



Motivation and work behavior in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border during Thailand's Reform Period

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Abstract

This survey research was aimed at 1) investigating motivation and work behavior in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border; 2) comparing work behaviors within tour operator establishments versus those in hotel establishments; and 3) examining the relationship between motivation and work behavior in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border in the context of Thailand's reform era. The three sample groups consisted of frontier tourism businesses and their employees located in Yala Province; tourism industry entrepreneurs, including hotel and tour businesses; and relevant public and private sectors. Data collection was achieved using questionnaires and interviews. The findings suggest that overall motivation toward work is determined by career growth, interpersonal relationships, work environment, rewards, and having a work-life balance. These aspects of motivation have a positive correlation at a moderate level with the work behavior of employees in the hotel industry, with a statistical significance of .05

Keywords: Motivation, work behavior, frontier tourism business, Thai-Malaysian border.

Introduction

In recent periods, Thailand has proven a popular tourist destination among a great many tourists. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicted that by 2020 the world's tourist population would reach 1,600 million, with 400 million travelers in the Asia Pacific and 160-200 million of those tourists traveling in ASEAN countries (World Tourism Organization: UNWTO, 2018). As such, the tourism industry plays an important part in Thailand's national economy. Thailand's popularity among tourists may be attributed to its relatively low cost of living and the availability of communications systems and public utilities relative to neighboring countries. For these reasons, the tourism industry has brought Thailand more than one trillion baht, or 8% of national GDP (The Association of Southeast Asian Nation, 2013).

The Department of Tourism, under the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, reported that Thailand welcomed approximately 26,735,583 walk-in tourists in 2017 and 30.27 million in 2018, an expansion in tourism of 13.29%. Thailand is estimated to have made approximately 1.344 trillion baht in 2018, about 15.1% higher than the previous year, as a result (Tourism and Sports Department, 2014).



The growing number of tourists taking part in Thailand's tourism industry has generated for the country significant income in the form of foreign currency. A top-down effort has been undertaken to drive the tourism industry due to its significance to the national economy. The 4th National Economic and Social Development Plan up to the most recent version (the 12th) have included a conceptual framework for determining tourism policies and strategies with the aim of their contextualization and integration according to the current tourism market. Such policies and strategies have been aimed at promoting value-added products and improving the quality of tourist attractions by adding more variety to tourist models and travel routes. In other words, there is an effort to create tourism alternatives that can better respond to the needs of tourists and at the same time promote cultural preservation and 'Thainess' (Bank of Thailand, 2014).

As tourism-related businesses have the potential to generate a large income, many new ones have been introduced into the market. Consequently, there is a need to set business standards in order to ensure quality and endurance in a competitive market. A high wage is one factor that encourages many individuals to take part in the industry, seeking out education and training. When rewards earned match the needs of employees and the organization, optimal work outcomes can be achieved (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Political conflict in Thailand, as well as other escalating issues, led to nationwide reform under the leadership of General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the 29th prime minister of Thailand. The main objective of this reform was to return happiness to all Thai citizens, as outlined in three phases. The phases were described in the new government's strategic plan, referred to as the Roadmap, which aimed to restore order to the country and work toward peace, development, and progress, promoting lasting happiness in the country (Arslan, 2012).

The National Reform Council (NRC) was established according to Section 27 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand. The body's main purposes are: to ensure that the democratic regime with the King as Head of State is appropriate to the context of Thai society; to hold honest and fair elections; to contain an effective mechanism to prevent and eliminate corruption and misconduct; to eliminate inequality and create economic and social justice for sustainable development; to enable state mechanisms to provide thorough and prompt services to the people; and to secure strict and fair law enforcement. Consequently, the NRC is responsible for studying and proposing approaches to national reform in 11 different areas. Moreover, there are 18 departments under the House of Commons Commission to assist in monitoring the implications of these reform approaches. In the area of tourism, the Commission on Agricultural Reform, Industry, Commerce, Tourism, and Services is directly responsible for analyzing, mapping, and proposing agricultural, industrial, commercial, and tourism- and service-related reform in order to ensure the achievement of the common goals assigned by the House of Commons Commission (Alderfer, 1972).

The group of five provinces on Thailand's southern frontier consists of Songkhla, Satun, Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. This provincial group plays an important role in Thai-Malaysian cross-border trade due to geographical advantages. Namely, the location facilitates connections with other ASEAN countries. Altogether, the five provinces occupy approximately 20,809.7 square kilometers and have a population of 3.8 million – 66% of which is Buddhist and 34% of which is Muslim. In Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat Provinces, however, the majority of the residents are Muslim, representing unique characteristics and cultural traditions unlike any found in other areas of Thailand. Pattani is the only province of this provincial group that does not share a border with Malaysia. As for the others, Songkhla Province neighbors Kedah and Perlis States, Yala Province neighbors Perak and Kedah States, Narathiwat Province neighbors Kelantan and Perak States, and Satun Province neighbors Perlis State. Along the frontier, there are nine border crossing checkpoints, with four of them serving as cross-border trade checkpoints, the latter of which are Sadao Checkpoint, Padang Besar Checkpoint, Tak Bai Checkpoint, and Su-ngai Kolok Checkpoint (Berg & Houtum, 2003).



Betong District is in Yala Province, situated at the southern tip of Thailand. The district has vibrant tourism-related businesses, such as hotels, accommodations, restaurants, and nightlife. Outside the district area, there are also tourist attractions, including hot springs, Piyamitra Tunnel, Winter Flower Garden, and so on. In 2017, Betong District welcomed 223,667 tourists (TAT, 2018). This district has served as the most suitable site for studies on the tourism industry relating to Thai-Malaysian frontier tourism businesses. It is the location of one permanent border crossing checkpoint – Betong Checkpoint, Betong District, Yala Province. This checkpoint connects to Bukit Buerapid Checkpoint in Kedah State, Malaysia. In addition to being the southernmost province of Thailand, Yala also shares a border with Malaysia and continues to face violence, with terrorism continuing to occur in the area (Castellani & Sala, 2011).

During Thailand's most recent period of reform, job satisfaction was recognized as one of the most effective motivations in the workplace. Motivation encourages people to work for the most excellent results. Therefore, cultivating it is considered a key to successful management. Moreover, positive work motivation is known to elicit positive work behavior. As such, the researchers were interested in studying motivation and work behavior in Thai-Malaysian frontier tourism businesses and wished to investigate possible links between these two factors. The research also examined national administrative policies regarding the tourism industry and their relationship with work motivation, as findings would have potential for developing management guidelines and improving effectiveness of work behavior as exhibited by employees working in tourism-related businesses on the southern border (Christine, et al., 2008).

Therefore, this research was conducted to study motivation and work behavior in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border during the reform period of Thailand. The main objectives of this study are:

- To study motivation and work behavior.
- To compare work behaviors in hotel establishments with those in tour operator establishments.
- To examine the relationship between motivation and work behavior among employees in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border during the reform period of Thailand.

Research methodology

This survey research included a sample group comprised of 40 border tour operator businesses and 300 employees working in hotel establishments and tourism-related businesses in Yala Province, as well as 10 public and private organizations. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used as research tools to meet the research objectives. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data, and the strength of relationships was measured using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.

Result and Discussions

The results of this study, on motivation and work behavior within tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border during the reform period of Thailand, are as follows:

- **Demographics**

The personal information of the respondents is summarized in Table 1.



Table 1. Demographics

Demographics	Total	Percentage
Gender		
Male	126	42.00
Female	174	58.00
Age		
Under 35 years old	65	21.70
35 – 40 years old	123	41.00
Above 40 years old	112	37.30
Place of residency		
Songkhla	53	17.70
Satun	37	12.30
Yala	123	41.00
Pattani	65	21.70
Narathiwat	22	7.30
Marital status		
Single	88	29.30
Married	166	55.30
Divorced	46	15.30
Education		
Below a Bachelor's degree	83	27.70
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	217	72.30
Establishment affiliation		
Hotel establishment	200	66.70
Tour operator establishment	100	33.30
Income		
10,001 baht/month – 15,000 baht/month	24	8.00
15,001 baht/month – 20,000 baht/month	192	64.00
More than 20,000 baht/month	84	28.00
Total	300	100.00

Table 1 illustrates the demographics of employees affiliated to tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border. The majority of the respondents were female (58%) and in the 35-40 year-old age range (41%). 41% of the respondents reported residing in Yala, 55.30% were married, and 72.30% held a Bachelor's degree or equivalent. 66.70% of the respondents worked in the hotel industry, and the majority made 15,001-20,000 baht per month (64%).

• **Overall and subcategory results regarding motivation**

The overall and subcategory results of this study connected to motivation of employees in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation values representing motivation levels of employees in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border

Overall motivation	Motivation levels		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Job characteristics	3.36	0.22	Moderate
2. Career growth	3.31	0.20	Moderate
3. Interpersonal relationships	3.86	0.21	High
4. Work environment	3.45	0.17	Moderate
5. Rewards	2.71	0.23	Moderate
6. Work-life balance	3.33	0.30	Moderate
Total	3.34	0.09	Moderate

Table 2 shows the results of this study as relate to motivation among employees in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border. The findings suggest moderate overall motivation. However, when each aspect contributing to motivation is considered separately, one can see that interpersonal relationships ranked highest, followed by work environment and then rewards. Details of the findings are discussed in the following section.

- *Job characteristics* as an aspect of motivation was ranked moderate overall. *Task expertise* and *suitability of given tasks* averaged first and second-highest under job characteristics, respectively, and *job satisfaction* averaged lowest.
- *Career growth* as an aspect of motivation was ranked moderate overall. Under career growth, *colleagues and supervisors' recognition of contributions and opinions* averaged the highest and *participation in decision-making toward change and direction of the organization* averaged the second-highest. *Support from the organization for growth opportunities exclusive of job changes or rotations* was the category with the lowest average.
- *Interpersonal relationships* as an aspect of motivation was the category ranked the highest overall. In terms of each subcategory, *cooperation among departments* and *helpful colleagues* averaged the highest and second- highest, respectively. *Opportunities to express opinion on important matters* received the lowest average score.
- *Work environment* as an aspect of motivation was ranked moderate overall. *Cleanliness of work environment* and *emergency readiness* had the first and second-highest averages, respectively. On the other hand, *readiness and suitability of utilities and equipment* was the category with the lowest average.
- *Rewards* as an aspect of motivation ranked moderate overall. *Promptness of reward reception* and *opportunities to take leave as necessary* were the first and second-highest subcategories, respectively, and *compensations and incentives* had the lowest average.
- *Work- life balance* as an aspect of motivation was ranked moderate overall. Regarding each element in this section, *working on assigned tasks after working hours* and *managing time between work, family, and social life* were found to average the first and second-highest; *having time to get exercise* averaged lowest.

• **Overall and subcategory results regarding work behavior**

Overall and subcategory results of this study connected to work behavior of employees in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation values representing work behavior levels of employees in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border, presented with overall and subcategory averages

Work behavior	Work behavior levels		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Performs duties while adhering to correctness and fairness according to the law	4.48	0.50	Highest
2. Has courage to stand for what is right and approved by the law, principles, and codes of conduct	4.16	0.54	High
3. Has courage to report perpetrators even if they are colleagues or relatives	3.78	0.60	High
4. Works without falling under bad influences	4.47	0.50	Highest
5. Discloses information within the scope of the law with vigilance, accuracy, expediency, and promptness	4.02	0.62	High
6. Discloses work process guidelines thoroughly, providing straightforward access to information to secure complete transparency	3.14	0.35	Moderate
7. Does not accept benefits from any other individual	4.40	0.49	Highest
8. Demonstrates full devotion to work and takes responsible for and delivers assigned work by adopting the correct method and seizing work outcomes that benefit the whole	4.43	0.49	Highest
9. Performs and constantly develops to achieve optimal work outcomes	4.18	0.47	High
10. Collaborates with all departments to achieve success in work	4.20	0.66	High
11. Is determined to improve at work with continuous learning	4.32	0.52	Highest
12. Works in an integrated manner with planning and follow-through	3.65	0.65	High
13. Shows diligence and uses talents to achieve goals	4.41	0.49	Highest
14. Improves methods and work process while being service-minded and efficient	4.08	0.41	High



Work behavior	Work behavior levels		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
15. Prepares for possible obstacles with well-planned approaches, which are adopted for the greater good	3.37	0.48	Moderate
16. Performs with accuracy at work to minimize errors and constantly monitors work and performance to properly carry out plans	4.39	0.50	Highest
17. Serves as a service-minded individual, with honesty and fairness	4.53	0.50	Highest
18. Serves in a way that demonstrates politeness and hospitality	4.56	0.49	Highest
19. Serves without prejudice, depending solely on logic and fairness	4.59	0.49	Highest
20. Volunteers with a service-minded approach	4.52	0.50	Highest
21. Demonstrates independence, self-reliance, and mindfulness of others, nature, and the environment	4.13	0.59	High
22. Demonstrates resourcefulness	4.55	0.49	Highest
23. Lifestyle is informed by principles of self-sufficiency, as suitable for the individual's economic and social status	4.50	0.52	Highest
Total	4.21	0.10	Highest

Table 3 reveals that work behavior of employees in tourism-related businesses located on the Thai-Malaysian border were ranked moderate overall. In terms of how each component of work behavior measured up, *Item 19 – serves without prejudice, depending solely on logic and fairness*, had the highest rankings, followed by *Item 18 – serves in a way that demonstrates politeness and hospitality*. On the other hand, *Item 6 - Discloses work process guidelines thoroughly, providing straightforward access to information to secure complete transparency*, had the lowest rankings.

Conclusion and discussion

A comparison of motivation and work behaviors among employees affiliated with hotel versus tour operator establishments revealed that the work behaviors of the two groups are of no statistical difference at $p = 0.05$, either overall or among the subcategories. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected. This is in line with theory described in (Wonganutaroj, 2001), which proposes that job satisfaction occurs when the collective feelings of related parties are positive or promote happiness at work and when rewards are received in exchange for work. Gratification from work encourages individuals to contribute and dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to their work, including by having a positive attitude in the workplace. These components of job satisfaction are essential to efficacy and efficiency at work, as well as success of the organization (Yeh, 2013). When comparing work behaviors of tour operator versus hotel business employees, there is no statistical difference at $p = 0.05$, either overall or among the subcategories.

Table 4. Analysis of findings on relationship between motivation and work behaviors among employees affiliated with tour operator businesses

Work motivation	Work behaviors		
	Correlation coefficient (r)	Sig.	Relationship level
1. Job characteristics	.214*	.000	Low
2. Career growth	.329*	.000	Moderate
3. Interpersonal relationships	.477*	.000	Moderate
4. Work environment	.515*	.000	Moderate
5. Rewards	.526*	.000	Moderate
6. Work-life balance	.398*	.000	Moderate
Total	.439*	.000	Moderate

Table 4, which presents an analysis of the findings on the relationship between motivation and work behaviors among employees affiliated to tour operator businesses, suggests a moderately positive relationship between the two factors, at a statistical significance of 0.05. This confirms the hypothesis. In terms of each aspect of motivation to work, career growth, interpersonal relationships, work environment, rewards, and work-life balance all showed a moderately positive relationship with work behaviors among employees affiliated with tour



operator businesses, at a statistical significance of 0.05. On the other hand, job characteristics as an aspect of motivation had a low-level positive relationship with work behaviors of tour operator business employees, at a statistical significance of 0.05

Table 5. Analysis of findings on relationship between motivation and work behaviors among employees affiliated with hotel establishments

Work motivation	Work behaviors		
	Correlation Coefficient (R)	Sig.	Relationship level
1. Job characteristics	.273*	.000	Low
2. Career growth	.336*	.000	Moderate
3. Interpersonal relationships	.536*	.000	Moderate
4. Work environment	.670*	.000	Moderate
5. Rewards	.672*	.000	Moderate
6. Work-life balance	.489*	.000	Moderate
Total	.497*	.000	Moderate

Table 5 illustrates an analysis of the findings on the relationship between motivation and work behaviors among hotel business employees. It indicates that motivation has a moderately positive relationship with work behaviors found among hotel business employees, at a statistical significance of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis was supported. Regarding each aspect of motivation to work, career growth, interpersonal relationships, work environment, rewards, and work-life balance all had a moderately positive relationship with work behaviors among hotel employees, at a statistical significance of 0.05. Meanwhile, job characteristics as an aspect of motivation had a low-level positive relationship with work behaviors among hotel employees, at a statistical significance of 0.05

The findings from this study are consistent with those reported in (Ogomaka, 1986), a study which investigated motivational elements as reported by teachers affiliated with Catholic schools in Los Angeles, USA. The study found that factors informing motivation from most to least important were career growth, recognition, efficiency, and religious agreement. Meanwhile, teacher-student relationships, parental support, job security, and salary had no influence on motivation (Domjan, 2014).

Another aligned study, by (Ray, 1987), was focused on the relationship of internal factors (motivational factors) and external factors (maintenance factors) with job satisfaction among community college employees working at student affairs departments in Massachusetts, USA. The study suggested that the most important factors creating satisfaction are job characteristics, followed by payment, supervision, career growth, colleagues, job security, and other general matters. The study implied that both internal and external factors are significantly related to job satisfaction at every job level (Nordlinger, 1977).

The theory described in (Mahaphatthanon, 2002) offers an explanation on motivation in line with the present study's findings. It points out that motivation is rooted in the mind of an individual who is catalyzed by a motive. This motive leads to an internal drive to perform at work, making valuable contributions corresponding to the direction or goals of the leader. Therefore, to motivate members of an organization, one must try in every way to encourage employees to behave in certain ways that serve the organization's goals (Eriksson, 1979).

This is consistent with theory described in (Gilmer, 1971), on the notion of related dimensions that affect job satisfaction. The dimensions are: 1) Job characteristics related to expertise are found to be of importance, especially among highly educated employees (Frey & Georeg, 2008). 2) Supervision is identified as another important dimension affecting job satisfaction (May, 1987); poor supervision can result in a lack of motivation to come to work, or resignation. There is also evidence that female employees tend to be more sensitive toward poor supervision relative to their male counterparts (Luthans, 1985). 3) Job security, in terms of the



ability to make the most of one's potential, and fairness in terms of supervision, has been identified as the most important dimension for unskilled employees or those with lower levels of education, as well as senior employees. However, the same importance has not been indicated by more skilled employees or those with higher levels of education (Goodson, 1985). 4) Organization, including organization size, reputation, income, and public relations, can make employees feel secure and safe while working. Regarding safety, senior employees tend to show more concern than juniors do. (Hampton, 2010). 5) Work environment, including lighting, air, canteen, restrooms, and working hours (Raub, 2008), is shown to have a more significant effect on male employees, while married female employees have shown more concern toward working hours. (Baum, 2015) 6) Salary or monetary income usually ranks near the top of the list, coming in behind career growth and job security (Ray, 1987). Employees tend to show more dissatisfaction than satisfaction toward this dimension, with male employees giving higher importance to income than their female counterparts. Assembly workers also tend to value salary more than office workers or governmental officers (Ho, 2011). 7) Career growth, in terms of promotion, commission, or incentives (Strameyer, 2001), is shown to affect satisfaction, as a job with no prospects for career growth can bring dissatisfaction toward work. However, male employees seem to be more concerned about career growth at a younger age (Horng & Tsai, 2010). 8) Social characteristics, including privacy and social recognition, can cause either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. (Tracy & Bricker, 2006) Individuals who find joy in collaborating with others tend to find satisfaction (Tseane-Gumbi, 2018). This dimension is closely correlated with age, job level, and gender, with female employees expressing more concern about this factor than their male counterparts (Jacobs & McClelland, 1994) 9) Communication, including exchanges of information, orders, reports, and internal and external correspondences, has been shown to be important to employees with a higher education (Yu, 2006). 10) The final dimension related to job satisfaction is rewards, including securing a pension, health and food welfare, housing, and holidays. (Kearney, 1998)

The theory described above is consistent with (Carpenter, 1988), a study that investigated the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction among mid-level executives working in a tertiary nursing school in the United States of America. The school executives expressed satisfaction in terms of job security, as the job was responsive to their needs, allowing opportunities to learn and grow (Kim & Lee, 2009). However, the respondents also reported the possibility of feeling more satisfied if given more opportunities in terms of decision-making and showing self-reliance, as well as in responding to other needs. (The Association of Southeast Asian Nation, 2013).

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