INNOVATION CULTURE IN TECH STARTUPS COMPANIES
IN THAILAND

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INNOVATION CULTURE IN TECH STARTUP COMPANIES IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to know whether innovation culture is important to tech startup companies that are driven by fast-changing technology and consumer trend, how they create the culture and how to nurture it in the future as the companies grow bigger. This study focus on technology-based startup companies in Thailand on their culture. The method of this study is through in-depth interview sessions to find out about their culture and the source that created it.

Significant findings from this study is that innovation culture is important to tech startup companies for their ability to grow and competitiveness, and the key to innovation culture is the leader and their vision toward innovation culture. Also, the startup companies need to find a way to nurture innovation culture within their company as they grow bigger so that they would be able to keep their capability and be competitive even in the future.

KEY WORDS: Tech Startup/ Innovation/ Culture/ Leadership/ Startup Culture

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Culture is not something that you set however you want, it comes naturally from when people are together, and culture in organization are varies: some are healthy, and some are not.

In normal organization, the culture depends on the people who work there, the way they do their jobs, and how their leader works with their people. If the culture is unhealthy, it would not be good for the organization, for example, if the people who has been in the organization for a long time is lazy, and always criticize people, and the supervisor has done nothing to change said behavior for the better, those who come later and wants to do the job would not be able to stay in such organization. So, if the organization wants their culture to be healthy, for their people to work hard with enthusiasm, they would have to try to set their culture accordingly, which would be a huge job, because, as aforementioned that culture is not something that can be set, or change overnight.

It is clear that culture would be hard to change when the company has grown into certain stage, but on the contrary, culture may be able to shape into certain way that the company wants by starting from the beginning, and from the leader.

The author would like to know about the culture in newly-emerged small tech company, or the tech startup company that rapidly grows and expands their business non-stop, whether it focus on innovation as they tend to have young employees, and work on products or services that revolve around technology and consumers' trends that always changing.

The reason why the author was interested in tech startup companies is because it is something new, and very interesting. They are usually small mobile or web application that made millions and millions baht, and repeat their business into other countries within no time. The most interesting thing about this to the author is that they are usually very few people working when it first start, normally there are a couple of founders and a

couple of first-generation employees. As mentioned that they make huge amount of money and expand really fast, the author wonder about their people and the culture; because it would be easy for the company culture to be the way the founders wanted it to be when there were only small number of employees, they can be innovative, fast-learner, multitasking, and enthusiastic as they want, but as they grow and more people coming in, how can they keep such innovative culture to be with the company, so that they can be as strong as they were when they first started and expanded, not go downhill and change into some unhealthy culture as some big companies do.

1.2 Research Questions

1. Is the culture in tech startup companies innovative?

2. What are the source or the strategies to innovation culture in tech startup companies in Thailand?

3. How could the company keep their culture to be innovative?

1.3 Research Scope

This study is an exploratory study with methods as follow;

1. Semi-structure with open-ended questions interviews with five tech startup companies in Thailand

2. Analysis of interview data and findings to find the similarity of each companies' culture

3. Sample Group – this study focus on tech startup companies in Thailand, the author interview fifteen people; at least one interviewee from management level, and at least two interviewees from operation level, from five tech startup companies

4. Period of Study – this study took around four months to study;

- Literatures review period consume about one month. The author has difficulties in finding literature regarding tech startup companies, most of the found literatures focus on small companies such as SMEs and entrepreneurship.

- Data collection and interviews period consume about one month, counting from the first interview sessions until the last one with the fifth company.

- Analysis and recommendation period consume almost one month. The author use most of this period on trying to summarize the findings from every company that match with each other, and categorized them.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To explore the culture in tech startup companies in Thailand

2. To recommend the tech startup companies to shape their culture to be innovative

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper focus on the topic about innovation culture in tech startup companies in Thailand focused on the character of tech startup companies, their culture, and the factors that create such culture, also, this study would try to find out the factors that could affect innovation culture in startup companies. In this chapter the definition of startup companies, innovation culture and literatures that has studied on related topics would be reviewed.

The areas to review literatures are:

1. Startup Companies
2. Innovation
3. Organization Culture

2.1 Startup Companies

There is countless number of startups in the world today, however, according to Nobel (2011), the startup failure rate could be up to eighty percent high, and that the failure could count as normal thing in startups. Some startups survive longer than the others that failed from running out of cash, offered solutions that the market does not need, founders leaving, or others reasons (Griffith, 2014). Startup companies usually start with a small number of founders with the same goal. The definition of startup companies are various, as everyone has a big picture of what these small companies does.

Startup companies in the past, before smartphones take over consumer, usually a new company in form of a dotcom, or web application, such as Amazon.com, eBay.com, and groupon.com, and there are so many of them that it's exceed market's demand, and ended up in dotcom bubble busted. After than come a startup companies; they are mostly internet or tech startup since they are a new dotcom companies, but not all startups are internet or tech related, just most of the succeed ones are, so people acknowledge the definition according to those companies.

To sum it all up, a startup is a company that is newly emerged company that has the goal to grow, and looking to develop business model, and it is not necessary to be tech-related company.

The most popular and is the largest portion of startup is the 'tech' startup company; tech startup is a company that deliver new or existing technology products and/ or services to market through new business model (Wongsarot, 2016). It is the technology based company that is most well-known and valuable in the world of startups such as Uber; the online application that helps passengers to call for transportation, or Airbnb; the company that helps connect traveler who is looking for a place to stay and the host who wants to rent out their place (Raymundo, 2014).

2.2 Innovation

Innovation in organization can be described in many definitions, some are generic, and some are specific, it all depends on where the scope, focus and analysis of each study and/ or research are; it could refers to the increase of employees' productivities and performances from creative or innovative process, or the organization's capabilities that distinguish ones from others.

There is a research on small companies (Gray, 2006) founded that innovation in each firm related to its growth potential, especially from owners' strategic objectives and continuously creation of culture through open communication and knowledge sharing within company. The knowledge from said communication would be combined and created into the new one, which would bring out the people's potential and company competitiveness. In this study, it stated that company with older, or more experienced owner would be less likely to focus on innovation, when compared to the ones with younger company owner, however, it also stated that the qualified knowledge of owner, too, effect the capabilities of company to adopt innovation in aspect that the owner with qualified knowledge tends to be more open to innovation, while the one without qualified knowledge is more averse to new knowledge and innovation.

Dobni (2008), referred to innovation as culture that has been defined as a context in an organization where there is an intention to be innovative from the people within, with enough infrastructure and environment to support the innovation, the behaviors

to influence market and value. It happened through people's behaviors and activities, which all links to actual action or an outcome, like employees sharing ideas about new product, or services, trying to find a way to improve the existing ones, having new technologies, organization's capabilities to respond to external situations and changes which eventually resulted in performances or the organization. Ahmed (1998), said that innovation is the feeling or culture in the organization that's leads to its true priorities or capabilities. Terblanche (2003), sees organization culture as a factor that would stimulate creativity and innovation that would bring organization to its competitiveness and survive the industry today that is knowledge-based, and often face with uncertain and change. While Porter and Stern (1999) defied innovation as a transfer of knowledge into new things, whether it is product, process, or service, with technology involvement.

According to many given definitions on "innovation", it is possible to say that innovation in organization is something that came from within organization itself; whether it is tangible sources such as people, infrastructure, or intangible ones as organization culture, working environment, communication, and/ or empowerment that is a critical factor for organizations' success.

Besides from the definition of innovation, there are also many studies and researches that try to categorized the types of innovation according to the character and its nature, so that it is easier to understand and develop; a summary of innovation types from various researches on the topic of innovation could be classified into category as followed;

1. Product Innovation - It is the creation or production of new products and services to markets and customers. Product innovation can create value to customers as well

2. Process Innovation - This is the type of innovation that aims to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the process, it could be improvement of the existing ones or introducing new ones to the organization. Olso said that process innovation is the implementation of a new or significant changes in techniques, equipment and/ or software' (OECD, 2005)

3. Business Model Innovation - Or strategic innovation, it is the creation or the development of a business model that changes the type of company's value proposition

and value network. It can capture new market segments and reposition the organization (Sukasiriwat, 2013)

2.3 Organization Culture

Culture is the shared value and beliefs which lead to the way people do things, it is the practice that has been performs continuously since the past, while organization culture is how employees behave in organization (Martins & Terblanche, 2003). People from different background and nationalities act differently in various situations because they have different values and national culture, it started since childhood, school, and organization, and combined everything one's experienced and carry with them as they grow (Hofstede, 2001).

Same goes to organization culture in Thai companies, Pimpa (2012) referred to Thai organization culture as high collectivistic society, as they manifest the value of 'we' or those who they take a liking to. Majority of Thai people strongly belief that doing the right thing is doing the thing that is 'right' in the eyes of society, or just do not stand out too much from the crowd.

Thailand has low masculinity in gender orientation, as people tend to be less competitive, and more caring toward others. And being masculine or seems aggressive is not appealing to Thai society (Hofstede, 2001).

Since the past, Thai national culture is high in uncertainty avoidance. Thai organization's goal usually aim for sustainable for secured situation where they can less likely to meet with the unexpected, as they have low tolerate to uncertainty. Also according to Thai's character of not wanting to do anything that would come out as rude, or offensive behaviors to others.

There is a large power distance culture that superiors consider themselves in higher status than their subordinates, and vice-versa, which is a mutual acceptance in Thai society, for example, in most Thai organization, subordinates expect to be told what to do, and the supervisor used to give orders or command them to do so as well. This shows high hierarchy or inequality in Thai organization.

For goal orientation, Thai organizations tend to focus on long-term orientation, as they aim for long-term benefits of the organization and stability status for themselves and the organization (Pimpa, 2012).

As aforementioned on innovation and organization culture shows that innovation is an important factor to organization success, and culture is the medium to deliver innovation through employees in organization, and create the innovative environment workplace for the desirable outcome or performance of the company. However, typical Thai organization seems to have the traditional culture of not wanting to try new things and try to act like part of the group, and not doing anything differently from everyone or how things used to be, which is the thing that prevent innovation or creativity within the company, especially those organizations that has been in a business for a long time or the ones with large number of employees.

On the contrary, smaller organization like startup company, or to be specific in this paper: tech startup company, is the one that is newly emerge into the market with small number of employees, need technology to deliver their product or service to customer, and have to think/ act fast enough to catch up with the market, is in the position to create their own culture to be innovative, because it is the thing that would make their company keep growing and have completive advantage to their competitors.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is designed to find out whether the innovation culture in tech startup companies in Thailand is the key factor for successful startups, and what makes the companies grow. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with top managements and employees from five tech startups companies as representatives of each organizations' cultures and innovativeness.

The framework of this paper is consisted of five stages which are literature reviews, semi-structured interviews, data analysis, discussion and recommendation, and conclusion.
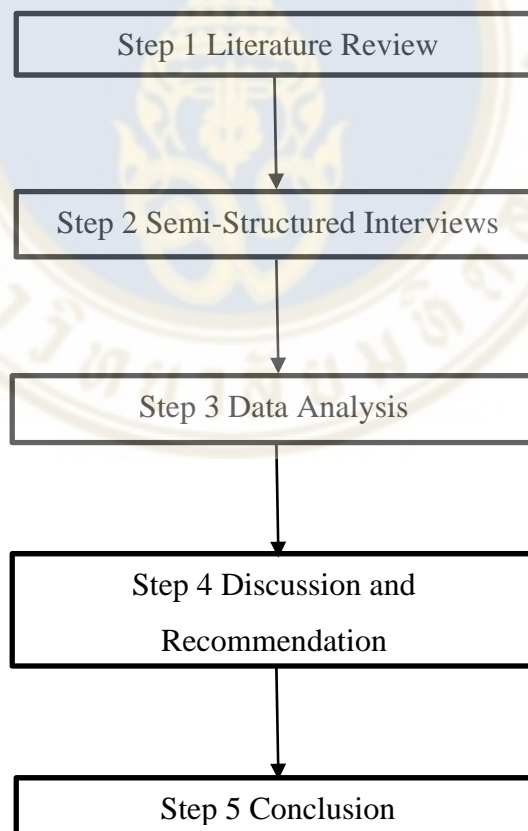

Figure 3.1   Framework of study

3.1 Primary Data Collection Method

The data used in this study will be collected through semi-structure interviews that the author conducted with the selected group of interviewees; which is the employees and managements from tech startups companies in Thailand. The information that author got from the interviews would be analyzed along with the extended research on relevant scholarly articles, websites, published books and others variety of sources, would be use to analyze, combined, and put together with frameworks and interview data. Furthermore, there will be an observation during the interview sessions to find out the reaction of the interviewees while they are answering the questions to see their facial expressions, body language, and to observe the physical appearance of the workplace, and environment of each companies to use in analyzation of the data.

3.2 Interview Method

In order to gain needed information to answer this study's question about innovation culture in tech startup companies in Thailand, the author has chosen the interview method to gather information about the work culture, structure of the organization, work environments, and others factor in the workplace. The interview questions are semi-structured and are adaptable to the nature of each company, and the position that they are in. All of the interviews are face-to-face sessions; the author would ask the prepared open-ended questions and recorded every interview for later analysis of this study.

3.2.1 Open-Ended Interview Questions

The open-ended interview questions has been developed in this study for the purpose to find out about the culture in tech startup companies that has a rapid growth and increasing number of employees. The lists of developed semi-structured interview questions as in the table shown below;

Table 3.1 Interview questions

Target	Findings	Questions
All	Innovation	How does your company usually come up with the new idea or innovative technology for your product/ service?
All	Innovation/ Structure	How is the structure of your company effects innovative thinking?
All	Communication	If you have new/ interesting ideas that you think would be useful, can you talk to someone about it to make it possible?, Do you have to go through many person/ process to express idea?
All	Leadership	Do your leaders/ co-workers listen to your idea/ opinion? Do leaders/ environments in company encourage innovation?
Management	Communication	Do your subordinate/ co-workers share their opinions or new ideas?
All	Innovation/ Culture	Do you think that your work condition helps you to think more freely, and be more creative for new trends/ technology?
All	Culture	What makes you feel proud to work at this company?
Management	Culture	What would your employees say are the top three reasons they love working for you?
All	Organization knowledge	What is your organization goal? / Do you know the goal of your organization?
All	Working style	Is risk-taking encouraged here, and what happens when people fail?
All	Organization knowledge	What makes your company different from others?

3.2.2 Target Population

The population of the target in this study consisted of fifteen employees from five tech startups companies in Thailand; with at least one interviewee from management level, and at least two interviewees from operational level, which make at least three interviewees from each company.

3.2.3 Sample Selection

The author has focus on employees from core positions of the company to be the interviewees, in order to get the information from the person who really understand the business of each startup, for example, application development team, marketing team, and sales team. The participants are as follows:

3.2.4 Interview Process

The interview dates were held during the end of February until the end of March of 2017. The author contacted the participants via telephone to make appointments, explain the purpose of the research, the number of target needed, and the duration for the interviews. The place where the interviews were conducted is of choice of the participant; most of the interviews were held at the offices of participants, only one interviewee asked to be interviewed at public place. There were some difficulties in making appointments due to the fact that this study needed both employees' perspectives, and managements' perspectives, so the appointments often held off until managements' schedule are open. However, all participants that the author contacted are willing to be a part of the interviews and happy to give their thoughts for the study, some management have shown interests in the work as ask that the finished paper to be sent to them once it is completed.

The interview questions are sent to interviewees at least one week before the meeting. The interview sessions took around 10-30 minutes depends on the answer of the interviewees. The author asked for the permission to record the sessions and explain the purpose of the research before the interview started.

The author asked for small meeting room, or private area to interview each participant so that they can express their opinion freely, and to avoid the chance of them feeling like they cannot say something because there are other people around. Regardless

of some difficulties in making appointments; every participants were on time, and very enthusiastic in giving information, many of them offer the chance of further discussions in case that the author did not get enough information by asking to email or phone them later. During the interview sessions, author took notes and observes carefully while probing questions so that the interview did not stop midway. Overall, the interviews went on smoothly.

CHAPTER IV
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To be a successful-growing tech startup companies, people is the key for the companies to be able to compete with competitors, and the culture of the organization is one of the factor that makes people stays with company for a long time. However, there are healthy and unhealthy culture, in this paper, the author believes that for tech startup companies that rely technology and fast-moving consumers' trends and lifestyles, the 'innovation culture' which create new knowledge, ideas, and continuous change is the factor that would create the competitiveness for the companies, and drive their people to its full potential.

In this chapter, the summary of interviews from selected fifteen employees, both management levels and operation levels, from five startups companies would be described, and the comparison between similar factors that said to be the source, or the cause of culture in tech startup companies that encourage innovation, which is the key factor for tech startups to stay competitiveness and steady growing in fast-changing consumers' trend world. The content would start from the brief explanation of each company, what it does, the findings from interview analysis, and comparisons from each companies findings to conclude the factor of innovation culture.

According to research methodology in previous chapter, the author had conducted the interview with targeted populations. The interviews were arranged at the office of interviewees. Each interview was conducted separately and privately from one another to prevent interviewee from feeling uncomfortable to answer questions when coworkers or supervisors at present. The semi-structured questions as shown in previous chapter were asked and adapted some context to suit with interviewees' positions, field of work, and the nature of each company, however, the main context and topic remained and asked during the interview. Also, throughout every interview sessions, the author has observed the interviewees' body language and facial expressions for their feeling during questions answering and other factors, furthermore, the locations

and work environments were paid attention to when visiting each companies, and asked in relevant interview questions.

Every interview sessions were recorded, along with note-taking during interview to jot the key message, or the similarities that author found from each company. All the data has been went through again before doing the analysis for this study.

Below are the summaries of interview results from five tech startup companies;

4.1 List of interview companies

Due to the privacy of interviewed company and to prevent the bias that might have occurred during reading this study, the name of startup companies would be confidential, however, the list of company code and its business type would be listed below;

Table 4.1 List of interviewed startup companies

Company	Business Characters
A	Restaurant reservation during off-peak hours via mobile application
B	Online marketing
C	Online recruitment for positions in startup companies
D	Books, magazines, and online content provider and application
E	Online games and application provider

4.2 The Analysis from Interviews

According to the interviews with five mentioned companies, the author has found the shared points and factors that could be the cause of the culture that nurture innovation in their organization. Below are the lists of findings that will be discussed in detail further in this chapter;

1. Organization Structure
2. Leadership

3. Work Environment

4. Knowledge Sharing

5. Culture

6. Teamwork

7. Communication

8. People

4.2.1 Organization Structure

Startup companies are newly formed, and most of them have small number of employees compared to traditional-form companies, the organization structures are flatted. The structure are usually are usually the founders, CEO, and straight to operational employees.

The noticeable finding from the interview is that the structures are flatted. Even in the ones that have about fifty employees, and started to have a traditional positions and structures, the management team and employees still have close relationship regardless of their positions.

"Of course, we have structure now, because we're growing in numbers. It's unavoidable, even though I like how we used to be when we first started, you know, the family-like kind of thing. However, everyone still call me 'brother' and we still hangout every Friday. It's like we have structure on the paper and for the workflow. They know that they can come and talk to me about anything."

Co-founder and CEO, Company A

The structure in tech startup companies are something to expected, even though they do not have official structure when the companies first started, it will eventually come as the number of employees grow bigger.

However, from the interviews with management and employees in this study, it is founded that everyone still manage to keep the company culture that they have since the beginning even when the company has grown bigger, divided into teams, divisions, or even departments. They know that the structure is part of the management thing that the company must have in order to be organized, and that those in higher position or team leaders are still the same person as before put in titles.

> *"It's (organization structure) all in papers. If they (the managements) treat and act with you the same, then, I don't see the problem of having it."*
>
> *Marketing Team Leader, Company B*

From the interviews and findings, the author think that, in startup companies, organization structure usually comes after they have grown for some times, since the company itself started from scratch, and had grown so fast that all the system in the organization has to catch up after sometimes. However, it is seen by the employees as a part of organization management, to make the company more organized, as it tend to be flat and not increase the power distance among employees and management team.

In conclusion, the structure in startup companies would help the innovation to continue if it is flat, because people in the structure can still collaborate; the leader of the company stays strong about the position in being the leader that every employee can approach, and the communication throughout the company still happen.

4.2.2 Leadership

According to the interviews with employees, leadership style is the key factor that makes the company the way it is. The interviewees who used to work in corporate section said that they do not feel intimidated by their supervisor as they might feel when they work in usual company. When asked whether their supervisor or team leader listen to them when they have new ideas or anything to say, the results were positive, that the leaders are open to their subordinates, and allow them to share their thoughts.

Furthermore, most of the employees that author interviewed, sees their CEO, and/or founders as role model, in the sense of character, working styles, and leadership style. Many of employees talk about their leaders with pride while interviewed.

> *"The founder is a really smart person, as you might sense from your interview with him. He has a vision of how our company should grow. He is very young when you think about how successful this company is, but he never stop, he always aim for the better, and that just makes me wanted to be like him someday"*
>
> *Sales, Company C*

In startup companies, the leader is the one who think of the ideas for the companies' products and services, so many employees would see these people as their heroes/ heroines, and the leadership style would affect the culture of the company, and

the employees as well. Also, as mentioned in (4.2.1) that even when the organization has become bigger and started having the structure, if the leader is determined in leading their startups the way they used to be; with positive environment, supportive atmosphere, encourage the teamwork and individual, the innovative thinking or process would still be in the culture, because leader is the one who will set the tone of the company.

The author thinks that leader is one of the most important factors to innovation culture in startup, and the key whether this culture would still going on as the company keep growing in the future, which would definitely require more people, structure, system and policies, all that are still unclear in the companies, because leader is the one who can influences the employees in startups, as evident from the interviews with employees when asking about their leader, most of them talked of their leaders in positive way, and see them as role model in work and other aspects. Meaning that, if the leader nurtures innovation culture, shapes the policies, strategies and other structures to support innovation in the company, it would be possible for the innovation culture to stays even when the companies has grown and become more structure that when they are startups today.

4.2.3 Work Environment

Every interview sessions held place at the offices of the interviewees, so, before and during the interviews, the author always take a look around their offices, even the location or how to get there. From observation through five offices, the author found that the tech-startup offices are decorated to look 'fun' rather than traditional looking office style. One company even has the Star Wars theme meeting rooms, with each rooms name after the character of the characters.

"We have small rooms for anyone in the company to access at any time. Because some people works best when others are around, while the other prefers quiet place to think and concentrate on their job."

Co-Founders and CEO, Company A

If they are newly emerged companies, the office would be someone's house renovating to use as a temporary office since they usually have less than ten people anyways; a couple of founders and small number of starting employees. And as the company grows, they tend to move to bigger, nicer place; however, the 'fun' vibe and

the relaxing atmosphere are remains, as the managements want everyone to feel like coming to work.

The sitting arrangement in the company usually an open-space means that everyone can see the whole room, and can communicate whenever they wanted.

"My seat is next to development team. I always hear they talk about those computer code stuff that I don't understand, but sometimes, I hear when they discuss about their work problem, and I thought that I might know the answer to that, so, one day I just said 'hey, the other day when you were talking about this problem, I think that you should do…..', and it helped them! So, yes, I think that sitting position in the office helps in term of communication, teamwork, and it definitely helps everyone to have a chance to learn new things every day."

Marketing, Company A

Majority of the interviewed employees said that they like coming to work because it does not feel like 'coming to work' in a sense that it is not boring, as the offices are decorated with in intention to make everyone enjoy the place, and enjoy their work.

Three out of five companies has spaces provided for any activities that the employees may wanted to have, they are usually an empty room or space to hold the events or activity sessions. The purpose of these space is for the employees to feel like they can have fun at work, and not too be too serious or tense.

"CEO have to rooftop space decorated for employees to just hang out. We have activity room, the girls held Yoga and Dance classes, and I join sometimes. It's good that we can really relax without being criticize for not solely focusing on work during working hours."

Developer, Company C

"I just finished set up the game room. Why? Well, it's because I like playing games, and we have a lot of developers here who REALLY like play games, and because why not."

Co-founder, Company E

In author's perspective, the reason that startup companies set their office to be more like 'co-working space' rather than traditional offices, is because they wanted their employees to feel more relaxed at work, and be able to think more innovatively, as they can work anywhere as long as they have the working devices with them. However,

the interior or decoration of the office does not have to always be creative, and / or out of the box because it is not the direct factor to innovation, but a supporting element that indirectly set the mood and tine to innovativeness.

4.2.4 Knowledge Sharing

This topic is one of the most important factors to innovation in startup companies, as new ideas or innovation usually come from sharing knowledge so that the new ones can be created. When asking about knowledge sharing within organization, every companies said that they are already doing it, as found from the interviews that the managements see knowledge sharing as important activities to;

- Create new knowledge and ideas which lead to innovation
- Create bond between employees
- Improve employees' skills in public speaking

When the startups encourage their employees to share knowledge, especially if the idea of sharing knowledge come from the leader, it would be support and continuous and the company and employees would be able to learn new things during the sharing. Every company said that they have the date and time for knowledge sharing session, unless the work schedule is too tight, they would postpone or rearrange the date, but they never cancel this sessions.

"There is this one guy in development team. He's so shy and would do anything to not speak to anyone if it's not about work or forced to. So I make this sharing session among teams, and make him speak of what he learn or whatever he wanted to share, part of me just wanted to mess with him a bit, but mostly I just wanted him to be able to speak with confidence. At first, he had this note with him to read while speaking, but when he's force to speak every week, he can do it with ease now. He even gives out speech at job fair and such. Can you believe that?"

Managing Director, Company B

As evident from the quote above, knowledge sharing does not only used as activities to create new knowledge, but also an informal development for individual as well. The author thinks that there are some people who have a lot of knowledge and skills, but lacks ability to pass it on, to teach, or to communicate and express it to others. The knowledge sharing sessions that requires everyone to share would help these people

to be able to express themselves and what they know to the others, the results are that everyone get to know new things, and the company can have a way to improve the product, service, or process to be more innovative.

"We have this meeting call 'Sharing Friday' where we have everyone gather around in the office, and share anything they wanted others to know or learn. It could be anything. You could just found something interesting on the internet; it doesn't even have to be work-related. I just want everyone to feel like they can talk, that they can express themselves, and communicate with anyone here."

CEO, Company C

Knowledge sharing is known to be the source of innovation because a person can use the knowledge or experiences that they have to combine with what they receive from the sessions in order to generate new ways of thinking, or new way to do things. According to the interviews, this activity is noticeably emphasize in every company; the leaders pay great attention to the sessions and attend as much as they can, and the employees see them as activities that increase collaboration among the team, or between teams, and the activities that give them the opportunities to learn new things.

4.2.5 Culture

The author has asked employees if they can explain what it feels like to work at their companies, the word that keeps popped up during the interview was 'fun'. When further pursue the meaning behind the word fun, they say that they enjoy the work they are given. They feel like they can do many things and challenge themselves when working.

"I have been with this company from the very beginning, you know, when there was only the founders and two employees, I'm one of those two. It's really fun because you have to do everything from start to finish. And you have to be fast, you have to be ready for everything all the time. Yes, it's a lot of work, but I enjoy it so much."

Sales, Company C

The work culture at startups tend to be hard-working, as employees and managements enjoy their work, and does not see the works as something boring, and feel like they are forced to do their jobs. Furthermore, the working style seems to be

open, and result-oriented. As four out of five managements said that they usually give the project to the team, and give them freedom to think and do the project on their own, however, they always available whenever their employees feels like they are lost or are doing things wrong, it means that they do not totally let employees run things and abandon them in the process.

Another thing that the author noticed during visiting the interviewees' offices are that, the management and employees tend to have close relationship, which is one of the reasons why everyone can talk freely with the leaders, and create such culture within their companies.

"Every Friday, everyone usually go out to find something to eat, and drink. Even the CEO and founders, they always join us if they're free. We're actually going today as well, it's good to have office near downtown."
Developer, Company A

Overall, the culture at tech startup companies tends to be about openness, and encourage their people to communicate and work together, which are the factors that lead to innovativeness. The author found from observation that every companies gave off similar vibes; young, energetic, and fresh, every interviewees seem eager to participate in the sessions, and answers every questions with enthusiasm. It shows that they generally feel passionate about the company, their work, and they position in the company, which is the strong and distinguish points of startup people that author thinks is the ultimate sources of innovation in their culture.

4.2.6 Teamwork

Startup companies tend to focus collaboration and teamwork, as teamwork is another thing that author noticed every company to have in common. Most of the time, management would give the project or task to the team, and let team members work things out with their own abilities, this is where collaboration and innovation occurs, because employees who are the member of the team would be allowed to work freely, and think outside the box as there is no instructions to do their work accordingly.

"We work in team, the success we have is the result of our team's hard work."

Developer, Company E

Part of the things that makes teamwork important and work out well in these tech startups is that the nature of their work are projects, and that many employee has been together almost since day one, and have been through a lot together as the company started to grow, even though when the company started growing, and many new faces entered the company, those who have already been inside has set the strong teamwork culture already and share it to the new generations.

"We have been together from the start, we are like family now. I've been with these people more than I've been with my parents recently."

Sales, Company C

"To be honest, one of the reason I stay here is because of the people. You can find the fun job anywhere, but there's no guarantee that you will find a friend there."

Game Designer, Company E

When asked whether teamwork helps them to be more innovative, many said that as they work together with other people, they have a chance to talk and share opinion more, which eventually leads to new ideas and innovation, and these innovations are what make their project successful.

The author opinion is that teamwork in startups create communication and informal knowledge sharing within teams, and these activates, intentionally or not, would somehow help people to think and act more innovatively, because they are not fixed with the rigid rules, and able to try new things on their own with no pressure that they will be at fault for not follow the rules.

4.2.7 Communication

During every interview sessions, the interviewees were asked about the communication within their companies, whether they can talk to the higher level or the management freely about work, or anything at all. Below are the most common comments from interviewees:

- If I have any questions about work, I feel like I can ask anyone, even the CEO

- There's always a communication going on in the organization

- If anything is wrong, communication is the first key to solve the problem

- Talking to others helps me to think of a new way to do things

Unlike usual companies, where CEO or management team seem to be in a much higher position that employees cannot reach to them, or communicate freely with them. In tech startup companies, communication always happens, and is a welcomed act.

"Everyone knows that they can talk to me about anything, anything, well, unless I'm in a meeting or something like that."

Managing Director, Company B

It is clear that without communication, there is no way for innovation to happen, because everybody would only focus on their job, and do things the same way that they used to do, while with communication, everybody can share what they know, what they want to know, or if there is a conflict in a workplace, communication would be the first and fastest step to solve the problems. So, in startup companies, communication is strongly supported and encourage from leaders because they see it as important tools to improve capabilities of their people and their companies, and the result of communication would help their company to be more innovative with their products, service, and process.

4.2.8 People

When asked about the people in the companies, the author has asked leaders about how they select people, and how do they treat them once they are in the company.

Most of the management said that they want those who have the right trait and personality for startup companies, which require a lot of energy, willpower, knowledge, and skills, depend on the type of business and position they applied for. The most important thing is that they (the management team, or recruitment panel) have to be sure that the candidate is someone who have the matching culture, and be able to learn new things at a rather fast pace.

*"I want people with **'startup character'**, you know, the type that loves to learn, do thing fast and understand things quickly. I don't know if you know this but we cannot find that trait in older generations, like, those mid-thirties won't have this character, as far as I know….Also, we want people to work hard, as we are newly emerged company, we don't have a lot of resources, but we do have a lot of work, so*

people who work hard, and smart would be my ideal employees. Everyone here does, by the way."

Co-founder and CEO, Company A

The author also asked further about the age of employees, and the answers are that employees in tech startup companies are around twenties to mid-thirties, but it is not that they set the age limit for candidates, but it could be because startups do not offers high salary as big corporates do, and they learn from past experiences that the culture of lifestyle of older candidates are not fit with the organization, another reason might be that the nature of the business is revolve around technologies, and the criteria of the employees is that they need to be able to learn, and fast, so, the management would want someone younger to do the job as they already grown up with technology and familiar with these things already.

"I tend to hire young people, as we work about technological products. Yes, in some positions we can use those older generation people as well, but they won't understand the context of our business. We also have new things to learn all the time, the learning speed of younger employees are definitely faster (than the older employees)...."

Customer Service Team Leader, Company D

The author see people is the important factor to innovation culture in the startup companies, as leader already mentioned in (4.2.2); people here means startups employees, who are the core workforce that drives innovation in the organization, and are selected by the leaders by their skills, knowledge, abilities, and most importantly, the culture fits. With intention or not, all the leaders and management who author interviewed said that they are very careful about selection people to join the company, because if they select the wrong people, it could affect what they have been working hard to build, such as the great teamwork, the positive and friendly atmosphere, the ability to learn new things, or the will to work hard while enjoy it.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the author would conclude the findings analyzed from the interviews about the innovation culture in tech startup companies in Thailand, as it is the key to companies' success and grow. Also, the recommendation of how to keep such culture within the company as they grow even bigger in the future would be provided. However, the author has found that they are some limitations and difficulties in doing this topic as well.

5.1 Conclusions

From the related literature reviews and interviews with the targeted audiences, the author has concluded that innovation is an important factor to the growth and competitiveness of tech startup companies in Thailand, and the sources of innovativeness in the companies come from people; from the employees who shape the culture unintentionally until it becomes a norm for those who already in the company, and the new comers who are welcomed with existing culture and adapt to it, to the leader who may or may not intend to create such culture, and is the one who lead and carries the culture through the companies. There are also other factors such as structure of the organization and the strategies, however, all these factors would depend on leader or management whether they would carry out the strategies or policy to nurture innovation culture or not.

5.2 Recommendations

According to the findings and conclusion, the author would like to recommend tech startup companies, in order to be more innovative and be able to keep the culture within their organization, and to make sure that it will not change to be the unhealthy cultures as some small companies do when they grow bigger. Usually, the goal of startup

companies are to 'grow', but as they grow like they planned, there need to be something else to shape how to grow, and into which direction or vision, by what strategies, and how to keep the good things that they already have in their company to be with them, because startups are the companies that formed and grown very fast that the strategies are not formally formed. Below are the lists of recommendations the author would like to suggest to startups;

5.2.1 Set the vision that focus on growth and innovativeness

Because the vision is something that would make everyone goes into the same direction, so, if the tech startup company wants to grow while nurture the innovation culture, it has to set the vision so that it can be like a pillar for the company to hold on while going into the same direction. For example, the vision for A company could 'to be the best restaurant reservation companies through innovation'. The key of the vision is that it should focus on the area that the company wanted to be.

5.2.2 Set strategies according to the vision

As the goal of tech startup companies are to grow, and now that the company has vison, they can set the strategy to move forward and not wander away from their expected route.

5.2.3 Shape organization structure to align with the strategies

The structure should suit the business type, and not create power distance, or cause lack of empowerment in companies. Even though some companies from the interviews said that they do not feel like having formal structure effects their work in anyways, but the management should bear in mind that organization structure is important for work process and management as the number of employees become larger. However, the structure should support the innovation process, such as communication, knowledge sharing, and cross-function, or it would become the obstacle to innovation instead.

5.2.4 Communicate the vision, strategies, and the new structure throughout the company

Since communication is one of the key to innovation, once everything is set, it is necessary to communicate to set the same understanding so that everyone know what the company wants, and what they should do.

5.2.5 Motivate employees to share the value of innovative ness

This could be done by starting from the leader showing the desirable action such as being eager to learn new things, share knowledge with others, and always try to communicate so that everyone have the same understanding about what is going on in the company. As found from the interview that most employees see leaders as role model, it would not be hard for them to follow the behavior if the leader start it first, and encourage everyone to do the same.

5.3 Limitations and Difficulties

During the making of this study, there are some difficulties that the author has found and makes the process of this paper slower than expected, the problems were found during chapter two, literature reviews, and gathering data from interviews to analyze in chapter four.

The difficulties that the author found is that tech startup companies, even though they are not the new term, are the topic that is little people study on, especially on academic side. Most of the literatures that the author found focus on SMEs, and entrepreneur. There are some researches and studies and on small companies, but not exactly on tech startups.

Another difficulty is that, the author does not work in this field, nor know anyone who works in this business, so it took quite some times for the author to find the way to get into each company. Also, the criteria of this study is that at least one management level has to be interviewed, so it make the interview process to be longer than when it first planned.

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