

**Employing a Transformative Learning Process for Promoting Sustainable Business Model through Organic Agriculture: A Case Study of the Sampran Riverside**

---

**Hasanuzzaman Tushar\***

Ph.D. Student, Graduate School of Human Resource and Organization Development, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand.

& Senior Lecturer, College of Business Administration, IUBAT, Dhaka.

**E-mail:** [tushar@iubat.edu](mailto:tushar@iubat.edu)

\*Corresponding author

**Somkiat Phaphon**

**Chararinchon Satian**

**Pakawat Piriyaopol**

Ph.D. Student, Graduate School of Human Resource and Organization Development, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand.

**Juthamas Kaewpijit**

Associate Professor,

Graduate School of Human Resource and Organization Development, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand.

*Received: 05/10/2018, Revised: 07/12/2018, Accepted: 10/12/2018*

---

**Abstract**

The recent increasing interest in organically produced food and awareness on the environment and health has induced to the promotion of organic agriculture business and practices throughout the world; as a result, the organic agricultural lands and related businesses are increasing significantly. In response, Asian organic production and business have established themselves in all regions of the world. In Thailand, it has received much importance as a start-up. The researchers selected the Sampran Riverside as a case, which is established on the pillar of traditional and cultural values of Thai society and promoting a successful sustainable business model through organic agriculture. The purpose of this study is to employ a transformative learning process to understand how and why Sampran Riverside and its stakeholder promoted a sustainable business model. The study used transformative learning theory to gain a better understanding (why) and to explain the phenomena (how). Data were collected through five methods, namely: a) direct observation, b) in-depth interview, c) secondary data, d) participating in the settings, and e) mysterious shopping. Fourteen

participants were chosen purposefully with a maximum variation. The researchers used thematic analysis of the data and concluded with a SOOKJAI (Thai word) transformative learning process. The process with seven steps was discussed in the paper and recommended further research area. The findings of this study would help both organic agriculture-related businesses and its stakeholders to understand and implement the learning processes.

**Keywords:** transformative learning; sustainable business model; organic agriculture; agribusiness; SOOKJAI; Thailand

## 1. Introduction

Agriculture has come to draw the inputs that enable its practice in the first place have become distant and disconnected from the core ethos in terms of sustainability (Hodge, 1993). This is mainly due to the fact that agriculture has become more focused on increasing profit and monetary gain, rather than core elements such as quality of yield as well as the overall intention. The practice was known for, namely the cultivation and harvesting of produce to *sustain* livelihood in general, both on the side of the farmer as well as the consumer.

The problem, in this case, the practice has shifted its focus to non-renewable sources, and thus, has resorted to the use of more harmful methods of production and cultivation. At the same time, the genetic base of agriculture has grown narrower over the years, due to the specialization of specific crops and varieties over others, especially regarding yield and ease of growth. With increasing external costs and pressure, the reliance on chemical synthetic fertilizers has also increased to a larger extent, thereby leading to higher levels of risks to human health and environmental destruction. Organic farming acts as an answer to these upraised problems due to the changing face of the agricultural practices.

In response to the recent increasing concern on organically produced food and awareness on the environment and health have induced to the promotion of organic agriculture practices and related businesses throughout the world (Gracia, & de Magistris, 2008; Roitner-Schobesberger, Darnhofer, Somsook, & Vogl, 2008; Willer, & Yussefi, 2011). The lands of organic agriculture are substantially increased in all regions of the world in the last few years. According to the latest FiBL survey, as of the end of 2014, the total organic agricultural lands were 43.7 million hectares

with 2.3 million producers; of which, 40 percent of the producers are in Asia with 8 percent of the world's organic agricultural land. Comparing to 2013, there were almost 500,000 more hectares of organic agricultural lands increased at the end of 2014; whereas, more than 158,000 hectares (+4.7 percent) were expanded in Asia (Willer, & Lernoud, 2016).

Organic production and domestic markets have established themselves throughout Asia, and the region has the third largest market for organic products (Sahota, 2016). At the same time, governments are taking the initiative to develop this growing sector (i.e., in Bhutan, Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand), - e.g. executing the ASOA (ASEAN Standard for Organic Agriculture) task force in 2015; which is mainly responsible to monitor the development progress with certification and recognition (Wai, 2016).

According to Northbourne (1940), who is credited as being the first individual to use the term in order to explain a theoretical framework, organic farming is more closely related to a community or a society rather than a practice. As per his observations and assumptions, there is an evocation of a societal establishment that is crafted out of simple and small units of productions, which are tightly and intrinsically connected to each other. At the same time, the concept of organic farming also involves the rejection of the use of large and impersonal units or methods of production which are aimed to be superior to humans or nature. This basic understanding of the process or the practice used in the study as we deal with the Sampran sustainable business model (see Figure 1) and the implications of the same. The model has been derived from the Sampran Riverside project, located in a region known as Nakornpathom in Thailand, which is merely an hour drive from Bangkok.

However, in order to promote sustainable business strategy using the Sampran Model in Figure 1, every organization must go through an evolutionary process by ensuring the economic, social, and environmental needs (Barin-Cruz, Ávila Pedrozo, & de Fátima Barros Estivalete, 2006). Therefore, all stakeholders of an organization require to go through a learning process to employ a transformation to sustainability, and this transformation needs a paradigm shift (Batie, 2008; Palma, & Pedrozo, 2016; Sterling, 2011), this process is somehow associated with transformative learning. Clark (1993) simply defined, “transformational learning shapes people; they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize” (p. 47). Transformative learning processes help to promote change, i.e.,

behavioral, challenges our existing beliefs, reconstruct of meanings and conventions. In this paper, we are aiming to build a transformative learning process to understand how and why Sampran Riverside and its stakeholder promoted a sustainable business model.

Our main focus through this study is to define certain theoretical frameworks upon which a pragmatically implemented business model is considered and analyzed. The pragmatic business model is mainly used in conjunction with the theoretical framework in order to ensure that certain bridges can be constructed for understanding sustainability in business on a more concise and intimate level. In this case, the Sampran Model is the pragmatic aspect of consideration, while the theoretical framework is consist of basic elements that contribute to the construction and consistent maintenance of sustainability within the context of a business.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Sustainable Business Model**

Sustainability is one of the core issues that most businesses around the world focus on, thereby being a crucial theoretical aspect as well within the field of managerial studies. Some of the main components within a business model that correspond in one way or other with sustainability include the strategic direction of the business, the processes that fuel the business, the supply chain of the organization/business, and entire economic systems that the business is built around (Gauthier, 2017; Lubin & Etsy, 2010; Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2009). According to Atiq & Mine Karatas-Ozkan (2013), sustainable development within the theoretical and pragmatic dimensions of business can be defined as the initiation, strategic planning and implementation of business processes with the singular aim of ensuring economic, social and environmental benefits. According to this particular definition of sustainable development within the context of business management and expansion, the core focus of a business has to be to exploit opportunities in such a way that shared value is created, for both the business as well as the societal foundation from which it derives. Numerous other definitions have been put forth by other authors in an attempt to encapsulate the concept in the most plausible way.

According to Salzmann, Ionescu-Somers, & Steger (2005), the designing and the implementation of business strategies in such a way that they allow for the mitigation of the environmental and social consequences and impacts arising from the

establishment of business operations and processes, forms the core essence of sustainable business development. As per the definition put forward by Lozano (2012), sustainable business development is mainly composed on the activities undertaken by an organization which is directed towards the balancing of environmental, social and economic factors which are directly related to the actions and decisions of the stakeholders and the organization as a whole. At the same time, Lüdeke-Freund (2009) defines sustainable business development as the integration of all three dimensions mentioned in the above definitions (social, environmental and economic) into the process of business management itself, with the aim of ensuring long-term gains which are devoid of negative impacts to the dimensions concerned, while also cater to the interests associated with all three.

In most cases, as per the observations put forth by Rudnicka (2016), most organizations take a reactive stance towards issues that may arise as a result of the direct or indirect impacts that their internal business operations have upon external factors within the three dimensions of social, economic and environmental aspects (Lans, Blok, & Wesselink, 2014). This reactive approach mainly involves focusing on reputation and image, rather than actual initiatives directed towards ensuring minimum negative impact of business activities on any of the dimensions, as well as ensuring an increased positive impact on all three at the same time. Sustainable business model involves taking a much more conscious stand towards the issues as well as the overall implications that business operations might have on external elements (Teece, 2010). In most cases, the sustainable business models are centered around some or the other already existing issue that is apparent in the immediate social, environmental or economic parameters within which the business operates.

## **2.2 Transformative Learning Theory**

The concept of transformative learning theory is based upon the same components which contribute to the aspect of sense-making or the formation of meaning within an experience. These components, which include everything from emotional, conative and cognitive processes that lead to the formation of meaning in the first place, are encompassed within the concept of frame of reference (Mezirow, 1991). According to authors like Mezirow (1991) and Cranton (1996) have pointed out that a frame of reference is essential made up of several different types of units, all of which uniquely and often intrinsically contribute to the process of meaning and understanding as a whole. The components of frames of references, when seen in the

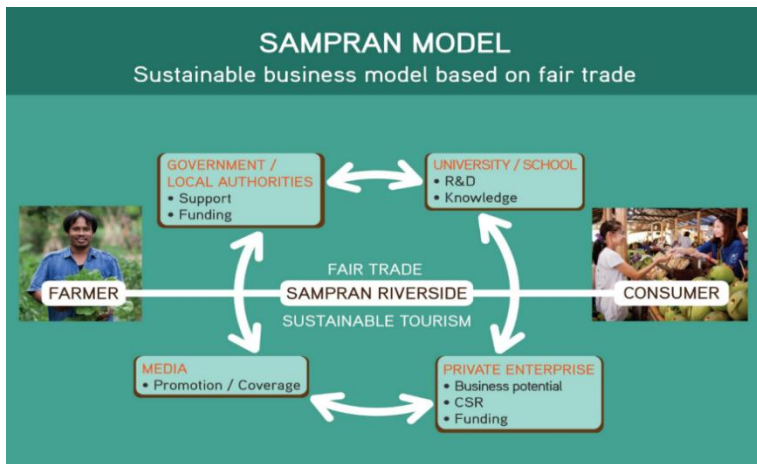
light of sense-making, include conditioned responses, feelings, values, concepts, and associations. These aspects ultimately define the way in which an individual views, interacts and understands the world around him/her. Moreover, these frames of references are also the main elements that lead to the formation of habits of mind and points of view. These two aspects are main pillars of the theoretical foundation upon which the empirical element of the study is to be structured and analyzed.

According to Mezirow (2000), habits of mind are arranged in the form of specific codes, which in turn are composed of orienting, abstract, and broad means of thinking, acting and feeling. The components of habits of mind are in turn derived from the same assumption, emotions, values and conceptual conditioning that make up frames of reference in the first place. These habitual codes, so to speak, are structured in the form of psychological, political, economic, educational, social and cultural patterns of thought, action, and feeling. On the other hand, the articulation of these habits and patterns is what constitutes a point of view. In other words, a point of view can be defined as a pattern of beliefs, which shape an interpretation or the complex web of feelings, judgments and attitudinal approaches that result in the construction of meaning. An example of a habit of mind or coded pattern that results in the formation of a point of view can be ethnocentricity, which is the essential element that gives rise to a certain level of predisposition to lean towards considering one's own group or community as being superior to another. The point of view that arises from such a habit of mind is manifested in the form of a complex set of emotional inclinations and feelings that contribute to the formation of groups and individual elements such as those of homosexuality, feminists, people of color, welfare recipients, and more.

The process of transformative learning involves critical self-reflection on one's interpretations as well as the beliefs that contribute to the formation of the same. One of the most important and common mediums of transformative learning involves becoming critically reflective of the way in which we learn to solve problems on a practical level, through the creation of assumptions. These assumptions, if analyzed and critically reflected upon, can result in the shifting of the paradigm which the basic process of creating meaning is derived from. The critical reflection of assumptions can occur when one engages in task-based problem solving, hears a different or conflicting point of view, indulges in subjective modes of reframing our assumptions, or even when we read a book.

### 2.3 The Sampran Model

The Sampran model, which is the main element that focused upon during the rest of the paper, as well as the essential empirical aspect upon which the learning framework has been developed, is a term that has been derived from specific community rehabilitation activities in a place in Thailand by the same name. The Riverside project has been crafted on the hard work and the constant efforts of over three generations of family management. Mr. Arrut Nawarat, the project's mastermind, is a passionate advocate of integrated organic agriculture aiming to promote sustainable business model through organic agriculture and employing the transformative learning process. The essence of this particular project is to create a sustainable business environment which is established on the pillar of traditional and cultural values of Thai society in the context of local business development.



**Figure 1 The Sampran Model demonstrates sustainable business based on fair trade within the ecosystem**

**Source:** Managing Director, private presentation, 23 September 2017, used with permission.

The main activities that characterize Sampran Riverside include savoring Thai cuisine that is based on the ingredients that are harvested through the age-old process of organic agriculture. Attending cultural workshops aimed at allowing visitors to grab a glimpse of the intricacies of Thai culture and tradition, experience

the immense sanctity of traditional Thai spa treatment, and stay in an antique Thai house. All in all, the Sampran Riverside is a locale as well as a community which has been established in order to attract visitors to the heart of the cultural heritage of Thailand (Sampran Riverside, 2017). However, once the deeper recesses of this establishment are plumbed, and the details are uncovered, it becomes apparent that there is much more than meets the eye. In this case, the Sampran Riverside and the experience that it provides visitors with is only a small inkling of the immense contribution that the establishment is doing as far as sustainable business is concerned (Asia One, 2017).

As per the afore-discussed SBM and TL, the core elements that define sustainability within the context of business processes, operations, and strategies, involves direct and conscious involvement of an organization within the three dimensions that are peripherally connected to its actions and activities, namely economic, environmental and social. In this case, we considered at the intricate ways in which the Sampran model is directed towards contributing as well as deriving the maximum amount of value as possible from the three dimensions that concern sustainability in the first place.

**A. Social:** The core focus area of the Sampran model, as far as the social dimension is concerned, is the farmer community. The objective that drives the Sampran model forward is one which is aimed at restoring balance to the local food system by giving back the power into the hands of the farmers by promoting and enabling the implementation of a holistic cycle of food production based on organic farming and cultivation. The social issue that they have chosen to tackle and provide a proper solution to is related to the numerous fallacies that exist within the supply chain and the overall management cycle concerning food production, with the main party at the disadvantaged end being the farmers themselves. One of the main sources of the problem seems to be the middlemen, who have complete control over the price of the product and hence, dictate control over the very livelihood of the farmers. Farmers are on the other side of the spectrum because they have no say regarding the price, and hence, are often forced to forsake efficient practices such as organic agriculture in the face of increased demand and over-burdening through external control (The Nation, 2016).

In the face of such a problem, the Sampran model, put forth and implemented by the Bliss Foundation, decided to enable farmers to connect directly



with consumers, to ensure that the impact of middlemen as far as their livelihood is concerned, can be reduced as much as possible. One of the main solutions, in this case, involved the conversion of agricultural practices into more sustainable measures. In this case, the Sampran Riverside acts as the main hub for increased opportunities for farmers, where they have the power to opt for more beneficial means of trade, while also having to use only farming methods which are more sustainable (Sampran Model, 2017). The introduction of workshops and other activities within the realm of the Sampran Riverside acted as just the right impetus for farmers to rehabilitate and change their ways. Some of the main market channels that have been introduced for farmers since the conceptualization and implementation of the project include the Sookjai Organics Website, Sookjai Market Roadshow, Sookjai Weekend Farmer's Market, and more (Patrawart & Sriurai, 2012).

**B. Environmental:** The increased demand caused by the antics of the middlemen has also resulted in the need for the farmers to use agro-chemicals and other synthetic materials in an attempt to increased yield. However, this has resulted in numerous problems owing to the way in which these chemicals result in environmental degradation while also having an adverse impact on the farmers' health (Hodge, 1993). The increased use of synthetic agrochemicals ultimately results in the degradation of the quality of the soil through the decimation of its nutrient-holding capacity, whereby a vicious cycle is initiated. In this case, the vicious cycle involves the use of more and more quantities of agro-chemicals, that too on a consistent and more regular basis, in order to compensate for the lack of vitality that is prevalent in the soil (Sampran Model, 2017).

The solution that was enabled by Bliss Foundation to counter and bring an end to this vicious cycle was the introduction of organic farming and cultivation. With the help of Kasetsart University, the foundation was able to create enough opportunities for farmers to inculcate the fundamentals of organic farming into their everyday routine, while also having access to the right tools, techniques and methods to conduct organic cultivation in the most efficient way possible (Luenguthai, 2015). Some of the main aspects where the foundation has collaborated with Kasetsart University include research and development in the areas of post-harvest techniques, processing, logistics projects, and organic agriculture technology, as well as cooperatives knowledge. This has enabled farmers to be more confident as far as approaching newer avenues of farming, namely in the realm of organic cultivation and sustainability as a whole.

**C. Economic:** The increased use of agrochemicals in the face of enormous demand and increased pressure from the middlemen has also resulted in a considerable multiplication in the level of expenditure on the part of the farmers. This aspect, coupled with the inability of the farmers to exercise control over the prices of their produce, has resulted in the piling up of debt. This vicious cycle of debt inflation through the lack of control as well as the considerable increase in pressure to improve yield has impacted the lives of over 35% of all farmers within Thailand.

The main solutions that have been implemented in order to counter the economic problems that the farmers have been facing till now include the opening up of numerous collaboration and market channels, thereby allowing the farmers to gain access to more direct avenues of free trade. The foundation has collaborated with the Ministry of Commerce in Thailand, mainly known by the name of the Department of Internal Trade, in order to create and enable the continued functioning of organic village projects and organic distribution centers (Sampran Model, 2017).

With the help of the Land Development Department, also known by the name of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, the Participatory Guarantee System has been crafted to empower farmers (Luenguthai, 2015). This is similar to the measures that have been taken in order to ensure proper restoration of community markets on the banks of the Tha Chin River (Sriwichien, Kiratiboorana, & Soungsaweng, 2014 ). This system allows farmers to gain incentives and also be a part of other more advanced groups of organic farmers, thereby allowing them to be a part of increasingly fast-moving organic initiatives and also having access to a stable support system. Another initiative that has been enabled for the increased economic growth of the farmers involves the “Farm to Function” program, which has been implemented through collaboration with the Thai Convention & Exhibition Bureau. This program allows conventional centers and hotels to buy organically cultivated rice directly from the farmers and is based on the principles of free trade as are all the other initiatives which are a part of the establishment that comes under the umbrella of the Sampran model (Cision, 2016).

Organic farming acts as an answer to these problems and issues that have risen owing to the changing face of the agricultural practice and industries surrounding the same. According to Mannion (1995), organic farming is a practice that shifts the focus or the core essence of cultivation from mere growing and harvesting or crops to the bigger picture, which includes the overall environment that

surrounds the cultivation process, the production techniques, as well as the farm biota. Another author, Scofield (1986), stresses on the fact that organic farming might not merely be attributed to the living elements that play a part in the process of cultivation but essentially encapsulates the entirety of the process in a holistic. This means or indicates the establishment of coordination and connections with all the disparate parts or processes involved in cultivation, in a systematic and wholesome way. The very first definition of organic farming emphasized the significant relationship of farming with a community and a society. The case of Sampran Business model also is aligned in the same strategy. Therefore, it is interesting to know how and why do they employ a transformative process to promote their sustainable business model.

The Sampran Riverside is only one of the many projects which have implemented under the umbrella of structural and functional units which owe their existence to the Sampran sustainable business model as a whole. By looking at each of these disparate elements and their activities in a separate manner, one might miss out on the intricacies and the profound implications of this model as a whole (STISD, 2017). On the other hand, if the different components of the model, as well as the intimate ecosystem of interconnected functionalities that characterize them, are considered collectively, the core importance of the model as a whole comes to light.

In this paper, we attempted to build a learning framework for understanding the core components and functionalities of a sustainable business model by examining the various dimensions that characterize the Sampran model. The primary foundation of this learning framework crafted on core theoretical principles, which ultimately give form to the ecosystem-like functional and structural elements that make the Sampran model what it is.

### **3. Methodology**

The researchers selected Sampran Riverside as a case, which is established on the pillar of traditional and cultural values of Thai society and promoting a successful sustainable business model through organic agriculture to serve the community and to develop the local business. The study employed a qualitative case study method to understand the case in depth. The study used transformative learning theory to gain a better understanding (why) and to explain the phenomena (how). Two major research questions guiding the qualitative inquiry were:

- a) Why do stakeholders employ transformative learning (TL) process for promoting sustainable business model (SBM)?
- b) How does Sampran Riverside employ TL process for promoting SBM?

Triangulation method was employed in this research which helps to validate using document, interview, and observation (Nancy et al., 2014). Data were collected through five methods, namely: a) direct observation, b) in-depth interview, c) secondary data, d) participating in the settings, and e) mysterious shopping. The fourteenth participant was selected purposefully with a maximum variation who: a) involve with the activities of the Sampran Riverside, b) profound knowledge of the sustainable business model of the Sampran Riverside. The participants were the stakeholders of Sampran Riverside including CEO, staff, merchants, representative of Bliss Foundation, and consumer. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, along with observations made during visits to the organic farms, Sampran Riverside and Sookjai market. Internal and published documents and information were also selected as secondary data to answer the research inquiry. The researchers participated different activities (cooking local cuisine, collecting vegetables from the field, chit chat with local farmers, a whole day spent in the village, lunch with local people, and name a few) and stayed overnight in the settings in order to gain a greater depth understanding. The researchers also conducted a mysterious shopping in the organic market called Sookjai market to understand the consumer and merchants perspectives and their product.

Face-to-face interviews were chosen because the opportunity to interact with the subject allowed the researchers to examine deeper to gain a better understanding. A semi-structured interview format was chosen because it allowed the subject to answer in their own words as opposed to being forced to select a predetermined answer or discuss the topic of interest in a fixed manner. Wherever permitted, the use of note-taking, photography and video recording were employed during the visit and data collection. Open-ended questions were used in the interviews to get participants' opinion, examples, and experiences. The interviews were conducted in the Thai language (except with the CEO), which is a native language of the participants. The researchers recorded and jotted down the field notes in the case of observing the important aspects and my interpretation. All interviews were transcribed for analysis.

The researcher used thematic analysis approach to analyze data collected from the 14 participants to draw the common theme. Interview transcripts were

thoroughly read several times to understand the flow of talk and; to identify the meaningful parts of the interviews and observation. The researchers concluded with a SOOKJAI (Thai word) transformative learning process. The SOOKJAI process holds the meaning of *blissful*, SOOK means happy, and JAI means mind or heart. The process with seven steps was discussed in the paper and recommended further research area.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

From the data, the researchers analyzed and interpreted the information gathering from the interviewees. Accordingly, the researchers took the Transformative Learning (TL) theory to analyze the data. The ten-step process of TL represented what had occurred with stakeholders. Therefore, this TL process was applied to discuss the phenomenon and diminished to seven steps (see Table 1), which each step also was named meaningfully for this project and community, as SOOKJAI (the Thai word that means *blissful*). Notably, this SOOKJAI transformative learning was used to be a conceptual framework for the discussion.

**Table 1 Summary of the Mezirow Transformative Learning Process and SOOKJAI Learning Process**

<i>SOOKJAI learning process</i>	<i>Mezirow's TL stages</i>
S = Sensing the problems	1. Disorienting dilemma
O = Observing own mindset	2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, guilt, or shame
	3. A critical assessment of assumption
O = Openness to change	4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
K = Knowledge exploration	5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
J = Joining knowledge into implementation	6. Planning a course of action
	7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
A = Action and building competency	8. Provisional trying of new roles
	9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
I = Integration	10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

The study concluded the result of research in Sampran Riverside which is operated collaboratively by the Bliss Foundation under the concept known as Sampran Model. Information from Mr. Arrut and the others were analyzed by representing the

management level and key stakeholders. As it is clear, the achievement of Sampran Model came from TL process. Thus, the findings found the answers and reasons replying questions of *how* and *why*.

#### 4.1 SOOKJAI learning process

Researchers found key processes of SOOKJAI at Sampran Riverside. SOOKJAI holds the meaning of *blissful*, SOOK means happy, and JAI means mind or heart.

The process of SOOKJAI can be described as follows,

S = Sensing the problems

O = Observing own mindset

O = Openness to change

K = Knowledge exploration

J = Joining knowledge into an implementation plan

A = Action and building competency

I = Integrating new mindset

The managing director of Sampran Riverside, Mr. Arrut Navaraj, is the third generation of this family business. Before his time, the business focused on tourism, aiming to be the site of attraction among local and foreign tourists since the place is very near to Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand. According to the economic downturn in 1997, which affected a dramatic decrease in the number of customers, as well as increased more competitors, and then Sampran Riverside differentiated itself to be.

Mr. Arrut started to reform the food supply chain for Sampran Riverside by his health concern and personal interest in organic products. He first thought that finding organic vegetables and fruits for hotel supply should not be any problem since the hotel was surrounded by agricultural farms in Nakhonpatom province. When he realized the fact that there was no supplier of the non-chemical contaminated product, he initiated a farming project in the hotel. During his learning in the organic agricultural process for many years, simultaneously, he was also aware of the traditional system that farmers had to rely on intermediaries to set the price and sold the products through them. On top of that, organic farming had a higher cost of

production, and there was no guarantee of products to be sold out. In 2010, he proposed a new initiative to buy vegetables and fruits directly from the farmers at the double price compared to the price they sold through intermediaries. The only requirement was the organic products. That was the time Arrut began to work hand-in-hand with local farmers to support and make a network with academic institutions. Since then, he has established and continuously developed *Sampran Model* to incorporate not only farmers and institutes but also consumers. One area in the hotel was set as Sookjai Market, that consumers can buy products directly from the producers. Of course, the products sold in this market have to be organic.

The SOOKJAI learning process is a transformative learning process, the process that all stakeholders work through and transform themselves (see Table 2). Starting from Mr. Arrut who sensed the problems of lacking the organic products supply and mastermind of this project (S = Sensing the problems), he first thought that it was a problem of suppliers in the way they did farming (O = Observing own mindset). Mr. Arrut, then, decided to talk with the farmers, exchange ideas with each other, and seek more information (O = Openness to change, K = Knowledge exploration).

Mr. Arrut employed the knowledge gained to set a new policy of direct purchasing (J = Joining knowledge into implementation). The new plan had to be worked out among his team who had been familiar with the traditional way of purchasing. Thus, he had to improve how he worked with his team to understand them and align (A = Action and building competency). Finally, Mr. Arrut integrated the mindset of direct merchandising by initiating Sookjai Market that not only be beneficial to his business, but also to the farmers and consumers (I = Integrating new mindset). SOOKJAI process will be described in next to answer the research questions with an explanation for each stakeholder and the organization.

**Table 2 SOOKJAI Learning Process (findings of the collected data)**

	<i>S</i> <i>Sensing the problems</i>	<i>O</i> <i>Observing own mindset</i>	<i>O</i> <i>Openness to change</i>	<i>K</i> <i>Knowledge exploration</i>	<i>J</i> <i>Joining into the implementation plan</i>	<i>A</i> <i>Action and competency</i>	<i>I</i> <i>Integrating new mindset</i>	
<b>CEO</b>	Difficulties in supplying organic products	Starting organic farming in Sampran Riverside	Learning the supply chain process from farmers	Understanding the SEP concept which relates to SBM	To extend from the concept of organic farming to SEP and SBM	The commitment of stakeholders involving in the project	Learn the benefits of SEP for SDG and commit to the project happily	<b>SBM</b>
<b>Staff</b>	Business downturn	No strategic plan	Buying organic products directly from farmers	Understanding the SEP concept which relates to SBM	To extend from the concept of organic farming to SEP and SBM	SEP and SBM become a form of the LO that impacts operations and knowledge communication		
<b>Farmers</b>	Exposure to chemical substances along the farming process	No knowledge of organic farming	Trying organic farming	Understanding the SEP concept which relates to SBM	To extend from the concept of organic farming to SEP and SBM	SEP and SBM become a form of the LO that impacts opportunity and innovation		
<b>Consumer</b>	Aware if poison containing vegetables	End users buy at a convenient place and low price	Buying directly from Sookjai market	Understanding the SEP concept which relates to SBM	To extend from the concept of organic farming to SEP and SBM	SEP and SBM become a form of the LO that impacts value-add produces		
	<b>WHY</b>			<b>HOW</b>				
				<i>Transformational Leadership</i>				
				<i>Learning Organization</i>				



#### 4.1.1 Why?

The research question was *why* do stakeholders employ transformative learning (TL) for promoting sustainable business model (SBM)?” can be answered according to each stakeholder.

**Leader:** In the above-mentioned paragraphs, the role of managing director was discussed. The reason why he employs TL for promoting SBM is emphasized here. Facing difficulties in supplying organic products are the key factors. Mr. Arrut would like to posit Sampran Riverside as a distinguished destination that tourists can enjoy the Thai cultural way of life, and the provision of healthy and organic products. He did not give up due to lack of supply. Instead, he realized that a change is needed to bring the business to be sustainable.

**Staff:** Despite the economic downturn and drop in income from tourism during the 1997 recession, Sampran Riverside did not decrease the number of staff. The staffs were aware of the business changing though they did not have any idea of strategic planning. They realized the policy change in the organization, led by the managing director, and took a chance to adapt. Mr. Arrut encouraged everyone to learn organic farming by experiencing how to plant it.

The kitchen staff who purchased vegetables and fruits was one of the most affected people. In the past, they could purchase the item as they needed. However, organic farming works best upon the natural season; then the hotel kitchen might not get the item as before. They had to exercise their creativity to cook from the products they had in stock.

**Farmers:** Farmers have a traditional way of farming by using chemical mixed in the soil. They also blow the chemical through sprayer on the vegetables and fruits when they are growing to protect agricultural pests. The chemical will, then, be accumulated in the products they produce, and, consequently, farmers are exposed to those chemicals by breathing and touching. Many cases of farmers suffer from diseases such as cancer. There is no reliable proof that the chemical causes those diseases, but it is thought so.

Some farmers were approached to transform the way they farm into the organic way. They did not have any idea to succeed since they did not have any

knowledge. They only did what they did before, sold the product to the middlemen, and started planting cycle repeatedly. Mr. Arrut, the managing director, supported them by providing knowledge and networking them with academic institutions. This strategy helped farmers begin to transform into organic farming.

**Consumers:** No one wants to buy things, especially food if they are aware of chemical or a poison containing. Most consumers have never met farmers and realized the high chemical exposure process in farming. However, in case of the Sampran Riverside market, the consumers are also not knowledgeable about the planting process and, usually, they make the decision to buy based on convenience place, regular price, and increasing concern about organic food. Even if some consumers would like to buy non-chemical contained products, they do not have the opportunity to find product easily among the regular supply chain processes.

At Sampran Riverside, Arrut has tried to educate guests who come to stay overnight at the resort on organic agriculture and the story of how the resort serve customers. A few years after his initiative to use organic products for hotel guests, he started operating Sookjai Market by providing free space to bridge farmers with consumers directly. The Sookjai market is operated every weekend, and consumers can buy organic products directly from producers. Price offered in the market is not influenced by the middlemen as like the other traditional supply chain system. Consumers do not have to bear the cost of logistics and the others suppliers' cost, therefore, they can buy it cheaper than other places.

#### **4.1.2 How does Sampran Riverside (SR) employ Transformative Learning (TL) for promoting SBM?**

According to the finding that was summarized and discussed as SOOKJAI Transformative Learning Model, the continuing second part of the process consists O – Openness to Change, K – Knowledge Exploration, J - Joining Knowledge onto Implementation Plan, A - Action and Building Competency, and I - Integrating New Mindset. These steps were found as an explanation of how SR employ TL concept of supporting the opportunity, knowledge, and advice to stakeholders who experience the same dilemma from the traditional agriculture.

The traditional way of agriculture and doing a business which is toxic from chemical substances. Also, they were exploited by the middlemen in terms of

business. Therefore, it illustrates the un-sustainability, which requires a solution. However, only the problem cannot enable them to achieve the transformative learning to be the *newest being* of them, but also it is what SR had provided critical factors to fulfill this transformative process.

In this study, individuals were not a change agent at the starting point. These stakeholders were accustomed to the traditional approaches. Even though they recognized the danger of chemical substances in growing produces, their worldview was relying on materialism and convenience ways of profitability without ethical and sustainable thinking. Accordingly, this phenomenon reflects that the people in Sampran firstly resisted change which had been provided by SR. Nevertheless, the key factors which conquered the resistance are the knowledge and the evidence.

SOOKJAI, at 'K,' 'J' and 'A' steps depict the enabling factors which came from the SR and its leaders that they were recognized as the Bliss (Sookjai) Foundation. SR provide knowledge and understanding of organic agriculture. According to Mr. Arinut, a pioneer and a chief of the project in Sampran Model, mention that the organic Farm did not come first in his thought but the survival of the business. Then, he later found this concept of organic agriculture would be the way of sustainable business and also the sustainability of local communities and farmers.

From the experience of SR, it became the knowledge management used to deliver the concept to the stakeholders. The study found that the stakeholders took time to adopt the concept. They were afraid the unreliability of incomes and complex of changes. However, there is some crucial turning point which are the answers to 'how' this SOOKJAI transformative learning has emerged until now. Firstly, they trusted in the SR leader' leadership and his dedication to the project, which contained the knowledge of organic farming related to the sustainability thinking. Secondly, the knowledge provided made them understand more, including experiential learning along the project, had proved the benefits of organic farming in the aspect of reducing the capital of insecticide.

Thirdly, they eventually realized in their family's health improvement. This issue reflects the critical point that organic agriculture had made openness of stakeholders for change and exploring to the knowledge. These O and K processes, in this case, seem to emerge back and forth, strengthening their understanding which led

to the adoption of the concept of individual planning in the internal transformative point.

Fourthly, they were aware of having a sustainable business model. They are not only felt the importance in healthy organic farming, but they also comprehended the consequence of SBM, which was suggested by SR leader and staff. The chemical substance-free business framework, healthy family, and value-added product were perceived as the only approach that they can sustain their profit and happiness. Therefore, these reasons convince them to adopt SBM to plan and act on the transformation process.

From all critical points to the summary, they present the key basis of Transformational Leadership, Learning Organization, and Community Partnership. SR can employ TL for promoting SBM by the prominent role of leader, the structure of community and organization, and the involvement of local communities in Sampran.

**4.1.3 Transformational Leadership:** According to this theory, SR leader, Mr. Arrut, has represented four identities of this type of leadership. This illustrates how he creates the engagement of stakeholders

- A. *Idealized Influence* – The ‘Walks the talk’ concept is the way that he did. His efforts in pursuing the goal became the ‘never-give-up’ role model which ideally impressed all stakeholders to follow and trust in what he believes.
- B. *Inspirational Motivation* – As with many types of leadership, the charisma of the leader is the key inspiration that impacted stakeholders. His personality and behavior during project collaborations increased their motivation successfully.
- C. *Individualized Consideration* – He demonstrated ability in this significant component. This project depends on the understanding of each individual’s background in farming and the problems behind their traditional farming which need different genuine approaches.
- D. *Intellectual Stimulation (IS)* – Eventually, for transformation, he as the transformational leadership applied the creative thinking and knowledge to energize stakeholders driving in the leader’s direction.

**4.1.4 Learning Organization:** In terms of Learning Organization represented in this project, as Senge (1990) stated five characteristics, this concept is another explanation of how stakeholders employ TL.

- A. *Systems thinking* - The benefits of organic farming have brought people in the community back to the original concept of agriculture without using chemical approaches. As a result, people were reminded and emphasized the systems thinking of basic natural farming which everything leans on each other within the system. It is also a key of SBM, which depends on a view of systems thinking community partnership.
- B. *Personal mastery* – In this study, to stop using pesticide and chemical fertilizer was not easy. It means they had to commit new learning and adaptation, which were a hard time at the beginning phase. However, this challenge has made them become a master and eager to transfer the knowledge to the others, including consumers who may adopt it to personal life.
- C. *Mental models* – For stakeholders of SR participating Sampran Model, it was necessary to unlearn the previous attitude. This is the proof of the openness and critical mechanism needed before replacement. In Sampran Model, they create many theories and practices for their agriculture. Researchers found that learning becomes norms and values.
- D. *Shared vision* – SR emphasizes on creating an individual vision. Stakeholders are not working on a daily basis, but they aim to the goals of community change. Organizational visions have shared and involved to promote SBM.
- E. *Team learning* – The study shows the team learning is the initial success of the Sampran Model. Before they joined the project, they had been the member of a small local community which operates as a team reflecting team learning that was a vital concept. It finally opened them up to be a community of knowledge and practices which becomes one key of SBM.

## 5. Implications for Practice

The paper concluded with proposing a learning process (SOOKJAI), which is developed from the integrated practice of Sampran Riverside project and insertion of Mezirows' transformative learning. The main contribution of this paper is to understand all the stakeholders' learning process of the selected case and model to answer the two questions of *how* and *why*. According to the study, TL plays the vital roles in the project of Sampran Model leading to the success in SBM. Although some may perceive the success of the organic agriculture, SR and Sampran Model have achieved the goal of business that contains the conceptual thinking in sustainability. It is both for the business itself and the community. The Transformative Learning in Sampran can be explained by SOOKJAI as learning and catalyze. The findings of this study would help both organic agriculture-related businesses and its stakeholders to understand and implement the learning processes. The Sampran Model, a living example of developing the local business, is a strong reference providing the necessary inspiration and motivation for the similar organization leaders and developing the community as a whole.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to understand how and why Sampran Riverside and its stakeholder promoted sustainable business model by employing the transformative learning process. The paper developed a learning process named SOOKJAI, which is mainly discussed and summarized the two major research questions how and why. The further research may conduct to prove empirically this learning process and make a comparison of the other similar projects to validate its implication. However, the inquiry selected a case which is based on organic agriculture and tourism activities. Therefore, to generalize the findings, there are some limitations, (i.e., specific context, concerned stakeholders, and geographical locations). The mastermind of this project, Mr. Arrut is a truly passionate and visionary leader, who demonstrated how a robust and resilient community could be built through developing local business.

## References

- Asia One. (2017). Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau Unveils 2018 Marketing Campaign. *Asia One*. Retrieved from: <http://www.asiaone.com/business/thailand-convention-and-exhibition-bureau-unveils-2018-marketing-campaign>
- Atiq, M., & Karatas-Ozkan, M. (2013). Sustainable corporate entrepreneurship from a strategic corporate social responsibility perspective: Current research and future opportunities. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 14(1), 5-14.
- Barin Cruz, L., Ávila Pedrozo, E., & de Fátima Barros Estivaleta, V. (2006). Towards sustainable development strategies: a complex view following the contribution of Edgar Morin. *Management Decision*, 44(7), 871-891.
- Batie, S. S. (2008). Wicked problems and applied economics. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 90(5) 1176-1191.
- Cision. (2016). TCEB Joins Hands with 13 Partners to Introduce Farm to Functions. *Cision PR Newswire*. Retrieved from: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/tceb-joins-hands-with-13-partners-to-introduce-farm-to-functions-300238124.html>
- Clark, M. C. (1993). Transformational learning. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 1993(57), 47-56.
- Cranton, P. (1996). *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gauthier, L. (2017). Sustainable business strategies: typologies and future directions. *Society and Business Review*, Vol. 12 No. 1, 77–93. doi: 10.1108/sbr-01-2016-0005
- Gracia, A., & de Magistris, T. (2008). The demand for organic foods in the South of Italy: A discrete choice model. *Food Policy*, 33(5), 386-396.
- Hodge, I. (1993). Sustainability: putting principles into practice. *An application to agricultural systems. Paper presented to Rural Economy and Society Study Group', Royal Holloway College*.
- Lans, T., Blok, V., & Wesselink, R. (2014). Learning apart and together: towards an integrated competence framework for sustainable entrepreneurship in higher education. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 62, 37-47.
- Lozano, R. (2012). Towards better embedding sustainability into companies' systems: an analysis of voluntary corporate initiatives. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 25, 14-26.

- Lubin, D. A., & Esty, D. C. (2010). The sustainability imperative. *Harvard business review*, 88(5), 42-50.
- Lüdeke-Freund, F. (2009). Business Model Concepts in Corporate Sustainability Contexts. In *Rhetoric to a Generic Template for 'Business Models for Sustainability'*. Lüneburg: Center for Sustainability Management (CSM).
- Luenguthai, P. (2015, December 6). Bliss Foundation rolls out organic initiative. *The Nation*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/%20Corporate/30274096>
- Mannion, A. M. (1995). *Agriculture and Environmental Change: Temporal and Spatial Dimensions*. Sussex: Wiley.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Nancy, C., Denise, B., Alba, D., Jennifer B., & Alan, J. N. (2014). The Use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 41(5), 545-547. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547>
- Nidumolu, R., Prahalad, C. K., & Rangaswami, M. R. (2009). Why sustainability is now the key driver of innovation. *Harvard business review*, 87(9), 56-64. doi: 10.1109/EMR.2015.7123233
- Northbourne, L. (1940). *Look to the Land*. London: J. M. Dent.
- Palma, L. C., & Pedrozo, E. Á. (2016). Transformative learning to promote sustainability: inserting the third level of learning in management programs. *Brazilian Journal of Science and Technology*, 3(1), 9. DOI 10.1186/s40552-016-0018-3
- Patrawart, J., & Sriurai, S. (2012). *Value Networks: A Strong Strategic Intent for the Development of Co-operatives in Thailand*. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.cai.ku.ac.th/SAR56/2.2.3.7%20UK\\_paper\\_55.pdf](http://www.cai.ku.ac.th/SAR56/2.2.3.7%20UK_paper_55.pdf)
- Roitner-Schobesberger, B., Darnhofer, I., Somsook, S., & Vogl, C. R. (2008). Consumer perceptions of organic foods in Bangkok, Thailand. *Food policy*, 33(2), 112-121. doi: org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2007.09.004
- Rudnicka, A. (2016). Understanding Sustainable Business Models. *Journal of Positive Management*, 7(4), 52-60.
- Sahota, A. (2016). The global market for organic food & drink. *The world of organic agriculture. Statistics and emerging trends, 2016*, 133-138. Retrieved from: [www.organic-world.net/yearbook/yearbook-2016.html](http://www.organic-world.net/yearbook/yearbook-2016.html).



- Salzmann, O., Ionescu-Somers, A., & Steger, U. (2005). The business case for corporate sustainability: literature review and research options. *European Management Journal*, 23(1), 27-36.
- Sampran Model. (2017). *23 November 2016 : Discover his Majesty's Sufficiency Living Model at the Bliss Festival 2016*. Retrieved from: <http://sampranmodel.com/en/2017/02/23-november-2016-discover-majestys-sufficiency-living-model-bliss-festival-2016/>
- Sampran Riverside. (2017). *Sampran Riverside: An eco-cultural destination since 1962*. Retrieved from: <http://sampranriverside.com/>
- Scofield, A. (1986). Biological Farming - The Origin of the Name. *Biological Agriculture and Horticulture*, 4(1), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01448765.1986.9754481>
- Senge, P. (1990). The art and practice of the learning organization. *The new paradigm in business: Emerging strategies for leadership and organizational change*, 126-138.
- Sriwichien, K., Kiratiboorana, Y., & Soungsaweng, W. (2013). The Fall, Existence and a Restoration Model of Community Bazaars along the Tha Chin River. *Asian Social Science*, 10(1), 257-264.
- Sterling, S. (2011). Transformative learning and sustainability: Sketching the conceptual ground. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, 5(11), 17-33.
- STISD.(2017).*Sampran Riverside Farm*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cmmu.mahidol.ac.th/test/stinsd/index.php/case-studies/sampran-riverside-farm>
- Teece, D. J. (2010). Business Models, Business Strategy and Innovation. *Long Range Planning*, 43(2-3), 172-194.
- The Nation. (2016, December 4). A farm concept that empowers communities. *The Nation*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/%20Corporate/30301083>
- Wai, O. K. (2016). Organic Asia 2015. *The World of Organic Agriculture Statistics and Emerging Trends 2016*, 172. Retrieved from [www.organic-world.net/yearbook/yearbook-2016.html](http://www.organic-world.net/yearbook/yearbook-2016.html).
- Willer, H., & Lernoud, J. (2016). *The world of organic agriculture. Statistics and emerging trends 2016* (pp. 1-336). Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL and IFOAM Organics International. Retrieved from: [www.organic-world.net/yearbook/yearbook-2016.html](http://www.organic-world.net/yearbook/yearbook-2016.html)

Willer, H., & Yussefi, M. (2011). L (2011) *The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerging Trends 2011*. In FiBL-IFOAM Report. Bonn: IFOAM and Frick: FiBL.