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Model of Competency Development of Accountants in Northeastern Thailand

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to present the model of competency development of accountants in northeastern Thailand. The researcher applied mixed methods research by conducting both quantitative and qualitative research. The statistics used in this research consist of frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, One-Way ANOVA (F-Test), Pearson Correlation Coefficient and content analysis. With regard to elements of accountants' competency that should be developed, the result shows that Talent (T) had the highest mean score, followed by Skills (S) and Knowledge (K), respectively. With regard to the comparison of attitude towards elements of accountants' competency that should be developed in total and, in particular, in the aspects of Knowledge, Skills, and Talent, classified by type of business, the hypothesis result shows that the sample in a different type of business had the same attitude towards accountants' competency that should be developed. With regard to the correlation analysis, the hypothesis result shows that all three competencies had a relationship with accountants' competency that should be developed in total at a high level with a statistical significance at .01. The researcher used the correlation coefficient to create the T-S-K Model to develop the competency of accountants in Northeastern Thailand.

Keywords: Development, accountants' competency, knowledge, skills, talent

1. Introduction

Thailand's 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027) aims to transform the country into an 'Advance Society, Sustainable Value-Creation Economy' to create a society that keeps pace with the dynamics of the world. This plan also has the main goal of developing people for the new era by focusing on enhancing people to have high competency in knowledge, behavioral skills, and characteristics according to the good norms of society. People will be provided the opportunities for continuous lifelong learning to prepare manpower for the needs of the labor market (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2021)

Accounting is another profession that has changed with the evolution of the times. In the context of the current economy, which is both an opportunity and an obstacle, that is important for the development of accountants to become international (Jabsornthip, 2014). When business competition becomes more intense, every type of business must develop every aspect to survive. Therefore, it is necessary for accounting to be developed in parallel with the business. Accordingly, business owners need accountants who can adapt their roles to become the partners of the executives. They must be able to prepare information reports for the executives or customers to understand more easily and know how to use technology to collect information, analyze data, and increase speed and accuracy (Garod, 2019).

However, there is still a gap between the business entrepreneurs' expectations and the competency of accountants. In the case of new graduates with Bachelor's degrees in Accounting, their knowledge and abilities do not meet the needs of entrepreneurs. This is due to a lack of professional skills, practical experience, and business knowledge, including tax law, accounting law, and other relevant laws. In the case of experienced accountants, even though most of them have specialized knowledge in the fields they perform regularly, they still lack omniscience or curiosity in other areas to learn new things. In consequence, the problems of human capital quality arise from educational inefficiencies and the inconsistency between labor market demand and labor quality, especially under the rapidly changing trend of technological advancement, which resulted in the change of labor skills demands. In addition to intellectual or technical skills, it is also expected that behavioral skills or human skills, such as creativity, communication, or teamwork, will be in demand and vital for jobs in the future. The reason is that it is the unique skills of human labor that cannot be replaced by modern technology (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2021).

Northeastern Thailand is the region with the largest area. There are provinces that are important economic cities spreading both in the upper and lower part of this region. There are also a number of entrepreneurs investing in manufacturing, merchandising, and service businesses. Most businesses employ employees who are responsible for accounting to work within the organization. Nevertheless, many businesses employ accounting firms to prepare accounting and tax reports for submission to the Department of Business Development and the Revenue Department. The researcher, as a professional accountant and an owner of an accounting firm in this region for over 20 years, has recognized the needs of business entrepreneurs and the limitations of accountants. Moreover, the researcher sees the

opportunity to increase the accountants' competency by developing the knowledge, skills, and talent to fulfill the expectations of business entrepreneurs. Therefore, the researcher is interested in studying the model of competency development of accountants. Currently, in Northeastern Thailand, no institution is conducting research in this field. The researcher aims to apply the research results in creating a course curriculum for the training session to develop accountants in the areas of professional competency, hard skills, and soft skills to enhance accountants' potential. This helps increase job opportunities and advancement and adds value and income for accountants.

If the business has professional accountants, they will be the important human capital to increase the competitiveness of the business in the future.

1.1. Purposes of Research

- To study the current accountants' competency.
- To compare the accountants' competency that should be developed, classified by type of business.
- To analyze the elements of accountants' competency that should be developed.
- To present the model of competency development of accountants in Northeastern Thailand.

1.2. Hypotheses of Research

- H1: Respondents in different types of business have different attitudes towards the elements of accountants' competency that should be developed.
- H2: The elements of accountants' competency in the aspect of Knowledge, Skills, and Talent have a relationship with accountants' competency that should be developed.

1.3. Research Paradigm

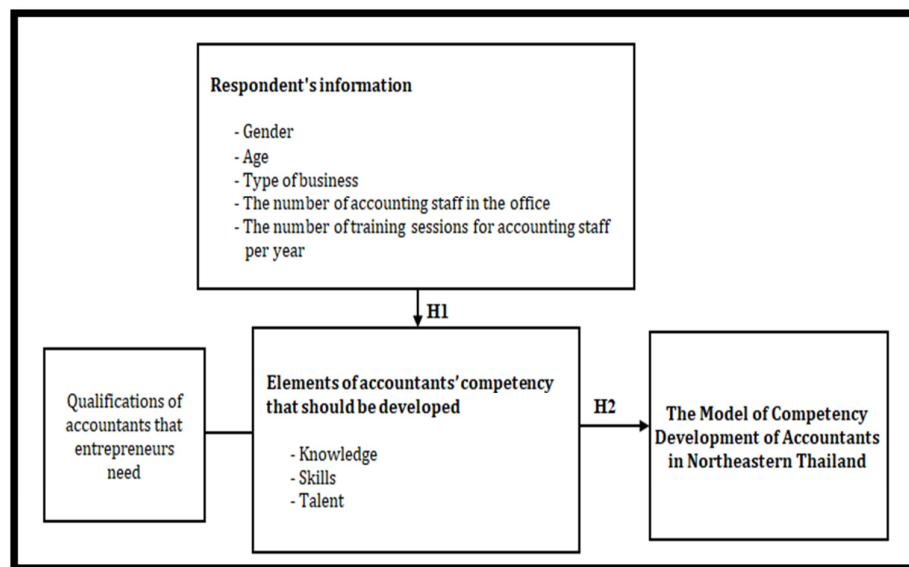


Figure 1: The Research Paradigm

2. Research Methodology

This research was conducted with mixed methods research, led by qualitative research followed by quantitative research, and used qualitative research to confirm quantitative research results. The process is as follows:

2.1. Qualitative Research

The researcher studied the literature, then analyzed and synthesized the variables from past research, and retrieved the elements of accountants' competency that should be developed in 3 areas: Knowledge, Skills, and Talent.

2.2. Quantitative Research

The researcher used these three elements to form a closed-ended and an open-ended questionnaire to explore attitudes towards the elements of accountants' competency that should be developed. The data were collected from 200 samples from the Chamber of Commerce network and the operators of large accounting firms located in provinces in the important economic zones of Northern Thailand, such as Surin, Ubon Ratchathani, Khon Kaen, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Udon Thani.

2.3. Qualitative Research

The researcher used the quantitative research results to create a questionnaire for 9 experts to evaluate the suitability and feasibility of the model.

3. Results of Data Analysis

3.1. The Results of Qualitative Data Analysis from the Synthesis of Element Variables

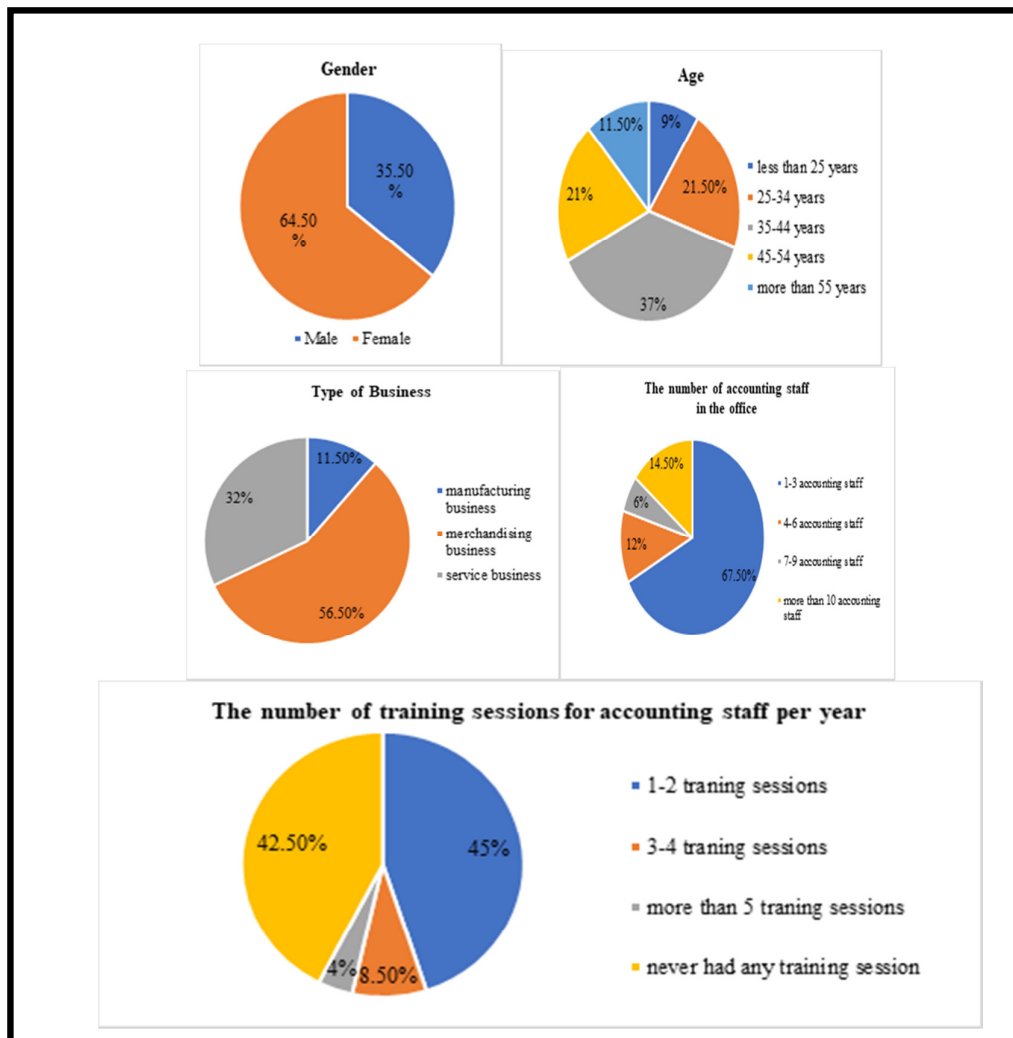
The researcher studied concepts from various academics and related research from both domestic and international sources and then synthesized the data and summarized the accountants' competency that should be developed, which is divided into 3 main areas and 19 sub-areas as follows:

- Knowledge (K) consists of (1) Taxation Laws, (2) Accounting Laws, (3) Business Laws and Regulations, (4) Customer's Business Structure, and (5) Executive Accounting.
- Skills (S) consist of (1) Financial Report Analysis Skills, (2) Accounting Program Skills, (3) Analytical Thinking Skills, (4) Planning Skills, and (5) Consulting Skills.
- Talent (T) consists of (1) Ability to Communicate Understandably, (2) Have Responsibility, (3) Have Honesty and Patience, (4) Ability to Use Foreign Language, such as English, Chinese, Etc., (5) Always Eager to Learn for Self-Development, (6) Ability to Solve Problems, (7) Ability to Work Well with Others, (8) Positive Thinking, and (9) Ability to Manage Time.

3.2. The Results of Quantitative Data Analysis

3.2.1. The Analysis Results of Demographic Profiles

With regard to the demographic profiles of 200 respondents, the results show that 64.50% were female, and 35.50% were male. 37.00% aged 35-44 years, followed by 21.50% aged 25-34 years, 21.00% aged 45-54 years, 11.50% aged more than 55 years, and 9.00% aged less than 25 years, respectively. 56.50% operated merchandising business, followed by service business at 32.00% and manufacturing business at 11.50% respectively. 67.50% had 1-3 accounting staff, followed by more than 10 accounting staff at 14.50%, 4-6 accounting staff at 12.00%, and 7-9 accounting staff at 6.00%, respectively. 45.00% had 1-2 training sessions for accounting staff per year, followed by those who never had any training session at 42.50%, 3-4 training sessions at 8.50%, and more than 5 training sessions at 4.00%, respectively (see figure 2).



3.2.2. The Analysis Results of the Accountants' Competency That Should Be Developed

Regarding the accountants' competency that should be developed, the result shows that the respondent agreed with the accountants' competency that should be developed at the highest level ($\bar{X} = 4.38$, S.D. = .660). In particular, Talent had the highest mean score ($\bar{X} = 4.42$, S.D. = .658), followed by Skills ($\bar{X} = 4.35$, S.D. = .770), and Knowledge ($\bar{X} = 4.32$, S.D. = .735), respectively (see table 1).

Accountants' Competency that should be Developed	\bar{X}	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
1) Knowledge	4.32	.735	Agree at the highest level	3
2) Skills	4.35	.770	Agree at the highest level	2
3) Talent	4.42	.658	Agree at the highest level	1
Total	4.38	.660	Agree at the highest level	

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Accountants' Competency That Should Be Developed in Total and in Particular

3.3. The Hypotheses Results

H1: Respondents in different types of businesses have different attitudes toward the elements of accountants' competency that should be developed. With regard to the comparison of attitude towards elements of accountants' competency that should be developed in total and in particular areas: Knowledge, Skills, and Talent, classified by type of business, the hypothesis result shows that the sample in different types of business had the same attitude towards accountants' competency that should be developed ($p > .05$) (see table 2).

Accountants' Competency that should be Developed		SS	Df	MS	f	Sig.
Knowledge	Between Group	2.290	2	1.145	2.145	.120
	Within Group	105.142	197	.534		
	Total	107.432	199			
Skills	Between Group	2.325	2	1.163	1.979	.141
	Within Group	115.754	197	.588		
	Total	118.080	199			
Talent	Between Group	1.419	2	.709	1.648	.195
	Within Group	84.809	197	.431		
	Total	86.228	199			
Accountants' Competency in Total	Between Group	1.774	2	.887	2.056	.131
	Within Group	84.542	196	.431		
	Total	86.316	198			

Table 2: The Comparison of Attitude toward Accountants' Competency That Should Be Developed in Total and in Particular Areas: Knowledge, Skills, and Talent, Classified by Type of Business
* $P > .05$

H2: The elements of accountants' competency in the aspect of Knowledge, Skills, and Talent have a relationship with accountants' competency that should be developed.

With regard to the analysis of the relationship among Knowledge, Skills, and Talent with accountants' competency in total, the hypothesis result shows that Knowledge)X₁, Skills)X₂(, and Talent)X₃(had the relationship with accountants' competency that should be developed in total (X) at a high level with the statistical significance at .01. While considering each pair of the relationship, the results show that every relationship had a high level of correlation, sorted from highest to lowest. The relationship between Talent)X₃(and accountants' competency that should be developed in total (X) ($r = .948$) was followed by the relationship between Skills)X₂(and accountants' competency that should be developed in total (X) ($r = .940$), and the relationship between Knowledge)X₁(and accountants' competency that should be developed in total (X) ($r = .902$) respectively (see table 3).

Variables	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X
X ₁	1.000			
X ₂	.823**	1.000		
X ₃	.755**	.830**	1.000	
X	.902**	.940**	.948**	1.000

Table 3: The Correlation Coefficient of Knowledge, Skills, and Talent with Accountants' Competency That Should Be Developed in Total

** With the Statistical Significance at .01

The results of the correlation coefficient analysis among Knowledge, Skills, and Talent, with accountants' competency that should be developed, can be used to create the model of competency development of accountants in northeastern Thailand (T-S-K Model) as follows:

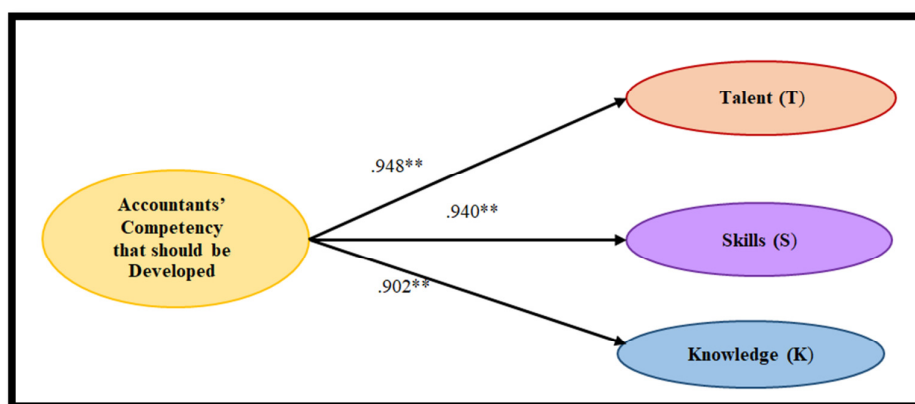


Figure 3: The Model of Competency Development of Accountants in North-eastern Thailand Created by the Researcher (T-S-K Model) (Addodon, 2022)

3.4. The Results of Qualitative Data Analysis from the Model Evaluation

With regard to the results of the evaluation of the model of competency development of accountants in northeastern Thailand, created by the researcher, the experts evaluated and saw that the model had the suitability and feasibility at high to the highest level.

4. Discussion

The results show that most respondents, as business entrepreneurs aged between 35 and 44 years, were between Gen X and Gen Y. They must work through the changing economic, social, and technological systems, including current business competition. It is also found that enterprises employ 1-3 accounting staff, and 45.00% encouraged their accounting staff to attend the training session 1-2 times per year, while 42.50% have never had any training sessions. Obviously, the accounting staff lacked the training and did not seek more knowledge and skills necessary to perform the job. This is in line with the research of Thasi, Romyen, and Thongrod (2020), who studied the desirable characteristics of accountants for entrepreneurs in Bangkok. The results show that the performance characteristic of an accountant is that there should be constant self-development. Educational institutions should also inquire about the needs of entrepreneurs to create and develop accountants. The training session for accountants should be organized by relevant agencies and notified to entrepreneurs who wish to send their accountants to participate in the training session.

With regard to elements of accountants' competency that should be developed, the result shows that Talent (T) had the highest mean score, followed by Skills (S) and Knowledge (K), respectively. Each main area has sub-areas that are important to the development of accountants' competency, as follows:

Regarding Talent, its sub-areas consist of:

- Have Honesty and Patience,
- Have Responsibility,
- Ability to Work Well with Others,
- Positive Thinking,
- Ability to Communicate Understandably,
- Always Eager to Learn for Self-Development,
- Ability to Solve Problems,
- Ability to Manage Time, and
- Ability to Use Foreign Languages, such as English, Chinese, etc.

It is relevant to the research of Salam and Hasan (2020), who studied the generic skills gap in curricula: are Thai accounting graduates ready for the contemporary workplace? The result shows that the generic skills required for the accounting profession were communication skills, leadership and teamwork, ethical and moral values, personal management or self-management, and decision-making. Accordingly, the research of Juljinda and Boonnoon (2018) about the needs of entrepreneurs to characteristics of a graduate of accounting program in Songkhla Province indicated the characteristics of graduates in the accounting field in the aspect of morality and ethics. It included discipline, punctuality, responsibility for duties, patience, diligence, perseverance in work, and sacrifice for the common good. In the aspect of interpersonal skills and responsibility, it included the ability to effectively adapt and work with others, both as a leader and as a follower who has been assigned, the ability to adapt to the organization and work system, and awareness of their roles and duties to oneself and society. In addition, it is relevant to the Buddhist principle, 'the Four Paths of Accomplishment (*Iddhipāda* 4)'.

Secondly, *Viriya* means to work with diligence to become proficient. Thirdly, *Citta* means to work with serious determination. The last one, *Vīmañsā* means to know how to think critically and develop creatively (W. Wachiramedhi, 2008). This is also in accordance with the principle of *Yonisomanasikāra*, which means using the right thinking, looking at things with thoughtful consideration, using intelligence to distinguish, thinking in an orderly manner, and seeing problems and causes of problems. These will enable them to understand and find solutions to problems and develop themselves (Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto), 2007).

Regarding Skills, its sub-areas consist of:

- Consulting Skills,
- Financial Report Analysis Skills,
- Accounting Program Skills,
- Planning Skills, and
- Analytical Thinking Skills

It is in line with the research of Prapaisri and Nuntapun (2020), who studied professional development guidelines for accounting professionals in the digital age. The results show that accounting professionals in the digital age should have technical skills, analytical thinking, and new business management to be a key gear in driving the organization so that the management work is efficient and effective, consistent and responsive to the changing business environment. Accounting professionals must also have the ability to think and analyze the business, including being a partner with business owners. Moreover, it is relevant to the research of Dwaase, Awotwe, and Smith (2020), who studied about skills requirements of a professional accountant in a changing work environment. The results show that in addition to the accounting skills requirements of technical and functional skills, accountants must also have personal skills, analytical thinking skills, and information technology skills, including organizational and business management skills. The role of accountants is changing in the modern era. Technical accounting skills are not enough; accountants also need other soft skills to be able to work in a modern business organization. Regarding Knowledge, its sub-areas consist of

- Taxation Laws,
- Accounting Laws,
- Executive Accounting,
- Business Laws and Regulations, and
- Customer's Business Structure

This is in accordance with the research of Koopeateng, Suakaew, and Manassong (2021), who studied the capabilities and efficiency of bookkeepers in accounting firms in the southern region of Thailand. The results show that knowledge about auditing and taxation had an effect on the efficiency of the bookkeeper's performance in compliance with accounting standards, information technology practice in accounting, and coordination with customers with statistical significance. Moreover, it is relevant to the research of Garod (2019), who studied about desirable characteristics of accountants in the digital era of enterprises in Loei Province. The results show that the desirable characteristics of professional accountants in the digital era include:

- The knowledge of taxation,
- The technology to develop industries in the digital era,
- The business strategy and management,
- The technology to support and promote Industry 4.0,
- The auditing and assurance,
- The information technology,
- The economics, the finance, and financial management,
- The financial accounting and financial reporting,
- The business and organization environment,
- The executive accounting,
- The law and regulations about business, and
- The governance with risk management and internal control

In addition, the research of Ditkaew *et al.* (2019) about desirable characteristics of accountants for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Muang Tak, Tak Province, also explained that the knowledge qualifications in the accounting profession included:

- Knowledge and ability in asset accounting,
- Knowledge of liability accounting,
- Ability to prepare and present financial statements to users, both inside and outside the organization,
- Knowledge and competence in executive accounting,
- Knowledge on cost accounting,
- Knowledge on tax accounting,
- Knowledge on accounting standards, and
- Knowledge on analyzing financial statements

The experts evaluated and saw that the model had the suitability and feasibility at high to the highest level. The T-S-K Model, created by the researcher, placed a high emphasis on Talent and Skills, which are the soft skills that have become increasingly important in the accounting profession as technology has replaced the role of accountants in recording data. This is in line with the concept of Chairat (2020). In the future, the work of accounting records will

disappear; it will remain only the discretion and analysis of data. The communication of information with the management section must be adapted to facilitate timely decision-making, including working with colleagues across professions to find solutions to problems for the organization.

5. Recommendations

- The research results bring about the knowledge that can lead to the creation of an accountant training session and development course that meets the needs of the labor market in northeastern Thailand.
- Entrepreneurs, accounting firms, and accountants can apply this knowledge to fix weaknesses and develop strengths to increase accountants' capacity to obtain the required personnel, create value, generate additional income, help reduce cost burden and increase efficiency in business operation.
- Further studies should be conducted to compare with other regions of the country.

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