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## **Gender Imbalance in the Hospitality Industry: A Case of General Managers of Five-Star Hotels and Resorts in Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is a research proposal comprising of three sections: introduction, literature review, and methodology. The study explores a possible gender imbalance in the hospitality industry while the study focuses on general managers of five-star hotels and resorts in Thailand. Based on this possible phenomenon about gender corresponding to the research, the cultural dimension of Thailand influencing Thai people is applied by using Hofstede's cultural dimension, Globe dimension, Inglehart's model, and the characteristics of Thai people by Komin to determine the specification of Thai cultures. The study will also explore hotel general manager's competencies and the relationship from the influence of Thai cultures toward hotel general manager's characteristics to explore new knowledge via Thai cultures and general manager position in five-star hotels and resorts to determine gender balance. This paper also provides a conceptual framework to generalize Thai cultural dimensions and general manager's competencies toward gender imbalance. The researcher employs a mixed qualitative and quantitative research method to explore gender imbalance and obtain useful results of gender phenomenon in service industry.

**Keywords:** Gender imbalance, five-star hotels and resorts, Thailand, general manager



## Introduction

As Thailand is well known as one of the most famous tourist destinations in Asia, to accommodate tourists, there are up to 10,756 accommodations in the Booking database (Booking, 2020). Some tourists may want to stay in the most luxurious and comfortable hotels. Therefore, they tend to choose to stay in five-star properties. They are defined as the highest level of service accommodation with comfort and luxury of service and amenity (Guillet & Law, 2010). Considering the number of five stars properties in Thailand, this study selects Booking. From its database, there are up to 381 five-star properties (Booking, 2020). Statistically, females generally hold general manager positions; nevertheless, males still run the top positions. This study collects the statistic from five-star properties' samples in Thailand listed in Booking's database. The researcher searched on the information from each property's website one by one. One hundred seventy-one properties reveal that 152

(89%) are males, and 19 (11%) are females. To further investigate gender imbalance, potential implications of cultural characteristics in Thailand which likely determine the practices. National cultures play an influential role in people's practices. Likewise, organizational cultures are also considered an important aspect of grooming employees' behaviors. Organizations provide essential elements via political, cultural, social, and personal environments (Belak, 2016). Based on Thai cultures, they might affect some extents that this study would like to investigate. Due to this gender characteristics phenomenon, four main reasons explained why this topic should be explored and considered in the hospitality research field.

First, not many researches about gender issues, especially in the hospitality field; it is hard to study males and females. Moreover, in the past, gender issues might not be an interesting issue, unlike nowadays. People tend to be more open about gender, as we can see from social media. However, in

Thailand, there are little researches been done about gender. Second, the initial investigation of available data showed that nowadays, gender issues' awareness building became one of the organization practices for many industries, especially in leadership. This study will allow readers to know the rational reasons for the gender imbalance in hotels and resorts of the general manager position, which can be implied the ways to promote gender equality of leader position in hotel workplaces. Hence, this links to big gap knowledge to extract reasons for how woman leadership is perceived in the general

manager position in five-star properties. Third, the study benefits Thailand's five-star properties with an in-depth understanding of the common characteristics of gender balance and how this influences their guests' perception. This research will also explore the specifications of five-star properties based on the survey outcomes of the responses towards the gender phenomenon of the general manager. Fourth, the researcher explores how characteristics of Thai people affect gender in/balance considering the presence of rich tradition and culture and limited researches on cultural dimensions in the context of the five-star properties. Based on the analysis mentioned above of current situations and previous researches, this study can be highlighted with five main research objectives.

To examine gender im/balance phenomenon from the lens of the general manager position in five-star hotels and resorts in Thailand.

To identify gender characteristics by linking them with the cultural dimensions that may influence gender issue based on im/balance of the general manager position in five-star hotels and resorts in Thailand

To examine factors of Thai cultures that may influence gender issue based on im/balance of general manager position in five-star hotels and resorts in Thailand

To explore the relationship between the influence of Thai cultures and five-stars hotels and resorts general manager position's characteristics in Thailand

To identify factors from the general manager position's characteristics that may influence gender issue based on im/balance in five-star hotels and resorts in Thailand.

## Literature review

Culture invariably defines the choices of decisions and practices on organizational practices. Hofstede's cultural dimension is one of the prominent theories of national culture. There are six dimensions from his study. The framework was developed, and his research was done at IBM, in which all surveys were from IBM (Hofstede, 1980). Some researches stated that Hofstede's dimension is a tool to generalize national culture with relevant and credible information (Blodgett, Bakir & Rose, 2008).

Hofstede's cultural comparative results revealed that Thailand served the purpose of indicating an Asian aspect, having 'high power distance,' which implied individuals' inequality, and people tended to accept inequalities in society. By Hofstede's definition, a high power distance score refers to the inequality of authority (Khlif, 2016). Hence, managers in a country with a high



power distance level tend to have strong decision-making authority (Hofstede, 2001). Another cultural concern is individualism. It represents the country's degree of whether people support individual or collective achievement (Khlif, 2016). Thailand shows that collectivism is dominated. It refers to the self-image that people tend to define themselves as "We" and they have to make sure that they belong to the 'in-group' so that the group itself takes care of them in terms of security (Hofstede, 2001). Also, another cultural dimension is uncertainty avoidance. It shows the condition of stressful acceptance in society for an unknown future (Hofstede, 2011). Thailand focuses on avoiding high uncertainty and providing strict rules, regulations, and policies without question (Khlif, 2016). Hofstede's dimension also represents masculinity versus femininity. A low masculinity level means that country contributes to the importance of relationships and modesty (Khlif, 2016). Thailand presents itself as a submissive country, where expressing quality of life and standing out from the group is not seen as an admirable trait. Consequently, it shows that society is less assertive and competitive.

The next dimension is long-term and short-term orientation. It refers to the choice of people's endeavors for the future or the present and past (Hofstede, 2011); it shows the relevant links to how people maintain their past or nostalgia to deal with present and future challenges. Long-term orientation refers to flexible orientation implying to establish good relationships and openness for strong ties in the future (Khlif, 2016), known as a pragmatic approach encouraging efforts in modern practice (Hofstede, 2011). However, Thailand represents a country with a low score on this dimension. It reflects that people embraced the norms and traditions; people have strong values in national practices and cultures, and the acts of societal change may be perceived as a suspicion. The last dimension is indulgence-restraint. It presents the level of gratification versus control for basic desires to enjoy lives (Hofstede, 2011). Thailand's score ranks at a moderate level. The result implied a balance between individual opinion and expression.

In addition to Hofstede dimension's model, GLOBE dimension is another cultural framework widely utilized to predict national cultures' outcomes. Globe research program was introduced in 1994; it grows its knowledge with 62 societies, establishing the attributes of cultures and global behaviors (Messner & Schäfer, 2015). GLOBE dimension suggests up to 9 dimensions based on literature. First, Thailand serves as a slightly low-performance orientation country. In general, most

countries have high values in this dimension, but they do not give importance to what they value practically. From this dimension, it shows that Thai people appraise good connections and relationships in the workplace, which can be counted as rewards rather than innovation or knowledge. Thailand's score implied a low assertiveness country from both practice and value. Thai people are mild in general because they nurture relationships. Being too assertive can be regarded as a bad personality and attitude which impact others' feeling.

The next dimension is a future orientation. Thailand has high scores for value, but a low score for practice; it shows that people look forward to planning and gratifying what they can do in the future.

Nevertheless, the value of future orientation is viewed as ideas and imagination and not reality. Humane orientation dimension, Thailand's score is relatively high for value, which means that Thai society tends to care and be sensitive to others in terms of feeling, perception, and harmony. If there are problems and mistakes, they are tolerant of keeping quiet and advise. Furthermore, practical styles are indirect to save the atmosphere and maintain good relations with each other. Moreover, Thailand obtained a medium score in the institutional collectivism dimension, which implied that Thai people demonstrated self-dedication to the organization. In practice, Thailand's scored high, which shows that Thais tend to be with others and practice what the majority because they take responsibility in the team. If one decides to do something alone, that person will be distinguished from a group in the Thai context.

The next dimension is gender egalitarianism. Thai people perceive gender equality based on the score of value, which falls into a moderate level. The result implies that people do not push for gender equality and do not discriminate. However, practically, it is different. Gender inequality still exists in Thai culture and society. Thais may not accept because they value equality as they do not express and show their attitudes toward gender inequality based on their perception. However, unequal gender practice exists in societies such as the workplace. People might practice it without consideration or awareness about gender inequality as people can notice that some jobs are mostly handed to men. Even they do not say directly that some jobs are handed to men, they know it in general. Another dimension is power distance. Thailand does not show attention via a value that much. However, it is extremely different when it comes to practice. Thais accept and practice status privileges such as position, age, education, job, and others. Also, people obey authorities and people who have high power. Thus,



they tend to follow traditions and pass to newcomers. In the last dimension, Thailand reaches a high level of uncertainty avoidance via value. It means that Thai people value highly toward rules, norms, and regulations in society and

organization because they believe that they can help to alleviate unpredictable situations that may happen in the future as much as possible. However, practically, the Thailand score shows the opposite outcomes. It represents that even there are many rules and regulations which people assume to have to ensure their lives, but they do not practice.

Inglehart's cultural method is relied on two main dimensions to explain cultural differences across the world via its borders: the traditional versus secular-rational values and survival versus self-expression values (Yeganeh, 2013). The first dimension is the traditional and secular-rational value dimension reflecting the contrast whether traditions and religions of societies are very important or not (Inglehart, 2008). By contrast, societies with secular-rational values are considered by the opposite side, which they regard as rational values. They concern about interpersonal communication and individualism rationally that democratic regimes govern people with less favoritism via traditions (Yeganeh, 2014). The second dimension of Inglehart is survival and self-expression values. Societies characterized by survival values emphasize materialist orientations showing low levels of well-being and tend to be intolerant for out-groups because they focus on hard work more than interpersonal trust and tolerance, and imagination (Inglehart, 2008). Furthermore, this survival dimension can be seen in undeveloped countries that those values may lead to corruptive behaviors (Yeganeh, 2014). On the other hand, self-expression values emphasize subjective well-being, quality of life, and self-expression (Inglehart, 2008).

Thailand is pointed to almost the middle of this map; even though the score does not show at an extreme level in the first dimension, Thailand negatively scores on traditional/secular-rational values around -0.3. It means that Thailand is a traditional oriented country. Also, societies value in power and favoritism that people tend to obey as what used to be in the past. Although these attitudes might not be expressed extremely directly in daily life, people get used to and have practiced. In the second dimension, Thailand scores at a positive level for survival/self-

expression value. With a score of 0.1, it shows that Thailand has a slight self-expression value, but it can be interpreted as neutral at the same time. People may have self-expression toward trust and quality of life, but the practices are limited and cannot be expressed directly in any organization. Because Thai cultures are concerned about traditions in which seniority and power status are important, self-expressions may be blinded to show from individuals. Hence, people keep remaining strong traditions and cultures softly to maintain a good relationship and harmony in societies. Practically toward gender, traditions are prioritized that males seem to dominate the leader role relating to characteristics of Thai people.

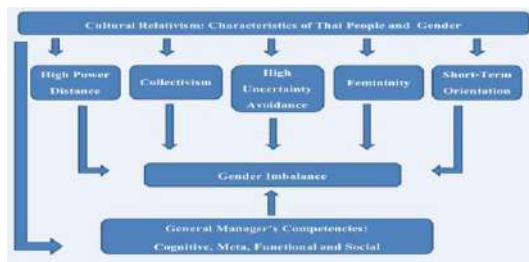
Furthermore, Thai women are characterized by the highest concern for family, peaceful, and no-conflict life, while the low value for freedom of politics and societal concern issues with low assertiveness (Komin, 1991). On the other hand, Thai men are characterized by a social-oriented concern for power and politics carrying ego values via their self-esteem, success in life and career, social recognition, freedom, and status, which they maintain more other-oriented than women (Komin, 1991). Apart from the gender issue, religion can represent national culture. Buddhism is the main religion, with 95% of the Thai population that did not influence social change (Komin, 1989). It affects Thai cognitive perception throughout caring for others, being helpful, and believing in faith and spiritual life. Also, people use Buddhist teachings to explain Thai social behaviors via individual emphasis, tolerance, and non-violence that have been used to characterize Thai attitudes and social behaviors (Komin, 1991). Therefore, Thai cultures are characterized by social relations.

Apart from gender issues, the nature of leadership competencies may influence the gender imbalance phenomenon. General Manager's competencies are classified based on job function and individual personality (Bharwani & Talib, 2017). In the job tasks, competencies relate to the basis of attitude and ability to perform given works. Based on the general manager's competencies study, there are four aspects relating to leader competencies. First, cognitive competencies are interpreted as knowledge related directly to an individual (Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). Second, functional competencies are interpreted as skills related to job-specific skills (Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). Third, social competencies are interpreted as attitudes and behaviors related to interpersonal attitude and individual behaviors and the ability to interact with other people (Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005).





Fourth, meta-competencies interpreted as motives and traits relate to the ability to understand, adapt and handle the situation to get new competencies or use existing competencies when each situation should be handled (Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005).



This conceptual model is based on rational cultural frameworks such as Hofstede, Globe dimension, Inglehart, and characteristics of Thai people. This study applies five keywords to group Thai cultural dimensions: high power distance, collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, femininity, and short-term orientation. First, Thailand serves as a country with high power distance as Hofstede's study and Globe dimension while people are strict to traditions from Inglehart's Thais' model and characteristics. Hence, it can be inferred that Thai people give high value to hierarchical practices while they keep them as traditional ways. Hofstede identified power distance as a societal value of the extent to which a society accepts inequality (Hofstede, 1980). In Thailand, managers are expected to give subordinates authority who cannot approach and make decisions, which is one of the most important managers' competencies. This hierarchical management style may affect particular general manager positions competencies influencing gender

imbalance because people may assume that males could make rational decision-making effectively. Second, Thailand represents collectivism. From a previous study, the individualism dimension that shows people's level in society integrates into groups (Hofstede, 1980). Moreover, the Globe dimension represents that Thailand indicates high institutional and in-group collectivism toward practices. Therefore, it concerns about relationships with non-confrontational behaviors. People prefer to strictly follow traditional practices because most people have been doing from the past and do not want to oppose others' ideas. Thailand has been practicing collectivism for many years, as we can see that most

leaders are men, such as the king and prime minister. Then, male represents as a symbol of leadership, so it may transfer and pass this value to now as a social value that people may focus on.

Third, uncertainty avoidance captures the extent of how ambiguity and uncertainty are desirable, and people tend to minimize it or not (Hofstede, 2001). In Hofstede's study, Thailand is recognized as a high uncertainty avoidance country and represents a high-value score in the Globe dimension with low assertiveness. Furthermore, from Thai characteristics, they tended to minimize surprising incidences because they focus on traditions that people have practiced toward religious beliefs, harmonious relations, and self-security. It means that they try to avoid high uncertainty avoidance as much as possible via taking risks, unfamiliar situations, and losing their face and others because people would like to minimize contrasts and problems that may come from misunderstanding.

Fourth, Thailand represents femininity toward the surrounding environment from people's behaviors. Femininity represents the environment sustain via a relationship in which quality of life and negotiation become very important (Hofstede, 2011). As Thailand has score via femininity and neutral from survival and self-expression orientation in Inglehart's study, Thais value highly in interpersonal communication influencing social relations. Also, Thai people focus on high human orientation via practice while keeping low future and performance orientation, although they value them higher. Some Thais may have wider perspectives for their performance and future, but in their real lives, they cannot practice and show their plans directly to others or in public because they may be regarded as showing off which they tend not to be distinguished from others. Therefore, competition is not aggressive because people value groups as harmony and perceive that it is more important; this relates to manager four competencies because the characteristics and the managerial style are necessary to determine effective workforce and work diversity. Also, the traditional value could apply to this dimension based on cultures. Thus, it leads to competencies of executive positions influencing gender imbalance.

Fifth, Thailand represents a short-term orientation. From Hofstede and Globe dimension represents short-term orientation toward traditions such as collectivism, low assertiveness, high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, and low gender egalitarianism because Thai society is strict to traditions as indicators to guide Thais.



Also, Inglehart's study represents that Thailand focuses on tradition and characteristics of Thai people show traditional ways based on Buddhism, harmony, soft approach, and others with the social smooth. Short-term orientation indicates that society prefers to follow traditions strictly because they value what they have done in the past. Moreover, they tend not to prefer the change that is in contrast to the traditional values. Hence, traditional style and practice may be essential in representing a leader relating to leader competencies from executive positions.

Apart from cultural dimensions, the four competencies of the general manager should be considered as well. Cognitive competencies are considered rational thinking, such as systematic and pattern thinking with objectivity (Wheeler, 2008). It directly affects individual capabilities of how general managers manage the strategy to be practical. They have to develop a plan logically to solve problems with critical thinking and decision-making rationally. Apart from knowledge, skills, or functional competencies are important too. Managerial success needs to have a reliable set of managerial skills in which technical skills or functional skills support organization (Tonidandel, Braddy & Fleedor, 2012). General managers need to carry good skills to work under pressure, and also some specific skills are required, such as yield management or computer skill. Next is a social competency concerning employee engagement (Kisamore, Jawahar, Liguori, Mharapara & Stone, 2012). Therefore, interpersonal communication is very important because managers need to have effective communication. Meta competencies are concerned with personal and conceptual because it relates to intrinsic ability to handle incidences based on their competencies and personal experiences which have groomed their characteristics and personalities from self-identities.

### **Gender Imbalance**

People generally believe that leadership was restricted for male-only, as biology's premise influenced that male is equal to the leader while there is stereotype viewing women as less talented than men (Appelbaum, Audet & Miller, 2003). It links to leadership effectiveness and leader characteristics that people perceive gender differently. Studies also indicated that male classifications were identified as a preferred leader rather than female (Kolb, 1999). Consequently, some people may think that women are incompetent than men based on biology and characteristics. However, nowadays, a woman is

promoted to work effectively in many organizations. Media woman representations via leadership positions are getting many interests (Mavin, Bryans & Cunningham, 2010).

Moreover, many media representations focus on gender leadership via social media such as websites, newspapers, advertisements, and photography (Mavin, Bryans & Cunningham, 2010). Even though the current trends support women's leadership more than before, traditional gender stereotypes still exist. Some gender studies claimed that males are concerned with independent behaviors such as aggressiveness, push, and ambition, whereas women are associated with communal actions such as

support, kindness, and empathy (Patterson, Mavin & Turner, 2012). Gender characteristics can attribute to leadership style. A previous gender study then stated that male leaders could express anger without frightening their credibility, while a woman's credibility seems to be weak in subordinates' eyes (Kapasi et al., 2016). Thus, competencies and talent are considered by gender (Galloway, Kapasi & Sung, 2015) since people will look at appearance first.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-method. Qualitative research will first be carried out, comprising 20 questions divided into three sections, such as gender opinion: interviewee's background, cultural dimensions, and general manager's competencies. The questions are open-ended. Research instruments in this qualitative method are semi-structured and in-depth interview which will also be applied in three sectional questionnaires which questions can be swapped or paraphrased according to respondents' answers. After that, quantitative research will be carried out to compare the results. The same three sectional questionnaires will be used as a qualitative method. The first section is based on demography and general thinking about gender that they have experienced in their daily lives. After that cultural dimension section will be asked to score their employees' perspectives toward gender equality or inequality from their entire experiences. The last section is the general manager's competencies, which will be proved whether they influence gender imbalance. This study uses a semantic differential scale that is one type of opinion questions so that respondents could evaluate their level of gender imbalance in each category. The scales start from the lowest, which is 1 (strongly disagree) to the highest 5



(strongly agree) or 1 (male) and 5 (female). Since the topic mentions Thailand, five-star hotels, and resorts from all around will be selected. Twenty interviews of a five-star hotel and resort' general managers and headquarter officers will be conducted. All questions are translated in both Thai and English. Leximancer software programs will be used to evaluate.

For the quantitative method, since there are up to 251 of five-star hotels and resorts in Thailand (Booking, 2020), this study selects five-star hotels, both international and Thai chains. To get reliable numbers of samples, some previous researches show the appropriate numbers. As for the hotel in Mauritius, 12 general managers are selected to represent the hotel industry via their career patterns in a total of 88 hotels in 1998 (Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000). Hence, the representatives of this study represent 14 percent. Although the sample size of general managers is limited, it is a reliable representative through the insight pattern of a specific career, which further research can use the results to develop and extend this issue in the future (Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000). For the quantitative method, all executive positions are welcome and encouraged to participate. In general, there are approximately 8 to 10 executive positions' employees in five-star hotels and resorts, so this study will gather up to 200 respondents from 20 hotels and resorts to hand in validity and reliability along with qualitative. All 30 questionnaires are translated in both Thai and English to assist the respondents in understanding the questions. For the quantitative data, SPSS software will be used to examine the findings. ANOVA will be used to evaluate the results and hypotheses through gender imbalance throughout reject or non-reject. Then, all results will be explained in detail whether each variable has a significant or not.

### Conclusions

To sum up, this study explores the gender imbalance issue from the general manager position in five-star hotels and resorts in Thailand. It relates to relevant factors that influence gender imbalance based on two main factors, which are cultural dimension and general manager's competencies. The cultural dimension is based on Hofstede and Globe dimension, Inglehart's model, and the characteristics of Thai people by Komin. Also, general manager competencies will seek cognitive, meta, functional, and social competencies. They state in their relations via gender imbalance, which can cause this phenomenon, so this study aims to construct an

effective framework that benefits the gender issue in the hospitality industry in Thailand.

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