

Working Morale on Hospitality Employees in Thailand

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of working morale among hospitality employees in the Pattaya district, Thailand, and to compare the differences between the working morale of the employees based on gender and years of work experience. The instrument used for collecting data was a questionnaire. This instrument comprised of 40 items that were grouped into eight aspects: (a) career advancement, (b) satisfaction with job position, (c) satisfaction with job responsibility, (d) satisfaction with supervision and supervisor, (e) relationship between peers and superiors, (f) satisfaction with salary and fringe benefits, (g) working environment, and (h) security in the workplace. The result of the study revealed that the overall working morale of the employees in the Pattaya district was at a high level. Regarding the eight aspects, the levels of the working morale for each aspect were also high. In additions, the results showed that there was no significant difference between the working morale of the hospitality employees based on gender and years of work experience.

Keywords: working morale, hospitality, hotel, employee, tourism

1. Introduction

The quality of service from hospitality industry providers are a crucial part of the tourism industry in Thailand. There is a high level of competition in the hospitality industry, especially in hotels and restaurants. Apart from good service, customers also require the convenience of modern accommodation, low prices and easy access to local places of interest, shopping. However, good service is instrumental to achieving customer loyalty, beating the competition, and appealing to the customer's emotions or 'heart' (Mcdowall, 2007). It is for these reasons that employees are the important aspect of delivering the best product and good service to customers (Petcharak, 2002). Therefore, it is unlikely to deny that a human element is the most valuable asset that a hospitality service provider has to offer. According to Jerris (1999), in every organization, creativity and resourcefulness are two important components of building and maintaining a successful and productive culture in the contemporary business world. However, in order to recruit and retain the current employees, the most influential factor is working morale (Jerris, 1999).

Morale is one of the most complicated components when measuring and evaluating human behavior. Morale can be regarded as a set of attitudes and responses to any work conditions that may influence the behavior of the individuals (Kanter, 1977). A high level of morale can be demonstrated when an individual shows determination to do the best under any given circumstance and the ability of a group of people to pull together continuously and consistently for a common purpose (Bayens, 1967). The morale of the employees, whether or not they are a professional, skilled, or unskilled worker, is a major concern. It is often a challenge for hospitality industry management to maintain employee working morale, retain them as staff, and offer the efficient, good service that customers expect (Cheng, 1995). In order for the management to better understand the needs of their employees, they should be familiar with several key theories that may help them to understand the basic human needs of their staff. In this study, the level of working morale among hospitality employees working in the Pattaya district will be examined. In response to the objectives of the study, two research questions have been proposed.

1) What is the level of working morale among hospitality employees in the Pattaya district?

2) Is there any significant difference between the working morale of the employee based on gender and years of work experience?

2. Concept of Morale

Definitions of morale have been provided by many authors. For example, Yoder (1981, p. 543-545) defined morale as “*evidence commitment*”, individuals exhibiting the behavioral symbols and symptoms of personal commitment. Morale is essentially regarded as subjective experience that an employee’s feelings or attitudes toward his work. Morale is related to work satisfaction and is connected with drive and enthusiasm. This definition is similar to Wongphut (1996) who defined morale as a mental condition that affects willingness, discipline, and enthusiasm. It can be concluded that morale is generally defined as a mental condition, attitude, or an individual’s feeling regarding their job, such as an employee’s level of enthusiasm, their expectation and their willingness to work. It is also an emotion that results from an employee’s perception of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that affect their level of job satisfaction. As a result, human beings are among the most valuable assets in an organization. Some of the relevant theories on employee morale include Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg’s two-factor theory.

According to Maslow (1954), there are five basic constructs in the human hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy consists of five categories of basic needs: (a) physiological needs, (b) security needs, (c) belongingness needs, (d) self-esteem needs, and (e) self-actualization needs. Physiological needs can be defined as the most basic human needs, such as food, water, air, and shelter. As a result, it is not possible to satisfy higher level needs if the basic needs are not met. Physiological needs can be compared to salary, working environment, and welfare. The second one that would be met is security needs. In general terms, security needs refer to the basic human need for survival or self-preservation and can be compared to job security in working life. When the first two levels have been met, the next level of needs must be satisfied. Belongingness needs can be described in term of having a chance to participate in the activities at workplace, feeling as a part of the group, and getting recognition from others. Self-esteem needs are concerned with gaining respect from others in the workplace and social sphere, and can be based on achievement, independence, and confidence. The last need is self-actualization, which is the need for success, which is the highest order of human needs and can be compared to promotion, career advancement, higher salaries and bonuses. Maslow’s conceptualization of human needs is represented by a triangle with five levels that he referred to as the Hierarchy of needs. Maslow claimed that lower-level needs must be satisfied before advancing to the next higher level.

Herzberg’s theory in Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) is based on two different factors that influence the human behavior. Herzberg identified the factors connected with job satisfaction as: achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement. The factors connected with job dissatisfaction were salary, the possibility of growth, interpersonal relationships, status, company policy and administration, working condition, personal life, and job security. Herzberg identified the satisfaction factors as “motivation factors” and the dissatisfaction factors as “hygiene factors”. Herzberg’s motivation factors are necessary in order to motivate employees to achieve higher performance levels. This factor is concerned more with the actual job itself, for example, how interesting the work is and how much opportunity it gives for extra responsibility, recognition and promotion. There are five factors in particular that were strong determiners of job satisfaction: (a) achievement, (b) recognition, (c) work itself, (d) responsibility, and (e) advancement. Herzberg’s hygiene factors are based on the need to avoid unpleasantness at work. If these factors are considered inadequate by employees, they can lead to job dissatisfaction. There are six factors in particular that were strong determiners of job dissatisfaction: (a) salary, (b) interpersonal relationship with superior, subordinates, and peers, (c) company policy, (d) security, (e) working condition, and (f) supervision techniques. Herzberg also claimed that the most importance of motivation is to fulfill the human needs at the highest level. Although the organization offers a good salary and fringe benefits to their employees, it will not provide them with opportunities for personal growth and development, give them recognition or enhance their abilities and skills. These factors can lead to low productivity and poor performance respectively.

These two theories have quite significant similarities. The element of motivation factors in Herzberg’s theory can be described as the last two levels of Maslow’s theory, self-actualization and self-esteem needs. The first three levels of Maslow’s theory, physical needs, security needs, and belongingness needs are equivalent to Herzberg’s hygiene factor as they are both concerned with these basic needs of human beings. Therefore, the level of working morale of hospitality employees working in the Pattaya district will be examined in eight aspects, (a) career advancement, (b) satisfaction with job position, (c) satisfaction with job responsibility, (d) satisfaction with supervision and supervisor, (e) relationship between peers and superiors, (f) satisfaction with salary and fringe benefits, (g) working environment, and (h) security in the workplace. This is because these factors are important elements which may affect the feelings and attitudes of employees and how this affects productivity and efficiency to the organization.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants consisted of 70 hospitality employees working in the Pattaya district, Thailand. The employees were Thai natives and range from staff to manager. In terms of gender, the majority, or 70%, of the participants in the study were female. The remaining 30% were male. Of the total participants, 44 (62.86%) had less than 5 years of work experience, and 26 (37.14%) had 5 years or more of work experience. They were asked to answer a questionnaire regarding their working morale. In addition, they were informed that their identity would remain anonymous and that their participation was voluntary.

3.2 Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire. It was designed to investigate the morale of hospitality employees working in the Pattaya district, Thailand. The self-reporting instrument consisted of 40 items, and was divided into two sections. The first section included demographic information. The participants were asked to provide their personal information, such as gender and years of work experience. The second section allowed participants to select the most appropriate answer according to their level of working morale. The level of working morale of hospitality employees working in the Pattaya district were measured by questions based on eight factors: (a) career advancement, (b) satisfaction with job position, (c) satisfaction with job responsibility, (d) satisfaction with supervision and supervisor, (e) relationship between peers and superiors, (f) satisfaction with salary and fringe benefits, (g) working environment, and (h) job security.

4. Results and Discussion

The standard five-point Likert scale was employed. The data gathered in this part were presented using means (M) and standard deviations (S.D.). The results are demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Level of working morale among hospitality employees

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Level
Career advancement	3.76	0.55	High
Satisfaction with job position	3.78	0.53	High
Satisfaction with job responsibility	3.99	0.46	High
Satisfaction with supervision and supervisor	3.69	0.86	High
Relationship between peers and superiors	3.85	0.69	High
Satisfaction with salary and fringe benefits	3.49	0.66	High
Working environment	3.63	0.57	High
Job security	3.73	0.61	High
Overall	3.75	0.47	High

As Table 1 showed, the overall level of employee morale was rated as high ($M = 3.75$, $S.D. = 0.47$). The Table also indicated that among the eight factors examined relating to morale, “satisfaction with job responsibility” was rated highest ($M = 3.99$, $S.D. = 0.46$), followed by “relationship between peers and superiors” ($M = 3.85$, $S.D. = 0.69$), and “satisfaction with job position” ($M = 3.78$, $S.D. = 0.53$). The result may be due to the fact that the hotel has adjusted its organizational structure, management system, scope of job competency, and focused on its employees, recognizing them as a valuable asset. The result of this study was supported by Daschler and Ninemeier’s (1989), they found that challenging work, work that yields a sense of personal accomplishment, increased responsibility, and the chance to grow in the job were all important. These were factors that encourage satisfaction of job responsibility, satisfaction of job position, and career advancement to be in a high level. Therefore, organizations would find several ways of designing jobs to maintain both quality and morale of employees in order to encourage them to work with the organizations as long as possible (Jerald & Robert, 1997). According to Herzberg et al.’s study (1959), Herzberg claimed that factors that influence human behavior can be separated into “motivation factors” and “hygiene factors”. If the motivation and hygiene factors were at a high level, it could reflect an overall positive performance both of the employees and the organization. Regarding the results, “satisfaction with job responsibility”, “satisfaction with job position”, and “career advancement” were

the three of eight factors that rated high. These were similar to the motivation factors that show the respect to how much employees like the job that they do. They are concerned with the actual job itself, for instance, how interesting the job is and how much opportunity it gives for extra responsibility, recognition, and promotion. As a result, if the organization can score highly in these factors, it will probably result in the employees being more likely to reach the organization's goals. The result also can indicate that the hotel pay more attention to the scope of work, give the clarification of duties to the employees, and focusing on the career path of their employees if they could show high performance in their working. Therefore, management should create strategies to support their employees in order to maintain and increase employee morale.

The findings, in addition, showed that there were no significant differences between morale based on gender. It is possible that gender might not be factors leading to differences in morale level. The findings were also relevant to Kittimavikrom's (1994) study on the morale of the employees in the personnel department of the Bangkok Bank Public Company Limited. Kittimavikrom found that there was no significant difference in morale levels in relation to gender. He explained that male and female had equivalent right in working and they could show their competencies and skills in order to perform their work successfully. As a result, they both got no differences in compensation and benefit from companies. This might be a reason why there were no significant different between morale and gender. From the result of the study, there was interesting information about the morale level based on gender. With regarding to the eight factors relating to morale, "satisfaction with job responsibility" was rated at the highest level for both males and females, despite they came from different job functions. The result indicated that male participants, who rated "satisfaction in job responsibility" high, were working in the engineer function. While the female participants, who rated "satisfaction in job responsibility" high, were working at sale and marketing function. This could imply that the hotel has clarified the duties or tasks that the employees are responsible for, whatever functions they are working at. The employees feel a sense of ownership of the work. Then, the employees are able to use their skills and abilities to accomplish their work as well.

Additionally, there also were no significant differences between morale and years of work experience. The findings of the study were consistent with the findings of Peungnusun's (1997) study, which dealt with morale of teacher at a vocational education school in Bangkok. Peungnusun found that differences in years of work experience caused no significant difference in the level of morale among teachers in the school. Participants in every range of working experience had a high level of morale. This is because each employee had worked in the same working environment where they feel familiar. Thus, years of work experience might not lead to significant difference between morale of employees.

5. Conclusion

The level of working morale among hospitality employees was examined with regard to eight factors; (a) career advancement, (b) satisfaction with job position, (c) satisfaction with job responsibility, (d) satisfaction with supervision and supervisor, (e) relationship between peers and superiors, (f) satisfaction with salary and fringe benefits, (g) working environment, and (h) job security. The study found that the level of working morale among the employees were high and there was no significant difference between morale level based on gender and years of work experience. The results may provide useful information for the hospitality service management team to generate ideas that will be used to improve and develop procedures in human resource management to lift the working morale level for hospitality employees, reducing the high absenteeism and turn over rate in the hospitality service industry. Additionally, when the management realizes the significance of a high level of staff morale, they will determine which aspects of it need to be focused on in order to increase the level of employee morale. Then management will be able to provide the suitable motivational approach to maintain morale, and then employees will reach their goals and the goals of the organization. As a result, not only employees will get benefits but also the whole organization will be more successful.

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