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Rapid Needs Assessment for Business Situations Management of a Selected Water Park Business in Nakhon Sawan Province During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This research article aims to (1) investigate the adverse impacts that affect the business situation of one Water Park in Nakhon Sawan province, (2) prioritize the organization's business management needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (3) examine the possible solutions to the adverse impacts from COVID-19 outbreak. A participatory qualitative research study was conducted with 12 executives (high-level management) of the Water Park business. Co-researchers (informants) were selected by the purposive sampling technique based on the criterion sampling technique. An In-depth interview and focus group interviews were chosen as the primary data collection techniques. Since this study was conducted with one Water Park business, the study was a case study data analysis. The research results found that the impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic on organizations, such as income scarcity, difficulties in operating the business, and employee sentiments, were issues that needed to be addressed urgently.

Keywords: Needs Assessment; Business Situations Management; COVID-19; Water Park Business

Introduction

The spread of the COVID-19 virus has had a significant impact on the global economy. In the middle of 2021, the spread of the COVID-19 new strains has contributed to the continued slowdown in global economic recovery. The world's financial crisis has also created business problems in Thailand. As Thailand is a major tourist destination, decreasing revenue from international travel suspension has resulted in a considerable stagnation for businesses in Thailand (The World

Bank, 2021). Since the global tourism industry was still unable to operate as an everyday activity, all hope in the tourism industry rested on domestic tourism. However, the problem of the COVID-19 epidemic still exists in Thailand as well (Kaendera & Leigh, 2021). The complicated steps to travel due to conditions regarding vaccination of Thai people and quarantine measures have affected the freedom of traveling to/in Thailand (TAT News, 2021). However, developed countries have a higher proportion of vaccinated people in their own countries.

Table 1 Thai economic status year 2020 – 2021

(%YoY)	2020	2021	
	The whole year	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
GDP (CVM)	-6.1	7.6	-0.3
Investment	-4.8	7.6	-0.4
Private investment	-8.4	9.2	2.6
Government investment	5.7	4.1	-6.0
Inflation	-0.8	2.4	0.7

Source: NESDC economic report year 2020-2021, (2021)

The aforementioned problems resulted in Thailand's GDP growth in 2020 decreasing to- 6.1 and -0.3 in quarter 3 of 2021. The GDP growth will continue to decline if the situation is not resolved. While there are many areas of government funding available to small and medium-sized businesses, it is still necessary to start rehabilitating and resolving problems at the internal organizational level (NESDC, 2021).

Travel conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic and the temporary suspension of tourist attractions have resulted in severe losses for Thailand's tourism sector (Marome & Shaw, 2021). The water park business in Nakhon Sawan province was also affected by the COVID-19 epidemic at a high level. The uncertain situation and loss of revenue of the water park business have resulted in a lot of confusion for the management and staff in running the business. Starting to revitalize, the company has to rely on well-prioritizing issues to reduce gaps and problems that may arise. In addition, the loss of the water park business must be resolved urgently.

Therefore, this research aimed to explore the business management needs of the water park business during the COVID-19 pandemic by applying rapid needs assessment procedure and providing some possible solutions and methods that could enhance the business ability while operating under the pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic. The process of resolving such issues

should be urgently established as soon as possible. Prompt and targeted troubleshooting could increase the likelihood of success, improve work efficiency and minimize problems during implementation. In participatory qualitative research, researchers and co–researchers shared their opinions through a focus group with an interview guide based on a semi–structured interview to prioritize problems and establish the views on solutions for the organization's best interest.

After identifying the adverse impacts of the COVID–19 epidemic from various departments, executives would understand the key points that are essential to be established in their business during the COVID–19 outbreak. The rapid needs assessment findings could help identify discrepancies between current competencies and expected competencies of the organization that need to improve during the Coronavirus 2019 pandemic.

Furthermore, the management team could provide a reasonable opportunity for employees to express their views regarding business gaps during the Coronavirus (COVID–19) epidemic situation. The well–organized rapid needs assessment process could systematically guide the managers to know what should be done and plan even better management strategies.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the adverse impacts that affect the business situation of one Water Park in Nakhon Sawan province.

2. To prioritize the organization's rapid business management needs during the COVID–19 pandemic.

3. To guide some possible business management solutions arising from the adverse impacts of the COVID–19 outbreak.

Literature Review

Rapid needs assessment

This study investigates the business management needs of one selected Water Park and Resort during the Coronavirus (COVID–19) epidemic. Since the COVID–19 epidemic directly affects business management and business growth, the management team also needs to assess the needs as soon as possible; therefore, the researchers applied a 'rapid needs assessment' as part of the HRD needs assessment. Rapid needs assessment means a process of providing a quick assessment immediately after a major disaster or emergency (USLegal, 2019). The needs assessment urgently

helps managers enhance organizational development and reduce the gaps in all business dimensions (ACAPS, 2020).

OCHA (2009) moreover described the same terminology that rapid needs assessment typically aims to provide information to answer the following questions; 1) what happened, 2) where did it happen, 3) who/what was affected, 4) what was the impact, 5) what resources already exist, 6) what are the humanitarian needs and gaps, 7) what are the particular highlighted concerns about the development of a situation or emerging threats, 8) what are the objectives of the intervention, and 9) how can one intervene, effectively.

The key rapid needs assessment strategies used to compile this research were 1) what was the impact on the business, 2) what was the damage suffered, and 3) what was the management viewpoint on the remedial action. 4) what problems have been addressed by management and what was the result, 5) what are the persistent adverse effects. The rapid needs assessment is a process that aims to analyze needs in an emergency or identify needs when having limited time. The nature of its questions is concise and directly indicates the required conditions. Thus, the rapid needs assessment would be suitable to reveal the management needs of the one selected Water Park and Resort during the Coronavirus outbreak.

Business situation management

Nowadays, the business environment and competition have changed dramatically. Knowledge management, business systems, and an understanding of changing management styles are essential for modern business people (Hock–Doepgen et al., 2021). Although there are no fixed rules in business administration, many experts have provided fundamental theories about business administration in many forms. Managerial work involves general management, processes management, roles management, and skills management (Tien, 2020). Whenever a problem arises with business factors, it results in the poor effectiveness of operating the business, and the terrifying consequence of those problems is the shutting down of the company. Therefore, solving business problems and knowing about managing business situations are crucial for business people and related parties (Harvard Business Review Press, 2017).

Impacts of COVID–19 on tourism and entertainment in Thailand

The impacts of COVID–19 on tourism revenue caused losses over 70 percent in 2020. The 70 percent of employees employed in food and beverages in the tourism field were in trouble when the business had to close (The National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020). Significantly this involved, job losses, reduced working hours, temporary business closure, and

reduced salaries (The World Bank, 2021). Although the spread of COVID–19 has caused tourism to flow away from the nation, the vaccination rate is slow, but the government has been helping people get vaccination slowly, step by step (Fletcher, 2021). Despite more vaccinations and lenient measures enabling theme parks to open, together with theaters and water parks, tourists are still concerned about contracting COVID–19 from playing on rides and spending time with others in the pools or limited areas. The existence of an amusement park business during the COVID–19 pandemic requires borrowing and cooperation with foreign investors. In addition, the revitalization of the entertainment business also requires enormous investments in space and human resource development (Jitpleecheep, 2022).

It can be seen that the whole tourism industry and the entertainment business are still concerned about the problem of attracting people. Effective business management gives entrepreneurs a greater chance of success. The needs assessment addresses the situation and should be acted on as soon as possible. Preparing the development path would provide business advantage and being ready to move forward as the situation improves in the future.

Research Framework

This qualitative research focuses on solving the problematic business situation of the one selected water park in Nakhon Sawan province. The framework was established in three steps, as shown in the following table:

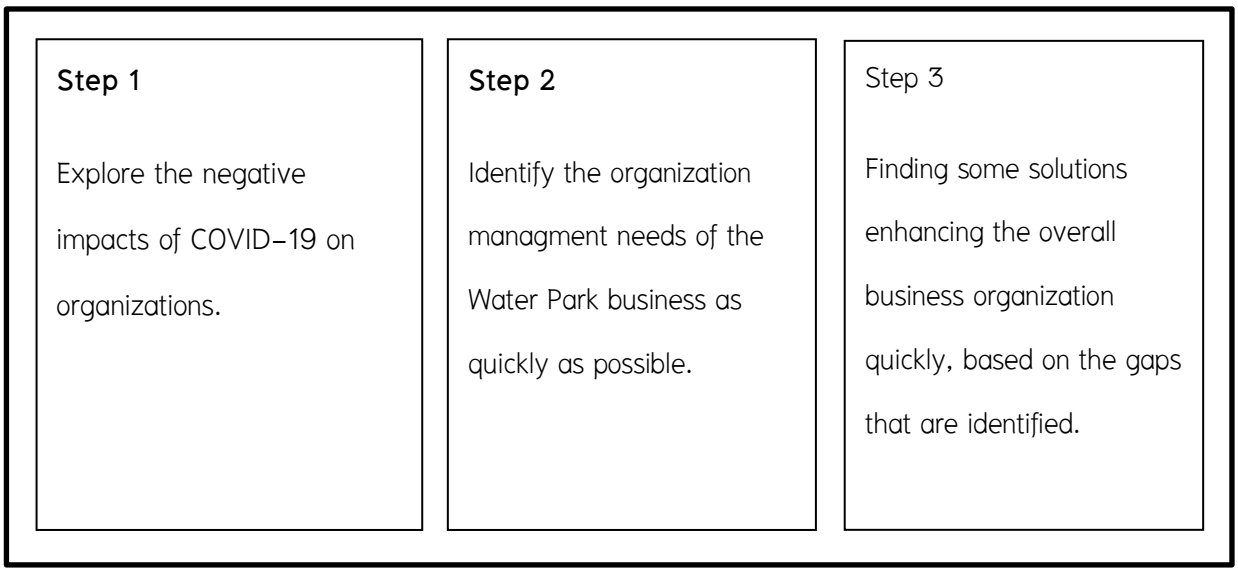


Figure 1 Research Framework **Source:** OCHA (2009)

Due to the impact of COVID–19, the water park business has been facing difficulty in managing financially and solving immediate problems; following the three steps mentioned in Figure 1 would help the organization foresee the ways to develop their business while working under the COVID–19 pandemic pressure. The three steps were described in detail in the Research Methodology as follows.

Research Methodology

The participatory research method was the method applied in this qualitative study. The Water Park located in Nakhon Sawan province was selected as a research field site. Purposive sampling as the criterion technique was used to identify the co–researchers (informants). To make sure that the researchers would acquire valuable information from the co–researchers, the researchers set up the criteria to select the co–researchers as follows:

1. The co–researchers have to have worked in the Water park for more than three years. The co–researchers who have worked in the Water park for more than three years would understand the changes in situations affected by the COVID–19 pandemic.

2. The co–researchers must be someone who is representative of each department or works as a department leader.

The interview schedules were developed according to the six types of interview questions suggested by (Patton, 2002). The six types of interview questions include; 1) Behavior/Experience Questions, 2) Option/Value Questions, 3) Feelings Questions, 4) Knowledge Questions, 5) Sensory Questions, and 6) Background/Demographic Questions.

An interview is a common form of data collection in case study research. Interviews or groups allow the researcher to attain rich, personalized information (Mason, 2002). The researchers followed the seven steps of interrelated activities, which consisted of 1) locating a site and individual, 2) gaining access and making rapport, 3) sampling purposefully, 4) collecting data, 5) recording information, 6) exploring field issues, and 7) storing data (Creswell, 2007).

The data collection procedure was divided into three steps as follows:

Step 1 investigating the adverse impacts that affect the business situation of one Water Park in Nakhon Sawan province

The co–researchers (managers from each department of the waterpark) would be in–depth interviewed by the researchers. The interview guide for the semi–structured interview was used as the tool. The main interview questions focus on understanding negative experiences within the

business departments, including individuals from the spread of COVID-19. The questions focused on co-researchers voices describing their feelings and experiences without leading questions from the researchers. This is to ensure that those responses are based on the facts of those affected by COVID-19.

Step 2 Prioritizing the organization's business management needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The needs of business situation management in this study were prioritized based on the severity of the problem and the level of immediate need for troubleshooting. The focus group interview was conducted in this step. The co-researchers were all the water park's HR departments, executives, and task managers.

Step 3 Guidelining the possible business management solutions due to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. This process applied a focus group interview to conduct the study. The high-level management team and senior water park consultants found the solution methods and summarized the conclusion as a manual plan.

Research findings

The first research objective is to investigate the adverse impacts of COVID-19 that affect the business situation of one Water Park in Nakhon Sawan province. To gain the most effective answers, it was essential to understand the co-researcher's experience while working under the pressure created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the main questions asked by researchers in collecting data were shown as follows; 1) Please describe your current business situation. (throw-away question, background question) 2) How does the COVID-19 pandemic impact you? (essential question) 3) In your opinion, how is your business impacted by COVID-19? (opinion question, essential question), 4) What is the most uneasy feeling you have experienced from what you recognized in your business caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 situation? (feeling question), 5) Which group of people do you think received the most impacts from the spread of COVID-19 in your business and how? (essential question), 6) How do you manage to deal with those impacts? (experience questions), 7) What are the results after attempting to deal with the problems? (experience question). 8) In your opinion, what essential points of the business should be developed as a top priority? (extra question, opinion question), 9) Why do you think that earlier points are essential to your business development? (probing question) etc. The following seven themes presented the issues in the water park business.

Theme 1: Business losses

Water parks are a service business that serves a large tranche of people throughout the year, but when the first wave of the COVID–19 pandemic emerged in Thailand, the water parks could not operate. The management team did not have any contingency plans and resolved to wait for improvement. Consequently, there was a loss of up to 2 million Baht due to water quality maintenance, including the cost of chemicals and cleaning labor and the electricity bill. During the second wave of COVID–19, the management team assigned employees to drain the water out of some pools to minimize the burden and cost of maintenance work. Consequently, the business encountered a severe loss of capital due to zero customers and finally reached the stage where the company was in a financially critical state.

Theme 2: Stress in the workplace issue

The study found that employees become overwhelmed at work, resulting in inefficient work output and internal relationship problems. Many factors contribute to the effects of this theme. The adverse impacts include the COVID–19 epidemic, which causes stress to management and is passed on to employees, being pressured both by colleagues and executives. Moreover, working against the clock, working in a job that does not match one's abilities, ignoring others' opinions, and multitasking, especially during the COVID–19 epidemic, when employees were forced to work on daily orders with jobs being shuffled around, also built a hostile atmosphere in the organization. As a result of losing profit, both the management and the employees were concerned and felt they had failed.

Theme 3: Unstable situation anxiety during the COVID 19 epidemic

Since a waterpark is a service business, some employees are concerned that they will come into contact with guests who might be infected with the virus. Furthermore, the stress from the loss of profit situation, as mentioned above, puts pressure on management to maintain the business—the unstable situation causes stress transmission to employees. Correspondingly, the government's announcement of the temporary closure of the water parks in Thailand has caused an overload status in the company. The overload status leads employees to experience anxiety about reduced working time and workdays or even job resignation because of the economic recession and the company not running smoothly.

Theme 4: Difficulties in managing food quality during the COVID–19 epidemic

In the service business, food and beverages are crucial because the quality of cooking is one way of achieving customer satisfaction. The spread of COVID–19 has made it more difficult for

the food and beverage department to manage its service. The Water park faces problems with cooking quality while COVID 19 is spreading, especially the cleanliness of the food from the customers' view. These include the perspective of the chefs towards cooking and how to present foods to customers. Moreover, the variety of food is also questioned by the customer.

Theme 5: Job rotation and employee new job tuning issues

The water park business is temporarily closed due to the COVID–19 outbreak, resulting in unnecessary staffing problems. As a result, management has devised a solution: introduce work rotation by assigning new responsibilities to workers. Unfortunately, the employee was unfamiliar with their new job and lacked experience, which resulted in many failures. Some workers are forced to perform several duties, which causes confusion and stress, and some workers are required to work on jobs that they do not want to do or which do not fit their skills, causing them to be unhappy at work. Furthermore, some employees are ordered to work with new coworkers with different work functions than they were used to. Therefore, the sense of a new position and the new coworkers requires both employees to spend time getting experience working together to complete the job as effectively as possible. However, the work's consistency is still not satisfactory.

Theme 6: Command relay problems and disobedience problems

The effect of doing the job rotation leads the employee to work in a position where they do not have enough ability to work—adjusting to new bosses and experiencing newly uncomfortable feelings while working. The mentioned reason led the managers to face command relay problems and disobedience problems.

The problem with order transfer and communication within the organization is based on different factors, such as the capability of the message sender and receiver, plus their physical and emotional state. Besides, the misinterpretation of the critical point of disrespect to the person giving the order is also a problem. Furthermore, non–compliance with the order or the hierarchy system affects work quality regardless of the positions and performance. Additionally, the language and words that lead to a negative response and the lack of emotional control during communication affect the firm's performance efficiency.

Theme 7: Employee encouragement and lacking motivation issue

All of the impacts mentioned in the above themes have resulted in employees feeling discouraged and hopeless at work. When the work environment is filled with anxiety and lack of motivation, some significant employees consider quitting, leading to a lack of talented employees in

the water park business in the future. The lack of motivation for employees results in inefficient work and drives the ongoing issues in managing the organization.

The second findings were the prioritized needs in the water park business management during the COVID–19 pandemic. Researchers and co–researchers prioritized the importance of solving problems systematically together. The results show two degrees of importance of the necessary level of urgency in resolving the issue, as presented in the next paragraph.

Needs that are significant and should be developed urgently consist of:

1) Employee encouragement and lacking motivation issue

2) Command relay problems and disobedience problems

3) Financial issue

4) Stress in the workplace issue

Needs that are significant and should be developed consist of:

5) Job rotation and employee new job tuning issue

6) Difficulties in managing food quality during the COVID–19 epidemic

7) Unstable situation anxiety during the COVID–19 epidemic

The research findings have shown that the need to address financial problems, stress and employee morale issues, and employee disobedience issues were listed as requiring urgent development. This is because those gaps directly affect the core business management system and deliver poor productivity in the organization. Job rotation and employee new job tuning issues, and unstable situation anxieties during the COVID 19 epidemic were prioritized as significant problems that should be developed due to these problems being caused by a change in the operating management system. Most executives in the organization understand that the COVID–19 pandemic is something that the organization cannot control, and changes in the work system in the organization regularly have to face adaptation problems. Finally, the issue of food quality control and food presentation should not be troubling since department staff can learn to perform appropriately according to the advice of the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand.

The third findings were the guideline of the possible business management solutions due to the adverse impacts of the COVID–19 outbreak.

The executives and senior consultants have proposed guidelines for the water park's management and possible solutions caused by the impacts of COVID–19 on the water park as follows.

1. The problem of lack of income can be solved by encouraging employees to do additional tasks such as selling future tickets and promoting the sale of organic vegetables grown in the water park area.

2. The problem of disobedience can be solved by building good relationships through the training process to enhance employee relations in the organization.

3. Work stress problems can be addressed by creating a positive working environment, providing employees with rest periods, enhancing positive communication in the organization, and educating the employees about COVID–19 prevention.

4. Everyone in the organization should exchange their opinions with an open mind to build good relationships. Encouraging each other could enhance employees' motivation to work. Moreover, the organization should provide a training course on morale building.

5. Managers should develop a knowledge of emotional control, positive communication, and command transmission to enable employees to obey and accomplish their tasks.

Discussion

The adverse impacts were that the business system was turbulent and created bad work outcomes due to all levels of employees being stressed. The research found that stress in the water park business starts from the loss of the business income. When the employees needed to work under the pressure of the COVID–19 pandemic also stressed all levels of the employees. Working in a hostile atmosphere led the employees to perform poorly and cause customer complaints.

Service businesses require direct customer contact, leading some employees to be worried about getting infected with the COVID–19 virus. As a result, sometimes it causes employees' feelings to be directly expressed through their facial emotions and body actions while serving, resulting in customer dissatisfaction.

Hofmann studied the masked smiles matter – employee verbal expertise and emotion were displayed during COVID–19. They found that the fear of being infected with COVID–19 has resulted in employees and customers wearing masks when using services and making purchases (Hofmann et al., 2021).

Another issue was the lack of morale and the poor relationship between the management team and employees. Executives are an essential factor in driving the business to achieve its goals. If executives have stress and cannot control their emotions, it will cause employees to become uncomfortable and unhappy at work accordingly (Apiwong, 2021). Some employees require

executives and managers to understand their different abilities and working styles. Each employee has different abilities even after finishing with the same grades. Some of the coresearchers claimed that each Water Park and Resort department had different working styles. Also, all employees in the organization had interpersonal skills, needs, and backgrounds in their life. Therefore, understanding the differences in employees' interpersonal skills would help the executives manage the water park more easily (Beenen et al., 2021). In the management field, diversity management plays a critical role in management.

Conclusions

The impact of the COVID–19 epidemic is unpredictable across the world. The global economy has been in widespread crisis, especially in the tourism industry. The survival of small to medium–sized businesses is a massive challenge in the era of the COVID–19 pandemic. In surviving as a company, it is imperative to address the real problems in the organization. Therefore, the use of the rapid needs assessment method is another method that organizations should consider and apply to resolve the situation in a timely way. Preparedness, anticipating upcoming problems, and adjusting management styles while working under the pressure of the viral epidemic are of the utmost importance that executives really should understand.

Additionally, the findings have shown that inefficient work is caused by morale problems and a lack of motivation among employees. Therefore, maintaining employees' physical and mental health is essential for enabling the organization to run its business smoothly while working under the pressure of the crisis.

Recommendations

The researchers have provided recommendations based on the findings as follows:

1. Recommendations for utilizing the research results

First, the process of assessing the needs of business situation management allows executives to see the direction of management better. Identifying the gaps requirements helps managers manage the problems while working in the COVID–19 pandemic.

Second, after a severe consultation meeting, it was found that gaps in management and work during the COVID–19 epidemic were still considerable. Applying the rapid needs assessment as the business management tool leads to understanding preliminary gaps in the organization.

The indirect benefit of identifying gaps is that managers are more alert to urgent resolutions, improving work environments results in smoother working.

Third, the opportunity for all departments to have open–minded discussions on issues is beneficial to building good relationships in the organization. Understanding at the departmental and individual levels allows executives to foresee directions in solving problems and developing at all levels in the future. Therefore, an in–depth study on how and how to implement open–minded discussions in the organization should keep continuing for the organization's highest benefit.

Fourth, knowledge of prioritization of needs, the prioritized possible solution methods, and learning management could be the basis for managers to formulate future corporate development plans.

2. Recommendations for future research

First, from the study results, it can be concluded that being pressured by adverse situations both within and outside the organization results in employees' stress and lack of morale. Therefore, inspiring employees to work can increase their competence and quality of work. Future research will be beneficial in exploring how to manage employees' psychological problems while working under the pressure of the COVID–19 economic crisis.

Second, it can be seen that COVID–19 caused the management team to be stressed. The work of managers who cannot plan long–term work and resolve revenue problems has resulted in the quality of work being below benchmarks. Therefore, it will be beneficial if future research would explore how to deal with the sudden concerns from the COVID–19 outbreak in organizations.

Third, the limitation of a qualitative study is the data collection technique which could mainly gain subjective data from the in–depth interviews and focus–group. After finding out the adverse impacts of the COVID–19 outbreak on the water wark's business situation from the management level, it would be better to do some quantitative studies to survey the majority of all employees working in the water park.

Fourth, business service necessity prioritization is the first step in business management. Prioritizing needs is a fundamental knowledge of management and employees at all levels. In addition, knowing the need for development in various dimensions of a business system can help the business continually develop.

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