

Research Article

King's Science-Based Local Administration: Implementing the Royal Working Principles, New Theory, And Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for Public Happiness

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Abstract: This qualitative study presents a comparative analysis of two case studies to investigate the systematic application of King's Science as an indigenous governance framework within Thai local administrative institutions. The framework reflects governance practices derived from the philosophical principles and development approach of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great (Rama IX). King's Science comprises three interconnected elements: the 27 Royal Working Principles, which guide routine administrative practice; the New Theory's three-stage development model, which organises development through sequential phases of self-reliance, collective organisation, and progressive expansion; and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, which provides an ethical and risk-management framework for strategic decision-making. Two organisations were purposively selected for recognised excellence in implementing King's Science: Thung Song Municipality, Nakhon Si Thammarat, an urban setting of approximately 30,000 residents, and Koh Phra Thong Subdistrict Administrative Organisation, Phang Nga, a rural island community of around 2,000 residents. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, policy document analysis, and participatory observation, and were examined using content, thematic, and narrative analyses, with triangulation employed to strengthen credibility. The analysis identified a consistent three-tier governance structure across both cases, comprising operational, methodological, and ethical-strategic tiers. The Koh Phra Thong case demonstrated that the group formation phase of Stage 2 can convert community social capital into institutional capacity supporting large-scale infrastructure investment. The study also documents implementation constraints, including employee resistance, project delays, and inter-organisational coordination challenges. Overall, King's Science exhibits conceptual convergence with contemporary governance paradigms and aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: King's Science, Sustainable Development, Public Administration, Royal Working Principles, New Theory, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, The New Theory's Three-Step Process.

1. Introduction

The contemporary discourse on sustainable development has increasingly highlighted the shortcomings of top-down governance models, creating stronger demand for management approaches that are inclusive, culturally grounded, and responsive to local contexts [1]. Local governance institutions occupy a pivotal position at the intersection of citizens and the state, translating broader development objectives into practical outcomes at the community level [2]. Consequently, scholars and practitioners have shown growing interest in integrating indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary administrative practices while safeguarding democratic accountability and effective governance.

Thailand offers a distinctive context for examining this issue. Over more than seven decades of national development, the country has established a comprehensive governance framework known as King's Science, derived from the philosophical principles and practical development initiatives of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great (Rama IX). The continuity of this framework has been reinforced during the reign of His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X), whose commitment to preserving, promoting, and extending these principles has further institutionalised King's Science as a dynamic body of knowledge linking traditional wisdom with contemporary governance challenges. Its international relevance was further recognised through the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006 [3], demonstrating that its significance extends beyond the Thai setting.

King's Science comprises three mutually reinforcing components. The first is the 27 Royal Working Principles, which provide practical direction for administrative practice and decision-making. The second is the New Theory, a three-stage development framework that guides

community development through the sequential phases of self-reliance, collective organisation, and progressive expansion. The third component is the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), which functions as a comprehensive ethical framework founded upon moderation, reasonableness, and resilience. In this study, these elements are conceptualised collectively as a three-tier governance architecture encompassing operational, methodological, and ethical-strategic dimensions.

This study also seeks to address two theoretical issues that have received limited attention within existing King's Science scholarship. The first concerns its relationship with dominant Western approaches to public administration, particularly New Public Management (NPM) [4] and Good Governance frameworks [5]. Although these paradigms share several objectives with King's Science, including performance orientation, transparency, and accountability, they differ fundamentally in their underlying assumptions about governance. Whereas NPM places considerable emphasis on market-oriented public service delivery, King's Science rejects the commodification of public services and challenges the cultural neutrality assumed by many conventional governance models. Instead, it anchors administrative practice in Buddhist ethics, collective responsibility, and long-term sufficiency. Examining both the commonalities and distinctions among these perspectives is therefore essential for evaluating the broader applicability of King's Science as a governance model beyond Thailand.

The second theoretical issue concerns the apparent duality between the hierarchical origins of King's Science and its participatory orientation. Although its principles originate from a royal institution and therefore derive legitimacy from a monarchical authority, their practical application places considerable emphasis on bottom-up participation, community self-reliance, and local empowerment. This reflects a broader governance dilemma involving legitimacy derived from

hierarchical authority and effectiveness achieved through participatory engagement. Comparable dynamics have been documented in numerous post-colonial governance systems where traditional authority structures coexist alongside democratic institutions [1]. Recognising this dual character is analytically significant because the successful implementation of King's Science in Thailand may be closely associated with the exceptional cultural legitimacy and moral authority of the monarchy, conditions that cannot be readily assumed in other national settings.

Despite the growing body of research on indigenous governance systems, substantial gaps remain regarding their operation within contemporary administrative institutions. Previous studies have largely concentrated on conceptual debates and historical perspectives, with comparatively limited attention devoted to practical implementation [6]. Furthermore, although King's Science has attracted considerable interest in Thai-language scholarship, relatively few English-language studies have examined its application within local governance institutions [3]. To address these gaps, this research investigates the implementation of King's Science across two contrasting local governance settings.

The central research question examines how local governance institutions systematically operationalise indigenous knowledge frameworks to achieve sustainable development across diverse geographical and socio-economic environments. Specifically, the study explores four interrelated aspects: (1) the implementation strategies adopted by local administrators to translate the three components of King's Science into administrative practice; (2) the ways in which these strategies are adapted to urban and rural settings while preserving the integrity of the framework; (3) the institutional mechanisms employed to overcome implementation barriers, organisational constraints, and stakeholder resistance; and (4) the broader lessons and policy implications that may inform governance reform in other developing countries.

2. Literature Review

2.1 King's Science: Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Positioning

King's Science represents a comprehensive framework for sustainable development that evolved during the 70-year reign of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej and through the implementation of more than 4,741 royal development projects [3]. This study draws upon two principal theoretical perspectives: Social Capital Theory [7] and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) [8]. These frameworks provide the primary analytical foundation for examining the three-layered governance architecture of King's Science. Social Capital Theory explains how the group formation stage of the New Theory converts community trust and social cohesion into institutional resources. In comparison, ABCD demonstrates how the Royal Working Principles build upon existing community assets rather than adopting deficit-oriented development approaches. To strengthen the analytical framework, the study also incorporates the Capability Approach, which complements SEP through its emphasis on expanding human capabilities, together with [7,8] distinction between bonding and bridging social capital, thereby providing a more nuanced interpretation of collective action processes.

The three components of King's Science operate as separate analytical dimensions while remaining functionally integrated within a unified governance architecture. The 27 Royal Working Principles comprise the operational layer, directing routine administrative practice and day-to-day decision-making. The New Theory constitutes the methodological layer, providing the structural framework for implementing major development programmes and projects. SEP functions as the ethical-strategic layer, shaping organisational decision-making and risk management. The systematic integration of these three layers provides the governance framework with analytical coherence, distinguishing comprehensive implementation of King's Science from fragmented or superficial applications that merely adopt isolated principles without embedding them within an integrated governance system.

2.2 The 27 Royal Working Principles: Operational Framework

The 27 Royal Working Principles provide the operational foundation of King's Science. Rather than functioning solely as practical administrative guidelines, they embody a participatory development philosophy that systematically embeds ethical values

within governance and public administration. Their conceptual foundations are informed by participatory development theory, systems thinking, and adaptive management [8]. The principles also complement the Capability Approach by emphasising the development of human capabilities and the value of local knowledge. From an ethical perspective, they are firmly rooted in Buddhist traditions that promote integrity, humility, perseverance, and collective responsibility, values that contrast markedly with Western governance paradigms that prioritise individual rationality and market efficiency. Comparable empirical work in local government confirms that organisational leadership shapes ethical conduct both directly and through the reinforcement of an ethics culture [9], that ethical leadership encourages discretionary citizenship behaviour among public officials [10], and that perceptions of workplace fairness are closely associated with ethical behaviour [11].

A comparative examination of the 27 Royal Working Principles and NPM reveals both shared characteristics and significant conceptual differences. Although NPM advocates efficiency, performance measurement, and market-oriented management practices [4], King's Science prioritises ethical leadership, community cohesion, and relational accountability. These distinctions become particularly apparent in practical implementation. Whereas NPM commonly evaluates governance through quantifiable performance indicators and encourages the marketisation of public services, King's Science conceptualises governance as a moral and relationship-based process centred on enhancing community well-being. Consequently, the Royal Working Principles demonstrate greater alignment with the New Public Service paradigm [4], which recognises citizens as active partners in governance, rather than as customers receiving public services, as typically emphasised within NPM.

2.3 New Theory: Three-Step Development Methodology

The New Theory was formally introduced by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 1992 as a structured framework for sustainable community development comprising three sequential stages: self-reliance, group formation, and expansion. Stage 1 concentrates on strengthening the capacities of individuals and households through the effective mobilisation of local resources, reflecting the sustainable livelihoods approach, which emphasises local assets and risk management. Stage 2 promotes collective action and collaboration, corresponding to [12] concept of social capital by enabling communities to overcome resource limitations through cooperative arrangements and shared learning [12]. Stage 3 focuses on scaling successful initiatives and developing wider collaborative networks, consistent with [13] Innovation Diffusion Theory. Comparable evidence from resource-constrained agricultural communities shows that resident-led self-organisation materially strengthens collective resilience [14].

A particularly important yet insufficiently theorised feature of the New Theory is Stage 2, in which group formation acts as the critical mechanism for converting locally generated momentum into institutionally recognised claims for external support. [7] argued that strong social networks reduce transaction costs while enhancing the credibility of collective action from the perspective of external stakeholders, including government agencies and development organisations. The findings from the Koh Phra Thong case provide a compelling illustration of this process in relation to large-scale infrastructure development. Community solidarity, demonstrated through documented preparatory activities rather than rhetorical claims alone, enabled locally generated trust to evolve into institutional resources recognised at the national level. Accordingly, the New Theory should be understood not simply as a sequential model of community development, but also as a systematic mechanism for accumulating social capital that strengthens institutional legitimacy and facilitates access to resources available through higher levels of governance. Evidence from sub-Saharan African local governments similarly demonstrates that community social capital strengthens citizen accountability behavior [15].

2.4 Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP)

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), formally introduced in 1998, offers a paradigmatic alternative to development models that prioritise economic growth maximisation. SEP is built upon three fundamental principles: moderation, which advocates avoiding excess in consumption and behaviour; reasonableness, which promotes decisions based on careful evaluation of causes and consequences; and resilience, which emphasises maintaining adaptive capacity amid external uncertainty. These principles are underpinned by two essential conditions: knowledge and ethics [3].

SEP departs fundamentally from conventional economic development theories by rejecting growth maximisation as the principal objective of governance. van Norren [16] identified substantial convergence between SEP and the SDGs, particularly in relation to poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, and participatory governance. Moreover, SEP exhibits strong conceptual consistency with Buddhist Economics [16] and Gross National Happiness frameworks [16], thereby positioning Thailand's development philosophy as a meaningful contribution to the international discourse on sustainable development. A defining characteristic of SEP is its integrated emphasis on resilience and ethical proportionality, both of which strengthen organisational risk management and accountability while addressing limitations commonly associated with technocratic governance models [5]. In practice, SEP operates as an internal decision-making framework that requires organisations to demonstrate that proposed initiatives satisfy the principles of moderation, reasonableness, and resilience. These value-based criteria complement conventional cost-benefit analysis by ensuring that strategic decisions incorporate social, environmental, and ethical considerations alongside economic outcomes.

2.5 King's Science in Relation to Post-NPM Governance, Indigenous Governance Frameworks, and Global Development Discourse

Understanding the theoretical positioning of King's Science requires examination from two complementary perspectives: its relationship with international post-NPM governance developments and its place among indigenous governance frameworks that provide alternatives to conventional Western administrative paradigms. Public administration reforms during the 1980s and 1990s were largely shaped by NPM, which promoted market-based mechanisms, performance measurement, and greater managerial autonomy [4]. From the early 2000s onwards, however, Holum [4] documented the emergence of post-NPM governance as a corrective movement that re-emphasised whole-of-government coordination, relational accountability, values-driven leadership, and sustained institutional capacity building. Rather than abandoning NPM entirely, post-NPM governance seeks to restore the ethical principles and public service orientation that had gradually diminished under earlier reform agendas [16].

King's Science exhibits notable convergence with post-NPM governance in three principal respects. First, the multi-stage structure of the New Theory integrates households, communities, and public institutions through a coordinated whole-of-community approach. Second, the accountability mechanisms embedded within SEP are more closely aligned with the values-based accountability promoted by post-NPM than with the contractual accountability traditionally associated with NPM. Third, the emphasis placed on institutional capacity building through the 27 Royal Working Principles and leadership development reflects the long-term institutional perspective advocated by post-NPM governance. These similarities suggest that King's Science independently arrived at many of the same governance principles as post-NPM, despite originating from a fundamentally different philosophical tradition. Nevertheless, an important distinction remains: whereas Western post-NPM models generally derive legitimacy from democratic governance and public accountability, King's Science is founded upon the moral authority of the monarchy and Buddhist ethical principles. This distinction has important implications for the transferability of the framework and is examined further in Section 5.4.

From the perspective of indigenous governance, Ubuntu, Buen Vivir, and King's Science each represent culturally grounded governance models that emphasise local relationships, communal values, and spiritual traditions as alternatives to universal technocratic approaches [17]. These frameworks similarly challenge the Western-centric assumptions embedded within NPM and Good Governance models, arguing that such approaches may not adequately reflect diverse cultural and social realities [5]. However, King's Science possesses a distinctive characteristic in that it originated from the highest level of state authority rather than emerging from grassroots movements or traditions of social resistance. This reversed developmental trajectory raises an important theoretical question concerning the circumstances under which top-down legitimacy can effectively generate bottom-up empowerment. Comparable governance dynamics have been observed in post-colonial societies [1], and this issue is revisited through empirical evidence in Section 5.1.

Within the wider sustainable development discourse, van Norren [16] demonstrated the normative and conceptual alignment between SEP and the SDGs. However, empirical evidence remains limited regarding the extent to which the practical implementation of King's Science within local governance institutions generates measurable outcomes that contribute to achieving the SDGs. This study addresses

that gap by presenting project-level empirical evidence drawn from two contrasting local governance contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study design to investigate the implementation of King's Science across two contrasting local governance institutions [18]. The comparative methodology enables the identification of patterns that are either context-specific or transferable across settings while evaluating the adaptability of the framework under varying socio-economic and geographical conditions.

The research is informed by three theoretical frameworks. First, Social Capital Theory [7] is applied to examine how the group formation stage of the New Theory converts community-based trust into institutional resources, particularly through Putnam's distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. Second, the ABCD framework [8] is employed to explain how the Royal Working Principles emphasise the mobilisation of existing community capacities and assets rather than approaches centred primarily on deficiencies and limitations. Third, Communities of Practice Theory, introduced by [8] and further developed by [8], provides an analytical lens for examining processes of knowledge exchange and transformation of organisational practices.

Jang and Park [8] argued that meaningful changes in practice develop through continuous participation within communities of practitioners, particularly through legitimate peripheral participation, rather than through unidirectional transfer of knowledge. This perspective provides insight into why the Chaipattana Foundation's SDLC programme achieved more sustainable outcomes than conventional training approaches and why behavioural transformation among officials at Thung Song Municipality required approximately eight months of continuous engagement and practical modelling. These theoretical perspectives are further reinforced by the Capability Approach, which is used to evaluate development outcomes by examining the expansion of human capabilities alongside measurable quantitative achievements.

3.2 Case Selection and Site Characteristics

The two organisations were purposively selected due to their recognition by the Chaipattana Foundation for demonstrating effective application of King's Science principles, while also representing substantially different governance structures and development settings. This intentional selection of contrasting cases was designed to enhance analytical depth by allowing investigation of how an identical governance framework operates under varying organisational scales, resource conditions, and development constraints [18].

Situated in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, Thung Song Municipality governs approximately 30,000 residents across 20 communities. As an urban local administrative institution, it experiences challenges commonly associated with urban governance, including recurring flood risks, the need for economic diversification, and the preservation of local cultural identity. Conversely, Koh Phra Thong SAO is a rural local administrative organisation responsible for approximately 2,000 residents across four villages. Its development challenges differ considerably, particularly in relation to infrastructure limitations, including restricted access to electricity, transportation difficulties, and geographical isolation. Despite these contextual differences, both cases share a significant common characteristic: the chief executives of both organisations participated in the SDLC organised by the Chaipattana Foundation and have incorporated King's Science principles into their organisational management and development practices since 2016. Therefore, both organisations provide an adequate period of implementation experience to facilitate a rigorous process-oriented examination of governance transformation and outcomes.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using four complementary approaches to establish methodological triangulation [18, 19]. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken with 12 key informants, including the mayor and five departmental directors from Thung Song Municipality, as well as the chief executive and five officials from Koh Phra Thong SAO. The number of participants was determined based on the sampling adequacy principles recommended

by [18]. The interviews focused on exploring the processes through which the three components of King's Science were interpreted, implemented, and transformed into practical governance outcomes. Recent systematic evidence on saturation indicates that this range of interviews and focus groups is normally sufficient to reach code saturation in focused qualitative designs [20].

Second, focus group discussions were organised with six participants from the first cohort of the SDLC delivered by the Chaipattana Foundation [18]. These discussions served to validate insights obtained from the interviews while incorporating additional perspectives from practitioners and specialists with direct implementation experience. Third, documentary analysis was performed using policy documents, project reports, and budgetary records obtained from both research sites. This process enabled the researchers to examine the development trajectory and implementation mechanisms of key initiatives over time. Fourth, participant observation was undertaken within the administrative and governance activities of both organisations over an eight-month period, allowing direct examination of implementation processes across different organisational contexts and operational environments. The trustworthiness of the findings was evaluated according to the four criteria established by [19]. Credibility was enhanced through member validation and triangulation among diverse sources of evidence. Transferability was supported through comprehensive contextual descriptions of the two case organisations. Dependability was reinforced through independent analytical procedures undertaken by multiple researchers. Finally, confirmability was established through systematic comparison and verification between interview evidence and documentary materials [21]. Consistency between the two intrinsic cases was established through concurrent method, source, and data triangulation [22]. Reflexive documentation of analytical decisions further supported confirmability [23], and tabular displays of evidence were used to make the analytical chain transparent to readers [24].

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis incorporated content analysis, thematic analysis, and narrative analysis to identify recurring patterns associated with

implementation processes, institutional mechanisms, and resulting outcomes. This analytical strategy was guided by the study's primary theoretical foundations, particularly Social Capital Theory and ABCD, while allowing sufficient flexibility for the emergence of additional themes derived directly from the empirical evidence. To enhance the robustness and credibility of the findings, triangulation procedures were implemented through independent analysis by multiple researchers, validation of interpretations with key informants, comparative examination across the two cases, and systematic integration of documentary materials with interview evidence [21]. The analysis deliberately considered not only successful implementation outcomes but also practical challenges, organisational resistance, and contextual limitations, thereby providing a balanced and comprehensive scholarly evaluation of King's Science implementation. These procedures respond to established guidance on demonstrating reliability, validity, and overall quality in qualitative inquiry [25].

4. Results

4.1 Comparative Implementation Framework

A comparative analysis of the two case-study organisations illustrates the manner in which the three components of King's Science were operationalised as an integrated governance architecture. The analysis highlights variations in implementation outcomes across different contexts and demonstrates their respective alignment with the SDGs, as summarised in Table 1. The comparison demonstrates structural consistency in the application of the three-layered governance architecture, while also revealing substantial contextual variations in implementation. Although the two organisations differ in terms of scale, geographical characteristics, and primary development challenges, both follow a shared institutional logic centred on strengthening internal capacities to establish credibility, mobilise external resources, and generate outcomes responsive to specific community requirements. This adaptive capacity supports the proposition that King's Science represents a transferable governance architecture rather than a purely culture-specific administrative practice.

Table 1: Comparative Implementation Framework: Thung Song Municipality and Ko Phra Thong SAO with King King's Science

Dimension	Thung Song (Urban, 30k)	Ko Phra Thong (Island, 2k)	Key Outcomes	SDG Alignment
Context & Challenges	Annual flooding; economic diversification; cultural preservation	No access to grid electricity; inadequate water transport; reliance on generator power	Flood impacts on 70 households to be solved within 24 hours (2025); cultural market: 200 vendors	SDG 8, 11, 16
Key Projects	Flood protection infrastructure; Thung Song cultural market; education development	5 km submarine cable (80 million baht); 4 floating piers (80 million baht)	All four villages now have access to electricity, and year-round water transport systems have been established.	SDG 7, 9, 16
New Theory Progress	Stage 1: Self-funded pilot project → Stage 2: Provincial-level group formation → Stage 3: National-level investment	Stage 1: Preparation of village labour registry → Stage 2: Joint presentation from all villages → Stage 3: Fundraising of 160 million baht	International fundraising of 160 million baht for Koh Phra Thong and the development of national-level flood protection infrastructure in Thung Song	SDG 17 (partnerships)
Institutional Challenges	Four senior officials opposed the consultation process, resulting in a 3-month delay in marketing planning.	Labour shortages during fishing season; inter-village coordination challenges.	Full participation achieved (~8 months); the market was launched after consensus was reached.	—

Note: THB = Thai Baht. SDGs as defined by [16]. Data were obtained from interviews (n = 12), focus group discussions (n = 6), document analysis, and participatory observation conducted during 2024–2025.

4.2 Implementation Patterns and Institutional Mechanisms

4.2.1 The 27 Royal Working Principles: From Philosophy to Administrative Practice

Both organisations integrated the 27 Royal Working Principles into their administrative practices through five institutional dimensions: (1) systematic assessment of community needs before project initiation, (2) participatory budgeting procedures involving multi-stakeholder committees and formally documented consensus-building processes, (3) continuous incorporation of feedback through quarterly monitoring and evaluation meetings, (4) facilitative leadership demonstrated by senior executives, and (5) ongoing improvement mechanisms that preserved organisational learning records. These records subsequently functioned as evidence of institutional credibility when seeking external funding support.

The most notable implementation challenge emerged in Thung Song Municipality, where four senior officials initially resisted participation in community consultation processes. This resistance reflected established hierarchical management traditions embedded

within the organisational culture. Overcoming this barrier required an eight-month transformation process involving sustained leadership demonstration, structured capacity-building activities, and collaborative learning initiatives with personnel from the Chaipattana Foundation. This experience corresponds with established models of organisational change, which emphasise that lasting institutional transformation requires the creation of urgency, development of a guiding coalition, and continuous communication of a shared vision before new practices can become embedded within organisational culture. This literature also highlights the importance of visible short-term achievements in reducing resistance to change. This principle is reflected in the Koh Phra Thong case, where the mayor's ethical decision to accept delayed electricity provision for his own village created a visible demonstration of fairness, strengthened community trust, and reduced resistance during later implementation stages.

The findings further support Communities of Practice Theory [8], indicating that the 27 Royal Working Principles do not automatically generate behavioural transformation. Rather, their effective application requires sustained participation, interaction, and experiential learning

within a community of practitioners before meaningful changes in administrative practice can be established. The time required for cultural transformation has important analytical implications. When King's Science is evaluated solely through NPM efficiency criteria, the eight-month transition period may appear as an administrative inefficiency or delay. However, from a post-NPM governance perspective [4], this process represents evidence of relational governance operating effectively, as institutional change was achieved through trust-building, shared learning, and value-based engagement rather than through rapid procedural implementation alone. Evidence on how professionals contribute to collaborative working supports this reading of practice change as relational rather than instructional [26], while public-sector

human resource research underlines the organisational conditions required to sustain such change [27].

4.2.2 New Theory: Social Capital Accumulation and External Resource Mobilization

For major development initiatives, both organisations implemented the New Theory's three-stage development process with a high level of consistency and adherence to its underlying principles. Table 2 presents the empirical evidence associated with each implementation stage, categorised according to the relevant forms of social capital and the respective case-study contexts.

Table 2: New Theory: Stage-by-Stage Social Capital Conversion Evidence

Stage	Social Capital	Koh Phra Thong SAO	Thung Song Municipality
1. Self-Reliance	Bonding capital formed [7]	Village residents contributed labour to the repair of roads, drainage systems, and public facilities. Outcomes were documented through records of participating households, labour hours contributed, and material compensation provided.	The municipality initially implemented a self-financed pilot flood mitigation project and systematically documented pre- and post-intervention impacts to demonstrate internal implementation capacity.
2. Group Formation	Bonding → Bridging conversion [7]	The village heads of all four villages jointly submitted supporting documentation, including records of electricity outages, written inter-village commitments, and Stage 1 registration records. → Budget officials identified these records as critical evidence supporting the approval of funding assistance.	The provincial and regional partnerships were established with the Department of Irrigation, the Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning, and the Trang Municipality. The municipality's prior investment record served as evidence of its credibility and commitment.
3. Expansion	Institutional legitimacy → external investment [13]	As a result, the project received approval for THB 80 million in funding for cable installation. A demonstrated record of high utilization capacity provided additional justification for a second funding proposal for the construction of a pier valued at THB 80 million, resulting in a total approved investment of THB 160 million.	National-level funding was allocated from multiple government agencies to support flood management efforts. By 2025, flood impacts had been substantially reduced, declining from annual flooding events affecting large numbers of households to incidents affecting only 70 households and lasting no longer than 24 hours.
Note: The classification of social capital types follows the conceptual frameworks developed by [7] Statements attributed to budget officials were obtained through in-depth interviews. THB = Thai Baht.			

A central analytical finding emerges from Stage 2 implementation in Koh Phra Thong. Budget officials specifically identified Stage 1 documentation, including records of household labour contributions and community-provided material offsets, as critical evidence supporting funding approval rather than relying exclusively on the proposed project requirements. This finding provides a practical demonstration of [7] concept of the transformation of bonding capital into bridging capital. Through systematic documentation of local contributions and collective community efforts, the community converted internal social cohesion (bonding capital) into external institutional recognition and resource support (bridging capital). The cumulative impact of Stage 3 further reinforces this mechanism. The successful completion of initiatives such as the cable installation project created a foundation for subsequent funding proposals, including an additional THB 80 million allocation for the development of a floating pier system. Consequently, a total external investment of THB 160 million was generated from the initial community mobilisation and locally organised labour established during Stage 1.

A comparable process was identified in Thung Song Municipality, although it occurred within a different institutional setting. Locally financed flood mitigation pilot projects produced documented evidence of technical capability and implementation effectiveness, which subsequently supported the development of provincial-level partnerships. These collaborations later facilitated investment from multiple national agencies. Although the two cases differed considerably in terms of project characteristics and organisational environments, both demonstrated an identical underlying institutional mechanism: documented self-investment creates legitimacy and credibility, which subsequently enables access to external resources. This pattern indicates that the resource mobilisation capacity of King's Science is not restricted to a particular project type or organisational context but is derived from a consistent governance logic centred on demonstrated commitment and collective action.

4.2.3 Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: Values-Based Project Appraisal

SEP was implemented in both organisations through a structured assessment procedure comprising five criteria that were consistently applied before approving major financial commitments. Instead of replacing

conventional cost-benefit analysis, SEP operated as an additional evaluative mechanism that broadened the decision-making process by incorporating ethical, social, and long-term sustainability considerations. Table 3 presents the assessment framework and demonstrates its practical application within the two case-study organisations.

Three characteristics of the SEP evaluation process are particularly important from an analytical perspective.

First, the Ethics Condition translates ethical principles into observable organisational practices through procedural adherence. The decision-making process regarding village electrification, in which the mayor's own village was deliberately connected at a later stage, was formally documented, publicly recognised, and widely discussed within the community. This action functioned as an institutional signal demonstrating that SEP-based decision-making standards applied consistently across all levels of administration. Consequently, it established a form of relational accountability consistent with the principles of the New Public Service paradigm proposed by [4].

Second, the Resilience Criterion encourages the incorporation of contingency measures, including backup utility poles, solar power systems, and maintenance resources prepared before potential disruptions occur. These arrangements proved particularly valuable in facilitating rapid responses to cable failures by relying on locally available resources. Without the requirement to consider resilience, such preventive investments may have been perceived as unnecessary costs and potentially excluded from expenditure planning. Third, both mayors explicitly highlighted the importance of the Reasonableness and Ethics criteria, explaining that these principles provided a justifiable foundation for demonstrating administrative compliance during audits conducted by the NACC and the OAG. This accountability dimension extends beyond the scope of conventional financial control systems by incorporating ethical justification and broader governance considerations into decision-making processes. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that SEP operates not merely as a symbolic philosophical principle, but as a practical governance mechanism capable of influencing organisational behaviour, accountability practices, and strategic decision-making outcomes. This is consistent with evidence that management capacity and integrity systems jointly determine the effectiveness of public accountability regimes [28].

Table 3: SEP Project Appraisal: Criteria and Organizational Application across Both Sites

SEP Criterion	Appraisal Question	Koh Phra Thong Application	Thung Song Application
Moderation	Is the scale of intervention appropriate to the identified needs?	Infrastructure investments were proportionate to the island's population size, while the provision of backup solar energy systems was appropriately calibrated to the risks associated with electricity outages.	Project scope was adjusted to align with the municipality's budgetary capacity at each stage of implementation. Access to central government funding was pursued only after clear evidence of local investment and commitment had been demonstrated.
Reasonableness	Was formal cost-benefit analyses conducted?	The cable route was selected to minimize damage to coral reefs (with coral restoration activities formally documented). In addition, a formal financial justification was prepared and submitted for the pier construction project.	Investments in flood prevention measures were justified based on annual damage assessments, while the marketplace development project was supported by vendor demand surveys that demonstrated its appropriateness and necessity.
Resilience	Are there emergency plans in place?	The original pier has been retained alongside a floating docking system. Backup solar and kerosene-based energy systems are maintained, and a cable maintenance gondola system has been procured to ensure operational continuity.	A dispute resolution protocol has been established for the market (activated following a three-month delay), and the flood mitigation project has been implemented in phases to accommodate potential funding disruptions and emergency response needs.
Knowledge Condition	Do officials possess necessary knowledge and skills?	The mayor has reviewed maritime electricity requirements. Relevant officials have received training in pier maintenance, and financial literacy programs have been delivered to 200 vendors.	Technical personnel have been trained in flood hydrology, educational programming is implemented by curriculum specialists, and academic partnerships have been established to support market development.
Ethics Condition	Does this decision reflect appropriate ethical considerations?	The mayor is aware of the delay in connecting the electricity system to his own village (Village No. 4, the most remote area), a matter that is publicly known. Members of the municipal council have stated that this forms a foundation of trust within the community.	All expenditures have been fully documented in preparation for audit by the NACC/OAG. Procurement procedures comply with applicable regulations, and all records are properly maintained.

Note: The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) framework is based on [3].

NACC refers to the National Anti-Corruption Commission; OAG refers to the Office of the Auditor General. The evidence is derived from interviews and participant observation in project review meetings.

4.2.4 Institutional Challenges and Adaptive Responses

The following four challenges were identified across the two case studies.

First, resistance among staff towards facilitative leadership practices was observed in Thung Song Municipality. This issue was progressively mitigated through continuous leadership demonstration and peer-based learning activities over an eight-month period. From an analytical perspective, this phenomenon corresponds with [5] concept of normative isomorphism, whereby organisations often reproduce established professional standards and inherited administrative practices. Accordingly, the shift from directive management towards facilitative leadership represented not simply a modification in individual behaviour, but a fundamental challenge to deeply embedded institutional logics. External institutional support, particularly from the Chaipattana Foundation, played a crucial role in legitimising the adoption of alternative management approaches.

Second, disagreements among community members during the planning phase of the cultural market project contributed to a three-month implementation delay. Nevertheless, this delay can be interpreted as evidence of meaningful participatory practice rather than ineffective management. The extended consultation process demonstrated that stakeholder engagement was substantive and decision-oriented rather than merely symbolic, although it involved unavoidable temporal costs. Third, tensions between livelihood requirements and governance participation emerged in Koh Phra Thong, where fishing activities limited community members' availability during Stage 1 implementation. This challenge was addressed through flexible adjustment of implementation schedules rather than through compulsory participation requirements. Such an approach remained consistent with the New Theory's emphasis on authentic capacity development and voluntary engagement rather than adherence to externally imposed timelines.

Fourth, the complexity of coordinating multiple agencies during Stage 3 was addressed through formalised liaison mechanisms established in both study locations. This adaptation reflects [5] concept of mimetic isomorphism, whereby organisations adopt practices demonstrated to be effective in comparable contexts to reduce uncertainty within complex operational environments. Overall, these challenges should be interpreted as inherent characteristics of participatory governance rather than evidence of organisational shortcomings. The adaptive responses developed by both organisations provide important insights for institutions seeking to balance participatory governance principles with practical administrative requirements. Comparable findings on inter-organisational collaboration within the state [29] and on the managerial tensions arising in multi-actor partnerships [30] indicate that formalised liaison arrangements are a common coping strategy in such settings.

4.3 Summary: Four Key Findings

First, the three-layered governance architecture demonstrated integrated functionality across both organisations. None of the individual layers achieved optimal performance independently; rather, their effectiveness emerged from the interaction and mutual reinforcement among all three dimensions, collectively strengthening organisational capacity and governance outcomes. Second, the process through which Stage 1 self-investment generated institutional credibility during Stage 2 represents the most analytically significant contribution of the New Theory. The findings reveal a transferable mechanism through which communities can convert locally generated social capital and collective participation into recognised institutional legitimacy and access to resources from higher levels of governance.

Third, the SEP appraisal protocol operated as a values-based accountability mechanism that incorporated ethical proportionality and responsiveness to community needs beyond the scope of conventional financial auditing systems. Its implementation produced observable organisational practices, including proactive contingency planning, ethical leadership demonstration, and systematic commitment to documentation and record maintenance. Fourth, the institutional difficulties identified in both cases, including employee resistance, community-level disagreements, competing livelihood demands, and multi-agency coordination challenges, should be interpreted as inherent elements of participatory governance rather than as isolated implementation failures. The adaptive approaches developed by both organisations provide practical guidance for other institutions seeking to reconcile participatory governance objectives with the operational realities of public administration.

5. Discussion

5.1 King's Science as Post-NPM Governance: Theoretical Positioning

Empirical findings from the two case studies indicate that King's Science can be understood as a culturally embedded form of post-NPM governance [4]. Its defining features, including values-oriented leadership, relational accountability, and sustained commitment to community development, extend beyond the efficiency-driven orientation of NPM [4] and the procedural compliance approach commonly associated with Good Governance frameworks [5]. Table 4 provides a systematic representation of this theoretical positioning.

Table 4: King's Science: Comparative Theoretical Positioning Against NPM and Good Governance

Dimension	King's Science (This Study)	New Public Management (Hood, 1991)	Good Governance (World Bank, 1992)
View of Citizens	Governance participants and partners; community solidarity as a governance resource	Service recipients and customers; citizens as consumers expressing preferences	Rights holders and stakeholders; civil society as a mechanism for accountability and oversight
Performance Logic	Relationship quality, community well-being, and ethical appropriateness (SEP criteria)	Measurable outputs, performance indicators, and market-like efficiency metrics	Procedural compliance, transparency indicators, and adherence to the rule of law
Accountability Mechanism	Relational accountability (through SEP appraisal and ethical role-modelling embodied in the Royal Working Principles); commitment in values	Contractual and performance-based accountability; grounded in performance agreements and output measurement	Formal procedural accountability; maintained through audits, anti-corruption institutions, and judicial oversight
Resource Mobilization	Social capital transformation: bonding capital → bridging capital → access to external institutional resources (New Theory)	Market-based mechanisms, competitive tendering and public-private partnerships.	Aid conditions, international lending, and technical assistance frameworks
Cultural Grounding	Explicitly culture-specific: Buddhist ethics, monarchical legitimacy, and Thai social norms.	Explicitly culture-neutral: assumes universal managerial rationality as the normative foundation	Aspires to universality: based on democratic norms and rule-of-law principles intended to be transferable across cultural contexts
Limitations Identified	Legitimacy depends on monarchical authority; social cohesion within small communities is essential; leadership development infrastructure is critically important.	Risks commodifying public services; undermining relationship-based governance; and eroding institutional trust.	Assumptions of cultural neutrality may conceal Western normative biases; implementation can become disconnected from local knowledge systems.
Note: NPM dimensions referred from [4] Good Governance dimensions referred from [5] and [8]. King's Science dimensions obtained from the empirical discovery in Section 4 and the theoretical literature reviewed in Section 2.			

The analysis identified three central theoretical perspectives. First, conceptualising citizens as active participants rather than service recipients or customers has significant institutional consequences. Organisations operating under this principle are required to dedicate resources to consultation, facilitation, and consensus-building mechanisms that establish collective responsibility and shared accountability. Accordingly, the three-month postponement of the cultural market project and the eight-month period required to transform staff practices should not be regarded as evidence of ineffective implementation. Instead, these experiences demonstrate the practical operation of participatory governance principles embedded within the framework. This interpretation is consistent with the change-management literature, which emphasises that sustainable organisational transformation depends on developing a guiding coalition and embedding new practices within organisational culture, processes that require sufficient time to achieve meaningful behavioural change.

Second, the relational accountability mechanism incorporated within the SEP appraisal protocol generates a distinctive form of accountability that cannot be easily reproduced through NPM or Good Governance approaches. Specifically, it encourages voluntary ethical conduct that is publicly visible and strengthens trust-based legitimacy for collective action throughout different stages of governance processes. This finding corresponds with the capability perspective, which conceptualises accountability as being closely connected to human agency, social relationships, and community engagement. Third, the transformation of staff resistance into facilitative administrative practice within King's Science reflects [5] concept of normative isomorphism, whereby institutional acceptance of new governance practices requires external legitimacy and professional reinforcement. In this context, support from institutions such as the Chaipattana Foundation played an important role in enabling new administrative approaches to become culturally accepted within organisations. Nevertheless, King's Science remains distinct from Western post-NPM models because its legitimacy is derived primarily from monarchical moral authority and Buddhist ethical traditions rather than democratic accountability. This distinction creates important considerations regarding the transferability of the framework, which are examined further in Section 5.4.

5.2 The Social Capital Conversion Mechanism: Theoretical Contribution

Empirical evidence from the Koh Phra Thong submarine cable project reveals a sequential process through which social capital is transformed under the New Theory across two developmental stages. During Stage 1, Self-Reliance activities generate bonding social capital [7] through systematic records of labour contributions, household participation, and material cost compensation. These activities represent more than operational involvement; they provide institutional evidence of the community's collective capacity for organisation and self-mobilisation. During Stage 2, Group Formation transforms this

documented bonding capital into bridging capital [7], thereby creating the institutional credibility required to secure external financial support. Budget officials explicitly recognised Stage 1 documentation as a prerequisite for funding approval, demonstrating that this conversion process is a structurally embedded requirement rather than an incidental outcome.

These findings contribute to [7] conceptualisation of social capital by explaining how institutions can enhance the visibility and accessibility of community-generated social capital for external resource providers through deliberate documentation practices. They also extend [7] framework by identifying the practical mechanism through which bonding capital is converted into bridging capital. Furthermore, the cumulative progression observed during Stage 3, where documented success from earlier initiatives directly supported a subsequent THB 80 million infrastructure proposal for the pier system, illustrates the accumulative character of social capital development. This finding is consistent with [12], who argued that successful collective action generates transferable institutional capacities that can support future governance challenges. A comparable mechanism was identified in Thung Song Municipality, although it operated through different institutional arrangements. This evidence demonstrates that the process is not restricted to small island communities but can also be applied within urban governance contexts, provided that the fundamental mechanisms of evidence generation, credibility formation, and external resource mobilisation are maintained.

5.3 Alignment with International Development Frameworks

King's Science demonstrates substantial conceptual convergence with internationally recognised sustainable development frameworks. The three-stage methodology of the New Theory closely corresponds with the principles of ABCD [8] by prioritising the mobilisation of existing community capacities rather than focusing on deficiencies or limitations. Notably, this similarity appears to have developed independently across distinct cultural settings. Furthermore, SEP's emphasis on moderation, reasonableness, and adaptive capacity demonstrates strong compatibility with the Capability Approach, which evaluates governance effectiveness through the enhancement of human capabilities and community wellbeing rather than through the pursuit of productivity maximisation alone.

The project-level outcomes presented in Table 1 provide empirical evidence of King's Science's contribution to the SDGs. Specifically, the submarine cable infrastructure project in Koh Phra Thong demonstrates alignment with SDG 7 through improved access to electricity, while the cultural market and flood mitigation initiatives in Thung Song correspond with SDG 8 and SDG 11. In addition, governance transformation observed across both study sites reflects alignment with SDG 16 through strengthened institutional capacity and accountable governance practices. These findings reinforce and extend [16] argument by demonstrating that the relationship between indigenous governance

frameworks and the UN SDGs extends beyond theoretical or normative compatibility. Instead, such alignment can be empirically observed through measurable implementation processes and tangible development outcomes.

5.4 Limitations and Conditions for Transferability

Four conditions constrain the direct transferability of the findings regarding the application of King's Science in alternative contexts.

First, the study focuses exclusively on cases that have been recognised as successful implementations, which limits the ability to determine the factors differentiating successful outcomes from partial or unsuccessful adoption. Future investigations should incorporate cases demonstrating varying levels of implementation effectiveness to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the framework's practical limitations and enabling conditions. Although the credibility of this study was strengthened through the trustworthiness procedures proposed by [19], including member checking, triangulation, and maintenance of an audit trail, potential sampling bias remains an important limitation.

Second, the moral legitimacy associated with the Thai monarchy represents a culturally specific foundation of authority that cannot be readily replicated in other national settings. The manner in which royal origins contribute to the acceptance and implementation of participatory governance within Thailand is highly distinctive. Consistent with [5] argument, institutional legitimacy is dependent upon forms of authority that are socially and culturally recognised within a particular context. Therefore, other societies seeking to adapt King's Science would need to identify equivalent sources of culturally legitimate authority, such as religious institutions, historical leaders, or trusted civil society organisations. Without such legitimacy, the absence of an accepted authority base may represent a structural limitation rather than a straightforward implementation obstacle.

Third, both case studies involve relatively small communities characterised by strong social cohesion, conditions that facilitate collective participation during Stage 2 of the New Theory. Although Thung Song Municipality provides preliminary evidence that the mechanism may function within a larger urban environment, its applicability to highly populated, socially fragmented, or economically unequal settings remains an empirical issue requiring further investigation. Fourth, both organisational leaders had completed the Chaipattana Foundation SDLC prior to implementation, establishing Communities of Practice [8] through which practitioners developed tacit knowledge, shared experiences, and relational capabilities via legitimate peripheral participation. Organisations without comparable leadership development structures may encounter substantially greater implementation barriers, as King's Science cannot be effectively reduced to a set of administrative procedures or policy instructions without undermining the integrated nature of its governance architecture.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that indigenous knowledge systems can be effectively integrated into contemporary local governance to achieve sustainable development outcomes across diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts. By examining two Thai local governance institutions facing complex development challenges, the study confirms the adaptability of King's Science and identifies the mechanisms through which its three-layered governance architecture generates practical outcomes. A key empirical contribution is the identification of the social capital transformation mechanism embedded within the New Theory. Stage 1 (Self-Reliance) develops bonding capital through documented community self-investment. Stage 2 (Group Formation) transforms this bonding capital into bridging capital, enabling communities to build institutional credibility, access external resources, and shift from passive beneficiaries to active development partners. Stage 3 (Expansion) further strengthens this process by using accumulated credibility to support additional resource mobilisation. The Koh Phra Thong submarine cable project, followed by a second THB 80 million infrastructure investment based on the same evidence foundation, provides a clear demonstration of this cumulative mechanism. The study positions King's Science as a culturally grounded governance framework that combines ethical leadership, relational accountability, and community-centred development. While it shares similarities with contemporary governance approaches, it remains distinctive through its foundation in Buddhist ethics, monarchical legitimacy, and Thai communal values. The SEP-based accountability mechanism further demonstrates that ethical governance can strengthen organisational responsibility beyond conventional performance measurement and procedural compliance. Successful implementation of King's Science depends on four essential conditions: (1) culturally legitimate authority that supports participatory

values, (2) leadership development that cultivates tacit knowledge and relational capacity, (3) sufficient social cohesion to enable collective action, and (4) organisational commitment to meaningful participation rather than symbolic consultation. Without these conditions, reducing King's Science to isolated principles or administrative procedures may weaken the integrated governance architecture responsible for its effectiveness.

6.1 Policy Implications for Developing Nations

Based on the empirical findings, five practical policy recommendations are proposed for policymakers and practitioners in other developing country contexts.

1. Adopt King's Science as an Integrated Architecture: King's Science should be implemented as a unified governance framework rather than as separate principles. The interaction among the three-layered governance architecture, the 27 Royal Working Principles, the New Theory, and SEP is essential for generating effective outcomes. Isolated adoption of individual components may result in fragmented implementation and reduced effectiveness.
2. Invest in Structured Leadership Formation: Leadership development should be regarded as a fundamental requirement rather than an additional capacity-building activity. The Chaipattana Foundation's NPY Course model, which combines value formation, case-based learning, and practitioner networks, demonstrates the importance of developing tacit knowledge and relational capabilities that cannot be replaced by administrative procedures alone.
3. Recognize Community Evidence in National Funding Mechanisms: Community-generated records of self-investment should be incorporated as legitimate criteria alongside technical proposals and financial assessments. The Koh Phra Thong case demonstrates that documented collective contributions can strengthen funding credibility when appraisal systems acknowledge community-generated evidence.
4. Adapt the SEP Appraisal Logic—Not its Buddhist Framing: The five-criterion protocol (Moderation, Reasonableness, Resilience, Knowledge Condition, Ethics Condition) can strengthen conventional cost-benefit analysis by incorporating ethical and value-based considerations. However, these principles should be adapted to local cultural and governance contexts rather than directly replicated using their original philosophical framing.
5. Systematically Document Implementation Difficulties, Not only Successful Outcomes: Recording challenges such as staff resistance, community conflicts, livelihood constraints, and coordination difficulties is essential for developing a reliable evidence base on participatory governance. These challenges represent structural aspects of reform rather than exceptional failures, and future organisations should maintain evidence systems capturing both achievements and limitations.

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