





“How to make employees happy: Evidence from Thai university lecturers”

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HOW TO MAKE EMPLOYEES HAPPY: EVIDENCE FROM THAI UNIVERSITY LECTURERS

Abstract

Ensuring workers' job satisfaction could help an organization maintain professional staff and achieve high productivity. Based on this evidence, many firms have tried to evaluate some specific factors which can influence job satisfaction among their employees so that they can appropriately issue new working policies to promote a better working environment. In this regard, the main objective of this paper was to investigate how salary, workload, work-family conflict, job stress, and burnout influence job satisfaction among university lecturers in Thailand. To achieve this aim, the study elaborated on a Google survey form to collect data from 450 lecturers from different universities around Thailand; the study reached a valid response rate of 86%. The results revealed that job stress, salary, workload, and work-family conflict significantly affect job satisfaction, while burnout has an insignificant impact. In comparison, job stress ($\beta = -0.47$) is the most decisive factor in job satisfaction. Salary ($\beta = 0.31$) is the second-largest factor influencing job satisfaction; workload ($\beta = 0.30$) is the third factor influencing job satisfaction. Last, work-family conflict ($\beta = -0.23$) has the most negligible impact on job satisfaction. Therefore, job satisfaction attitudes among university lecturers rely mainly on their stress level; thus, this study highly recommends that all related universities develop a new working policy to minimize job stress among lecturers.

Keywords

salary, stress, satisfaction, universities, workload, work environment

JEL Classification

M10, M12

INTRODUCTION

When a person possesses high job satisfaction, he or she is likely to demonstrate a positive working attitude toward his or her firm (Janib et al., 2021). Notably, any organization that can provide job satisfaction highly promotes working motivation and increases productivity (Tentama et al., 2019; Živěicová et al., 2022). Moreover, being able to maintain workers' satisfaction can help organizations to save more money from investing in job advertisements and other training courses (Lee et al., 2020) because satisfied workers are most likely to dedicate their loyalty and continue working with the same firms (Gurková et al., 2013). Thus, making workers happy with their jobs is essential for every organization.

There are numerous job opportunities in higher education in Thailand since job vacancies are announced by 310 academic institutions, including colleges and universities (Muangmee et al., 2021). Yet, job satisfaction among university lecturers has not been extensively researched. Kim et al. (2005) mention that a lack of job satisfaction among workers can negatively influence their decision to continue working with their organizations in the future. In fact, unhappy workers will likely leave their current firms (Lee et al., 2020). Consequently, this situation can

make organizations face a severe loss in work productivity, and they have to spend more budget looking for new professionals. According to this evidence, if all related institutions, especially universities, can maintain high job satisfaction, it can be a significant advantage to keep more professional staff and reach higher productivity. Therefore, examining factors influencing job satisfaction among university lecturers is essential for all universities.

Previous studies individually have emphasized the significant impact of salary (Elsahoryi et al., 2022), workload (Janib et al., 2021), work-family conflict (Dodanwala & Shrestha, 2021), job stress (Ramlawati et al., 2021), and burnout (Cheng & O-Yang, 2018) on job satisfaction. Despite these claims, the impacts of the suggested factors on job satisfaction among university lecturers remained unclear because different groups of people from different workplace contexts are likely to express different perspectives (Abun et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a need for more explanations in the existing literature on how these factors influence job satisfaction among university lecturers. To fill in the current research gap, the main goal of this study is to integrate these factors and investigate how they affect job satisfaction among university lecturers.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Job satisfaction is defined as a person's positive feeling toward a person's current work that is resulted from her or his assessment (Pratama et al., 2021). Obviously, satisfaction over a certain job or work position can take place only if a result of an individual's working outcome surpasses her or his expectations (Mahmood et al., 2021). According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985), a person's actual behavior is influenced by his or her behavioral intention, while the interaction of behavioral attitudes causes particular behavioral intention, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms. Based on this theory, job satisfaction is viewed as employees' emotions and attitudes to work, creating a close relationship between employees and their organizations (Kim et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2022). Therefore, high job satisfaction among workers can result in positive working attitudes and productivity. Meanwhile, it has been confirmed that job satisfaction greatly influences workers' attitudes, which leads to a decision to continue or quit working for a current organization (Annisa & Supriyanto, 2021). Thus, many organizations always check their employees' job satisfaction (Park & Kim, 2021).

Based on a satisfaction evaluation, several indicators (e.g., recognitions, payment, relationships between supervisors and workers, etc.) are suggested to evaluate to check the current job satisfaction status (Ramlawati et al., 2021). When one of these

indicators changes, it may also influence the degree of job satisfaction; however, its full judgment involves different indicators. Therefore, job satisfaction is complex and requires further research to investigate the issue of satisfaction in the current workplace.

According to the current theoretical standpoint, job satisfaction is a crucial variable that all organizations have to pay more attention to and conduct possible research to create a better working environment. Different researchers from various contextual studies suggest some key factors to help firms enhance employees' job satisfaction. For instance, from the epidemiology-nutrition context, Elsahoryi et al. (2022) suggest providing reasonable payments to workers. Once they receive enough salary to support their living standards, they have positive emotions toward their jobs.

On the other hand, from the education service context, Janib et al. (2021) suggest managing workloads well. Employees feel satisfied with their jobs when they can complete their tasks within the standard. Thus, they are happy to work and complete their tasks based on schedules. From the construction service context, Dodanwala and Shrestha (2021) suggest reducing work-family conflict. When the working time does not interfere with individuals' family meetings, they can feel more relieved and return to work the next day cheerfully.

Ramlawati et al. (2021) suggest minimizing workers' stress levels researching the banking service

context. When the workers have low job stress, they are likely to show a good working mood, which makes them have more favorable desires to do work. Further, Cheng and O-Yang (2018) suggest lowering workers' burnout considering the hospitality service context. Reducing burnout among workers can make them feel less emotionally exhausted from their work. Thus, personnel can feel relaxed and fully energetic to work the following days.

Although salary, workload, work-family conflict, burnout, and job stress are already related to job satisfaction in different industries, a few studies have tested these factors on job satisfaction among university lecturers. To fill this research gap, this study integrates these factors into a single theoretical model and examines their impacts on job satisfaction in higher education.

Salary is an actual payment paid monthly to a worker (Xiao, 2002). Sweet et al. (2011) mention that salary represents payments to all professionals working for specific organizations. Changes in salary amount significantly impact individuals' working behavior (S. Lee & D. Lee, 2017). According to Mahmood et al. (2019), in the banking sphere, a person with a high salary shows positive energy to work for his or her organization. Based on nurses' perspectives, raising payment to workers can result in high motivation that makes them stay positive in their workplaces (Akinwale & George, 2020). Based on the above theoretical explanations, salary and job satisfaction are positively related. Elshoryi et al. (2022) have outlined salary as a significant determinant of job satisfaction in epidemiology-nutrition.

According to the definition of workload, Janib et al. (2021) conceptualize it as some workers' tasks and other job responsibilities that organizations assign. In the academic context, the workload can be related to duties such as teaching tasks, doing research, facilitating curricula activities, and attending meetings (Hosain, 2016). In general, an acceptable workload can reduce workers' laziness and make them work actively; however, once the workloads become high, the workers may face more pressure which causes psychological issues (Inegbedion et al., 2020). From pharmacists' perspectives, increas-

ing the number of tasks also requires more physical and psychological effort to complete the job; therefore, this situation possibly creates an unfavorable desire for the workers who feel uncomfortable with their jobs (Lea et al., 2012). Moreover, Basson and Rothmann (2018) also explain that overloads can raise emotional pressure; thus, they may negatively influence workers' satisfaction. Therefore, based on the above theoretical arguments, workload and satisfaction show a negative connection. Holland et al. (2019) also agree that high workloads reduce worker job satisfaction in healthcare.

In a conceptualized definition of work-family conflict, Hong et al. (2021) define work-family conflict as a conflicting role between work and family time that causes a person to be unable to manage a suitable time for his or her family meeting. According to the boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) and conservation of research theory (Hobfoll, 1989), a person has to reallocate his or her resources to finish the tasks if the work significantly requires more time and effort to complete. In other words, once the work requires extra time and effort, it demands more sacrifice from the person rather than allowing him or her to meet the family. Researching innovative workers' behavior, when individuals' works interfere with their personal family time, they seem to receive more pressure and discomfort feelings from their work (Choi et al., 2018). Considering the workplace flexibility perspective, workers do not enjoy working in a job that requires extra time beyond the firms' standard hours. At the same time, they are supposed to leave for their families (Rhee et al., 2020). These theoretical arguments likely outline a negative connection between work-family conflict and job satisfaction. Hong et al. (2021) demonstrate that work-family conflict is a negative factor of job satisfaction in education.

Job stress is a negative psychological state resulting from too much pressure from a person's job responsibilities (Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhipongs, 2016). Mansour and Tremblay (2016) mention that an individual's stress can happen based on two methods (transactional and interactional). In the transactional method, a negative relationship between a worker and the work environment can

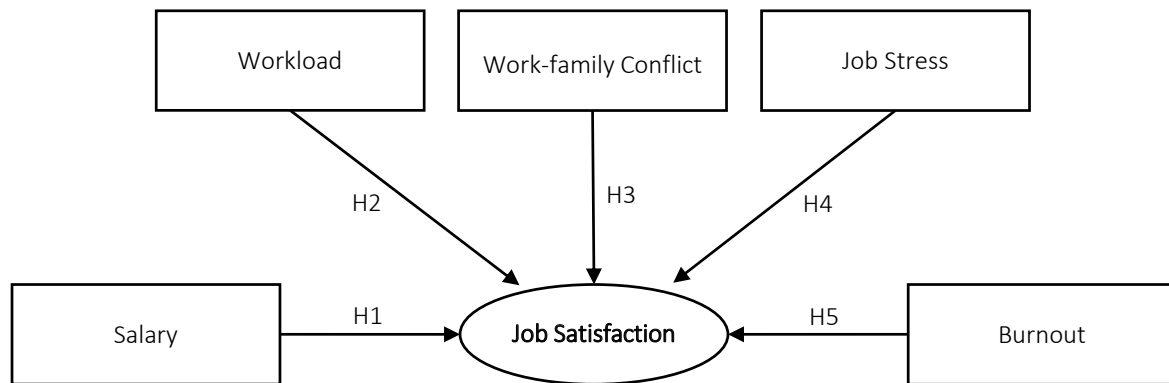


Figure 1. Research framework

stress workers. In the interactional method, stress can emerge when a person's working characteristic does not match his or her working environment. Based on the conservative theory of Hobfoll (1989), a person feels stressed because of three main reasons:

- a net loss of resources;
- an insufficient gain from a firm's investment; and
- a threat of resource losses.

In the telecommunication context, a person seems to show negative feelings toward his or her work after reaching high stress (Hayajneh et al., 2021). Considering work-life balance during Covid-19, stress develops psychological illness in a person who may easily have a negative mood at work (Dodi et al., 2021). The above theoretical arguments reveal a negative connection between job stress and job satisfaction. In the work-from-home context, Dodi et al. (2021) have found that increasing job stress leads to low job satisfaction.

Burnout is conceptualized as a worker's syndrome of emotional exhaustion that results from working for an extended period (Torlak et al., 2021). There are three primary forms of burnout: depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion (Lizano & Barak, 2015). Lizano and Barak (2015) also mention that a person who possesses burnout has a depletion of his or her emotional resources and personal energy. In hospital-

ity working behavior, once a job causes a person to feel exhausted, he or she seems to have a bad feeling about the current job (Cheng & O-Yang, 2018). Based on working behavior in banking, workers show negative emotions toward their current workplaces after struggling to complete their tasks (Munandar et al., 2020). According to the above theoretical arguments, there is a negative link between burnout and job satisfaction. In the education context, Madigan and Kim (2021) reveal that many teachers feel unhappy with their work after they experience high burnout.

This study aims to fill the research gap by developing a new research model to evaluate the antecedents influencing job satisfaction in the university context. Therefore, the objective is to evaluate the impact of salary, workload, work-family conflict, job stress, and burnout on job satisfaction in the university context. Thus, all hypotheses are developed as follows (Figure 1):

H1: High salary increases job satisfaction among university lecturers.

H2: High workloads reduce job satisfaction among university lecturers.

H3: High work-family conflict reduces job satisfaction among university lecturers.

H4: High job stress reduces job satisfaction among university lecturers.

H5: High burnout reduces job satisfaction among university lecturers.

2. METHODS

The research population includes lecturers working at universities in Thailand. Four hundred fifty participants were asked to fill in the survey. To be convenient for participants, the study offered a Google survey form to collect data from participants in different areas of Thailand.

The survey process identified the participants' profiles on the universities' websites. Next, once their profiles were related to the lecturer position, they received direct emails to ask for their consent and promise not to reveal their information to the public. Then, a Google survey link was sent to their emails. As a result, the study collected a 100% response rate. However, it was decided to use only 387 valid responses for data analysis after clearing outliers.

The survey instrument of this study comprises six main variables. Each variable's items were originally adopted from previous studies. For example, three salary items were adopted from S. Lee and D. Lee (2017). Second, three items of workload were adopted from Sadiq (2020). Third, three items of work-family conflict were adopted from Vickovic and Morrow (2020). Fourth, three job stress items were adopted from Chen et al. (2011). Fifth, three burnout items were

adopted from Cheng and O-Yang (2018). Finally, three job satisfaction items were adopted from Matzler and Renzl (2006).

A five-point Likert scale was used. Kim et al. (2023) explained that this rating technique is convenient because it offers a mid-scale (3 = neutral), which divides a clear cut between positive and negative scales. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2021) also found that the participants feel comfortable because the current rating method consumes less time and effort to complete the survey (Kim et al., 2022).

3. RESULTS

This study applied a multiple-linear regression method to analyze 387 valid data. This study held three leading diagnostics before starting the linear regressions. First, the contents of each variable were checked using Cronbach's Alpha scores (above 0.7) to find content reliability (Kim & Jindabot, 2022; Sang, 2022). As shown in Table 1, each variable obtained Cronbach's Alpha scores above 0.7, indicating content reliability. Next, all variables were checked to find multicollinearity using collinearity scores (tolerance and variance inflated factor (VIF)) of independent variables, whose scores had to pass a minimum requirement (tolerance scores > 0.10 and VIF < 10) to ensure

Table 1. Reliability and collinearity diagnostic

Variable	Items		Cronbach's alpha	Collinearity statistics	
				Tolerance	VIF
Salary	1	Being happy with my salary offered by the workplace	0.77	0.350	2.855
	2	Receiving good employee benefits to staff			
	3	Receiving bonus if working overtime			
Workload	1	Requiring more time to finish the work	0.81	0.318	3.149
	2	Requiring more effort to finish the work			
	3	Receiving more tasks to do at my workplace			
Work-family conflict	1	Staying away from family because of my work	0.79	0.436	2.293
	2	Being unable to do any housework because of work			
	3	Being unable to join family celebrations because of work			
Job stress	1	Feeling less motivated to do the work	0.83	0.409	2.445
	2	Feeling more pressure from the work			
	3	Always having a bad mood because of the work			
Burnout	1	Being emotionally drained from the current work	0.76	0.389	4.608
	2	Being frustrated with the current work			
	3	Feeling hard to solve problems in this work			
Job satisfaction	1	Being happy to work for this university	0.92	-	-
	2	Like working environment of this university			
	3	Being happy with this university's policies and rules			

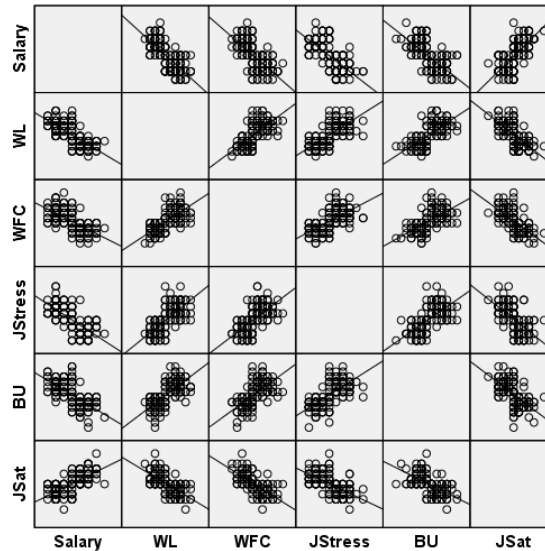


Figure 2. Linearity results

that there were no conflicting regression results (Ringim et al., 2012). Based on Table 1, the tolerance and VIF scores passed the requirements of the no multicollinearity index, indicating no multicollinearity among independent variables.

Finally, linearity, which indicated linear relationships between variables, was checked using scatter dots around the linear lines. Once the scatter dots remain along with the linear lines, the linearity between variables exists (Kim et al., 2022; Kim & Jindabot, 2021). Based on Figure 2, the scatter dots were found to remain along with the linear line of each variable; thus, there is linearity between the variables. Therefore, the multiple linear regression method was finally performed (Figure 3 and Table 2).

All critical ratios of multiple linear regressions are briefly reported in Figure 3 and Table 2. First, re-

gardless of impacts on job satisfaction, job stress significantly affects job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.47$, $t = -4.788$ and $p < 0.001$), which supports hypothesis 4. Next, salary significantly affects job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 2.602$, and $p < 0.001$), confirming hypothesis 1. Then, workload significantly affects job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.30$, $t = -2.430$, and $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis 2. After that, work-family conflict significantly influences job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.23$, $t = -2.065$, and $p < 0.05$), which supports hypothesis 3. In contrast, burnout does not show any significant relationship with job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.03$, $t = -0.082$, and $p > 0.05$), which rejects hypothesis 5.

Based on the above results, the results confirmed four hypotheses, except for hypothesis 5. Table 2 shows the summary of the hypotheses testing results.

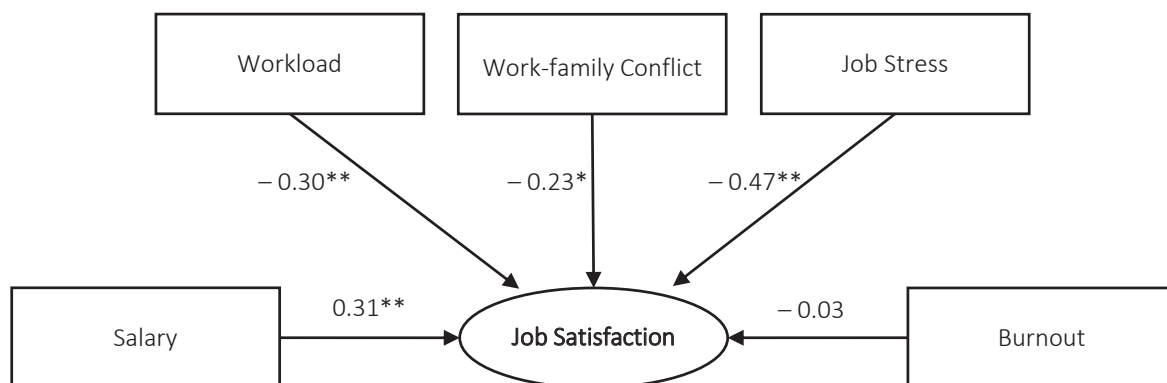


Figure 3. Results of multiple linear regressions

Table 2. Summary of multiple regression ratios and hypotheses testing

No.	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Std. Beta	t-value	p-value	Result
1	Salary	Job satisfaction	0.31	2.602	0.000**	Supported
2	Workload		-0.30	-2.430	0.000**	Supported
3	Work-family conflict		-0.23	-2.065	0.018*	Supported
4	Job stress		-0.47	-4.788	0.000**	Supported
5	Burnout		-0.03	-0.082	0.308	Rejected

Note: * shows $p < 0.05$; ** shows $p < 0.001$.

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the empirical results, job stress negatively influences job satisfaction. Once a person has a high stress level, he or she possibly faces psychological challenges (Dodi et al., 2021; Hayajneh et al., 2021). In this regard, a person may have had an unstable mood which quickly caused him or her to have a negative attitude toward his or her current job. Like Dodi et al. (2021) and Hayajneh et al. (2021), this study found that university lecturers were most likely to feel unhappy with their current job once they had high job stress. This situation could lead to an unhealthy working life if they continue working for a long term with their universities.

Next, salary positively influences job satisfaction. S. Lee and D. Lee (2017) revealed that providing enough payment to extensively support workers' basic needs possibly increased positive attitudes, especially motivation to work. Similar to Akinwale and George (2020) and Elshoryi et al. (2022), their positivity with their current job made them feel even more comfortable and happier to do their organizational tasks. The current results also outlined the significance of payment to university lecturers' job satisfaction. Once they received better payments and other compensations, they could support their living expenses and their family members. This could be a turning point to make them feel positively toward their organizations. Thus, a good salary made them happy to work for their organizations.

Then, workload negatively influenced job satisfaction. Providing acceptable workloads to workers could reasonably make them finish their job on time (Basson & Rothmann, 2018; Holland et al., 2019). However, similar to Basson and Rothmann (2018) and Holland et al. (2019), if the number of

workloads surpassed several workload standards, it became pressure for everyone who felt unhappy with their current job. In this case, university lecturers would no longer enjoy working for their workplaces if they received so many responsibilities from the universities. This situation indicated job dissatisfaction among those lecturers.

After that, the work-family conflict demonstrated a negative effect on job satisfaction. Once the job requires more time and effort, it cuts individuals' personal relationships with their family and society (Hong et al., 2021; Rhee et al., 2020). Thus, it could pressure their personal lives, leading to even more stress among those workers. In this circumstance, it was found to be unfavorable to the lecturers, who needed to be isolated from their family members. This isolated situation could place them in a vulnerable position in the workplace. Supporting Hong et al. (2021) and Rhee et al. (2020), a high propensity for job dissatisfaction among university lecturers could happen.

In contrast, burnout negatively influences job satisfaction. Its impact on job satisfaction was insignificant. Different from Cheng and O-Yang (2018), Madigan and Kim (2021), and Munandar et al. (2020), burnout was not a primary predictor for university lecturers. Its insignificant impact on lecturers' job satisfaction indicated a low emotional exhaustion rate among the lecturers. In this case, those lecturers were not likely to demonstrate much concern with burnout as their job stress was a major concern with their work satisfaction.

As for managerial implications, this study outlines four significant factors in job satisfaction. Top management in higher education must prioritize and improve these factors to ensure higher job satisfaction among university lecturers. First, human resource managers can reduce job stress by providing sufficient support and a clear working objec-

tive for individuals' tasks. For instance, lecturers can focus on teaching from Monday to Thursday, while Friday is used for research or meetings. Next, universities should provide enough payment to support lecturers' living expenses, including medical care services, eating, renting, etc. Then, workloads should be designed carefully for the lecturers by providing reasonable teaching hours and other consultant duties for students.

Finally, work-family conflict can be reduced by encouraging lecturers to dedicate their work concentration and finish the required daily tasks before time to leave the office. Meanwhile, the roles of human resource managers are to encourage lecturers to leave the offices once the main tasks are completed. By doing so, lecturers can relax and regain their energy to work the next day.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impacts of salary, workload, work-family conflict, job stress, and burnout on job satisfaction among university lecturers in Thailand. The results statistically displayed significant impacts of job stress ($\beta = -0.47$, $p < 0.001$), salary ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), workload ($\beta = -0.30$, $p < 0.001$), and work-family conflict ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.05$) on job satisfaction, while burnout ($\beta = -0.03$, $p > 0.05$) demonstrated an insignificant impact on job satisfaction. To sum up, job stress, salary, workload, and work-family conflict are the main predictors of job satisfaction among university lecturers. Furthermore, despite their impacts on job satisfaction, job stress is identified as the major concern on lecturers' job satisfaction as this factor contributes the highest impact on job satisfaction.

Despite this accomplishment, the results of this analysis have some limitations. First, the data may have contained biased responses because participants answered the survey themselves. Therefore, new studies should use different approaches (e.g., face-to-face interviews). The results also had limited generalization to the workers in other industries, such as hotel, restaurant, and airline industries, because there were significant differences between workers' characteristics. Therefore, new studies should apply these factors further to investigate employees' working behaviors in those industries to obtain new findings and conclusions.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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Writing – review & editing: Siwarit Pongsakornrungsilp.

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