

NEEDS, ATTITUDES, AND MOTIVES AMONG WORKERS IN A THAI FACTORY

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The importance of understanding human behavior in organizations has long been recognized in many highly industrialized nations such as the United States and Great Britain. It is not an economic paradox that managers in such technologically developed countries make great investments in plants, machinery, and equipment and yet emphasize the need for proper handling of human resources. It is rather a matter of their recognizing the interdependencies of technological and human factors in industry, and then striving to obtain the best possible employment of that technology by intelligently directed and motivated employees. That is, managers in such economies are aware that although technology is often the primary determinant of productivity, potential output will not be realized if worker effort is inadequate.¹

Appreciation for the human factor is no less vital among those responsible for managing the organizations of developing economies. Whatever the environmental setting, managers, who endeavor to improve their skills in influencing human behavior in organizations inevitably develop a growing need for knowledge about man at work. They need information not only about the physical capabilities of workers, but about worker attitudes and motivation as well. They realize that human performance is not simply a function of ability, but results from the interaction between ability and motivation.

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¹ For a discussion of those variables which influence actual vs. potential output, see Gene K. Groff, "Worker Productivity: An Integrated View," *Business Horizons*, 1971, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 78-86.

The research reported here was designed to gather objective information about men at work, important information too long based on subjective opinions and impressions of questionable reliability. Modern managers in all cultures require such data, upon which they can base initial policy decisions regarding their workers.

In the United States, managers have come to rely less and less on folklore, hearsay, tradition, and other intuitive sources as bases of information about the attitudes and motivation of workers. Instead, these managers are turning to a more scientific approach, rooted in the disciplines of the behavioral sciences and mathematics. This trend is reflected in and facilitated by the growing efforts of U.S. business schools and departments

..... to equip their students with statistical and mathematical tools and concepts from the behavioral sciences which can be applied to the solution of business problems.²

This more scientific approach is based on the use of empirically derived, reliable, and valid techniques of acquiring information about human attitudes and motivation in organizations. These techniques are reliable in that they yield consistent measurements, and valid in that they actually measure what they claim to measure.

The most prominently used of these techniques is the attitude survey. In this technique, important attitudes and motivational patterns of workers are systematically assessed by means of an attitude questionnaire administered to and completed by the workers themselves. The questionnaire typically consists of a series of multiple choice or multiple response questions whose reliability and validity in measuring the attitudes in question have been developed, tested, and demonstrated in previous research.

It was to this end, then, that this research project addressed itself: to test the feasibility of using attitude surveys among Thai workers as sources of information for managers about human behavior in their organizations. A questionnaire was developed, composed of attitude measurement scales which had previously demonstrated their reliability and validity on populations of U.S. workers. The research plan was to translate the questionnaire into Thai and administer it to a population of Thai workers similar to populations of U.S. workers on whom the questionnaire had been previously tested.

² W. George Pinnell and Joseph M. Waldman, "Business Administration on the Collegiate Level in the United States," *Thai Journal of Development Administration*, 1969, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 102-107.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

A questionnaire booklet entitled *A Survey of Worker Opinions*, developed and edited by Drs. Groff and Reitz, was used to measure the attitudes of the workers. The *Survey* was designed to provide measures of attitudes important to worker motivation on the job. It consisted of several attitude scales which were developed and tested extensively on worker populations in the U.S. Translation of the *Survey* from English to Thai was directed by Dr. Sriprinya Ramakomud.*

The workers studied in this research were 113 Thai operatives in a U.S. -owned manufacturing plant in Bangkok. The characteristics of the group were as follows:

- Sex** : Male: 44 %; Female: 56 %
- Age** : 20-29 years: 60 %; 30-39 years: 31 %; 40-49 years: 7 %
- Childhood Home** : Farm: 26 %; Small town: 30 %; City: 44 %
- Education** : 4-5 years: 43 %; 6-10 years: 24 %; 11-14 years: 33 %
- Work Experience** : 1-3 years: 31 %; 4-6 years: 32 %; 7-9 years: 37 %
- Job Skill Level** : Unskilled: 33 %; Semiskilled: 27 %; Skilled: 40 %

The *Survey* was administered to the workers at the worksite in small groups. Anonymity of the workers' answers was guaranteed, and stressed during the administration. Workers were not asked to put their names on the questionnaire booklets, and no attempt was made to identify any completed booklet with any individual worker. The average length of time to administer the complete *Survey* to a group was some what under two hours.**

* The translations were done as follows. Dr. Ramakomud worked with Dr. Lawrence McKibbin to try to obtain a clear understanding of the meaning of all the items in the English version of the questionnaire, before translating it into Thai. After translation, the Thai version was given to a bilingual secretary (Miss Rachaniwan Arthakor, whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged), for translation back to English. Differences between the original and the retranslated English could thus be observed and the items could be reworked until reasonable retranslated versions were obtained. Translation from English to Thai is risky business; however, the authors feel that the final translation was quite acceptable.

** An important side effect of the survey should be mentioned: the workers seemed pleased that they had been asked to participate in the survey. A number of them made comments commending management for giving the workers an opportunity to express themselves in this manner.

The *Survey* consisted of five parts, each designed to measure a particular attitude or set of attitudes: (1) job involvement; (2) relative importance of needs; (3) ideal Supervisor; (4) internal vs. external control; and (5) the cultural continuum checklist.

RESULTS

Job Involvement

Part One of the Survey measured the strength of the workers' involvement in their jobs.³ Individual scoring high on Job Involvement have internalized beliefs about the worthwhileness and importance of work. They identify with their work and perceive their work to be important to themselves and to the company.

The Job Involvement Scale runs from 0 to 180. The average Job Involvement Score for the Thai workers was 117, a figure significantly higher than the norm of 97 for similar workers tested in the United States.

Job Involvement Scores were further analyzed to determine possible effects of individual characteristics such as age, education, sex, childhood home, work experience, or skill level on Job Involvement. Since none of those individual characteristics were found to be related to Job Involvement, it is reasonable to conclude that the difference between Thai and U.S. workers in job involvement is due to cultural differences.

Relative Importance of Needs

A second part of the Survey assesses the relative importance of various types of worker needs, and is based on the grouping of needs into categories as suggested by Dr. Abraham Maslow in his book *Motivation and Personality*.⁴ The five categories of needs examined by the Need Preference Inventory⁵ are:

Need for Security: The desire for a predictable, structured, and reliable environment. The desire for fairness and a familiar, nonthreatening environment.

³ The Job Involvement Scale was developed and tested by Dr. Charles N. Greene of Indiana University.

⁴ A.H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1954).

⁵ The Need Preference Inventory was developed and tested by Dr. Michael Beer of Corning Glass Works, Corning, N.Y. A report of the development and use of the scale is found in his *Leadership: Employee Needs and Motivation* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Bureau of Business Research, 1966).

Need for Affiliation: The desire for belonging. The desire for association, for acceptance by one's fellows, for giving and receiving friendship and love.

Need for Esteem: The desire for reputation or prestige, respect or esteem from other people. The desire for status, dominance, recognition, attention, importance, or appreciation. A desire for esteem from others.

Need for Autonomy: The desire for independence and freedom on the job. The desire for achievement, competence, mastery, adequacy, and confidence. The desire for self-respect and self-esteem based on one's own opinion of oneself as reflected in the specific factors above.

Need for Self-Actualization: The desire to realize one's own potential. The desire for personal growth and self-development. The desire to become whatever one is capable of becoming.

The Survey of the Thai workers resulted in the following ranking of needs in order of their importance. The most important needs are ranked first. The lower the average score, the more important the need:

Rank	Need	Score
1	Self-Actualization	13.3
2	Autonomy	16.4
3	Esteem	17.3
4 (tie)	Affiliation	21.6
	Security	21.6

According to the Survey, Self Actualization is the most important need to the Thai workers studies. Autonomy and Esteem needs as the next in importance. Affiliation and Security needs appear to be of the least importance to these workers.

Interestingly, this ranking of need importance is almost identical to that indicated by a similar group of workers tested in the U.S. The U.S. group ranked Self-Actualization as most important, Autonomy as second in importance and Security as least important, just as did the Thai workers. However, the Thais considered Esteem as significantly more important than did their U.S. counterpart. The U.S. workers, however, considered Affiliation as more important than did their Thai counterparts.

Ideal Supervisor

A third part of the Survey, the Ideal Supervisory Behavior Scale,⁶ asks the workers to describe the behavior of the ideal supervisor. It measures the emphasis which workers believe an *ideal* supervisor should place on two areas:

Initiating Structure: defining workers' roles, structuring the work, applying pressure for production.

Consideration: showing regard for the comfort, well-being, status, and contributions of workers.

The scale on each of the two dimensions of ideal leader behavior ranges from 0 to 80. The average scores of the Thai workers who participated in the Survey were:

Initiating Structure:	46.1
Consideration:	32.8

That is, the average Thai worker believed that the ideal supervisor should be somewhat more concerned with production and output than he is with the workers' well-being and comfort.

The Ideal Supervisory Behavior Scores were further examined to determine whether any of the individual characteristics of worker age, sex, home, education, experience, or skill level affected descriptions of the behavior of an ideal supervisor. However, none of those worker characteristics were found to be related to either Initiating Structure or Consideration in the ideal supervisor description.

The relative emphasis on the two ideal supervisory behavior dimensions was quite similar to that indicated by workers tested in the United States: relatively more emphasis on Initiating Structure (production and output) than on Consideration (worker comfort and well-being). In fact, both groups of workers had identical mean scores on Initiating Structure. However, U.S. workers had a higher mean score on Consideration than did Thais. Apparently, the U.S. workers believe the ideal supervisor should show more concern for his workers than the Thai workers believe he should show.

⁶ The Ideal Supervisory Behavior Scale was developed from the Leadership Opinion Questionnaire distributed by Science Research Associates of Chicago, Illinois, with their permission. For a description of the development and use of the LOQ, see Edwin A. Fleishman, E.F. Harris, and H.E. Burt, *Leadership and Supervision in Industry* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 1955).

Perhaps this finding means simply that the particular Thai plant in which this research was done had supervisors who showed more concern for their workers than production, or it may mean that consideration as such is culturally normal behavior so that no special emphasis is needed on this factor.

Internal vs. External Control

The fourth part of the Survey, the Internal-External Control Scale⁷, measures the degree of control which the worker believes he has over what happens to him. The scale ranges from 0 to 20. A low score indicates that one is an "internal", who believes that his fate is largely under his own control. "Internals" are confident that reward and satisfactions generally result from their own behavior. A high score indicates an "external", who believes that his destiny is largely beyond his control. "Externals" feel that luck or chance or other forces beyond their influence generally determine what happens to them.

The average score for the Thais who participated in the Survey was 10.4. Such a score would classify one as being relatively "external", who believes that forces beyond his influence play an important role in much of what happens to him.

This average score of 10.4 is significantly higher than the average score of 7.6 for workers tested in the U.S. This difference would seem to indicate that the average Thai worker is more of an "external" -- feels he has less control over his fate--than the average U.S. worker. However, the range of scores among Thais was quite large, from a low of 4 (quite internal) to a high of 19 (very external).

The Internal-External Scores were further analyzed to determine whether any individual characteristics of the workers affected the extent of their "internality" and "externality". It was found that female workers had higher scores than male workers. That is, among the Thai workers, females are more likely to feel that what happens to them is beyond their control. In addition, skill level is apparently related to feelings of control. The average Internal-External Scores among Thai workers according to their skill level were as follows:

⁷ The Internal-External Scale was developed and tested by Dr. Julian B. Rotter of the University of Connecticut. A detailed report of the instrument can be found in his "Generalized Expectancies for Internal versus External Control of Reinforcement." *Psychological Monographs*, 1966, Vol. 80, No. 1.

Skill Level	I-E Score
Skilled	9.6
Semiskilled	10.4
Unskilled	11.4

Apparently, more skilled workers feel that they have greater control over their rewards, satisfactions, and destinies than do less skilled workers.

Relationship Among Job Involvement, Needs, Ideal Supervisor, and Feelings of Control

Relationships among the various attitude scores measured by the Survey were also examined by correlational analyses. These analyses revealed several significant relationships.

There was a direct relationship between the two dimensions of Ideal Leader Behavior. That is, workers who scored high on the Initiating Structure dimension also scored high on Consideration. This would indicate that some workers see the ideal supervisor as being more active in general than do other workers.

In addition, there were some significant relationships between Ideal Supervisory Behavior Scores and Need Preference Scores. Workers who saw the ideal supervisor as being more concerned with production and output and structure than did their co-workers also were less concerned with Autonomy for themselves. On the other hand, workers who saw the ideal supervisor as being more concerned with the comfort and well-being of his workers tended to be less concerned with Self-Actualization and more concerned with their own Affiliation needs. These results confirm the notion that a worker's expectations as to how his supervisor should behave are partly determined by the relative importance of various needs to that worker.

A negative relationship was found between Initiating Structure and Internal-External Control Scores. "Internals" felt the ideal supervisor should place less emphasis on production, output, and structure than did "externals." Finally, there was a strong relationship between Job Involvement and Consideration. Workers who were highly involved in their jobs tended to see the ideal supervisor as showing much concern for his workers' well-being, status, and contributions.

There was one last significant relationship among the four major sets of attitudes. Job Involvement and Internal-External Control Scores were directly related. That is, "externals" tended to evidence greater job involvement than "internals."

The Cultural Continuum Checklist⁸

The final part of the Survey consisted of seven questions about work and worker relations. The questions assess worker attitudes toward responsibility, work itself, co-workers, and certain types of management policies and have been found in previous studies to elicit very different responses from workers of different cultures.

The questions are reproduced here, together with the percentage of Thai workers who responded to each of the four possible answers for each question. In addition, the percentage of 1,042 U.S. workers surveyed by Whitehill and Takezawa⁹ who responded to each answer are given as bases for comparison.

Motivation to Work

Question:	Percent of responses	
	Thais	U.S. ¹⁰
I believe workers are willing to work hard on their jobs because:		
(a) they want to live up to the expectations of their family, friends, and society	17%	10%
(b) they feel it is their responsibility to the company and to co-workers to do whatever work is assigned to them	64%	61%
(c) the harder they work, the more likely they are to be promoted over others to positions of greater responsibility	13%	9%
(d) the harder they work, the more they expect to earn	6%	20%

A strong majority of the Thai workers indicated their belief that workers are willing to work hard because of their responsibilities to the company and to co-workers. The responses of the Thais are not too dissimilar from those of U.S. workers, with the exception being answer (d). Comparatively few Thais believe that chances of increased earnings motivate workers to work hard.

⁸ The Cultural Continuum Checklist was developed and tested by Dr. Arthur M. Whitehill, Jr. and Shin-Tchi Takezawa of the East West Center in Hawaii. For a description and analysis of their complete checklist, see Whitehill and Takezawa, *The Other Worker* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1958).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106

Diligence

Question:	Percent of Responses	
	Thais	U.S. ¹¹
I think it is most desirable for my co-workers to:		
(a) work at whatever level is set by older members of their group as being a normal day's output	17%	1%
(b) work at maximum capacity, without endangering their health, helping others when their own tasks are completed	45%	9%
(c) work at the minimum level necessary to keep their jobs, since this will spread the work among more employees	4%	6%
(d) work at whatever level is necessary to perform their own jobs well	34%	84%

Almost half the Thai workers felt that they should not only work at maximum capacity, but should help others when their own tasks were completed. The percentage of Thais feeling this way was far greater than the percentage of U.S. workers surveyed by Whitehill and Takezawa.

However, there were differences in the way Thai workers of different skill levels answered this question. The majority of those answering (a) were skilled workers; the majority of those answering (d) were unskilled. Almost all the semiskilled workers responded (b). Perhaps the nature of the work in this particular factory was such that only the middle group-- semiskilled--could reasonably be expected to help others when their own work was completed.

Identity with Company

Question:	Percent of Responses	
	Thais	U.S. ¹²
I think of my company as:		
(a) strictly a place to work and entirely separate from my personal life	15%	23%
(b) the central concern in my life and of greater importance than my personal life	15%	1%
(c) a part of my life at least equal in importance to my personal life	35%	22%
(d) a place for me to work with management, during work hours, to accomplish mutual goals	34%	54%

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 118

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 111

Half of the Thai workers supported either answer (b) or (c), indicating that for them work was either equal to or greater than their personal lives in importance. This is more than double the percentage of U.S. workers who responded that way, and confirms the significantly higher Job Involvement scores of Thais compared to U.S. workers.*

Technological Advances

Question:	Percent of Responses	
	Thais	U.S. ¹³
If work-saving new machines or methods, not immediately affecting your own job, are introduced in your company, would you:		
(a) actively support such changes, since they ultimately must help everyone, including workers	53%	25%
(b) quietly approve of such changes, since they are inevitable in modern industry	30%	39%
(c) quietly disapprove of such changes, since they may cause some workers to lose their jobs	9%	22%
(d) actively resist such changes, since they may help owners and managers, but always hurt workers	8%	14%

There appeared to be little resistance to work-saving methods among the Thai operatives especially when compared to responses of U.S. workers. In fact, the majority of Thais indicated active support for such changes. This attitude may well exist because the factory in which this research took place has not yet experienced great technological change. Should there evolve a threat of loss of jobs due to automation such as has been widespread in the U.S., the attitudes of Thai workers might well change.

* One of the authors (McKibbin) has observed, in a number of instances, evidence of workers' apparent concern with and interest in their jobs as parts of their lives. Workers do not seem to rush on home at quitting time quite as rapidly as they do in the United States. In fact one general manager of a European firm in Bangkok observed that his workers were unhappy when the company went to a five, instead of a five-and-a-half day week because they did not know what they were going to do with themselves on Saturdays.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 122

Willingness to Subordination

Question:	Percent of Responses	
	Thais	U.S. ¹⁴
Regarding rules and disciplinary penalties established by management, I would:		
(a) accept such rules and penalties, but show no ill feelings against co-workers who violate them	54 %	33 %
(b) reluctantly accept such rules and penalties, but speak against them and give moral support to co-workers who violate them	6 %	7 %
(c) accept such rules and penalties, regard violators as undesirable co-workers	23 %	38 %
(d) evade such rules and penalties whenever possible in an attempt to control management's authority over worker behavior	17 %	22 %

Over three-fourths of the Thai workers indicated that they would accept management rules and disciplinary penalties. However, only 23 % would harbor ill feelings toward co-workers who violated such rules. Compared to U.S. workers' responses, this percentage is somewhat small. This would be consistent with Thai values which stress that a man reaps his own reward or punishment for his own acts, but one should not be too harsh in condemning a person for his failings.

Tenure of Unqualified Workers

Question:	Percent of Responses	
	Thais	U.S. ¹⁵
If a worker, although willing, proves to be unqualified on his job, management should feel a responsibility:		
(a) to continue his employment until he retires or dies.	34 %	23 %
(b) to terminate the employment of unqualified workers after giving about two weeks notice.	22 %	20 %

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139

	Thais	U.S.
(c) to continue his employment for as long as one year so that he may look for another job.	22%	19%
(d) to continue his employment for three months so that he may look for another job.	23%	38%

There was considerable division of opinion among Thai workers over how long management should continue the employment of an unqualified worker. There was more support for lifetime tenure among Thais than among U.S. workers. This is certainly consistent with oriental tradition--one would be very surprised if a group of Asians were less favorably inclined toward life-time employment than would Americans.

However, the sexes tended to differ in the way they responded to this question. Females were much more likely to support answer (a) than males. Among U.S. workers, the reverse was true.¹⁶

Employee Performance Evaluation

Question:	Percent of Responses	
	Thais	U.S. ¹⁷
In order to maximize satisfaction of workers, the best management policy is to:		
(a) make evaluations and comparisons, but keep the results secret	28%	5%
(b) avoid, whenever possible, evaluation and comparison of individual performance	5%	11%
(c) make evaluations and comparisons, and encourage better workers by informing them of their strengths	36%	6%
(d) make evaluations and comparisons, and inform each worker of both his strengths and weaknesses so he will know where he stands.	31%	78%

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 207

There appeared to be some reluctance among the Thai workers to employee performance evaluations. Less than a third of the respondents indicated support for evaluations including disclosure to the worker of both his strengths and weaknesses. Over one-fourth of the workers felt the result of such evaluations should be kept secret.

The result is consistent with the Thai concern with "face." To communicate a person's short-comings and weaknesses would cause him to lose face, and one must refrain from causing someone else to lose face, therefore, communication of negative evaluations should be avoided.

Conclusions

Any conclusions drawn from this research should be considered tentative at best. The survey covered worker in only one plant; the responses, therefore, may reflect only the situation in that plant and may be not representative of Thai workers as a whole. Nonetheless, the findings in this exploratory study should be of interest to managers in the Thai setting, and certain hypotheses may be suggested for further testing, for example:

1. Thai workers want their supervisors to be relatively more concerned with production and output than with workers well-being and comfort.
2. Performance evaluations of Thai workers might be resented if they criticize the workers performance.
3. Thai workers are quite likely to accept changes in methods of work and the introduction of modern machinery.
4. Work is at least equal in importance to any other factor in the average Thai workers daily life.
5. Thai workers, particularly lower-level workers, show high degrees of involvement in their jobs; they believe strongly in the importance and worthwhileness of work.

Certainly the research casts doubt upon the concept of the Thai worker as one who is concerned only with "sanuk."
