

## **The Investigation Upper-Northern Thailand Wellness Spa Business Service Quality for Customer Satisfactions**



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**ABSTRACT:** This study of the knowledge management model for wellness spa business entrepreneurs in Upper Northern Thailand was a research and development (R&D) that aimed to find new methods to leverage the service standards for spas in Upper Northern Thailand by managing the knowledge and fortifying new skills to add to the existing knowledge to provide quality and standardized services to meet with certain expectations of the market and its customers in the future. Spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand are unique by their identities, cultures, the style of “Lanna” the reflects through the 5 senses of human beings: sight, taste, smell, sound and touch, which is able to satisfy spa customers. The created model was then evaluated under a conceptual framework of project evaluation through inspections and evaluations from 6 spa business experts who suggested that the selected spa entrepreneurs could improve the existing skills and knowledge in all the 6 categories by managing knowledge through adult learning and learning readiness of the entrepreneurs appropriately by their own contexts. In order to achieve this goal, necessary trainings, seminars, and workshops were conducted as tools in managing the knowledge.

**KEYWORDS:** Wellness Spa Business, Knowledge Management, Entrepreneurship

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Spa businesses in Thailand are ranked among the top-5 spa businesses globally which is another promotional aspect for Thailand besides the natural tourist attractions with the uniqueness in their traditional ways of massages that attract many customers from around the world.

The service models of spas in Thailand are varied by their locations (Thai SME-GP, 2012): spa entrepreneurs in Thailand are able to apply their unique local identities in their spa businesses, such as local traditions, herbs, knowledge, etc. Therefore, with appropriate supports to provide knowledge in business management to inspire new service concepts, especially applications of local resources, new innovations could be added to the leverage the exiting knowledge and understanding of spa entrepreneurs in each local area of the country.

However, among countless wellness spas in Thailand, it was found that only 521 spas could meet international standards for spas as verified by the Ministry of Health. This is a rather small number for spas in Thailand (The Federation of Thai Spa and Wellness Association, 2019). The main areas of improvements could be having more staff with qualifications and professionalism with correct sets of skills and some necessary skills like the abilities to communicate in major foreign languages (Sunadtra, 2016).

This article, therefore, presents the results from creating the knowledge management model for wellness spa entrepreneurs in Upper Northern Thailand and how it performed in real situations through activities provided for selected participants.

### **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study was conducted to investigate Upper-Northern Thailand Wellness Spa Business Service Quality.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Several methods were used in this study to learn more about spa business situations in Upper Northern Thailand, namely, in-depth interviews with 10 selected spa entrepreneurs who operated in Upper Northern Thailand, questionnaires to collect information from 373 other spa entrepreneurs, questionnaires to collect information on expectations towards spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand from 400 spa customers, and to develop the knowledge management model for wellness spa entrepreneurs in Upper Northern Thailand. The created model was evaluated later by 6 selected spa business experts.

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### IV. RESULT

From the objective and the knowledge management model for wellness spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand created in this study, the results can be summarized using the steps of CIPP Model as the following:

#### A. Contexts

This study has 2 important factors that are the main contexts of this study. The details can be summarized as the following:

**1. Upper-Northern Thailand:** in this study includes Chiang Mai, Nan, and Lampang. The spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand are unique by their identities and cultures that reflect through facilities, uniforms, dialects, local knowledge such as applications of local herbs, local massage styles, and other “Lanna” identities that are measured through the 5 basic senses of human beings: sight, taste, smell, sound and touch, including natural environments that promote delights and relaxations.

**Sense of Sight** includes visual perceptions on landscapes, nature, forests, etc., the feel relaxing, including Upper Northern styles of architectures with Lanna style decorations such as Upper Northern style woven fabrics are used to decorate facilities, carved woods used as interior decorations, paintings that show local lifestyles, local musical instruments, local flowers, uniforms and services of local staff, etc.

**Sense of Smell** includes applications of natural fragrant plants that are used to decorate facilities and some are made into essential oils, in cents, candle, etc., that can be used in Upper Northern spas to relax and serve as natural ways of treatments.

**Sense of Taste** includes local herb and vegetables that are selected to be used in making refreshing herbal drinks and seasonings for customers.

**Sense of Sound** include Lanna music played with local instruments that make customers feel relaxed while they are receiving their treatments.

**Sense of Touch** includes unique massage skills that apply local Upper Northern herbs along with physical touches that can relax muscles and make customers feel more comfortable.

**2. 5 As of Tourism Businesses** are factors that determine success of tourism businesses. The 5 As consist of the following:

**Attractions:** the main attractions of spa businesses in Thailand, especially Upper Northern Thailand, are advantages in climates and in environments of nature that attract visitors from around the world, including applications of local resources in wellness spa business in Upper Northern Thailand and other hospitality factors that help visitors feel relaxed and impressed.

**Accessibility:** spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand can be easily accessed with transportations or locations that are also easy to access by personal vehicles due to better roads that have been improved over the years.

**Amenity:** spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand provide varieties of amenities to facilitate their customers, whether they be parking lots, shuttle cars, basic quality infrastructures, including decorations seen on facilities that make customers feel the uniqueness of Lanna cultures, identities and nature. Other amenities can include clean spa rooms, Wi-Fi accesses, etc.

**Accommodation:** some spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand are close to hotels and have shuttle cars that can pick up customers to their spas. Most spa also have lobbies that customers and enjoy and relax with books, magazines, drinks, and refreshments while they wait for their treatments as well.

**Activities:** spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand provide customers with additional activities they can enjoy while they wait for their treatments, e.g., books, magazines, computers with internet access, or spacious lobbies for families, etc.

#### B. Input

The 6 inputs, in accordance to the 7 standards of ASEAN Spa Service Standards (2016): place, service, people, products, equipment, management, environmental practices, that were chosen to be input factors to create the knowledge management model for spa entrepreneurs in Upper Northern Thailand were as the following:

**Human Resources Activities:** spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand understand human resources in a satisfying level as they are able to evaluate and hire staff with expertise and experiences in spa businesses, know how many staff they need to hire in their businesses for each of the positions, proper wage and welfare management, inspire teamwork, follow up on staff satisfactions in their workplaces to maintain service standards, etc.

**Management:** spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand understand management in a good level as they are able to plan strategies and always modernize their businesses in order to have quality services and competency in their markets, know who to develop marketing strategies, find information, and design attractive campaigns, plan financial situations and accounting by referencing to current economic situations, etc.

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**Products and Services:** spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand can provide proper products and services by applying materials and ingredients that are found in their local areas into unique products, e.g., rare local herbs, local wisdom, local promotional media design, etc.

**Physical Environments:** spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand can design great facilities and accommodations by considering area positionings and design to reflect Lanna cultures and meet the spa standards set by the Ministry of Health, and can provide customers with the most effective use of their areas for customers to have as highest quality services as possible.

**Service Standards:** spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand can design effective services using their existing knowledge and can control the quality of their services to highly satisfy their customers. They also have plans to help their staff learn better skills, knowledge, and performances for better working efficiencies to satisfy and gain trust from their customers.

**Foreign Language Skills:** spa businesses in Upper Northern Thailand mostly use Thai as a main communication language. Despite that, the entrepreneurs have plans to help their staff learn new major languages like English, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc., to move forward to being ASEAN businesses to facilitate visitors and support tourism in the country.

**Level-3 Heading:** A level-3 heading must be indented, in *Italic* and numbered with an Arabic numeral followed by a right parenthesis. The level-3 heading must end with a colon. The body of the level-3 section immediately follows the level-3 heading in the same paragraph. For example, this paragraph begins with a level-3 heading.

### C. Process

Km Process Development in driving knowledge management for spa entrepreneurs in the upper north of Thailand is Adult Learning Andragogy, which means: Learning as an adult is vastly different from learning as a child. During primary and secondary education, goals and objectives are set by the instructor, and learning is structured around defined teaching plans.

Spa businesses manage their internal knowledge within their organizations through mostly learning from real situations, exchanging experiences and knowledge from one generation of staff who have more knowledge and experiences to another new generation of staff, including learning from example spa businesses and invited experts to improve their own existing knowledge and skills.

There are also programs for other staff members in other parts, such as front desk staff, information staff, etc., to help them learn new skills and modern business approaches in this ever-changing world and to establish learning environments for the staff to learn and exchange what they know with each other to better meet expectations of their customers.

### Driving Mechanisms

A key concept used in the CIPP model is that of evaluation stakeholders, who are intended to use the findings, those who may otherwise be affected by the evaluation, and those expected to contribute to the evaluation are 400 stakeholders; 1) the spa entrepreneurs in the Upper-Northern Thailand and 2) the customers who used to visit or have an interest in visiting spa operators in Upper Northern Thailand.

The researcher applied the “context, input, process out product” CIPP model Daniel Stufflebeam et al. (1966) evaluation as an umbrella concept in developing this study’s conceptual framework. This CIPP model requires its components to form a related and functional framework under a given context of spa business and knowledge management. Those components consist of input, process and product, then extending to the outcomes.

The context here refers to the academic and field context of spa and wellness as the main issue of knowledge management process. “Input” in this knowledge management model consists of 5 main elements. Those are the spa business entrepreneurs and staff as the potential knowledge acquires or learners. On the other hand, they could even function as the providers of information and knowledge among themselves, which in the return, became their own learners or information knowledge recipients.

The important element is set of learning contents under various questionable issues that the potential learners information acquires have or “should have had” to gain from suitable sources of information data.

Other elements with the “Input” aspects were physical environment and language that are necessary for spa business.

This study firstly focused on finding out the knowledge contents under a number of issues of the spa business entrepreneur as the important element of the input, which was determined to formulate the appropriate knowledge management process (within the CIPP model). This focus would be relevant to this study’s objectives.

Then a knowledge management model for spa business entrepreneurs was developed with its procedural techniques of information acquisition and interpretation in order to conduct their business expected. This focus would be relevant to the study’s objective by applying the results of their current knowledge perceived by themselves.

The product of the model was a set of expected competencies necessary for spa business as the results of the application of knowledge management model as judged by experts in spa business against the knowledge process and some related ASEAN spa standard criteria. Then the outcome should be a knowledge management process for spa business in Upper-Northern Thailand.

Driving mechanisms for CIPP model used in spa business in Upper-Northern Thailand are:

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**1.) Adult Learner Experience:** staff in spa businesses are mostly adults that already have some experiences in their field of work who are interested in improving their existing skills and knowledge and in solving problems and issues that they have experienced. Therefore, learning as adults requires considering certain factors like physical conditions, needs, desires to learn, past experiences, and desires to improve, including, but not limited to, readiness to learn and learning abilities of each learner. As for this research, the selected staff were found to be actively ready to learn better skills, knowledge and experiences in specific areas to help them provide better services more effectively to their customers.

**2.) Readiness to Learn:** the selected staff this research had readiness to obtain more knowledge, skills, and experiences to add to their existing ones by learning from others and sharing what they know with others to improve their works and also by learning how to work together with others as a team for better efficiency.

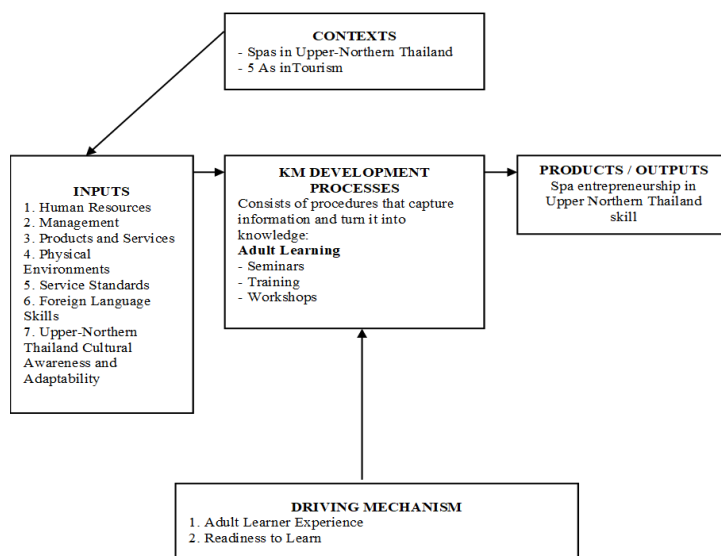
### D. Products/Outputs

The knowledge management manual, as evaluated by the experts, was found to be highly efficient. The model consists of knowledge management methods for all of the 6 knowledge categories for spas in Upper-Northern Thailand plus one additional knowledge category suggested by the experts, which was Upper-Northern Thailand Cultural Awareness and Adaptability.

The knowledge management manual created in this research was also found by the experts to be very suitable for learners and instructors in Upper-Northern Thailand spa businesses and, when combined with Andragogy, could improve knowledge and understanding for both entrepreneurs and their personnel in the long run as well if applied correctly.

The experts also found that the 6 categories of knowledge presented by the researcher were all necessary for spa businesses, especially Human Resources since spa businesses are considered service businesses which require workforces in order to be functional. The experts also voiced their opinions that Physical Environments could also play a major role for spa businesses because the main factors that attract customers have always been relaxation and treatments.

The 7th input, as seen in the knowledge management model below, was also suggested by the experts to add to the model because all of the experts agreed that Upper-Northern Thailand Cultural Awareness and Adaptability could also help spas in Upper-Northern Thailand find their unique identities and adapt to changes quickly in order to compete in international scenes as well.



**Figure 1. Knowledge Management Model for Spa Businesses in Upper Northern Thailand with the 7th Input Suggested by Experts**

## VI. DISCUSSION

The knowledge management model for wellness spa entrepreneurs in Upper Northern Thailand in this research was created using Stufflebeam's CIPP Model to understand the contexts of spas in Upper Northern Thailand which are unique and outstanding by their identities, Thai "Lanna" cultures, and local wisdoms that have been passed down from generations to generations and cannot be learned elsewhere. The spas in Upper Northern Thailand emphasize the use of products are services that respond well with the 5 basic human senses: sight, taste, smell, sound and touch, positive environments that are adjusted to the "Lanna" style that blends well with nature, including product and service charges that are appropriately priced compared to other domestic regions and foreign countries in in order to reach more customers.

The inputs that were the main factors of this research as obtained from Stufflebeam's CIPP Model, which were the 6 categories of knowledge: Human Resource, Management, Products and Services, Physical Environments, Service Standards, and Foreign Language Skills, were used to create a suitable knowledge management model that integrates knowledge, skills and existing

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experiences, in the forms of activities that were based on the readiness to learn for adults working in spa businesses in each context, which were seminars, training and workshops which led to products and outcomes that can be used in improving knowledge management for spa entrepreneurs in Upper Northern Thailand.

In addition to the six inputs, the experts all suggested that, with the existing model with 6 categories of knowledge for spa entrepreneurs being already suitable, there was another important category to add to the knowledge management model for wellness spa entrepreneurs, which was Upper Northern Thailand cultural awareness and adaptability.

### VII. CONCLUSION

The knowledge management model for spa entrepreneurs in Upper-Northern Thailand in this research was created using Stufflebeam's CIPP Model to understand the contexts of spas in Upper-Northern Thailand which are unique and outstanding by their identities, Thai "Lanna" cultures, and local wisdoms that have been passed down from generations to generations that cannot be learned from elsewhere. The spas in Upper-Northern Thailand emphasize the use of products and services that respond well with the 5 basic human senses, namely, Sight, Taste, Smell, Sound and Touch, positive environments that are adjusted to the "Lanna" style that blends well with nature, including product and service charges that are appropriately priced compared to other domestic regions and foreign countries in order to reach more customers.

The inputs that were the main factors of this research as obtained from Stufflebeam's CIPP Model, which were the 6 categories of knowledge, namely, Human Resource, Management, Products and Services, Physical Environments, Service Standards, and Foreign Language Skills, were used to create a suitable knowledge management model that integrates knowledge, skills and existing experiences, in the forms of activities that were based on the readiness to learn for adults working in spa businesses in each context, which were seminars, training and workshops which led to products and outcomes that can be used in improving knowledge management for spa entrepreneurs in Upper-Northern Thailand.

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