and thinking. During interaction, the members adjust themselves to get along and work together. Resulting for the adjustment unites them to achieve the mission goal. The group influence is mainly from different forms of the group formation such as associations or clubs for persons with disabilities. Among these, the active associations or club include the Association for the Blind of Thailand, the Universal Association of the Persons with Mobility Difficulties, the Association for the Deaf of Thailand, the Center for Independent Living of the Disabled of Nakhon Pathom Province, and the Center for Independent Living of the Disabled of Nonthaburi Province etc. The unions aim at rendering the policy on life quality development among the disabled and equalize rights, opportunities, welfare, and benefits of persons with disabilities in accordance with the constitution. It also demonstrates strengths of persons with disabilities to determine their equal role in the society.

From relevant concepts and theories to empowerment previously discussed, it shows relationship with empowerment of persons with disabilities, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Diagram of Concepts and Theories to Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities



### **Conditions to Success in Empowering Persons with Disabilities**

The significant factors relevant to empowerment for persons with disabilities is equal opportunity with normal people (Owen, 2011; Ngwena, 2004). Therefore, the government must state a very clear policy on rights and equality of the disabled in the society. This is in line with the constitution, which clearly states a guideline in assisting persons with disabilities. In Thailand, there is a section devoted for equality between the normal and disabled. Operations to equalize groups of people should be continually done, especially in social welfare, health, education, career, social services, and environment modification for persons with disabilities. By doing so, it requires quite a large budget and it might not be sustainable. Thus, empowerment for persons with disabilities becomes a major alternative to accelerate life quality for the disabled. This idea helps empower knowledge and competence of the individuals through assisting system and also means or tools of development such as providing education, training, and developing skills that could lead to positive transformation (Hewitt & Wright, 2019; UNESCO, 2013). Persons with disabilities can determine their own lives, as well as receive opportunities and support from the community to leverage their life quality in all aspects. The persons with disabilities, therefore, may achieve their life goals through these empowerment methods. The WHOQOL Group (2004) stated that the key factors affecting life quality of the disabled in accordance to WHO include physical, mental, social, and environmental. Physical and mental factors are considered internal, while social and environmental are considered external. Therefore, the internal factors of positive-self, self-acceptance, leaning and perceptive skills, mental and physical health efficacy, adjustment skill, bravery, and patience are among good qualifications needed to empower for persons with disabilities. If they possess these qualifications, they then will be able to control external factors, and they eventually transform to accomplish their life goals.

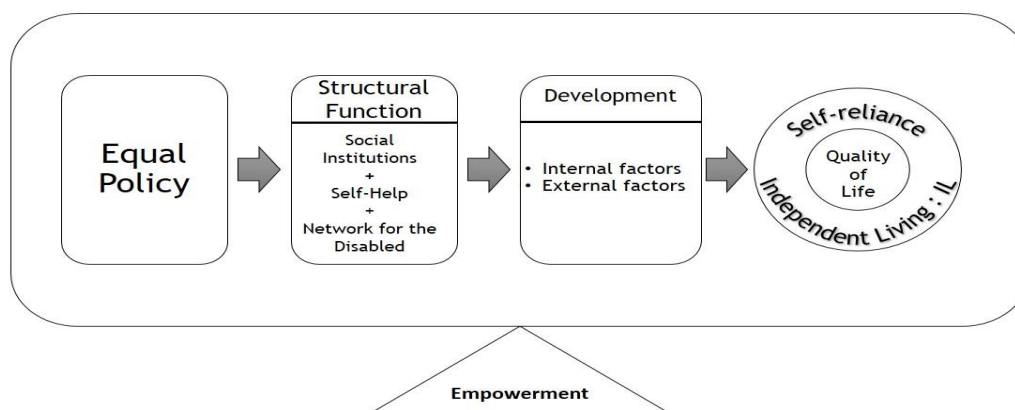
Major external factors include social support from families, networks of the disabled, and community. These support the disabled by giving love, warmth, and care. Moreover, support for development from different relevant agencies empowers the disabled to live independently (Khad Si, 2009; Suwannasub et al, 2016). Institution, organizations, networks, and communities could support and empower the disabled in various ways such as health, education, knowledge, skill training, and essential living skills that allow the disabled to live a good life. Moreover, there should cooperate to make balance and equality for every person in the nation. This concept is in line with the Structural-functional Theory. The theory claims that society is one social system that consists of many parts. Each part relates and supports in a reciprocal fashion to make equilibrium to the society. If there is incongruence among social units such as transformation of population structure, or technological changes, these lead to inequilibrium society and causes problems to other social units. Thus, the balanced society is the society that gathers all units together to have resistant power to the changes in society (Barnard, 2000; Giele, 2006). Conditions to success in empowering persons with disabilities additionally include self-reliance. If the individual could rely on his or herself, it would leverage the life quality by doing activities by his or herself, instead of waiting assistance from the relevant agencies. Self-reliance postulates that human beings possess thinking ability and skill to develop themselves for highest potential, both quality and morality if opportunities open, along with supporters. Recently, this concept has been promoted as a means to develop global citizens (Ghari, 1980; Rivera Drew, 2009). Self-reliance covers three major components: 1) health reliance. This include the empowerment that enables the individual to assess and take care of their physical and mental health, avoid any health-risk behavior, having knowledge when receiving health services, knowing about rights of health security system; 2) they need to economically rely on themselves. Therefore, they need to develop skills and competence to earn for living. Documentation on incomes and expenses must be made. They need to follow the principle of sufficient economy; 3) they need to rely

on themselves in terms of information and learning. There should be training sessions to help the disabled possess information literacy, as well as information searching and accessing skills. Information exchanges among groups, communities, and organizations are also important because they may use such information to live the day, or to work (Kumhom, 2011: 298-306). Rattaman (2011) found that the underlined reason why the disabled being emotional and upset with their disabilities is because they felt that they could not rely on themselves, physically nor emotionally. In addition, the study revealed that the disabled lack plans of income, expense, or future is because they lack professional opportunity to earn income. To gather as a group makes them feel stronger because they can exchange information, also be informed about benefits and welfare, and learn about career and daily life. From the findings, it can be concluded that to enable disabled persons for self-reliance, empowerment on physical and mental health is really needed so that strengthens the disabled be stronger to face problems in their lives, opens opportunities to learn for living, to learn for life management, and to learn for work. Support from families, networks of the disabled, public and private organizations that enables them to live their life equally in the society.

We may also adopt the idea of Independent Living (IL) to leverage life quality of persons with disabilities. This idea proposed that we should encourage the disabled to have self-confidence and self-esteem so that they can choose and be free in thinking, selecting, or choosing the own living style. Therefore, what would empower the disabled are the principle of equal human rights, the principle of customer protection, the principle of self-help, reducing medical reliance, and reducing give away benefits (Anyanwu, 1992; Dhungana & Kusakabe, 2010). Regarding the Self-Help principle, it empowers person's competence, confidence, and behavior to live in the disruptive world. Also, the Self-Help organizations also have a key role in the disabled empowerment because they join the group and being empowered through an integration of knowledge. They receive important news and information that is essential to their life. They receive friendly consultation, training job and career, training skills on income and expense management, training on self-care, information of rights for the disabled. All lead them to perceive their true self, being confident, and certain that the disabilities would not impede their happy living. Recently, there are quite a number of Independent Living Centers at a provincial level such as Nakhon Pathom, Nontaburi, and Chonburi. These centers represent organizations for the disabled in different activities with the aim that the disabled would live in a good life quality.

The centers move the disabled society by publicizing ideas of independent living among the disabled, and also building attitude and awareness on rights of the disabled to general public so that the public will accept diversity of members in the society. Therefore, the union of the disabled in the center for independent living plays a key role in the success of empowerment for the disabled. The centers also help the disabled for management skills, which is in line with Phusri et al (2011), who found that the union of the disabled in Nakhon Ratchasima province leverages competence of the disabled persons in terms of relevant rights and law, self-care, the use of assistive devices, development of professional skills, mobilizing resources for development (such as an establishment of saving cooperative and loan service for job. Abovementioned factors of success can be summarized in in Figure 2.

## Key Success of Empowerment



**Figure 2** Diagram of Key Success of Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities

### Conclusion

As Thailand has recently announced its 20-year National Strategic Plan (2017-2036) and the 12<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development (2017-2021), human resources are developmental focus of the nation. Persons with disabilities are important for the development, just like the normal ones. Development of life quality for the disabled from the past were always in the manner of giving welfare and benefits by the government, and they were likely temporary fulfillment. Empowerment is more important for leverage life quality of the disabled since it will definitely lead to better change of their life, at individual and group levels. From such importance, the government has determined the Empowerment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, starting from the 5<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan. In order to develop better life quality for persons with disabilities, the EQUAL policy and strategy must be seriously implemented. Persons with disabilities must receive equal opportunities as similar to the normal ones. They must be empowered both internally (such as knowledge, attitude, life and professional skills development, and some other experiences) and externally (such as support from families, networks for the disabled, public and private organizations). The support aims to promote self-reliance and independent living among the disabled. Moreover, union among the disabled such as Self-Help can be a good network in assisting the disabled to enhance competences that needed for life quality development so that persons with disabilities can live their lives equally and happily in this disruptive world.

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