

## Senior Volunteers: A Human Capital in Thai Society

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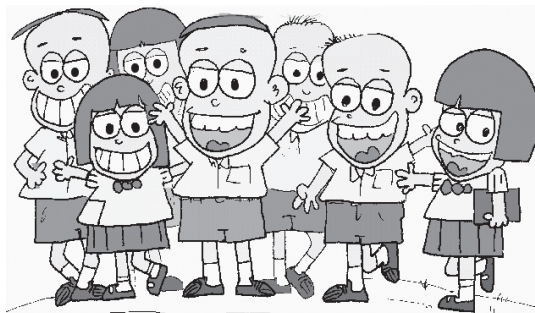
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### บทคัดย่อ

การประยุกต์ใช้หลักการสร้างทฤษฎีฐานราก (The Grounded Theory) ในการศึกษาครั้งนี้ได้ค้นพบองค์ความรู้ที่สำคัญและมีประโยชน์เกี่ยวกับการเป็นอาสาสมัครของวุฒิอาสา (Thai Senior Volunteers) ต่อสังคมไทยและต่อวุฒิอาสา การศึกษาวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่ออธิบายมุมมองหรือโลกทัศน์ของวุฒิอาสาเกี่ยวกับการเป็นอาสาสมัคร เลือกผู้ให้ข้อมูลแบบเฉพาะเจาะจงและแบบเชิงทฤษฎี (Theoretical Sampling) จากวุฒิอาสาที่มีประสบการณ์ในการเป็นอาสาสมัครของธนาคารสมอง (The Brain Bank) จำนวน

33 คน เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลด้วยวิธีสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกแบบหลักการสร้างทฤษฎีฐานราก (The Grounded Theory Interviewing) ด้วยแนวคำถามการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกแบบกึ่งโครงสร้าง (Semi-structured interview guideline) วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยมือ (Manual) และด้วยโปรแกรมคอมพิวเตอร์ ค้นพบของการศึกษานำเสนอในรูปแบบของแบบจำลองที่อธิบายกระบวนการในการเป็นวุฒิอาสาที่ประสบความสำเร็จ *Success of Volunteering as Active Aging Model (S-VVA Model)*.



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## Abstract

The grounded theory strategy applied in this research made a significant contribution to the knowledge of the important roles senior volunteers play in Thai society and revealed the benefits to the society, as well as to the volunteers themselves. This study applied a qualitative research approach in order to assemble and assess descriptions of Thai senior volunteers. Purposive sampling and theoretical sampling was used to identify 33 participants who had experience of volunteering at the Brain Bank. Data were collected from in-depth, semi-structured interviews of the participants. Grounded theory interviewing played a significant role in this study as it is a powerful methodology for the purpose of building theory from data. Based on the ATLAS.ti software program and manual coding into categories, the findings are presented in a tentative model, Success of Volunteering as Active Aging Model (S-VVA Model).



**Keywords :** Volunteering, Senior volunteer, Elderly, Human Capital, Grounded Theory, Thailand

## Introduction

Senior volunteers play an important role in the social and economic life of Thailand. They are increasingly recognized as a valuable resource for communities, organizations and individuals. There are more than 3,000 older Thai adults with relevant occupations who have a great deal of knowledge, skills and experiences, and often volunteer to support the country (Brian Bank, 2010). As retirement age increases, so do the expected returns of investing in human capital of older workers. In the following text the researcher will look at some findings on the link between volunteering as active aging as a tool for national development. There are relevant issues for policy making and the construction of comparative indicators to support policy.

In the study of Grano, Zelli, and Violna (2008) the importance of older people as a source of volunteering has long been recognized in several industrialized countries. Older people represent ideal candidates for this type of activity, not only for the societal benefits that accrue through volunteer service, but also because of the benefits they could gain from being engaged in volunteering. Indeed, there is considerable evidence linking older people's volunteering activity to higher levels of life satisfaction (Onyx & Warburton, 2003). A longitudinal study of Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, and Tang (2003) has confirmed the positive relations between volunteering and various measures of well-being, relations that remain significant even after controlling for differences in health

status, age, and socioeconomic level. Moreover, there are some studies suggesting that volunteering is also related to positive functioning and to reduced mortality risk in those who volunteer even when other types of activities such as physical activity, everyday activities, or having hobby. These are taken into account (Shmotkin, Blumstein, & Modan, 2003).

Ester and Kerkhofs (2008) concluded that one of the most discussed alternative policy options is to promote that older employees work longer, even after the age of 65. Keeping workers longer in the workforce is an increasingly popular labor market policy in order to combat demographic trends such as the ageing of its workforce. However, the ageing of its populations and the globalization of its member states are becoming major issues for ASEAN. There is a challenge imply that most ASEAN countries particularly Thailand have to play the economic game with older players, as the proportion of population ageing in Thailand is increasing much faster than in many developed countries (Mujahid, 2006). The implications of Thailand becoming an aging society include serious problems, such as: (1) working-aged persons will have to work harder to support the elderly; (2) many Thai workers have a low base of knowledge, and low skills, which will cause problems in terms of national productivity and economic growth; and (3) public service problems, such as health care services, inadequate retirement pensions and social security benefits, lack of doctors to service the aging population (The NESDB, 2007).

In order to cope with these problems, the Thai government may need to take urgent action to support the elderly, who have the knowledge, skills, and experience with active aging, so that they can support their communities and the nation.

One significant initiative was that a Brain Bank was created in 2001 by Her Majesty, the Queen. She is interested in older Thai adults who have a great deal of knowledge, skills and experience, and often volunteer to support the country. At present, there were over 3,000 elderly volunteers in 21 occupations in the Brain Bank (The NESDB, 2009).

After reviewing the research studies and policy documents that are related to volunteering, it was found that only a few studies have addressed the perceptions of elderly volunteers in Thailand. This study will fill the knowledge gap and assist policymakers to face these potentially serious problems with the benefit of empirical research findings. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assemble and assess descriptions of volunteering, as perceived by senior volunteer who are members of the Brain Bank who are “VUT ASA”.

### Research Questions:

1. What are the pathways that lead elderly Thais to be volunteers?
2. What are elderly Thais respond to opportunities to make more significant contributions as volunteers?

## Research Design & Strategy

In developing the strategy, the researcher needs to consider its informational adequacy, efficiency and an array of ethical considerations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Creswell (2007) stated that strategies of inquiry provide specific direction to form a research design. For this research, a grounded theory is used as the strategy.

Grounded theory is “*a specific methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the purpose of building theory from data*” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.1). According to Creswell (2007) there are two popular approaches to implementing grounded theory, the systematic procedure of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and the constructivist approach of Charmaz (2000, 2006). For this study, the constructing of grounded theory that is described in the constructivist writing of Chamaz (2006) was most suitable. This approach does not study a single process or core category as in the systematic procedure of Strauss and Corbin approach. Instead, Kathy Chamaz advocates a social constructivist perspective that includes emphasizing diverse local worlds, multiple realities, and the complexities of particular worlds, views and action (Creswell, 2007).

## Data Collection and Analysis

The interview was conducted with 33 participants. All participants were active members of the Brain Bank. The number of respondents was determined by completeness or saturation of the information provided in the interviews. The

saturation of the information occurs when no more new information is learned from respondents. Saturation is used to indicate when to stop gathering data. However, the criterion for judging when to stop data collection under the principles of grounded theory is quite different. Goulding (2002, p.68) explained that *“the researcher must open the idea of modification, and look for patterns in what is not said, as well as what is. Only when there are no new pattern, or possible concepts, emerging from the data, should the researcher leave the field”*. Corbin & Strauss (2008) called “Theoretical saturation”.

The researcher in this study used both ATLAS.ti and manual coding in hard copies of interview transcripts. Manual coding was employed at the beginning, and then the ATLAS.ti program was used for a more refined process of analyzing text and image data. All the codes of each respondent’s interview transcripts were reviewed and compared and code merges were made when it was found that one or more codes had similar meaning and could be merged together. Then code families were established. The code families were populated by grouping all the codes that fell into a similar category. The ATLAS.ti software program allowed concept maps linking all the codes in each family to be constructed.

### Rigor Criteria

Three dimensions of rigor or trustworthiness were applied in this study: (1) An audit trail of this

study was established at the early states of this research. It included relevant data and information from the start of the preparation of the research proposal. Items were revised and updated until the end of the research project; (2) Triangulation of data sources was applied in this research. The technique of comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different time and by different means within this research was applied. This was done through comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view. In addition, documents and other written evidence including pictures that could corroborate what participants reported, such as newsletters, project documents, yearly reports, individual reports complemented the interview data; (3) Authenticity checks conducted in this study included: obtaining informed consent from all participants, accuracy checks, and additional interviews with certain participants. Informed consent from all participants was obtained. An accuracy check for translation of the Thai version of the transcript into the English language was also conducted.

### Findings, Discussion and Theory Development

The findings were initially open codes and then developed as concepts and categories. The interview was conducted with 33 participants. The classification of participant is displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1 Classification of participants**

<b>Occupational</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
Senior Medical Doctor	5
Senior Dentist	1
Senior Pharmacist	1
Senior Nurse	2
Senior Governor	2
Senior Engineer	2
Senior Educator in Higher Education	6
Senior Educator in Primary & High School	4
Senior Public Enterprise	1
Senior Policeman	1
Senior Agriculture	4
Senior Musician & Artist	2
Local Expert or called ‘Local Wisdom’	2

## Response to the Research Questions

### “What are the pathways that lead elderly Thais to be volunteers?”

Two categories of findings were integrated to answer this question: the unique qualifications of volunteers and the decision to become a volunteer. The findings revealed that there are over 21 occupations represented in the Brain Bank, such as health care, education, military, agriculture, engineer and business. There is a unique qualification of volunteers. Most of participants who are volunteer members of the Brain Bank were former government officers who had high ranking. With over thirty years of work experience, they have more fulfilled knowledge, skills, ability, and life experience than any other age group (The NESDB, 2007).

The unique qualification of the participants could be explained by four interrelated themes which are knowledge, skills, abilities, and life experience.

Before becoming the volunteers of the brain Bank all participants all shared the similar past experiences that they all are former the government officers who had been through several kinds of experience with an average of more than thirty years. To explain the uniqueness of the volunteers of the Brain Bank several scholars (Schultz; 1971, Becker; 1964, Davenport;1999, Tan; 1999, Schuller; 2001, Kim; 2006) refer to the experience of the participants which include knowledge, skills, and abilities as human capital. Knowledge, skill and abilities (KSA) that exist within each of the participants of this present study is unique. It is not only the unique of knowledge, skill and abilities but also the high quality of all those attribute. KSA of each participant was determined from their formal education and informal experiences or through their lives and working experience. Some participants earned their KSA and volunteer according to their KSA, while others volunteer in other areas of their expertise,



but their KSA is still acceptable and valuable for their society. The KSA of each participant enabled them to increase productivity and earnings, which in turn improves the productivity of the organizations in which they work and the societies in which they live.

The model of Davenport (1999) refines the definition of human capital by breaking it into the elements of ability, behavior and effort. He stated that ability means “*proficiency in a set of activities or forms of work. Ability comprises three subcomponents, knowledge, Skill, and Talent*” (P.19).

The participants of this present study not only have knowledge, skill and abilities that are valuable for them personally, but also the behavior and effort that they are willing to share with others, making this group of people’s KSA, as so-called human capital, even more valuable.

Melancon (2007) also stated that KSAs are developed when employees receive the necessary resources to aid their learning. Other resources for developing KSAs include informal, or self-initiated, activities. For instance, individuals develop KSAs through activities, such as talking with others, collaborating with others, observing others, and sharing resources. The participants for this present study had earned all kinds of characteristic of human capital and they still gain more of their qualification through their group as the volunteer for the Brain Bank, as the results showed that during their volunteer work they all shared, collaborated and searched for more hands to serve their society. As

one participant shared she could learn from her friend while being the volunteer of the Brain Bank.

*//...As a volunteer, I have only my experiences. I have not graduated in high education. I graduated only in secondary school. I like to see many exhibitions at IMPACT Exhibition and Convention Center, Bangkok International Trade & Exhibition Centre, Queen Sirikit National Convention Center. I watch the innovations about mechanic and other innovation. I am self access learner, so I am studying volunteer being. You may know that there are 8 subcommittee volunteers in Nontaburi province. I go to work with every subcommittee. I wanted to help them and gain more knowledge from the groups as they are high education and more experience ... // (P23)*

There are three interesting points on the decision to become volunteer that emerged in this study: (1) encouragement from the Queen, (2) helping Society, and (3) happy to contribute.

The Brain Bank was established following Her Majesty the Queen’s speech in 2000. She said on her birthday, August 12 of that year, she had the idea that there was an important story in which the Brain Bank took people who retired and who still had the knowledge and ability to help their communities by working for the common interest of Thailand. This was the beginning of the Brain Bank.

The current Queen, as part of her duties as being a royal wife, also dedicates her tireless efforts for the betterment of the Thai people and the entire

nation. For instance, she has led the revival of traditional handcrafts as an alternative source for income. The Queen spends much time travelling to rural areas to find sources of supplementary income in the off-season or in the area affected by drought or floods. As a tribute to Her Majesty's boundless contributions for the happiness of the entire population and the prosperity of the national as a whole, her birthday, August 12, is now a public holiday. Thai people join all royal and devoted subjects of the kingdom in wishing Her Majesty the Queen a long life of good health and happiness (Chadchaidee, 2004). One of the participants expressed that he volunteered:

*// ... Because of Her Majesty the Queen's idea. She was, at that time, about 68 years old and said that those retired citizen who have full of experiences, skills and knowledge. It will be better to bring out their abilities to do other beneficial to communities than doing nothing at home. I still remember the day the Queen gave a speech at Chitralada palace that she will be the leader of 68 years old citizens who were willing to work for the public. So as we know she has been working for us for all her entire life, so this is my decision with royalty and highest honor.../// (P8)*

Another participant expressed that:

*// ... When I am a volunteer of the brain bank, then, I have an idea that I have to do the best, for the Queen and the nation. Therefore, if there is any meeting or seminar, I will not be absent even*

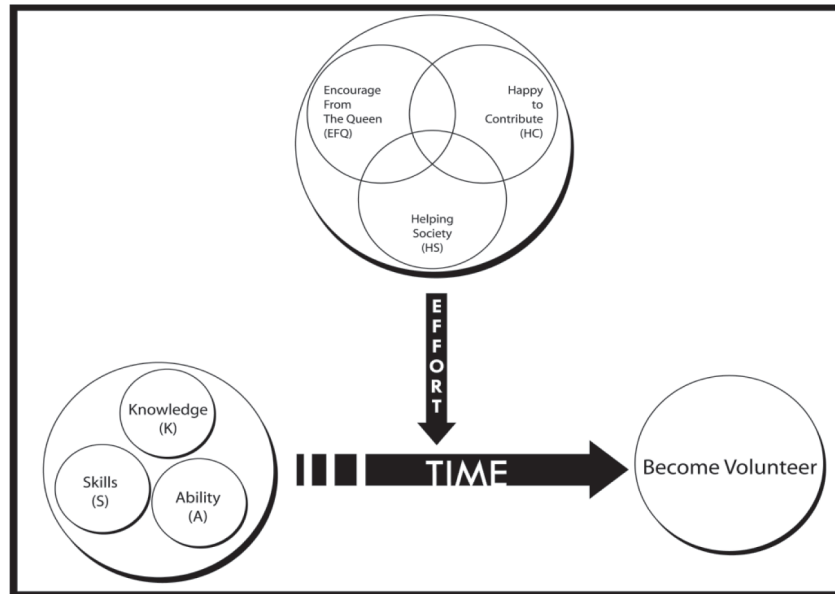
*I am busy in anything. As there is a seminar at Bangkok or hotel, I still go there ... //(P9)*

This theme draws attention to the point that all participants quite clearly feel honored to be a part of the Queen's project. Another decision is that all participants expressed that they want to help society. It was very interesting that all participants wanted to help the society. Some participants expressed the view that they will continue working as volunteer until they die. Joungtrakul (2008, p. 29) concluded that "one of the most important concepts in Thai culture is helping each other. The helping mind is instilled in Thai people and they help others without expecting any return or any compensation". Participants are satisfied that they are able to help. They will also be a volunteer somewhere else if people or any organizations ask for help. They are happy to contribute. One of the most important points that emerged here is that the motivation of the Queen to maintain the abilities of Thai senior citizens.

In summary, knowledge, skill, and abilities or human capital, together with the inspiration from the respected person of the Queen, is the starting point for the pathway of becoming the volunteer for the Brain Bank for this present study. Then, the participants all shared their feeling of willingness to help and happy to share for their society. The summary of the findings is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Pathways that lead elderly Thai to be a volunteer



**Source:** Generated by Saratid Sakulkoo, 2009.

***“What are elderly Thais responses to opportunities to make more significant contributions as volunteers?”***

In responding to this research question, the benefits of volunteering will be discussed. Other findings pertaining to opportunities to make more significant contributions as volunteers are also integrated to answer the research question.

The members of the Brain Bank felt good about themselves for being able to repay or help society and their country. The volunteers felt proud of themselves. They felt honored to be a volunteer, especially the volunteer of the honorable organization like the Brain Bank that has been established by

the most respected people, the Queen herself. One participant expressed that being the volunteer of the Brain Bank is very special, since the name of the volunteer of the Brain Bank in Thai is “VUT”. This particular word in Thai has a special meaning that does not mean being a regular volunteer. It means honorable or invited volunteer. This word is used for the people that are respected by others and will be assigned to an individual who has been recognized nationwide. As he/she expressed that:

*// ... When we are elderly then they give us the honor. They call us VUT. VUT is honor word that they give us. I can feel the honor that they give us. I never thought that I would have a*

*chance to help and work here. My work before I retired is working in slums, in the communities. When I look back I feel that what the honor I can work here and do what I have the expertise on. It's good to be able to meet, be able to responsible for the project. Everyone is happy to be able to help. They are very willing to help ...// (P2)*

In addition, other good feelings toward themselves, such as feeling fresh, full in one's heart, good inside, good that they are still valuable for society, worthy, benefiting life and family, happy to contribute, and dignity of human are the expressions that the participants used to describe the benefit of being the volunteers of the Brain Bank. These feelings would lead to more opportunities to contribute to work as volunteers. Other benefits that the participants stated were the feeling of being glad to meet a variety of people, more chance to meet various groups, establish network, have a chance to serve society, have a chance to be a giver, and have a chance to share ideas and knowledge. Benefits that has already been mentioned, such as having good health, having good emotions, still strong and healthy, still thinking continuously, work happily and live happily, work well with healthy mind, be a volunteer good for health, and healthy physically and mentally. The last benefit is significant in being able to contribute as volunteers of the Brain Bank who were able to make merit as one of the important practices as a good Buddhist, as one means of cultivating good.

Several previous studies indicate that there are real health benefits for older persons who volunteer. While researchers agree that additional research is needed, all also agree that volunteering improves the overall quality of life for older persons, because it gives meaning and purpose to their lives. It also offers specific benefits, such as: (1) studies show that older persons who volunteer have fewer medical problems than the senior population in general; (2) volunteer activities help older persons stay physically active; and (3) volunteering helps keep the brain engaged, which helps protect the memory as people age (U.S. Administration on Aging, 2007). Takeo Ogawa (JICA, 2007) emphasized that the elderly people are not only a beneficiary of social services, but also a provider of social services, and the aging population does not only increase the cost, but also offers opportunities to the society.

*// ... Feeling so good that I still have worth for society even though I am retired, so that it time for me to devote and share my skill and knowledge to our society. Let us see how much I can do. Now I'm still a volunteer but accident this period I didn't join the meeting for 2 times because I had an accident. I fell on the floor right here (1<sup>st</sup> floor at home). So I cannot drive my car. Now, I feel better after recover ... // (P5)*

Another contribution to human capital is the positive outcome of the implementation of the projects that the participants work with contribution of volunteer improve the outcome of important projects, such as the school health project that was able to be the

part of children's health development, is a good example.

*// ... Nowadays the local government provides us with a budget, since they realize and they also part of the school committee. Like in Chiangmai, the water tank is so old and it is rusty. We go to the school and recommend them to have the water quality checked. It is obvious that there is rust substance in the water so the local government realized that their kids also drink this kind of water so they collect money from the community, 100 and 200 baht per house to buy a new tank. And also when we have a meeting at the school, some wealthy people not the head man they joined the meeting and donate drinking water for the school...// (P2)*

Data pertaining to barriers were examined in order to look for the recommendations from the participants when they were talking about those barriers. Those recommendations from the participants could be divided into two sections as follows: for the Brain Bank organization itself and to the volunteers.

For the Brain Bank, to make more significant contributions as volunteers, the participants recommended that the organization that is responsible for the volunteers should be the organization that is able to make a good network. It was suggested that the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security is the most appropriate ministry because it has an organization chart at the provincial level for every province. The participants stated that it would be a lot easier

than at present where the Brain Bank is under the NESDB and there is no other office to be the network. If the administration of the Brain Bank is handled by another ministry then there will be supporting staff to assist the volunteers of the Brain Bank in terms of paper work and collaborating work. Then the volunteers themselves would be able to make more valuable contributions to the projects themselves. As one of the participants recommended:

*// ... I think the government should take it very seriously. I don't think Sa Pha Pat, the National Economic and Social Development Board (the NESDB) is the right organization to responsible for it. It should be the ministry of ... Um ... some kind of social like the ministry of Social Development and Human Security. The NESDB (Sa Pha Pat) is the brain, it is not the organization that will responsible for anything that need a lot of activities ... //(P7)*

Another recommendation made by the participants was the way to increase the opportunity to contribute, as volunteers of the Brain Bank, is to give more recognition to the volunteers. The recognition that was mentioned by the participants is giving some kind of identity such as the identification card for others to recognize that this individual is an honorable volunteer of the Brain Bank. At present there is nothing to tell who is the volunteer of the Brain Bank.

*// ... I felt our network is vigorous. I still make network or work in people section informal style more than in a bureaucratic system due to we're fed up with a bureaucratic system. I try to find*

*the way to adore them(volunteer members). This is a kind of recognition or identity or bonus, and shows them that government is generous and gives them a reward for their devotion. I asked the governor to make a special card. In 2007, I told the governor to seal logo. He is very generous and he told that I will seal the logo with my signature for them. It is the nucleus of the province. Each district has about 7-10 persons, and each one level has subcommittee. Most of them are the head of the club working as committee in district level. The committee in province is selected from district ... //(P3)*

In summary, two main benefits of volunteering were viewed as significant, (1) the benefits to the volunteers themselves and (2) the benefits of the outcomes of the volunteers' implementation to the society. A recommendation about the placement of the organization that is responsible for the volunteers under another ministry is another means to increase the opportunity to contribute as the volunteers. Giving the recognition to the volunteers of the Brain Bank is another means to increase the opportunity to contribute. A summary of those benefits and recommendations is presented in Figure 2.

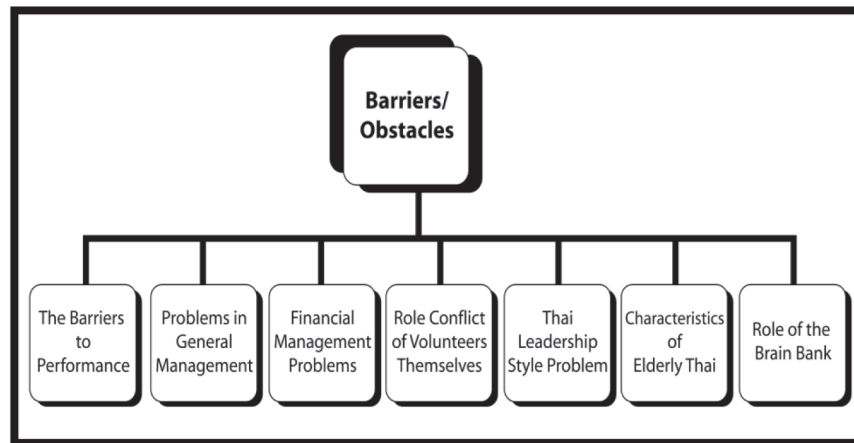
**Figure 2** Benefits and Recommendation for Opportunity to Contribute as Volunteer



**Source:** Generated by Saratid Sakulkoo, 2009.

The researcher was able to distinguish seven distinct barriers /obstacles to increase volunteering. The obstacles to performance were general management, financial management, organization, role conflict of volunteer themselves, leadership style, characteristics of Thai elderly, and the role of the Brain Bank. Summary of the barriers are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3** Seven distinct barriers to volunteers' performance



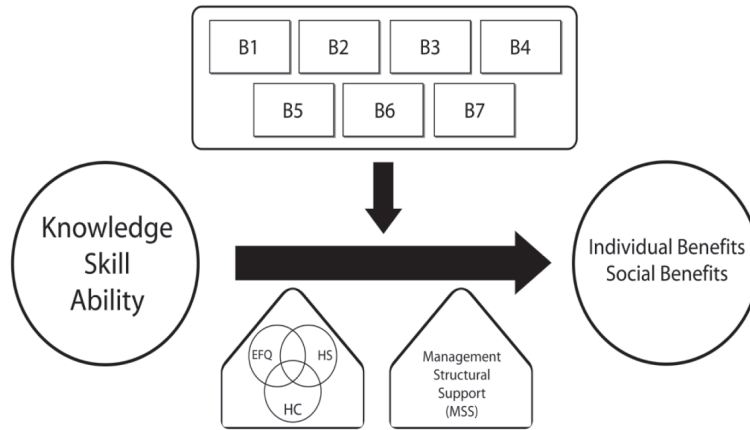
**Source:** Generated by Saratid Sakulkoo, 2009.

### **An Independently Proposed Model for Volunteering as Active Aging in Elderly Thais (VAA Model)**

The researcher wants to propose the model that has been drawn from the findings of the present study. It is apparent that the elderly owned their knowledge, skill, and abilities. The elderly also have a willingness of helping and sharing their knowledge, skill, and abilities to their society through the volunteering as they want to repay to their home

land. However, the benefits of volunteering have been obstructed by the barriers. If some motivators are motivated such as the motivation from the respected people, the realization of the worthiness of being able to help the society and joy in sharing, and the barriers have been solved, then this valuable group of human resources will become a great deal of human capital. Therefore, the early model of volunteering as active aging is proposed as follows (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4** The Early Proposed Model for Volunteering as Active Aging in Elderly Thais (VAA Model)



B1-B7 = Barriers, EFQ = Encouragement from the Queen, HS = Helping Society, HC = Happy to Contribute, MSS = Management Structural Support, VAA = Volunteering as Active Aging

**Source:** Generated by Saratid Sakulkoo, 2009.

If the group of elderly that owned the KSAs has been motivated and the barriers of being the volunteers have been solved then volunteering will be promoted and benefits will be gained by the society and individually as illustrated in the proposed early model.

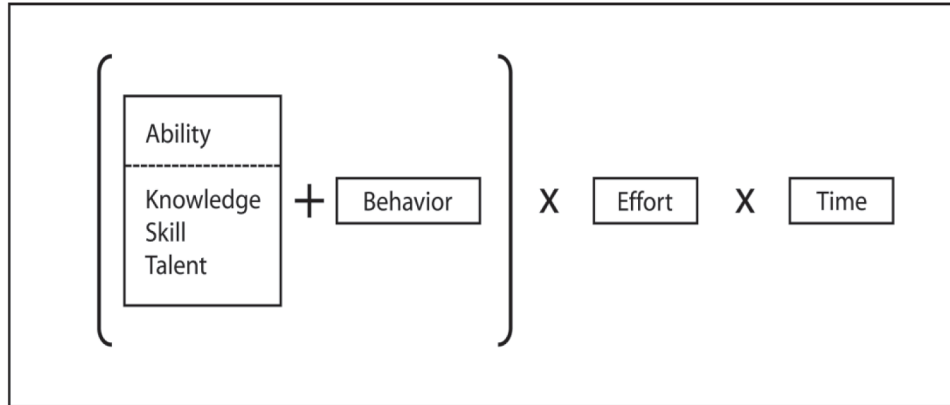
### **An Economic Model of Thai Human Capital**

The ability which is comprised of knowledge, skill and talent is named as human capital by Davenport (1999). Davenport refined the definition of human capital by breaking it into the elements of ability, behavior and effort. He stated that ability means “*proficiency in a set of activities or forms of work. Ability comprises three subcomponents, knowledge, Skill, and Talent*” (p.19) (see Figure 5).

As shown in Figure 5, Davenport concluded that ability comprises three subcomponents: (1) Knowledge, (2) Skill; and (3) Talent – the inborn faculty for performing a specific task. To consider the source of each aspect of ability, Davenport (1999) explained that skill combines knowledge and talent (and sometimes behavior) and is often specific to a particular job or set of task. Behavior mean observable ways of acting that contribute to accomplishment of a task. Effort is the conscious application of mental and physical resources toward a particular end. Effort activates skill, knowledge, talent and harnesses behavior to call forth human capital investment. Time refers to the chronological element of human capital investment: hour per day, year in a career, or any unit in between. In short, the total human capital investment = (ABILITY +



**Figure 5** Human Capital Investment



**Source:** Davenport, 1999, p.19.

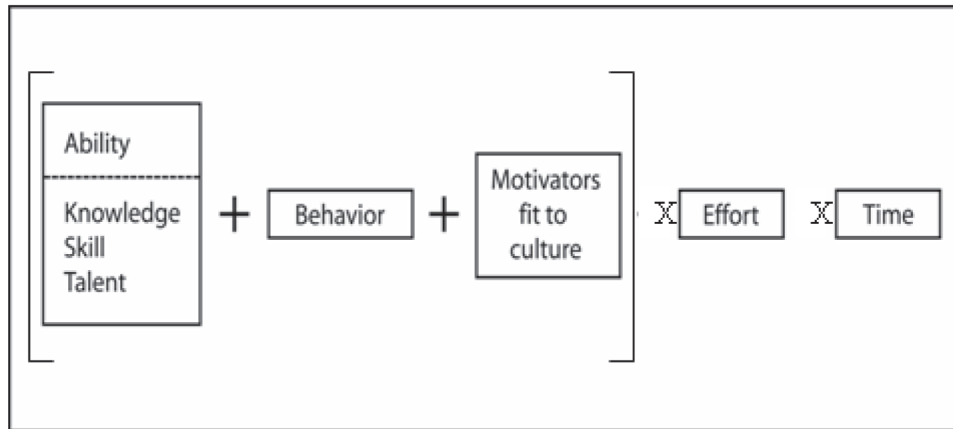
BEHAVIOR) x EFFORT x TIME. Davenport has refined the way human capital investment works by considering the conditions that predispose an individual to invest their human capital. There are two different but related ideas: commitment to an organization and engagement in a job. Commitment to an organization can come in several forms such as attitude toward the organization, on plans to maintain the employee in the organization (pension for instance), and loyalty based commitment (feel tied to the organization due to the loyalty). Engagement in a job is the twin concepts with the commitment to the job. Low level of commitment leads to turnover and decreased engagement in a job leads to high absenteeism. Commitment and engagement determine how much effort will be expended. Effort, in this equation, is analogous to rate of interest. Using these concepts, Davenport feels we can estimate an ROI (Return on Investment) for available human capital.

Results of the exploration of volunteering as perceived by elderly Thais who are members of the Brain Bank found that the uniqueness of the participants were similar to the human capital stated by Davenport (1999). Those characteristic were ability, knowledge, and skill that the participants owned since most of them were former government officers. Davenport suggested that the investment in human capital is ability plus behavior multiplied by effort and time. However, the researcher found some differences from the concepts of Davenport. The results from the present study indicated the importance of motivation and altruism. In addition recognition of the Thai way of life that adapted the Buddhist principle of cultivating good and applying “Bunkhun” concept in Thai culture do not appear in the model of Davenport. Therefore, because of these extra existing resources (i.e. culture) the Thai investment strategy of accruing human capital may be somewhat different from that of

other cultures. Thailand may not have to spend as much time as in other culture if the right efforts, such as the appropriate motivators, have been put into effect. If the model of Davenport were to be

adapted for Thai culture, it might be represented as follows (See Figure 6). However, further research is needed in order to refine the model as suggested below.

**Figure 6** Adding to Thai culture to Human Capital Investment



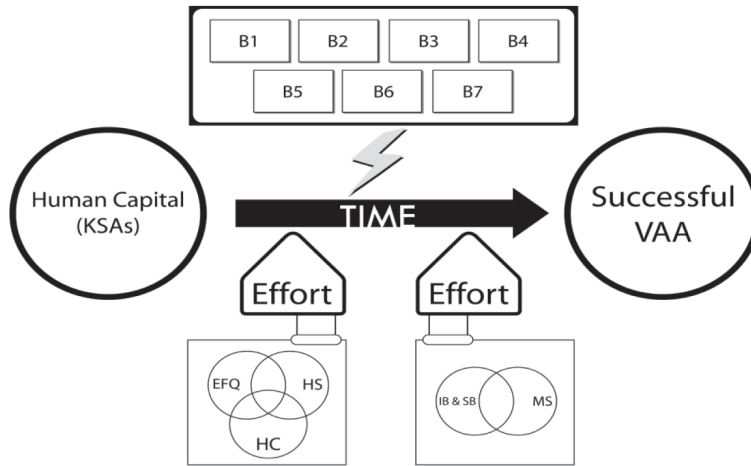
**Source:** Generated by Saratid Sakulkoo, 2009. Adapted from Davenport, 1999, p.19.

**The Proposed Model for Successful Volunteering as Active Aging in Elderly Thais (S-VAA Model)**

After reviewing Davenport’s model of human capital investment, the researcher proposes a model that has been developed from the findings of the present study. The KSAs earned by the elderly volunteers are regarded as human capital. The motivator can be added to “Effort”. There are two kinds of additional effort. The first kind is the encouragement from the Queen, the realization of the worthiness of being able to help the society,

and the joy in sharing. The second kind of effort is the recognition of individual benefit and the benefits to the society. The seven barriers are still named as barriers. The end results of being a volunteer is the successful volunteer. If the human capital has been motivated by the efforts, the efforts have been put forward, and the barriers have been solved, then the time involved in becoming a successful volunteer will be less. If not, it will take longer time, as in the proposed model for Successful Volunteering as Active Aging in Elderly Thais (S-VAA Model) (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7** The Proposed Model for Successful Volunteering as Active Aging in Elderly Thais (S-VAA Model)



Tentative Model of Successful VAA (S-VAA Model)

(B1-B7 = Barriers, EFQ = Encouragement from the Queen, HS = Helping Society, HC = Happy to Contribute, IB = Individual Benefit, SB = Social Benefit, MS = Management System, VAA = Volunteering as Active Aging)

### Implications for Practice

This section presents the implications for practice suggested by the findings of the research. The implications were divided into three sections: for the human resources development professional, for the Brain Bank, and for the policymakers.

**Implication for practice # 1: For the HRD Professional.** As the HRD professional who is responsible for making explicit all the KSAs of the elderly who will be the majority of the population in the near future, the first thing that the HRD professional needs to keep in mind is to value the KSAs possessed by the elderly. This value might

have been neglected in the past, or replaced by concepts, such as sympathy for their age. There is an urgent problem that ignoring the value of these KSAs of the elderly is a big loss for the nation. Not only do we lose their expertise, but also the budget to fix their health problems may increase if this group of elderly are ignored and become a burden to society because of being neglected or not having a channel to volunteer to fulfill their wishes and energies. The HRD professional needs to propose ways to promote the talents of the elderly in order to create the appropriate channels, such as the center of knowledge sharing, for the elderly to be able to volunteer.

**Implication for practice # 2: For the Brain Bank.** Looking at the proposed model again (See Figure 2), especially the boxes labeled “Effort”, there were two boxes of effort in the proposed model. The first part of effort was the motivators which were the motivation for the elderly to become volunteers. The findings indicated that encouragement from a respected person, the Queen, encouraged the elderly to realize the benefits of being volunteers (e.g., being able to help society and the feeling of being happy to contribute to society) was the motivation or effort for promoting volunteering. Another part of effort, in the second box, was the realization of the benefits of being a volunteer, such as feeling good toward themselves, becoming healthy, living with dignity and being able to make positive changes to the society. These two kinds of effort could be formally enhanced by the organization, in this case the Brain Bank. There is a need for the Brain Bank to promote drawing the attention of the elderly to become volunteers. Although the willingness of the elderly could be promoted informally, the findings indicated that being a volunteer was one way to practice being a good Buddhist. A thoughtful task, such as sending a formal invitation letter to the elderly to become a volunteer or giving recognition, such as listening to the suggestions of the elderly or providing some kind of identification, could be the means to increase the number of elderly volunteers.

**Implication for practice # 3: For the Policy Makers.** The third implication is a need for increased accountability of local governments, private sectors

and non-profit organizations in their human capital investment. Based on the findings of this study, most of the volunteer members of the Brain Bank were former government officers who had a high rank. With over thirty years of work experience, they had more fulfilled knowledge, skills, and ability than any other aged workers. The results of this study indicated that in order to invest in human capital, especially in elderly Thais, all stakeholders (i.e., federal government, local government, the private sector, non-profit organization, and older volunteers themselves), are required to become involved in the effort. A human capital investment perspective involves supporting the KSAs that exist within individuals, especially elderly Thais. Human capital enables individuals to increase their productivity and earnings, which in turn improves the productivity of the organizations in which they work and the societies in which they live. There is a need for increased accountability of local governments, private sectors and non-profit organizations in human capital investment in older people especially in the volunteering as active aging concept. All policymakers at every level should provide the means to promote motivation for these invaluable resources in the community. For instance, providing a small budget to support the volunteer projects motivated volunteers’ effort. In addition, all sources of barriers that are avoidable, such as the complicated managerial aspects, should be eliminated. Imagine if all elderly people in the country were convinced to become volunteers, offering help to the society and sharing their

expertise. The whole country will not only gain benefits, but also save the national health budget by reducing the health problems of the elderly.

## Conclusion

This study assembled and assessed descriptions of volunteering as perceived by senior volunteers who are members of the Brain Bank through an exploratory, grounded theory interviewing method. The results of this study support the relevance of important concepts which include volunteering and active aging, human capital investment, social capital and cultural relativity theory, especially in Thai culture. The findings also suggest some differences from the concepts of Davenport (1999) in term of human capital investment. The results from the present study indicated the existence of effort such as the recognition of the Thai way of life that adapted the Buddhist principles of cultivating good and applying the “Bankhun” concept in Thai culture which do not appear in the model of Davenport

as different culture and contexts. Therefore, for Thais, investment in human capital may be a little different from other cultures. Thais may not have to spend as much time as in other cultures promoting volunteering if the right effort such as the appropriate motivators has been put into effect.

The findings from the present study also indicated the need for the Brain Bank or any organization responsible for the volunteers to provide the motivation to convince elderly people to join volunteering clubs formally or informally. The recognition of the elderly volunteers should also be emphasized.

Overall, the results of this study point to the need for increased accountability of local governments, private sectors and non-profit organizations in human capital investment and offer the proposed S-VVA model as proposed by the researcher. It is hoped that the conclusions and implications of this study can be used as groundwork for the future study and practice of volunteering stakeholders in Thailand.

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