

Motivational Factors and Employee Loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill

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Abstract. This research aims to (1) examine the differences in work motivation factors and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill and (2) investigate the demographic factors affecting employee loyalty. The findings reveal that intrinsic motivation - such as achievement and work value - has a higher average than extrinsic motivation, such as recognition from others and rewards. Employee loyalty is most influenced by growth opportunities, while compensation and benefits have a relatively lower impact, suggesting that intrinsic motivation has a greater effect on employee loyalty than extrinsic factors. Regarding demographics, the results show a statistically significant negative relationship between department of employment and employee loyalty, indicating that employees from different departments exhibit varying levels of loyalty. Additionally, educational level negatively correlates with perceptions of benefits, implying that employees with different educational backgrounds view benefits differently. However, gender, age, and income do not significantly influence employee loyalty. The study utilized a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool, targeting employees of Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill, with a sample size of 432 and 302 valid responses. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and the data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Thailand is recognized as one of the world's major sugar exporters. In 2023, the country exported sugar valued at approximately USD 3.493 billion, accounting for about 1.2% of the nation's total export value and ranking third globally after Brazil and India (Thaipublica, 2025). The sugar industry is closely linked to the agricultural sector, particularly sugarcane farmers who supply the primary raw material for production. Moreover, the industry plays a vital role in driving both local and national economies through employment generation, household income, and value-added agricultural products.

However, the industry faces several challenges, including global sugar price volatility, the effects of climate change (e.g., drought), and trade policies of key partner countries such as India, all of which impact the sector's income stability (SCB EIC, 2024). These factors contribute to work-related uncertainty, affecting job satisfaction and employee engagement, especially among permanent staff who face greater risks regarding job security.

Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill is a significant player in Thailand's sugar industry, particularly in the northeastern region. The company manages operations from procuring sugarcane from local farmers to production and export to international markets. With a large workforce across production, management, and logistics, employee motivation becomes a critical factor influencing operational efficiency and long-term sustainability.

Statistical data from 2023–2024 show that global sugar consumption is growing at an average annual rate of 0.5–1.5% (USDA, 2024). Meanwhile, Thailand's sugar production has declined by 20.9% due to drought (SCB EIC, 2024), leading to increased workloads and declining job security and motivation among employees. Therefore, it is essential for organizations to foster appropriate motivation through benefits, career advancement opportunities, and a collaborative work environment to maintain employee loyalty.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how both intrinsic factors (e.g., achievement, challenge) and extrinsic factors (e.g., rewards, social status) relate to employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill. This research employs questionnaires and statistical analysis, and its findings are intended to guide organizational leaders in formulating human resource policies that promote morale and retain valuable personnel for long-term sustainability.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To examine the differences in motivational factors and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.
- 2) To investigate the demographic differences that affect employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study aims to explore theories and concepts related to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, as well as the definition of employee loyalty within the workplace context. It also examines demographic factors that may influence employees' behaviors and attitudes. The literature review provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between work motivation and employee loyalty, with the ultimate goal of informing the development of effective human resource management strategies within the organization. The relationships among the variables are considered as follows:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between demographic factors and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Wu (2021) stated that demographic factors such as age, gender, income, and education level play a crucial role in analyzing consumer behavior and needs. This information can be effectively utilized in policy or strategic planning to enhance employee satisfaction and loyalty.

Phattharawadee On-Aksit (2022) argued that gender, age, marital status, income, education, and occupation influence

individual behaviors and decision-making. These factors can reflect employees' sense of attachment and loyalty within the organizational context.

Baker et al. (2023) suggested that demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, and marital status affect individual behaviors and outcomes, including satisfaction and loyalty. Such information is valuable in understanding and fostering employee loyalty within organizations.

Hypothesis 2.1: Extrinsic Motivation.

Hypothesis 2.1.1: There is a positive relationship between rewards and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Yildiz et al. (2023) stated that rewards such as bonuses and public recognition are among the methods that enhance work motivation. These rewards help employees feel valued and satisfied with their jobs, which are key foundations for organizational loyalty.

Mutesasira et al. (2024) noted that rewards and recognition—such as praise or awards for outstanding performance make employees feel appreciated, thereby increasing their motivation and contributing to long-term organizational loyalty.

Herzberg (1959), rewards such as salary and recognition are considered “hygiene factors.” While these factors may not directly lead to job satisfaction, they play a crucial role in minimizing dissatisfaction and, when managed effectively, can foster employee loyalty.

Hypothesis 2.1.2: There is a positive relationship between recognition from others and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Silitshena (2022) stated that “recognition” from supervisors and colleagues is a crucial element of motivation, as it helps employees feel valued and a part of the organization. This sense of belonging significantly contributes to fostering sustained employee engagement and loyalty.

Collins et al. (2022) pointed out that extrinsic motivation, such as recognition from others, plays a significant role in enhancing job satisfaction and encouraging employee dedication. This, in turn, leads to increased organizational commitment and loyalty.

Mutesasira et al. (2024) identified “recognition” and “appreciation” as key strategies for boosting employee motivation. Employees who perceive their contributions as being acknowledged are more likely to be committed to the organization and tend to exhibit long-term loyalty.

Hypothesis 2.1.3: There is a positive relationship between avoidance of punishment and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Demissie et al. (2024) stated that job satisfaction and the perception of fairness within the organization, such as not being unfairly reprimanded or punished, influence employees' level of loyalty. Management that adheres to principles of justice and provides support contributes to building trust and loyalty within the organization.

Fejfarová et al. (2022) This research indicated that work motivation is related to employee loyalty, particularly when employees feel their efforts are rewarded and they are not unfairly criticized or punished, which results in a greater tendency to remain with the organization in the long term.

Kesara Boonchob (2022) proposed that psychological motivation, such as job security and working in a stress-free environment, affects work performance and the intention to stay with the organization. This reflects a positive relationship between the avoidance of punishment and employee loyalty.

Hypothesis 2.1.4: There is a positive relationship between social status and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Tan (2021) explained that demographic factors, such as social status, influence individuals' behavior in choosing to participate in various activities, including work-related decisions. Differences in status, such as being married or having a family, can significantly affect organizational commitment and the level of loyalty in their work.

Phattarawadee On-Aksit (2022) indicated that family status, such as marital status, affects individuals' decision-making behavior, including in the workplace. Employees with families tend to have greater psychological stability and are more likely to exhibit loyalty towards the organization in order to generate income and security for their families.

Hensley et al. (2023) pointed out that marital status and housing characteristics are significant components of demographic data that influence the interests and behavior of the population, including loyalty in the work context. Social status can serve as a mediating variable in relation to organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 2.1.5: There is a positive relationship between expectations and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Vroom (1964) introduced Expectancy Theory, highlighting that employees' expectations regarding the outcomes of their work influence their job motivation. If employees believe that their efforts will lead to desired rewards, they will exhibit greater motivation and loyalty towards the organization.

Tiang-uan et al. (2024) stated that motivation arising from work-related expectations, such as promotions or appropriate compensation, can significantly enhance work performance and employees' loyalty to the organization.

Mutesasira et al. (2024) proposed that expectations of receiving rewards or recognition from the organization play a crucial role in reinforcing employee motivation, which leads to long-term job satisfaction and a strong sense of organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 2.2: Intrinsic Motivation.

Hypothesis 2.2.1: There is a positive relationship between interest and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Deci (1980) introduced Self-Determination Theory, emphasizing that “interest” is a significant intrinsic driver of motivation. When employees are interested in their work, they feel a sense of autonomy and enjoyment, which leads to long-term loyalty and engagement with the organization.

Silitshena (2022) explained that employee motivation can arise from a feeling that one is performing meaningful work that aligns with their personal interests. This fosters enthusiasm and a sense of belonging, resulting in sustained employee loyalty towards the organization.

Virgana et al. (2024) stated that interest in the work performed is a highly influential intrinsic motivational factor. Employees who find their work enjoyable and challenging experience internal drive, which leads to commitment to goals and loyalty to the organization.

Hypothesis 2.2.2: There is a positive relationship between autonomy and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Aryawan et al. (2024) pointed out that intrinsic motivation, such as the feeling of autonomy at work, influences job satisfaction and organizational commitment. When employees can control how they perform their tasks, they feel valued and exhibit long-term loyalty towards the organization.

Collins et al. (2022) explained that autonomy in the workplace is a significant component of intrinsic motivation, which affects efficient work performance and enhances job satisfaction. Employees who are trusted to make their own decisions tend to demonstrate greater loyalty towards the organization.

Karorsa et al. (2024) emphasized that expectations and autonomy in task execution can stimulate employees' sense of ownership over their work, resulting in intrinsic motivation that leads to loyalty and continuity in their employment with the organization.

Hypothesis 2.2.3: There is a positive relationship between achievement and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

McClelland (1960) introduced the Three Needs Theory, identifying "the need for achievement" as a significant driving force. Individuals who experience a sense of accomplishment in their work tend to have high motivation and develop long-term goals, which influences their commitment and loyalty to the organization.

Yildiz et al. (2023) pointed out that work motivation is rooted in the need for achievement. When employees perceive value in their work and recognize tangible success, they feel proud and loyal to the organization that supports their advancement.

Welch et al. (2021) stated that achievement in work is a key factor in fostering motivation and satisfaction. Employees who feel they are successful in their roles tend to have emotional stability and consistently demonstrate loyalty towards the organization.

Hypothesis 2.2.4: There is a positive relationship between value and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Silitshena (2022) stated that strong motivation arises when employees perceive their work as having "meaning" and "value" to the organization. This sense of significance helps employees develop self-esteem and increases their tendency to be loyal to the organization in the long term.

Balkar et al. (2024) pointed out that intrinsic motivation, such as a sense of value in one's work or personal satisfaction, is a key driver in enhancing job and organizational engagement. If employees feel their work is beneficial, they will exhibit loyalty and a desire to remain with the organization long-term.

Santi et al. (2024) explained that the "value" employees receive from the organization, such as recognition, opportunities, or the importance of their role in the job, directly influences their motivation. Employees who feel valued are more likely to develop commitment and loyalty towards the organization.

Hypothesis 2.2.5: There is a positive relationship between challenge and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

Maslow (1943) identified "Self-Actualization" as the highest level of human needs, which can be realized through the assignment of challenging tasks. Employees who receive such opportunities often develop a sense of pride and loyalty towards the organization.

McClelland (1960) discussed the Need for Achievement as a primary human motivator, which arises when individuals face challenging goals. Employees who are given opportunities to prove their abilities develop pride and tend to be loyal to the organization.

Deci (1980) proposed that intrinsic motivation occurs when individuals have the opportunity to engage in challenging activities that they can control autonomously. Appropriate challenges make employees feel enjoyment and a sense of purpose, leading to sustained motivation and loyalty towards the organization.

4. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The research framework of this study is designed to explore the relationship between work motivation factors and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill. Based on the research objectives and hypotheses, the framework integrates key variables derived from theoretical foundations and previous studies. The independent variables are divided into two main categories:

- 1) Demographic factors, including gender, age, education level, department, and average monthly income.
- 2) Motivational factors, categorized into external and internal motivations. External motivations include rewards, recognition by others, avoidance of punishment, social status, and expectations. Internal motivations encompass interest, autonomy, achievement, sense of value, and challenges.

The dependent variable is employee loyalty, which includes aspects such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, career growth opportunities, compensation satisfaction, and the adequacy of welfare benefits. The conceptual framework posits that both demographic and motivational factors have a positive relationship with employee loyalty. Specifically, it is hypothesized that employees with different demographic profiles and higher levels of motivation—whether externally driven (such as rewards and recognition) or internally driven (such as personal growth and a sense of meaningfulness)—will exhibit stronger loyalty to the organization.

To test these hypotheses, the study employs a quantitative research method using a survey questionnaire distributed to 432 employees of Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill. The collected data are analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation analysis, to identify significant relationships between variables. This framework aims not only to verify theoretical assumptions but also to provide practical insights for organizational management in designing effective human resource strategies. By understanding how demographic characteristics and different types of motivation influence employee loyalty, organizations can better foster a committed and stable workforce.

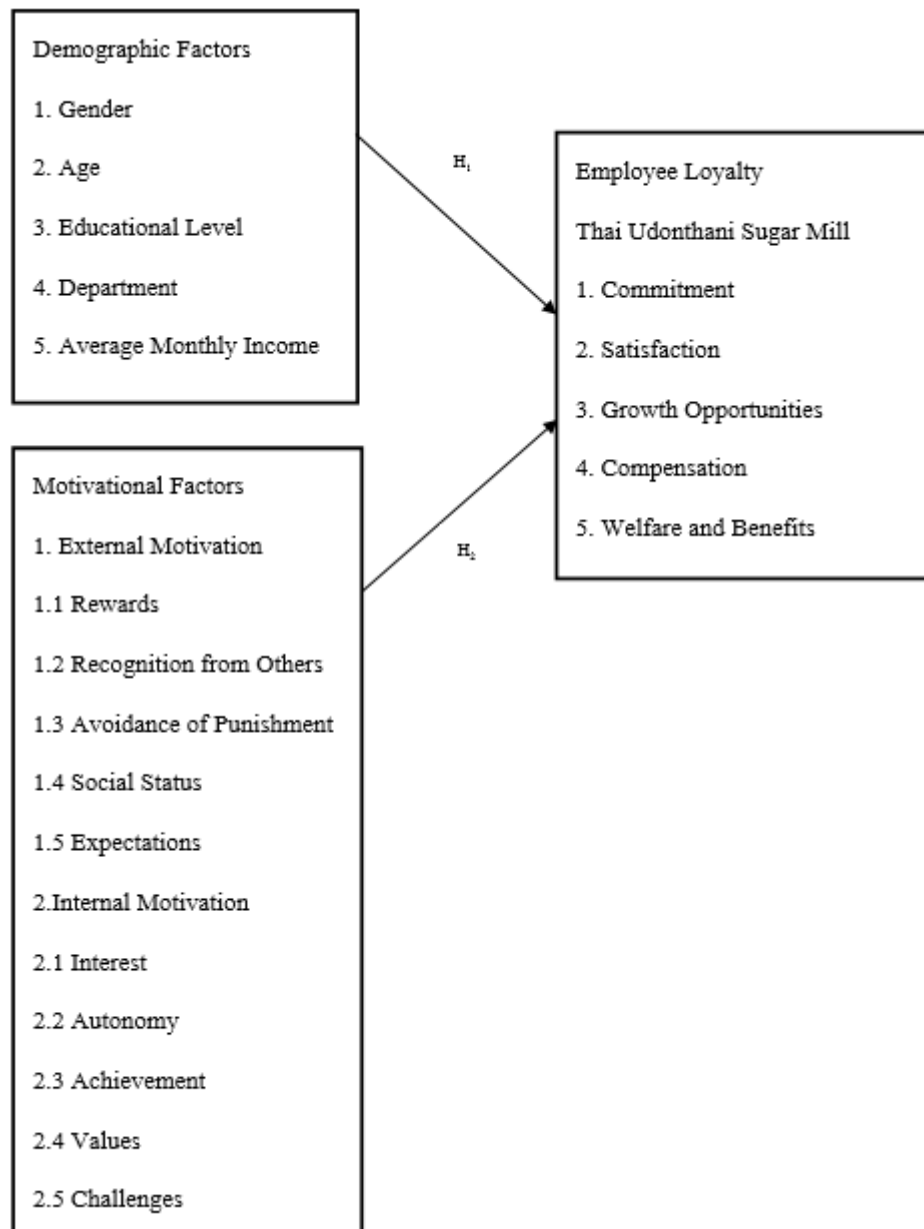


Figure 1: Research framework.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative method using a survey design to investigate the relationship between demographic factors, work motivation factors, and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill. Data were collected using a systematically developed questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

The population of this study comprised 432 employees of Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, focusing on employees with at least one year of work experience to ensure the reliability of the data.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a questionnaire divided into four sections:

Section 1: General demographic information, including gender, age, education level, department, and average monthly income.

Section 2: Work motivation factors, categorized into external and internal motivations.

Section 3: Employee loyalty, covering organizational commitment, job satisfaction, career growth, compensation, and welfare.

Section 4: Open-ended questions for additional suggestions.

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

The instrument's content validity was evaluated by three experts, achieving an IOC score of 0.60 or above. Furthermore, a try-out was conducted with 30 employees, and the instrument's reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70 for all variables.

Data collection was conducted online via Google Forms, distributed through channels such as Line and Facebook, from February to April 2025. Both primary and secondary data were gathered to support the research objectives.

Data analysis was divided into two parts:

1) Descriptive Statistics: Used to describe demographic factors, work motivation, and employee loyalty, presented as

percentages, means, and standard deviations.

2) Inferential Statistics: Correlation analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses regarding the relationships between demographic factors, motivational factors, and employee loyalty.

All data were processed using the SPSS statistical software to ensure accuracy and credibility.

6. RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1: Summary of Results

Objective	Research findings
To examine the differences in motivational factors and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	The study revealed that employees exhibited relatively high levels of both external and internal motivation, significantly influencing their loyalty to the organization. Employees with higher motivation whether through rewards, recognition, or personal challenges tended to demonstrate stronger loyalty compared to those with lower motivation. Furthermore, internal motivations such as interest in work and a sense of achievement had a greater impact on enhancing employee loyalty than external motivations.
To investigate the demographic differences that affect employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	The analysis indicated that certain demographic factors, particularly departmental affiliation, significantly influenced employee loyalty. Meanwhile, other factors such as gender, age, education level, and average income did not show a significant impact. These findings suggest that specific work environments and departmental contexts play a more critical role in shaping and maintaining employee loyalty than general personal demographic characteristics.
Hypotheses	Research findings
There is a positive relationship between demographic factors and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	The findings reveal that demographic factors overall have a relationship with employee loyalty, although the relationship is slightly negative. Only department affiliation significantly affects loyalty levels, while gender, age, education, and income show no significant relationship.
There is a positive relationship between rewards and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	The research shows that appropriate rewards significantly motivate employees and enhance their loyalty to the organization.
There is a positive relationship between recognition from others and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	Recognition from coworkers and supervisors is found to strengthen employees' sense of value and loyalty to the organization.
There is a positive relationship between avoidance of punishment and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	A fair punishment system and the opportunity to avoid mistakes encourage employees to work diligently and remain loyal to the organization.
There is a positive relationship between social status and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	Employees recognized for their social status within the organization, such as through promotions, are more likely to demonstrate strong loyalty.
There is a positive relationship between expectations and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	Meeting employees' expectations, such as supporting their personal goals, significantly enhances their loyalty.
There is a positive relationship between interest and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	Employees whose work aligns with their interests show higher motivation and loyalty to the organization.
There is a positive relationship between autonomy and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	Granting employees autonomy in decision-making and work methods fosters greater loyalty and work satisfaction.
There is a positive relationship between achievement and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	Employees who experience achievement in their work express stronger pride and loyalty to their organization.
There is a positive relationship between value and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	Feeling valued within the organization enhances employees' commitment and loyalty sustainably.
There is a positive relationship between challenge and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.	Assigning challenging tasks boosts employees' motivation and deepens their commitment to the organization.

7. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between work motivation factors and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill, with a particular focus on analyzing the impact of demographic factors, external motivation, and internal motivation on employee loyalty within the organization.

The research findings revealed that demographic factors such as gender, age, education level, and average monthly income did not significantly affect employee loyalty, except for departmental affiliation, which showed a significant relationship. Employees affiliated with departments that promote career advancement and professional development exhibited higher loyalty levels compared to others.

Regarding external motivation, factors such as rewards, acceptance from others, avoidance of punishment, social status, and organizational expectations were found to have a positive relationship with employee loyalty. Receiving appropriate rewards and recognition from supervisors and colleagues significantly enhanced employees' sense of self-worth and organizational commitment.

Internal motivation, including interest in work, autonomy, achievement, sense of value, and facing challenges, demonstrated a clear positive relationship with employee loyalty. In particular, achievement and facing challenges played crucial roles in fostering employee satisfaction and continuous engagement. A strong sense of personal value within the organization contributed to long-term loyalty and a commitment to organizational growth.

When comparing external and internal motivations, internal motivation was found to have a greater influence on employee loyalty. Employees with high internal motivation, such as intrinsic interest in their work or pride in personal achievement, tended to exhibit higher loyalty levels than those motivated solely by external factors.

Statistical analysis confirmed that enhancing both external and internal motivations is critical to maintaining employee loyalty. Internal motivational factors, such as interest and achievement, were the strongest predictors of organizational commitment, while

external motivators like rewards and recognition played a supportive role in reinforcing fundamental motivation.

In conclusion, employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill is influenced by multiple factors, with internal motivation playing a predominant role in fostering strong organizational commitment. Simultaneously, external motivation acts as a reinforcement mechanism, while appropriate management of demographic differences across departments enhances the overall effectiveness of building employee loyalty.

8. DISCUSSION

The results from the research objectives 1 and 2 are as follows:

Objective 1: To examine the differences in motivational factors and employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

The research findings revealed that employees with high levels of both external and internal motivation demonstrated greater loyalty to the organization compared to those with lower motivation levels. Internal motivators, such as interest in work, achievement, and facing challenges, showed a stronger influence than external motivators. These results align with Deci and Ryan (1985) study, which emphasized that intrinsic motivation more effectively enhances long-term satisfaction and commitment than extrinsic motivation. Herzberg (1959) also proposed that motivators, such as achievement and recognition, drive job satisfaction and loyalty more significantly than hygiene factors like salary or benefits. Similarly, Aryawan, Prayudi (2024) confirmed that internal motivation plays a crucial role in employee retention, especially within the industrial sector.

When considering external motivation, factors like rewards, acceptance from others, and social status were found to positively impact loyalty, though to a lesser degree than internal factors. Support from colleagues and supervisors helped strengthen organizational relationships, consistent with Silitshena (2022) findings that recognition and rewards enhance employees' sense of value and intention to stay. Overall, this study suggests that value-driven motivations emphasizing personal development and success exert stronger influence on employee loyalty than reward-based motivations.

Objective 2: To investigate the demographic differences that affect employee loyalty at Thai Udonthani Sugar Mill.

The findings indicated that demographic factors such as gender, age, education level, and average monthly income did not significantly affect employee loyalty, except for departmental affiliation, which showed a clear impact. These results are consistent with Wu (2021) research, which suggested that some demographic factors influence behavior and loyalty, but their impact depends largely on organizational management and internal culture.

The study by Cáceres-Reche et al. (2022) further supports this view, indicating that environments promoting growth and development have a greater positive effect on employee loyalty than basic demographic characteristics. Similarly, the domestic research by Phatharawadee On-Aksit (2022) confirmed that work environment factors, such as advancement opportunities, managerial support, and organizational atmosphere, influence loyalty more strongly than basic demographic attributes.

Comparative analysis indicated that employees in departments offering developmental support and fostering a success-oriented atmosphere demonstrated stronger and more sustainable loyalty. Meanwhile, demographic factors such as age and income played a secondary role in determining loyalty.

9. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

This study contributes to expanding knowledge on work motivation factors and employee loyalty within the context of the sugar industry in Thailand. The findings reaffirm the critical role of internal motivations, such as achievement, interest in work, and sense of personal value, as key drivers of employee loyalty. Additionally, the research highlights that external motivator, including rewards and recognition, serve a supportive role in maintaining employee commitment to the organization.

The insights gained from this study deepen the understanding of the relationships among demographic factors, departmental affiliation, and loyalty levels, providing a foundation for further theoretical development in motivation and organizational behavior in the Thai context. This research significantly enriches the empirical database for future academic studies on human resource management and organizational sustainability through the enhancement of employee motivation and loyalty.

10. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the limitations identified in this study, several recommendations for future research are proposed as follows:

First, future studies should expand the sample to include organizations from different industries beyond the sugar industry, such as general manufacturing, service sectors, or technology fields. Cross-industry comparisons would provide broader insights into motivational factors and employee loyalty across diverse organizational contexts, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

Second, future research should incorporate internal organizational factors such as organizational culture, managerial support, and work-life balance to assess their combined impact with motivational factors on employee loyalty. A deeper exploration of the work environment could yield more comprehensive findings regarding the mechanisms that foster organizational commitment.

Third, it is recommended to adopt a mixed methods research approach, combining quantitative surveys with in-depth qualitative interviews. Utilizing qualitative data would provide richer insights into employees' attitudes, motivations, and personal experiences, leading to a more profound understanding of the internal drivers influencing loyalty.

Finally, conducting longitudinal studies is encouraged to observe changes in employee motivation and loyalty over time, particularly in response to organizational policy shifts or external factors such as economic crises or technological changes. Longitudinal research would offer a more precise understanding of the sustainability of motivation and employee loyalty across different periods.

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