

MULTILEVEL CAUSAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE STRATEGIC SUCCESS OF THAI EXPORT BUSINESSES

Chankoson T. *

Abstract: The objective of this research was to study the multilevel causal factors affecting the strategic success of Thai export businesses. The present research applied questionnaires to collect primary data from 1,152 employees and entrepreneurs in 384 Thai export companies (3 respondents were selected from each company). All statistical data, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, minimum value, maximum value, skewness, kurtosis, and multilevel structural equation model were analyzed using the statistical program. It is found that overall findings have provided the evidence that respondents view about strategic success of Thai export businesses were at high level. Their opinions on reliance, competitive advantage, modern organizational management, marketing, and intellectual capital were also at a high level. The developed multilevel structural equation model for the strategic success of Thai export businesses was found to be consistent with the empirical data. At the individual level, it was found that marketing, reliance, and intellectual capital had a positive causal relationship with the strategic success of Thai export businesses.

Key words: multilevel causal factors, strategic success, Thai export businesses

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Introduction

The competition in export markets continues to become more and more intense due to the changes in economic, social, political and technological conditions as well as the opening of free trade zones in many countries. The global economic situation has greatly changed since 2013, resulting in a slowdown in Thai export growth. Thus, each organization has sought various business strategies and approaches to be a tool for creating competitive advantage necessary for both current and future competitions (Maliklin, 2011). It is very important for an organization to select a business approach that is suitable for its organizational goal by taking into account the changes in business environment, its business strengths and weaknesses, and the assessment of competitive potential for maximum efficiency and effectiveness. The export sector has been an important part of Thailand's economic growth, especially during the past 15 years. Thai exports currently account for 75 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). The GDP can be divided into household spending (54%), business investment (14%), government spending (25%), exports (75%), and imports (67%), which clearly

* Dr. **Thitinan Chankoson**, Assistant, Professor, Faculty of Business Administration for Society, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

✉Corresponding author: tchankoson@gmail.com

shows that exports of goods and services are a critical component of Thailand's GDP (Bank of Thailand, 2016). Considering the nature of Thai export businesses, most Thai exporters focus on producing large quantities of quality products with affordable prices that meet the needs of the international market in order to be able to compete with business competitors. Each organization needs to adapt to rapidly changing situations, especially when there is an economic integration in the ASEAN region. Once Thai exporters can define business strategies that meet customers' needs and satisfaction, it means that they have more competitive advantage than others. On the other hand, if Thai exporters ignore or pay no attention to continuous development, they will have competitive advantage and may be unable to survive. Thus, competitive advantage is very important to the future performance of organizations. It helps create both short- and long-term profits in terms of efficiency, quality, innovation, and customer responsiveness (Danthamrongkul, 2003). Supporting client service employees to have operational abilities in the above 4 main areas is considered a way to create competitive advantage or business success. Organizations aiming at success should develop their client service employees to have decision-making and problem-solving abilities and support them to exercise their abilities at work in an effective way (Nawikan, 2005). This approach will help improve business performance to a higher level and enhance organizational success in terms of market position, quality, innovation, social responsibility, human resources, financial resources, physical resources, cost efficiency, and long-term profitability (Drucker, 1982).

Literature Review

The research studies and literature related to the present research were thoroughly reviewed as follows. According to the concept of strategic success, an organization can achieve strategic success through placing importance on market position, quality, new change, social responsibility, human resources, financial resources, physical resources, cost efficiency, and long-term profitability. Peter F. Drucker suggested the "indicators" of strategic success as shown in Table 1 and indicated that they are the important "variables" or "items."

Table 1. Nine Key Variables or Items of Strategic Success (Drucker, 1982)

| Key Items | Description |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Market Position | Measuring goals and goal achievements in terms of market position, market share, and new products aimed at building customer loyalty. |
| 2. Quality | Maintaining and developing the quality of products and services. |
| 3. New Change | Achieving new product/ process development. |
| 4. Social Responsibility | Maintaining good behaviors, including ethics and social responsibility such as participation in environmental preservation and quality of life enhancement. |

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 5. Human Resources | Recruiting, maintaining, and developing human resources at all levels to have high knowledge, and abilities, good attitude, and employee/ labor relation skills. |
| 6. Finance Resources | Appropriately procuring, storing, and managing financial resources. |
| 7. Physical Resources | Creating, procuring, and maintaining physical resources such as building, factories, machinery, equipment, tools, and technology. |
| 8. Cost Efficiency | Effectively allocating resources to produce goods and services at low cost. |
| 9. Profitability | Achieving appropriate profit levels and indicators of good financial status. |

The concept of business strategy is associated with the following 5 main elements: 1) marketing (M), 2) reliance (R), 3) intellectual capital (IC), 4) modern organizational management (MOM), and 5) competitive advantage (CA). In terms of marketing, Kotler (2000) proposed the 4Ps Marketing Mix concept, comprising of product, price, place or distribution, and promotion and defined it as a process of determining a marketing strategy by identifying and combining all components of the 4Ps into a specific marketing mix. A marketing mix can be adjusted according to organizational situations such as the amount of demand and period of time. The second element or reliance refers to a personal trust towards other parties under the conditions of trustworthiness and risk (Currall and Judge, 1995). Reliance can change and develop over time (Lewicki and Bunker, 1995). The reliance level of each individual varies depending on assessments. It is also found that cultures have an influence on individuals' reliance (Jaevenpa and Leidner, 1999). Various methods and practices are required to create customer reliance and trust in terms of credibility, ease of service, and risk management (Yousafzai et al., 2003). Export and economic growth of Thailand, according to Dechprom and Jermstittiparsert (2019), export and trade openness is an important factor in economic growth. In addition, the expansion of exports helps to stimulate export product production. Considering Thailand's export situation, as of September 2017, Thai exports were on the rise for 7 consecutive months with an average increase of 12.2 percent, which accounted for 21,812 million US dollars. However, as per the latest findings, the export level of country is declined by 2.57 percent year-on-year to 18.56 billion USD in April 2019, showing a 4.88 percent decline in March 2019. The expansion of exports continued to grow in all major markets, especially in the CLMV countries, China, and Japan. Exports of all products had continually increased. Particularly, exports of agricultural and agro-industrial products continued to rise for 11 consecutive months. Export products with high growth rates in terms of quantity and price included rubber, sugar, and frozen and processed chicken. Exports of rice and food achieved good growth in the aspect of quantity. Exports of industrial products continued to increase for 7 consecutive months.

Research Framework

The marketing mix concept of Kotler (2000), the trust concept of Yousafzai et al. (2003), the intellectual capital concept of Edvinsson and Malone (1997); Lönnquist and Mettanen (2003); and Fitz-enz (2009), the learning organization concept of Senge (1990); Kieser and Koch (2008); Saadat and Saadat (2016); and Pedler and Burgoyne (2017), the competitive advantage concept of Danthamrongkul (2003); Simpson et al. (2006); Sirisuwat and Jindabot (2012), and the strategic success concept of Drucker (1982) were applied to develop the research framework as shown in Figure 1.

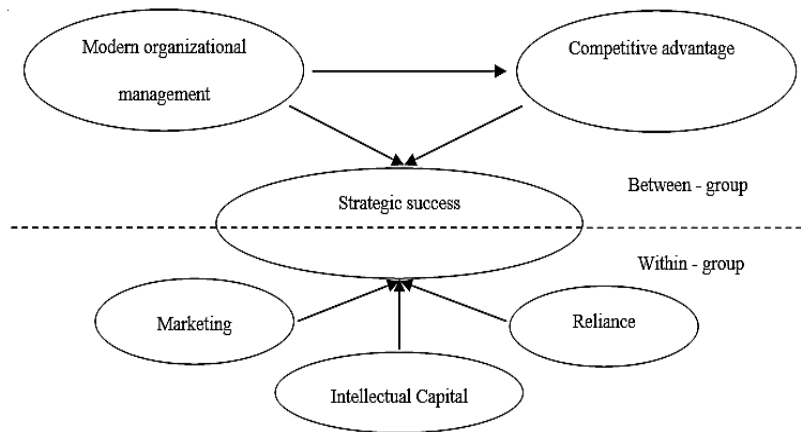


Figure 1. Research Framework

Research Methodology

Research design: The present survey and development research used questionnaires to collect data and employed multilevel structural equation modeling to develop a model.

Research population and sample size: The population of this research was Thai exporters. The number of Thai exporters was large and not properly collected due to the frequent mobilization of exporters. The formula of Billingsley (1995) was used to calculate the sample size. The proportion of sample was set at 50% or 0.50 with a reliability value of 95% and an error allowance of 0.05. The details are as follows. $SS = Z^2 \times (P) \times (1-P) / C^2$; $Z=1.96$, $p=0.50$, $c=0.05$. Hence, the appropriate sample size of 384 was determined. Then the multistage sampling method (Cochran, 1977) was applied, comprising 1) a stratified random sampling that divided Thai export businesses into 4 main groups: (1) exporters of agricultural and livestock products, (2) exporters of agro-industrial products, (3) exporters of industrial products, and (4) exporters of mineral and fuel products (Office of the

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, 2017); 2) a quota sampling that selected a total of 384 exporters that could be easily accessed from the 4 main groups of exporters (96 exporters from each 4 groups), and 3) a simple random sampling that drew 3 employees/entrepreneurs from each 384 exporters by randomizing the list of Thai export businesses. Finally, a total of 1,152 respondents from 384 Thai export businesses were selected. The sample size of this study was consistent with the concept of Muthen (2004), which suggested that the sample size that is suitable for multilevel analysis should consist of at least 50 groups and each group should have at least 2 representatives. In the present research, three respondents were select from each 384 export companies. The data analysis would be divided into 2 levels: 1) individual or micro level (within-group), where the unit of analysis is a person and 2) organizational or macro level (between-group), where the unit of analysis is an organization. The data would be aggregated from the micro level to the macro level (Hussain et al., 2019).

Research instrument: The research instrument that was used to collect data from 1,152 employees/entrepreneurs was self-filled questionnaire, composed of 2 parts: 1) the personal information of the respondents, and 2) the opinions about the factors affecting the strategic success of Thai export businesses. The Likert scale questionnaire with 5 possible responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The width of class interval was set at 0.80 (Kuharatanachai, 2003) Research instrument assessment: The questionnaire was examined by 3 experts in order to ascertain the content validity. Normally, an odd number of experts are preferred to avoid tie in opinions (Rowinelli and Hambleton, 1977). The Item-Objective Congruency Index (IOC) was used to select the questions with IOC of 0.5 and above (Tirakanun, 2007). Then the pre-test was carried out with 30 people in order to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire. Generally, the number of pre-test participants is flexible and depends on convenience and appropriateness (Suwannawong, 2010). Based on the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test, it was found that the reliability values of the questions were between 0.81 and 0.96, which met the threshold criterion of 0.7 (Cronbach, 2003). The Corrected Item-Total Correlation values were between 0.21 and 0.91, which met the criterion of 0.20 and above (Piyapimonsit, 2010). Thus, the questionnaire was deemed reliable and appropriate to be used in data collection.

Data analysis: The data were analyzed using the statistical software as follows:

1. The descriptive statistics used to analyze social science data were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and simple correlation coefficient values.
2. The model of the causal factors affecting the strategic success of Thai export businesses was analyzed using the MSEM technique. The advanced statistical program was applied to analyze the within-group model together with the between-group model. The maximum likelihood with robust standard errors (MLR), chi-square index, comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square

residual (SRMR) were used to examine the consistency between the model and empirical data (Morris, 1995; Heck and Thomas, 2000; Goldstein, 2003).

Results and Discussion

General information of the respondents: It was found that the majority of the respondents was female (62.5%) aged 31-40 years old (36.5%), followed by 41-50 years old (34.5%). Their average age was 34 years old. In terms of marital status, most of the respondents were single (48.5%), followed by married (40.1%). Their education was at the bachelor's degree level (55.3%) and lower than bachelor's degree level (29.8%). They mostly worked at the operational level (49.5%), followed by the primary management level (36.4%). The respondents mostly had a work experience of 6-10 years (32.4%), followed by 11-15 years (29.5%). Their average work experience was 7.96 years.

Factors affecting the strategic success of Thai export businesses: The respondents' overall opinions on the factors affecting the strategic success of Thai export businesses were at a high level ($\bar{X}=3.63$). Their opinions on reliance ($\bar{X}=3.82$), competitive advantage ($\bar{X}=3.70$), modern organizational management ($\bar{X}=3.69$), marketing ($\bar{X}=3.54$), and intellectual capital ($\bar{X}=3.40$) were also at a high level as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Levels of opinions on the factor affecting the strategic success of export businesses

| Opinions on the factor affecting the strategic success of export businesses (n=1,152) | Min | Max | \bar{X} | SD | Level |
|---|------|------|-----------|------|-------|
| Marketing | 3.15 | 4.21 | 3.54 | 0.49 | High |
| Reliance | 2.74 | 4.35 | 3.82 | 0.44 | High |
| Intellectual capital | 2.68 | 4.15 | 3.41 | 0.52 | High |
| Modern organizational management | 2.56 | 4.30 | 3.69 | 0.47 | High |
| Competitive advantage | 2.22 | 4.37 | 3.70 | 0.50 | High |
| Total | 2.67 | 4.28 | 3.63 | 0.36 | High |

Regarding the strategic success of Thai export businesses, the respondents' opinions on the overall strategic success were at a high level ($\bar{X}=3.53$). Their opinions on the strategic success in the aspect of cost efficiency ($\bar{X}=3.70$), human resources ($\bar{X}=3.68$), physical resources ($\bar{X}=3.68$), new changes ($\bar{X}=3.58$), profitability ($\bar{X}=3.53$), quality ($\bar{X}=3.51$), social responsibility ($\bar{X}=3.41$) were at a high level, while the opinions on the aspect of market position and financial resources were at a medium level ($\bar{X}=3.36$). The item that obtained the highest

score was the employees are the members of the Social Security Fund ($\bar{X}=4.43$). The details are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Levels of opinions on the strategic success of Thai export businesses

| Opinions on the strategic success of Thai export businesses (n=1,152) | Min | Max | \bar{X} | SD | Level |
|---|------|------|-----------|------|--------|
| Market position | 2.20 | 4.18 | 3.36 | 0.55 | Medium |
| Quality | 2.18 | 4.43 | 3.51 | 0.58 | High |
| New changes | 2.35 | 4.29 | 3.58 | 0.61 | High |
| Social responsibility | 2.11 | 4.16 | 3.41 | 0.57 | High |
| Human resources | 2.31 | 4.36 | 3.68 | 0.63 | High |
| Financial resources | 2.17 | 4.22 | 3.36 | 0.50 | Medium |
| Physical resources | 2.08 | 4.09 | 3.68 | 0.59 | High |
| Cost efficiency | 2.06 | 4.22 | 3.70 | 0.69 | High |
| Profitability | 2.32 | 4.15 | 3.53 | 0.67 | High |
| Total | 2.21 | 4.23 | 3.53 | 0.42 | High |

Appropriateness of data for further analyses: The results showed that the skewness and kurtosis values of marketing (M), reliance (R), intellectual capital (IC), modern organizational management (MOM), competitive advantage (CA), and strategic success were -0.511 to 0.006 and -0.850 to 0.018, -0.673 to -0.405 and -0.109 to 0.090, -0.361 to 0.058 and -0.530 to -0.443, -0.678 to 0.106 and -0.735 to 0.338, -0.368 to -0.023 and -0.587 to -0.286, and -0.710 to -0.125 and 0.507 to 0.722 respectively. The above skewness and kurtosis values were appropriate for analyzing the multilevel structural equation model of the factors affecting the strategic success of Thai export businesses because all of the skewness values did not exceed an absolute value of 0.75 and all of the kurtosis values were lower than an absolute value of 1.50. This was indicative of normal data distribution (Hoogland and Boomsma, 1998). Regarding the correlations between the variables at the individual level, it was found that marketing (M), reliance (R), intellectual capital (IC), and strategic success (SG) were correlated with each other at a statistical significance level of 0.05 with the correlation values (r) ranging from 0.134* to 0.628*. At the organizational level, modern organizational management (MOM), competitive advantage (CA), and strategic success (SG) were correlated with each other at a statistical significance level of 0.05 with the correlation values (r) ranging from 0.123* to 0.685*. The correlations between the variables were not high, considering that $r < 0.80$. Thus, there was no multicollinearity among the variables. All variables, comprising marketing, reliance, intellectual capital, modern organizational management, competitive advantage, and strategic success, were found to be appropriate for analyzing the multilevel causal relationships at the individual and organizational levels. Multicollinearity is a phenomenon caused by a high positive correlation between variables, which will result in inaccurate coefficient estimates. On the other hand, if a correlation between variables is highly

negative, it will make coefficient estimates become more accurate. When multicollinearity occurs, it is important to remove an independent variable with high correlation value from an analysis (Prasithrathsint, 2008).

The results of the MSEM suggested that the developed between-group model (organizational level) was consistent with the empirical data, considering that $\chi^2=99.671$, $df=97$, $P=0.154$, $CFI=0.923$, $TLI=0.911$, $RMSEA=0.037$, $SRMRW=0.018$, $SRMRB=0.005$, and $\chi^2/df =1.028$. The results showed that $P>0.05$ with no significant difference from zero, which indicated that the developed multilevel structural equation model fit with the empirical data. The other values also met the threshold criteria, as the CFI and TLI were close to 1, RMSEA and SRMR were lower than 0.08 (Hu and Bentler, 1995), and χ^2/df was less than 2 (Goldstein, 2003).

According to the results of the MSEM, the inter-class correlation (ICC) values of the observed variables were between 0.117 and 0.216. This showed that, apart from within-group variations, all 28 observed variables also had between-group variations ranging from 11.70% to 21.60%. As the ICC values were greater than 0.05, it indicated this set of data had sufficient variations for multilevel factor analysis (Snijders and Bosker, 1999).

Considering the component fit measure, it was found that at the individual level the factor loadings of all variables in the developed multilevel structural equation model, namely marketing (M), reliance (R), intellectual capital (IC), and strategic success (SG(A)) ranged from 0.227 to 0.981, which indicated that all components in the developed model had validity. At the organizational level, the factor loadings of modern organizational management (MOM), competitive advantage (CA), and strategic success (SG(B)) ranged from 0.273 to 0.969, which exceeded an absolute value of 0.30 (Kline, 1994).

Regarding the multilevel causal factors statistically significantly affecting the strategic success of Thai export businesses, it was found that, at the individual level, the strategic success of Thai export businesses was directly affected by marketing (DE=0.513*), reliance (DE=0.338*), and intellectual capital (DE=0.409*). At the organizational level, it was found that modern organizational management had both direct and indirect effect on the strategic success of Thai export businesses through competitive advantage (TE=0.872*; DE=0.514*+IE=0.358*). Competitive advantage was found to have a direct effect on the strategic success of Thai export businesses (DE=0.567*). The details are shown in Table 4.

At the individual level, it could be seen that all factors, comprising marketing, reliance, and intellectual capital, had a positive causal relationship with the strategic success of Thai export businesses. At the organizational level, modern organizational management and competitive advantage had a positive causal relationship with the strategic success of Thai export businesses.

Table 4. Direct and indirect effect on the strategic success of Thai export businesses

| Independent variables | Direct and indirect effect on the strategic success | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--------|--------|----------------|
| | DE | IE | TE | R ² |
| Within | | | | |
| M | 0.513* | - | 0.513* | 0.545 |
| R | 0.338* | - | 0.338* | |
| IC | 0.409* | - | 0.409* | |
| Between | | | | |
| MOM | 0.514* | 0.358* | 0.872* | 0.586 |
| CA | 0.567* | - | 0.567* | |
| (MOM→CA) | 0.631* | | 0.631* | 0.398 |

* $P < 0.05$

In addition, the developed multilevel structural equation model could predict the strategic success of Thai export businesses at the individual and organizational levels with a predictive power of 54.5% and 58.6%, which met the criterion of 40% (Saris and Strenkhorst, 1984).

Conclusions

This study has considered the various factors which have their strategic influence on the export of Thai business firms. To analyse this relationship, an overall data is collected from various employees working in various export business firms. Various statistical and econometrical methods are applied, covering the title of casual factors and success of Thai export. Findings of the study explain there is a significant relationship between multilevel causal factors and export of Thai business firms. Study findings are highly recommended to various export firms working in the region of Thailand. In addition, students from the field of economics and business studies can review the study results for better understanding of overall financial trends in the country. However, study contains several limitations as well. At first, present study is applied through primary data collection from various employees of export firms. Although, managerial implications are justified but for the variables like exports has time series trend and secondary measures can provide better outcomes. At third, study is conducted in Thailand with no excessive managerial implications. Future studied could address these limitations with better justification and robust findings.

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WIELOPOZIOMOWE CZYNNIKI PRZYCZYNOWE WPLYWAJĄCE NA STRATEGICZNY SUKCES FIRM EKSPORTOWYCH TAJLANDII

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu było zbadanie wielopoziomowych czynników przyczynowych wpływających na strategiczny sukces tajlandzkich przedsiębiorstw eksportowych. W niniejszym badaniu do zebrania podstawowych danych zastosowano kwestionariusze od 1152 pracowników i przedsiębiorców z 384 tajlandzkich firm eksportowych (z każdej firmy wybrano 3 respondentów). Wszystkie dane statystyczne, w tym częstotliwość, procent, średnią, odchylenie standardowe, wartość minimalną, wartość maksymalną, asymetria, miara spłaszczenia i model wielopoziomowego równania strukturalnego przeanalizowano za pomocą programu statystycznego. Ogólne ustalenia dostarczyły dowodów, że opinie respondentów na temat strategicznego sukcesu tajlandzkich przedsiębiorstw eksportowych były na wysokim poziomie. Ich opinie na temat

zaufania, przewagi konkurencyjnej, nowoczesnego zarządzania organizacją, marketingu i kapitału intelektualnego były również na wysokim poziomie. Opracowany model wielopoziomowego równania strukturalnego dla strategicznego sukcesu tajlandzkich przedsiębiorstw eksportowych okazał się zgodny z danymi empirycznymi. Na poziomie indywidualnym stwierdzono, że marketing, zaufanie i kapitał intelektualny miały pozytywny związek przyczynowy ze strategicznym sukcesem tajlandzkich przedsiębiorstw eksportowych.

Słowa kluczowe: wielopoziomowe czynniki przyczynowe, sukces strategiczny, tajskie firmy eksportowe

影响泰国出口业务战略成功的多层因果关系因素

摘要：本研究的目的是研究影响泰国出口业务战略成功的多层次因素。本研究采用调查问卷收集了来自384家泰国出口公司的1,152名员工和企业家的主要数据（每家公司选出3名受访者）。使用统计程序分析所有统计数据，包括频率，百分比，平均值，标准偏差，最小值，最大值，偏度，峰度和多级结构方程模型。结果发现，总体调查结果提供了证据，表明受访者认为泰国出口业务的战略成功处于较高水平。

。他们对依赖，竞争优势，现代组织管理，营销和知识资本的看法也处于较高水平。
。发现泰国出口企业战略成功的多级结构方程模型与实证数据一致。在个人层面，人们发现营销，依赖和智力资本与泰国出口企业的战略成功存在正向因果关系。

关键词：多层因果因素，战略成功，泰国出口业务