

A qualitative exploration of day spa therapists' work motivations and job satisfaction



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 January 2017

Received in revised form

16 May 2017

Accepted 18 October 2017

Available online 10 November 2017

Keywords:

Expectancy theory

Day spa therapists

Work motivations

Job satisfaction

Thailand

Qualitative research

ABSTRACT

The spa industry has been growing rapidly in Thailand since the 1990s (Hirankitti, Mechinda, & Manjing, 2009). Being that employee productivity is a primary factor driving the success of a business, it is important to understand how employees are motivated, engaged, and retained at the work place. Therefore, the goal of this research study is to explore attitudes and levels of job satisfaction among Thai spa therapists working at day spas. An in-depth interview process was used as the primary qualitative research method for this study. Fifteen interviews were given and from a thematic analysis of the data, five themes emerged. These themes included *strong open relationships in the workplace*, *tangible benefits*, *deeply rewarding career beyond financial benefits*, *involvement in day spa development process*, and *job perception conflict*. Spa therapists' internal fulfillment was generated through good relationships with spa operators, co-workers, and customers as well as through involvement in the decision making process. Expectancy theory provides a model that helps explain the results of this study. Through a continuous motivation-effort-reward cycle, employees develop feelings of being satisfied with their jobs. Therefore, it is important for spa employers to be aware of the needs of their employees and to create opportunities for employees to successfully meet those needs in order to increase job satisfaction and work performance.

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1. Introduction

Studies conducted by the International Spa Association show that the spa industry is growing rapidly (International Spa Association, 2014). The spa industry in Thailand has been on the rise since the 1990s as it was ranked second in the world behind Australia for spa destinations in 2009 (Hirankitti et al., 2009). The spa industry has played an important role in generating revenue for Thailand since the 1970s (Apivantanaporn & Walsh, 2012). Khamanarong, Khamanarong, and Khamanarong (2009) categorized the spa business as a service industry which aims to generate profit. Thus, it is necessary to explore elements of the spa industry to gain further insight into ways that promote successful operations. While customers provide the source of income, spa

therapists, with their unique set of skills, are vital to the value of any spa business. As such, it is important for spa businesses to remain competitive not only by gaining customers, but also by retaining and supporting employees.

To retain valuable employees, spa operators need to have a sense of what drives them beyond a mere paycheck and what factors contribute to their perceptions of satisfaction with their jobs. Bowen (1997) emphasizes the importance of internal marketing, a process by which a company seeks to enhance its internal operations, often in the form of motivating employees. He states that if customers are to become enthusiastic, employees themselves must be enthusiastic about the product as well as the company they represent (Bowen, 1997). A report on award winning businesses showed a consistent implementation of certain practices with regard to creating a supportive workplace culture (Blackburn & Rosen, 1993). These practices include empowering the employees through inclusion in the decision making process, advocating a climate of positive employee relations and teamwork, acknowledging employee contribution, and utilizing a system of rewards to

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reinforce a commitment to quality (Blackburn & Rosen, 1993). In this study, spa therapists from five different locations in North-eastern Thailand participated. Both male and female spa therapists of varying ages were interviewed in order to share their work experiences regarding what contributes to job satisfaction and what motivates them to continue at their present location.

Numerous studies have examined employee job satisfaction and motivation in the context of the service industry (Costen & Salazar, 2011; Joung, Goh, Huffman, Yuan, & Surlles, 2015; Pelit, Öztürk, & Arslantürk, 2011). However, there was a gap in the literature when considering job satisfaction and motivation from a more qualitative perspective of the lived experiences of spa therapists in Thailand. Addressing this gap derives importance from the sheer growth of the industry and the increasing demand to find and retain quality spa therapists. Additionally, the findings from previous research examining these variables in other areas of the service industry do not directly translate to the experiences of spa therapists.

There are fundamental differences between the services provided by spa therapists and those provided by other service industry employees. These differences stem from the highly personal nature of the spa service and a difference in the lead time from product creation to consumption (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008). For example, the experience of a pleasurable stay in a hotel is created by a team of employees though with minimal direct interaction with the customer relative to the overall stay. The same is true at a restaurant. Not only is there likely no interaction between the chef preparing the food and the customer enjoying it, there is a lead time differential as well. By the time the customer is enjoying their food, the chef is certainly busy preparing another order. The spa therapist, on the other hand, is fully engaged and invested in the well-being of the customer from the beginning to the end of the service period without separations in time or distance. The service provided is thus the direct and continued presence of the spa therapist and their skills. Recognizing the differences between the experiences of spa therapists and other service industry employees calls attention to the gap in the literature focusing on job satisfaction and motivation. This study aims to build on previous research by exploring spa therapists' perceptions of what contributes to job satisfaction and what motivates them to continue to provide high quality services.

2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research study is to explore employees' motivations and their levels of job satisfaction. Because a large portion of what a spa offers is the skill of its employees, it is important for spas to retain their employees by supporting them (Wetprasit, 2006). For this reason, there is a need to understand how the spa industry may better support employees through an evaluation of the experience of spa therapists working in day spas. Therefore, the objective of this study aims to elicit ways in which spa owners or managers could improve working environments for their employees by understanding work motivations and sources of job satisfaction among Thai spa therapists working at day spas in Thailand. Results from this study can be used to inform spa business owners and operators about the needs of their employees as well as ways to create a more cohesive and thriving workplace environment.

3. Literature review

3.1. Spa industries

Most of the spa research mentions that customers usually visit

the following seven types of spas: hotel or resort spas, day spas, club spas, medical spas, cruise spas, mineral spring spas, and destination spas (Boonyarit & Phetvaroon, 2011; Frost, 2004; Langvinienė & Sekliuckienė, 2009; Loureiro, Almeida, & Rita, 2013; Monteson & Singer, 2004). Each type of spa provides unique services and various results for customers who choose a category of spa to suit their needs. Previous studies have provided the definitions of different types of spas as follows (Healing Holidays, 2013; Joppe, 2010; Langvinienė & Sekliuckienė, 2009):

- (1) *Hotel or Resort Spas*: This type of spa provides a variety of services for customers such as facial massage and body treatment. Some places may include fitness facilities and healthy food for customers.
- (2) *Day Spas*: Day spas provide similar products and services compared with hotel spas such as facial treatment, body massages/scrubs, and skin care.
- (3) *Club Spas*: A primary purpose of a health club is to prepare professional fitness equipment, amenities, and spa products and services to serve members within one day.
- (4) *Medical Spas*: Medical spas aim to prepare wellness care and spa services for customers.
- (5) *Cruise Spas*: This type of spa prepares spa services and exercise facilities for traveling customers such as a variety of spa packages and fitness amenities. Choices of healthy food may also be offered on a cruise.
- (6) *Mineral Spring Spas*: This type of spa location offers customers natural mineral springs and using hydrotherapy treatments.
- (7) *Destination Spas*: A destination spa is a location helping customers to improve their lifestyle such as providing education about healthy food, fitness, and spa services.

Despite the spa industry's rapid growth, as well as the day spa making up the largest percentage of spa types compared to other spas (Eisner, 2013), there is limited research on day spas. Previous studies have focused on hotel or resort spas (Langvinienė & Sekliuckienė, 2009; Madanoglu & Brezina, 2008; Mandelbaum & Lerner, 2008; Monteson & Singer, 2004; Tsai, Suh, & Fong, 2012). This lack of day spa research invites further investigation, especially that which considers employees' job perceptions because employees in the service industry play such an important role in generating income by providing quality service to customers. Understanding employees' job perceptions would help day spa business operators find solutions to increase employees' job satisfaction, which may also reduce employee turnover rates for spa businesses.

3.2. Thai spa industry and culture

Coinciding with the rapid growth of tourism in Thailand is the meteoric rise of its spa industry. The ten-year period from 1995 to 2005 showed a trajectory that brought Thailand to its status of being the region's spa industry epicenter (Loh, 2008). Since then, the revenue of the Thai spa industry rapidly increased from \$675 million in 2013 (Andrews, 2015) to \$1.01 billion in 2015 (Spa Business, 2017). This phenomenon has continued to support the economic security of Thailand by providing numerous jobs and opportunities throughout the country. Around 43.87% of the total workforce are employed in the service industry in Thailand, which is an increase of about 6.32% since 2013 (The World Bank, 2017). The Thai spa industry employed 11,240 people in 2007 (Spa industry benchmarks go global, 2008) and 70,897 people in 2015 (Spa Business, 2017), a 530.76% increase between 2007 and 2015. Even though the travel and tourism industry is a large segment

creating jobs in Thailand, the employment rate of this industry increased only 0.11% between 2012 and 2013 (Tourism Authority of Thailand News, 2016). As the industry and its workforce continue to grow, it is important to understand how employees derive satisfaction from their jobs as well as what motivates them to provide a high quality service.

However, the underlying values influencing the motivations and job satisfaction of employees may often vary depending on culture (Komin, 1990). According to Hofstede and McCrae (2004), culture is a collection of attributes expressed through behavior that may distinguish one group of people from another. Culture may be defined as a shared set of beliefs, values, and customs that connect a group of people (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). Thus, a consideration of how variations among cultures might relate to employee attitudes is prudent.

An overview of the research on Thai culture revealed a common set of values (Burnard & Naiyapatana, 2004; Komin, 1990; Runglertkengkrai & Engkaninan, 1987; Vongvipanond, 1994). The most prevalent seem to be relational in nature. Thai people highly value smooth interpersonal relationships characterized by gratitude and an honest caring for one another (Runglertkengkrai & Engkaninan, 1987). With regard to the work environment, Thais tend to be more relationship-oriented than task-oriented (Komin, 1990; Runglertkengkrai & Engkaninan, 1987).

A number of differences present themselves when comparing Thailand with other cultures. One notable difference is a general lack of tipping within Thai culture. Tipping is not a part of Thai culture and is not obligatory in situations where it might be in western cultures (Thailand: Tipping & Etiquette, 2015, para 1). People in the Thai service industry get paid monetarily, but they also gain an intangible compensation for their efforts. Their genuine concern for others helps instill the high value placed on the quality of the service they provide. However, the inclusion of a small tip can convey the appreciation of excellent service (Thailand: Tipping & Etiquette, 2015, para 1).

Acknowledging that culture influences one's underlying set of values suggests the need to consider culture in understanding what goes into the experience of day spa employees. This experience consists of working with managers, other employees, and customers. In order for the industry to continue to grow and develop, spa managers should be mindful of the cultural influence on their employees level of satisfaction within their work environment.

3.3. Job satisfaction of employees in service industry

According to Nadiri and Tanova (2010), employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to produce quality work, in turn, making their customers satisfied. This process may also encourage customers to mention the service in a positive light to others. Employee job satisfaction can be the result of several variables such as "trust" in a company and its ability to offer a "rewarding" experience through challenging work. When employees assess their job experience, they often either feel satisfied or dissatisfied (Kim, Leong, & Lee, 2005). Low levels in job satisfaction can create a high turnover rate of employees (Nadiri & Tanova, 2010). Silva (2006) stated that "employee turnover has been a large problem in the hospitality industry necessitating an investigation into the reasons for this turnover. Some of the reasons cited for this turnover are low compensation, inadequate benefits, poor working conditions, poor worker morale, and inadequate recruitment (p. 317)." Lam, Zhang, and Baum (2001) stated that high employee turnover rates result in increased recruitment and training costs as well as decreased productivity.

Ghiselli, La Lopa, and Bai (2001) pointed out that one of the factors influencing whether employees are satisfied with their jobs

are job characteristics or working conditions. The researchers identified employees' job satisfaction as depending on "autonomy," "variety," "task identity," "feedback," "dealing with others," and "friendship opportunities." If employees are dissatisfied with their working conditions, they tend to resign from their jobs and switch to another workplace (Ghiselli et al., 2001). This creates high turnover for businesses. On the other hand, employees who are satisfied with their job are more likely to make a commitment to their jobs (Kim et al., 2005). These employees tend to have higher levels of motivation while remaining loyal to a company, which has the outcome of higher productivity and lower turnover rates. For example, providing a degree of autonomy to employees is one strategy to generate employees' job satisfaction. Gazzoli, Hancer, and Park (2010) studied how empowerment and employee job satisfaction impact service quality at restaurants. They found that the importance of work tasks and autonomy of performing duties led to higher levels of job satisfaction and higher service quality provided by the staff. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate what factors can enhance job satisfaction for spa therapists so as to retain high quality spa therapists for longer periods.

3.4. Expectancy theory

According to Chiang, Jang, Canter, and Prince (2008), "expectancy theory provides a general framework for assessing, interpreting, and evaluating employee behavior in learning, decision-making, attitude formation, and motivation (p. 331)." The concept of expectancy theory in the working context was first developed by Vroom (1964). Vroom (1964) explained that expectancy theory was built from four assumptions. First, several components influencing people's decisions to work for an organization include passion, desire, motivations, and their personal experiences. Second, people's behavior or their reaction to the organization is the result of comparing input and outcome. People are more likely to work for an organization if they believe they can earn benefits worth their effort. Third, people tend to work in an organization to reach different goals. For example, some employees would like to work hard so as to increase their income or acquire bonus options, while others place higher value on having more vacation time. Challenging tasks may also be a goal for some employees. Greenberg and Baron (2008) suggested some techniques to generate employees' work motivations including job enlargement, job enrichment, and job characteristics.

Job enlargement is a strategy in which a company gives employees more responsibility though not requiring greater skill level. Job enrichment is a technique whereby an organization gives employees more responsibility requiring greater skill level. The model of job characteristics helps a company to design a job that enhances the interests of employees based on what they do. This may include skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Additionally, some employees prefer to have freedom to perform their tasks and flexibility in their job. As people tend to select working goals based on desired outcomes, these opportunities to increase job satisfaction are crucial to explore.

Three types of motivational beliefs are the core elements that make up expectancy theory: expectancy, instrumentality, and valance (Greenberg & Baron, 2008). Expectancy is the belief that one's level of effort corresponds to the quality of their performance. If they work hard, they will perform well. Instrumentality is the belief that one will be rewarded for one's performance. Valance is one's perceived value of the rewards expected. This concept can be applied to spa therapists' work motivation. For example, spa therapists who work hard to improve their skills might expect to be able to provide higher quality service for customers (i.e., expectancy). Once the spa therapist provides high service quality, they might

expect to receive rewards such as an increase in pay and appreciation from customers (i.e., instrumentality). And finally, if the employee feels the rewards are worth their effort, they are further motivated to work hard (i.e., valance). The expectancy theory model thus plays an important role in understanding what motivates employees how they find satisfaction with their jobs (Lunenborg, 2011). Therefore, this concept was used to examine various aspects of work environments and situations that motivate Thai spa therapists to work at day spas.

4. Method

A qualitative research design was used in this study to explore Thai spa therapists' work motivations and job satisfaction. Hodges (2011) mentioned that a qualitative method allows researchers to gather all details of an incident which helps researchers develop a deeper understanding of the contexts. Additionally, the strength of qualitative research comes from participants providing their thoughts and opinions in the form of open discussion allowing researchers to discover more in-depth information about a topic (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). Therefore, an in-depth interview process was used as the qualitative research method for this study. Small local operations located in a province in Northeastern Thailand were selected because owners of these small local businesses are more likely to be the primary operators and thus build direct relationships with each therapist. Each day spa operator employed between five and seven spa therapists. The requirements and procedures for selecting the participants for this study are as follows:

1. The criteria for choosing participants were that: (1) they must be Thai, (2) they are at least 18 years old, and (3) they only work at day spas. This research excluded spa therapists working in other types of spas, such as hotel or resort spas because spa therapists who work at hotel or resort spas may have different thoughts and opinions which may lead them to have different work motivations and levels of job satisfaction at the workplace. Although the definition of day spa therapists includes those who provide beauty treatments, the locations within the area of this study mostly employed therapists whose roles are to only provide body massages. Thus, massage therapists were the primary focus of examination for this study.
2. Snowball sampling was used for participant recruitment. Participants were recruited based on references from previously interviewed participants. Proyrungroj (2013) explained that the snowball sampling method helps researchers find respondents based on connections between respondents who have already participated. The first participant recommends other people who meet the requirements for volunteering and who might be interested in participating. Not only does this method assist researchers in gaining access to the right participants based "social group" connections, but it also helps generate credibility for researchers by having others recommend the study (Burns & Grove, 2005; Proyrungroj, 2013).
3. The first participant called next potential interviewees and mentioned that the researchers were looking for participants for this study. Then the researchers contacted the potential interviewees based on the first participant's recommendation.
4. If the potential interviewees agreed to participate in this study, they were scheduled for an interview. The researchers scheduled one participant per day between 5pm. and 6pm. after his/her work.
5. The researchers met the interviewees for the interview at a certain location (outside their work place location). Each participant was asked to express his/her opinions for twenty-

five questions (see Appendix for the interview questions). The interview lasted about 1 h. At the end of the interview, the participant recommended people who might be interested to participate in this study.

6. The interview process continued until no new themes arose. Fifteen spa therapists were selected and interviewed for this research.

According to De Gagne and Walters (2010), a sample size of qualitative research is identified by researchers based on their assessment of the data collection. For this study, the researchers decided to stop collecting data when informational redundancy and data saturation was achieved. With this aim, fifteen therapists were interviewed including twelve females and three males (see Table 1). Each interview was audio recorded and lasted about 1 h. The ages of participants were 28–63 years old. Regarding experience, the participants had been working as spa therapists from 8 months to 20 years. In terms of education, the highest education level was high school. Spa therapists generated monthly income between 5000 baht and 20,000 baht (around \$170 - \$670). Even young people who have just received an undergrad degree tend to start making an income of about 15,000 baht (around \$500) based on starting monthly income in Thailand, (Fernquest, 2011).

All information from the interviews including observations were coded and analyzed by a linear hierarchical approach for the qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2014). Pseudonyms were assigned to participants. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the interview data (Spiggle, 1994). To use these approaches, there were six steps to analyze the data set:

1. All participants were interviewed in Thai. Upon completing the interview, the researchers organized the information collected into a transcript. The researcher who is Thai transcribed the data word-for-word from Thai to English. To ensure the interview information preserved meaning, the professional translator was used to translate from English to Thai again. The researchers were thus able to maintain accurate and reliable data.
2. After the transcript was ready, the researchers clarified the overall participants' ideas and comments.
3. Three researchers aided in generalizing the themes of the study. The authors examined each individual transcript and then identified commonalities and differences across the transcripts from participants' tone and wording from the interviews. This process was repeated until distinctive themes emerged.
4. The overall model and themes of the analysis process were formed. The researchers categorized the information into the relevant themes.
5. Once the researchers analyzed the qualitative data, a description of the analysis was formed into a narrative in order to describe the results of the study.
6. For the last step, the researchers analyzed how the findings were used for application and future research.

The linear and hierarchical approach provided some advantages for this research. First, it helped the researchers gather and understand participants' information clearly. Second, it helped the researchers categorize and manage the data efficiently allowing analysis of consistent information to be used for the implications of the findings. A wider age range and experience of spa therapists provided an accurate population sample of those working as spa therapists thus strengthening the reliability of the research.

5. Interpretation

Five themes emerged from the interview data pointing to

reasons behind why participants chose their jobs and were satisfied with them. All themes were related to Thai spa therapists' job motivations and job satisfaction at day spas.

5.1. Strong open relationships in the workplace

This theme represents the relationship between spa therapists (i.e., participants) and employers, colleagues, and customers. Participants were asked to talk about how they communicated with their employers. They were also asked to describe the working environment with their co-workers. Additionally, participants explained their relationship with their customers including their loyal customers. Most participants have good relationships with their owners, co-workers and customers. These were found to be some of the main reasons encouraging participants to work at their current day spa.

5.1.1. The relationship between spa therapists and employers

Taylor, 45 years old, felt that his owner was like his own sister. Taylor explained that his employer maintained open communication with all employees and created a family-like environment at work.

Taylor: I am very close to the owner, as if I were her brother. I do not feel that she is my employer. She treats us very well. The owner is open minded. We listen to each other.

Similarly, Bob, 43 years old, mentioned that he enjoyed working at his current day spa because the employer cared about employees, the quality of the work environment, and their personal lives.

However, Ami, aged 37, mentioned that she was thinking to move to another day spa because she did not have a good relationship with her employer who did not allow her to offer ideas that might improve the day spa.

It is not clear from previous studies that close relationships between employees and employers can affect employees' job satisfaction. The current study suggests that employees who have positive relationships with their employer tend to satisfy with their job and continue working at their current workplace.

5.1.2. The relationship between spa therapists and colleagues

Michele, aged 57, also discussed her relationship with her colleagues. Michele mentioned that she liked working at her current location because her colleagues are like her family members.

Michele: I feel like we are a family. We love each other. So, it makes me happy to work here. We understand each other. There is no problem to work with my colleagues. In the case where there is a problem, we are open to talk. We do not argue.

Diana, 46 years old, explained her relationship with her co-workers saying she likes doing activities with her colleagues. Diana pointed out that her colleagues are a very important part of what makes her happy working at the day spa.

Diana: My colleagues and I always have lunch together. After the shop closes, we like to hang out and do activities at the shop almost every day such as singing karaoke. We also share our massage techniques with each other. I am very happy and enjoy working here. There is no pressure working here. We can talk about everything regarding both work and personal life.

The findings reflect Woods' (2011) claim that having a good relationship with colleagues is an important element for young professional employees to be satisfied with their jobs.

5.1.3. The relationship between spa therapists and customers

Jessica, 38 years old, mentioned that she has return customers who only request to receive massages with her. These customers are satisfied with her massage techniques and sensitivity to their preferences.

Jessica: I have a good relationship with customers. I usually do not like to talk to customers unless they prefer to. I have 3–4 loyal customers who come every month. They prefer me because of my massage techniques and manners.

5.2. Tangible benefits

The theme of tangible benefits emerged when participants provided information about the reasons why they decided to

Table 1
Demographic information of interview participants.

Name	Age	Gender	Education	Job Positions/Titles	Monthly Income	Duration of Employment in Current Job (years)	Total Work Experience as Spa Therapist (years)
Pam	28	Female	High School	Spa Therapists	\$200	8 months	8 months
Allison	39	Female	Middle School	Spa Therapists	\$400	1	1
Cories	32	Female	High School	Spa Therapists	\$170	2	2
Susan	33	Female	Middle School	Spa Therapists	\$333	1	3
Taylor	45	Male	Middle School	Spa Therapists	\$267	4	4
Bob	43	Male	High School	Spa Therapists	\$400	2	4
Jessica	38	Female	Middle School	Spa Therapists	\$233	2.5	5
Diana	46	Female	High School	Spa Therapists	\$200	6	6
Ami	37	Female	Vocational Degree	Spa Therapists	\$400	4 months	6
Brook	47	Female	N/A	Senior Spa Therapists	\$670	3	10
Michele	57	Female	N/A	Senior Spa Therapists	\$500	12	12
Katy	55	Female	Lower School	Spa Therapists	\$233	11	13
Paul	61	Male	High School	Senior Spa Therapists	\$430	8	14
Nina	63	Female	Middle School	Spa Manager	\$670	14	14
Anne	43	Female	High School	Spa Therapists	\$300	1	20

Note: About 35 Baht ≈ \$1 (Bloomberg Business, November 21, 2015); Undergraduate degree tend to start making an income at 15,000 Baht ≈ \$429 (Fernquest, 2011).

become spa therapists and their perceptions of the benefits of being a spa therapist. The tangible benefits can be grouped into three categories including income, additional perks, and health benefits. All participants mentioned that they now have a better income since they have become spa therapists. Also, all spa therapists were happy with their jobs because they were able to organize and be flexible with their work schedules. The responses of participants regarding each category of tangible benefits are as follows.

5.2.1. Income

Pam, 28, was able to help support her family being a spa therapist.

Pam: I am very satisfied with being a spa therapist because it can generate a significant income for me compared to other jobs I could get with my level of education.

Another spa therapist named Brook, aged 47, mentioned that her only other option was working in construction with her educational level. The average monthly income of construction workers is 3500 baht (\$114) per month (World Salaries, 2005). However, she approximately generates about 20,000 baht (\$670) per month as a spa therapist.

5.2.2. Additional perks

Katy, 55 years old, appreciated how her employer treated all of the employees by providing food and beverages for their employees.

Katy: The reason that I like working here is because my employer and her husband are very good to me. My employer asks all spa therapists every day what we would like to have for lunch for the next day, and she then provides food and drinks for us.

Nina, 63 years old, described the benefits that her employer provided for the employees. She said that her employer offered to give her and another employee a raise, which they turned down explaining that they were already very satisfied with all the benefits they already receive. Her employer provides free room and board including three meals and medical benefits.

5.2.3. Health benefits

Some spa therapists described how their jobs helped them take care of health problems. Nina used to be a fruit vendor. She said that she became a spa therapist because she had a back problem from sitting too long every day when she sold fruit.

Nina: I used to be a fruit seller for 30 years. I quit because I was sick from sitting too long each day. I had a sore body. Someone suggested that if I became a spa therapist, it might help me feel better. This job saved my life.

Similarly, Anne was a hair dresser before she became a spa therapist. She felt better after receiving a massage from her current employer. After that, she decided to become a spa therapist.

Anne: I was allergic to the chemicals in the hair products which eventually caused me great discomfort. I started receiving massages and began to feel better and better. This was the point that I decided to quit my job at the salon and became a spa therapist.

The findings of this section demonstrate that spa therapists

appreciated the benefits they received such as better income, health payment support, additional days off, free meals while on duty, and an overall better quality of life which led to increased job satisfaction. These tangible external rewards motivated participants to work hard to achieve their goals, which in turn contributed to their level of satisfaction with their job. Based on the theory of expectancy (Chiang et al., 2008; Greenberg & Baron, 2008; Vroom, 1964), employees tend to perform better if they are rewarded and if they perceive the value of those rewards as worth their effort.

5.3. Deeply rewarding career beyond financial benefits

Jessica talked about how much she was proud of her job. She stated “this job allows me to help people feel better after they receive a massage. It makes me feel great when customers get relief from pain.” Additionally, participants were asked if they expect tips from customers. Most participants did not expect tips from customers.

Paul, 61 years old, mentioned how much he feels great when customers show appreciation to him after they are relieved from physical pain. He stated, “This job helps people release their pain and relax from stress. It makes me feel happy when I see people who are released from their pain. Those customers usually come back and say thank you to me. They show respect when we see each other outside the shop.”

In addition to the joy from making others feel good, participants mentioned “freedom” as one of benefits of their job. Allison, 39 years old, talked about how she likes to spend much of her time with her family. Her employer lets her design her own schedule.

Allison: This job gives me more freedom compared to other jobs. I can organize my own schedule. Now, I pay more attention to taking care of my family. I will not come to work if I need to do anything with my family. The owner is nice. She understands and does not complain about that.

Similarly, this finding is related to Brook's reason why she likes her job. She did not want to work too much because she was more concerned about her health. She likes this job which allows her to design her own schedule.

The results show that spa therapists appreciated their job due to the flexibility of their schedules and the freedom it provided. This finding supports Greenberg and Baron (2008) who stated that a flexible program at work allows employees to choose/create the work schedule which fits them most. The authors explained that people prefer different working hours based on personal characteristics, and the flexible hour program tends to increase employees' performance and job satisfaction, which has the effect of decreasing the employee turnover rate.

5.4. Involvement in day spa development process

The theme of involvement refers to how much participants are able to contribute to the decision-making process at the day spa. Participants were quite involved in the decision-making process. For example, Paul explained how he helped his employer create a good environment for customers.

Paul: The owner always listens to me and agrees with my opinions. For example, I suggested types of clothes for customers and decorations for the shop to the owner. I help the owner a lot with how to decorate the inside and outside of the shop to help attract customers.

Some spa therapists do not really get involved in the decision-making process at their location. Ami expressed her feelings about the owner that made her not want to be a part of the decisions at the shop.

Ami: I never get involved in the owner's decisions. I have some ideas, but I haven't really shared my ideas with the owner yet. I am not really satisfied with how the employer treats me. The owner does not show a spirit of collaboration or create good relationships with the employees. I am not very happy with that. She never invites me for lunch when she is having it.

Bob had a different opinion regarding sharing his ideas with his employer. He stated that "most of the time, my colleagues like to share their ideas with the owner, and I often agree with their opinions, though I don't speak up very often."

The findings of this study support Carless' (2004) research which found that the level of service employees' empowerment can predict their degree of job satisfaction in organizations. Carless' study defined the meaning of empowerment as "employee perceptions of their individual power to cope with the events, situations, and people they encounter at work" (p. 406). A number of participants in this study suggested they took part in the decision-making process by sharing their ideas to improve day spa environments and facilities. This autonomy is likely to increase the level of Thai spa therapists' job satisfaction.

5.5. Job perception conflict

This theme of job perception conflict refers to how participants perceived their job as a spa therapist, and how they thought about others' perceptions regarding their jobs. Participants were generally satisfied with their jobs and had positive perceptions about their jobs. However, they often mentioned the negative image of spa therapists generated from society. This shows the conflict between their own perceptions of their jobs and the perceptions they think that others have of their jobs. Some participants believed that other people's perceptions about spa therapists have changed from negative to positive. For example, Nina shared her perceptions of the job.

Nina: I am very proud of this job. I am happy when I am able to help people relieve their pain. I actually helped one person to be able to walk again. I will continue doing this job forever. People now respect this job and me as a spa therapist. In the past, people used to look down on this job. However, people have been changing their attitudes and respect this job now.

Anne shared her opinions of her job saying she was concerned with how other people might think of her job. She said that "people generally look down on this job like working as a prostitute. This is because some spa therapists do that as well. It makes people generalize that every spa therapist must be the same." On the other hand, Susan, a 33-year-old spa therapist, mentioned that other people might not look down at her job because there are always return customers coming to the spa shop.

Susan: I think that people do not look down at my job because they still come back and receive services from us. There are a lot of return customers here. I am proud of this job and proud of what I have learned. This job supports my family.

Cories, 32, described how she handles people who look down at her. She stated that "people look down on this job because they

think that spa therapists are prostitutes at the same time. I do not mind when people think that because I know that I am not. Male customers have sometimes said such a thing to me, but I explain to them that I am not."

Similarly, Paul tends to have a positive attitude about being a spa therapist, and he is proud of his job because it allows him to help people release their pain.

Paul: Some people might look down on this job. However, I do not care what people are thinking. This job requires a spa therapist to study all the time. There are always new things to learn which is what I really like about this job. I have a chance to develop myself all the time. Some people give high value to this job like we are a type of doctor. We help people to release their pain.

6. Discussion

The results of this study provide meaningful understanding regarding the work motivations and job satisfaction of spa therapists in Thailand. The researchers found themes related to a family-like environment, a deeply rewarding career beyond financial benefit, and involvement in the development process at day spas. These characteristics influenced spa therapists' job satisfaction by providing internal fulfillment. Spa therapists' internal fulfillment was generated through good relationships with spa operators, co-workers, and customers. This is also through involvement in the decision making process such as designing spa packages.

Similar to the findings of Nadiri and Tanova (2010), results of the interviews indicated that the relationships and communication between spa therapists and operators are an integral part of increasing employee job satisfaction. In addition, the results of the relationships between employees and customers influenced employees' perceptions of their jobs, and thus can be added to the theory of job satisfaction. Thai spa therapists were more likely to be happy with their jobs when they were able to create positive relationships with customers.

More than just receiving extra money, spa therapists appreciated tips from customers because it meant that customers were actually satisfied with their service. Income was not the only reward influencing job satisfaction for spa therapists. They were more proud of their job as a way to help customers to get relief from pain. Even though some spa therapists assumed that others may not appreciate their jobs, they did not mind and still enjoyed working as spa therapists because they thought this job helped solve people's physical problems. Spa therapists also saw a positive direction in the perceptions of their job among others and as well as themselves.

Furthermore, taking part in making decisions allowed spa therapists to show their creative ability and help improve the working environment. This motivated them to become involved in their working environment which has the effect of increasing job satisfaction. This finding supports the study of Lashley (1995) as empowerment brings several benefits to a business such as instilling motivation, increasing quality and productivity, promoting job satisfaction, improving labor stability, and generating profitability. This is related to the motivational capacity of job enlargement as a company gives employees more responsibility (Vroom, 1964).

Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) can help explain the results of this study (see Fig. 1). The theory suggests that employee motivations develop from the belief that their efforts will result in a set of desired rewards. Thai spa therapists believed that working hard would lead to an increase in the quality of the services they provide

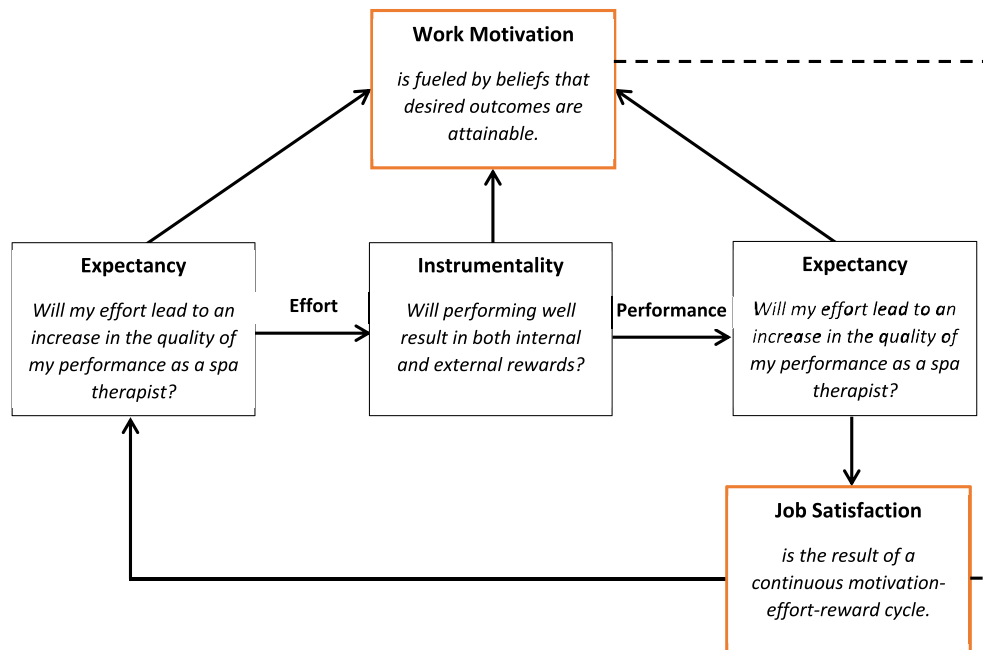


Fig. 1. Spa therapists' job satisfaction and expectancy theory.

to customers as well as the maintenance of positive work environments (i.e., expectancy). For example, they were committed to learning and sharing new spa techniques with their colleagues as well as increasing their involvement in the decision making process at the location. Believing their efforts would result in an increase of the quality of their performance, Thai spa therapists then anticipated rewards based on their hard work (i.e., instrumentality). Beyond standard monetary expectations, some of these rewards consisted of having return customers and creating friendships with co-workers and spa owners. Thai spa therapists highly valued close relationships with their customers, colleagues, and spa owners. By believing their efforts would result in these desired outcomes (i.e., valence), the Thai spa therapists were further motivated to work hard. Increased job satisfaction was the general outcome of actually receiving the desired rewards thus continuing the motivation/reward cycle.

In addition, the themes that emerged from participants' perceptions of job satisfaction and motivation are consistent with expectations based on Hofstede's cultural value dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; Karin Andreassi, Lawter, Brockerhoff, & Rutigliano, 2014). Collectivist cultures such as Thailand tend to value teamwork and working well with others, a practice thus related to job satisfaction as this is reflected in the prevalence of responses giving rise to the theme of *Strong open relationships in the workplace*. Karin Andreassi et al. (2014) found that "accomplishment, personal recognition, and equal opportunity were the strongest predictors of job satisfaction" in Asia (p. 66–67). In the present study, many participants' responses consisted of statements suggesting their job satisfaction and motivation were derived from feelings of achievement ("It makes me feel great when customers get relief from pain") and personal recognition ("Those customers usually come back and say thank you to me. They show respect when we see each other outside the shop"). Therefore, these statements contributed to the theme of *Deeply rewarding career beyond financial benefits*. A point of interest here is that, unlike most service employees who seek personal recognition from their employers/managers, spa therapists seem more likely to also receive it from the customer. Finally, the theme of *Involvement in day spa*

development process encapsulates Karin Andreassi, Lawter, Brockerhoff, and Rutigliano's value dimension of equal opportunity which is akin to the motivational capacity of job enlargement explained in the section on Expectancy Theory.

7. Conclusion

The results of this study shed light on key factors motivating Thai spa therapists which lead to their overall job satisfaction. These factors include strong open relationships in the workplace, tangible benefits, deeply rewarding career beyond financial benefits, involvement in day spa development process, and job perception conflict. Expectancy theory helps researchers explain that spa therapists will have increased motivation if they believe their hard work will result in desired outcomes. If the desired outcomes are met, the motivation cycle perpetuates and job satisfaction increases. Customers are more likely to respond positively to spa therapists who are happy with their jobs and who show genuine care for them. This type of interaction produces satisfied customers who may return regularly thus allowing spa therapists to generate more income while increasing their intangible rewards as well.

Culture also plays a significant part in understanding the needs and motivations of spa employees. Whether an operation in question is a multicultural setting or not, a spa owner/operator should always be cognizant of what drives his or her employees. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that spa employers in Thailand, or those in other countries employing Thai spa therapists, should be aware of the need to maintain positive working relationships with their spa therapists and provide opportunities for them to be involved in the spa development process in order to increase job satisfaction and work performance.

This study is not without limitations. The research only examines Thai spa therapists which represents only one perspective. Therefore, future research comparing American and Thai spa therapists' perceptions of job motivations and satisfaction would most likely prove to be informative. Strategies to improve job perceptions of spa therapists may also be examined for future

research. Finally, it is always necessary to investigate customers' perceptions towards day spa products and services to help owners improve their businesses.

Appendix

Interview Questions:

1. What are the reasons you decided to become a therapist and what are the reasons that made you choose to work at this particular day spa?
2. How much involvement do you have in making decisions or creating new ideas for the employers? Can you provide examples?
3. Can you design or change your schedule? In your opinion, do you have enough days off? Why? How long do you work a day (or a week) (or can you explain your daily or weekly schedule?) and how long can you have a break per day?
4. Do the design, environment, and colleagues inspire you to remain at the day spa where you work? Why? If you could change it, what would you like to change?
5. What are your benefits? Are you satisfied with your compensation?
6. How is your relationship with the employers?
7. Do you feel the communication between the employer and employees is open and clear? Can you explain?
8. How is your relationship with your co-workers? What are the good things or challenges to work with your co-workers?
9. How is your relationship with your customers? Do you have the same (loyal) customers requesting to have you especially? How long have they been asking for you?
10. In case, you are moving to work at new place, do think your loyal customers would go with you to a new shop?
11. Have you ever had a negative experience with a customer? Can you explain it (negative experience) and how did you handle the situation?
12. Do you expect a tip from customers? (How much do you get for the spa fee and how much % of it you expect to get as a tip?) Is it a problem for you if they do not give one?
13. What treatments do you specialize in? How long were you trained?
14. What are your other roles/responsibilities in the day spa besides a therapist?
15. How do you value your job as a massage therapist compared to other occupations? Why?
16. How do you think that other people perceive value of your job?
17. What is the most satisfying thing about working as a spa therapist? What is your definition of job satisfaction?

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