

Group Interaction, Participation and Leadership: Comparison between Successful and Unsuccessful Rubber Sheet Improvement and Sales Groups in Southern Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to examine group interaction in giving group information to rubber group members, investigate group operations and members' participation, identify opinion leaders by using the sociometry in different farmer success levels, and compare some differences between groups. Sixty-seven farmers, 32 from an unsuccessful group (low level of performance) and 35 from a successful group (high level of performance) were interviewed without sampling.

The findings revealed that in group interaction for giving information about the group, members interacted with each other in the group and also across the group boundary. With reference to group participation, most members attended group meetings, however, they preferred to be listeners rather than opinion givers. Most helped support group activities. They accessed group information by various sources and were satisfied with the group's operation. For leadership identification, the sociometry showed that each group had two opinion leaders, which was classified as polymorphic leadership. In testing the hypotheses, statistical differences between groups were observed for group interaction in giving information. The unsuccessful groups had more group interaction in giving information than the successful ones.

Key words: Social network, Sociometry, Participation, Leadership, Rubber farmer's association

INTRODUCTION

In southern Thailand rubber plantations are widespread, both small and big depending on the socioeconomic status of the farmer. On the small farms the rubber grower manages the farm alone, whereas on the bigger farms the owner hires labour to manage the farm. Farmers make use of new technology (as recommended by government agricultural agents) differently, according to their personal beliefs, knowledge and skills. This results in a variety of quality of rubber sheets ranging from good to poor. Those who follow the government recommendations make higher quality rubber sheets and receive a higher price for their sale.

Individual farmers with only small plots to farm always face problems with selling their small number of rubber sheets. When they sell to local merchants, they receive a lower price without an option to bargain. To help improve this imbalance, farmer associations