

Abstract

‘Novices Learning “Positioning” Informally in Thai Tourism Workplaces: Five Case Studies’ is a study of five (5) new Thai graduates, three men and two women who entered employment in small intermediary service industry enterprise work places in the key tourism sector of the Thai economy in 2005 and 2007. Its main aim was to identify how these novices coped with the work that they were allocated. Methodology was qualitative, with simple prospective panel design involving follow-up for periods of up to 20 months. Data were collected in 2 phases by means of on-site visits to observe novices at work and collect work samples. Semi-structured interviews were held with novices, the Managing Directors of the enterprises they worked for and ‘Significant Others’ who directly supervised them.

Findings illuminate how tourism enterprises differ in structure and in the work that managers allocate novices. They illustrate the substance of the tasks assigned by management and how novices learned formally and informally in and beyond the immediate work place to undertake them. Enterprise size, ethos, work structures, nature of assigned tasks and cultural factors influenced their successful learning. Individual factors of confidence, commitment, willingness to learn, field specific and generic knowledge and skills acquired through degree studies influenced effectiveness in assigned roles.

Thai novice informal work-related service industry learning is a 3-stage process: **Stage 1:** Awareness-raising from external and internal stimulus. **Stage 2:** Response and decision-making - often solo, usually conscious and deliberate. **Stage 3:** Action reflecting adoption of customized ‘winning’ practices, role positioning for personal job satisfaction or enterprise positioning for market success – leading to desired outcome(s). Significant informal learning for selling was customizing to achieve enterprise goals. This study also proposed a ‘grounded’ evidence-based definition of informal work-related learning for Thai novices in service industry roles.