

A Management Model for Self-Reliance of Local Churches: A Case Study of the First District in Northern Thailand

Pikul Pongklang^{1*}, Juree Vichitdhanabadee¹, Anurak Panyanuwat²

¹*Interdisciplinary Studies College, Payap University*

Superhighway Chiang Mai-Lampang Road, Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province, 50000

²*University Council, Payap University*

Superhighway Chiang Mai-Lampang Road, Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province, 50000

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the trends and develop management model for self-reliance of local churches in the First District, Upper Northern Thailand. The Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR) technique was employed in three rounds to collect data from 28 key informants selected from the First District Church Committee and pastoral leaders. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and questionnaires. Quantitative analysis was performed using the median and interquartile range, while qualitative analysis employed inductive content analysis. The findings revealed that the management model for local churches to achieve self-reliance comprises four dimensions: (1) Planning, characterized by a clear structure, active member participation, and the integration of technology with income-generating activities; (2) Implementation, which emphasizes participatory organizational culture and collaboration with external organizations; (3) Transparent monitoring and evaluation; and (4) Improvement based on evaluation results to develop personnel capacity and reduce external dependence. Furthermore, the results indicated that the overall trend of church management demonstrates a high level of feasibility (Md.=5, IQR=0.78) and aligns with the desired model for self-reliant administration. In total, 94.38 percent of the findings encompassed the four dimensions. The study suggested that local

* Corresponding Author

E-mail: pikoon_p@payap.ac.th

churches should apply strategic management aligned with community contexts and develop leadership to enhance sustainability and management effectiveness.

Keywords

Management Models, Local Church, Self-Reliance, The First District, PDCA Cycle, Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research technique.

Introduction

In Thailand, local churches operate under the Church of Christ in Thailand, which organizes its congregations into 24 districts to strengthen coordination and governance. Each district carries responsibilities such as pastoral care, mission planning, leadership development, and resource allocation to support local churches more effectively. Local churches serve not only as places for religious ceremonies and spiritual nourishment but also as community hubs where Christians gather to promote the ongoing development of their local communities. Their role extends beyond enhancing the quality of life for church members and the surrounding society; they also maintain close ties with the community and engage in multidimensional interactions. These interactions encompass not only religious matters but also the strengthening of household economies and overall stability. The aim is to ensure that members achieve financial security, physical and mental well-being, and receive spiritual blessings alongside practical knowledge for sustainable living. (Church of Christ in Thailand 2024)

Thus, the role of local churches is not confined to fostering faith and devotion leading to offerings but also to providing opportunities for education, vocational training, and support. The First District plays a particularly important role in promoting unity and participation in shared activities, with the goal of fostering community development based on strong and resilient churches. To fulfill these roles, effective management is essential—covering organizational structures, resource allocation, personnel development, and strategic planning tailored to local contexts. A core element in this process is self-reliance, understood as the capacity of churches to maximize their available resources in support of their mission and to meet the needs of their communities (Church of Christ in Thailand 2024; Pongklang 2011; Chairacha et al. 2025).

From this synthesis, the researcher argues that self-reliance goes beyond financial security. It also encompasses knowledge management, leadership capacity, and adaptive

governance aligned with local contexts. These dimensions are vital to advancing the church's mission and ensuring long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, strengthening local church self-reliance remains a significant challenge. Reviews of previous studies revealed that the main challenges in managing local churches are not limited to the shortage of personnel with administrative skills, but also include constraints in financial management efficiency, leadership development, and strategic planning that fail to align with social and cultural changes. Such limitations have led to continued dependence on external funding. Additional findings further indicated that the participation of church committees in local church operations was at a moderate level, particularly in planning and implementation. Similarly, the overall factors influencing operations were also at a moderate level, including planning, implementation and operational improvement. These findings reflect managerial limitations that require systematic and continuous development. (Chairacha et al. 2025; Pongklang 2011; 2022; 2025; Wakeman & Duangnapha 2013). Therefore, implementing the PDCA cycle enables churches to systematically and continuously improve their operations. It supports leaders in strategic planning, effective execution, performance monitoring, and refining practices to enhance organizational resilience and long-term stability

Another critical gap lies in the absence of mechanisms and skills necessary to drive organizational effectiveness, particularly in strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation, and the application of modern technology. Although some leaders recognize the importance of self-reliance, they still lack essential competencies such as systems thinking and long-term organizational management, which pose barriers to sustainable capacity development (Pongklang 2025).

This situation highlights the ongoing challenges faced by local churches. Even though the First District has continuously carried out evangelistic and community development missions, it still struggles with rapid social, economic, and cultural changes, especially in Upper Northern Thailand. A critical research gap emerges from the persistent mismatch between the churches' increasing responsibilities and their limited organizational capacity to respond effectively to changing community needs. The challenges are not limited to personnel shortages but also include weaknesses in effective management systems and the absence of strategic planning aligned with the local context (Pongklang 2025). These factors remain major obstacles to building sustainable self-reliance in local churches.

In light of these challenges and findings, enhancing self-reliance in local churches within the First District, Upper Northern Thailand, becomes clear. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate management trends and propose an appropriate management model for local churches in the region. The research builds upon earlier studies, including “Operational Development of the Planning and Development Department of the First District, Church of Christ in Thailand” (Chairacha et al. 2025) and “Guidelines for Local Church Management of the Church of Christ in Thailand for Self-Reliance” (Pongklang 2025). These prior works provide a foundation for exploring the mechanisms and essential elements needed to strengthen the capacity of local churches to achieve sustainable self-reliance. The results of the research contribute to the development of a management model that aligns social, economic, and cultural contexts, enhances the capacity of leaders and personnel in strategic management, planning, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as promotes the application of technology to increase the efficiency of mission implementation. In addition, it helps reduce dependence on external funding through the efficient use of resources and can be further extended as knowledge for developing a management prototype that can be applied to other local churches to strengthen self-reliance in a stable and sustainable manner.

Objectives

1. To examine the trends of local church management for self-reliance.
2. To develop an appropriate model of local church management for self-reliance based on the PDCA Cycle.

Review of Literature

Khwankaew (2023) described the PDCA cycle as a systematic process of improvement and control. Its origins can be traced to Deming’s concept (Deming 1986), commonly known as the Deming Cycle. The model consists of four stages: Plan, which emphasizes systematic planning, defining objectives, problem analysis, and strategy development; Do, which refers to implementing the plan with clear role assignments, resource allocation, and execution; Check, which focuses on monitoring and evaluating performance to identify gaps between goals and outcomes; and Act, which involves making necessary improvements based on evaluations to ensure continuous development. Management models refer to frameworks or approach that organizations use to plan, control, and evaluate operations effectively.

Applying the PDCA cycle as a management framework enables local churches—Christian communities established in specific areas to conduct religious activities and nurture members’ spiritual life—to manage activities systematically, encourage member participation, and continuously improve processes. (Chairacha et al. 2025)

This approach is closely connected to the concept of organizational self-reliance, in which Neill et al. (2023,534) emphasized the importance of setting goals aligned with internal capacities, allocating resources efficiently, and conducting continuous evaluation for learning and improvement. Within the context of local churches, this perspective is essential for building stability, fostering unity, and reducing dependence on external factors. Moreover, Poolpatarachewin (2003,20) described that the application of Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR) technique enhances the comprehensiveness of the PDCA process by allowing experts and stakeholders to share participatory insights, thereby contributing to the development of a sustainable management model that is contextually appropriate for local churches.

Previous studies Carroll and Slater (2009) indicated that organizational self-reliance, particularly in faith-based contexts, depends on effective financial management, leadership, and resource mobilization, alongside transparency and accountability to reduce external dependency. Moreover, Gnatzy and Warth (2011,1625) described the Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR) technique that enables organizations to anticipate future challenges and design sustainable, context-appropriate management models

The review of related studies Chairacha et al. (2025) found that overall performance of the Planning and Development Division of the First District was at a high level in planning, implementation, and improvement. Similarly, Pongklang (2025) reported that local churches demonstrated high efficiency in improvement and moderate performance in evaluation, while maintaining high expectations for systematic development in planning, implementation, improvement, and human resource development. This is consistent with Pongklang (2011,68), who highlighted that churches had established effective organizational structures and internal control systems, as well as with Pongklang (2022,80), who indicated that local churches continuously monitored, supervised, and evaluated their operations.

In terms of leadership and organizational management, Taboonmee (2023,98) observed that sustaining organizations in rapidly changing environments requires visionary leaders with strong adaptive capacity. Likewise, Nooin and Sangayatin (2021,103) argued that

self-reliant organizations should adopt appropriate structures, apply basic technology to develop skills, and build networks alongside utilizing social media for communication. In the same vein, Noimee and Usaho (2023,110) suggested that approaches to developing transformational leadership among administrators should encompass idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

With respect to community participation, Maneechai (2022) found that community development emerges from collaboration between leaders and members in identifying and addressing problems collectively, which fosters improvements in quality of life, knowledge, occupational skills, income, and moral values based on Buddhist principles. This aligns with Namburi (2019,183), who explained that participation encompasses shared thinking, decision-making, implementation, and mutual benefits. Similarly, Kongsiri (2014) and Weeraphanpong (2014,59) emphasized the importance of leadership, the utilization of resources and social capital, cultural preservation, and external support.

Regarding governance and management, Rerkaroonthong et al. (2024) underscored the importance of assessing integrity and transparency, requiring management structures and measures aligned with relevant institutional criteria. Likewise, Khumsawad and Sirisukha (2015,565) identified planning as the most critical factor influencing the financial efficiency of subdistrict administrative organizations. Further, Kongpetdit and Chantuk (2016,14) highlighted the role of communication and negotiation skills in enhancing competitiveness, while Rod-urai (2018) reported that managing meditation centers in Bangkok involves general administration, facilities, communication, teaching teams, and planning, with an emphasis on participation and the use of internal resources.

Based on the review of literature and related studies, the researcher proposes the following conceptual framework for this study.

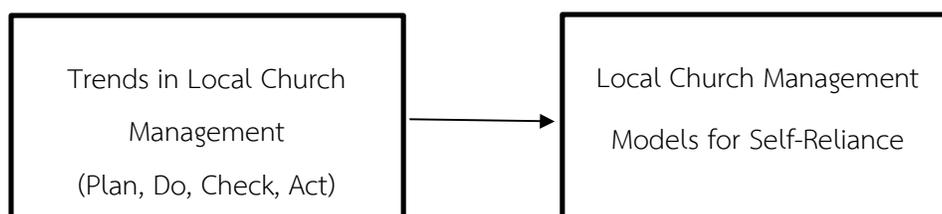


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Research

Research Methodology

1. Population and Sample

This study utilized a purposive population comprising 16 members of the First District Church Administration Committee and 12 chairpersons of the local church pastoral districts.

2. Research Instruments

This study employed in-depth interviews (5 questions) on trends in local church management toward self-reliance, and questionnaires (2 Part total 40 questions) covering management issues based on Deming's PDCA cycle: planning (9 questions), doing (7 questions), checking (12 questions), and acting (12 questions). The research instruments were reviewed by three experts, yielding an Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) of 0.87, indicating a high degree of alignment with the research objectives. Furthermore, a reliability analysis of the questionnaires produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.881, exceeding the standard threshold of 0.70, thereby confirming the consistency and reliability of the instruments (Cronbach 1951).

3. Data Collection

3.1 Primary data was collected using the Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR) technique from 28 key informants to gather information on the trends of local church management toward self-reliance. The process consisted of the following rounds:

3.1.1 EDFR Round 1: In-depth interviews with key informants were conducted to explore their perspectives on trends in local church management toward self-reliance. The focus was on four key areas: planning, implementation, monitoring, and improvement. This round aimed to obtain comprehensive baseline information that reflects the actual context.

3.1.2 EDFR Round 2: A questionnaire was developed based on the data obtained from the in-depth interviews. It was used to assess the feasibility and consistency of the identified management trends, with the purpose of building consensus among the informants and filtering out issues that were both significant and highly feasible.

3.1.3 EDFR Round 3: The final round focused on evaluating the desirable future scenarios of local church management toward self-reliance in each aspect. The aim was to validate and consolidate the collective perspectives systematically, thereby producing a credible future vision that can be practically applied.

3.2 Secondary data was gathered to strengthen the credibility of findings, including reviews of relevant books, textbooks, documents, academic journals, and previous research studies.

Prior to data collection, this study received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Payap University on January 14, 2025, under project code PYU_REC No. 67/078 and certificate of approval COA No. 68/003.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Qualitative Data: The researcher will analyze qualitative data by conducting content analysis, presenting findings for each topic.

4.2 Quantitative Data: The responses were analyzed using Median and Interquartile Range (IQR) to assess the level of consensus among informants. Consensus was considered achieved if the IQR value ($Q_3 - Q_1$) was less than or equal to 1.50 (Bun-on 1979), indicating consistency among informants. The interpretation of mean scores (Md.) followed Srisaard (2023), as outlined below:

4.21 – 5.00	Highly feasible trend
3.41 – 4.20	Very feasible trend
2.61 – 3.40	Moderately feasible trend
1.81 – 2.60	Low feasibility trend
1.00 – 1.80	Least feasible trend

4.3 Quantitative Data: Data were analyzed using frequency and percentage. A desirable management model in each aspect was defined as one receiving at least 85% (Srisaard 2023) consensus among respondents.

Research Results

Trends in Local Church Management for Self-Reliance

Based on in-depth interviews with key informants under the first round of the EDFR future research process, four major trends in local church management for self-reliance were identified: clear and participatory planning with integrated technology; inclusive and collaborative implementation with income-generating projects; transparent evaluation aligned with current contexts; and systematic improvement based on feedback to enhance leadership and community engagement. These elements are guided by the PDCA framework to ensure effective and sustainable management.

1. Plan

Local churches are increasingly developing structured management plans tailored to their contexts, emphasizing realistic goals, member participation, and the use of digital tools to enhance efficiency. These plans also incorporate income-generating activities to support households and strengthen the church's self-reliance and resource sustainability.

2. Do

Local churches are advancing toward self-reliance by fostering participatory organizational culture, utilizing member and community data for decision-making, and enhancing skills in management and technology. Collaboration with external organizations and vocational training, especially through the First Church's support income-generating projects like beekeeping and integrated farming, strengthening economic stability and expanding opportunities for sustainable mission work.

3. Check

Local churches are strengthening self-reliance by developing transparent and accountable evaluation systems that reflect current social and technological contexts. Member participation is encouraged in assessing resource use, communication, and program outcomes, including partnerships and leadership development. Checking results: such as progress in beekeeping and integrated farming; inform operational improvements to better meet community needs.

4. Act

Local churches are systematically acting and checking results. Key efforts include enhancing leadership capacity, tailoring training to community needs, and fostering ongoing participation. Long-term strategies focus on strengthening missions with local vocational potential through sustainable projects like beekeeping and integrated farming, which strengthen both household and church economic stability to support effective ministry.

The data collected from in-depth interviews in EDFR Round 1 were developed into a questionnaire in EDFR Round 2 to assess the feasibility and consistency of the identified trends, build consensus among informants, and filter out key issues with high practical potential. EDFR Round 3 focused on evaluating the desirable future scenarios of local church management in each aspect, aiming to systematically validate and consolidate shared perspectives, as presented in Table 1 to Table 4.

Table 1 Showing the median, interquartile range, levels of likelihood, consistency, and desirability regarding local church management in planning

Trends in Local Church Management		EDFR 2			EDFR 3	
		Md.* ≥3.50	Q ₃ - Q ₁ ** ≤1.50	Feasibility	Consistency	Percentage/ Preference
Plan						
1	Define a clear vision and mission aligned with community needs and church policies, supported by systematic action plans.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
2	Structure the organization with defined roles to decentralize management, reduce external dependency, and enhance mission effectiveness.	5	0	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
3	Develop leaders by strengthening management, communication, and strategic planning skills to meet community needs effectively.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
4	Enhance members' capacities through ongoing training in vocational skills, household management, and active church participation.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
5	Promote member participation in decisions and operations to foster ownership, commitment, and internal collaboration.	4	0	High	Consistent	92.86 Desirable
6	Establish transparent communication systems using technology, member databases, online platforms, and remote meetings.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
7	Build external networks to expand access to resources, knowledge, and activities supporting the church's mission.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	85.71 Desirable

Table 1 Showing the median, interquartile range, levels of likelihood, consistency, and desirability regarding local church management in planning (Continue)

Trends in Local Church Management		EDFR 2			EDFR 3	
		Md.* ≥3.50	Q ₃ - Q ₁ ** ≤1.50	Feasibility	Consistency	Percentage/ Preference
8	Plan financial management by budgeting and systematically allocating resources for mission activities and long-term stability.	4	1	High	Consistent	92.86 Desirable
9	Implement systematic planning with clear steps and objectives aligned with local church policies for sustainable self-reliance.	4	1	High	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
Average		5	0.78	Highest	Consistent	96.83 Desirable

*Criteria for Feasibility or Likelihood of Occurrence: A median score ranging from 3.50 to 5.00 (Md. ≥ 3.50) indicates a high level of feasibility.

**Interquartile Range (IQR): If the calculated IQR of any given trend is less than or equal to 1.50 ($Q_3 - Q_1 \leq 1.50$), it suggests that the opinions of the key informants are consistent or reflect a consensus.

From Table 1, Key informants identified planning as the most prominent trend in local church management within the First Church District of Upper Northern Thailand (Md = 5, IQR = 0.78), with 96.83% indicating it as the most desirable aspect for promoting self-reliance

Table 2 Showing the median, interquartile range, levels of likelihood, consistency, and desirability regarding local church management in doing

Trends in Local Church Management		EDFR 2				EDFR 3
		Md.* ≥3.50	Q ₃ - Q ₁ ** ≤1.50	Feasibility	Consistency	Percentage/ Preference
Do						
1	Encourage member participation in decisions, operations, and evaluations, fostering a collaborative and accountable organizational culture.	4	1	High	Consistent	89.29 Desirable
2	Develop communication and information systems using technology, diverse channels, and member databases for transparency and effective mission planning.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
3	Provide training in management, project planning, communication, and technology to enhance performance and prepare personnel for future responsibilities.	4	0	High	Consistent	92.86 Desirable
4	Develop vocational skills for sustainable income, ensuring economic stability for families and supporting long-term church self-reliance.	5	0	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
5	Build external partnerships to implement vocational projects, generate income, exchange knowledge, and strengthen mission sustainability.	5	0	Highest	Consistent	92.86 Desirable
6	Develop context-appropriate income-generating projects to enhance church financial stability and reduce dependence on external resources.	4	1	High	Consistent	85.71 Desirable
7	Conduct gospel outreach aligned with community context, while strengthening economic resilience to support ongoing mission activities.	5	0	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
Average		5	0.43	Highest	Consistent	94.39 Desirable

*Criteria for Feasibility or Likelihood of Occurrence: A median score ranging from 3.50 to 5.00 (Md. ≥ 3.50)

indicates a high level of feasibility.

**Interquartile Range (IQR): If the calculated IQR of any given trend is less than or equal to 1.50 ($Q_3 - Q_1 \leq 1.50$), it suggests that the opinions of the key informants are consistent or reflect a consensus.

From Table 2, Key informants identified doing as the most prominent trend in local church management within the First Church District of Upper Northern Thailand ($Md = 5$, $IQR = 0.43$), with 94.39% indicating it as the most desirable aspect for promoting self-reliance

Table 3 Showing the median, interquartile range, levels of likelihood, consistency, and desirability regarding local church management in checking

Trends in Local Church Management		EDFR 2				EDFR 3
		Md.* ≥ 3.50	$Q_3 - Q_1$ ** ≤ 1.50	Feasibility	Consistency	Percentage/ Preference
Check						
1	Establish a transparent and verifiable reporting system aligned with social, economic, and technological changes.	5	0	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
2	Continuously evaluate and improve internal communication channels to ensure understanding, clarity, and transparency.	4	0	High	Consistent	92.86 Desirable
3	Encourage member participation in monitoring and decision-making regarding church operations	4	1	High	Consistent	92.86 Desirable
4	Monitor and assess resource utilization to maximize efficiency in achieving the church's mission.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	96.43 Desirable
5	Evaluate technology use to enhance work efficiency and broaden mission accessibility.	3	1	ปานกลาง	Consistent	78.57 Undesirable
6	Assess outcomes of training and member capacity development to strengthen self-reliance skills.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable

Table 3 Showing the median, interquartile range, levels of likelihood, consistency, and desirability regarding local church management in checking (Continue)

Trends in Local Church Management		EDFR 2				EDFR 3
		Md.* ≥3.50	Q ₃ - Q ₁ ** ≤1.50	Feasibility	Consistency	Percentage/ Preference
7	Systematically monitor and evaluate member and leader development to reinforce organizational strength.	4	1	High	Consistent	92.86 Desirable
8	Track and assess external collaborations to expand opportunities and resources supporting the church's mission.	5	0	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
9	Develop and adjust church missions to align with community context and meet members' needs.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	96.43 Desirable
10	Evaluate social impact of mission activities to design programs addressing societal needs effectively.	3	2	Moderate	Inconsistent	71.43 Undesirable
11	Monitor membership growth and self-reliance levels to ensure long-term sustainability of the church.	5	0	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
12	Develop human resources, data systems, and supportive attitudes to enhance monitoring and management capacity.	5	2	Highest	Inconsistent	100.00 Desirable
Average		5	0.83	Highest	Consistent	93.45 Desirable

*Criteria for Feasibility or Likelihood of Occurrence: A median score ranging from 3.50 to 5.00 (Md. ≥ 3.50) indicates a high level of feasibility.

**Interquartile Range (IQR): If the calculated IQR of any given trend is less than or equal to 1.50 ($Q_3 - Q_1 \leq 1.50$), it suggests that the opinions of the key informants are consistent or reflect a consensus.

From Table 3, Key informants identified checking as the most prominent trend in local church management within the First Church District of Upper Northern Thailand (Md = 5, IQR = 0.83), with 93.45% indicating it as the most desirable aspect for promoting self-reliance

Table 4 Showing the median, interquartile range, levels of likelihood, consistency, and desirability regarding local church management in acting

Trends in Local Church Management		EDFR 2				EDFR 3
		Md.* ≥3.50	Q ₃ - Q ₁ ** ≤1.50	Feasibility	Consistency	Percentage/ Preference
Act						
1	Develop transparent and creative internal communication to enhance member participation in church activities.	5	0	High	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
2	Share evaluation results and member feedback openly to encourage engagement and mission ownership.	5	2	Highest	Inconsistent	100.00 Desirable
3	Promote member involvement in strategic planning, monitoring, and decision-making to drive self-reliance.	5	0	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
4	Continuously develop members' and leaders' skills to strengthen capacity for mission implementation.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
5	Enhance leaders' community analysis skills to support planning and context-appropriate decision-making.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	96.43 Desirable
6	Adjust training and capacity-building programs based on evaluations and members' needs continuously.	4	1	High	Consistent	92.86 Desirable

Table 4 Showing the median, interquartile range, levels of likelihood, consistency, and desirability regarding local church management in acting (Continue)

Trends in Local Church Management		EDFR 2				EDFR 3
		Md.* ≥3.50	Q ₃ - Q ₁ ** ≤1.50	Feasibility	Consistency	Percentage/ Preference
7	Align mission strategies and management structures with community changes and social context.	4	1	High	Consistent	92.86 Desirable
8	Foster a culture of systematic evaluation and self-development to sustain long-term self-reliance.	4	1	High	Consistent	92.86 Desirable
9	Use evaluation data to improve operations and inform strategic decisions on an ongoing basis.	3	2	Moderate	Inconsistent	78.57 Undesirable
10	Develop technology and operational tools to enhance efficiency in church management and communication.	5	1	Highest	Consistent	100.00 Desirable
11	Establish effective data systems to support evidence-based management and decision-making.	3	1	Moderate	Consistent	71.43 Undesirable
12	Promote a continuous organizational change culture to support adaptation and personnel development.	4	2	High	Inconsistent	89.29 Desirable
Average		4.50	1.08	Highest	Consistent	92.86 Desirable

*Criteria for Feasibility or Likelihood of Occurrence: A median score ranging from 3.50 to 5.00 (Md. ≥ 3.50) indicates a high level of feasibility.

**Interquartile Range (IQR): If the calculated IQR of any given trend is less than or equal to 1.50 ($Q_3 - Q_1 \leq 1.50$), it suggests that the opinions of the key informants are consistent or reflect a consensus.

From Table 4, Key informants identified acting as the most prominent trend in local church management within the First Church District of Upper Northern Thailand (Md = 4.50, IQR = 1.08), with 92.86% indicating it as the most desirable aspect for promoting self-reliance

Local Church Management Model for Self-Reliance

Local church management for self-reliance in the First Church District of Upper Northern Thailand adopts the Deming Cycle (PDCA) as its core framework. Based on findings from the Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR), each PDCA component—Plan, Do, Check, and Act—is closely linked to key management trends: participatory planning, collaborative doing, transparent checking, and systematic acting. These interconnected steps are essential for effective and sustainable management and omitting any one of them may compromise overall performance and hinder the achievement of self-reliance goals. The management model is summarized in Figure 2.

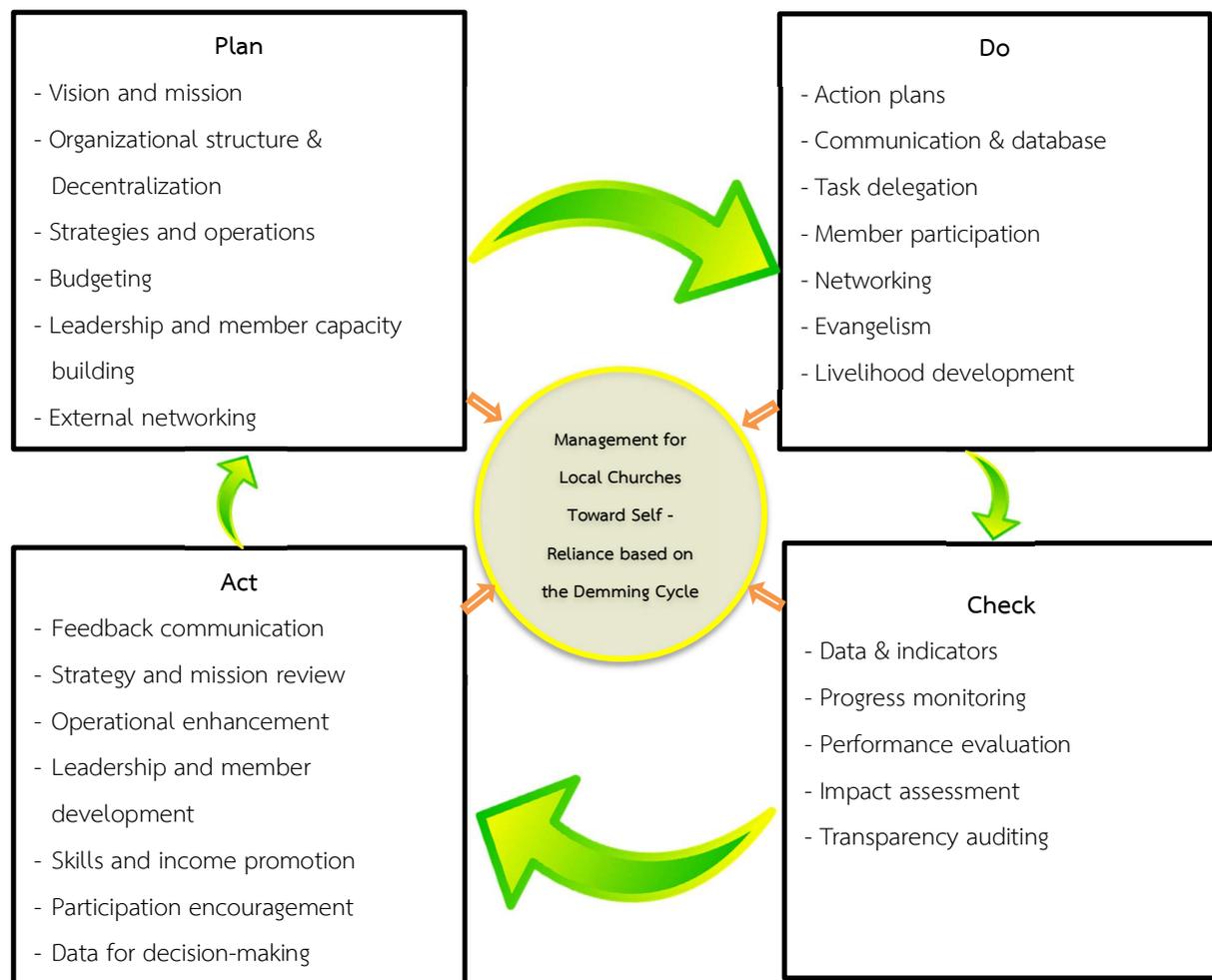


Figure 2: Local Church Management Models for Self-Reliance

Discussion

Objective 1: To examine the trends of local church management for self-reliance

The findings indicate that several key components play a vital role in driving progress and ensuring the sustainability of local churches, including personnel, organizational structure, resources, and spirituality. This aligns with Rod-urai (2018), who highlighted that the management of meditation centers relies primarily on individual factors and internal resources. Similarly, Weeraphanpong (2014) emphasized that the sustainability of self-reliance depends on community leaders, resources, collective organization, and shared values. Pongklang (2011; 2022) further noted the importance of establishing an organizational structure suited to operations, together with continuous monitoring, supervision, and evaluation (Khwankaew 2023).

In addition, the findings underscore the importance of capable and visionary leadership, complemented by active participation of members, particularly the younger generation. This is consistent with Noimee and Usaho (2023), who argued that transformational leadership should focus on setting a clear vision, serving as a role model, encouraging constructive input, and assigning tasks aligned with individual skills and potential. Transparent and accountable management systems, combined with effective use of resources such as assets and budgets, are essential to reducing reliance on external funding. This view is supported by Maneechai (2022), who stressed that community strength and unity across economic, social, and cultural dimensions arise when members can voice opinions, engage in decision-making, and contribute to problem-solving.

The importance of cultural revitalization and local leadership is further reinforced by Kongsiri (2014), who pointed out that community leaders, empowerment, and the preservation of language and culture play crucial roles in the self-reliant management of the Chong ethnic community in Khlong Phlu Subdistrict. Economic conditions, combined with flexible policies from the Church of Christ in Thailand, further enhance resilience. However, Kongsiri (2014) also emphasized that while government and private organizations can support community advancement, excessive dependence on external assistance jeopardizes long-term sustainability. This observation corresponds with Weeraphanpong (2014), who explained that the self-reliance of the Khlong Lat Mayom community was derived from their ability to solve problems and make decisions independently.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that local churches tend to prioritize planning that is structurally clear and contextually relevant, with strong emphasis on member participation to foster a sense of ownership and unity. This is consistent with Khumsawad and Sirisukha (2015), who found planning to be a critical factor for management efficiency, and Namburi (2019), who argued that participation includes thinking, decision-making, doing, and the sharing of collective benefits. The findings also emphasize the need to develop members' skills in management, communication, and technology, while encouraging collaboration with external organizations to expand mission opportunities. This aligns with Kongpetdit and Chantuk (2016), who highlighted the role of communication skills in enhancing organizational competitiveness, and Nooin and Sangayatin (2021), who noted that self-reliant organizations integrate basic technology to build personnel capacity and establish networks.

Objective 2: To develop an appropriate model of local church management for self-reliance based on the PDCA Cycle

The research highlights the necessity of transparent checking systems that encourage member participation, thereby ensuring that information is effectively used for continuous acting of organizational practices. This reflects modern management approaches and corresponds with Rerkaroonthong et al. (2024), who emphasized the role of integrity and transparency assessments in fostering ethical and accountable operations.

The feasibility of self-reliant management was found to be at a very high level, demonstrating the confidence and determination of both leaders and members to drive sustainable change. This is consistent with Taboonmee (2023), who noted that organizational survival in rapidly changing environments requires visionary and adaptable leadership beyond conventional approaches. Each management dimension: planning, doing, checking, and acting shows that systematic planning, coupled with the integration of technology, enhances operational efficiency (Deming 1986). This corresponds with Chairacha et al. (2025), who reported that key informants actively engaged in planning, doing, and acting processes, and with Pongklang (2025), who highlighted that local churches hold high expectations for efficiency in every stage of management. The dimensions of checking and acting particularly reveal the readiness of key informants to apply assessment results for continuous organizational enhancement. Chairacha et al. (2025) similarly reported that the effectiveness of local church management and expectations for acting were rated at a high level.

Conclusion

The management trends of local churches toward self-reliance encompass four key areas: planning (Md.=5, IQR=0.78), doing (Md.=5, IQR=0.43), checking (Md.=5, IQR=0.83), and acting (Md.=4.5, IQR=1.08). Each area was found to have the highest level of feasibility (Md.=5, IQR=0.78) with strong consensus among respondents. Overall, 94.38% expressed support for self-reliant church management. The appropriate local church management model was developed by applying the principles of the Deming Cycle (PDCA), consisting of the steps: Plan, Do, Check, and Act. This model serves as a systematic and continuous tool for improving church management practices.

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Research findings can be applied in three key areas: Practically, by adopting strategic management and technology to strengthen church sustainability; Policy-wise, by aligning strategic plans with national policies and local contexts for integrated development; and academically, in leadership development, digital transformation in church management, and performance measurement.

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