



THE MICE LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES IN THAILAND FROM EXPERTS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The current study's goal is to investigate issues surrounding human development in Thailand's MICE sector from the viewpoints of stakeholders. The 18 participants in the qualitative research were from Thailand's MICE cities. A number of problems were found, including a lack of awareness among workers, a shortage of workers in the MICE sector, a lack of knowledge of foreign languages, a lack of communication skills, a lack of effective networking among stakeholders, and a lack of training programmes. The resolution of these problems could lead to job prospects.

Keywords. MICE city, expert perspective, worker, Thailand

Introduction

The Meeting, Incentive, Convention, and Exhibition (MICE) market is rapidly expanding. According to the International Congress and Convention Association, there are 12,937 rotating association meetings taking place in 2018; 379 extra meetings have been added since the same period in 2017 (ICCA, 2018). According to the research, the value was \$752 billion in 2018 and is predicted to reach \$1245 billion in 2023. The Asia-Pacific area is expected to develop at a faster rate of 8.6% between 2017 and 2023. The relaxation of immigration requirements, stronger investment infrastructure for enterprises, and increased demand for commercial aircraft all contribute to the expansion of the Asia-Pacific MICE market.

Thailand has secured reaching 1,386,000, which may create 105,600 million baht in income, due to vigorous competitiveness. The number of MICE travellers from the meetings and incentives industry is anticipated to reach 762,000, generating 57,000 million baht in revenue in 2019 (TCEB, 2020). Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) anticipates that the number of international MICE tourists entering Thailand in 2021 would reach 1,386,000, generating 105,600 million baht in revenue. The number of MICE travellers from the meetings and incentives industry is anticipated to reach 762,000, generating 57,000 million baht in revenue. As a result, there are several prospects for the business sector in Thailand's MICE industry to grow.



The country's purpose is to strengthen the country's image and Thailand's readiness to host international events, as well as to develop local MICE ecosystems in five major provinces to become sustainable MICE cities: Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Khon Kaen.

Without sufficient and proactive planning, national revenue and destination competitiveness may suffer. The problem in this duty is to guarantee that the MICE industry's expansion corresponds to the high expectations of MICE travellers, particularly in terms of offering great service. Despite Thailand's well-deserved reputation for world-class hospitality. However, MICE tourism is one of the fastest expanding areas in the tourism and hospitality industry, necessitating additional capabilities beyond those required for leisure travel (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). Communication, interpersonal skills, negotiating, problem-solving, organisational skills, and computer abilities are some of the talents required for MICE planners, according to Cleary and Van Noy (2014).

As a result, in order to establish the country as a MICE destination, human resources must also be developed. while a result, it guarantees that the number of MICE experts remains in line with the growing market potential for MICE events, even while the business sector faces a manpower shortage in order to meet market demands. As a result, the purpose of this study is to define what the MICE sector requires in terms of human capital from the perspective of industry actors in order to overcome the associated human capital issue and discover a feasible solution.

Review literature

Similarly to other businesses in the framework of the Human Resources department, the MICE industry's purpose is to give attractive and appealing job chances for people to develop themselves for their future professions (McCabe, 2012). However, several difficulties have been explored in the MICE business, including as turnover and employee shortages (Nadia & Hassnah, 2019). According to McCabe (2012), the MICE business is also dealing with high workforce turnover, mobility, and a scarcity of qualified employees. This may have an impact on industry development since it may be difficult for businesses to increase their performance and reputation without a sufficient and proper quality personnel. According to Adros and Wee (2019), researching human capital in the tourist business is difficult. According to the researchers, the MICE sector is one of the primary components that contribute to the expansion of the tourist industry, and it is relevant to investigate the associated human development issue in the MICE market.

Several studies on the MICE business have paid close attention to skills. According to several academics, the MICE business has grown during the previous decade, but workers' skills remain restricted (Fenich & Hashimoto, 2010; Ishfaq, Imran, Joseph, Haqdad, & Asif, 2022; Lee & Hiemstra, 2010; Brewerton & Lynne, 2001; Ard & Binprathan, 2018). According to studies, the quality of workers is critical to the success of the hospitality business (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). According to Rogers (2015), a variety of skills, including the use of technology and the ability to speak foreign languages, are required for corporate events and tourism in the UK. Due



to the rapid growth of transit networks, visitors seek great service (Haven-Tang, Jones, & Webb, 2007). Additionally, because the MICE industry is so complicated, it requires workers with knowledge of things like marketing, event planning, and interpersonal communication. High language proficiency, a positive outlook, and polite service were found to be the most crucial elements in determining customer satisfaction for international conferences in Taiwan by Kuo, Chen, and Lin (2010).

Specific technical and administrative abilities are required in South Wales for corporate event and tourist personnel' organisational and management skills (Haven-Tang, Jones, & Webb, 2007). Furthermore, in satisfying site selection requirements, Fawzy (2008) discovered that workers' skills and competencies are crucial for success in the MICE planning and site selection process. According to Kim and Boo (2010), the ability of a supplier or employee in the MICE industry to meet quality standards and deadlines for delivery is a good indicator of how a location will be chosen. Each position's knowledge and comprehension should be correct because the literature indicated that talents needed to be improved. In South Wales, for instance, it was found that a large number of service providers in the sector are ignorant of the potential of the business to leisure market (Haven-Tang, Jones, & Webb, 2007).

In a similar vein, there are still few people in Thailand who have degrees in MICE. Service providers in Thailand, such as hotel staff, restaurant waiters, and tour guides, allegedly still lack expertise of the industry, claim Uanasaard and Binprathan (2018). This is particularly true when it comes to certain demands, like the halal tourism sector. This may be due to the fact that people working in the MICE industry frequently have a range of hospitality backgrounds (Sangpikul & Kim, 2009). According to Rogers (2015), the MICE industry is slowly expanding necessary education and training programmes since there aren't enough experts available to deliver them. Furthermore, because there are numerous sorts of work, the intricacy of employment is significant (Swarbrooke & Susan, 2001). According to Junek, Lockstone, and Mair (2009), the industry provided a set of abilities such as communication, problem-solving, and stress management. The researchers go on to list the abilities necessary for their study, which include cultural fit, teamwork, personality, experience, and individual expertise.

According to Fenich and Hashimoto (2010), unique education and training course roles for employees in the MICE business are required. According to Baum (2015), some of the issues confronting the MICE business include poor wages, a lack of opportunities for growth and development, and a difficult work environment. As previously said, Thailand's recent expansion of MICE has been quick, which may result in a scarcity of human resources in the MICE sector. Similarly, certain nations, like China, Taiwan, and Malaysia, are facing HR issues (Asif, 2022; Sandy Sou & McCartney, 2015). As a result, it is critical to examine and comprehend human resource concerns from important stakeholders in the MICE business. The study's goal is to explore the talents that the MICE industry may require from the business sector.



The findings might help stakeholders solve and reduce challenges linked to human resources in Thailand's MICE business. As well as assisting people who wish to work in the business in preparing for and improving the unique skills required by the MICE industry.

Research Objective

The study's major goal is to analyse human development concerns in the MICE business from the viewpoints of stakeholders. The results should contribute to economic growth by promoting entrepreneurship and innovation within the existing tourist sector, as well as helping to create new job possibilities. The study may aid in identifying the specific talents that stakeholders may require in the MICE business. This might assist raise awareness of MICE's development potential and the benefits of being a MICE city, as well as improve knowledge of developing employees in the MICE business.

Research Methodology

To achieve the study's research purpose, mixed approaches were used. However, the focus of this work is on the qualitative research conducted in Thailand's MICE city. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders were conducted in five TCEB-promoted MICE cities: Bangkok, Chaing Mai, Khon Kaen, Phuket, and Pattaya. The primary informants were selected via the TCEB website prior to the interview. The researcher had recorded the probable respondent's contact information, including email address and phone number. The appointment was set up over the phone and followed up on through email. Because the participants were industry professionals, and the majority of them were company management teams, frequent follow-up through email and phone conversations were undertaken as a reminder. The researcher had contacted 31 volunteers in all, but only 18 were confirmed to be a part of current study.

As a result, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 MICE sector stakeholders, including 6 hotels, 5 organisers, 2 venues, 3 travel agencies, and 2 spas. Semi-structured interviews were done in which each informant was asked and given the same set of questions (Hennink et al., 2011). For data analysis, thematic analysis was performed. The purpose of this research is to investigate human development difficulties in Thailand's MICE business.

Research findings

All the key stakeholders from five MICE cities agreed that worker is one of the key success factors for MICE business and emphasize the importance of being a MICE city as a driver for inward investment. A clear understanding of the MICE visitor expectation and satisfaction is important. The study found worker played a significant role in the MICE industry because they add value and raise the quality of products and services. However, there are related issues that



have been faced by the industry players related to human capital in the MICE industry. The study has found six major issues from the interviews.

Lack of understanding of workers in the MICE industry

Even though the tourism and hospitality in Thailand have been recognized for a very long time as it plays an importance role for the country in term of the economic. However, MICE tourism is relatively new as it only occurred after TCEB has been established. Several workers who work in the MICE industry are the same worker who works in the tourism industry such as hotel and venue. This might create confusion among the public, the perception that amateurs can provide an equivalent service to that of trained professionals (Bouchon, Hussain & Konar, 2015; Ishfaq, Imran, Joseph, Haqdad, & Asif, 2022). All the key stakeholders point out the issue. They agreed that most workers, especially new graduates, are new and have of understand and awareness.

“Most of the workers currently work in the MICE section have already had experience within the tourism and hospitality sectors. However, specific skills for the MICE section are still needed, such as preparing for the bidding process. (Travel agency, Pattaya)”

“We used to assume that people who have been working in the tourism industry could efficiently work in the MICE industry, but I have realized there are some particular skills that we require for MICE workers, especially in an exhibition. (Event planner, Phuket)”

“As I know, MICE is a new thing for us, and not many universities or colleges have yet to have MICE subjects. This is the reason why we still lack workers with experience. (Event planner, Phuket)”

“I am glad that from now on many universities will start teaching MICE meaning we will eventually have more people who have a familiar background, which will [make it] easy [for them] to learn and gain some experience. (Event planners Khon Kaen)”

The remarks can suggest that there is a serious problem with people's knowledge and awareness of the industry. Uanasa-ard and Binprathan (2018) claim that there is still a dearth of awareness of service among Thai service providers, including hotel staff, restaurant waiters, and tour guides. This is particularly true when it comes to certain demands, like the halal tourism sector. This may be due to the fact that people working in the MICE industry frequently have a range of hospitality backgrounds (Sangpikul & Kim, 2009).

Lack of availability and sufficiency of workers in the MICE industry

Unsurprisingly, an availability and sufficiency of workers have been found as an issue. The reason for this as the MICE industry and the MICE city in Thailand has promoted not long ago by



TCEB. However, as the industry has grown rapidly and become highly competitive. Due to this market competitiveness, Thailand welcomed 1,255,985 international MICE visitors and generated revenue of 95.6 billion (TCEB, 2018). To be able to handle the high competition to bid and win the events internationally, the skills of employees are required. Some respondents question the issue. The issue was mentioned due to the competition that they faced in the industry.

“I don’t think all event companies know about the bidding process because is not work that we do every day, most of the time we are waiting for TCEB to help us to win the bid. (Event planners, Phuket)”

“In my opinion, there is no need to learn how to prepare a proposal or join the bidding process as we will never win. Not sure because we never do it or if it is already decided which company will win even before the bidding start. (Event planners, Khon Kaen)”

“Pattaya is so close to Bangkok, so most of the time the organizers are from Bangkok, that why we are not good at planning an event. (Event planner, Pattaya)”

According to the messages above, the majority of event planners were concerned about the bidding procedure. The reason for this is that respondents recognise that winning the bidding would provide them with several rewards. However, bidding may necessitate additional resources and skills above those required for typical sales operations (Getz, 2004). Furthermore, the bidding process may include a variety of components such as convention and visitor bureaus, an explanation or description of the destination or bidders, a support offer, and which organisations expect to organise events (Horte & Persson, 2000). All of the requirements must be completed in order to submit a successful bid. A brand image, packaging, pricing, service quality, and locations are all factors to consider when bidding on MICE content (Horte & Persson, 2000). Bidders should also be able to bargain and have specialised facilities for both large and small events (Getz, 2004).

As a result, not only are bidding abilities in great demand, but so are sales and marketing skills, as well as negotiation skills. More significantly, multiple personnel with a thorough awareness of prospective criteria or concerns that must be addressed in order to be successful in the bidding process.

Foreign language knowledge and communication skill

Studies have shown that success in the hotel industry depends significantly on the calibre of the employees (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). Rogers (2015) examined a range of skills required for business events and tourism in the UK, including language proficiency and interpersonal communication. It is believed that being fluent in several languages, most notably English, is crucial, especially if a company plans to grow abroad. Some of the respondents offered advice on this topic.



“English language could be an issue especially if the company is dealing with international clients. Our company provides an English course “English for communication” for our staff. However, in the future, we expected to recruit someone who knows more than one language. (Event planner, Bangkok)”

“Knowing more than one language is now important as these days we have to contact people all over the world. I think English is important and has become a universal language now, but other languages are also necessary too, for example, Chinese or Russian. (Event planner, Phuket)”

“A high standard of service among the workers in the MICE industry includes communication and the ability to run a work process. This could help to gain some benefits and give a good picture of Thai workers in the MICE industry. (Event planner, Bangkok)”

The results of the interviews related to the current study have been added to earlier research in the MICE sector. To increase client satisfaction, MICE sector employees in the Asia Pacific area should expand their knowledge and experience, ideally by learning new languages (Kuo et al., 2010; MacLaurin, 2002). Some participants noted that it is essential to host events in MICE cities and that organisational and managerial skills, as well as workflow particular to events, need to be developed:

“Ability to communicate the workflow of staff in the company is also important because MICE travellers are people who travel for business and work, which require better service than just leisure travellers do. To provide professional service is the aim of our company. (Event planner, Bangkok)”

“A high standard of service among the workers in the MICE industry includes communication and the ability to run a work process. This could help to gain some benefits and give a good picture of Thai workers in the MICE industry. (Event planner, Bangkok)”

Lack of Networking among stakeholders

In the context of this study, networking in the MICE sector refers to relationships with other participants and membership in trade organisations. The associations offer a variety of information that can be shared among the members, according to earlier studies. According to Lee and Back (2009), networking and specialised education in MICE may be able to forecast how satisfied participants will be. The TCEB is the industry leader when it comes to Thailand. However, the analysis discovered problems with TCEB membership.

“Our company has been run for long time even before MICE has been promoted. But now since TCEB happened I feel like I work harder as there are more companies and higher competition in the industry. I don’t think the information that TCEB has provided covers all the business in the industry. As well as, most companies don’t run the business in a friendly way which makes sense. (Event planner, Khon Kaen)”



“I am not sure if we need friends when we do business. For example, all the business in Phuket is doing well by themselves for very long time and they don’t even know TCEB. But maybe if we do have community or networking that we could share information property that might be a good idea. (Event planner, Phuket)”

Lack of training course

As the MICE sector has expanded significantly, more personnel with the necessary abilities are needed. The study concluded that the MICE sector needs to offer more training courses. Training programmes in management, leadership, communication, and other topics. At first look, it could appear that some participants were in agreement that Thai colleges should offer courses in MICE, but others contend that practical knowledge and experience are far more valuable than theoretical knowledge, and that the only way to learn is to work in the industry.

“I try to attend the training courses that TCEB provided which relate to MICE as much as I can, such as the marketing program. This is really helpful as I do not have to go back to school, but I can still improve on the skills that I need. (Travel agency, Pattaya)”

“I am glad as now some universities in Thailand started to add a MICE subject, as I believe that learning from school first and then the training afterward would be comprehensive for the young generation. (Event planner, Bangkok)”

“I do not think Thai universities need to teach a particular subject in MICE, but maybe it could be just an option or short training course. As I think, they need to learn from their real working life as it is much different from reading books. My staff here never have a MICE degree, but they work very well just from the hospitality knowledge. (Venue, Khon Kaen)”

To address this issue, Thailand can create a MICE degree programme to meet the demand for knowledgeable and skilled MICE workers, together with internal training for international conference services and appropriate training for certain occupations (Kuo, Chen, & Lin, 2010). According to Asif (2019) and Uansa-ard and Binprathan (2018), knowledge and training may assist employees be completely prepared for the difficulties of the job as well as help the firm grow and improve service quality in the MICE sector.

Discussion and conclusion

The study's goal is to pinpoint the problems with human capital that the industry's participants have experienced in Thailand's MICE sector. The researcher was able to align the interview's findings with the study's goals by using the information she gathered from them. Five topics have been created in relation to this study, according to the study. The findings included a



lack of understanding of MICE industry professionals, a shortage of MICE industry workers, a lack of communication and language skills in foreign languages, a lack of networking among stakeholders, and a lack of evening courses. The primary issue is the lack of comprehension among MICE industry employees.

Currently, the majority of workers come from the hospitality industry. This is because they consider the MICE sector to be less significant than either the tourist or hospitality sectors. The respondents think that appropriate education and training programmes, as well as strong networking among stakeholders, will be effective ways to raise awareness of the business. Additionally, 52% concur that networking should cover MICE-related academic areas. Additionally, the business community might offer a strong directive or need for the MICE programme, which could assist the sector in resolving concerns with a lack of personnel and availability.

It is possible to look at the study's results in more detail. This study only focused on the conclusions from the viewpoint of the industry actors when it came to capital needs. Future research may concentrate on MICE industry employees or students enrolled in MICE courses. The results may support this research for a large population. Additionally, the MICE sector in Thailand might benefit from further research on each topic.

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