

# Management and Stakeholder Collaborations of Community Colleges in Thailand

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## Abstract

This study aims at, firstly, understanding and comparing management approaches of education administration in Pichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College, secondly, understanding and comparing stakeholder collaborations in Pichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College and, finally, recommending approaches for education management and stakeholder collaboration of community colleges in Thailand. A conceptual framework is derived from public value management concept and new public governance practices in public administrations, especially in education, in USA and other countries. The research design is a sequential mixed and multiple-case study with dominant qualitative research. The research comprises of quantitative and qualitative data collections and analyses. The quantitative data were collected by questionnaires from 411 inside and outside stakeholders from four community colleges, namely Nan Community College, Buriram Community College, Uthaithani Community College, and Narathiwat Community College, which represented four regions respectively. Analysis adopted some descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficient. The qualitative data were collected by individual in-dept interviews and group focused interviews from 49 inside and outside stakeholders of Pichit Community College, Phang-nga Community College, and Institute of Community Colleges. The analysis derived from chronologies, pattern matching and explanation building. It found that management approaches of education administration in Pichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College could respond to local communities only in short-term. Educational standards, planning, procedural operations, and resource allocations were legally bounded from the bureaucratic system in Bangkok. The strategic purpose and plan of developing middle-level manpower not being derived from local communities would not be effective in long-term. In addition, each and every stakeholder to both community college involved in

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the education management with limited extents and channels. At an individual level, stakeholders participated regularly in operational management in day-to-day activities. However, at an organizational level, cooperations from stakeholders emerged only on a non-binding case-by-case basis. This research recommended a structural reform in laws governing the community colleges in accordance with the empirically proved model of stakeholder leveraged within public value driven collaborative governance.

**Keywords:** Community college, education management, public value management, stakeholder collaboration, new public governance, collaborative governance

## Introduction

Community colleges in Thailand, which offers 3-year associate degree with exception of two also offering vocational certificates, are expected to provide some opportunities to youngsters to access to higher education due to their financial restrictions and family circumstances in rural provinces. The first ten community colleges were established in 2003 under Ministry of Education with the purpose of developing human resources for middle-level skilled labor market, which are ready economically for higher education. Then in 2015, altogether 20 community colleges had been centrally administered by Institute of Community Colleges, a juristic entity under the Ministry and, later, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation in 2019. Thai students regularly face difficulties associated with living cost, travelling distance, studying and commuting time, occupational readiness, and so on, which prohibits their access to higher education and advanced career. However, with compulsory education to complete secondary school certificate (approximately 18 years old), the number of students finishing the certificate of M.3 (junior secondary education) (approximately 15 years old) from 1966 to 2001 rose to more than 2 million, the 67.5 and 30 percents of those continued senior high-school certificate and vocational certificate respectively. Following this, some students proceeded to bachelor's degree programs, while others left the formal education entirely. The tendency remained persistent from 2001 to 2021, indicating that graduates of upper secondary education often overlooked associate degrees, a significant societal termed by Chalemwong (2012) as a “degree obsession”. One reason was a common thought that a university degree guaranteed better and more stable employment, brought pride to parents. Another reason was a rapid expansion of higher education institutions, despite agricultural and industrial sectors in Thailand requiring more practical experiences than academic excellence. Consequently, this has led to widespread unemployment among bachelor's degree holders (high-level skilled workforce) across the country. Furthermore, according to the Office of the Education Council Secretariat (2009: 8), over 70 percent of vocational graduates pursued bachelor's degrees, resulting in a continuous shortage of middle-level workers ready to enter the workforce. Therefore, the problem of “producing middle and high-level manpower, which the country has been severely lacking” since 1966, when the Second National Economic and Social Development Plan was effective, remains unaddressed. Meanwhile, a surplus of high-level manpower has become a new issue that does not yield economic and social benefits. This raises the question of whether and how the establishment and administration of community colleges actually reforms Thai education to better align with economic and social environments.

To find an answer begins with analyzing the approaches to education management from the inception of the idea of community college as such in the present, which emerged five years later from the Second National Economic and Social Development Plan to address the shortage of mid-level and high-level manpower. The strategic policy in then the Third National Economic and Social Development Plan (1972-1976) consisted of measures, policies, and goals for developing a national education system, which encouraged sharing school building and spaces, community-supported schools, and cluster schools (various types of schools grouped together). It also included measures to motivate and support teachers in regional areas for better welfare, safety, and opportunities for further education (National Economic and Social Development Board [NESDB], 1973: 413-414). Moreover, the Third Plan set directions to promote education of the model of community college to meet the demand for mid-level manpower (NESDB, 1973: 417). It also aimed to improve quality of educational administration, experimented with a community college system with cooperations from private sectors in higher education to produce mid-level manpower in the fields aligned with the development of various occupations (NESDB, 1973: 423).

Community colleges, which are public post-secondary academies under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, currently operate under Community College Institution, a centralized bureaucracy regarding budgeting, educational standard, and public policies for the community colleges and are governed by the Ministry, Bureau, and Department Reform Act (No. 19) B.E. 2562 (2019) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation Administration Act B.E. 2562 (2019). This centralization has created an imbalance between the strategic planning and central administration versus local organizational management (Tanom Intarakumnerd, 2012, 375-376, 384-385). It also leads to issues of inconsistency with the changing educational context of local areas and a failure to truly respond to the needs of stakeholders, particularly employers and local communities (Intarakumnerd, 2012: 381-385).

From the mentioned issues, it was evident that the establishment and administration of community colleges in Thailand stemmed from central government. The policy implementations had focused on fulfilling the centralized strategies and allocating resources from the central authority without responding to diverse economic and social circumstances in local areas. There was no mechanism allowing diverse stakeholders to initiate and to collaborate in the administration of community colleges. Laws and regulations did not provide comprehensive avenues for stakeholder

participation in all managerial and operational processes, hindering the ability to meet actual needs. This stood in stark contrast to the establishment and administration of community colleges in United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan. In the United States, for instance, over 1,000 community colleges emerged from differing local needs and were driven by diverse stakeholders through socio-economic negotiations over several decades since post-colonial era (Thelin, 2019: 31-32). This led to continuous improvements and reforms in management approaches over many eras (Thelin, 2019: 170, 302, 326), resulting in a unique educational system distinct from secondary and undergraduate education, especially since after World War II (Thelin, 2019: 301; Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2014: 8-11).

Addressing the issues through the management approach of community colleges in Thailand requires understanding, analyzing, and explaining the circumstances related to public policy implementation, organizational operations, public value management, stakeholder networks and collaboration through a lens of public governance theories. By views of Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg (2014: 447-451) and Denhardt and Denhardt (2015: 22-25), public governance of community colleges in Thailand is no different from Old Public Administration, as it lacks efficiency, effectiveness, and equity towards common public goals. It does not arise from networked relationships in the public governance, leadership, and diverse public value management (Bryson et al., 2014: 452-453). Specifically, the demand side, regarding the core issue of shortage of mid-level manpower in Thailand, Thai family values make families proud of their children attaining a bachelor's degree. On the supply side, the management of associate degree education in community colleges is inefficient, with high dropout rates and low graduation rates (Phang-Nga Community College, 2023). Additionally, the government bureaucracies administer the community education alone without collaborations from private sectors and local stakeholders in setting goals, determining outcomes, and overseeing the operations cannot fulfill the inception of the idea of community colleges in Thailand.

### **Research Objectives**

This research project studies Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College as representatives of community colleges nationwide, where most people are in agriculture (central region) and tourism (southern region) respectively. Because education helps youngsters sustain livelihoods and achieve living security, this study critically examines the education management and the stakeholder collaboration in community colleges, and their social impacts from both internal and external stakeholders. The result provides empirical evidence for two research questions:

1) Whether and how the educational management in Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College appropriately responds to local needs.

2) Whether and how respective stakeholders collaborate in the administrations of Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College.

## Literature Review

### Management and New Public Governance

Since Christopher Hood introduced New Public Management (NPM) in 1989, governments around the world had started adopting business management principles to manage public affairs extensively, including the United States in 1993 (Lynn, 2006: 107, 110-111) and Thailand in 2007 (Government of Thailand, 2007). Since the Thai Bureaucratic Development Strategic Plan B.E. 2556 - 2561 (2013-2018), Thai government and public bureaucracies have adhered to NPM, and have been aimed for the efficiency of public resource management through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that align with government policies and strategies set forth by the Office of the Public Sector Development Commission (OPDC). This includes community colleges, which, as higher education institutions, must manage educational programs and operations in accordance with the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) under the jurisdiction of, then, the Office of the Higher Education Commission, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, according to the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) and its amendments (No. 2) B.E. 2545 (2002).

However, public administration advances both theoretically and practically under the concept of New Public Governance (NPG). Lynn et al. (cited in Osborne, 2010: 119-123) suggested that an emerging governance approach, which is replacing traditional models, relies on network connections and the distribution of power in civic social institutions. Moreover, Osborne (2010: 8-10) contended that the concept of NPG still relied on bureaucratic system. Social units were diverse, consisting of multiple actors who depended on each other to deliver public services. This diversity and interdependence resulted in multiple processes in policy making, all of which existed within the public sector.

Further, the concept of Public Value addressed the shortcomings of NPM and extended into NPG. Moore (1995) suggested that government agencies would become increasingly aware of their external environment, beyond responding to political demands. Therefore, public service organizations

must formulate operational strategies to be measured by public value and must manage public resources in ways adaptive to ever-changing external environment. Rather than solely efficient outcomes of public sector management regardless of whoever carrying out those public tasks like NPM, Public Value emphasized outcomes accepted by citizens who were directly affected by the public service deliveries. According to Bozeman (2007), Public Value aimed to ensure the cost-effective use of resources, which was a key principle of NPG, emphasizing market-efficiency, accountability, and fairness altogether in all government operations. Bozeman argued that in context of public policy, accountability was referred to as achieving hierarchical goals according to policies and procedures in public affairs. Fairness, on the other hand, meant impartiality in the provision and practice of public affairs (Bozeman, 2007).

Value-driven public service management requires the involvement of external stakeholders in public organizations, integrating them as essential parts of public service provision (Public Service Ecosystems) (Osborne, Powell, Cui, & Strokosch, 2022: 634). Therefore, public administrators must develop and manage public service organizations to be flexible yet efficient. Moreover, they must focus on enhancing operational competencies derived from external environmental factors, not just seeking support from the changing political context (Moore, 1995: 210-211). In short, the concept of public value has evolved towards NPG by addressing the shortcomings of NPM through the ideas of the Public Value Chain, the Public Value Account, and the Public Value Scorecard.

Although many scholars insist that networking inevitably depends on bureaucracy, there is a growing number of scholars suggesting that public administration with NPG can function solely through networks for three reasons (Yi, 2018: 195, 202-205). Firstly, NPG is rooted in theories of institutions and social networks for public service delivery with multiple interdependent actors involved in the delivery. Secondly, the effectiveness of the networks in driving public service operations can be developed from supporting relationships within stakeholders' network through the structure of network governance, regarding shared problems and opportunities to enter the process of policy formulation, joint implementation, and oversight of relevant public policies, known as Collaborative Governance Networks. And thirdly, public service management creates value by delivering services that meet citizens' needs, which requires the involvement of external stakeholders. These stakeholders must be integrated as an essential part of public service provision (Public Service Ecosystems).

Developing and managing the organizations that provide public services to flexibly and efficiently attain public value under NPG requires new leaders who are attentive and capable of enhancing operational competencies. This involves actively seeking and integrating direct participation from both inside and outside stakeholders, rather than seeking political supports.

### **Leadership**

Achieving goals requires leadership, which often emphasizes new approaches to problem-solving or new processes for successfully implementing policies. Miao, Newman, Schwarz, and Cooper (2017: 71) suggested that organizations develop innovative behavior by enhancing an importance of the entrepreneurial role in leaders, encouraging personnel to seek and create valuable opportunities for themselves within the workplace.

Lagowska, Sobral, and Tavares (2022) studied formal vertical leadership and informal shared leadership, where leadership rotated from all levels to lead street-level bureaucracies in education. They found that transformational leadership in a vertical structure enhanced a connection between shared leadership and team empowerment, which positively impacted the performance of educational organizations (Lagowska et al., 2022: 1043-1044). The educational organizations facilitating the shared leadership in their operations, the performance had improved and increased a sense of autonomous decision-making over responsibilities (Lagowska et al., 2022). Moreover, performance results indicated that shared leadership often had the same impact on the organization as transformational leadership. Developing public officers through training was a starting point for cultivating shared leadership in public organizations, as aligned with the findings of Nguyen et al. (2022). Further, Nguyen et al. (2022: 2-3) identified three key application approaches: providing detailed job descriptions, addressing individual exchange issues, and combining tangible and psychological incentives. The study by Nguyen et al. (Nguyen et al., 2022: 1, 10-12) confirmed that public value-focused transactional leadership enhanced the significance of performance, like transformational leadership. Therefore, by integrating public value into task assignments through a participatory style of interaction, coupled with increased communication, supportive facilitation, and recognized public value (psychological contracts), the organizational commitment could be fostered and so drive a collective achievement.



Theories and studies on leadership over the past ten years have begun to emphasize the relationship between the leadership and the management of an organization in adapting to changes in the external environment, as in Lindsay, Pearson, Batty, Cullen, and Eadson (2020: 925-927), Kalawong (2011: 180-183), Jensen (2017: 48), for instance. This expanded the scope of leadership from being related to internal work and conditions within the organization to include managing external environment as well. This was particularly important for creating internal organizational changes to align with external conditions. Finally, Lindsay et al. (2020, 925-927) argued traditional top-down bureaucratic structures and New Public Management (NPM), which focus on efficiency than public value, both failed to gain the mutual benefits of the public sector and citizens. The public sector must create an organizational approach for collaborative governance system within a public organization, enabling it to drive and integrate expertise and resources from diverse non-governmental stakeholders. Collaborative governance was a management approach that fostered leadership to lay the groundwork for cooperation and developed into management innovation in the public sector.

In summary, public sector work involving citizens requires innovative management solutions as a sustained resolution. This inevitably necessitates some flat bureaucratic structures both internally and externally so as to collaboratively create public value that mutually benefits public sector and citizens. Therefore, the public sector must establish organizational approaches for collaborative governance systems. Public sector leaders must manage the organization to be ready for collaboration with external stakeholders and to continually adapt to the external environment.

### **External Environment and Stakeholders**

Organizations do not exist in isolation, as all human, financial, material and physical resources provided from environment. Therefore, organizations cannot avoid interactions with their external environment, whether with individuals or social units, which enables an access to the resources necessary for achieving their goals. The resulting benefits that each party expect from these exchanges motivate them to adjust their behavior accordingly (DuBrin, 2009: 68-69). The expected behavior for acquiring benefits extends to influence the external environment, a process known as social exchange (Blau, 2008: 16-21). For these reasons, understanding the political, economic, and social environments external to an organization enables the assessment of the organization's dependency on these environments, leading to the formulation of appropriate operational strategies. It also determines a decision-making process within the command chain aligned with the changes. Strategy, therefore, is the

method of formulating an organization's strategies, capitalizing on opportunities presented by the political, economic, and social environment (Hrebiniak, 2008: 458). Thus, strategy serves as a common action and a designate direction for operations and encompasses resource procurement, allocation, and prioritization to maximize efficiency.

Mintzberg (1983: 241-243) emphasized the importance of strategic planning, especially at a macro level between organizations and the outside stakeholders. Organizations could build a negotiating power with external entities by addressing their needs, withholding information from unrelated groups, and forming coalitions to counter other groups (Mintzberg, 1983: 260-261). Organizations could manage their environment beneficially through three main approaches: stakeholder analysis, strategic influence on stakeholders, and collaborative strategies in a form of alliance (Mintzberg, 1983: 262-269). Further, Purday (2012: 409-411) found that stakeholders sought a collaborative governance process to achieve mutually agreed-upon goals. Additionally, Breyer (2011: 9-12) studied collaborative relationships in various activities between public and private sectors in a local area. He found that many stakeholders managed public projects without formal authority, but they benefited some policy arrangements agreed to be implemented. This aligns with Donahue and Zeckhauser (2011: 72-77) and Jones (2012: 417-418), who proposed that stakeholders would participate in formulating operational plans and monitoring mechanisms in public sector activities.

Genuine and effective collective benefits do not solely depend on an isolated management of public affairs but on public governance. This aims at enhancing operational efficiency to create mutual benefits internally and externally. Public agencies should therefore be accountable bureaucracies (accountable bureaucracy) to all these stakeholders (Bowornwathana, 2013: 137-139; Hood, 1991: 17-20; Peters, 1996: 99-104; Rhodes, 1996: 652-657; Wilson, 1989: 375-378). Thus, any reforms must start with the development of a governance system based on a balanced foundation of participation and social institutions (Bowornwathana, 2006: 667-669; Johnston, 2005: 80; Lambsdorff, 2007: 17-18; Rose-Ackerman, 2008: 66-69).

In sum, for public sector organizations, citizens are not merely recipients of public services but also taxpayers who should and must be empowered to participate in the administration of public service organizations as their key stakeholders. Viewing the boundaries of the public organizations from a pluralistic nature of stakeholders in society helps construe multiple processes in creating and

implementing public policy. Consequently, the importance of stakeholders to the public organizations, according to NPS (New Public Service) and NPG (New Public Governance) concepts, can be categorized into three types:

- 1) Stakeholders as key factors in defining and achieving organizational goals.
- 2) Stakeholders who, through legitimate power and accountability, define their relationship with the organization.
- 3) Organizational goals and the relationship between the organization and stakeholders are influenced not only by stakeholders but also by other organizations with superior authority, determining a legitimacy of the organization's power over its stakeholders.

### **Relevant Research**

Educational curriculums that foster civic learning help citizens become more engaged and active for a social accountability, enabling them to understand differences, to recognize that conflict is an opportunity to learn, and to view it as a fundamental community process grounding up a strong democracy. Especially in the digital age, teaching methods can enhance civic learning more effectively, providing opportunities to understand and practice democratic principles, to engage in dialogues with diverse groups, and to develop projects in collaboration with various communities (Hurtado, 2019: 94-97).

Further education helps at-risk youths facing economic and social challenges transition to adulthood, and potentially prevents social problems. However, it may exacerbate inequalities among youth and widen generational gaps. College administrators and leaders play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Their approach to college management - whether focused on achieving excellence or promoting social justice - significantly impacts these young people (Pennacchia & Bathmaker, 2021: 1-2). For community colleges, they establish extensive and continuous local partnerships, enhancing the high-skilled human capital for labor market. Therefore, community colleges serve as vital sources for developing the human and social capital essential for the strength of economy and the sustainability of society in the United States (Pennacchia & Bathmaker, 2021: 10).

Various researches about community colleges were evident that achieving organizational goals requires collaboration between administrators and personnel. Community colleges needed an organizational culture that both motivated staff and strengthened academic capabilities to enhance

long-term performance, driving genuine economic and social progress within the community. Braxton et al. (2013: 79) supported the approach of integrating academic work with teaching to enhance effectiveness in three areas: advancing and applying some teaching practices, enabling community access to research benefits, and elevating the prestige of community college faculty. Consequently, Braxton et al. suggested that community colleges should emphasize and enhance more of their academic mission. Further, administrators needed both societal trusteeship and organizational stewardship worldviews (Palmer, 2013: 444-446). Administrators with a societal trusteeship approach viewed their roles towards outside stakeholders as part of their mission to uphold public interest and social equity. Conversely, those with an organizational stewardship would focus on prioritizing the organization's survival and efficiency. Despite the divergent orientation of these worldviews in fostering public service motivation, community college administrators could not wholly abandon either (Palmer, 2013). Therefore, Scull, Harbour, and Tao-Han (2020: 47) and Adler (2014: 775) proposed that community college management, particularly its leadership, should prioritize human resources as a bridge to outside stakeholders. This involved investing in human resource development, creating an environment conducive to collaboration, and supporting basic living needs through their operations.

For Thailand, the effectiveness of community college education management depended on the following four key aspects (Pinjamrat, 2012: 133-135): administrative policy and operational practices, internal and external conditions, quality assurance processes and personnel capability and professionalism.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework attempts to integrate a theory of Public Value Management (Moore, 1995, 2013) and the theoretical concepts of NPG in an open system (Winaicharn Sapparojpattana, 2020, 177). This includes an examination of some theoretical components and their concepts in relation to an educational system of community colleges in Thailand and the management approaches. The idea of a public value chain under a public sector strategic triangle (shaded areas in Figure 1) is extended through a collaborative governance aimed at the public value. This comprises Public Value Management of community colleges and the stakeholder collaborations with their relevant networks (white background ovals in Figure 1).

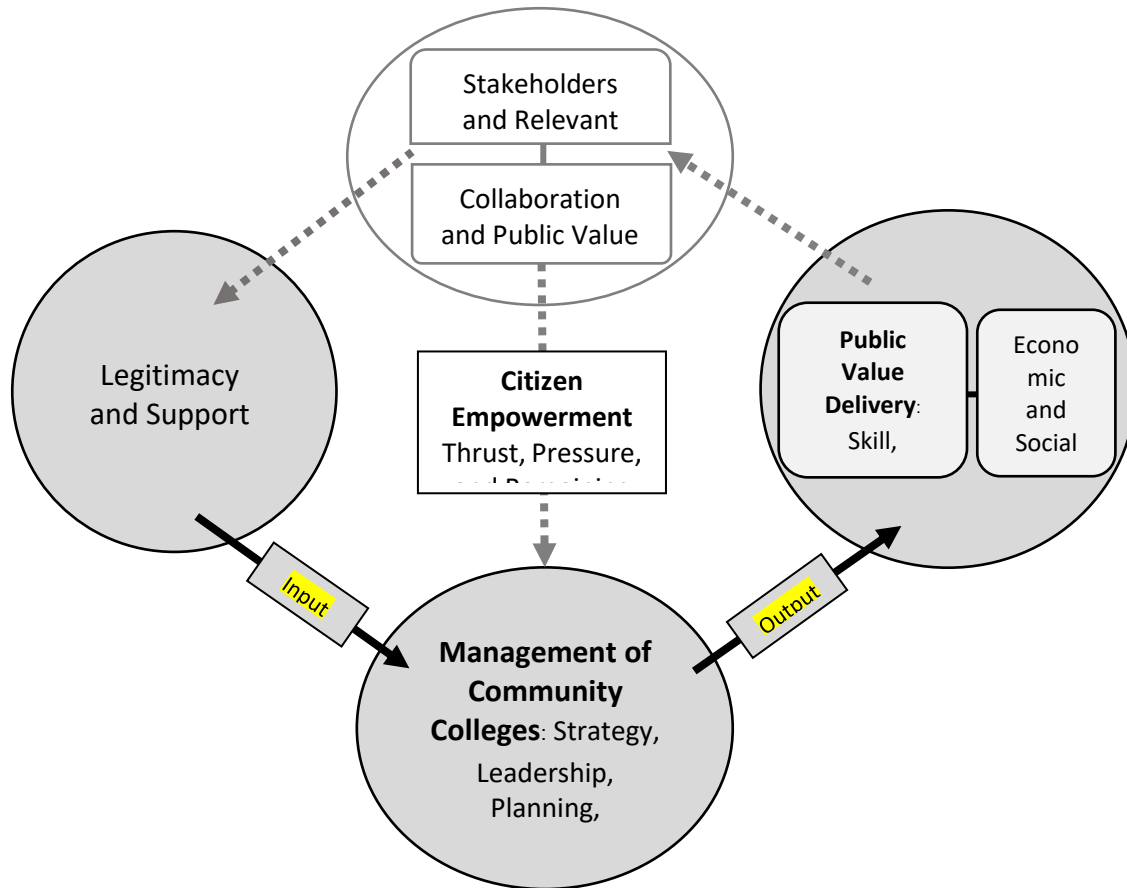


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The extension also aligns with the context of community colleges, derived from the theoretical framework of NPG. According to concepts and research findings of Moore (1995, 2013), the public value chain consists of the delivery of public services and their economic and social outcomes, which leads to legitimacy and support through the participation of outside stakeholders and related interest groups (Moore, 2013: 2154-2333). This involves negotiations with stakeholders, informal consultations with public service recipients (key stakeholders who might be overlooked by the bureaucracy both legally and practically), and formal hearings in designated channels to set action plans and their goals.

From Figure 1, the input factors are legitimacy and support, which arise from a collaborative governance aimed at public value. This component is derived from authoritative overseers, policy administrators, executives, faculty members, supporting staff, guest instructors, students, alumni, employers, public and business sector networks, and other stakeholders. These stakeholders participate

in sharing ideas and ways of action, making joint decisions, managing teaching and learning together, providing student and community services, and monitoring the outcomes of community college education management. Their collective effort ensures that the delivery of public value (which has been co-determined and reviewed) involves imparting the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences essential for the economic system and the sustainability of society, regarded as output factors.

According to this research framework, motivation, pressure, and bargaining power are solid evidence of citizen empowerment, which are the capacity of stakeholders arising from political, social, or economic conditions and shared uses (power-with) in managing the education of the community college they are involved with (circular response behavior) (Follett, 1925: 80-82, 97, 111). And the final theoretical component is the intensity of the arrows. Darkened arrows indicate direction and have been empirically confirmed in practice, while dashed arrows indicate direction and are theoretical issues confirmed by this research study. The examination of the research framework reveals that the delivery of public value does not align with the economic and social outcomes that stakeholders expect to receive. Without empowering stakeholders, it is impossible to drive and pressure the education management of community college to deliver a desired public value. Furthermore, without stakeholder collaboration, there is no bargaining power to bring about economic and social benefits to local communities.

Comparing the education management and stakeholder collaboration of Phichit Community College and Phangnga Community College according to the research framework, this investigation for the level of citizen empowerment aims to understand the obstacles and issues in the education management of community college away from stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

## **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a sequential mixed method with dominant qualitative research and a multiple-case study. Data collection comprised of two stages: firstly, a quantitative survey of respondents proportionately selected from four community colleges, and, lastly, some in-depth and focused group interviews from 48 key informants purposefully selected in the two community colleges and an in-depth interview from an executive in Institute of Community Colleges. At the first stage, the sites of quantitative enquiries were represented each geographical regions as Nan Community College

for north, Uthaithani Community College for central, Buriram Community College for north-eastern and Narathiwat Community College for south, a total of 411 respondents from stakeholders for every of those sites into two groups. Firstly, inside stakeholder groups include 3 members of college council, a director, 12 teachers, 6 personnels. And secondly, outside stakeholder groups include 18 current students, 8 public officials, 12 parents, 20 alumni, and 20 employers of those alumni. And at the other stage, a total of 49 key informants were purposefully selected from Pichit Community College (24), Phang-nga Community College (24) and Institute of Community Colleges (1). Collecting quantitative data was a survey with close-ended questions being adjusted from the results of index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) evaluation by two academics and one public officials. The questionnaire mainly used an ordinal scale for responses but also includes some questions measured by interval and nominal scales. The survey of 45 questions was divided into four sections as follows: section 1 was about information on job functions and related organizations or networks with 10 questions of nominal, interval, and ordinal scales, section 2 was about expectations and attitudes towards the performance of community colleges with 10 questions of ordinal scale, section 3 was about opinions and understanding of the operation of community colleges with 15 questions of ordinal scale and section 4 was about perspectives on legitimacy and support for community colleges with 10 questions of ordinal scale. In addition, in-depth interview semi-structural open-ended questions covered informants' authority, role, profession, knowledge and experience in community colleges and the institute; their participation, involvement and ideas regarding the administration of community colleges and how such involvement contribute any policies, strategies, and practices; their opinions about education management that yielded the best economic and social outcomes for the provinces; their opinions about the economic and social impacts of the education management of this community college; expectations from the education management in the community colleges; experiences and participations in any channels for following up, monitoring and promoting success of the administration of community colleges; experiences and expectations regarding human resources management; expectations and satisfactions about the graduates. Then, the study focused questions for group interviews clarified the previous responds with more reasons and examples from other 10 key informants divided into 3 groups of mixed stakeholders for each community college so that theoretical framework could be examined thoroughly.

Quantitative data analysis was operated by descriptive as well as inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis is an explanation of the management approaches of community colleges and the involvement of stakeholders in their operations and outcomes. It included the significance levels and relationship

patterns of management approaches by both inside and outside stakeholders on the outcomes. Descriptive statistics are used to summarize the key features of the data, which include percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation. Then correlation analysis was used to determine the highest possible linear relationship between groups of independent variables and dependent variables. Independent Variables included legitimacy according to regulations, social legitimacy, government support, support from private organizations and public support. Dependent Variables included performance according to government policies, performance according to strategic goals, implementation of strategic plans, operational practices and key activities related to education management and activities. The findings from the prior analysis were used to refine the following interview questions. Consequently, the analysis of qualitative data critically examined the data separately for each community college by chronologies of critical events, content pattern matching, and explanation building in order to confirm or falsify the preliminary proposition. Subsequently, a comparative analysis of the data between Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College will be conducted and hence inferential generalization could be made.

With regards to ethical considerations, this study strictly adhered to international principles and relevant regulations concerning privacy and consent of each respondent and every key informant from data collection onto the presentation of research findings. (Chuto, 2008, pp. 260-271; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013, pp. 1892-1894; Yin, 2016, pp. 41-47). Letter of consent and written explanation of this study were properly presented and well accepted by all respondents and key informants of the investigation. In addition, this research approach and methodology had already approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee, Panyapiwat Institute of Management before the conduct of this research.

## **Results**

Data collection and analysis from questionnaires of personnel and outside stakeholders included 250 inside individuals, accounting for 60.8 percent, and 161 outside individuals, accounting for 39.2 percent. The statistical results are shown in table 1.



**Table 1.** Pearson Correlation Coefficient of the Survey

	R (Inside Stakeholders)			R (Outside Stakeholders)		
	Expectations and Attitudes	Opinion and Understanding	Legitimacy and Support Perspectives	Expectations and Attitudes	Opinion and Understanding	Legitimacy and Support Perspectives
Pearson Correlation	1	.643**	.540**	1	.675**	.597**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0		0	0
N	250	250	250	161	161	161
Pearson Correlation	.643**	1	.640**	.675**	1	.676**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0	0		0
N	250	250	250	161	161	161
Pearson Correlation	.540**	.640**	1	.597**	.676**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		0	0	
N	250	250	250	161	161	161

From the table, data can be interpreted accordingly. Expectations and attitudes toward the performance of community colleges by internal individuals are moderately correlated ( $r = .540^{**}$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.000) with their views on legitimacy and support for the community college. Similarly, expectations and attitudes toward the performance of community colleges by external individuals are moderately correlated ( $r = .597^{**}$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.000) with their views on legitimacy and support for the community college. In addition, opinions and understanding of the operations of community colleges by internal individuals are moderately correlated ( $r = .640^{**}$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.000) with their views on legitimacy and support for the community college. Likewise, opinions and understanding of the operations of community colleges by external individuals are moderately correlated ( $r = .676^{**}$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.000) with their views on legitimacy and support for the community college. Consequently, it can be concluded that the opinions and understanding of community college operations by both internal and external stakeholders are moderately aligned with their views on legitimacy and support for the community college. Additionally, expectations and attitudes toward the performance of community colleges by both internal and external stakeholders are moderately aligned with their views on legitimacy and support for the community college.

Data collection and analysis from in-depth individual interviews, group focused interviews, and some relevantly investigated documents comprised from 36 inside stakeholders, accounting for 73.5 percent, and 13 outside stakeholders, accounting for 27.5 percent. The qualitative analysis results are summarized as follows:

1) Mid-level workforce strategy of Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College

1.1) The national mid-level workforce strategy by the government did not align with local contexts and problems because it was a one-size-fits-all strategy for entire country, without considering differing economic and social conditions of regions, provinces, and localities.

1.2) The implementation of the national mid-level workforce strategy by Institute of Community Colleges involved a minimal participation from stakeholders. Only representatives of experts, local organizations, individuals, and community college personnel appointed as official board members of the Institute and Community College Council participated in setting goals, plans, and resource allocation. The driving and monitoring of goals and indicators were set by the central government without involvement from other stakeholders at all.

2) Management of Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College

2.1) Managements aligned with national workforce strategy under the supervision of Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation and the legal administrative authority of the Institute through hierarchical command in official bureaucratic system.

2.2) Managements aligned with local contexts and problems in fulfilling duties without exceeding limits set by laws, regulations, policies of the parent agency, and the chain of command. The community colleges could manage in a way that suits the situation and community cooperation, requiring leadership and organizational and local commitment from personnel to avoid bureaucratic constraints.

2.3) Managements involved occasional short-term cooperations with stakeholders through formal arrangements and agreements in both formal and informal collaborations in community service and development, such as vocational and skills training, production innovation development, and improving community quality of life. There were also cooperations in credit transfer with undergraduate institutions and in the establishment of Sukhothai Community College involving various stakeholders.

3) Teaching and learning managements at Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College

3.1) Teaching and learning managements met higher education standards and aligned with Institute of Community Colleges policies. Faculties developed lesson plans according to higher education standards and conducted teaching according to these plans. Occupational and skills training courses, and academic and maintenance services were also run in line with the policies and budget of the Institute of Community Colleges.

3.2) Teaching and learning management were tailored to local contexts and problems. Phichit and Phang-nga Community Colleges adapted teaching to diverse learners, family backgrounds, and varied experiences in the classroom. Faculties developed occupational and skills training courses and academic and maintenance services to address local situations.

3.3) Teaching and learning managements involved cooperations from various local organizations and individuals, both formally and informally. The cooperations were more of a partnership than collaboration. The cooperations in teaching comes from private and government organizations, with short-term and temporal participations from students, alumni, entrepreneurs, and local government agencies in organizing occupational and skills training courses and academic services and maintenance for the community. Parents and families of students also closely collaborated with teachers to solve learning problems of their students.

## Discussion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the goals of the national mid-level workforce development strategy, set in a one-size-fits-all manner, do not thoroughly consider the differing economic and social conditions and the specific local issues that were the basis for establishing the first 10 community colleges in 2002 and later elevating them to Institute of Community Colleges starting from 2015. Moreover, it does not genuinely involve both internal and external stakeholders in the collaboration, both legally and practically, making it unable to meet the current and long-term workforce production needs of Phichit and Phang-nga provinces, and of Thailand as a whole.

Community colleges have the potential to be sources of high-skilled human resource development and valuable social capital for the strength of the economy and the sustainability of Thai society if they can establish broad and continuous local partnerships, similar to those in the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2022). The researcher synthesizes the above

conceptual framework into a reform guide for the country's sub-baccalaureate higher education system according to these objectives.

The associate degree of higher education system must move beyond the principles and practices of NPM and adopt those of NPG, specifically Collaborative Governance. This involves connecting stakeholders into a network and empowering them to directly participate in the operations of community colleges. It requires transformational leaders to enable the bureaucracy to facilitate the implementation of the national mid-level workforce development strategy. The development of multiple processes to create policies and management strategies for community colleges should involve stakeholders in jointly setting, implementing, and monitoring these policies and strategies (Yi, 2018; Lindsay et al., 2020; Backhaus & Vogel, 2002).

Leadership empathetic to create supportive organizational environment demonstrates by providing resources to personnel and prioritizing student success, fostering a working environment conducive to collaborative relationships, and organizing learning activities that specifically care for students. Consistent actions ensure that leaders, personnel, students and the engaged stakeholders are ready to implement public policies and develop education management that recognized and ensure public value of the communities (Scull et al., 2020).

Externally, the stakeholder network with community colleges in the innovation ecosystem should include entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, businesses, government agencies, and higher education institutions (Budden & Murray, 2022). These should seek common goals to enable collaboration throughout the educational management process, benefiting all parties. Additionally, cooperation in sharing resources across organizations permanently can reduce uncertainties in educational management amidst changing economic and social environments (Ketokivi, Schroeder, & Turkulainen, 2006; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Friedman & Miles, 2006; Duangsri, 2020). Bureaucracy and leaders at all levels must seek and implant values meaningful to all stakeholder groups (common good) in a balanced and acceptable manner (Schrage et al., 2021), thereby granting full legitimacy and support to community colleges.

When the management of community college takes into account of changing external environment and public needs (Public Value) in setting goals, implementing actions, and evaluating outcomes, the role of leadership in strategic management will evolve to ensure continuous stakeholder collaboration (Jensen, 2017; Ready et al., 2020). Especially in the digital age, public (and all) organizations are not isolated; untapped resources and potential personnel exist in the external environment and networks. Therefore, an organization should be viewed as an open social unit. Consequently, the organizational performance can be resulted from co-innovation among internal and external stakeholders (Miao et al., 2017), necessitating a serious institutional reform of the community college system in terms of internal authority structures and interaction patterns with external entities, both formal and informal in the near future.

## Conclusions

In response to the first research question, the performance and educational management of Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College had been effective according to government strategies and policies (NPM). However, they lacked flexibility in response to economic and social conditions at administrative level, resulting in long-term inefficiency they maintained flexibility at operational level in teaching in response to the needs of students and academic service recipients, the outcome which was considered short-termly effective. This was consistent with quantitative research findings on the expectations and attitudes of both inside and outside stakeholders towards the performance and education management of community colleges, which were at a high to very high level. In other words, stakeholders, both inside and outside, had high to very high expectations and positive attitudes that the community college operations aligned with local needs based on their own experiences (short and medium-term efficiency). However, the legitimacy and support from both inside and outside stakeholders towards the community colleges' operations were at a high level (long-term efficiency). This resulted in a moderate relationship between expectations and attitudes towards performance and the legitimacy and support for community college operations. In summary, the educational management of Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College responded to local needs only in the short term. They adhered to educational standards, planning, compliance with regulations, and resource allocation from central bureaucratic system. Therefore, it can be concluded that the national mid-level workforce strategy starting at the local level has hardly achieved long-term results.

In response to the second research question, setting goals, planning, and resource allocation primarily dictated by the central bureaucracy made it inflexible to respond to current and future economic and social changes. Because the personnel at Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College, while having freedom in their practices, must operate under policies and budgets set forth by the Institute. Various stakeholder groups participated accordingly as personnel who felt committed and eager to developed themselves cannot make any initiatives; students, families, and communities were still unable to propose goals, plans, and resource allocation based on the realities, and so projects were carried out without continuity and integration of required resources in the long term; and private and public organizations did not view their collaboration with community colleges as to meets their respective missions and objectives. The qualitative findings here did not entirely align with the quantitative research results on the opinions and understanding of both internal and external stakeholders regarding their level of participation in the management of community colleges, which is only high. Also, the opinions and understanding of internal stakeholders about their level of participation are at a high to very high level. However, the legitimacy and support from both internal and external stakeholders towards the community colleges' operations are only high. In other words, according to the understanding of most internal stakeholders, there was a view that they could still participate more in the educational management of the community colleges than they currently do. There were still some things that can be implemented but have not yet had the opportunity. Meanwhile, outside stakeholders understood that the "co-operations" they provide to the community colleges might have been "collaborations," as these collaborations still involved long-term integration of goals, plans, and resources. The participation of organizations still depended on the central government or under jurisdiction of the respective superior organizations. This resulted in a moderate relationship between the opinions and understanding of stakeholders about their participation and the legitimacy and support for the community colleges' operations. In summary, all stakeholder groups involved in the operations of Phichit Community College and Phang-nga Community College within limited scope and channels. At the individual level, there was a regular short-term collaboration with the community colleges. However, at the administrative level, it tends to be occasional cooperation rather than continuous collaboration.

### **Conflict of Interest**

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