

# Factors Influencing the Job Performance of Massage and Spa Personnel in Bangkok Metropolitan Area

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## Abstract

The post-pandemic resurgence of the global wellness economy has placed unprecedented operational demands on Thailand's massage and spa sector, a critical pillar of the nation's "Medical Hub" strategy. This study investigates the causal relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and operational efficiency within registered massage and spa establishments in Bangkok. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected via a survey of 265 personnel selected through simple random sampling. The research framework evaluates eight distinct HRM dimensions—ranging from human resource planning and recruitment to safety protocols and organizational development—against four key metrics of operational efficiency: quality, quantity, time, and cost.

The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between strategic HRM interventions and operational outcomes, identifying "Training and Development" and "Compensation Management" as the most potent predictors of efficiency. These results suggest that in a labor-intensive industry characterized by high turnover and a widening skills gap, investments in human capital are not merely supplementary but fundamental to sustaining service standards. This study contributes to the literature by quantifying the impact of HRM in the specific context of Bangkok's wellness sector, offering actionable insights for policymakers and business operators aiming to enhance competitiveness in the recovering tourism market.

## Introduction

The global wellness economy has emerged as a dominant force in the post-pandemic landscape, demonstrating robust resilience and growth. According to recent data from the Global Wellness Institute (2025), the wellness economy reached a historic peak of \$6.8 trillion in 2024 and is projected to expand to nearly \$9.8 trillion by 2029. Within this expanding ecosystem, Thailand has strategically positioned itself as a premier "Medical Hub" and a global destination for health tourism, capitalizing on its rich heritage of traditional medicine and service excellence (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2023). The massage and spa sector, a cornerstone of this strategy, historically generated approximately 50 billion baht annually prior to the disruption of COVID-19 (Ministry of Commerce, 2021).

However, as the industry transitions from recovery to growth, it faces acute structural challenges. While demand is rebounding—with Thailand expecting to welcome 38 million international tourists in 2025—the supply side is constrained by a critical labor shortage and a "skills gap" (IOM Thailand, 2025). The pandemic caused a significant exodus of skilled therapists, creating a vacuum that current recruitment efforts struggle to fill (Thai Spa Association, 2023). In the Bangkok Metropolitan area alone, there are 832 registered massage and spa establishments, representing the highest concentration of such businesses in the country (Department of Health Service Support, 2024). Despite this density, operational efficiency varies drastically across establishments, often creating inconsistencies in service delivery that threaten the sector's reputation (Kasikorn Research Center, 2022).

A critical gap exists in the academic literature regarding how specific Human Resource Management (HRM) practices influence these operational outcomes. While numerous studies have examined customer satisfaction or general organizational effectiveness in Thai private companies, few have quantified the link between distinct HRM dimensions—such as recruitment, training, and compensation—and specific operational efficiency metrics like service quality, turnaround time, and cost management within Bangkok's spa sector. This lack of empirical evidence hinders the development of targeted strategies to address the current workforce crisis.

Therefore, this research aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the influence of eight core HRM dimensions on the operational efficiency of personnel in Bangkok's massage and spa businesses. By integrating Human Capital Theory with practical operational metrics, this study seeks to provide a data-driven framework for elevating industry standards and ensuring sustainable growth in a competitive global market.

## Literature Review

**Theoretical Foundations of Human Resource Management in the Wellness Industry** The strategic alignment of Human Resource Management (HRM) with operational goals is pivotal in labor-intensive sectors such as the wellness industry, where the service provider is inseparable from the service product. This study synthesizes three foundational theories to explicate the mechanisms through which HRM practices influence operational efficiency in Bangkok's massage and spa businesses.

Gary Becker's **Human Capital Theory** (1964) provides the primary economic justification for regarding spa personnel not merely as operational expenses, but as high-value assets. Becker distinguishes between *general training* (transferable skills) and *specific training* (skills unique to the firm). In the context of Thai traditional massage, where technique and therapeutic

knowledge are nuanced, investment in specific training directly correlates with enhanced service quality and revenue generation. When spa operators invest in upskilling therapists—transforming raw labor into specialized human capital—they reduce error rates and elevate the therapeutic outcome, which constitutes the "Quality" dimension of operational efficiency. This theoretical perspective supports the argument that the "skills gap" currently plaguing Bangkok's post-pandemic recovery is essentially a deficit in human capital investment (Global Wellness Institute, 2023).

Complementing the economic view, Victor Vroom's **Expectancy Theory** (1964) offers a psychological framework for understanding therapist motivation, particularly regarding the "Time" and "Quantity" dimensions of efficiency. Vroom posits that motivation is a function of Expectancy, Instrumentality, and Valence. In the Thai spa context, compensation structures are frequently performance-based, relying heavily on commissions and client tips. Consequently, the *Instrumentality*—the belief that serving more clients or performing higher-value treatments leads to greater financial reward—is exceptionally high. Furthermore, the *Valence* (value) of these monetary rewards is significant for the workforce demographic. Therefore, transparent compensation management acts as a catalyst, motivating personnel to optimize their service delivery speed and manage turnaround times effectively to maximize their daily client intake without compromising standards.

However, motivation alone does not ensure retention or long-term efficiency. Frederick Herzberg's **Two-Factor Theory** addresses the industry's chronic turnover rates by distinguishing between *Hygiene Factors* and *Motivators*. Hygiene factors, such as base salary and workplace safety, do not generate satisfaction but prevent dissatisfaction. In the post-COVID-19 era, the "Safety and Health" dimension of HRM has elevated from a regulatory compliance issue to a critical hygiene factor; therapists must feel physically safe from infection risks to perform adequately. Conversely, *Motivators* such as recognition, professional growth, and skill certification drive superior performance. Chen and Wu (2023) reinforce this in their analysis of the Asian spa industry, finding that while competitive pay prevents attrition, it is the culture of continuous learning and organizational support that significantly amplifies operational performance.

**Defining Operational Efficiency in the Service Context** While efficiency is often viewed through a manufacturing lens, this study adapts the classical definition by Peterson and Plowman (1953) to the service-oriented nature of the wellness sector. Operational efficiency is herein defined as the optimization of resources to achieve organizational goals through four distinct metrics:

1. **Quality:** The precision of massage techniques and the therapeutic value delivered, minimizing customer complaints and re-work.
2. **Quantity:** The capacity of personnel to serve a maximum number of clients per shift while maintaining physical endurance.
3. **Time:** The adherence to service duration standards and the minimization of idle time between sessions.
4. **Cost:** The judicious use of consumables (oils, herbs, linens) and energy resources to maximize profit margins.

**Empirical Evidence** Recent empirical studies substantiate the link between robust HRM systems and these efficiency metrics. Johnson et al. (2021), in a global study of hospitality practices, demonstrated that integrated HRM systems—specifically those prioritizing training and development—account for significant variance in employee productivity. Specific to the region, Chen and Wu (2023) identified that in Asian spa contexts, training programs that blend technical skills with soft skills (service orientation) are the strongest predictors of service quality. Furthermore, local data indicates that establishments with structured performance appraisal systems experience lower variance in service delivery times, suggesting that feedback mechanisms are crucial for standardization (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2023).

**Conceptual Framework** Based on the synthesis of these theories and empirical findings, the research model posits those eight dimensions of HRM function as Independent Variables: Human Resource Planning, Recruitment and Selection, Training and Development, Compensation Management, Performance Appraisal, Labor Relations, Safety and Health, and Organization Development. These variables are hypothesized to exert a direct positive influence on the Dependent Variable, Operational Efficiency, as measured by Quality, Quantity, Time, and Cost.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study adopts a quantitative research design utilizing a cross-sectional survey methodology to empirically investigate the causal relationships between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and operational efficiency. This approach was selected to provide a statistically rigorous analysis of the "factors" influencing performance within the massage and spa industry, moving beyond anecdotal evidence to identify generalizable patterns. The research design focuses on testing the degree of influence that eight specific HRM dimensions exert on the operational outputs of service personnel in Bangkok.

### **Population and Sampling Procedures**

The target population for this research comprises operational personnel currently employed in massage and spa businesses registered with the Department of Health Service Support. As of the latest fiscal year, there are 832 registered establishments within the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration area. To ensure the findings are representative of this expansive sector, the sample size was calculated using the formula proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Based on the total population parameters, a sample size of 265 respondents was determined to be sufficient for achieving a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

The sampling process utilized a simple random sampling technique. This probability sampling method was chosen to minimize selection bias and ensure that personnel from establishments of varying sizes and locations within Bangkok had an equal probability of inclusion, thereby enhancing the external validity of the results.

### **Research Instrument**

The primary instrument for data collection was a self-administered, structured questionnaire divided into three distinct sections:

1. **Demographic Data:** This section gathered background information on respondents, including gender, age, education level, and tenure, to establish the profile of the workforce.
2. **HRM Practices (Independent Variables):** This section comprised questions measuring eight specific dimensions of HRM: Human Resource Planning, Recruitment and Selection, Training and Development, Compensation Management, Performance Appraisal, Labor Relations, Safety and Health, and Organization Development.
3. **Operational Efficiency (Dependent Variable):** This section assessed efficiency across four standardized metrics adapted for the service industry: Quality (service excellence), Quantity (client volume), Time (speed and punctuality), and Cost (resource optimization).

All items regarding HRM practices and operational efficiency were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "Strongly Disagree" and 5 represented "Strongly Agree." To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted with a non-sample group of 40 personnel. The internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The analysis yielded coefficients exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70 for all variables, confirming that the instrument was consistent and reliable for the full-scale study (Cronbach, 1951).

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was performed using statistical software to ensure precision. Descriptive statistics, including mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (S.D.), were utilized to interpret the general levels of HRM implementation and efficiency perceived by the respondents.

To test the research hypothesis, Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was employed. This inferential statistical method was selected to identify the optimal set of predictor variables (HRM dimensions) that significantly influence the dependent variable (Operational Efficiency). The stepwise approach automatically selects the most statistically significant predictors while excluding those that do not contribute to the model's explanatory power. Prior to regression analysis, the data were rigorously screened for multicollinearity using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values and Tolerance levels. This step ensures that the independent variables are not highly correlated with one another, thereby validating the accuracy of the regression coefficients.

## Results and Discussion

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

The descriptive analysis of the 265 respondents reveals a demographic profile characteristic of the Bangkok metropolitan wellness sector. The workforce is predominantly female (82%), reflecting the traditional gender composition of the Thai spa industry. The age distribution is concentrated within the 30–50 year bracket (64%), suggesting a workforce that possesses moderate life experience but potentially varies in formal education. Educational backgrounds are diverse, with a significant portion holding vocational certificates or secondary education degrees, while a smaller segment possesses bachelor's degrees, primarily in management or health-related fields. This profile underscores the industry's reliance on vocational skills over

academic qualifications, aligning with the operational reality where manual dexterity and service intuition are paramount.

### Hypothesis Testing and Statistical Analysis

The core hypothesis, positing that Human Resource Management (HRM) practices significantly influence operational efficiency, was tested using Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis. The model confirms that the eight HRM dimensions collectively predict operational efficiency with high statistical significance ( $R^2 = 0.685$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The stepwise procedure isolated specific variables that exert the most profound impact, revealing a distinct hierarchy of influence among the HRM practices.

#### Key Finding 1: The Primacy of Training and Development

Training and Development emerged as the most significant predictor of operational efficiency, exhibiting the highest standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.35$ ). In the context of massage and spa services, the "product" is indistinguishable from the skill of the provider. Unlike manufacturing, where efficiency is machine-dependent, spa efficiency relies on the therapist's physical technique and anatomical knowledge. Establishments investing in rigorous training protocols—covering both traditional Nuad Thai techniques and modern therapeutic modalities—report substantially lower error rates (Quality) and optimized service durations (Time). This finding validates Human Capital Theory, demonstrating that specific training transforms raw labor into high-value assets capable of delivering superior therapeutic outcomes with minimal resource wastage.

#### Key Finding 2: Compensation as a Driver of Stability

Compensation Management was identified as the second most influential factor ( $\beta = 0.25$ ). The regression analysis indicates that fair and transparent pay structures—specifically those integrating base salaries with performance-based commissions—are critical for reducing turnover. In an industry plagued by high attrition rates, the stability of the workforce is directly linked to operational continuity. High turnover disrupts operational flow, necessitating constant retraining and causing service delays. By aligning financial rewards with output quantity (Expectancy Theory), spa operators stabilize their workforce, thereby maintaining consistent service speeds and reducing the hidden costs associated with recruitment and onboarding.

#### Key Finding 3: The Role of Organizational Development

Organizational Development, specifically the cultivation of a positive service culture, also showed a significant positive relationship with efficiency ( $\beta = 0.22$ ). A supportive organizational climate fosters "service-mindedness," an intangible yet vital component of the "Quality" metric. Personnel who feel integrated into a supportive culture exhibit higher levels of engagement and are more proactive in managing client needs, which streamlines the service delivery process and enhances the overall customer experience without incurring additional physical costs.

### Discussion

These findings align with global trends in the hospitality sector while highlighting unique nuances of the Thai context. Consistent with Johnson et al. (2021), who emphasized the universality of training in global hospitality performance, this study confirms that skill

acquisition remains the bedrock of service efficiency. Similarly, the results corroborate Chen and Wu (2023), whose study of the Asian spa industry highlighted the critical interplay between technical skill and service quality.

However, the Thai context introduces specific variables not always present in general hospitality literature. Notably, the influence of Safety and Health practices was found to be a more significant predictor of efficiency than in comparable Western studies. This deviation can be attributed to Thailand's strategic "Medical Hub" policy and the strict regulatory environment enforced by the Ministry of Public Health. Unlike general relaxation spas elsewhere, Thai establishments often operate under quasi-medical standards. Compliance with hygiene protocols is not merely a legal formality but a component of operational speed; staff proficient in safety protocols can turn over treatment rooms faster and with greater confidence. Thongchai (2020) argues that in the Thai organizational context, adherence to such standards is often viewed as a proxy for professional discipline, directly influencing the "Quality" dimension of efficiency.

Furthermore, the prominence of Organizational Development reflects the collectivist nature of Thai workplace culture. As noted by Sukanaya (2019) in her study of Thai manufacturing and service sectors, strong employee relations and a cohesive culture buffer against burnout, a common efficiency killer in physically demanding roles. Consequently, operational efficiency in Bangkok's spa sector is not achieved solely through mechanistic speed but through a holistic blend of technical mastery, financial security, and cultural cohesion.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

**Conclusion** The empirical evidence presented herein dismantles the archaic view of Human Resource Management (HRM) as a mere administrative necessity, repositioning it as a core strategic driver within Bangkok's wellness economy. As the massage and spa sector navigates the volatile post-pandemic landscape, operational efficiency has ceased to be solely a function of cost control; it is now intrinsically linked to the optimization of human capital. This study conclusively demonstrates that the "quality" and "time" dimensions of efficiency are heavily dependent on continuous skill development and strategic compensation structures. In an industry where the service provider is the product, the stagnation of skill acquisition or the demoralization of the workforce through inadequate pay structures results in immediate operational degradation. Therefore, for Bangkok to maintain its competitive edge as a global medical hub, spa operators must view their workforce not as a variable cost to be minimized, but as a critical asset class requiring sustained investment and strategic management.

**Academic Contribution** Theoretically, this research extends the application of Gary Becker's Human Capital Theory beyond traditional corporate or manufacturing settings into the specific, high-touch context of the Thai wellness economy. While classical theory emphasizes general education, this study highlights the disproportionate impact of specific technical training—encompassing both physiological knowledge and traditional Nuad Thai techniques—on operational outcomes. It provides a validated framework for understanding how intangible assets, such as service culture and therapist motivation, translate into tangible efficiency metrics like turnaround time and resource utilization in the hospitality sector.

**Managerial Recommendations** To elevate operational standards, stakeholders must adopt a proactive approach to HRM:

**For Spa Owners and Operators:** Management must transcend the baseline of minimum wage compliance. Implementing performance-based incentives rooted in Expectancy Theory is essential; when therapists perceive a direct correlation between their effort (service quality/quantity) and their reward (commissions/bonuses), operational speed and consistency improve. Furthermore, operators should institutionalize structured "Upskilling" programs that hybridize traditional wisdom with modern therapeutic standards. Establishing clear career pathways—from junior therapist to senior specialist or trainer—will address the "valency" of rewards, satisfying the psychological need for growth and reducing turnover.

**For Government and Policy Makers:** The Ministry of Public Health, through the Department of Health Service Support, should enforce stricter certification standards. Regulatory frameworks must evolve to ensure that the "Quality" dimension of efficiency remains globally competitive. This includes mandating periodic recertification for therapists to ensure adherence to safety and hygiene protocols, which this study identified as critical predictors of operational efficiency in the "Medical Hub" context.

**Limitations and Future Research** This study was confined to quantitative data collected within the Bangkok Metropolitan area. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the qualitative nuances of therapist burnout or the specific operational dynamics of resort-based spas in tourist-centric provinces like Phuket or Chiang Mai. Future research should employ mixed-method approaches to explore these psychological factors in depth and conduct comparative studies across different geographical tourism clusters to broaden the generalizability of the findings.

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