The Understanding about Cultural Intelligence of Cabin Crew from Thailand’s International Airlines

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Abstract
In the airline business, cabin crew are the employees who have direct contact with passengers. They are in an occupational group that generally has to face many difficulties in the workplace. In addition to their responsibilities to ensure the safety of the flight, one particular issue that creates tremendous stress for cabin crew is when they have to serve passengers from other different cultures. This study explores the understanding of cabin crew from the international airlines concerning cultural intelligence. The key informant of 12 cabin crew were selected from the international airlines in Thailand. Interview approach was used to collect the data using an in-depth interview form which was then analyzed by using content analysis. The findings revealed 1) there is the importance of knowing cultural intelligence for cabin crew from the international airlines, 2) it is not just the skills to deal with the passengers but everyone in workplace, 3) everyone is different, 4) their experiences matter, 5) we should think, learn, plan, and act, 6) we also should embrace and adapt the Thai cultures that have already existed to the world, 7) it is important to learn knowledge through the diversities and differences, 8) and also learn the knowledge through experiences, 9) we should realize the awareness of cultural diversity and difference. 10) we should expand the perspective since the world is bigger than you think, 11) we should discuss and learn the shared understanding and involvement in cultural diversity and difference for every cabin crew, and 12) we should identify the appropriate actions to effectively work and deal with people from different cultural backgrounds. The study summarized, then proposed the findings of overall understanding about cultural intelligence of cabin crew to Thailand’s international airlines organization. The researchers proposed the outcomes to the research institutions, the academic institutions, and the airline organizations in Thailand and around the world.

Keywords: cultural intelligence, cabin crew, international airlines, Thailand, understanding

1. Introduction
The working capability of human resources has been no longer limited by geography. Globalization has made business in a challenging position. It is one of the main words of the 21st century (Abdurrahman, 2015). The world is dramatically innovating and changing. It is important for employees to connect interculturally for the job they work in a multicultural setting. It has opened the doors of opportunities for many international organizations such as hospitals, universities, import-export companies, and the airline business. The 21st century has seen vast change in the airline industry of many countries, imposing much dislocation on both people and companies engaged in the provision of airline business. In the airline industry, cabin crew members are the employees who have direct contact with passengers. They are in an occupational group that generally has to face many difficulties in the workplace. In addition to their responsibilities to ensure the safety of the flight, one particular issue that creates tremendous stress for airline cabin crew members is when they have to serve passengers from other different cultures (Jones, 2004). The nature of a cabin crew job is often having to deal with foreign passengers, cabin crew members are required to have broader cultural knowledge to help them interact effectively with passengers from different ethnic groups. The cabin crew is the job that always needs to be confronted with many difficulties in the workplace. Generally, miscommunication and inappropriate interactions that cabin crew unintentionally demonstrate can cause dissatisfaction to passengers who come from different cultures and backgrounds, which subsequently makes cabin crew members experience work anxiety (Suthatorn and Charoensukmongkol, 2018).
Seriwatana & Charoensukmonkol (2020) explored the contribution of cultural intelligence to team relationship conflict and team trust from the perspective of minority cabin crew. The findings not only provide additional insight regarding the contribution of cultural intelligence to employee wellbeing in the airline industry, but also suggest some moderating conditions that could make cultural intelligence particularly important for cabin crew. Finally, the study provided recommendation for airline organizations about interventions to prevent the psychological stress of their cabin crew. Guang & Charoensukmonkol (2022) also investigated effects of cultural intelligence on leadership performance among Chinese expatriates working in Thailand. The findings revealed that Thai subordinates evaluate Chinese expatriates as possessing high cultural intelligence and perceive them more favorably in terms of supervisor support. Additionally, supervisor support mediates the positive effect of cultural intelligence of Chinese expatriates for leadership effectiveness and subordinates’ commitment to the supervisor.

With the positive results revealed by the earlier motioned research studies, the present study aims to explore the background of each cabin crew from the international airlines concerning cultural intelligence. The cabin crew from the international airlines was selected due to the fact that a cabin crew job is the job that generally has to face many difficulties and tremendous stress in serving passengers from other different cultural backgrounds. Suthatorn & Charoensukmongkol (2018) mentioned about the nature of a cabin crew job is often having to deal with foreign passengers, cabin crew members are required to have broader cultural knowledge to help them interact effectively with passengers from different ethnic groups. Furthermore, their responsibilities are not only to ensure the flight safety, the important issues that cause the tremendous stress for the cabin crew is when they have to provide the services to the passengers who come from different cultures and backgrounds. Normally, inappropriate interactions and miscommunication which the cabin crew unintentionally show can cause the foreign passengers’ dissatisfaction. It unfortunately makes airline cabin crew experience work anxiety. Because of that, they are required to have a broader knowledge of culture to help them interact successfully with the passengers who come from different cultures and backgrounds. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the understanding of cabin crew from the international airlines concerning cultural intelligence. Moreover, the research study also emphasizes the emerging issues and problems related to the airline organizations.

1.1 Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a dynamic concept which helps people from different culture environments to be able to fit in other different cultures, and motivated by the practical reality of globalization in the workplace. It is the versatile competency for successful adaptation to new various cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar environments attributable to cultural context which is usually different with their cultural elements. It is the skill to adjust and work effectively in culturally diverse environments. People with cultural intelligence will learn more about a culture based on their experiences in interactions, and gradually reshape their thought process to be more sympathetic to each culture, then adjust their behaviors to be more appropriate when interacting with the people from other different cultures (Earley, 2002).

Earley (2002) identified four components in cultural intelligence: 1) cognitive CQ, it is an individual's general knowledge comprehension regarding cultural institutions, norms, practices, and convention in different cultural environments. The knowledge of various aspects in each culture helps them to understand the overall specific culture and the way it differs from one context to another context. 2) metacognitive CQ, it is an individual's previous knowledge used to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. It facilitates individuals to adapt their cognition by abandoning pre-existing conceptualization of how and why people function the way they do. 3) motivational CQ, it is the interest in individuals, movement and motivation to get involved in other new cultural environments. These individuals place values for new cultural experiences and enjoy interaction with people having various cultural backgrounds. They tend to accept new challenges in a non-local culture context and better tolerate frustrations during an interaction. 4) behavioral CQ, it is an impractical prospective earn deal with colleagues and managers’ abilities in the suitable performance in the settings of cross-cultural opportunities. People who have high behavioral CQ tend to adapt their verbal and nonverbal behaviors to suit the given context and they can determine where the particular behavior is needed and perform it effectively.

1.2 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the understanding of cabin crew from the international airlines concerning cultural intelligence which consists of prospective, use and importance of cultural intelligence

1.3 Research Questions

The question that guided this research was: 1) what are the perspectives about cultural intelligence of Thailand’s international airline cabin crew? 2) what is the use of cultural intelligence of Thailand’s international airline
cabin crew? and 3) what is the importance of cultural intelligence of Thailand’s international airline cabin crew?

1.4) Research Framework

2. Method

2.1 Design

The researcher adopted a qualitative approach in this research study. The qualitative research helps researchers gain the in-depth information and also obtain the insight of the perspective of the study. The researcher employed in-depth interview to gain data from the key informant. The questions in the in-depth interview were created to ask the key informants about the perspectives, experiences, and problems to find the understanding of the cabin crew from Thailand’s international airlines.

2.2 Key Informants

The researcher employed a purposive sampling method to select nine key informants that best represent the whole population. And these are the criteria to select 12 key informants: 1) they must work as cabin crew at the international airlines in Thailand, 2) informants must have experiences as cabin crew who work at the international airline in Thailand with the minimum of three years, 3) informants must have experiences as cabin crew who work in economy class, business class, or first class, 4) must have a permanent employment status with the key performance indicator (KPI) score over 80, and 5) they are willing to participate the research study.

2.3 Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Process

In this research study, the in-depth interview form, which was created after reviewing relevant research studies. The questions are open-ended questions, they were used to obtain in-depth information about the understanding about cultural intelligence of the key informant. The questions asked about the understanding about cultural intelligence of cabin crew from the international airlines which consists of the prospective, use, and importance. The in-depth interview form was finalized for the application after obtaining the comments and suggestions from the experts.

2.4 Data Analysis

The researcher employed content analysis of Luo (2019) to analyze the data by 1) selecting the content that the researcher will analyze based on the research question, choose the texts that you will analyze, 2) defining the units and categories of analysis, 3) developing a set of rules for coding, 4) coding the text according to the rules, and 4) analyzing the results and draw conclusions.

3. Findings

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<td>Cultural Drive is the determination to learn and attain knowledge and understanding about cultures.</td>
<td>1) Importance of knowing of cultural intelligence</td>
<td>&quot;...We as the cabin crew especially in the international airline cannot avoid facing the cultural diversities and differences every day, I think we are the group of people that need to understand everything about cultures...&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;...We work for an international airline, and we definitely have to work and deal with the people who come from different cultures. It is so important to understand how to work and deal&quot;</td>
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cabin crew to work effectively.

2) Not just passengers but everyone in the workplace

Detail: Cultural intelligence for cabin crew is not the skill to effectively work and deal only with passengers, but everyone in the company or even the organization. Most of the cabin crew are more on how to work smoothly with the passengers, and few of them are concerned with both passengers and colleagues. And there are a lot of advantages if they can understand all the people who come from different cultural backgrounds in the workplace. When the cabin crew realize how to work and deal with the colleagues in the first place, there will be no worries when they have to confront, work, and deal with the passengers for the next step.

Cultural Intelligence Knowledge is actively and continually accessing and acquiring information on and understanding about norms and implication of cultures

1) Everyone is different.

Detail: People should always remember that everyone is different. Even though people come from the exact same place, it does not mean that they have the same understanding about norms and implication of cultures. However, if people believe that everyone is different, they will learn how to be more aware of their verbal and non-verbal when dealing with people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

2) Experience matters

Detail: Everyone has different experiences in life. People come from many different backgrounds and they definitely have different understandings in ways of life, norms, and implication in cultures. People learn how to fall, get back, fix, improve, change, and familiarize with cultures.

Cultural Intelligence Strategy is a plan of action in response to particular cultural norms and implications for dealing effectively with other people from that cultural background.

1) Think, learn, plan and act

Detail: Since cabin crew have to work and deal with many people who come from different cultural backgrounds every time they perform their job duty, they cannot just go, work, and deal with every stranger. They should think about the problem, learn how to solve the problem, plan how to solve the problem and change the action by using things that they have learnt from thinking, learning and planning aforementioned in order to respond to each particular cultural norm and implication for dealing effectively with other people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

effectively with them…”

Cabin crew J, 24th Nov 2021

“...Let’s say that the cabin crew should have the background knowledge about everything in cultures which I sometimes call it the universe of culture. The more we understand them, the more we can live well with others in this world…”

Cabin crew K, 25th Nov 2021

“...Cultural intelligence is not just the skill for cabin crew to effectively deal with passengers, but with everyone in the company. Everyone in the company comes from different cultural backgrounds, we are all diverse and different, we need to understand each and every diversity and difference that we all have…”

Cabin crew B, 4th Nov 2021

“...For me, dealing with colleagues is the first thing I always consider when I have to start my work. It is because we should understand each other before work, deal and function with the customers. If we can understand how to work well among all of us, I think we can fix every problem we possibly confront…”

Cabin crew C, 8th Nov 2021

“...For me, everyone is different, everyone comes from different backgrounds, different cultures. Even though we come from the same hometown, it does not mean that we have the exact same thought, belief, worldview or way of life…”

Cabin crew D, 8th Nov 2021

“...Culture of each individual comes from experiences in life that we have experienced before, we learn how to fall, get back, fix, improve, change, and familiarize with every culture which sometimes can be similar and sometimes can be totally different…”

Cabin crew E, 9th Nov 2021

“...For me, cultural intelligence is how individuals deal with diversities and differences from knowledge and experiences. Everyone is diverse and different; people need to understand the diversity and difference that people all have…”

Cabin crew A, 2nd Nov 2021

“...Talking about cultural intelligence, I think it is the ability or skill to help people deal effectively with other people who come from different cultural backgrounds. As the cabin crew, culture is definitely the ability or skill that we all get to know, learn and strategize to deal with the passengers beautifully…”

Cabin crew H, 17th Nov 2021

“...I have worked in the office for the airline before
Cultural Intelligence

Action is the proper verbal and nonverbal communication and interaction with other people from a particular cultural background.

Cultural Intelligence

Dimension

Cognitive Cultural Intelligence is the general knowledge and comprehension regarding cultural institutions, norms and practices.

1) Knowledge through the diversities and differences

Detail: As the cabin crew who works for the international airlines in Thailand, they should think about Thai unique cultures and should employ the uniqueness with the plan and strategy when working and dealing with the people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

"...Talking about Thai society, Thai people consider a lot of seniority which can be complicated when you have to work and deal with people from many different cultures..."

Cabin crew F, 11th Nov 2021

2) Knowledge through experiences

Detail: Experiences can be the rich knowledge especially when it comes to knowledge and comprehension about cultures. Experiences can provide cabin crew with fruitful examples when it is time to deal and work with the people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

"...Culture of each individual comes from experiences in life that we have experienced before, we learn how to fall, get back, fix, improve, change, and familiarize with every culture which sometimes can be similar and sometimes can be totally different..."

Cabin crew E, 9th Nov 2021

Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence is the awareness and reflection of knowledge, understanding and thinking process about different cultures.

1) Awareness of cultural diversity and difference

Detail: Each of the cultures has its own way of living a life. When one individual goes and has to work, deal, or even live with those who are not from the exact same cultural background, the individual should be aware of knowledge, understanding, and action before work or deal with them.

"...For me, cultural intelligence is how individuals deal with diversities and differences from knowledge and experiences. Everyone is diverse and different; people need to understand the diversity and difference that people all have..."

Cabin crew A, 2nd Nov 2021

2) Expand the prospective since the world is bigger than you think

Detail: It is beneficial when cabin crew learn more about other cultures. However, this group of cabin crew works for the Thai international airlines, they have to learn and acquire the knowledge even more because there might be some totally unfamiliar cultures from another corner of the world.

"...I have worked in the office for the airline before turning to the cabin crew. And I can tell it is totally different. To be the cabin crew, you need to communicate and interact more with the people. And to work in the international airlines, we cannot deny working with people from different cultures and backgrounds..."

Cabin crew I, 22nd Nov 2021
Motivational Cultural Intelligence is the internal force that drives them to be interested in learning, knowing, understanding, and getting involved in different cultural environments.

1) The shared understanding and involvement in cultural diversity and difference for every cabin crew
Detail: Since the job as the cabin crew is the job that has to work and deal with cultural diversities and differences in every time they perform their duties, cabin crew need to have shared understanding to getting ready in every time they work. Plus, they should familiarize themselves with the cultural diversities and differences every time they get involved in the job.

Behavioral Cultural Intelligence is the appropriate and action indexing with the people from different cultural backgrounds.

1) Appropriate action to effectively work and deal with people from different cultural backgrounds.
Detail: After you get to understand, prepare your knowledge, plan your strategy, you need to apply everything for yourself and perform the appropriate both verbal and non-verbal action in order to effectively work and deal with other people from different cultural backgrounds.

"...Let’s say that the cabin crew should have the background knowledge about everything in cultures which I sometimes call the universe of culture. The more we understand them, the more we can live well with others in this world...”
Cabin crew K, 25th Nov 2021

"...We as the cabin crew especially in the international airline cannot avoid facing the cultural diversities and differences every day, I think we are the group of people that need to understand everything about cultures...”
Cabin crew G, 14th Nov 2021

"...We work for an international airline, and we definitely have to work and deal with the people who come from different cultures. It is so important to understand how to work and deal effectively with them...”
Cabin crew J, 24th Nov 2021

"...For me, dealing with colleagues is the first thing I always consider when I have to start my work. It is because we should understand each other before work, deal and function with the customers. If we can understand how to work well among all of us, I think we can fix every problem we possibly confront...”
Cabin crew C, 8th Nov 2021

"...Talking about cultural intelligence, I think it is the ability or skill to help people deal effectively with other people who come from different cultural backgrounds. As the cabin crew, culture is definitely the ability or skill that we all get to know, learn and strategize to deal with the passengers beautifully...”
Cabin crew H, 17th Nov 2021

4. Discussion
Overall, cultural intelligence was seen to be essential and helpful for cabin crew from Thailand’s international airlines. This discussion was enhanced by addressing three research questions as follows.

What are the perspectives about cultural intelligence of Thailand’s international airline cabin crew?
The first emphasis that has emerged before in literature and studies on cultural intelligence were expressed by the key informants in this study. For this reason, it was a significant result of this study that the job as a cabin crew is the job that needs to understand about the cultural diversities and cultural differences. It is a job that needs to face, deal and work with the people from the cultural backgrounds. Especially the cabin crew from the international airlines, they cannot avoid facing the people from around the world. These people can be passengers, colleagues, bosses, etc. in the workplace. It is coded as a positive view which is relevant to the expression of being key skills that help cabin crew work effectively, cultural intelligence can be skilled and flexible about understanding different cultures. It is a system of interacting knowledge and skills, linked by cultural metacognition, that allows people to adapt, to select, and shape the cultural aspects of their environment (Richardson, 2008). The key informants’ second emphasis on people should always remember that everyone is different. Even though people come from the same place, it does not mean that they have the same understanding about norms and implication of cultures. However, if people believe that everyone is different, they will learn how to be more aware of their verbal and non-verbal when dealing with people who come from different cultural backgrounds. Peterson (2004) defined cultural intelligence as the ability to engage in a set of behaviors that uses skills (i.e., language or interpersonal skills) and qualities (e.g., tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility) that are tuned
appropriately to the culture-based values and attitudes of the people with whom one interacts. Crowne (2008) also agrees that cultural intelligence is a multifaceted competency consisting of cultural knowledge, the practice of mindfulness, and the repertoire of behavioral skills. It is a capability to adapt effectively to various cultural settings which allows individuals to understand and adjust to diverse cultures. This means that cultural intelligence is the versatile competency for successful adaptation to new various cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar environments attributable to cultural context which is usually different with their cultural elements.

What is the use of cultural intelligence in Thailand’s international airline cabin crew?

In this particular study, the outcome was that the key informants’ views on the use of cultural intelligence of Thailand’s international airline cabin crew in their workplace were necessary and challenging. The key informants stated the positive views on the use of cultural intelligence. The most frequently stated positive aspect in the study was about the experiences in dealing and working with other people from different cultural backgrounds can be the rich knowledge especially when it comes to knowledge and comprehension about cultures. When Earley (2002) stated about cultural intelligence as a person’s capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to cultural context. Plus, Farrell (2020) also confirmed that cultural intelligence goes beyond our existing knowledge of cultural sensitivity and awareness by highlighting certain skill sets and capabilities needed to successfully realize your objectives in culturally diverse situations. In addition to this issue, the key informants agreed that each of the cultures has its own way of living a life. When one individual goes and has to work, deal, or even live with those who are not from the exact same cultural background, the individual should be aware of knowledge, understanding, and action before work or deal with them. This is relevant to Dyne, Ang and Tan (2019). They stated that cultural intelligence can influence the extent to which individuals proactively and effectively adapt to differences in new cultural environments.

What is the importance of cultural intelligence in Thailand’s international airline cabin crew?

The first highlights the importance of cultural intelligence of cabin crew from the international airlines. The key informants highlighted that cultural intelligence will be one of the key elements to help the employees and the organization step up their abilities to the next higher level. This is relevant to Ang et al. (2007)’s statement about cultural intelligence that is similar to social and emotional intelligence in that cultural intelligence is a form of interpersonal intelligence. Social intelligence is a broader form of interpersonal or real-world intelligence that refers to the ability to understand and manage others. Furthermore, they also suggested that the international organizations should provide the courses about cultural intelligence for the employees. In the future, it will be one of significant skills to drive the organization. Similarly, Javidan & Teagarden (2011) suggested that the cultural intelligence model concerns intercultural capabilities only, while the Global Mindset Inventory embraces personality traits, attitudes and worldviews, as well as capabilities, especially in the international organizations.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In 1960, the cultural intelligence studies’ roots can be found in the first organizational research around the concepts of intelligence and culture. Then scientists tried to mix these two concepts in order to create the new concept (Karma & Vedina, 2011). Cultural intelligence is the competency of an individual in the way of adaptability to the new cultural environment with the successor which is usually different with their cultural element. A concept that has gained considerable attention, cultural intelligence (Earley, 2002)

This study aimed to explore the perspective of each cabin crew from the international airlines concerning cultural intelligence. The study carried 12 key informants that were selected from the international airlines in Thailand. The key informants answered the questions aimed at their perspective towards cultural intelligence.

The study revealed the perspective of each cabin crew from the international airlines concerning cultural intelligence as follows:

1) Importance of knowing cultural intelligence. The cabin crew job is the job that needs to understand about the cultural diversities and cultural differences. It is a job that needs to face, deal and work with the people from the cultural backgrounds. Especially the cabin crew from the international airlines, they cannot avoid facing the people from around the world. These people can be passengers, colleagues, bosses, etc. in the workplace. Cultural intelligence can be one of the key skills that help the cabin crew to work effectively.

2) Not just passengers but everyone in the workplace. Cultural intelligence for cabin crew is not the skill to effectively work and deal only with passengers, but everyone in the company or even the organization. Most of the cabin crew are more on how to work smoothly with the passengers, and few of them are concerned with both passengers and colleagues. And there are a lot of advantages if they can understand all the people who come from different cultural backgrounds in the workplace. When the cabin crew realize how to work and deal with
the colleagues in the first place, there will be no worries when they have to confront, work, and deal with the passengers for the next step.

3) **Everyone is different.** People should always remember that everyone is different. Even though people come from the exact same place, it does not mean that they have the same understanding about norms and implication of cultures. However, if people believe that everyone is different, they will learn how to be more aware of their verbal and non-verbal when dealing with people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

4) **Experience matters.** Everyone has different experiences in life. People come from many different backgrounds and they definitely have different understandings in ways of life, norms, and implication in cultures. People learn how to fall, get back, fix, improve, change, and familiarize with cultures.

5) **Think, learn, plan and act.** Since cabin crew have to work and deal with many people who come from different cultural backgrounds every time they perform their job duty, they cannot just go, work, and deal with every stranger. They should think about the problem, learn how to solve the problem, plan how to solve the problem and change the action by using things that they have learnt from thinking, learning and planning aforementioned in order to respond to each particular cultural norm and implication for dealing effectively with other people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

6) **Thai culture.** As the cabin crew who works for the international airlines in Thailand, they should think about Thai unique cultures and should employ the uniqueness with the plan and strategy when working and deal with the people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

7) **Knowledge through the diversities and differences.** Cabin crew should have the basic belief that we are all different and diverse in cultural institutions, norms and practices. Cabin crew should learn the general knowledge and comprehension about other cultures before work and deal with them.

8) **Knowledge through experiences.** Experiences can be the rich knowledge especially when it comes to knowledge and comprehension about cultures. Experiences can provide cabin crew with fruitful examples when it is time to deal and work with the people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

9) **Awareness of cultural diversity and difference.** Each of the cultures has its own way of living a life. When one individual goes and has to work, deal, or even live with those who are not from the exact same cultural background, the individual should be aware of knowledge, understanding, and action before work or deal with them.

10) **Expand the perspective since the world is bigger than you think.** It is beneficial when cabin crew learn more about other cultures. However, this group of cabin crew works for the Thai international airlines, they have to learn and acquire the knowledge even more because there might be some totally unfamiliar cultures from another corner of the world.

11) **The shared understanding and involvement in cultural diversity and difference for every cabin crew.** Since the job as the cabin crew is the job that has to work and deal with cultural diversities and differences in every time they perform their duties, cabin crew need to have shared understanding to getting ready in every time they work. Plus, they should familiarize themselves with the cultural diversities and differences every time they get involved in the job.

12) **Appropriate actions to effectively work and deal with people from different cultural backgrounds.** After you get to understand, prepare your knowledge, plan your strategy, you need to apply everything for yourself and perform the appropriate both verbal and non-verbal action in order to effectively work and deal with other people from different cultural backgrounds.

The researchers proposed the outcomes to the research institutions, the academic institutions, and the airline organizations in Thailand and around the world who will be able to develop and apply the outcomes from this research study as another insights.

**References**


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