Evaluation of probationary performance of Thai Government officials

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Abstract: This mixed methodology research aims to evaluate the probationary performance of Thai Government officials in order to obtain the suggestion for improving the criteria and method of probationary performance. The qualitative research started from an interview with executives, followed by the survey on behaviours of new generation and opinion survey on probationary performance among government officials. Content analysis and multiple regression analysis were applied. According to the findings, data from every source agreed that the main function of probationary performance is to be the last step in selecting qualified government officials suitable for specific agencies. The factors of organisation culture of government agencies, the nature of Thai Government officials, and behaviours of the new generation can forecast the decision of new generation to work in civil service by 56.90%. The result suggested that the probationary period should be six months. It is also recommended that e-learning and general seminar among officials during probationary period as should not be part of the judgment criteria, but be under supervision of supervisors. In addition, the ratio of performance and behavioural score should be maintained at 50:50, but the minimum score of each attribute is 60%, and the minimum total score is 70%.

Keywords: probation; new government officials; organisational culture; nature of Thai Government officials; new generation behaviour; probationary performance; civil service; core competency; recruitment period.


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1 Introduction

Probationary period is a trial period during which time a new employee is tested for their knowledge, proficiency, and skills suitable for the position, before the employee is assigned to officially take the position as a permanent employee. Also, the probationary period allows new employees to examine whether they are satisfied with the new job or new working environment (Bull and Tedeschi, 1989; Wang and Weiss, 1998; Loh, 1994). According to the research with 1,881 companies, Loh (1994) discovered that the decision of new employees to take the position is positively related to the salary, i.e., the increase of salary after passing the probationary period. In addition, Intarakamhang and Peungposop (2014) found that the most important factors that the talents remain working in an agency and committed to the organisation is the challenge and opportunity for self-development. Chuawanlee and Intarakamhang (2013) who investigated the development of standard procedure for training new government officials before the official taking of the position found that, after the seminar among 271 government officials working upcountry during the probationary period in 2009, the seminar participants had more knowledge, learning behaviour, creativity and core competencies during the monitoring period of one month than before the seminar (p < 0.001) and that they have slightly better attitude toward civil service. The findings in these studies prove that the development process during probationary period of six months plays an important role in increasing the performance and the improving positive attitude toward civil service and working behaviour, which can lead to ethical and qualified government officials as it is expected by the effort to reform government official system and regulations of Civil Service Act B.E. 2551 Section 59 which encourages continuous development of probationary officials.

Probationary performance is the last step of recruitment that allows the original affiliation to review the capabilities and working behaviours of the probationary officials. This is because these qualities cannot be evaluated from the test score or other recruitment process. Some of the qualities that the organisation is look for are social role, self-image, traits, and core competencies, and it takes time to clearly see these qualities.

For Thai Government agencies, the Office of Civil Service Commission (OCSC) enacted the regulations on probationary period and development for government officials B.E. 2553, put into effect in 2010. On this matter, OCSC has also conducted the basic survey on problems of probationary period of Thai civil service. The findings can be summarised into six items as follows:

1. the original affiliation of the position fails to complete all the training programs within six months, forcing them to extend the probationary period
Evaluation of probationary performance of Thai Government officials

2 the content of e-learning system and general seminar does not agree with the true requirement of the specific position
3 the persons in charge of probationary process do not have proper knowledge, understanding, and application
4 most government agencies are dependent on OCSC in general seminar for new government officials while the original affiliation only organises the program specific to the skills and requirement for the actual work
5 the recruitment period is uncertain, disrupting the continuing probationary performance
6 the probationary performance in each department is limited, making it impossible to evaluate the desirable qualifications of probationary officials because some functions take time to witness the performance.

Based on the above problems, the authors and OCSC monitored the evaluation results of probationary performance of civil service to get more in-depth data, such as appropriateness of the criteria and method of probationary performance, the process of probationary performance, behavioural measurement of government officials, the commitment on probationary period from executives, evaluators, supervisor for probationary officials, HR officers, and the probationary officials themselves. The research team also investigated the advantages, limitations, and problems in probationary performance and collected the opinions of the new generations on their decision to work in civil service. It is expected that the data will be useful in head hunting and recruitment and in improving the criteria for probationary performance that fit the current situation.

2 Objectives of the research

Probationary period is a trial period during which time a new employee is tested for their knowledge:
1 to compare the probationary performance system outstanding in human resource management in state enterprise and private organisations in Thailand and other countries in Asia, Europe, and Americas
2 to evaluate the probationary performance of government officials in order to obtain in-depth data about probationary performance system
3 to find the suggestions for improving the criteria and method of probationary performance of government officials suitable for the current situation.

3 Literature review

Probationary period is a trial period during which time a new employee is tested for their knowledge.
3.1 Knowledge about probationary performance of government officials

The regulations of Civil Service Act, B.E. 2551 (Office of the Civil Service Commission, 2008) highlights five key principles: ethical focusing on ability, equality, transparency, fair opportunity, knowledge suitable for civil service, work-life balance, specialty, public-oriented, commitment, value, and productivity. The probationary performance process of government officials according to the Act defines the relevant criteria as follows:

Part 1 Evaluation of the probationary performance of government official shall be based on two attributes: performance achievement and behaviour of the evaluated recruit with the ratio of 50:50, and the minimum score of each attribute is 60%.

Part 2 Development of probationary recruits need to includes three activities as follows:

1. **Orientation:** government agencies need to organise an orientation to inform the probationary officials on the organisational structure, powers and responsibilities, executives, and organisational culture. Another purpose of orientation is also to give the probationary officials encouragement during the probationary period.

2. **Self-learning:** government agencies need to get probationary officials to do self-learning through the e-learning system, especially on law and regulations of civil service.

3. **General seminar:** probationary officials need to participate in the general seminar in order that they are informed of good behaviours of government officials.

It should be noted that these three activities need to be completed within the probationary period of six months. The results shall be used for evaluation. If any of these activities are not completed, it is considered that the probationary officials fail the probationary performance evaluation.

3.2 Concepts of probationary performance in private organisations

A probationary employee is an employee hired to take a position with a condition that if the employee performs well, he or she will become a permanent employee. However, if the employee fails to fulfil the requirement of the position, the employment can be terminated. Probation is the time when the employee is tested for suitability for the position. It is used as the final decision-making step of the employer. The probationary system is usually used for new employees, transfer, or promotion. More often than not, probation benefits the employer as well as the employee. To clarify, at the beginning, the employee may not be 100% sure that the new workplace is right place for him or her to do for a long time or even for the rest of his or her life. Some employees may want to test whether they can fulfil the requirements of the assigned position or work with the employer or other colleagues. In addition, should the employees find undesirable working conditions such as dangers from machines, factory environment, noise, heat that affects skin, these conditions may be taken into consideration of the employee and compared to the remuneration with the risk that they have to take. When the employees think these
conditions are not right for them, they can resign and find a new job without leaving bad history in their resume.

3.3 Factor affecting the decision to work in civil service among new generations

Government official professions are well respected and considered superior than most other jobs. Despite rather low salary, the honour of government official is recognised by the society at large (Phermsuwan, 2010). There are many factors involved in the decision such as preference, passion in the job, information received, value, experience, or personal needs. The decision to do a job is merely made by a person to make a living based on interest, proficiency, capability, and personality between the person and the position. The test results by Roe (1957) (referenced in Limmunjing, 2013) about the relationship between professional development and personality revealed that a person most of the time selects a job that suits his or her needs and personalities which vary greatly. The decision to do civil service is also the case. According the study with Thai samples, the factors that encourage people to do civil service are:

1. expectation from working in civil service
2. relation in Thai culture
3. professional security and welfares (Mengkhao, 2012; Phukphueng and Ueachitthaworn, 1999).

Regarding the use of new generations as the research samples, the age criteria as defined by the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (2013) was used. According to the criteria, the population in general can be divided into four generations: traditionalist, baby boomers, Gen Xers, and Gen Yers and Gen Zers. People in the working group are those born from 1965 to 1993, also known as Gen Xers and early Gen Yers. Those who are walking in the working world are born after 1993, also known as late Gen Yers. These people have similar behaviours about work. For example, they have various skills, technology knowledge, desire to do unofficial or independent job and to have absolute power in their jobs.

The decision to do civil service refers to a process of reasonable thinking of a person to do a job or make a living. A person will work in civil service when he or she thinks that the job suits his or her skills, knowledge, proficiency, interest, expectation, and personalities which vary by social and cultural factors. The factors are divided into three groups (Ginzberg, 1951, referenced in Phermsuwan, 2010) as follows:

1. pull factors such as the goal, objective, belief, standard, value, trait, and social norm
2. push factors such as expectation, obligation, and being forced by the person himself/herself or by other people
3. able factors such as job opportunity, the ability that matches the job, and supports.
4 Methods

The mixed methods are used in this research. The exploratory sequential design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) is used. Qualitative methodology is used first, followed by quantitative methodology. The research is divided into two stages as follows:

Stage 1 includes the actions taken for objective number 1. Documents are analysed. Additional interview is conducted with HR officers in Thailand about the principle, method, and process of probation. The interviewed organisations include state enterprises in Thailand, private organisations in Thailand, organisations in Asia, in Europe, and in Americas, totally ten organisations, as well as executives of ten government agencies.

Stage 2 includes the actions taken for objectives number 2 and 3 to analyse the opinion and monitor the probationary performance process. The quantitative questionnaire is handed out to respondents selected using quota random sampling method. The samples include students, private organisation employees, and government officials. The sample size of this research is calculated by using Yamane (1973) formula with reliability level of 95%.

1 The survey to gather the opinion of new generations on working in civil service and organisational culture of government agencies and the nature of Thai Government officials and the decision to work in this field is conducted with 400 students in private and public schools and employees of private and public organisations aged 18–34 in Bangkok and upcountry.

2 The analysis of opinion on probationary performance process according to the regulations on probationary period and development for government officials B.E. 2553 and efficiency evaluation of probationary officials are surveyed from relevant officials from 20 ministries. More details are as follows:
   • officials responsible for probation of officials (100 people)
   • officials working as the evaluator or supervisors (100 people)
   • officials working as trainers and trainers for the probationary officials (100 people)
   • officials appointed permanent officials from 2010–2014 (400 people)

4.1 Creation and development of indicators

1 Literature review on laws relevant to government officials and previous studies is conducted to define the factors to develop the tools. The tools are developed from:
   a the concept of Generation Yers’ behaviours as measured by ability and personal skills relevant to work (United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, 2013)
   b the concept of organisational culture of government agencies according to belief, expectation, value, and practices by Cameron and Quinn (2011) and Lamoolmon (2013)
   c the natures of government officials as measured by three aspects according to the professional qualifications (Office of the Civil Service Commission, 2008; Wongsuk, 2009).
The questionnaire constructs consist of seven items of general information such as original affiliation, position, age, and gender. The questionnaire is the five-point rating scale type. The respondents will check one of the 1–5 levels of agreement. Scale 1 represents the lowest and the five the highest opinion on probationary performance process and efficiency of probationary official development. The respondents are from four groups:

a. officials responsible for probation of officials
b. officials working as the evaluator or supervisors
c. officials working as trainers and trainers for the probationary officials
d. officials appointed permanent officials from 2010–2014.

The content includes the following items:

- the intention of probationary performance of civil service
- principles and activities of probationary performance consist of evaluation, judgment criteria, and probationary period
- method of probationary performance evaluation consists of professional achievement, behaviour of the probationary officials, forms used in probationary performance
- the role of relevant personnel in evaluating probationary officials
- development of probationary officials consists of orientation, self-learning, e-learning, and general seminar.

The developed questionnaire is submitted to three psychological and evaluation experts for review. The index of congruence (IOC) is checked. The items with the minimum IOC of 0.6 can be used to represent the characteristics or group of a certain behaviour.

The questionnaires to be used for data collection with the 4 groups of government officials are used as a trial with 50 government officials to verify the quality of the tool. To check the quality, the item-total correlation (r) need to be more than 0.2 and the Cronbach’s alpha (α) needs to be close to 1. The test results are as follows:

a. the five items testing the intention of probationary performance of civil service show the r value from 0.534–0.754 and α of 0.845
b. the 13 items testing the principles and activities of probationary performance show the r value from 0.203–0.585 and α of 0.773
c. the 14 items testing method of probationary performance evaluation show the r value from 0.436–0.627 and α of 0.864
d. the 22 items testing the role of relevant personnel in evaluating probationary officials show the r value from 0.261–0.768 and α of 0.938
e. the 24 items testing the development of probationary officials show the r value from 0.229–0.890 and α of 0.965.
4.2 Data analysis

1 Data from document, interview, and open-ended questionnaire are analysed by content analysis.

2 Quantitative data from the questionnaire are analysed by descriptive statistics, number, percentage, mean, standard deviation, one-way ANOVA, comparative correlation, and multiple regression analysis.

5 Results and discussion

5.1 Results from studying papers and interviews on probationary performance within organisation

1 Methodologies and criteria: the results reveal that most organisations use competency assessment to evaluate performances and skills, including behavioural performance and competency that the organisation expect from each position or fulfil the criteria designated. Most assessments come in two equal parts:
   a probationary performance calculated from quality and quantity of works assigned to each position
   b probationary conduct considered from employees’ attributes or core competency the organisation expects which differs among organisations.

2 Probationary period: every organisation sets the duration of probation based on Thailand Labor Law, that is within six months or 180 days. For private sectors and state enterprises, both domestic and international, the duration is shorter, that is, within 119 days. Additionally, state enterprises between Thailand and USA sets even briefer duration: no more than 90 days.

3 Orientation and training: most organisations opt for on the job training to train new employees. This training lets them work in real situation with seniors or supervisors monitoring and offering them off the job training.

4 Criteria of probation: most organisations enact regulations or manuals concerning personnel to implement their work effectively, assuring that the new employees would learn work process and adapt to the environment, along with the culture of the organisation.

5 Designation of relevant personnel in probation process: directors or direct supervisors play the most important role on probation process from training, giving advice and improvement, to evaluating the probation in final process approved by the super ordinate and HR or the organisation.
5.2 Analysis of opinions in new generation’s decision to serve as government officials

1 Surveys on the interest and decision of new generations to work in civil service revealed that they find it appealing to do so as it offers financial stability and adequate welfare.

2 Culture of organisation in state sector and the nature of Thai officials’ decision to work in civil service pointed out that most of the new generation utterly agrees that by enabling officials to take part in state affairs the officials feel the significance and bond with organisations.

3 Factors affecting the decision to work in civil service: statistical results showed that the most significant factor leading new generation to become government officials is competency. This means that the more the new generation sees the potential in improving their skills, the higher probability they will apply for government official positions. Multiple regression analysis unveiled the causative factors predicting the trend of government official job application which are organisational culture and the nature of Thai Government officials. The organisational culture is the most important impact factor predicting the job application as the new generation gives importance to the traditional work environment, expectation, values, and social conduct. They would consider from outstanding aspects of the organisation especially the aspect of culture and conduct which grant them career advancement, financial stability, and welfare.

5.3 Summary of quantitative studies on opinions towards probationary process from four groups of government officials

1 Intention of probation: the four groups fully understood and approved the benefits of probation. The most admirable aspects are its transparency and moral-based regulations, showing that government officials in every rank and sectors perceived the importance of probation that would likely lead to the implementing to its efficacy.

2 Probationary process criteria: three groups, except the new officials group, opined that according to the regulation the duration of six months but no more than 12 months is appropriate and sufficient to learn rules, conducts, work process, ideas and culture of the organisation; long enough to participate in seminars, trainings, and appraisal. For the newcomers, they felt they had no option but to follow the rules, but approved of the criteria for probation.

3 Method for evaluating probation: all groups agree that the board consists of one chairman and other two committees as this proves the transparency and justice for newcomers by having someone who fully understands the work condition. Also, this would strengthen the perception of justice of other processes within the organisation.
4 *Responsibilities of supervisors:* all agreed that five dimensions must be met:
   a. work assignment
   b. clear instruction
   c. probation supervision
   d. probation support
   e. probation evaluation.

5 *Responsibilities of mentors:* generally, mentors guide the probationary employees through the work process, content, conduct, organisational culture, and follow-up. With all these responsibilities, mentors should be acquainted with the system and rules as well as praise the importance of probationary process.

6 *Responsibilities of human resource personnel:* the aspect that all groups agree is that HR personnel must be equipped with knowledge and understanding of probationary process.

7 *Improvement of probationary personnel:* every group unanimously agree on the importance of orientation as it is the next step after the selection of the personnel into the organisation that prepare them with the knowledge necessary for early period of the training.

5.4 *Case study of qualitative research from in-depth interview*

Studies of opinions gathered from case study of qualitative research from in-depth interview with commanders and delegates about probation in ten organisations. The study revealed that most executives had faith that rules and regulations of probationary process that OCSC formed are meticulous and applicable for personnel admission appraisal based on the principle of good governance. To achieve the intention of effective probation, most groups agree that executives from every rank must pay attention to probationary process as well as implement the whole system so that the personnel admission process becomes truly effective. The other benefit of having probationary process is the controlling force of admission process. Without it, transparency of working process might be questioned.

From the aspect of problems and impediments of probationary process, the recruitment of personnel for testing and screening fails to obtain what the organisation really looks for. Moreover, the duration of the seminar does not go along with personnel admittance, especially scholarship students. Sometimes the number of personnel recruited to the organisation is insufficient to hold training in designated duration. In some cases, the personnel is overabundant; the content of the training does not reconcile with its mission; the training session lacks the staff; unsuccessful probation due to the disproportioned probationary personnel and given assignments. Not to mention the problem of evaluators being transferred during the probation and probationers are not fully understanding instructions and detail.

To improve the probationary process, flexibility in the process is advised.
Evaluation of probationary performance of Thai Government officials

1 OCSC should assign employees to clarify some ambiguity as regulations of OCSC is too broad and government has to imply for themselves which sometimes lead to errors when the manual for probation does not go in detail and require clarification.

2 There should be a conduct or channel to protect evaluators from being sued when they do not grant pass to the probationers as evaluators nowadays are too scared to dismiss the probationers.

3 There should be orders appointing the board of committee mainly considering their position.

4 Curriculum for government correspondence writing via e-book is advised to be increased.

5 There should be a mediator monitoring each sub-organisation regarding probationary process.

5.5 Case study of qualitative research from focus group

Studies of opinions gathered from case study of qualitative research from focus group (nine qualified persons) from public and private sectors gather to verify all the studies included in this research and contribute relevant information as follows:

1 Criteria for probation: the attendees found the duration of 6 month probation appropriate and also added that the duration does not matter. Regardless of time, whether six months or a year, probationers might not demonstrate their knowledge prominently. Thus, time does not verify the performance of probation as evaluation does.

2 Methodology and criteria for evaluation: the attendees report that the duration of recording is not consistent with evaluating. Problem might arise if supervisors or mentors record the probation in three-month period. So, they advised that evaluating session from two sectors should be modified; that is; both supervisors and mentors together evaluate their probationers every three months, for example.

3 Responsibility of personnel concerning probationary process: it was agreed that the important factors depicting the efficiency of probation should not rest on the rules and regulations but on the working process. For instance, the problem that arises when newcomers have to work with other officials comes from the discrepancy of perspective. It is rare to find one during the recruitment and screening but only to be found once they start working in real condition. Therefore, every involving sector, whether it is the direct supervisors, mentors, or HR, must hold hands and achieve the successful probation.

4 Orientation, training, and improvement: some of the newcomers did not pass the probation within six months as they could not attend the seminar in specified period. The attendees recommended that seminar participation be not required to pass the probation. For small public organisations problem might occur as, for each recruit and screening session, personnel are inadequate to hold a seminar.
6 Suggestions

From the summary of qualitative and quantitative studies included in this research leading the diagram suggesting the model of probationary process is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 The diagram suggesting the model of probationary process (see online version for colours)

7 Summary of improvement on probationary process

The additional modification to the original model is the duration of probationary process. The probationers are to pass the process between the period of no less than six months but no more than nine months. In case that probationary evaluation cannot be completed, it can be prolonged for three months only once. Accumulated duration of probation and the extension could not exceed nine months to avoid relevant sectors and supervisors neglecting necessary improvement for probationary personnel. Regarding improving government officials during the probation, requirement for training and seminars to pass the probation is revoked. However, for improvement regarding the probation to continue,
there should be additional regulation. Public sectors shall continue to improve newcomers in three dimensions even if the session of probation exceeds designated time. For example, the improvement of three dimensions is to be achieved within one year starting from day one of service.

Furthermore, psychological attribute evaluation, such as perspective towards work, bond with organisation, or leadership, was proposed to be included in the evaluation criteria. This was because studies from behavioural psychology and industrial and organisational psychology found the significance of these attributes to clearly affect the working conduct and efficiency. Additionally, evaluation session from two sectors should be consistent. The board of probationary evaluation along with supervisors is to follow up every three months or at least two times according to the diagram.

To conclude, suggestion for improved model of probationary process was adapted from the original 2010 model of OCSC dealing with the probationary process and government personnel improvement during probation. The major changes are to facilitate the concerning sectors involving with the probationary process and the benefits between organisations and probationers who are new generation ready to face the challenge in condition that the working environment is appealing, who have competency consistent with the nature of present Thailand work conduct, and who could self-learn accordance with tier own interest excellently. It is worth mentioning Thailand is a constitutional monarchy which unlike many of its neighbours such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Malaysia it has never been a colony of a western country that enabled the government system to become with the unique work environment (Urip, 2010; Dana et al., 2014).

This redesigned model still follows the main objectives of probation, that is, to finalise the process of employee recruitment of an organisation while objectives and intentions are understood, as well as the benefits of probation are appreciated.

References


