

Integrated Causal Factors For and Guidance on the Enhancement of Transparency in Local Administrative Organizations in Northeastern Thailand

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Abstract

Thailand is still perceived as corrupt with the latest report issued by Transparency International (Transparency International, 2017) showing that Thailand was ranked 96th (out of 180 countries) with the score of 37 (out of 100), up from 35 in the year 2016), and within the ASEAN countries, it was ranked 5th. These corruption problems are generally attributed to the work behaviors of the state officials concerned. It's mixed methodology. Qualitative data were collected from 24 key informants in a focus group discussion and 12 experts in an in-depth interview. Quantitative data were collected from 400 LAOs staff across the northeast of the country. Results revealed that all the factors in the structural equation model were positively correlated at the significant level of 0.01. Leadership of administrators was found to have the highest direct effect on transparency of LAOs, followed by public participation, attitudes towards transparency, organizational culture, and organizational politics. Public participation was found to have the highest indirect effect. All the factors in the model could account for the transparency of LAOs by 82.70 per cent. To enhance transparency, it was recommended that administrators set a good precedent in matters pertaining to decentralization of power, clear viewpoints on anti-corruption, teamwork encouragement, compliance with rules and regulations, and more public participation in the monitoring and assessing the performance of the LAOs.

Keywords: Transparency, Integrated Causal Factors, Enhancement, Local Administrative Organization

Introduction

Measures for preventing and tackling the problem of corruption in Thailand are abundant and these include such measures as immediate supervision, evaluation, and prosecution, as well as awarding the whistle-blower and penalizing the wrong doer, but one important factor that could be highly effective in the fight against acts of corruption is transparency. According to Jenpuengpon et.al. (2017), the detection of a case of corruption is unlikely if there is no published disclosure of the organizations or persons concerned, hence unlikelihood for bringing the corrupt parties to justice. From the standpoint of international community, Thailand is still perceived as somewhat corrupt with the latest report issued by Transparency International (Transparency International, 2018) showing that Thailand ranks 96 (out of 180) with the score of 37 (out of 100), up from 35 in 2016). Like six other countries which also rank 96 in the corruption perception index 2017-Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Panama, Peru, and Zambia, Thailand still has a lot to do to tackle the corruption problem which tarnishes the country's image and stands in the way of its progress and development.

Thailand has recently put in place the integrity and transparency assessment (ITA) of state agencies throughout the country, making it one of the most important strategies included in the national strategic plan for prevention and suppression of corruption. This development is seen as a preventive and proactive measure which has to be implemented by all the state agencies within the country. With the ITA, the government hopes that transparency, efficiency, and public services will be enhanced as can be seen in, for example, announcements of clear procedures and time to spend carrying out each task in a government office.

To help boost the decentralization of power and enhancement of public participation in the administration of local government bodies, Local Administration Organizations (LAOs) have been established in Thailand as a form of local government. Other objectives of the LAOs are to directly address the problems and meet the needs of the local people and at the same time promote democratic administration with the participation by the people. In other words, to place more power in citizens' hands, to increase democratic accountability and to make it easier for local people to contribute to the local decision making process and help shape public services are also its objectives.

The LAOs are therefore more closely related to the majority of the people in the country than other government bodies, and they have more influential roles to play which directly impact the people in the respective areas. Meanwhile, the LAOs need to create good and positive images to entrust the people with their administrative effectiveness by presenting wholesome images in terms of transparent administration, honesty, integrity, and public participation at all levels.

Reports on cases of corruption in Thailand, however, indicate that sub-district municipalities are the local government bodies that have been heavily involved in corruption cases. Acts of corruption have been attributed to many factors, but one important factor that is the individual work behavior of the staff at a sub-district municipality. Moreover, reports by the State Audit Office points to some causes involving acts of corruption by state officers such as cash short which results from embezzlements of budgets or other state properties and items such as fuel.

Puang-ngam (2006) summarized seven causes of corruption acts commonly found in Thailand's local administrative organizations and these include budget preparation, individual nature, loopholes in laws and regulations, lack of knowledge and integrity, lack of public relations, lack of cross-checking by other parties, and individualized authority and effect. By the same token, a recent study by the Office of Public Sector Anti-Corruption Commission (PACC, 2018) revealed 3 forms of corruption found in local administrative organizations-revenue collection, budget implementation, and procurement and supplies management. The first form of corruption pertains to revenue collection. Examples of corruption acts include a lack of a system for cross-checking the reception and payment of taxes, staff's flouting the rules and regulations concerned, and the people bribing the officers and the officers taking bribes. Another example of this kind of corruption is an unusually low tax estimation on the part of the officer in charge to help his or her own business or their acquaintances.

The corruption acts pertain to budget management involves political networks in which local and national politicians act in tandem with state officers responsible for preparing budgets and projects. These seemingly professional project developers prepare and propose subsidiary plans in a way that a big project is further divided into several smaller schemes which can bypass the procurement and supplies management and price competition process. Finally, the corrupt procurement and supplies management exists in every step of the process. The authorities and parties concerned work hand in glove when they are in the process of determining the central price, price competition, inspection and acceptance of purchased items, and the payment.

Pertaining to the administration and public service provision, it is undeniable that the LAOs are wanting in the effectiveness and transparency, rendering them inefficient in responding to the needs of the local people. NESDB (NESDB, 2017: 61) reports that the inefficiency is due partly to the centralized power structure in which the central, regional and local administrations are overlapping and the lack of integrated networks of operation based on the public participation. Moreover, additional issues add to the questionable images of the LAOs, including inappropriate task assignment for the LAOs which are underprepared for such tasks as providing basic services for the public. Acquisition of power in some LAOs is not transparent, and this results in an ineffective follow-up system for the assessment of budget implementation.

The researcher was therefore keen on investigating the work transparency of the LAOs in the Northeast of Thailand. The results from the study could be used as a solid body of knowledge on the development and enhancement of work integrity and transparency within the LAOs at all levels-provincial, regional, and national. With improved work integrity and transparency, the LAOs would be perceived as government bodies with good images, hence meeting the government's urgent issues and Thailand's better image in the eye of the international communities.

The foregoing literature review has landed the author several causal factors pertaining to the transparency of administration within LAOs. Therefore, to examine the integrity and transparency of LAOs and relevant body of knowledge for the sake of enhanced positive images towards LAOs and their transparency as well as meeting the current government's pressing concerns, the present investigation was carried out. The following questions were addressed in this study:

- 1) What are the attributes of transparency?
- 2) What are the integrated causal factors for the transparency of the LAOs in the northeast of Thailand?
- 3) What guidance is derived for enhancing the transparency of the LAOs in the northeast of Thailand?

Literature Review

Work transparency in local administrative organizations is the way in which the administration of a local government organization is implemented in an open and accountable manner and outside stakeholders are given access to all the information concerned. Transparency can be demonstrated through several procedures including loud and clear communication, accountability, readiness for appraisal, and reliable measures for evaluation and assessment. The six elements of transparency has been synthesized from various sources (King Prajathipok's Institute, 2005; Transparency International, 2003; The National Anti-corruption Commission, 2017) by the researcher from the literature included personnel administration, organizational structures and authority, compliance with rules and regulations, procurement and supplies management, disclosure of and access to information, public services, and budget management.

Causal factors leading to work transparency

Based on the literature, the author of the present investigation has synthesized 8 categories of the factors that cause work transparency the details of which are as follows:

1. Knowledge about transparency: Knowledge is theoretically instrumental in recollection and comprehension. What is recalled includes definitions, facts, theories, structures, solutions to problems, and relevant standards. Recalling is therefore attributed to comprehension and knowledge of the information synthesized. In this study, the researcher synthesized the information from several resources including Thailand's Official Information Act (B.E. 2540), the Government Procurement and Supplies Management Act, BE 2560, and the Royal

Decree on Criteria and Procedures for Good Governance, B.E.2546 (2003). Based on the synthesized information, three elements of transparency emerged: procurement and supplies management, disclosure of and access to public information, and good governance.

2. Public participation: Participation in public administration by the people is generally in practice in liberal democratic countries. It is a form of administration in which people's demand is catered to under the notion that when the people are allowed to participate in the government administration, efficiency of the administration will improve and public services will be provided more effectively because the people can supervise to what extent their basic rights are protected. According to Ketsuwan (2013), more work transparency in government agencies can be achieved through public participation. In this regard, the researcher summarized six elements of public participation from various sources (such as Wasi, 1998; Kaewhanam, 2011; Sompong, 2013; Puang-ngam, 2012; Cohen & Upoff, 1998): co-thinking, co-planning, cooperation, co-evaluation, reinforcement, and creation of community networks.

3. Administrator's leadership: Leadership in this respect refers to effective leadership in terms of appropriateness, compatibility of the leader, followers, and task. In the words of Chongvisan (2013) leadership is fomented within "a human psyche"(p.10). The effectiveness of leadership also relies on the environments within an organization such as its commitment and transformation leadership. Transformational leadership further enhances farsightedness and aspiration among the followers, hence their being integrity-oriented staff. Four elements of leadership is synthesized and summarized from Bass and Availio (1994, Chongvisan (2013), Swasthaisong (2018), and Yukl (2013) as follows: ideological influence, aspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualism.

4. Organizational culture: Organizational culture involves two sides of the organization-the organizational life and the individual life. It is important for fabricating the patterns of behaviours and life within an organization. It also controls the organization by means of a code of conduct aiming to consolidate unity within the organization. It is nowadays widely recognized that to manage an organization effectively, it is vital that the management of organizational culture must be prioritized (Jittaruttha, 2017). Therefore, four elements of organizational culture was synthesized and summarized from the literature (Jittaruttha, 2017; Chongvisan, 2018; Koompai, 2010; Handy, 1991) as follows: club culture, role culture, task culture, and existential culture.

5. Participatory administration: In participatory administration, a leader or administrator opens the opportunity for the staff members within an organization to voice their views and concern over the activities to implement or that have been implemented in line with the goals initially set. With participation in a decision making process involving any strategies or projects, the staff's morale and sense of responsibility are boosted. As a result, conflicts within the organization are contained and all the staff members press ahead with the achievement of the organization. Three elements of participatory administration were synthesized and summarized from the literature (Swansburg, 1996; Sudjari, 2000; Thariboon, 2016) as follows: freedom in organizational management, organizational commitment, and co-formulation of objectives and goals.

6. Organizational politics: Politics in an organization is a common phenomenon abundantly occurring in Thailand's organizations, in both public and private sectors. In Thailand societies where collectivism and cronyism are salient, reciprocity is seen as an indispensable act, and therefore it is a vital factor for indicating behaviours of an organization such as integrity, accountability, indiscrimination. According to Chuavalli, 2004) In a positive side, organizational politics is in the form of standing up against the wrong doing, but at the same time putting the achievement of work before playing favourites. The two elements of organizational politics were summarized from the literature (Grandz & Murray, 1990)

Chuavalli, 2004; Lorsuwanrat, 2008; Vigoda, 2000): General organizational politics and compliance without getting involved in a conflict.

7. Attitudes towards transparency: This type of attitude is basically a result of a person's interaction between his current circumstances and form mental traits. By this definition, a person's past mental traits can be changed in accordance with the current circumstance he is facing. An attitude affects a person as seen in various actions he demonstrates. A theory about attitudes (Allport, 1967) posits that attitudes can be learned, and therefore can be changed; while at the same they can remain unchanged at a certain time. Researchers (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) also confirm that attitudes stimulate a human's determination and as a consequence interaction. Based on the literature (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975; Tharapot, 1991; Panthumnavin, 2010; Swasthaisong, 2018), three elements of attitudes towards transparency were derived: cognition, emotion, and behaviour.

8. Work value: Work value is an individual belief or thought which needs time to form and finally constitute a person's way of life. Value determines how an individual behaves. People with similar value tend to assimilate into a community. In essence, work value is demonstrated both in terms of content and intensity. The following five elements of work value was derived from the literature (Jujo, 2008; Chongvisan, 2013; Panthumnavin, 1989; Rokeach, 1961) and investigated in this study: steadfastness with the right, honesty and responsibility, straightforwardness and accountability, indiscrimination, and achievement-oriented task.

Methodology

Design

A mixed methods design was adopted for the present study which involved three phases: Phase 1 was concerned with reviewing related literature and generating the conceptual framework of the study based on the data derived from a focus group interview with 24 key informants; **Phase 2** related to a quantitative study of the integrated causal factors for the effective transparency of LAOs in the northeast using a self-response questionnaire; and **Phase 3** recommendations for enhancing the effective transparency, using an in-depth interview with 12 informants.

Participants

Twenty key informants were purposively selected from local administrative organizations, external independent organizations, Civil society and Public administration scholars for the focus group discussion. 400 staff from 5 types of local administrative organizations in northeastern Thailand were selected through a stratified random sampling method. The 5 types of local administrative organizations included city municipalities, district municipalities, sub-district municipalities, sub-district administrative organizations, and provincial administrative organizations. The criterion for determining the sample size for analysis in a SEM was based on the 1:20 ratio of the sample size needed for the determination in a SEM analysis (Enders, 2001, as cited in Kessung, 2006).

Instruments and data analysis

1. A focus group discussion was used as a tool for collecting the qualitative data from 24 key informants purposively selected for the purpose of the present study. The data were recorded and transcribed, and then analyzed using the content analysis method.
2. A test of knowledge of transparency in administration (TKTA) (with difficulty index (p) value ranging between 0.20-0.80, and KR20 value = 0.85) and a five-scale Likert's type questionnaire (Discrimination index value (r) between 0.42-0.85 and Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability = 0.989) were used for collecting the quantitative data.
3. An in-depth interview was used for collecting the qualitative data from 7 experts on the transparency in administration. The data were analyzed using content analysis.

Results

1. The results from the focus group discussion

As derived from the 25 key informants, it was found that the attributes of effective transparency in the administration of LAOs in the Northeast were six-fold. They could be structured from the most important to the least one as follows: Compliance with rules and regulations; procurement and supplies management; disclosure of and access to official information; personnel management; organizational structure; and budget management.

Most of the informants agreed that effective law enforcement was the most important integrated causal factor for the effective transparency of administration in the LAOs. The next influential factors in order of importance included: awareness of anti-corruption; participatory administration; leadership; state officials' values; public participation; positive attitudes towards transparency; knowledge and understanding about transparency; civil society networks; standards of performance and assessment; organizational culture; and organizational politics.

2. The results of confirmatory factor analysis of structural equation modeling (SEM)

The results of the analysis of the SEM indicated that the model of the factors for transparency of administration in the LAOs in the Northeast was consistent with the empirical data, taking into account the IOC indexes including $\chi^2 = 112.024$, df= 64, P-Value = 0.083, CFI =0.911, TLI= 0.915, SRMR= 0.004, RMSEA=0.003 and $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.750$, respectively. The construct reliability(c) of all the variables was between 0.965-0.998, which was higher than the criterion of 0.60, and the construct validity of the variables were in consistence with the criterion, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the structural equation model of knowledge, public participation, organizational culture, leadership of administrators, organizational politics, participatory administration, attitudes towards transparency, work values, and transparency

Latent variables	Observed variables	Factor loadings (λ)	S.E.	Z-test	Residual R ²
Knowledge (KNO)	KNO1	0.448**	0.048	9.332	0.976
	KNO2	0.863**	0.048	17.795	0.349
	KNO3	0.679**	0.046	14.856	0.801
Public participation (PP)	PP1	0.857**	0.015	56.246	0.266
	PP2	0.924**	0.009	97.939	0.135
	PP3	0.865**	0.014	60.586	0.294
	PP4	0.852**	0.015	55.163	0.339
	PP5	0.838**	0.016	50.989	0.314
	PP6	0.863**	0.014	59.962	0.295
Organizational culture (CUL)	CUL1	0.938**	0.007	135.886	0.107
	CUL2	0.956**	0.005	178.352	0.080
	CUL3	0.966**	0.005	212.527	0.063
	CUL4	0.877**	0.012	70.900	0.244
Leadership of administrators (LEA)	LEA1	0.353**	0.045	7.781	0.781
	LEA2	0.820**	0.018	45.383	0.240
	LEA3	0.946**	0.009	108.650	0.077
	LEA4	0.919**	0.010	87.959	0.146

Table 1 (Con.)

Latent variables	Observed variables	Factor loadings (λ)	S.E.	Z-test	Residual R^2
Organizational politics (POL)	POL1	0.852**	0.015	58.742	0.264
	POL2	0.972**	0.005	201.482	0.063
	POL3	0.954**	0.006	160.897	0.101
Participatory administration (PM)	PM1	0.821**	0.023	35.392	0.657
	PM2	0.871**	0.021	40.736	0.215
	PM3	0.745**	0.028	26.729	0.356
Attitudes towards Transparency (ATT)	ATT1	0.786**	0.023	34.610	0.278
	ATT2	0.866**	0.017	50.524	0.174
	ATT3	0.873**	0.016	52.978	0.154
Work values (VAL)	VAL1	0.726**	0.025	28.701	0.430
	VAL2	0.846**	0.016	52.925	0.153
	VAL3	0.927**	0.010	97.368	0.079
	VAL4	0.872**	0.014	62.502	0.149
	VAL5	0.859**	0.015	57.556	0.158
Transparency (TRA)	TRA1	0.827**	0.017	48.398	0.213
	TRA2	0.915**	0.010	96.063	0.096
	TRA3	0.796**	0.019	41.157	0.340
	TRA4	0.924**	0.009	105.280	0.107
	TRA5	0.903**	0.011	85.872	0.155
	TRA6	0.872**	0.013	66.471	0.198

R^2 of the SEM for transparency (TRA) 0.827**

**significant at the .01 level

It was found that most of the variables in the model were positively correlated at the significant levels. The factors that had direct effect on transparency were, in order of effect sizes, leadership of administrators ($d=0.349**$), public participation ($d=0.265**$), attitudes towards transparency ($d=0.173**$), organizational culture ($d=0.136**$), and organizational politics ($d=0.099**$). Public participation was found to have the highest indirect effect ($d=0.436**$). All the variables in the model could predict 82.70 per cent of the transparency, as indicated in Table 2

Table 2 Direct effect, indirect effect, and total effect of extraneous variables embedded in the causal factors for work transparency

Output variable	Work transparency			
	Input variable	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
KNO	0.033	0.092**		0.093
PP	0.021**	0.436**		0.646**
LEA	0.267**	0.148**		0.415**
CUL	0.275**	0.010		0.285**
PM	0.019**	0.039		0.058
POL	0.057**	0.006		0.063**
ATT	0.151**	0.054		0.205**
VAL	0.080	-		0.080
R^2		0.827		

3. The results from the in-depth interview regarding recommendations for enhancing transparency of the LAOs in the northeast

The recommendations for enhancing transparency of the LAOs in the northeast were summarized as follows: LAOs administrators must not talk the talk, but they must walk the walk in regards to decentralization of power, transparency policy, teamwork implementation, strict law enforcement, and encouragement of public participation. They should adhere to the good practices of governance in developing the transparency. They should establish a network of cooperation among civil societies so that they have the chance to monitor the state officials' performance. They should create awareness of anti-corruption and appraisal of good citizens among the LAOs staff and the people in general. Finally, strict social measures should be devised and put into use in order that civic people could live happy lives but indecent ones face harsh social punishment.

Discussion

The main findings in this study were consistent with previous studies. Swasthaisong (2018) confirmed that enhancing transparency of the universities in Sakon Nakhon province needs to focus on the transparent processes involving procurement and supplies management, personnel management, and academic affairs. Khopornprasert (2011) also found in her study of a development of standard practices for transparency in state agencies in Thailand that out of the 8 attributes of transparency, procurement and supplies management, provision of public services as well as personnel and budget managements emerged as the most important factors.

Most of the variables in the SEM in this study were found to have positively significant effects on the transparency of the LAOs, especially in regards to leadership of administrators and followers' job satisfactions, and they could predict the transparency of the LAOs by more than 80 per cent. This finding was in accord with several past research findings (e.g. Chongvisal, 2013; Swasthaisong, 2018). In addition, politics in an organization was found to be one important factor that could affect transparency of the LAOs, and this finding was supported by Gandz and Murray (1980) who found that politics in organizations has several detrimental effects on the organizations, but at the same it is unavoidable for the administrators not to get involved in it.

One recommendation derived from this research was that more disclosure of government information should be made in order that the people gain the opportunity of access the information. In this regard, Jenpuengpon et.al. (2017) recommended that the disclosure of official information must be of the same standard throughout all the government organizations. There must be a clearly stated minimum set of information to be disclosed. In addition, the whistle blower must be appropriately protected and the private sector and general public should have more opportunity to participate in an inspection and assessment of the government performance.

Another recommendation for the enhancement of transparency in local government organizations derived from the present study was the more systematic and transparent management of budgets and imposing stiffer penalties for corruption cases. Both national studies (e.g. Swasthaisong, 2018) and international ones (e.g. Deng, 2018) well supported this aspect of recommendation offered in this study. In addition, there are a number of consistent research, including 1) Jermsittiparsert, Atsadamongkhon, & Sriyakul, (2015) who studied Politics in the Process of Local Development Plan: Case Study of the Lan Tak Fah Subdistrict Administrative Organization, Nakornchaisri, Nakornpathom 2) Srivithaya & Sonsuphap (2014) who studied "Guidelines on Corruption of Thai Listed Companies in the Stock Exchange 3) Kanyajit & Ketsil (2018) A study on "The Development of Anti-Corruption Network Potentially 4) Watcharothai (2018)" The Studies for Guideline

Protection of Public Corruption in Thailand 5) Phrakhruopatnontakitti, Watthanabut, & Jermsittiparsert (2019) who studied "Exploring the Link between Corruption, Environment Quality, Energy Consumption and Economic Growth: A Case for Selected ASEAN Countries."

Suggestions

For implications

1. The six aspects of transparency should be emphasized for the sake of the enhancement of transparency of the LAOs in the northeast, and these aspects range from strict compliance with the concerned rules and regulations to budget management.
2. The causal factors which affect the transparency of LAOs in the northeast and must be prioritized in terms of the enhancement are leadership of administrators, followed by public participation, attitudes towards transparency, organizational culture, and politics in organizations, respectively.
3. Guidelines for enhancing transparency in local government organizations include: 1) Sufficient lifestyle. 2) Strict compliance with regulations and clear guidelines. 3) Improving laws to be timely and concise there are penalties for those who commit serious and severe corruption, such as leaving government service, confiscating life imprisonment, execution and performing seriously and strictly. 4) Being a good role model for executives. 5) Disclosure and recognition of information Public news by disclosing project information in a transparent, clear and continuous manner such as news, measures, work procedures Procurement Budget use As well as being able to inspect. 6) Promotion of education and religious training By cultivating consciousness and promoting morality Ethics for local administrators Government officials Local employment recipients. 7) Other guidelines, such as the management of local government organizations, should behave as a good model. Decentralized management Have a clear position on transparency Promote teamwork Follow the rules strictly create a working system that allows people to participate in concrete examination. Information disclosure provides easy access. Including various independent organizations

For further studies

1. The setting of the present study was the LAOs in the northeast of Thailand. Future research should extend its context to cover all the regions of the country.
2. Future research should investigate the development of models, mechanics and approaches to changing and adopting attitudes towards and culture of anti-corruption which could have affect the direct and indirect prevention and suppression of corruption acts, and a comparative study of Thai and foreign cases should be carried out.
3. Workshop sessions should be developed based participatory action research or experimental research pertaining to raising awareness of transparency in the LAOs.
4. Future study should include other factors that might have the effect on the transparency of LAOs, such as perception of public information, organizational or corporate climate, ethical power of administrators and staff, teamwork, organization health, quality of work life, work motivation, future orientation, and democratic values.

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