



Development of Competencies for Community Entrepreneurs in Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province Through Appreciative Inquiry

Pariwat Sirakiatsakul^a and Phuriwat Cheekham^{b*}

^aDepartment of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, Chiang Mai, Thailand

^bDepartment of Home Economics, Faculty of Sciences and Technology, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, Chiang Mai, Thailand

*Corresponding author. E-mail address: phuriwat_che@g.cmru.ac.th

Received: 27 August 2025; Revised: 18 December 2025; Accepted: 22 December 2025; Available Online: 10 March 2026

Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to propose a competency development process for community entrepreneurs, focusing on new product creation and enhancing community income through digital marketing, using the Appreciative Inquiry approach. Data was collected through interviews with 26 entrepreneurs representing 15 community products in Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province. The findings revealed that successful community entrepreneurship was driven by six key success factors: external network support, peer motivation, strong group participation, utilization of social capital, continuous product quality improvement aligned with consumer behavior, and leadership expertise. Essential competencies were classified into three dimensions: knowledge, skills, and attributes. Based on these findings, a four-stage competency development process following the AI 4-D cycle (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny) was proposed and piloted with two model community enterprises. The results indicate that integrating Appreciative Inquiry with competency-based development enhances entrepreneurs' ability to create new products and effectively use digital marketing to increase community income. Future research is recommended to quantitatively validate the competency framework and examine its impact on business performance across different regional contexts.

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry, Competency, Entrepreneurs, Community, Chiang Mai

Introduction

The Thai government's development policy currently emphasizes the philosophy of sufficiency economy as a guiding principle for national development. The targets and indicators outlined in various development plans align with Thailand's 2036 vision, which corresponds with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals focus on people-centered, sustainable development, promoting economic growth that reduces inequality and drives growth through increased productivity based on local wisdom and innovation (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, Office of the Prime Minister, 2016). Consequently, development efforts have shifted toward income distribution to communities and the creation and enhancement of community-based occupations. A key factor in this development is "human capital", which is recognized as one of the six strategic priorities in Thailand's 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan, emphasizing the enhancement and development of human capital capacity.

The context of developing community entrepreneurs' potential focuses on knowledge related to building entrepreneurial capacity through the creative economy concept. This involves transforming surplus local raw materials into value-added processed products and creative outputs, uncovering potential and successful factors affecting community enterprise operations, and subsequently developing an integrated model emphasizing the use of community resources to generate added value through unique local products (Social Creative Potential Development Integrated Model: SCPD) (Murnpho & Unaromlert, 2018). Community enterprises serve as a foundation for community economic development following the sufficiency economy philosophy. However, many such enterprises are not yet ready to compete in the commercial market and thus require support in knowledge,



local wisdom, income generation, mutual assistance, management capacity, and enterprise model development to strengthen community economic systems, enabling them to evolve into higher-level business operators (Community Enterprise Promotion Division, Department of Agricultural Extension, 2020). Thailand has more than 90,000 registered community enterprises nationwide. Among them, Chiang Mai Province accounts for over 2,400 community enterprises, making it one of the provinces with a high concentration of community-based economic activities. This prominence is largely attributed to its abundant natural resources, strong cultural capital, and tourism-oriented economy, which together provide a supportive environment for the development of community enterprises (Community Enterprise Promotion Division, Department of Agricultural Extension, n.d.). Furthermore, technological advancements increasingly impact all sectors, including education, with a current trend toward lifelong learning, non-formal education, and occupational skills rather than degree-based education (OECD, 2019). To foster local knowledge management and development in Chiang Mai Province, this study aimed to develop community entrepreneurs who were members of local communities to sustain their businesses competitively by enhancing human capital, thus raising community income. Developing and embedding knowledge to improve the competencies of community entrepreneurs and enterprises was seen as a pathway for sustainable community self-reliance.

Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province, was selected as the research area due to its diversity of community enterprises, long-standing local knowledge base, and active engagement with government and academic support mechanisms. Importantly, preliminary exploratory interviews conducted with community entrepreneurs and government agency prior to the main data collection phase identified persistent needs for competency development, particularly in the areas of new product innovation and digital marketing. Despite the existing strengths of the area, these findings highlighted a clear demand for a systematic and context-sensitive competency development approach tailored to the local community context.

Therefore, the researchers believed that the study titled “Development of Competencies for Community Entrepreneurs in Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province through Appreciative Inquiry” would contribute to increasing community income and managing human capital to address personnel management challenges. It would support organizational members in acquiring knowledge, enabling community-driven innovation in products. This initiative aimed to promote and empower community enterprises in Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province, to operate independently and effectively, enhancing their capacity to add value to products, develop marketing media for income distribution, and establish a stable and sustainable community economic base.

Objective

To propose a competency development process for community entrepreneurs, focusing on new product creation and enhancing community income through digital marketing.

Literature Review

Competency Theory, Human Capital, and Creative Economy in Community Entrepreneurship

Competency theory provides a fundamental framework for understanding effective performance in organizational and entrepreneurial contexts. The theory conceptualizes competency as an integrated set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes that enable individuals to perform tasks successfully and achieve desired



outcomes (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Boyatzis, 2008). Rather than focusing solely on formal qualifications, competency theory emphasizes observable behaviors and capabilities that can be developed through learning and experience. In the context of community entrepreneurship, competencies such as leadership, innovation, communication, and problem-solving are particularly critical, as entrepreneurs are required to manage limited resources, coordinate group members, and respond to dynamic market conditions.

Closely related to competency theory, human capital theory highlights the economic value of investing in people's capabilities. According to Becker (1993), education, training, and skill development enhance individuals' productivity and contribute to long-term economic growth. In community-based enterprises, human capital development is especially important because entrepreneurs often rely on experiential knowledge and informal learning rather than formal business education. Strengthening competencies through targeted development processes can therefore improve both individual performance and collective economic outcomes at the community level (OECD, 2019).

These theoretical perspectives align with the creative economy concept, which emphasizes value creation through innovation, local wisdom, and cultural resources. The creative economy framework views economic development as being driven not only by capital and labor, but also by creativity, knowledge, and cultural assets embedded within local communities (UNESCO & UNDP, 2013; Murnpho & Unaromlert, 2018). For community enterprises, the ability to transform local raw materials, traditional knowledge, and cultural identity into value-added products represents a key competitive advantage. However, such transformation requires specific competencies related to product innovation, design, marketing, and the use of digital technologies.

Recent literature further indicates that technological change has intensified the need for competency-based development approaches. Digital platforms and online markets have reshaped consumer behavior, requiring entrepreneurs to develop new skills in digital marketing, content creation, and customer engagement (World Economic Forum, 2020). For community entrepreneurs, these challenges are often compounded by limitations in access to training and support systems. As a result, development approaches that are context-sensitive and grounded in local realities are increasingly emphasized.

In response to these challenges, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has been recognized as a suitable approach for competency development in community settings. AI adopts a strength-based perspective, focusing on existing positive experiences, collective knowledge, and shared aspirations rather than deficiencies (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Previous studies suggest that AI enhances participation, empowerment, and ownership among community members, making it particularly effective for developing competencies in grassroots and community-based organizations (Pliansiri & Boonsathorn, 2015; Chansongsaeng & Somkhaoyai, 2021).

Despite the growing body of literature on competency development, human capital, and creative economy, there remains a gap in empirical research on how these theories can be systematically integrated into a practical competency development process for community entrepreneurs. In particular, limited attention has been paid to designing development processes that combine theoretical foundations with participatory approaches and local contextual factors. By linking competency theory, human capital theory, and creative economy concepts with empirical evidence from community entrepreneurs in Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province, this study addresses this gap and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of competency development at the community level.



Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is widely recognized for its strength-based approach, emphasizing existing positive capacities rather than organizational deficiencies. Its key strength lies in fostering collective engagement, empowerment, and sustainable change through participatory learning processes (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). AI is particularly suitable for community-based development as it values local knowledge, shared experiences, and collaborative visioning, which align with the characteristics of community enterprises.

Appreciative Inquiry was a tool used to identify and build upon positive factors already existing within a system. It consisted of four main stages: 1) Discovery – uncovering the best of positive experiences by exploring success factors, opportunities, strengths, potentials, and talents, 2) Dream – inspiring goal setting by envisioning a compelling and possible future, 3) Design – developing strategies, structures, and processes, and 4) Destiny – achieving the goals by implementing the strategies (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), as illustrated in Figure 1.

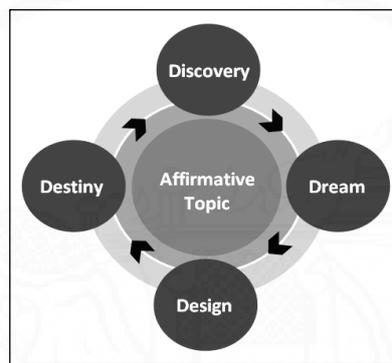


Figure 1 The 4-D model of appreciative inquiry.

Source: Adapted from Cooperrider and Whitney (2005, as cited in Pliansiri & Boonsathorn, 2015).

The development of personnel competencies through Appreciative Inquiry involves identifying positive factors that contribute to organizational success and designing projects to enhance personnel competencies. The development of an action plan could be achieved by drawing on the positive experiences of personnel who had created innovations in various aspects of the organization's work. These experiences were then used to formulate shared practices, which were implemented to design common operational guidelines. This process was central to setting the direction for developing personnel, learners, and communities, enabling them to adapt effectively amidst changing circumstances (Chansongsaeng & Somkhaoyai, 2021).

In addition, Appreciative Inquiry could be applied to identify customers' positive experiences and the qualities they expected from employees, which could then be used to formulate approaches for enhancing staff performance. Desired employee attributes and knowledge identified included: 1) a service-minded attitude, 2) knowledge of products and services, 3) willingness to serve, 4) providing useful advice and consultation to customers, 5) understanding customer needs and solving their problems, 6) consistent customer follow-up, 7) offering products that meet customer needs, and 8) clear communication with accurate information (Tharnavech & Rattanaphan, 2020).

In this study, Appreciative Inquiry was employed to extract the knowledge and experiences of community entrepreneurs in order to identify their competencies. It also served as the framework for participatory action research, leading to the proposal of a competency development model for community entrepreneurs.

Community Entrepreneur Competency Development

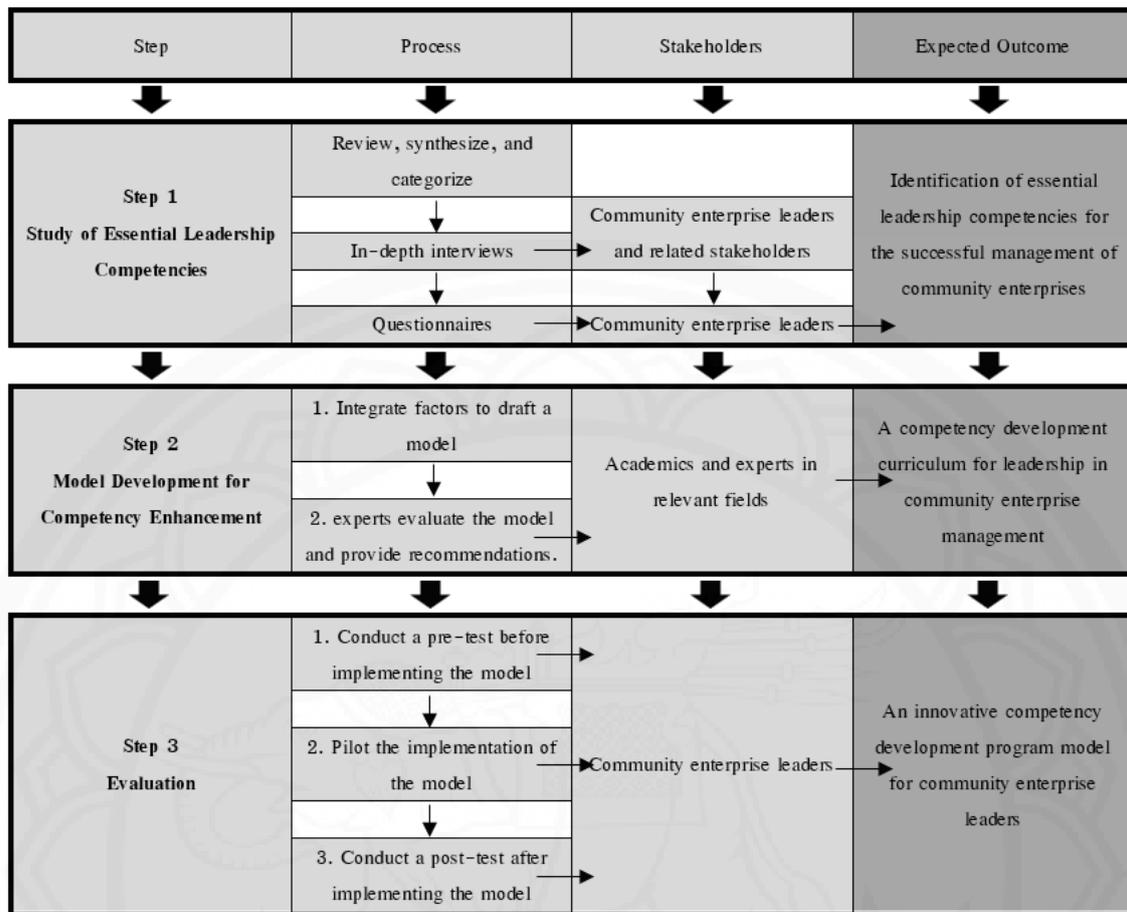


Figure 2 Development of the leadership competency model for successful community enterprise management.

Source: Adapted from Thaichiamaree et al. (2020).

Thaichiamaree et al. (2020) identified key components of leadership competencies that contributed to the successful management of community enterprises. These included: 1) risk management, 2) problem-solving, 3) creative thinking, 4) communication, 5) decision-making, 6) self-development, 7) knowledge management, 8) marketing management, 9) product management, 10) social and cultural capital development, 11) environmental management, 12) network management, 13) financial and accounting management, 14) leadership, 15) good personality, 16) morality, and 17) honesty. The authors also proposed the following competency development process as shown in Figure 2 above.

In this study, the leadership competency concepts that contribute to the successful management of community enterprises were adapted and integrated with the Appreciative Inquiry process to propose a competency development process for community entrepreneurs. Using Participatory Action Research (PAR), the proposed model was practically implemented with community entrepreneurs from selected model community enterprise groups. This approach enabled the integration of theoretical foundations with participatory and context-specific practices.

In summary, this study aimed to develop a competency enhancement model for community entrepreneurs that could inform policy development, serve as a foundation for practical training programs, and be extended to other communities to sustainably strengthen the grassroots economy.



New Product Development

The selected concepts proposed by Lamb et al. (2000) and Kulkalyuenyong et al. (2024) were adopted in this study because they provide complementary and systematic frameworks for understanding and implementing new product development that align well with the practical needs and contextual realities of community enterprises. The literature was reviewed and linked systematically to ensure coherence between theoretical foundations, conceptual frameworks, and the research objectives.

New product development is a crucial process that enables organizations to gain a competitive advantage in rapidly changing markets. It plays a key role in fostering innovation and ensuring business sustainability, particularly for small and resource-constrained enterprises such as community businesses. Lamb et al. (2000) conceptualized new product development by categorizing new products into six types: 1) original or new-to-the-world products, 2) new product lines, 3) modified products or additions to existing lines, 4) improved or revised products, 5) repositioned products, and 6) cost-reduced products. This framework remains theoretically robust and widely cited because it offers a clear and comprehensive classification that helps explain the nature and degree of product innovation. In the context of community enterprises, this classification is particularly relevant, as many innovations emerge through incremental improvements, product modification, or repositioning based on local resources and existing capabilities rather than radical innovation.

However, recognizing the dynamic nature of contemporary markets and the increasing importance of innovation processes, this study did not rely solely on Lamb et al. (2000). Instead, the framework was integrated with the more recent process-oriented model proposed by Kulkalyuenyong et al. (2024), which reflects current innovation practices and emphasizes a systematic sequence of product development activities. Kulkalyuenyong et al. (2024) proposed a five-step framework consisting of: 1) opportunity identification, 2) concept development, 3) design and development, 4) validation, and 5) product launch. This framework is particularly suitable for community enterprises, as it provides practical guidance for transforming local ideas and resources into market-ready products while accommodating constraints related to capital, technology, and expertise.

By integrating Lamb et al. (2000) product typology with Kulkalyuenyong et al. (2024) innovation process framework, this study establishes a balanced conceptual foundation that combines a well-established theoretical understanding of product innovation with a contemporary, practice-oriented approach to product development. This integration supports the design of a competency-based and context-sensitive product development process that is appropriate for community entrepreneurs. Ultimately, understanding both the types of new products and the processes through which they are developed enables community enterprises to align product innovation with market needs while fostering long-term business sustainability.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach within the scope of Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province. The objective was to propose a competency development process for community entrepreneurs using the Appreciative Inquiry process. The study was conducted with two model community enterprises: 1) The Rong Khi Lek Agricultural Housewives Group Community Enterprise, and 2) The Doi Cocoa Processing Learning Center Community Enterprise. The target population comprised business owners and key stakeholders involved in managing community-based enterprises in Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province. A purposive sampling method was applied, in collaboration with the Doi Saket District Community Development Office, to select participants



according to the following criteria: 1) officially registered with a government agency, 2) certified with at least one product standard, and 3) recipient of at least one award, such as OTOP 3–5 stars. Based on these criteria, the sample comprised 15 community-based businesses, with a total of 26 interviewees.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and participants provided informed consent for their information to be used solely for academic purposes, with their identities kept confidential. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis to categorize and identify patterns and relationships within the data in order to summarize key issues, interpret meanings, and address the research objectives. Two researchers were involved in the data analysis to minimize research bias. ATLAS.ti software (<https://atlasti.com/>) was used to validate the analysis results, thereby enhancing the accuracy of qualitative data analysis.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research was ensured through several strategies. Audio recordings of the interviews were made, and data accuracy was verified with participants after each interview (Member Checking). Direct quotations from the participants were used to confirm truthfulness and clarity in all aspects of the analysis and reporting (Credibility). Data triangulation was conducted by gathering information from multiple groups and locations to validate the accuracy and reliability of the data (Confirmability). The proposed process was then piloted with model community entrepreneurs to refine and finalize the knowledge package, which was subsequently delivered to relevant agencies for integration into strategic policy development.

The research procedure, combined with the Appreciative Inquiry process, comprised in four parts as follows:

Part 1: Discovery – Identifying the Best of Positive Experiences

This first step involved interviews to extract the tacit knowledge of success factors and experiences of community entrepreneurs through memories and storytelling, as well as to identify patterns of entrepreneurial competencies. The Appreciative Inquiry technique was applied by conducting in-depth interviews with positively framed questions about past experiences that led to success and the competencies required to build on that success in the future. The collected data was then analyzed and synthesized into a set of success factors, essential competencies, and development needs.

Example of a positive question:

“In your opinion, how has running a community-related business or producing community products helped you improve yourself?”

Example of content analysis:

Innovation-driven product development refers to the ability to apply technology and innovation to improve products so that they align with consumer behavior, solve product-related problems, and meet customer needs. Based on interview data:

“We improved our production process. We looked for innovations that could increase output. We had to develop ways to boost productivity and compete with others – such as reducing costs. If customers have more options, they won’t choose our product.” (Interviewee J-DK21, Interviewed, 2024)

Part 2: Dream – Inspiring and Defining Future Goals

This step involved conducting interviews aimed at inspiring and defining future goals by asking questions about the interviewees’ envisioned future. The purpose was to generate a shared vision that would serve as a foundation for designing strategies, structures, and processes to develop community entrepreneurs in a participatory manner.



Example of a question:

In your role as the owner or operator of a community-based business, if it were possible to improve various aspects of your business operations in the future, which areas would you like to develop or enhance?

Part 3: Design – Developing Strategies, Structures, and Processes

This step integrated the study's findings to propose a competency development process for community entrepreneurs using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. The process involved group meetings with representatives from government agencies, selected interview participants, and members of model community enterprise groups to jointly review, implement, and refine the proposed process. The revised process was then pilot-tested with two model community enterprises in the target areas, as mentioned above.

The community entrepreneur competency development process consisted of the following five steps:

1. Drafting the Development Process: utilizing the synthesized competency framework and key contributing factors to create a draft development process.

2. Expert Review: receiving feedback and recommendations from experts to improve and refine the draft competency model. Importantly, the three experts specializing in community entrepreneurship competency development, communication, and online marketing who evaluated the model were not the same individuals as the 26 interviewees to avoid potential bias.

3. Pilot Implementation with Target Groups: implementing the community entrepreneur competency development process with the target groups through the following five sub-steps:

3.1 Designing curricula and activities aligned with the competency model of community entrepreneurs identified in this study, aimed at enabling them to create new products and increase community income.

3.2 Conducting training programs and activities to enhance various competencies of community entrepreneurs.

3.3 Transferring knowledge on creating food products from local raw materials to the target groups, improving production methods to suit the specific community context, and using post-activity discussions to assess participant satisfaction.

3.4 Providing knowledge on digital marketing to community entrepreneurs, with post-activity discussions to evaluate participant satisfaction.

3.5 Evaluating the results of the competency development process for community entrepreneurs.

4. Refinement: improving and finalizing the process based on evaluation results and feedback.

5. Presentation of the Enhanced Development Process: presenting the finalized process as a model for enhancing the capacity of community entrepreneurs.

Part 4: Destiny – Achieving the Goal and Implementing Strategies

This step involved mobilizing and integrating resources to transform the envisioned future of the target groups into reality. It focused on translating strategies into actionable plans and initiatives, ensuring that the intended outcomes were achieved in practice.

Results

The integration of success factors and community entrepreneurs' experiences, combined with the competency model, led to the proposal of a competency development process. This process focused on creating new products aimed at increasing community income through digital marketing by applying the Appreciative Inquiry approach, as illustrated in Figure 3.

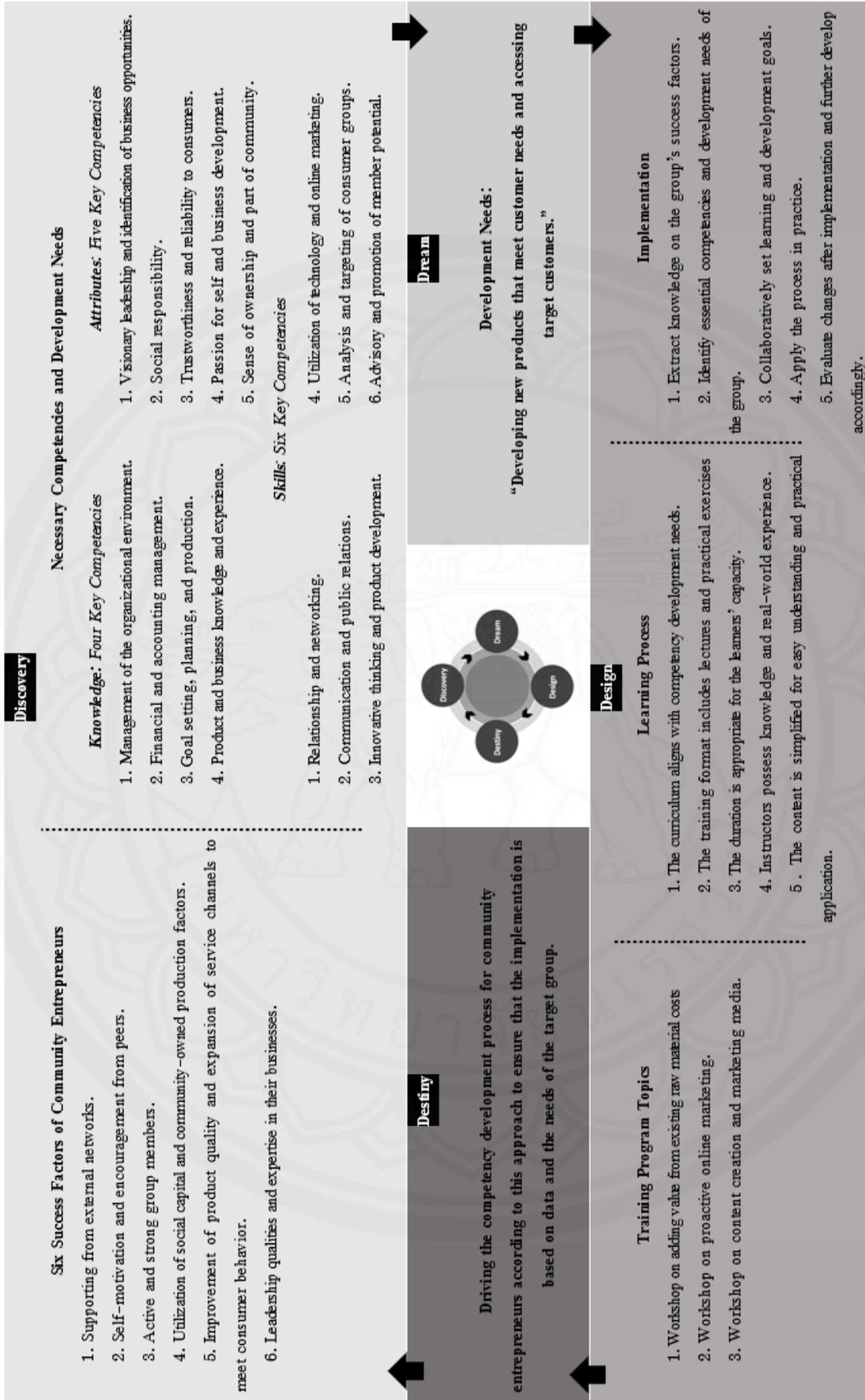


Figure 3 The process of enhancing community entrepreneurs' competency focused on new product development and increasing community income through digital marketing.



From Figure 3, the research findings can be presented in four parts as follows.

Part 1: Discovery – Identifying the Best of Positive Experiences

By extracting the knowledge of successful entrepreneurs, the study identified factors contributing to their success, as well as the essential competencies and development needs.

1. Factors contributing to the success of community entrepreneurs consisted of the following six elements:

Table 1 Success factors of community entrepreneurs

Key Success Factors	Key Points
1. Supporting from external networks.	Proactive engagement with external networks—including public agencies, private sectors, and fellow entrepreneurs in similar or related industries—serves to cultivate support systems, foster collaboration, and strengthen collective bargaining power and competitiveness.
2. Self-motivation and encouragement from peers.	Receiving inspiration and support from both internal and external sources across various aspects—such as role models, family members, and peers—provided encouragement and guidance that contributed to eventual success.
3. Active and strong group members.	Collaborative work planning based on participatory decision-making and shared opinions encouraged members to engage in self-development, thereby supporting group activities and strengthening the group's capacity for sustainable progress.
4. Utilization of social capital and community-owned production factors.	Initiating a community-based business by leveraging social capital, local wisdom, and existing production factors or resources within the community supports the sustainability of enterprises connected to the local context.
5. Improvement of product quality and expansion of service channels to meet consumer behavior.	Demonstrating readiness and adaptability to market changes through ongoing enhancement of product quality and customer service, in response to shifting consumer behaviors.
6. Leadership qualities and expertise in their businesses.	Group leaders invest time in learning and self-practice until they achieve expertise in their products or businesses. They are capable of managing and solving problems, accumulating experience that enable them to sustainably build on their success.

2. Essential competencies and development needs consisted of three aspects: knowledge (4 competencies), skills (6 competencies), and attributes (5 competencies), as follows:

Table 2 Essential competencies and development needs

Competencies	Key Points
1. Knowledge	
1.1 Management of the organizational environment.	Knowledge in general organizational management, such as organizational culture, work environment, fostering participation, personnel care, resource mobilization, and securing funding to sustain business operations.
1.2 Financial and accounting management.	Knowledge in financial management, accounting, tax filing, and procedures related to financial institutions to ensure smooth business operations and create opportunities for business expansion, including household accounting and personal expense management for members.
1.3 Goal setting, planning, and production.	Knowledge in systematic management and operational planning throughout the entire process—from upstream, midstream, to downstream—until the product is delivered to the consumer.
1.4 Product and business knowledge and experience.	Seeking in-depth knowledge and experience about the product and business with genuine understanding; learning from sales experiences and developing products based on customer feedback. This learning should be accompanied by practical tools and support from relevant agencies for real-world application.

**Table 2 (Cont.)**

Competencies	Key Points
2. Skills	
2.1 Relationship and networking.	Skills in observing the behavior of individuals, interacting with business partners, consumers, and supporting networks from external agencies, which lead to building supportive networks and expanding the business.
2.2 Communication and public relations.	Skills in communication and promotion of products, customer service through marketing platform channels, including foreign language communication skills.
2.3 Innovative thinking and product development.	Skills in applying technology and innovation to develop products and packaging that align with consumer behavior, solving usage problems to meet consumer needs.
2.4 Utilization of technology and online marketing.	Skills in using various digital technologies to operate the business and conduct marketing on online platforms that support purchasing decisions both online and offline.
2.5 Analysis and targeting of consumer groups.	Skills in systematic analytical thinking to identify target groups who are product users, develop methods or strategies for brand recognition, and utilize channels to reach the target groups or customers.
2.6 Advisory and promotion of member potential.	Skills in providing work-related consulting, observing and managing group members to utilize each individual's potential by assigning tasks that match their strengths, as well as supporting members in their personal development.
3. Attributes	
3.1 Visionary leadership and identification of business opportunities.	Having a personality that reflects leadership qualities, possessing vision, and recognizing strengths and opportunities for further business development.
3.2 Social responsibility.	Giving back to the community after the business has grown from being an integral part of the community by creating added value from local resources. Upon achieving success, entrepreneurs contribute to society through activities such as serving as trainers and developing learning centers.
3.3 Trustworthiness and reliability to consumers.	Building credibility, trust, and confidence in the brand image and the business owner's reputation, characterized by honesty and sincerity in business operations, maintaining standards, providing accurate product information, and delivering quality products to consumers.
3.4 Passion for self and business development.	Openness to learning, confidence, determination, having a strong vision, and perseverance in continuously seeking knowledge and self-development in all aspects.
3.5 Sense of ownership and part of community.	Group members have a strong sense of business ownership and are committed to the growth of the business. As the business thrives, the livelihoods of the members and the community also improve accordingly.

Part 2: Dream – Inspiring and Defining Future Goals by Asking About Future Visions

The researchers asked about the goals or visions of the target community entrepreneurs from two model community enterprises: 1) Rong Khi Lek Agricultural Housewives Community Enterprise, and 2) Doi Cocoa Processing Learning Center Community Enterprise. It was found that their vision was “to develop new products that meet market needs and to access target customer groups”. Therefore, the researchers collaborated with the entrepreneurs to define key topics for curriculum development that align with the needs of the target groups and cover the necessary competencies to realize this vision. The consideration of required competencies and development needs was made in alignment with the success factors of community entrepreneurs, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 above.



The necessary skills identified included: 1) communication and public relations, 2) innovative thinking and product development, 3) utilization of technology and online marketing, and 4) analysis and targeting of consumer groups. In terms of attribute, visionary leadership and identification of business opportunities was emphasized. These competencies were essential for community entrepreneurs to achieve their goals and drive sustainable business growth.

Part 3: Design – Developing Strategies, Structures, and Processes

This step involved using the identified competencies and development needs to establish a framework for designing the competency development process for community entrepreneurs. The competency development process consisted of five steps as follows:

Step 1: Using the Synthesized Set of Competencies and Contributing Factors to Draft the Development Process

Interviews with the target group of community entrepreneurs revealed their needs for competency development in order to achieve their desired goals or envisioned future, as described above. Accordingly, a curriculum was designed to align with these needs, as follows:

Activity 1: Workshop on Adding Value from Existing Raw Materials Costs

This activity provided perspectives on identifying business opportunities through the innovative use of the group's existing raw materials to create added value.

Activity 2: Workshop on Proactive Online Marketing

This activity focused on shifting the business mindset to recognize opportunities in digital marketplace. It emphasized the importance of adapting to reach online customer segments, training participants in analytical thinking to correctly identify target groups, analyzing media and channels to access these audiences, acquiring knowledge about media production processes, and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the overall community business operations.

Activity 3: Workshop on Content Creation and Marketing Media

This activity offered hands-on training in storytelling, using AI for marketing content creation, filming short video clips, photography, and applying these skills in real-world marketing practices.

Step 2: Obtaining Expert Evaluation and Recommendations

Before implementing the curriculum with the target group, it should be reviewed and refined based on expert advice and through focus group interviews. In this phase, feedback was sought from three experts in community entrepreneurship competency development, communication, and online marketing. Their evaluation and recommendations provided valuable insights for enhancing the curriculum's effectiveness prior to its actual application.

1. The essential competencies and competency development needs of community entrepreneurs, in general, were aligned with the success factors and the nature of doing business within the community context under the current market situation.

2. The identified competency development needs of community entrepreneurs consisted of five core competencies, which were considered both essential and sufficient for operating a business in the present day. In particular, leadership qualities—such as having vision, recognizing business opportunities, and playing a significant role in driving the group toward success—were crucial. Leaders should be able to identify opportunities for business expansion, build networks, and develop channels to reach the target consumers. These abilities were key to ensuring business sustainability.

3. Community-based businesses faced limitations in terms of members' capabilities, especially in adopting and developing technological skills. Most members of registered community enterprises possessed strong production capabilities, product development skills, and a willingness to improve themselves to support their businesses. However, due to constraints related to age, learning pace, and adaptability, learning activities should be designed in a semi-ready-to-use format. Tools or AI should be incorporated to aid memory, facilitate ease of application, and allow learning from real user experiences.

Step 3: Pilot Implementation with the Target Group

Activity 1: A workshop was organized to enhance the value of existing raw materials used by the community enterprise group. The program was developed in collaboration with experts to design a competency-building curriculum focusing on visionary leadership, the ability to identify business opportunities, and the use of innovation in product development. The workshop provided perspectives on upgrading products and creating added value through creative thinking, utilizing high-quality local raw materials. This process involved developing brand identity, product labels, and packaging, as well as creating new products derived from the community's existing resource base.

Activity 2: A hands-on workshop on proactive online marketing, in collaboration with experts to design a curriculum aimed at enhancing competencies in communication and public relations, the use of technology and online marketplaces, as well as analyzing and reaching target audiences.

Activity 3: Workshop on content creation and marketing media, conducted in collaboration with experts to design a curriculum that promotes competencies in communication and publicity, the use of technology and online marketing, as well as analysis and access to target groups.

Example of creating new products from existing community resources and developing content and marketing media

In the community enterprise of the Rong Khi Lek Agricultural Housewives Group Community Enterprise, the researcher used lemongrass powder to make herbal rice sprinkle powder, packaged in bottles. The product branding, labeling, and packaging were developed, and nutritional analysis was conducted, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Herbal rice sprinkle powder, RKL brand.

The Doi Cocoa Processing Learning Center Community Enterprise promoted value addition by developing branding, labels, and packaging. It also provided creative knowledge on product utilization by developing menus to welcome visitors who came to study at the learning center, allowing them to experience the cold-pressed macadamia oil product, as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Cold-pressed macadamia oil, chocomac brand.

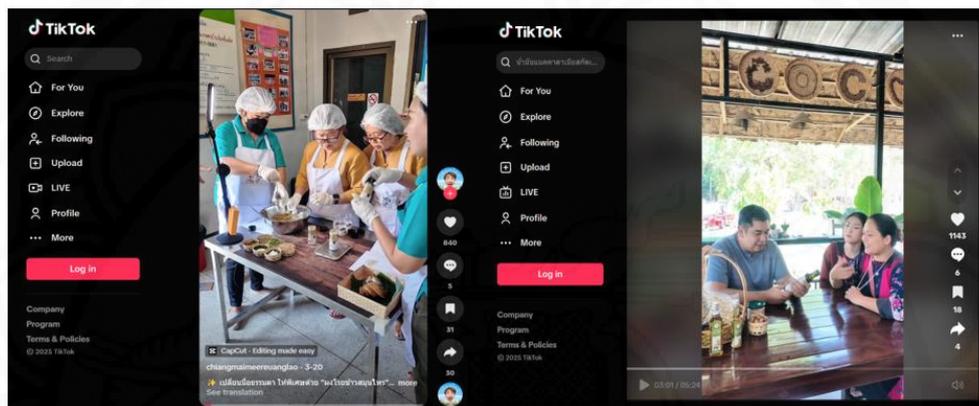


Figure 6 Content and marketing media.

Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSMERSFtk/> and <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSMER8ucu/>

Step 4: Refinement

The evaluation of the competency development program for community entrepreneurs, based on interviews with leaders of the community enterprise groups involved in the development, revealed the following:

1. The training curriculum was relevant and aligned with the competency development needs.
2. The training format combined lectures with practical exercises, enabling participants to understand and apply the knowledge effectively.
3. The duration of the training was appropriate for the learning capacity of the participants.
4. The instructors possessed practical knowledge and experience, communicated in an engaging and interesting manner, making the learning enjoyable.
5. The content had been adjusted to be easy to understand for the participants and was applicable to their work.

Therefore, the analysis and knowledge extraction from successful entrepreneurs, competencies that aligned with the needs of community entrepreneurs were identified. These competencies were key to achieving success in community business operations. Based on these findings, a curriculum was designed to develop community entrepreneurs, effectively promoting competencies that could be applied in current business practices. Follow-up on increased sales performance over the next six months was recommended.

Step 5: Proposing the Complete Competency Development Process for Community Entrepreneurs

The competency development process for community entrepreneurs was proposed, as illustrated in Figure 3.



Part 4: Destiny – Achieving the Goals by Implementing Strategies

The process of developing community entrepreneurs' competencies was promoted and pushed forward to relevant agencies to ensure actions were based on data from successful entrepreneurs. This approach aligned with the targeted and sustainable development needs of the group's potential.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study employed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to capture knowledge from successful community entrepreneurs, leading to the identification of key success factors, essential competencies, and development needs. The findings indicate that effective community entrepreneurship requires competencies that can be grouped into three closely connected dimensions: knowledge, skills, and attributes. This finding is consistent with competency theory, which explains effective performance as the integration of these three dimensions rather than dependence on formal qualifications alone (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Boyatzis, 2008). The strong alignment between the empirical findings and competency theory supports the validity of the proposed competency framework for community entrepreneurs.

From the perspective of human capital theory, the results suggest that investment in competency development contributes to higher productivity and more sustainable economic outcomes at the community level (Becker, 1993). The emphasis on competencies related to product innovation and digital marketing reflects current economic conditions in which competitiveness increasingly depends on knowledge-based skills and adaptability. This finding is in line with OECD (2019) and the World Economic Forum (2020), which emphasize that entrepreneurial success is strongly influenced by innovation capacity, digital skills, and continuous learning.

The use of Appreciative Inquiry as the main development approach also offers important theoretical and practical insights. Unlike traditional problem-focused training models, AI emphasizes existing strengths, shared successes, and positive experiences within the community. This approach encouraged strong participation, collaboration, and a sense of ownership among community entrepreneurs. These results are consistent with previous studies showing that AI enhances engagement and leads to more sustainable learning outcomes in both community and organizational development contexts (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Pliansiri & Boonsathorn, 2015). By integrating AI with a competency-based framework, this study demonstrates how theory-driven development can be effectively applied through participatory processes in real community settings.

When compared with previous research, the findings are closely aligned with those of Thaichiamaree et al. (2020), who identified leadership competencies as a key factor in successful community enterprise management and proposed a structured leadership development model. Similarly, this study highlights competencies such as visionary leadership, opportunity recognition, and innovation as critical for community entrepreneurs. However, this study extends earlier research by explicitly integrating leadership competency concepts with the Appreciative Inquiry process and embedding them within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework. This integration allows not only the identification of competencies but also their practical application, testing, and refinement through real-world implementation.

In addition, the findings support the work of Murnpho and Unaromlert (2018), who emphasized the importance of creative economy concepts in strengthening community entrepreneurs' ability to transform local resources into value-added products. This study further demonstrates that competencies related to innovation, creativity, and digital marketing are essential for converting local wisdom and cultural resources into products that



meet market demands. The study advances existing literature by proposing a systematic competency development process that connects creative economy concepts with competency theory and participatory learning mechanisms.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by addressing an important gap in understanding how competency theory, human capital theory, and creative economy concepts can be integrated into a practical and context-sensitive development process for community entrepreneurs. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the proposed competency development model offers clear practical benefits. It can be used by government agencies, educational institutions, and community development organizations as a guideline for designing training programs, capacity-building initiatives, and policy interventions tailored to community enterprises. By grounding the model in empirical evidence from Doi Saket District and applying a participatory, strength-based approach, the study provides a practical pathway for enhancing entrepreneurial competencies, increasing community income, and supporting sustainable grassroots economic development.

Suggestions

Recommendations for Future Research

1. This study proposes a competency development process for community entrepreneurs through Appreciative Inquiry, focusing on new product development and digital marketing to enhance community income. While the qualitative findings sufficiently explain how and why the competencies contribute to entrepreneurial success, future quantitative research is necessary to statistically test the relationships between specific competencies and measurable performance outcomes such as income growth, market expansion, and business sustainability. Quantitative validation would strengthen generalizability and support policy-level application of the proposed model.
2. A comparative study should be carried out on the competencies and course development needs of community entrepreneurs between the northern region and other regions of Thailand.

Recommendations for Practice

1. It is necessary to survey the needs and segment target groups according to age, location, and business type. The curriculum requirements should be aligned accordingly. Policy support should be promoted to relevant agencies with continuous implementation by including the activities in the annual budget plan.
2. The community entrepreneur competency framework can be used to design online courses for developing community entrepreneurs, providing an alternative form of lifelong learning.
3. Collaborative and integrated operations should be conducted in managing budgets among relevant regional agencies, including provincial-level agencies working together with local academic institutions such as Rajabhat Universities.

Acknowledgments

This research was part of the project “The Application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to Develop a Competency Model for Community Entrepreneurs in Choeng Doi Subdistrict, Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province”, funded by the Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI), approved by the Chiang Mai Rajabhat University Institutional Review Board (IRB) under COA No. 372/2024 and IRB No. IRBCMURU 2024/372.14.08. The researcher would like to sincerely thank all community entrepreneurs who kindly participated in the interviews.



Appreciation is also extended to research assistant Miss Rotchanakorn Baengthit, Miss Thantita Sathirachaiyawit and Mr. Natthapong Ruenthong for the completion of this research.

References

- Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press. <http://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226041223.001.0001>
- Boyatzis, R. E. (2008). Competencies in the 21st century. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(1), 5–12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710810840730>
- Chansongsaeng, A., & Somkhaoyai, T. (2021). Application of appreciative inquiry process using soar analysis in school action plan development. *Journal of MCU Humanities Review*, 7(2), 371–385. <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/human/article/view/256781>
- Community Enterprise Promotion Division, Department of Agricultural Extension. (n.d.). *Community enterprise database*. Retrieved March 20, 2020, from <https://smce.doe.go.th/search>
- Community Enterprise Promotion Division, Department of Agricultural Extension. (2020). *Outstanding community enterprises 2019*. New Thammada Press. <https://sceb.doe.go.th/วิสาหกิจชุมชนดีเด่น>
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. (2005). Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change. In D. L. Cooperrider, P. F. Sorensen, Jr., T. F. Yaeger, & D. Whitney (Eds.), *Appreciative inquiry: Foundations in positive organization development* (pp. 9–34). Stipes Publishing.
- Kulkalyuenyong, P., Pitayavatanachai, Y., & Sutthi, J. (2024). Building new product innovation for small and medium entrepreneurs. *The Journal of Social Communication Innovation*, 12(1), 165–174. <https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jcosci/article/view/270861>
- Lamb, C., Jr., Hair, J. F., Jr., & McDaniel, C. (2000). *Marketing* (5th ed.). South-Western College Publishing.
- Murnpho, S., & Unaromlert, T. (2018). Potential development for community entrepreneurs based on the concept of creative economy. *Silpakorn Educational Research Journal*, 10(1), 131–144. <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/suedureasearchjournal/article/view/68865>
- OECD. (2019). *OECD skills strategy 2019: Skills to shape a better future*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264313835-en>
- Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, Office of the Prime Minister. (2016). *The twelfth national economic and social development plan (2017–2021)*. <https://www.nesdc.go.th/en/the-national-economic-and-social-development-plan/>
- Pliansiri, P., & Boonsathorn, W. (2015). The succession planning process development of the leaders in ethnic community through Appreciative Inquiry (AI). *NIDA Development Journal*, 55(3), 59–86. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/NDJ/article/view/39730>



Spencer, L. M., & Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at work: Models for superior performance*. John Wiley & Sons.

Thaichiamaree, T., Klamsakul, S., & Phuekbuakhoa, W. (2020). Development of leadership competency model for success in community enterprise management. *Journal of Social Science and Buddhistic Anthropology*, 5(7), 313–327. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JSBA/article/view/244442>

Tharnavech, W., & Rattanaphan, P. (2020). Guidelines to enhance the competency of bank clerks using the appreciative inquiry case study: ABC's bank in Khon Kaen province. *NEU Academic and Research Journal*, 10(3), 121–135. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/neuarj/article/view/244779>

UNESCO, & UNDP. (2013). *Creative economy report 2013, special edition: Widening local development pathways*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000224698>

World Economic Forum. (2020). *The future of jobs report 2020*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/>